
As Maura Healey cruises to her party’s nod for governor, Democratic voters energized by the Supreme Court’s recent abortion decision express overall satisfaction with the slate of candidates, even if they might be undecided in some races.

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

AMHERST, Mass. – While state Attorney General Maura Healey all but locked up the Democratic party’s nomination for governor when her closest opponent ended her campaign earlier this summer, a new University of Massachusetts Amherst / WCVB Poll released today finds uncertainty surrounds a number of the party’s down-ballot races heading into the Sept. 6th primaries.

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the 500 likely Democratic primary voters surveyed support Healey for the commonwealth’s top office when including leaners, consolidating what was already a substantial 30-point lead in a previous UMass/WCVB Poll, conducted in June.

“While Healey is poised to win the Democratic nomination for governor, the rest of the statewide races are less settled,” says Tatishe Nteta, professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll. “As the campaigns for attorney general, lieutenant governor, secretary of state and auditor come into the final stretch, large swaths of the commonwealth’s Democratic electorate remain undecided in each of these races, making any lead tenuous at best. It looks as if each of these races will come down to the wire, with the candidate who is best able to mobilize the state’s undecided voters likely emerging victorious next Tuesday.”

“There’s still a great deal of uncertainty about down-ballot primary races, despite the fact that several of these races are hotly contested and have involved big campaign expenditures,” says Jesse Rhodes, professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “This makes sense, though – primary elections are difficult for voters to understand, because without the cue of party affiliation it is much harder to differentiate between candidates, especially when these candidates are not well-known figures. While opinion will likely firm up a little in the coming days, we could be in for some unpredictable – and close – races.”
In the race for the party’s nod for lieutenant governor, Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll has 31% of the support of Democratic voters including leaners, a 14-point increase in her support since June, while state Sen. Eric Lesser and state Rep. Tami Gouveia carry 17% and 15% support, respectively. Driscoll’s overall 14-point lead over Lesser, her closest competition in the race, marks an expansion of what was a five-point lead in June, but more than one-third (37%) of those polled said they don’t know who they will support next week.

“Despite the millions of dollars being spent in the lieutenant governor’s race, many voters are scratching their heads about how to vote,” says Raymond La Raja, professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “With a week to go, 37% still say they don’t know. That’s not surprising. Many people don’t really know what the lieutenant governor does, even if it is a partnership with the next governor and a stepping stone to the state’s top office.”

Incumbent Secretary of State William Galvin, in his seventh term and 27th year in the position, has also improved upon his lead over Tanisha Sullivan, president of the Boston branch of the NAACP, boasting a 49-30 advantage when including leaners. While Sullivan’s support has risen five points since June, Galvin’s rose 11 points. One-fifth (20%) of those polled were undecided, down from 37% in June.

“Experience or change?” Nteta asks of the secretary of state match-up. “In a race that reminded some of the 2018 contest between Ayanna Pressley and then-Rep. Michael Capuano, Galvin has extended his lead over Sullivan with days to go until Election Day. With Galvin enjoying high job approval ratings from the state’s Democratic electorate, Sullivan has her work cut out for her if she wants to make history and become the state’s first female and African American secretary of state.”

The race to replace Healey as attorney general has seen attorney Shannon Liss-Riordan overcome a 10-point deficit (21-11) in June to take a slim one-point lead (29-28) over former Boston City Councilor Andrea Campbell. The percentage of undecided voters in this race has been nearly halved since June, from 59% to 31%.

“The attorney general’s office has a lot of power,” La Raja says, “and yet just 1-in-3 voters have made a choice between the two main contenders. There’s a lot of uncertainty in the race when you have so many voters undecided a week out from the election. This one is hard to call, particularly because major politicians have endorsed each of the candidates.”

“Who says politics are boring?” Nteta asks. “As the campaign to succeed outgoing Attorney General Maura Healey approaches the final days, the two remaining candidates, Andrea Campbell and Shannon Liss-Riordan, are in a statistical dead heat for the office as the state’s chief prosecutor. With each candidate touting their major endorsements and our airwaves, computer screens and mailboxes flooded with campaign ads touting the bona fides of both candidates, only time will tell which candidate was best able to
connect with the state’s Democratic voters and move one step closer to becoming the state’s next attorney general.”

The new poll also finds a dead heat in the race for state auditor, which was not polled in June. Former Assistant Secretary of Transportation Christopher Dempsey and state Sen. Diana DiZoglio are tied with 26% support each, although nearly half (48%) of those surveyed said they don’t know which candidate they’ll vote for on Tuesday.

“With a week to go until Election Day, the race for auditor is a rarely seen tie,” Nteta says. “However, leading the race are voters who don’t know who they will vote for on September 6th, leaving the door open for both Dempsey and DiZoglio to make a last second push for votes over the Labor Day Weekend in hopes of becoming the state’s next auditor.”

In every race surveyed, respondents of the poll said that the top quality they are looking for in the candidate they will support is that they best represent their views on the issues, followed by their honesty and trustworthiness. Overall, 88% of the poll’s respondents expressed satisfaction with the slate of Democratic candidates running for statewide office this year.

