

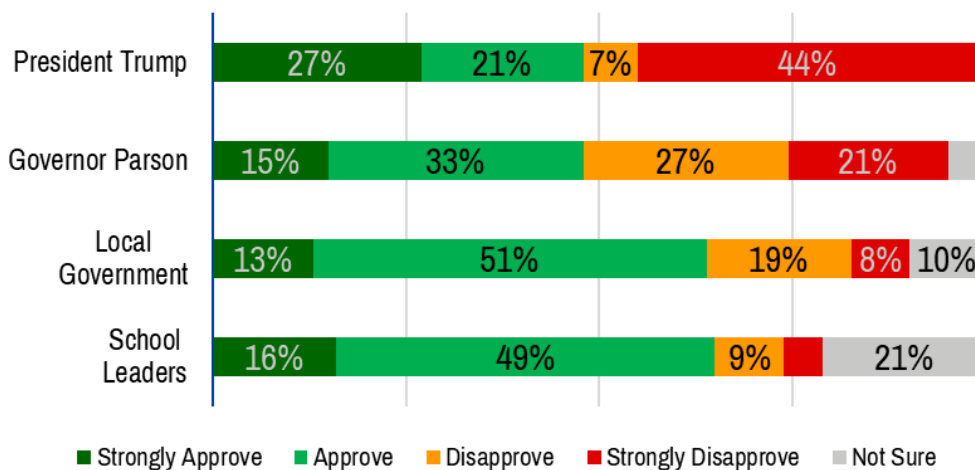
COVID, Leadership, and Missouri's Schools

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Introduction

Between June 23 and July 1, 2020, we worked with YouGov to interview 900 likely voters from the state of Missouri. Along with questions on preferred presidential and governor candidates, we asked about the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected their lives. We found that Missourians are fairly split when it comes to National and State officials' responses, but are generally pleased with how their local officials have responded. Our results show a strong partisan divide with strong disapproval from Democrats towards Republican leadership. We also find that voters, especially those with children, approve of how their local schools have handled the pandemic. Looking toward the coming school year, we find that voters favor face-to-face instruction, a result likely due to home learning and its impacts on day-to-day life.

Figure 1: Do you approve or disapprove of the way each has handled the COVID-19 pandemic...



Missouri Voters

As part of the first SLU/YouGov Poll, Missourians were asked a variety of questions pertaining to the national, state, and local responses to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. Likely voters in Missouri expressed strong opinions (leaning slightly toward disapproval) related to President Trump's handling of the pandemic, while there was more ambiguity regarding Governor Parson's approach. Conversely, Missourians were generally pleased with how their local government officials (i.e. mayors, county executives, etc.) have done in responding to the health crisis, with 64% saying they approve. We will show in the next section that these outcomes for Parson and Trump are heavily influenced by voters' party identification.

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Special points of interest:

- Overall Missouri voters are show more approval for the way our local leaders have responded to COVID than they do for the performance of the Governor and President
- Voters tend to agree with going back to in-person school in the fall
- Results were heavily divided on party lines

Party Line Differences?

While just under half of respondents approved of the President and Governor's responses to COVID-19, there is a clear party line division. Among likely Missouri voters who identify as Democrat, 95% disapprove of how President Trump has handled the pandemic, with 87% saying they "Strongly Disapprove". These results are nearly reversed among Republican voters. Ninety-one percent of Republicans expressed approval of the President's handling of the pandemic.

While most Independents in Missouri said they would likely vote for President Trump in the Fall, 61% of Independents said they disapprove of how he has handled the pandemic. Although President Trump holds a 7 point lead over former Vice President Joe Biden, if Independent voters' disapproval of the pandemic bleeds over into the election, the President's lead could continue to shrink.

Local Support

We found strong support for local officials handling the pandemic. Roughly two-thirds (64%) said they approve of how their local government leaders have handled the pandemic, 27% disapprove of their local response, while only 10% were undecided (Figure 1).

Support for local government was not party specific, though a higher percentage of Democratic voters expressed disapproval than did their Republican counterparts (37% vs. 17%). These results also were similar across urban and rural parts of the state.

