

**UMass Lowell**  
**Survey of Massachusetts Democratic Primary Likely Voters**

**August 13-21, 2020**

**N=800 Massachusetts Democratic Primary Likely Voters**

**The sample has an adjusted margin of error +/-4.1% for LVs**

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**

### ***Markey Pulling Away from Kennedy in MA Senate Primary***

In a new poll of likely voters in Massachusetts' upcoming September 1 primary election, Incumbent U.S. Senator Ed Markey has opened up a commanding lead over his challenger, U.S. Representative Joe Kennedy, III. Markey, the sitting Massachusetts Senator who first took office in 2013 during a special election to replace then Senator John Kerry, now leads Rep. Kennedy, 52% to 40%. The poll, conducted by the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion, was fielded from August 13-21 and carries a margin of error of 4.1%

The result marks a significant 14-point shift in the race. In the previous UMass Lowell poll released on May 7, 2020, Kennedy and Markey appeared to be locked in a tight race, with Kennedy at 44% and Markey at 42%.

By far the biggest split in this race is voters by education. Among those with a college degree, Markey is ahead by 37 points, 65%-28%, while Kennedy leads among those without a college degree by 15 points, 53% to 38%.

Markey is also particularly strong among young voters, women, whites, and those with a family income of more than \$100,000 per year. Among voters 18-44, Markey leads Kennedy 59-32, while he enjoys a more modest lead, 49-43, among those 45 and older. Likewise, among women, Markey leads by 18 points, 55%-37%, but among men, his lead is only 5 points, 48%-43%. Among those who make over \$100,000 a year (family income), Markey leads by 24 points,

57% to 33%, while Markey and Kennedy are tied at 46% among those who make less than \$50,000 per year. And, among white voters, Markey leads by 16 points, 55% to Kennedy's 39%, but Kennedy is up one point, 41% to Markey's 40% among non-white voters.

The campaign, which has turned acrimonious for a primary contest where the candidates' views on the issues are not markedly different, has shifted to discussion of endorsements, records, past voting history, and the lack of comity of online supporters. Much has been made about the insider/outsider tenor of this campaign, with Markey, the long-term public servant acting as the "outsider" after gaining support from Progressives after his endorsement from Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14) and Rep Joe Kennedy, III, the challenger, by virtue of his name, acting as the "insider." When we look at the race by those who say they trust government, we find that among government trusters, 58% support Kennedy compared to 35% who support Markey, while among government distrusters, 37% support Kennedy and 54% support Markey. We found a markedly similar split in polling between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton in 2016, another race strongly characterized by an insider/outsider dynamic.<sup>1</sup>

For all the acrimony created by recent campaigning, a majority of Democratic primary likely voters (52%) say that their life is not likely to be any different (no better or no worse) in 6 years whether Ed Markey or Joe Kennedy win this primary election. Only 22% say it will be better (7% much better, 15% somewhat better) if Kennedy wins and 26% say it will be better (10% much better, 16% somewhat better) if Markey wins. Perhaps this is why Kennedy has had a hard time breaking through to lead in the polling; it is difficult to unseat a sitting incumbent if you cannot convince the electorate that you are going to make their lives better or are a significantly different candidate. It is difficult to run an *outsider* campaign against an incumbent if the electorate thinks you are more of an *insider*.

There has also been a considerable shift in perception here. A majority of voters think that Ed Markey is likely to retain his seat (52%) compared to only 28% who think Rep Kennedy will win this election.

### *Massachusetts Democratic Likely Voters Against School Reopening*

While a national debate continues about the proper way to reopen government and services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, perhaps no issue has been more thorny than schools. Our poll asked Massachusetts Democratic Primary Likely Voters whether their local schools should reopen for face to face instruction in Fall 2020. Only 16% said yes (5% definitely yes, 11% probably yes), while 84% opposed reopening (49% probably no, 35% definitely no).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/primary-distrust-political-distrust-and-support-for-the-insurgent-candidacies-of-donald-trump-and-bernie-sanders-in-the-2016-primary/578E3061392DDE1BF3BE3F615054F97A>



Given that this is a poll of likely voters in the Democratic primary (and therefore does not include all Massachusetts adults or all registered voters), it is instructive to look at the cross-tabulation by party identification to see how Independents differ from Democratic partisans. Among pure Independents, who make up 14% of the Democratic primary electorate, there is more support for reopening schools – 35% say yes (18% definitely yes, 17% probably yes) compared to Democrats at 12% (3% definitely yes, 9% probably yes). Polling has generally shown a partisan-motivated response to risk and coronavirus with Democrats more risk-averse and Republicans more risk-acceptant. While we do not know how Republicans would respond to these questions, it is important to put these Democratic responses in the proper context.

