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**THE COVID STATES PROJECT:  
A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY**  
**REPORT #28: PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR MEASURES  
AIMED AT CURBING COVID-19 IN MASSACHUSETTS**

USA, December 2020

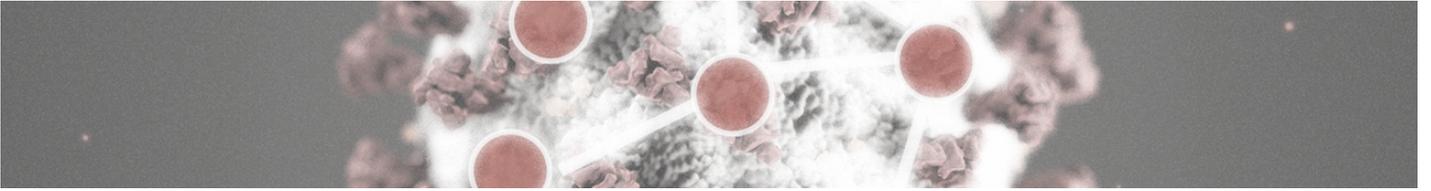
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Northeastern University  
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on Media, Politics and Public Policy





**Report of December 4, 2020, v.1**

***The COVID States Project***

**From:** The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public’s Policy Preferences Across States

***A joint project of:***

Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

**Authors:** Matthew A. Baum (Harvard University); Katherine Ognyanova (Rutgers University); Ata A. Uslu (Northeastern University); David Lazer (Northeastern University); Roy H. Perlis (Harvard Medical School); Mauricio Santillana (Harvard Medical School); James Druckman (Northwestern University); Alexi Quintana (Northeastern University); Adina Gitomer (Northeastern University); Matthew Simonson (Northeastern University); Jonathan Green (Northeastern University); Hanyu Chwe (Northeastern University), and Jennifer Lin (Northwestern University)

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Northeastern University  
Network Science Institute



# COVER MEMO

Summary Memo — December 4, 2020

## *The COVID States Project*

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### **Note on methods:**

Over 10 survey waves, we polled 139,230 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The data were collected between April and November 2020 by PureSpectrum via an online, nonprobability sample, with state-level representative quotas for race/ethnicity, age, and gender. In addition to balancing on these dimensions, we reweighted our data using demographic characteristics to match the U.S. population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, education, and living in urban, suburban, or rural areas.

For this report, we focused on data from Massachusetts: a total of 919 respondents polled between October 1 and November 28. The data was weighed for demographics to match the population of the state. You can find the aggregated data used in this report online at the following link: [github.com/kateto/covidstates](https://github.com/kateto/covidstates).

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## Public support for restrictive measures to protect against COVID-19 in Massachusetts

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As COVID-19 continues to surge nationwide, some particularly hard-hit localities are implementing (or re-implementing) relatively strict measures to protect public safety. As of this writing, Massachusetts Governor Charles Baker has put a number of [statewide measures](#) in place, including a stay-at home advisory, asking residents to remain at home from 10:00 pm to 5:00 am, with many businesses required to remain closed between 9:30 pm and 5:00 am; a requirement that all visitors to Massachusetts (with some exceptions) quarantine for 14 days or produce a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of entering the Commonwealth, with a \$500 fine for failure to comply; a requirement that all residents over age 5 wear face masks when in public, with noncompliance punishable by fines up to \$300; and limits of indoor gatherings to 10 people and outdoor gatherings to 25 people.

Measures such as closing non-essential businesses, adopting distance learning, and restricting restaurants to take-out were effective earlier in the pandemic in the US (and other countries); however, the trade-offs involved in these decisions have provoked fierce debates around the country during the current surge. While some advocates have sought to frame the debate as a choice between public health and education, on the one hand, or the economy, on the other, in many respects the decisions that public health officials face are far more complicated, and public views on these topics more nuanced.