Figure 2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each has handled the COVID-19 pandemic...President Trump

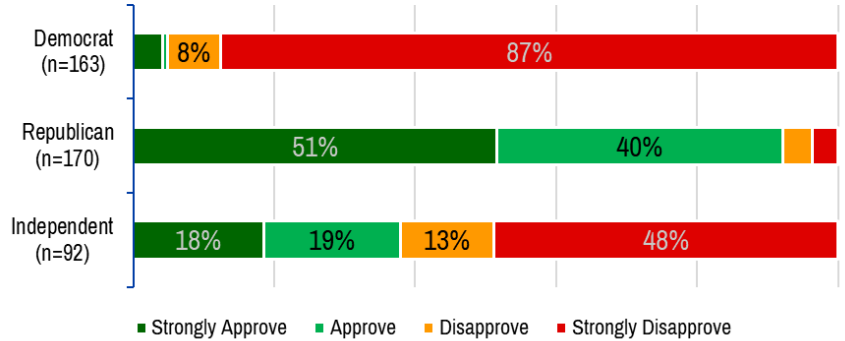


Figure 3. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each has handled the COVID-19 pandemic...Governor Parson

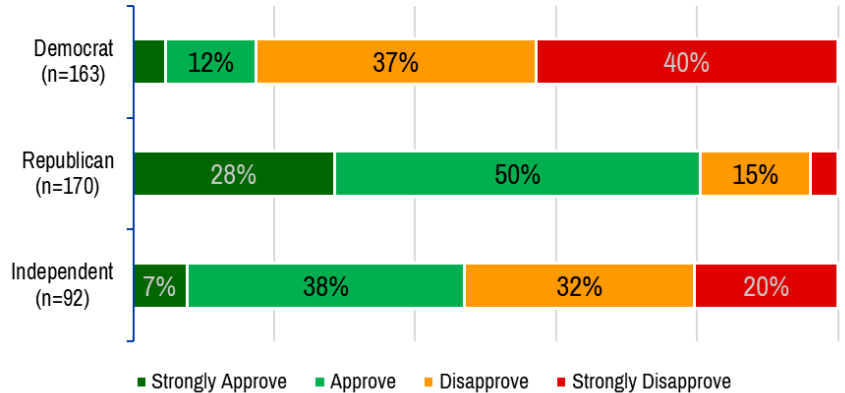
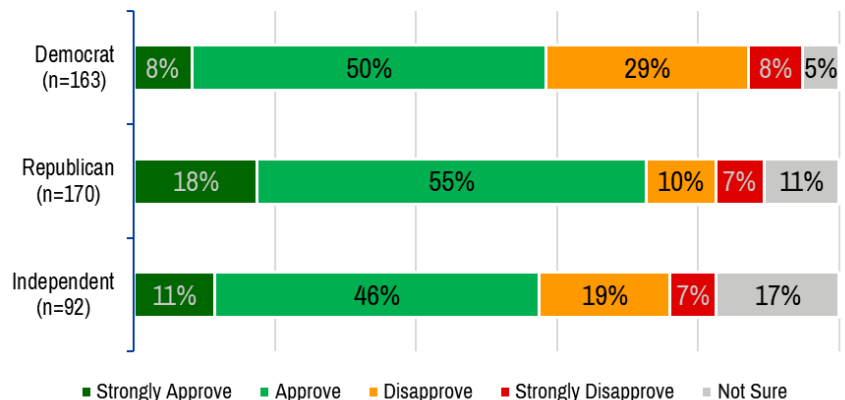


Figure 4. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each has handled the COVID-19 pandemic...Local Government



Voter education level?

We also examined whether there was a relationship between voters' education level and perceptions of our leaders' handling of the COVID pandemic. We found that Missourians with higher levels of education typically disapprove (and even strongly disapprove) of how President Trump has handled the pandemic. Among voters with a Bachelor's degree or higher, 61% strongly disapprove of the president's handling of COVID. Conversely, among voters with a high school degree or less, 64% approve or strongly approve of how the president has handled the pandemic.

