



## Survey of Massachusetts Likely Voters June 7-15, 2022

**N = 1000 Massachusetts Likely Voters**

**The sample has an adjusted margin of error +/-4.0%**

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

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Do you have a question about this poll? If so, tweet @UML\_CPO and we'll get back to you.

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### HIGHLIGHTS

A new statewide survey from the University of Massachusetts Lowell looks at trial heat matchups for the upcoming gubernatorial elections this November, the effects of growing inflation on Bay State voters, ongoing concerns and debates about the COVID-19 pandemic, and offers a concerning look toward the fall 2022 national elections that focuses on democratic stability.

#### 1. Massachusetts Governor Head-to-Heads

*"In a rough year for Democrats, the governor's race in Massachusetts looks surprisingly smooth for them. Both Democratic candidates look strong against either Republican in November. This election isn't over, but Democrats have the high ground. If they're going to try it, Republicans seeking the corner office on Beacon Hill need to tie themselves to Gov. Charlie Baker, who remains popular among voters across the Commonwealth." says Associate Professor John Cluverius, Associate Director of the Center for Public Opinion.*

Governor Charlie Baker, a Republican, is set to retire as Governor of Massachusetts as a very popular figure. His approval rating sits at 72% and as he has throughout much of his term, he remains more popular among Democrats (77% approve) than Republicans (62% approve).

Without Baker on the ballot, this early snapshot gives Democrats, especially the early front-runner, Attorney General Maura Healey, nearly a 30-point lead among likely voters over her closest Republican opponent. Healey leads Republican favorite, Geoff Diehl, 61% to 30%, with 1% saying they will vote for another candidate and 8% undecided. Republican Chris Doughty fairs only slightly better against Healey – Healey leads Doughty 58% to 30% with 2% saying they will vote for another candidate and 10% saying they are currently undecided.

In an April UMass Lowell survey of Democratic Primary Likely Voters, Healey lead her Democratic primary opponent Sonia Chang-Diaz by 45 points (62% to 17%). Should her campaign close the gap on Healey and should Chang-Diaz become the nominee, she would still be a prohibitive favorite over both Diehl or Doughty. Head-to-head, Chang-Diaz leads Diehl 54% to 29% with 3% saying they will vote for another candidate and 15% undecided. Likewise, Chang-Diaz leads Doughty 50% to 30% with 4% saying they vote for another candidate and 16% saying they are undecided.

## 2. The Inflation Effect

*“Sometimes economic distress is a political strategy used by the out-party. In this survey we see some evidence of Republicans attempting to capitalize on inflation concerns in expression of their economic attitudes. But we also see evidence of real economic distress. Nearly a third of Americans had difficulty paying for a basic expense in the last month, and this was heavily concentrated among the poorest Bay State voters,” notes Professor Joshua Dyck, Director of the Center for Public Opinion.*

Americans are experiencing rapid inflation rates in excess of 8%, the highest in over 40 years – and Massachusetts likely voters are expressing widespread concern about rising prices heading into a midterm election year. Our survey sought to understand both the sincere difficulties that Americans are encountering because of rising prices, and the way in which voters use motivated reasoning to process their experiences through their partisan perspectives.

We see strong stylized versions of reality reflected in partisan responses. For instance, 28% of Massachusetts likely voters say that things in the country are headed in the right direction, while 72% say that things are off on the wrong track. However, there are large partisan differences here: 42% of Democrats say things are headed in the right direction, compared to 11% of independents and 6% of Republicans. Likewise, Joe Biden’s approval rating overall is at 53% approve and 47% disapprove. However, among Democrats, his approval rating is 80%, compared to just 24% among independents and 6% among Republicans.

Yet, there are clear signs that objective economic circumstances are affecting certain segments of the population. Asked if they have had problems paying for basic expenses in the last month like housing, utilities, food, medical expenses, car payments, etc., 29% of Bay Staters reported that they had. Partisan differences are relatively muted: 25% of Democrats report problems compared to 33% of Republicans. However, 58% of those who make less than \$50,000/year report financial troubles in the last month, compared to only 15% of those who make \$100,000/year or more. Asked if things are going to get easier or harder in the next 6 months, the majority of respondents (54%) say that things are going to get harder, with the greatest pessimism concentrated among Republicans (70%) and independents (71%). Asked where they blame falls, the majority of Massachusetts likely voters say that it is the fault of politicians (53%), but this is far more concentrated among Republicans (85%) than Democrats (35%).

### 3. Democratic Stability

*“We have known for some time that Republicans have bought into the nonsense about election fraud surrounding the 2020 election. That alone is disturbing. But I’m also disturbed to see nearly half of Democrats assert that Clinton was the rightful winner in 2016 – this type of finding suggests that the moral authority that Democrats often claim in this space is on shaky ground. Someone needs to defend democratic institutions. Preferably it would be both parties, at least one, and certainly not neither,” says Professor Dyck.*

Over the past weeks, Congress has presented findings of the January 6<sup>th</sup> Commission, to investigate the insurrection that occurred at the U.S. Capitol in 2021. Our survey uses several questions to tap into general disaffection with American politics, as well as specific attitudes about ballot-counting procedures and election fraud. The January 6<sup>th</sup> Commission focuses this discussion as the insistence of fraud, it has been argued, was used as a political strategy, with the intention for former President Trump to retain political power.