Based on emerging evidence, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recently refined its messaging to communities and provided clear guidelines on the risks of an array of activities – such as [indoor dining](#) and [keeping schools open](#) by implementing multiple prevention measures – in the presence of high COVID-19 transmission. Notably, [many European countries have prioritized keeping schools open over bars and restaurants](#). The corresponding priorities in the US have been more varied.

In the November post-election wave of our survey, we asked respondents whether and to what extent they approved or disapproved of seven such measures intended to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, including: (1) asking people to stay at home and avoid gathering in large groups (which, for economy of words, we will frequently refer to as “*stay-at-home*”), (2) requiring most businesses other than grocery stores and pharmacies to close (which we will refer to as “*businesses*”), (3) canceling major sports and entertainment events (“*events*”), (4) prohibiting K-12 schools from teaching in person (“*schools*”), (5) limiting restaurants to carry-out only (“*restaurants*”), (6) restricting international travel to the US (“*international travel*”), and (7) restricting travel within the US (“*domestic travel*”). We also queried respondents in our October wave about six of these seven restrictive measures, with the exception being prohibiting in-person K-12 classes. We offered participants four

response options: strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, and strongly disapprove. We collapsed this into two categories: approve or disapprove. We present our findings below, both aggregated and broken out by population subgroups.

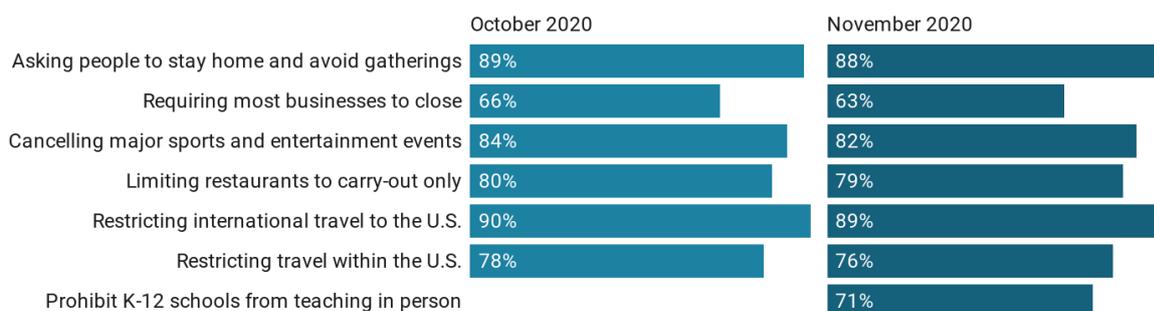
## OVERALL PATTERNS

In November, **we find quite high levels of support for all seven restrictive measures, ranging from lows of 63% of Massachusetts residents supporting closing most businesses and 71% supporting prohibiting in-person teaching in K-12 schools, to highs of 89% and 88% supporting restricting international travel to the US and imposing stay-at-home requirements, respectively** (Figure 1). Between the extremes, 76% support restricting domestic US travel, 79% support restricting restaurants to take-out only, and 82% support canceling major sports and entertainment events. These numbers are generally slightly higher than national support for these measures (identical for restricting international travel, and up to six points higher in every other case).<sup>1</sup>

The percentages varied only modestly from October levels, with the largest change being a 3-percentage point decline in support for closing businesses. For all other measures, the difference from October to November is 2 points or less.

### Support for COVID-19 measures in MA

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?  
[ Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve ]



Massachusetts sample, N = 919, Time period: 10/01/2020-11/28/2020

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org)  
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**Figure 1. Support for COVID-19 Measures in MA**

<sup>1</sup> For this and other places in this report where we reference national numbers (as well as numbers for other states) see our [Report #26 on Trajectories of US Health Behaviors](#). Note that the numbers for Massachusetts in the current report differ slightly from what is reported in the national report, because the data for this report are somewhat more recent.