Governor Parson's handling of the pandemic elicits similar approval patterns (but to a lesser degree) from Missourians. While the Governor prompts fewer responses of strong approval or disapproval than does President Trump, Governor Parson also received more positive responses from Missourians with lower levels of education.

With regard to the performance of local government officials to COVID-19, as shown above, Missourians generally approve. While support was highest among respondents with the highest education levels, support was strong (greater than 60%) in each of the three groups. Finally, Missourians exhibit greater uncertainty in their views of local leaders than they do in their views of the President and the Governor. Approximately 10% chose not sure about the local leaders and more than 20% chose not sure about school leaders.

Figure 5. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each has handled the COVID-19 pandemic...**President Trump**

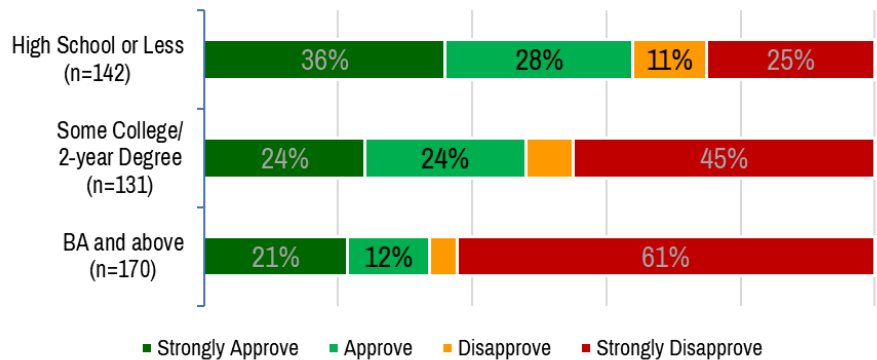


Figure 6. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each has handled the COVID-19 pandemic...**Governor Parson**

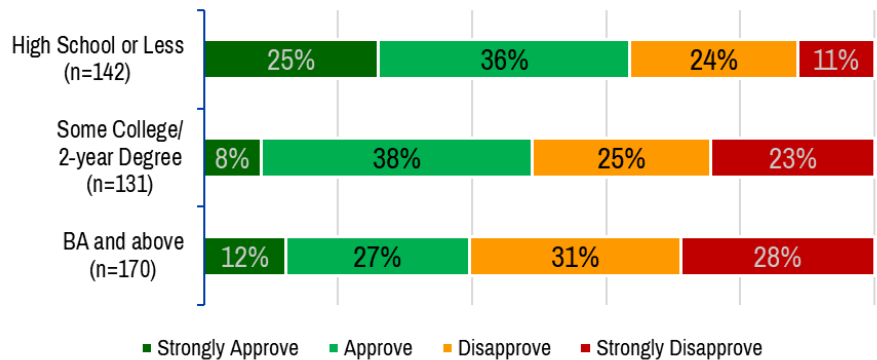
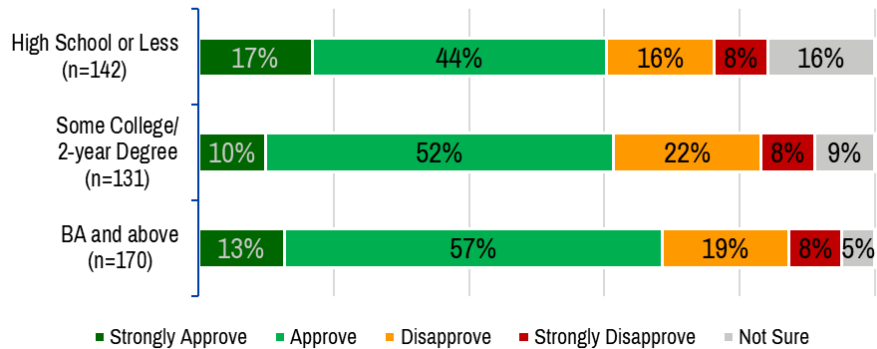


Figure 7. Do you approve or disapprove of the way each has handled the COVID-19 pandemic...**Local Government**



COVID-19 and Schools

As a result of the COVID pandemic, schools across the country shifted to home learning. This decision not only impacted students and teachers, but heavily impacted the home and work lives of families across Missouri. Our poll finds that Missourians approve of the approach school leaders took towards the pandemic. Among our sample of voters, 65% approve of how their school local school district handled the pandemic, 14% disapprove, and 21% were undecided. Approval of local school leaders and districts' handling of the pandemic was consistent across party lines, as well as across voters of all ages. Approval for school leaders was more pronounced among residents in rural Missouri, with 28% strongly approving. Voters with school-age children expressed their approval of schools' handling of the pandemic. Seventy-two percent of the subsample who said they have school-age children approve of how their school is handling the pandemic thus far.

