



NATIONAL POLLING RESULTS: AMERICANS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT USING EVIDENCE AND DATA TO MANAGE THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

In [March 2019](#), Results for America (RFA) commissioned NORC at the University of Chicago to include within its AmeriSpeak® survey¹ questions regarding the public's views on evidence-based policy in general and RFA-backed initiatives in particular. The polling occurred from Friday May 29 through Monday June 1 and the results were both encouraging and enlightening. Roughly nine-in-ten Americans supported the notion that policymakers should seek the best evidence when making decisions, and about the same percentage indicated they would be more likely to support a candidate who shifted public dollars towards programs that were proven to work. About 85 percent of Americans indicated their support for setting aside 1 percent of funds for program evaluation, and a similar share voiced support for the practice of shifting public dollars towards programs that have proven to work. At the same time, many Americans showed concern over lack of evidence in policymaking: just eight percent indicated that evidence primarily drove policymakers' decisions.

Since we conducted this 2019 poll, our country has experienced the global COVID-19 pandemic, the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression, and a growing grassroots movement committed to dismantle and reimagine government policies and programs that have intentionally and unintentionally discriminated against and subjugated people of color for years. The data collected regarding the impact of COVID-19 and its economic fallout as well as the grassroots protests occurring simultaneously have highlighted both immediate and long-standing disparate treatments of communities of color by our health, economic, and criminal justice systems.

It has also become clear that key to addressing these disparate impacts is having accurate, disaggregated evidence and data from which to make informed decisions. [Data](#) such as the total number of cases in a community, the capacity of local hospital beds, the number of positive tests and the number of people able to obtain tests, the number of COVID deaths is critical for making decisions about things like whether and when to open schools and businesses. But,

¹ Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. These sampled households are then contacted by US mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. While most AmeriSpeak households participate in surveys by web, non-internet households can participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by telephone. Households without conventional internet access but having web access via smartphones are allowed to participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by web. AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of governmental agencies, academic researchers, and media and commercial organizations. For more information, email AmeriSpeak-BD@norc.org or visit AmeriSpeak.norc.org.

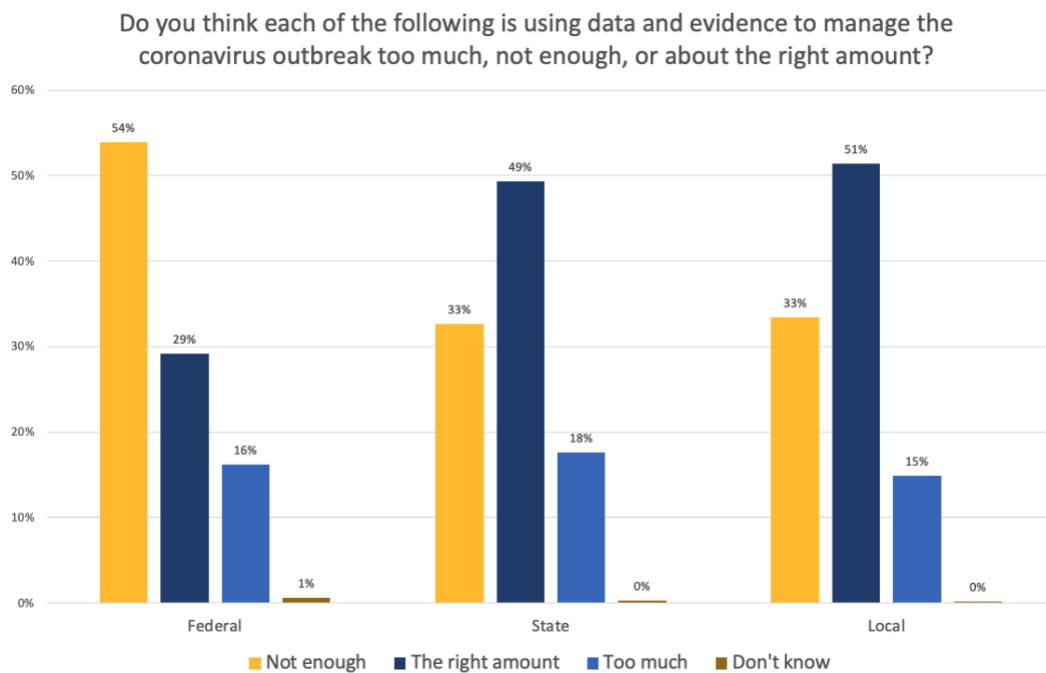
federal, state and local governments have used this information to varying degrees to inform their decisions, raising the question of what the public thinks about how these decisions are being made. Thus, RFA turned to NORC and commissioned a new study, this time focused on the public's perception of how their government leaders were using data and evidence to inform their response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Questions and Results

