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Broad Majorities, Including Firearm Owners, Support Gun Control Measures in Mass., According to New UMass Amherst / WCVB Poll

Results of the poll also show President Biden's support in the Bay State below 50% for the first time and higher support for reparations than among the national populace

Topline results and crosstabs for the poll can be found at www.umass.edu/poll

AMHERST, Mass. – The results of [a new University of Massachusetts Amherst / WCVB Poll released today](#) show wide support for a number of gun control measures, including among firearm owners across the commonwealth.

More than three-quarters (76%) of the poll's 1,000 Massachusetts respondents strongly support requiring background checks for all gun sales, with an additional 9% stating that they somewhat support such a measure. Over three-quarters (77%) of the poll's respondents support raising the minimum age to purchase assault weapons and high-capacity magazines from 18 to 21, while nearly two-thirds (64%) support banning the manufacture and sale of them entirely, and 7 in 10 (71%) support ending the online sale of guns and ammunition.

One-fifth (20%) of the poll's respondents identified as gun owners, and among this group 83% support background checks and nearly three-fifths (59%) support ending the online sale of guns and ammunition. Two-thirds (67%) support raising the age to buy assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, while a total ban of such items is supported by nearly half of all gun owners (48%).

More than three-quarters of Republicans (83%) and conservatives (77%) also support expanding background checks, while their support for other restrictions is more tepid.

“As the nation continues to struggle with finding common ground on gun control laws that will curb the number and prospect of mass shootings, national elected officials may want to look to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for inspiration,” says [Tatishe Nteta](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. “While much has been made of the yawning national partisan divide on guns, our results show that there are areas of agreement between Republicans and Democrats on what many deem ‘common sense’ gun control measures in the commonwealth that include opposition to easing the ability to obtain concealed carry permits, support for background

checks, and raising the minimum age to purchase assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines.”

“Massachusetts has some of the strictest gun laws in the country and there is overwhelming support for additional gun regulation, with even gun owners in the state heavily in favor of these changes, but aspects of Massachusetts law may bump against a recent Supreme Court decision that could reduce the discretion of law enforcement in deciding who is not allowed to have a gun license,” says [Raymond La Raja](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll.

The poll asked a handful of gun-related public safety questions, as well. Nearly half of all respondents (49%) strongly oppose making it easier for gun owners to obtain a concealed-carry permit, with an additional 14% somewhat opposing the idea, while 20% express any form of support. More than half of the poll’s respondents (53%) also oppose allowing teachers and school officials to carry guns in K-12 schools, although a nearly equal percentage (56%) support requiring K-12 schools have an armed police officer present throughout the school day.

Fully half (50%) of the poll’s respondents say that it is very likely that there will be another mass shooting in the U.S. in the next few weeks – with an additional 26% saying that it is somewhat likely – and while nearly half (46%) say they are worried of becoming a victim of gun violence themselves, only 35% expect a mass shooting here in the Bay State.

“Perhaps Massachusetts guns laws or other contexts make people feel safer from mass gun violence,” La Raja notes. “Even though three in four Massachusetts voters think a mass shooting is likely in the next few weeks somewhere in the United States, within Massachusetts most voters think a mass shooting is unlikely.”

Biden approval and looking ahead to 2024

The UMass Amherst / WCVB Poll also found that President Joe Biden’s approval numbers among Massachusetts residents have fallen to the lowest levels during his presidency, just 45%.

“As we approach the 2022 midterm election, Democrats in the U.S. Congress cannot like what they are seeing with President Biden’s approval numbers,” Nteta says. “In one of the nation’s bluest states, the president’s approval ratings for the first time have dipped below 50% with a majority now expressing disapproval of the job that Biden is doing. Across demographic and political groups, the president’s approval [has declined since March of 2021](#) and this includes key members of the Democratic coalition such as people of color, liberals, young people and women. Biden has only a few months to turn his sinking numbers around or he will face a U.S. Congress led by Kevin McCarthy and Mitch McConnell.”

“While Biden’s approval ratings are down among Massachusetts voters, he is still the top pick of most Democrats to lead the party ticket in 2024,” La Raja notes. “More than a quarter of our poll’s respondents – 26% – ranked him first, compared to 14% who choose Bernie Sanders and the same percentage for Elizabeth Warren.”

“The second time’s a charm? In 2020, Elizabeth Warren in her quest for the White House finished a distant third in the state’s Democratic primary behind both Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders,” Nteta adds. “If President Biden were to change his mind and not run for re-election in 2024, Sen. Warren emerges as the frontrunning ‘second choice’ in the state’s 2024 Democratic presidential primary, narrowly beating out Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and Sen. Sanders.”

Meanwhile, former President Trump continues to maintain his lead in the GOP race for the 2024 presidential primary.

“Among Republican primary voters Trump remains the top choice,” La Raja says. “Just over half – 51% – ranked him first as their selection to be the party’s nominee, compared to 24% for Ron DeSantis. We will see if the January 6 hearings pull down some of Trump’s popularity within the party. It is not clear that they will, which presents a significant challenge for the Republican Party and nation going into the next presidential election.”

“The Republican Party can’t quit Donald Trump,” Nteta says. “While under Trump the party lost control of the House of Representatives, the Senate and – most importantly – the White House, the twice-impeached former president remains a singular force in the ‘Grand Old Party.’”

Reparations to the descendants of slaves

Finally, the latest UMass Amherst / WCVB Poll once again asked respondents’ views on reparations for the descendants of slaves, and the statewide poll showed greater levels of support for such measures than a [national UMass Poll conducted in December 2021](#).

“With the murder of George Floyd and the corresponding national movement for racial reconciliation, the question of whether the descendants of slaves should be paid reparations has burst onto the policy agenda,” Nteta says. “While efforts to pay reparations have stalled at the federal level, many states, localities, colleges and universities have begun exploring the possibility of reparations to the descendants of slaves. In Massachusetts, the City of Boston recently issued a formal apology for the city’s role in the slave trade, the Town of Amherst has recently announced plans to pay reparations to descendants of slaves, and Harvard University has acknowledged its role in the institution of slavery and has dedicated over \$100 million to atone for their participation in slavery in the U.S. These efforts are relatively more popular in the Bay State than in the nation, as residents of the state consistently express greater levels of support for making cash payments, apologizing, providing college tuition, and providing housing assistance to the descendants of slaves. As the movement for reparations

continues, the state may emerge as a leader in devising policy solutions to one of the nation's original sins.”

Methodology

This [University of Massachusetts Amherst / WCVB Poll](#) of 1,000 Massachusetts respondents was conducted by YouGov June 15-21. YouGov interviewed 1,131 total respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 1,000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacement, using the person weights on the public use file.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity and years of education. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 and 2020 Presidential vote choice, own/rent, gender, age, race and education to produce the final weight.

The margin of error within this poll is 3.5%.

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