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## UNH Research Looks at Role of Politics and Media in COVID-19 Pandemic

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(HTTPS://WWW.UNH.EDU/UNHTODAY/NEWS/2020/04/06/unh-research-looks-role-politics-and-media-covid-19-pandemic)

DURHAM, N.H.—In a nationwide effort to alter behaviors and curb the spread of the coronavirus, research from the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire found a majority of Granite Staters made changes, but those who approved of President Trump’s handling of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and who regularly watch Fox News, were less likely to alter their routines due to COVID-19. “Overall, close to 77% of New Hampshire residents made lifestyle adjustments such as leaving home less often, but this still leaves a minority that did not—and that group poses a critical challenge for efforts to slow the spread of the disease,” said Tom Safford, associate professor of sociology and Carsey faculty fellow.



The survey done in mid-March showed N.H. residents had polarized opinions about Trump’s handling of the pandemic with 40% strongly or somewhat approving and 56% strongly or somewhat disapproving reflecting general criticism of the administration which had come under fire for not following advice from scientists and medical experts in such key areas as testing, health-worker protections, medical preparations and individual behavior.

In direct contrast, support among residents was high for Governor Sununu’s response to the COVID-19 situation with 67% strongly or somewhat approving, only 13% strongly or somewhat disapproving and 20% expressing more neutral opinions.

Despite disappointment with the Trump administration’s actions, researchers found that a large majority of New Hampshire residents, 77%, say they trust government science agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control for information about the coronavirus.

“As the COVID-19 outbreak intensifies, both information and misinformation has spread as rapidly as the virus itself with more people expressing more trust and confidence in science agencies compared with the president or government during this crisis,” said Lawrence Hamilton, professor of sociology and senior Carsey fellow.

When it came to the role media played in conveying public health recommendations, researchers found a striking 24-point gap in behavioral changes related to the frequency of watching one specific network, Fox News. Overall, 81% of those who never watched Fox News reporting major behavioral changes around the COVID-19 warnings, compared with just 57 percent of those who watch Fox News every day.

The survey was conducted by the Carsey School of Public Policy, working with UNH's Survey Center, between March 17 and 26. Findings were based on responses by 650 NH residents that completed an online survey and were part of the Granite State Panel, an effort by the Survey Center to investigate new ways of gathering and understanding the opinion of New Hampshire residents. Granite State Panel members are recruited from randomly selected landline and cell phone numbers across New Hampshire and are sent surveys periodically. The survey was started when New Hampshire had only 17 confirmed COVID-19 cases and the U.S. total was around 22,000. On the final day of the survey period, Governor Sununu issued a stay-at-home order.

The Carsey School of Public Policy is nationally recognized for research, policy education and bringing people together for thoughtful dialogue to address important societal challenges. The school develops and facilitates innovative, responsive and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

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