Four questions asked in the survey were designed to elicit respondents' views about how their federal, state and local government leaders are using data, evidence and advice from experts to manage the coronavirus outbreak and to make decisions about re-opening businesses, schools, parks and the like. The two repeat questions sought to gauge any change in the public's opinion about the importance of evidence-based policymaking and support for officials who made evidence-based decisions. The key takeaways are summarized below.

Takeaway #1: Americans think state and local governments are making more use of evidence and data to manage the coronavirus outbreak than the federal government.

The survey asked respondents if they think the federal government, state government and local government are using data and evidence to manage the coronavirus outbreak too much, not enough or about the right amount. Fifty-four percent of respondents thought the federal government was not using data and evidence enough, while only 33 percent of respondents thought their state or local government was not using it enough.



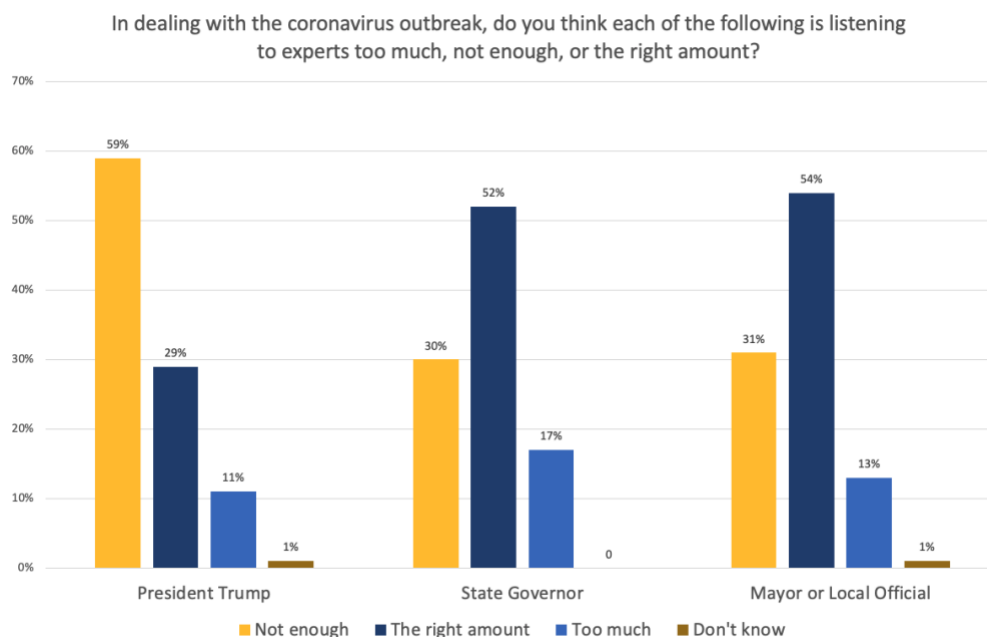
Conversely, 49 and 51 percent of respondents thought their state and local governments, respectively, were using data and evidence the right amount in their response efforts.

Only 29 percent thought the federal government was using data and evidence the right amount. Less than 20 percent of respondents thought any level of government was using data and evidence too much.

Those who most strongly believed that state governments were using data and evidence an appropriate amount were respondents who were white (57 percent), over 60 (63 percent), and had no high school diploma (55 percent). The same groups also thought the local government was using data and evidence appropriately to manage the virus.

Takeaway #2: Americans think the President is not listening to experts enough, but they also think governors, mayors and county executives are.

Another question in the survey asked respondents to what extent they thought the president, their governor, and their mayor/county executive were listening to experts to manage the coronavirus outbreak. Only 29 percent of respondents thought the president was listening to experts the right amount while 52 and 54 percent, respectively thought their governor and mayor/county executive were listening to experts the right amount. Respondents' perception that the president is not listening to experts mirrors their sense that the federal government is not using data and evidence enough to manage the coronavirus outbreak. On the contrary, the majority of respondents both thought their state and local governments were using data and evidence and that their state and local elected officials were listening to expert opinions to guide their management of the current health crisis.