We also asked whether voters approve of how school leaders handled the pandemic, we asked whether voters thought schools should resume face-to-face instruction in the fall. Overall, 59% of Missourians interviewed believe school should be in-person. Among those voters with school-age children, 63% said they agree with having in-person school this fall.

Figure 8: Do you approve or disapprove of the way each has handled the COVID-19 pandemic...Local School District

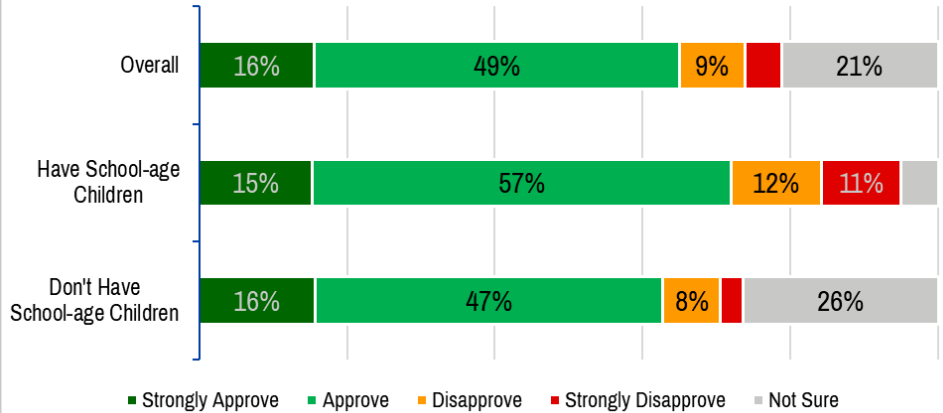


Figure 9: Agree/Disagree...Kindergarten through 12th grade schools should have face to face instruction in the fall

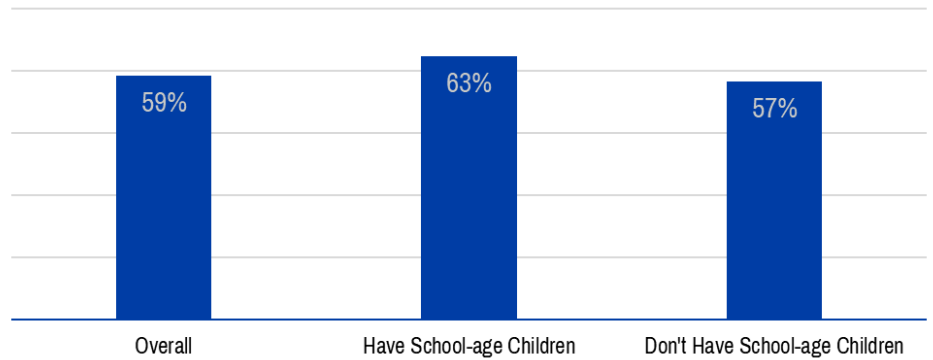
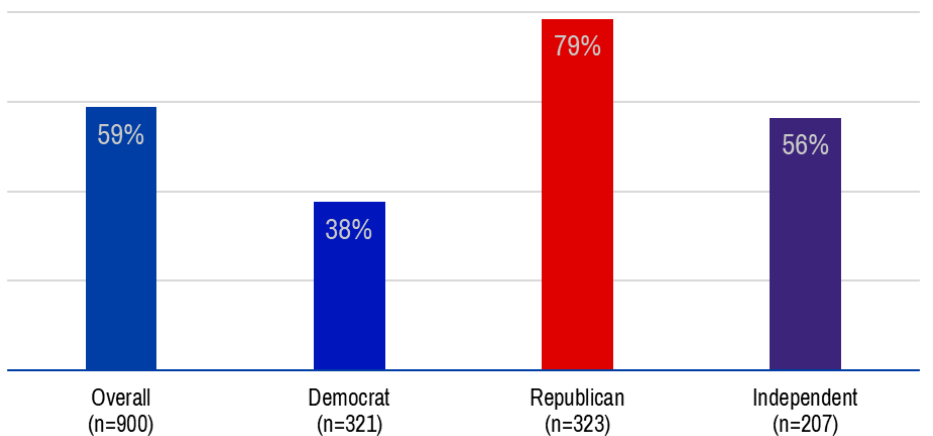