## PARTISAN DIVIDE

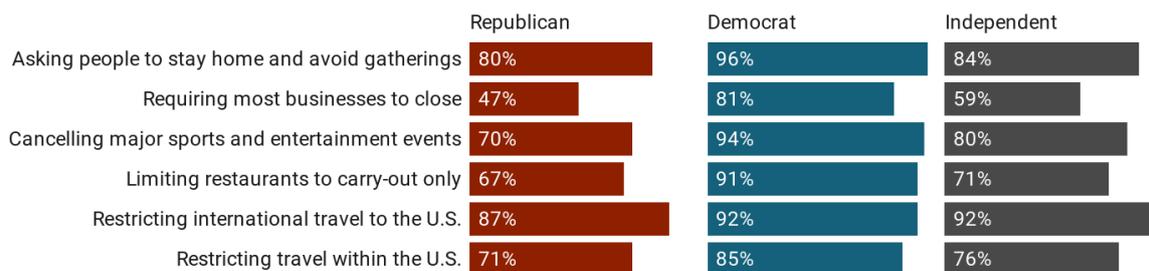
For partisan divide and all remaining subgroup analyses, we combine the October and November waves in order to improve our statistical leverage.

Beginning with partisan subgroups, **Large majorities across party lines support five of the six measures** (Figure 2). Among Democrats, more than four out of five respondents support all six measures, with support levels ranging from 81% to 96%. **Significant majorities of Republicans support five of the six measures, with the exception of closing most businesses, which is supported by 47% of Republicans, compared to 81% of Democrats and 59% of Independents.**

For the other five restrictions, Republican support levels range from 67% (for limiting restaurants to take-out only) to 87% (for restricting international travel to the US). On average, Republicans are about 20 percentage points less supportive than Democrats of restrictive measures (90%, on average, for Democrats, compared to 70% among Republicans), though this figure masks wide variance. The largest partisan gap is 34 percentage points, for closing non-essential businesses, while the smallest is 5 percentage points, for restricting international travel to the US (supported by 92% of Democrats and 87% of Republicans).<sup>2</sup>

### Support for COVID-19 measures in MA by party

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?  
[ Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve" ]



Massachusetts sample, N = 919, Time period: 10/01/2020-11/28/2020

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**Figure 2. Support for COVID-19 Measures in MA by Party**

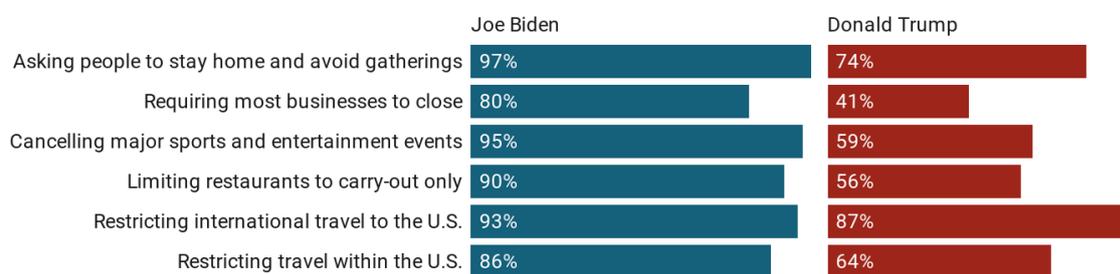
<sup>2</sup> We exclude prohibiting K-12 schools from teaching in-person classes from this and subsequent comparisons, as we have fewer observations for that question.

Independents consistently fall in between the partisan subgroups (except for restricting international travel, for which support levels from both Democrats and Independents are 92%), albeit with quite high levels of support across all of the restrictive measures, ranging from a low of 59% for closing businesses to a high of 92% for restricting international travel to the US. The overall average support level among Independents, across the six measures, is 77%. These general partisan patterns are consistent with the national numbers.

Unsurprisingly, all of these patterns are similar when we compare respondents who report intending to vote (October) or having voted for (November) Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election, compared to their counterparts who report intending to vote/having voted for Donald Trump (Figure 3). That said, the average gaps here are somewhat larger (27 percentage points, compared to 20 percentage points, on average, between Democrats and Republicans). This is most likely attributable to the inclusion in the latter metric of respondents who were highly polarized in their attitudes regarding COVID-19 by the election campaign, yet do not identify with either party.