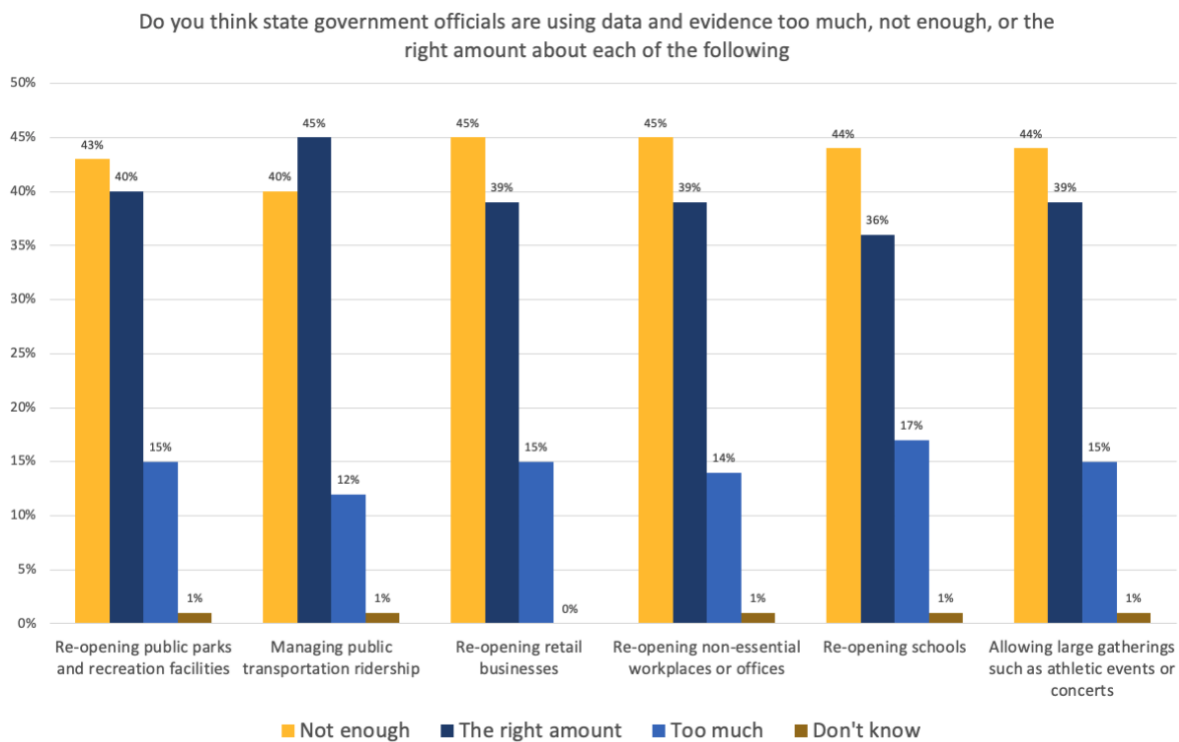


A majority of respondents in most groups - age, gender, income, education, race - thought their state or local elected officials were listening to experts the right amount. Those demographic groups disproportionately affected by COVID were less likely to think their elected officials were listening to experts enough. Specifically, the groups that were more evenly split between whether their mayors and governors were listening the right amount were Blacks (48% mayor listening the right amount, 60% governor listening the right amount), Latinos (42% mayor, 35% governor), people with incomes below \$30,000 (44% mayor, 39% governor), and young people (40% mayor, 37% governor). White respondents, on the other hand, generally think their governor and mayor are listening to experts the right amount (54% and 60% respectively).

With respect to the federal government, although 59 percent of respondents thought President Trump wasn't listening to experts enough, a majority of respondents thought the federal government was relying on information from the news media (54%), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (79%), doctors or health care professionals (65%), scientists (66%), and other experts within the federal government (64%).

