



University of Rhode Island

Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy

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Survey of Rhode Island Residents

Field Dates May 14, 2020 - May 26, 2020

N=600 Rhode Island Residents

Adjusted Margin of Error: +/- 4.78

See [uri.edu/ssirep/research](http://uri.edu/ssirep/research) for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure. Survey design and analysis by Shanna Pearson, Director, Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy, University of Rhode Island. Do you have a question about this poll? If so, email [shanna\\_pearson@uri.edu](mailto:shanna_pearson@uri.edu) and we'll get back to you.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

*Rhode Islanders helping each other in the crisis. A large majority have found the help they needed.*

The social connectedness of American communities and social networks have long been documented to be in decline. Americans, it has long been argued, increasingly are living in silos with little community connection or connection to social networks that provide support. During this crisis, though, Rhode Islanders who have needed assistance have mainly found the help they needed, and in large part that has been a product of the organizations that serve the community, the government, and their social networks. Twenty-three percent of respondents said that during this crisis, they have needed help from an organization or person outside their home. Of those who needed help, 72% said they were able to find the help they needed. A majority of respondents (54%) said they received that help from their social network of friends and neighbors, while 28% said they received help from an organization such as a food pantry, and 27% said they received help from the government.

A large number of respondents also report that they helped their community during this crisis: 44% said they had volunteered for an organization, helped a person in need, donated money, or done some other act of volunteering. Hispanic (17%) and non-white (15%) were the most likely to volunteer with an organization. Non-white and Hispanic respondents (both 37%) and those

who had experienced a work disruption (34%) were the most likely to say they had helped a friend, family member, or neighbor.

We also asked people how they found out how to help their community. State and local news sources (29%) and social media platforms (27%) were the two most commonly listed ways people found information about ways to volunteer and help their communities. Democrats (17%) were the most likely to turn to the state and to local news as sources of information about how to volunteer, and they were twice as likely to use social media as a resource for finding out about volunteer opportunities (14% for Democrats, compared with 7% for political Independents and Republicans).

*Rhode Islanders pay close attention to coronavirus news; however, many say they have heard conflicting and/or false information about the pandemic.*

Turning our attention to the information needs of Rhode Islanders, 87% of respondents say they have followed pandemic related news either very (55%) or fairly (32%) closely, with high income residents following it most closely (64% very closely and 30% fairly closely). A plurality of Rhode Islanders also reports paying more attention to news (45%) during the pandemic than normal; 30% say they are following the news the same as usual, and another 17% say they are following it more than usual at times but then less at others, indicating that they are having news overwhelm. Only 8% of respondents indicated that they are routinely following the news less than usual.

The Governor's daily coronavirus briefings have been watched by many respondents. Eighty-six percent said they have watched at least one of the daily briefings, and more than half of respondents have watched at least half of the briefings (51%).

The vast majority (84%) say the state and local news is doing a good job providing information about the coronavirus they feel they need to know (45% said "very well," with another 39% saying "somewhat well"). Rhode Islanders' preferences for news sources is spread across venues, but the most popular source for state and local news about the coronavirus was television news (70%), followed by directly accessing information from government websites (34%). Social networks such as friends, family, and coworkers (28%) were practically tied with news websites, apps, or podcasts (27%) for sources of coronavirus news.

However, Rhode Islanders are concerned about the quality of the information they are getting regarding the pandemic: 45% of all respondents and 47% of those who have followed news about the pandemic report that they have seen conflicting facts about the outbreak. Republicans (56%) and ideological conservatives (58%) were the groups most likely to report seeing conflicting information.

A majority of respondents also reported seeing some (43%) or a lot (12%) of information about the coronavirus that seemed completely made up. Non-white (23%) and Hispanic (24%) respondents were the most likely to report seeing "a lot" of information that seemed completely fabricated. Of those who said they had seen some made up news, a majority report seeing the

false information on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (58%). A large number of respondents who reported seeing untrue information said they had seen it on television (34%). Republicans (43%) and ideological conservatives (49%) were the two groups most likely to report seeing what seemed like made up information on television. Democrats (62%) and ideological liberals (67%) were the groups most likely to report seeing fabricated information on social networking sites; however, a strong majority of almost all groups reported seeing what seemed like made up information on social networking sites.

*Raimondo and State Government popular, Trump unpopular in Rhode Island in the wake of the global pandemic.*

As Rhode Island battles the Covid-19 pandemic, a newly released poll of Rhode Island residents from the University of Rhode Island's Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy finds that Governor Gina Raimondo, the RI Department of Health, local governments, state and local media, and the RI Department of Labor and Training get high marks, while President Donald Trump and Congress have low approval ratings. A large majority (69%) of Rhode Island residents approve of the way Gina Raimondo is handling her job as Governor; only 18% disapprove. Raimondo's numbers are strong across all subsets of the public, including majority approval among Republicans (53%), Conservatives (56%), and those who have been laid off or lost wages due to the pandemic (58%). Raimondo's highest approval ratings are among women (72%), and Democrats (81%) and the ideologically liberal (82%). Contrast that with President Donald Trump's approval rating, which the poll found stands at 32%, while 56% disapprove. In Rhode Island, Trump does best among Republicans (72% approval) and ideological conservatives (64% approval), both of which are lower than similar polls of President Trump's approval ratings among Republicans and conservatives in neighboring Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Local government response to the pandemic gets lower marks (52% approval) but slight disapproval ratings (18% disapproval). Many people express that they are unsure how their local governments have been doing at their jobs (30%). Political Independents (42% approval), Republicans (35% approval), ideologically moderate (47% approval) and conservative (45% approval) as well as those who experienced a work disruption (46% approval) are the only groups whose members did not give a majority approval to their local government's response.

Rhode Islanders are particularly approving of their state and local media (70% approval, 15% disapproval) and, in particular, the Rhode Island Department of Health (75% approval, 11% disapproval). No subset of Rhode Islanders did not give majority approval to RIDOH or state and local media. The Department of Labor and Training also received majority approval (54% of all residents approve, 14% disapprove) and very high marks from those who have experienced a work disruption as a result of the pandemic (61% approval). Of those who are now receiving unemployment assistance because of a pandemic-related work disruption, 65% approved of the RIDLT's job responding to the pandemic.

*Other Findings*

- Non-white respondents (32%) were less likely to feel that state and local news media were doing “very well” at providing coronavirus information that people like them needed to know than white respondents (48%).
- Those without a college degree (13%) were much more likely to have watched every daily briefing by the Governor than those with a college degree (4%).
- Republicans and Democrats watched "all" the briefings in even amounts (12%).
- Non-white (58%) respondents are much less likely to get coronavirus news from television than white respondents (73%).
- Non-white respondents who said they received coronavirus information from friends got much less second-hand information (53%) than white respondents (71%), but they were much more likely to get petitions to sign (13% vs. 4%).
- In almost all cases, political independents are more unsure and less informed on coronavirus issues than their partisan counterparts.
- While a majority of respondents approve of the job the national media is doing covering the crisis (55%), a far greater majority approves of state and local news media (70%).