### Support for COVID-19 measures in MA by 2020 vote choice

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?  
 [ Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve" ]



Massachusetts sample, N = 919, Time period: 10/01/2020-11/28/2020

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**Figure 3. Support for COVID-19 Measures in MA by 2020 Vote Choice**

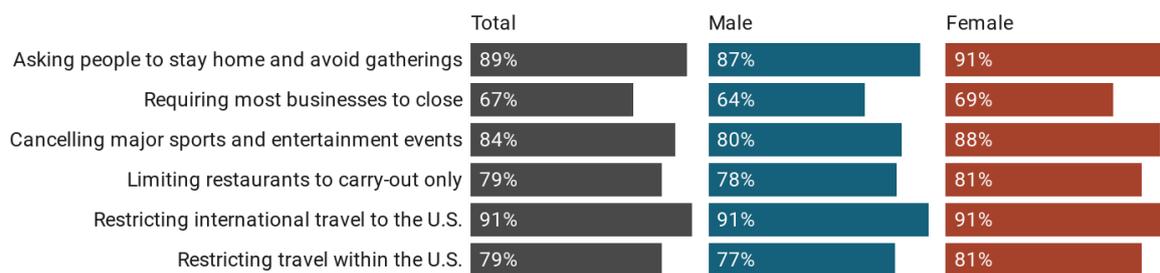
### GENDER GAP

**Women are more supportive than men of all six restrictions**, albeit to varying degrees (Figure 4). The largest gender gap (8 percentage points) is for canceling major sports and entertainment events (supported by 88% of women, compared to 80% of men). For closing non-essential businesses, the gender gap is 5 points (69% for women vs. 64% for men). The gaps vary from zero to 4 points for the other restrictive measures, including 4 points

for stay-at-home orders (91% for women vs. 87% for men), 3 points for limiting restaurants to take-out only (81% for women vs. 78% for men), 4 points for restricting domestic travel in the US (81% for women vs. 77% for men), and no gender difference at all for restricting international travel to the US (91% for both women and men). Women are generally more supportive of all restrictions nationally as well.

## Support for COVID-19 measures in MA by gender

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?  
 [ Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve" ]



Massachusetts sample, N = 919, Time period: 10/01/2020-11/28/2020

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**Figure 4. Support for COVID-19 Measures in MA by Gender**

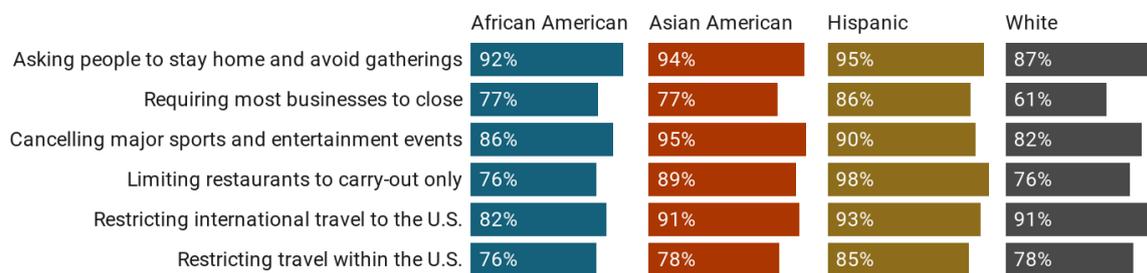
## RACIAL DIFFERENCES

**We also find that non-white Massachusetts residents are more supportive than white residents of all six restrictions, while white respondents are the least supportive of the racial/ethnic groups we compared for four of the six measures** (Figure 4). The exceptions are restricting domestic travel in the US and international travel to the US. In both cases, Black respondents are slightly less supportive (in the former case, 76% among Black respondents vs. 78% for whites, and in the latter case, 82% for Black respondents vs. 91% for whites). The least popular measure among white respondents is closing most businesses, which 61% of whites support, compared to 77% each for Asian American and Black respondents, and 86% for Hispanics. With 25 percentage points, the largest racial/ethnicity gap, in turn, emerges for this measure (61% among white respondents, compared to 86% support among Hispanics). We observe the second largest racial/ethnicity gap for limiting restaurants to carry-out only, with 22 percentage points (98% support among Hispanics versus 76% among white respondents). In between these extremes, 76% of Black respondents (to be more precise, 76.3%, compared to 75.7% among whites) and 89% of Asian Americans support limiting restaurants to carry-out only.

