

Contact:

Tatishe Nteta, nteta@polsci.umass.edu

Jesse Rhodes, jrhodes@polsci.umass.edu

Ray La Raja, laraja@polsci.umass.edu

Alex Theodoridis, atheodoridis@umass.edu

Jared Sharpe, jsharpe@umass.edu

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As Gov. Healey Nears 100 Days in Office, New UMass Amherst/WCVB Poll Finds She Enjoys Almost 60% Approval Among Mass. Residents

Statewide poll also finds 8 in 10 support providing free breakfasts and lunches for all K-12 public school students; nearly 7 in 10 support construction of high-speed rail service between Springfield and Boston

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

AMHERST, Mass. – As Gov. Maura Healey closes in on the completion of her first 100 days in office, a new statewide [University of Massachusetts Amherst/WCVB Poll](#) has found that nearly six in 10 respondents approve of her performance thus far, with even stronger majorities supporting her calls for free meals for public K-12 students and the construction of east-west rail service connecting Boston with Springfield.

The poll of 700 Bay State residents found Healey garnering 57% approval for the job she has done, with just 24% disapproving.

“Approaching the first 100 days of the Healey administration, our results suggest that the new governor is still enjoying a honeymoon period, with close to seven in 10 residents believing that Healey has met (61%) or exceeded (8%) expectations,” says [Tatishe Nteta](#), provost professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. “Like her predecessor, Charlie Baker, Healey is emerging as a singularly popular figure in the commonwealth as majorities of men, women, working class, middle class, upper class, middle age, older residents, whites and people of color all positively view the job that she has done. The holdouts, unsurprisingly, include conservatives, Republicans and Trump voters.”

When asked to describe the commonwealth’s new governor, residents overwhelmingly used words like “good,” “competent,” “excellent,” “smart” and “strong.”

“We do see differences in views of Gov. Healy based on gender,” notes [Raymond La Raja](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and co-director of the poll. “The governor gets broad support from all voters, however 62% of women approve of how she is doing her job compared to 51% of men. Younger people, non-college-educated and lower income respondents to our poll tend to give her somewhat less support, but she still gets about a majority of these voters.”

“While the picture is overwhelmingly rosy, there are indeed warning signs that Healey still has work to do,” Nteta agrees. “With a likely showdown with the state Legislature over her budget proposals, ongoing critiques concerning her administration’s lack of transparency, and the likely attacks of Healey by state Republicans, the somewhat rosy assessment of Healey’s first 100 days are bound to take a hit.

“As attorney general, Healey famously took on the Trump Administration, the National Rifle Association and the opioid industry, and in so doing became the darling of progressives here in the commonwealth and across the nation,” Nteta adds. “As governor, Healey in her first months in office has charted a more moderate path, proposing changes to the state’s tax code and resisting calls for more transparency, but she has yet to shake the progressive tag as a plurality of residents when asked to describe the new governor use the terms ‘progressive’ or ‘liberal.’”

By far the most important single issue the poll’s respondents want to see Healey address during this first year in office is housing, with 30% saying she needs to confront housing shortages and affordability. The only other issue garnering double-digit concern from the poll’s respondents is inflation at 13%.

“On the issue that most people listed as a top priority – housing affordability and shortage – just 29% say Gov. Healey has handled the issue well,” La Raja says. “Her numbers are particularly weak among those in the state making more than \$100,000. That sounds like a lot of money but most of these folks are in the hyper-expensive Boston area market, perhaps looking to buy a home. They don’t feel well off when the median price for a single-family home in Greater Boston is \$900,000.”

Support for the Governor’s Policies

“As Gov. Healey faces her first showdown with the Massachusetts State Legislature over her budget priorities and tax code changes, her administration can be confident that she has strong and broad public support for many of her signature policies, most notably providing free breakfast and lunch to all K-12 students (79%) and the creation of east-west rail (67%), as well as changes to the estate tax (48%) and capital gains tax laws (50%),” Nteta says.

“Who says there is no such thing as a free lunch?” La Raja asks. “Nearly four in five respondents to the poll approve of permanently providing free breakfast and lunch for all K-12 students in the state’s public schools. Not surprisingly women – who are most likely to be responsible for childcare – are the biggest supporters, with 84% saying that they want this policy compared to 72% of men. Younger and lower income voters support the policy in higher numbers, too, and although conservative voters typically oppose government spending, majorities of both groups also support it.”

La Raja notes that, overall, 67% also support construction of high-speed rail service between Springfield and Boston. “There are significant differences based on party

affiliation and ideology,” he says. “However, even majorities of Republicans and conservatives support the policy. The most footloose group – young people – especially like this idea, with 76% of those between age 18-29 favoring it. This generation also happens to have less access to cars than previous generations of youth.”

“Even a majority of conservatives and Republicans, who give Healey low approval ratings and are likely to believe that Healey in her first 100 days has not met expectations, are strongly in favor of Healey’s signature tax code changes, the provision of free breakfast and lunch for all of the state’s public school students, and addressing the state’s transportation and housing crisis through the creation of an east-west rail system,” Nteta says. “Whether the new governor will be successful in making these relatively popular policy solutions a reality will be the story of her first year in office.”

Comparisons to Her Predecessor

The poll also asked respondents their views of Healey’s predecessor in the governor’s chair, Charlie Baker, and to compare the current and former state executives’ styles.

“As former Gov. Baker takes the reigns of college sports in his new role as president of the NCAA, he remains a uniquely popular political figure in the commonwealth,” Nteta says. “When asked for one word to describe Baker, most residents of the Bay State described Baker as ‘good,’ followed by ‘fair,’ ‘moderate’ and ‘great.’ While the former governor has repeatedly asserted that a future in national politics is not in his plans, voters in the state still can’t quit the former governor and are poised to support him should he decide to seek higher political office.”

That level of approval enjoyed by Baker points to some of the policy stances taken by his successor, Nteta says.

“During her campaign for governor, Maura Healey repeatedly asserted that she sought a continuation of the policy priorities of the Baker administration and to mimic the leadership style of the former governor,” Nteta explains. “Now serving as the commonwealth’s first Democratic governor since 2014, Healey has proposed budget priorities and pursued changes to the state’s tax code initially proposed by the Baker administration. Thus, it is by no means a shock that a third of the state’s residents view Healey’s policy positions (41%), ideology (35%) and leadership styles (32%) on par with that of former Gov. Baker. In fact, given the continued popularity of Baker in the state, it may be ‘good politics’ to be seen as following in Baker’s footsteps.”

Methodology

This [University of Massachusetts Amherst/WCVB Poll](#) of 700 respondents nationwide was conducted by YouGov March 28-April 5. YouGov interviewed 821 total respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 700 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) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (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, years of education, and region. 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 by 2016 and 2020 Presidential vote choice and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories) and education (4-categories) to produce the final weight.

The margin of error within this poll is 4.7%.

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