In this context, 93% of Democratic primary likely voters in Massachusetts say that COVID-19 is more serious than the seasonal flu, while only 5% say it is similar to the seasonal flu and 1% say it is less serious. Owing to its seriousness, more Democratic primary likely voters (35%) say that COVID-19 will prove to be a greater threat to humanity over the next 5 years than climate change (31%), while 36% say that the threats are about equal.

Overall, Massachusetts voters also appear to be satisfied with their options to either vote early or by absentee ballot – 83% say it is neither too easy nor too hard to cast a ballot by mail. Interestingly, more say it is too easy (12%) than say it is too hard (5%). However, without an option to vote early or by mail, 15% of Democratic Primary Likely voters say they would opt to stay home and not vote in this election. If they knew that showing up to vote in person would lead to them contracting COVID-19, 62% say they would stay home. We think that this highlights two phenomena. First, a potential COVID surge could have deleterious effects on voter turnout without sufficient means to vote in an alternative way. Second, this may also reflect the low stakes of this primary election.

### *The Popularity of Prominent Public Figures*

In Massachusetts, it's good to be Charlie Baker. The Governor, a Republican, continues to be extraordinarily popular among Democrats. Among Democratic primary likely voters in the upcoming Senate election, he enjoys an 89% approval rating (54% strongly approve, 35% somewhat approve), with only 11% saying disapprove (8% somewhat disapprove, 3% strongly disapprove). These numbers are virtually unchanged from our May 7, 2020 poll. His approval rating is even higher among registered Democrats (54% strongly approve, 36% somewhat approve, net: 90% approve) than among unenrolled registrants who plan to take the Democratic ballot on September 1 (53% strongly approve, 33% somewhat approve, net: 88% approve).

Baker's favorability rating, a net +71, is only slightly lower than the favorability rating for Massachusetts Democratic primary voter darlings, President Barack Obama (89% fav, 8% unfav, net: +81) and Dr. Anthony Fauci (85% fav, 5% unfav, net: +80).

Massachusetts Democratic primary voters are also quite favorably disposed to the Democratic nominee and his running mate. Vice President Joe Biden has a +67 (80% fav, 13% unfav) rating, while Senator Kamala Harris has a +65 rating (77% fav, 12% unfav). Asked if Democratic voters made the right decision in nominating Biden, 70% of Massachusetts Democratic Senate primary voters agree that Biden was the right choice (35% definitely, 35% probably), while 31% think that it should have been someone else (19% probably, 12% definitely). Asked if Harris was the right choice for Biden's running mate, 83% agree that she is (51% definitely the right choice, 32% probably), while 16% say that it should have been someone else (9% probably someone else, 7% definitely).

### *Other Findings*

- Among Massachusetts Democratic primary likely voters, Black Lives Matter has a +71 favorability rating (79% fav, 8% unfav). By comparison, police officers have a +25 favorability rating (52% fav, 27% unfav).
- Ed Markey's decision to focus on his roots as an ice cream man was probably a good decision. Ice cream has a favorability rating among Democrats of +91 (93% fav, 2% unfav).
- Among social media companies, TikTok is the most disliked with a -20 favorability rating (19% fav, 39% unfav). Facebook -4 (41% fav, 45% unfav) and Snapchat -1 (23% fav, 24% unfav) also have negative ratings. Other technology companies like Google +67 (79% fav, 12% unfav), Microsoft +50 (66% fav, 16% unfav), Amazon +44 (67% fav, 23% unfav), Grubhub +17 (36% fav, 19% unfav), and Uber +4 (37% fav, 33% unfav) all have more positive ratings.
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of Massachusetts Democratic primary likely voters say that their positions have moved to left in the last six months, while most (71%) say they have stayed about the same. Just 5% say they have moved to the right.