For stay-at-home restrictions, Hispanics are the most supportive group (95% support), compared to 87%, 92%, and 94% of white, Black, and Asian American respondents, respectively. Finally, for cancelling major sports and entertainment events, the most supportive group is Asian Americans (95%), compared to 82%, 90%, and 86%, respectively, among white, Hispanic, and Black respondents. Again, we note that the generally greater support for restrictions from non-white respondents is true nationally as well as in Massachusetts.

## Support for COVID-19 measures in MA by race and ethnicity

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?  
 [ Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve" ]



Massachusetts sample, N = 919, Time period: 10/01/2020-11/28/2020

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**Figure 5. Support for COVID-19 Measures in MA by Race and Ethnicity**

## GENERATION GAPS

With several exceptions, **we find fairly consistently high levels of support across age cohorts** (Figure 6). Respondents in the youngest cohort (ages 18-24, "Gen Z") are less supportive of two of the restrictive measures than the other age cohorts we compared, including stay-at-home restrictions, supported by 83% of Gen Z respondents, compared to 91% of respondents age 25-34, 92% of respondents age 35-44, 89% for age 45-54, 88% for age 55-64, and 89% for respondents age 65 or older. Gen Z respondents are also least supportive of restricting international travel to the US (82% support, compared to 88% for respondents age 25-34, 93% for respondents age 35-64, and 94% for respondents age 65 or older. We observe similar patterns with respect to age nationally.

## Support for COVID-19 measures in MA by age

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?

[ Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve" ]

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	83%	91%	92%	89%	88%	89%
Requiring most businesses to close	70%	70%	75%	75%	57%	56%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	79%	91%	88%	87%	79%	81%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	87%	87%	85%	84%	69%	68%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	82%	88%	93%	93%	93%	94%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	78%	77%	84%	87%	71%	76%

Massachusetts sample, N = 919, Time period: 10/01/2020-11/28/2020

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### Figure 6. Support for COVID-19 Measures in MA by Age

Respondents over age 65 are least supportive of closing most businesses (56%), closely followed by respondents age 55-64 (57%), then ages 18-34 (70%), and ages 35-54 (75%). The oldest respondents are also the least supportive group for limiting restaurants to take-out only (68%), again closely followed by respondents age 55-64 (69%), then age 45-54 (84%), age 35-44 (85%), and ages 18-34 (87%). Finally, for restricting domestic US travel, respondents age 55-64 are least supportive (71%), followed by their older counterparts, age 65+ (76%), and then 77%, 78%, 84%, and 87% for respondents ages 25-34, 18-24, 35-44, and 45-54, respectively.

The largest generation gaps in support for restrictive measures emerge for limiting restaurants to take-out only and closing most businesses (19 percentage points in each case). In the latter instance, the gap is between respondents over age 65 and their counterparts between ages 35 and 54. In the former case, the identical gap emerges between respondents over age 65 and their counterparts under age 35.

