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New National UMass Amherst Poll Finds Decreasing Support for Police Reform, Black Lives Matter Movement

Poll also finds 60% of Republicans oppose gay marriage, and nearly half want to make providing gender-affirming medical care to transgender youth a crime

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

AMHERST, Mass. – As the United States approaches the second anniversary of the killing of George Floyd, which sparked a national conversation about policing and racial issues, the results of a [new national University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](#) released today find decreasing support for police reform and the Black Lives Matter movement.

The new poll, which also gauged the 1,000 respondents' views regarding LGBT issues and education, found across-the-board decreases in support for a number of police reform measures since an [April 2021 UMass Poll](#) asked about the topic. After years of calls to “defund the police,” support for reducing funding for state and local police departments to instead spend money on social services dropped seven points, from 38% to 31%; support for banning the use of military grade equipment and weaponry by state and local police fell from 48% to 42%; support for allowing citizens to sue individual police officers accused of the excessive use of force or misconduct decreased from 59% to 54%; support for restricting the ability of police officers from deactivating their body cameras shrunk seven points, from 71% to 64%; and support for banning chokeholds by police officers fell, from 62% to 58%.

While support for these reforms fell, opposition to them increased only marginally and in some instances actually decreased. Instead, the percentage who responded that they neither support nor oppose the measures saw the greatest increase, with roughly one in four respondents replying with such indifference on each proposed change.

“As incidents of violent crime have increased in the past year and with President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party calling for the use of unused stimulus funds to be directed to police departments across the country, it is no surprise that the public’s one-time enthusiasm for policies designed to bring about wholesale changes to the nation’s police departments has waned in the past year,” says [Tatishe Nteta](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. “What is somewhat surprising is that this decline is seen across the board, with ardent supporters of police

reforms such as progressives, Democrats, African Americans and young Americans also exhibiting a decrease in their support for these changes. The movement for police reform may have experienced its zenith of support in the United States.”

Likewise, support for the BLM movement in the U.S. has decreased since last April, with support for the movement’s goals falling from 48% to 41% and backing of the movement’s strategies and tactics dropping from 40% to 31%. As with police reform, the increased opposition to BLM – which grew by three percentage points for each question – was matched or topped by those who expressed indecision. The poll found a combined seven-point increase among undecided respondents on the question of BLM’s strategies and tactics and a three-point increase undecided respondents on the question of the movement’s goals.

“While Black Lives Matter signs still adorn lawns from coast to coast, Americans may be growing tired of the Black Lives Matter movement as support for the strategies, tactics and goals of the movement have experienced a precipitous decline in the past year across demographic and political groups,” Nteta says. In fact, some of the steepest declines in support for the movement were found among African Americans, who reported a nine-percentage point drop in the movement’s goals since last April (from 67% to 56%) and a 16 percentage point decrease in support for the movement’s strategies and tactics (from 65% to 49%).

LGBT in the Justice System, Classroom and Boardroom

Almost seven years after the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states with its decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the new poll found that over one-third of Americans overall (35%), 60% of Republicans and over two-thirds of conservatives (67%) continue to oppose allowing gays and lesbians to legally marry. Still, Nteta says that calls on the court to reverse *Obergefell* could backfire.

“With the Supreme Court’s impending decision on abortion, some pundits and legal scholars have speculated that the Supreme Court may seek to overturn the constitutionality of same sex marriage in the U.S.,” he says. “Such an attempt would be uniquely unpopular. In an era of racial, class and generational divides across a range of issues, majorities of men and women, young and older Americans, working class and the well off, people of color and whites, and Americans with lower and the highest level of education all favor same sex marriage. Given the diversity of support for same sex marriage, it may be the death knell for the perception of the legitimacy of the court if they seek to overturn this popular constitutional right.”

The poll found that Americans are much more polarized on the issue of discussion of LGBT and racial topics in schools. Respondents were nearly evenly divided (39% agree – 38% disagree) when asked about whether they support their state establishing a tip line for parents to anonymously report teachers who are teaching material of which some parents disapprove. Slight pluralities disapprove of other measures surveyed, including allowing schools to remove books that include discussions of sex of which some parents

disapprove (37% agree – 41% disagree) and having schools prohibit discussions of race of which some parents disapprove (33% agree – 42% disagree).