The partisan political acrimony in the United States has sowed a great deal of distrust. Massachusetts voters do not trust the federal government to do what’s right. Trust, however, is a fundamental building block for democracy, and as it is erodes, support for democratic processes, norms, and functions also can erode with it. Presently, just 17% of Bay State likely voters trust the federal government to do what’s right all the time or most of the time, while 83% trust the government less (only some of the time/hardly ever). This is consequential, because we see evidence voters have become increasingly likely to express a willingness to question the validity of democratic process.

Asked who the legitimate winners were of the 2016 and 2020 elections, majorities affirmed the winners, with 69% saying Donald Trump was either definitely (43%) or probably (26%) the winner in 2016 and 74% saying Joe Biden was either definitely (62%) or probably (12%) the winner in 2020. But the partisan questioning of election results, in both elections, is concerning. In 2016, nearly half of Democrats (47%) said the Hillary Clinton was either definitely (25%) or probably (22%) the winner of the 2016 Presidential election. Whereas 71% of Republicans say that Donald Trump was either definitely (37%) or probably (34%) the winner in the 2020 election.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. COVID-19

*“A year after ‘hot vax summer,’ Bay Staters are feeling much more chilly about the pandemic and getting back to normal. While people are mostly satisfied with*

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<sup>1</sup> As empirical political scientists and staunch adherents to non-partisan polling, we are duty bound to note that there is no current credible scientific evidence that voting irregularities exist that suggest that Hillary Clinton was the rightful winner of the American Presidency in 2016, nor that Donald Trump was the rightful winner in 2020.

*the government response to the pandemic at the state and federal level, they are worried about day-to-day interactions. We still see a slim majority supporting a mask requirement in public schools, and school committees will have a lot more bitter fighting on their hands come fall. For now though, if you're planning an indoor wedding this summer with a lot of Democrats on the guest list, expect some no-shows." notes Professor Cluverius.*

What stage of the pandemic are we now in? How much government intervention is still necessary in terms of masking and distancing mandates?

Overall, Massachusetts likely voters report high satisfaction with the state government response (72%) and also give the federal government positive ratings (58%). We continue to see large partisan differences on whether masks should be required in in local public schools. Overall, 52% believe that a mask requirement is appropriate; this include 70% of Democrats, but only 17% of Republicans and 38% of independents. We also see large differences by race, as 45% of white respondents are in favor of masking, compared to 71% of non-white respondents.

The public is also split, again by party ID and race, on whether it is safe or unsafe to attend an indoor even with more than 50 strangers. Among all respondents, 49% say this is either very or somewhat safe. However, among Democrats, only 34% say this is safe, compared to 76% of Republicans. Likewise, 51% of white respondents report feeling safe in gatherings of 50 or more, compared to 41% of non-white respondents.

Asked if COVID-19 is more or less serious, or similar to the seasonal flu, 70% say it is more serious, 4% say it is less serious, and 26% say that it is similar. However, again, we see large partisan differences: 87% of Democrats say that it is more serious than the seasonal flu and just 11% say it is similar to the seasonal flu, while only 34% of Republicans say it is more serious than the seasonal flu and 58% say it is similar to the seasonal flu.

Taken altogether then, we see an increasingly polarized atmosphere surrounding COVID-19 in the Commonwealth, one where a majority of Democrats still see the benefits of masking, especially in schools, and view the spread of COVID-19 as dangerous, whereas Republicans no longer see a value in masking, and a majority do not see COVID-19 as ostensibly different from the season flu.

## **5. Other Notable Findings**

- With national discussions centering on abortion after a draft opinion in the Dobbs case was leaked in May suggesting the court would overturn Roe v. Wade, we asked Massachusetts voters their opinions. Regarding whether there should be a right to an abortion, 62% said there definitely should be a right to an abortion, 18% said there probably should be one, 8% said there probably should not be one, and 12% said there definitely should not be one. Additionally, 31% believe that medications should be available for medical abortions over-the-counter, without a prescription, 28% believe

they should require a prescription and a telehealth appointment with a medical provider, 29% believe they should require a prescription and an in-person appointment with a medical provider, and 13% believe that no medical abortions should be allowed. Finally, 56% of respondents report that they have either had an abortion or someone they know closely has had an abortion, including 60% of Democrats, 56% of independents, and 48% of Republicans.

- On June 14, the Supreme Judicial Court threw out a ballot measure which would have asked voters whether or not to approve a law sponsored by Uber, Lyft, DoorDash and other rideshare and food app companies to classify gig workers as contractors and not as employees subject to benefits. As it now stands, the measure has been struck down because of the single-subject rule and will not appear on the November ballot. However, we asked Massachusetts voters how they were thinking about the issue given that our field period took place almost entirely before the measure was struck down. Just 30% of likely voters said they intended to vote yes, compared to 59% who intended to vote no, with 11% undecided.
- In a hypothetical Super Bowl matchup between the New England Patriots and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, led by quarterback Tom Brady, 59% of likely Massachusetts voters would cheer for the Patriots, 7% for the Buccaneers and 34% would not cheer for either team.