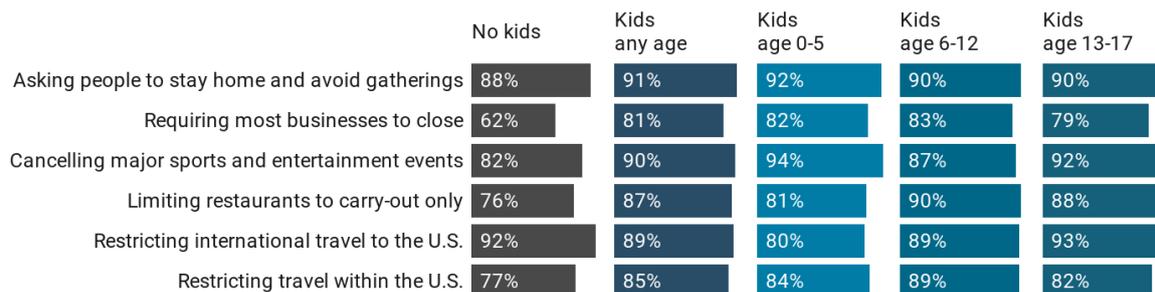
## PARENTAL STATUS

Respondents who report having school-age children in the home are more supportive than their counterparts without such children in the home of five out of the six restrictive measures, with the exception of restricting international travel to the US, for which the latter respondents are slightly more supportive (92% vs. 89%) (Figure 7). The largest such gap is for closing most businesses, which is supported by 81% of respondents with school-age children, compared to 62% of respondents without school-age children.

The corresponding gaps for the other measures are 3 percentage points for stay-at-home orders (91% vs. 88%), 8 points for canceling major events (90% vs. 82%), 11 points for limiting restaurants to take-out only (87% vs. 76%), and 8 points for restricting domestic US travel (85% vs. 77%).

## Support for COVID-19 measures in MA by parent status

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?  
[ Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve" ]



Massachusetts sample, N = 919, Time period: 10/01/2020-11/28/2020

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**Figure 7. Support for COVID-19 Measures in MA by Parent Status**

When we further break down the results to account for the ages of children in the home, most of the differences are quite small, with two exceptions (see again Figure 7). The first exception is a 13-point gap for restricting international travel, between respondents with children under age 6<sup>3</sup> (80%) and with children of age 13-17 (93%). The second exception is the 9-point gap for limiting restaurants to take-out, between respondents with children under age 6 (81%) and with children of age 6-12 (90%). (But note that, due to the smaller numbers of respondents.

## WEALTH GAPS

Our final comparison looks at differences across income groups (Figure 8). As with parental status, **the most noteworthy finding is the relative absence of differences across income groups.** The overall average gap between the groups that most strongly and least strongly support these restrictive measures is 7 percentage points, in which the largest such gap emerges for closing most businesses, with 11%. This measure is supported by

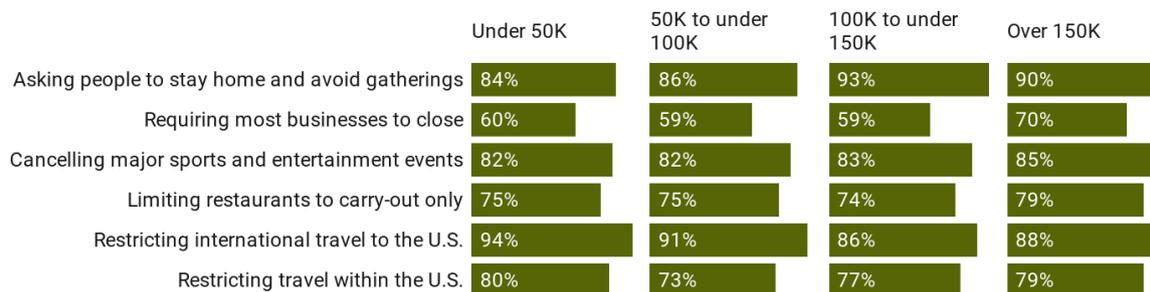
<sup>3</sup> Note that we had fewer respondents with children in this age cohort (N=54). Consequently, estimates for this age category are less precise than for the other categories.

60% of respondents with incomes below \$50,000, and by 59% of respondents with incomes of 50,000 to 150,000, compared to 70% of respondents with incomes of \$150,000 or higher. At the opposite end, only 3 percentage points separate respondents across income groups on the issue of canceling major sports and entertainment events, with support levels ranging from a low of 82% among respondents with incomes below \$100,000 to a high of 85% among respondents whose incomes are \$150,000 or higher.

## Support for COVID-19 measures in MA by income level

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?

[ Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve" ]



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