Among individual demographic groups polled, only Republicans, conservatives and Trump voters in 2020 expressed majority support for these school policies, while respondents over age 55 expressed higher rates of approval for them than younger respondents. Similarly, these groups also responded in greater numbers that it was inappropriate for teachers to discuss race, sexuality and gender identity in class.

“Schools continue to be a major battleground in the culture wars,” says [Alexander Theodoridis](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “Republicans and Democrats hold vastly different views about what topics are appropriate to discuss in America’s classrooms, with large majorities of Republicans telling us that many discussions of race and sexual orientation have no place at any grade level.”

Overall, majorities of the poll’s respondents support K-12 students being taught about Critical Race Theory (55%) and being assigned books about a person who is gay, lesbian, bi-sexual (61%) or transgender (56%). Majorities also support teachers having conversations with their students about different sexual orientations (66%) and having a photograph from their wedding on their desk if they are married to someone of the same sex (61%). However, slight majorities of the poll’s respondents (53% each) find it inappropriate at any grade for K-12 teachers to ask their students for their preferred gender pronouns or to tell their students that he or she is gay.

“There’s a significant generation gap on school policies related to sex and sexual orientation,” says [Raymond La Raja](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “Older people are clearly more uncomfortable exposing students to discussions around these topics – 47% of people over 55 support removing school books that include discussions of sex, compared to 32% of those 30 to 54 years old and 26% of those 18 to 29 years old. The same is true for talking about sexual orientation, as 63% of people over 55 do not think it is appropriate for teachers to tell their students they are gay, compared to 47% of respondents 30 to 54 years old and 40% of those 18 to 29 years old. Clearly, the younger generation of adults – those who are most likely to have children in the schools – are more open to these discussions.”

“For the past year, prominent conservative commentators and Republican candidates for public office have been touting an increased parental role in shaping the curriculum of public schools, their support for de-emphasizing school instruction on the nation’s history on race, and their belief that the mere discussion of words associated with the LGBT community will do irreparable harm to the nation’s children,” says Nteta. “Their message has been received as Republicans and conservatives emerge as the strongest and most consistent proponents of increased parental control over what children are taught in the nation’s classrooms.

“However,” he adds, “as Republican-led state legislatures and governors pass legislation aimed at restricting the discussion of the diversity in sexual orientation among human beings in their public schools, it is important to note that this position is out of step with public opinion as a majority of the American public believe that it is appropriate for children to read books that feature gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people and to have conversations about differences in sexual orientation.”

A plurality of the poll’s respondents (42%) and 70% of Republicans polled expressed support for legislation proposed or enacted by state legislatures prohibiting transgender youth from joining school-sponsored sports teams that match their gender identity, if their gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Nearly equal percentages of the poll’s respondents strongly support (29%), are opposed to (30%) or are unsure of (29%) such bills.

“While conservative attacks on the rights of LGBT Americans have proven somewhat unpopular, in the realm of sports, a plurality of Americans across demographic and political groups remain unwilling to allow transgender youth to participate in sports that match their gender identities,” Nteta says.

While only 26% of Americans said they would support a bill in their state designating the provision of gender-affirming medical care to transgender youth a crime – and 41% said that they would oppose it – nearly half of Republicans (49%) said that they back such a measure.

Perhaps surprisingly, considering the divisions the poll found among responses to racial and LGBT issues, pluralities of the poll’s respondents actually support various corporate initiatives to address diversity and racial equity, such as expressing their opposition to state laws that they say discriminate against LGBT individuals (44% support), expressing their commitment to racial equity (50% support), donating money to nonprofit organizations that address racial equity and combat systemic racism (49% support) and changing their hiring practices to increase diversity and equity in their workforces (45% support).

“There is space for corporations to be positive civic actors, because we find weak public opposition to them engaging on issues of race,” La Raja says. “Just 20% of Americans oppose corporations expressing their commitment to racial equity. Only 25% oppose corporations expressing opinions on laws that corporate leaders believe are discriminatory. Perhaps most relevant for corporate practices, just 24% oppose corporations changing their hiring practices to increase diversity and equity in the workforce.”

Methodology

This [University of Massachusetts Amherst Poll](#) of 1,000 respondents nationwide was conducted by YouGov May 5-9. YouGov interviewed 1,056 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, 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 3.5%.

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