**Views on Issues**

The UMass Amherst / WCVB poll also asked respondents of their views on various issues, including abortion, the economy, college student loan forgiveness and the 2024 presidential election.

**Abortion**

The June U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* looks to be a major driving force in the upcoming midterm elections, with 56% of the poll’s respondents – and nearly two-thirds of women (63%) – stating that the court’s has increased their likelihood of turning out to vote this November.

“This is consistent with patterns around the nation,” Rhodes says, “in which Democrats have been mobilized by the perceived threat of the court’s decision to register and turn out to vote. While Republicans and conservative activists have long sought to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the court’s decision appears to have been a net negative for them politically. Democrats, who feel threatened by the decision, have been particularly motivated to turn out to vote.”

Nine out of 10 respondents all approve of the efforts of Gov. Charlie Baker (89%), the state Legislature (92%) and Healey (89%) to protect women’s rights to choose to have an abortion in Massachusetts.

**Student Loan Forgiveness**
The recent announcement by President Joe Biden to cancel up to $20,000 in student loan debt for federal student loan borrowers receives overwhelming support from the survey’s respondents, with 82% approving of – and 63% expressing strong support for – the decision. The president’s decree has near-universal support among the poll’s respondents who stated that they have student loan debt, with 96% of them supporting the decision. Over three-quarters of those polled (77%) who indicated that they do not have student loan debt also support the decision, with more than half (56%) expressing strong support. The respondents were almost evenly split about the terms of the forgiveness plan, with half (50%) saying that Biden should have cancelled more than $20,000 in student loan debt, while slightly fewer than half (47%) said the president chose the correct amount of debt to dismiss from borrowers’ ledgers. Only 4% said that borrowers should have less than $20,000 forgiven.

“Biden’s loan forgiveness plan looks like good politics in Massachusetts,” La Raja says. “Voters in the college-heavy Bay State show strong support for President Biden’s loan forgiveness plan.”

“While support is strongest among those with student loan debt, even those without loan debt favor substantial loan forgiveness,” Rhodes adds. “In fact, half of those we polled would have supported the cancellation of even more debt! Clearly, this policy is a significant source of enthusiasm for President Biden at present.”

**Economy and state of the state, nation**

Following a trend from previous iterations of the UMass Amherst / WCVB Poll, the most recent survey once again found that respondents view their own economic situation and the state of the commonwealth’s economy in higher standing than that of the national economy. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the new poll’s respondents rate the Bay State’s economy as either “good” or “excellent” and nearly three in five (58%) said the same of their own economic situation, while only 38% rated the state of the national economy in such regard.

Similarly – and like previous polls – the survey’s respondents also have a much more positive view on the overall direction of the state than that of the country, with two-thirds (66%) saying things in the Bay State are generally going in the right direction and only 16% feeling that the commonwealth is on the wrong track. Meanwhile, just 39% say that the U.S. is headed in the right direction, and nearly half (48%) say the country is on the wrong track.

“While Massachusetts Democrats are feeling the squeeze of inflation and economic uncertainty, they remain upbeat about the state’s economy and their own economic circumstances,” Rhodes says. “These positive views of the state stand in stark contrast with their perceptions of the national situation, which are quite negative.”

“The Massachusetts electorate is not going into this election looking to throw the rascals out,” La Raja says. “They appear fairly optimistic about the state.”
Individual approval ratings

The latest poll found that retiring Republican Gov. Baker continues to carry the overwhelming support of his opposition party’s voters as he heads off into the sunset this fall, with 72% of the survey’s respondents approving of how he has done his job and less than one-quarter (24%) disapproving. President Biden holds an 83% approval rating, 70% approve of Healey’s performance as attorney general and two-thirds (66%) approve of Galvin’s job as secretary of the commonwealth. The state Legislature receives the approval of nearly three-quarters (73%) of the poll’s respondents.

Potential 2024 presidential candidates

Asked to rank the top three candidates they would support to be the Democratic Party’s presidential nominee in 2024, 22% listed President Biden as their top choice – a four-point drop since the June poll – followed by Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg at 17% (a four-point increase in support), Sen. Elizabeth Warren at 15% and Sen. Bernie Sanders at 12%. Buttigieg (16%) Warren (15%) and Vice President Kamala Harris (15%) were neck-and-neck as second choice among the survey’s respondents, indicating a potentially wide-open race should Biden choose not to run in 2024, when he will turn 82 shortly after Election Day.

“While Joe Biden is popular among Massachusetts Democrats, support for his renomination as the party’s presidential standard-bearer is very soft,” Rhodes says. “This is not inconsistent with what we’ve been seeing in other polls. If these patterns hold, this could become a real problem for Biden after the 2022 midterms, when the race for the nomination kicks into gear. If enthusiasm for Biden remains soft, he might face a challenge for the nomination – a very rare event for a sitting president, and one that could pose difficulties for Democrats.”

Methodology

This University of Massachusetts Amherst / WCVB Poll of 500 likely Democratic primary voters in Massachusetts was conducted by YouGov August 26-29. YouGov interviewed 547 total respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 500 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 2020 Cooperative Congressional Election Study with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements.

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 own/rent, gender, age, race and education to produce the
final weight.

The margin of error within this poll is 5.1%.

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