Figure 10: Agree/Disagree...Kindergarten through 12th grade schools should have face-to-face instruction in the fall



SLU Poll

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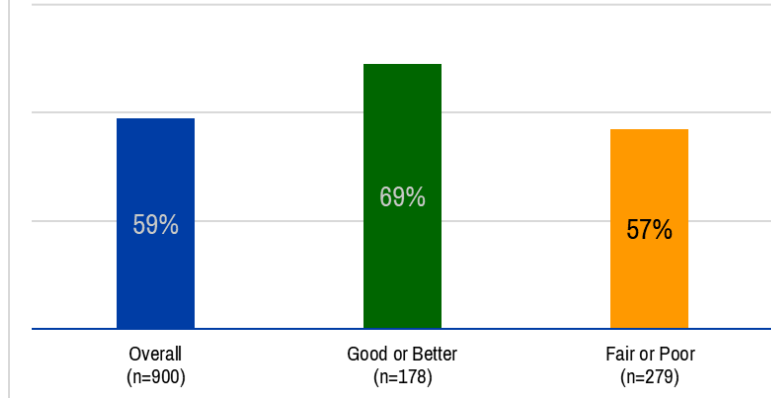
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Figure 11: Support for Face-to-Face Instruction And Voters' Rating of Local Schools



Missourians' opinions on returning to school in the fall also differ along partisan lines. Among respondents identified as Republicans, 79% agree with going back to in-person learning in the fall. Conversely, only 38% of Democrats agree with the statement. There was little difference in opinion for urban and rural families on whether school should be face-to-face in the fall.

Finally, we asked how respondents would "grade" their schools on a range from Poor to Excellent. Among respondents who rated their schools as Good or Excellent, 69% agree that schools should re-open in the fall. Among respondents who rated their school as Fair or Poor, 57% agree schools should re-open this fall.

Conclusions & Lessons

In our poll of likely Missouri voters, we learned party alignment is strongly related to views on how government officials have responded to the COVID pandemic. Republican voters generally approve of how President Trump and Governor Parson have handled the crisis. However, Democrats not only disapprove but were more likely to state they "Strongly Disapprove". With regard to local officials and school leaders, there were no clear connections to political party. We found that Missourians generally approve of how their local officials and school leaders have handled the pandemic, regardless of party affiliation.

Voters with school-age children were especially supportive of how school leaders have approached COVID. One of the most notable disruptions resulting from COVID has been the need for home learning, and many leaders are grappling with questions related to returning to school. We found that a majority (59%) of Missourians have expressed a desire to return to some form of normal when it comes to school. The support was strongest among Republican voters (79%) and among those who rated their local schools as good or excellent (69%).

Overall, these results related to COVID are informative and the partisan differences are not too surprising. We will be very interested in the responses of Missourians related to COVID when we check back with them in our Fall 2020 Poll.

About the SLU/YouGov Poll

YouGov interviewed 900 Missouri likely voters between June 23, 2020 and July 1, 2020. The YouGov panel, a proprietary opt-in survey panel, is comprised of 1.2 million U.S. residents who have agreed to participate in YouGov Web surveys and regularly used by CBS News and The Economist. Using their gender, age, race, and education, YouGov weighted the set of survey respondents to known characteristics of registered voters of Missouri voters from the 2018 Current Population survey. The margin of error for the weighted data is 3.95%.