Takeaway #3: Americans think state governments are not sufficiently relying on data and evidence to make reopening decisions

Americans generally think state governments are not relying on data and evidence enough in their re-opening decisions. For opening decisions related to retail businesses (45%), bars and

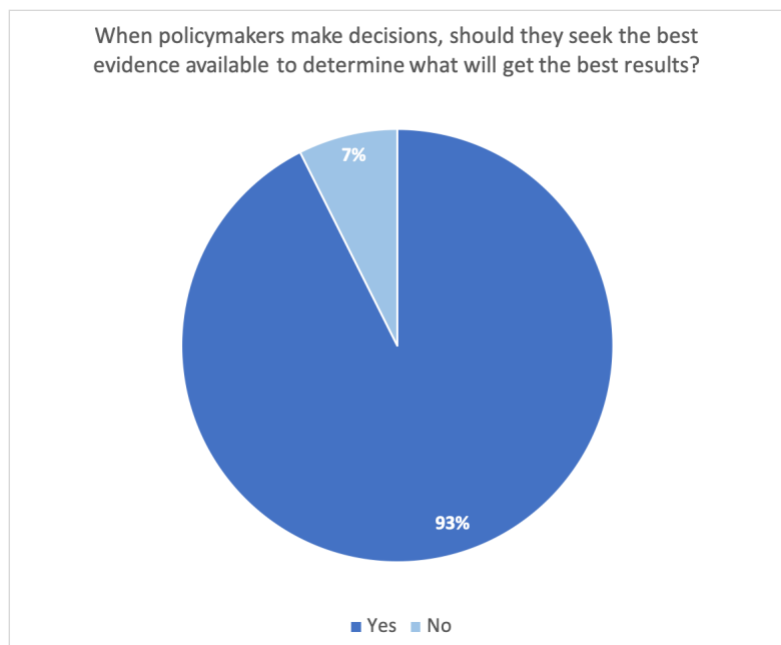


restaurants (47%), non-essential workplaces (45%), schools (44%), and large gatherings (e.g., concerts and athletic events) (44%), respondents thought state governments were not relying on evidence enough. In terms of parks, respondents were pretty evenly split between thinking state governments were using data and evidence the right amount (40%) or not enough (43%) when deciding whether or not to open them.

For public transportation decisions, the split was similar, with 45 percent of Americans believing states were relying on data and evidence the right amount and 40 percent believing they were not using it enough. These same respondents, however, thought state governments generally were relying on data and evidence the right amount in managing the coronavirus outbreak.

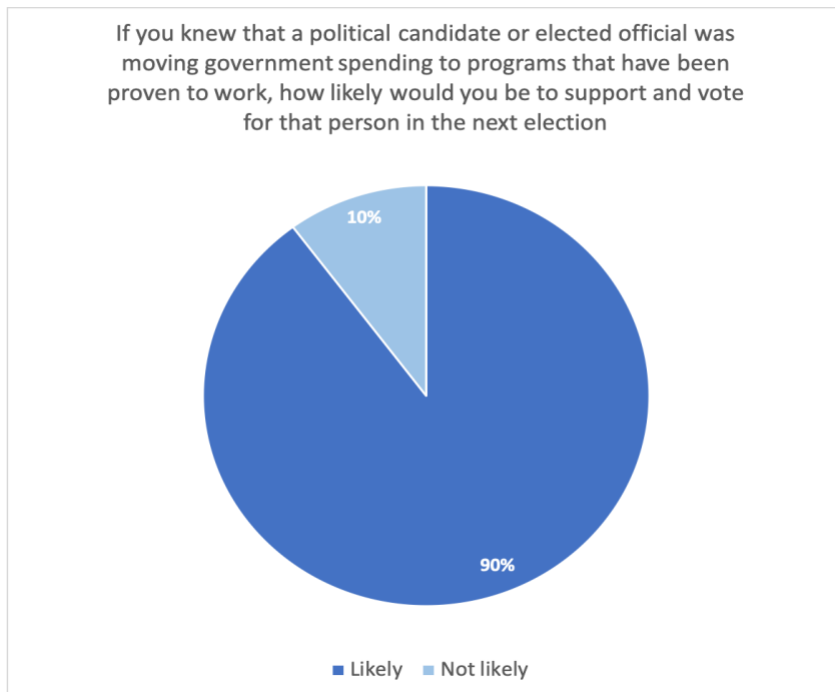
Takeaway #4: Americans continue to exhibit broad support for evidence-based policy.

The survey re-asked several questions that we asked one year ago regarding support for evidence based policy. One question asked, “When policymakers make decisions, should they seek the best evidence available to determine what will get the best results?” An overwhelming 92 percent answered yes, with only 7 percent answering no. This level of support was roughly consistent across ages, genders, income levels, and political party affiliation. And it was consistent with last year’s response when 89 percent answered yes and 9 percent answered no.



A second question again measured support for policymakers who embrace evidence, asking “If you knew that a political candidate or elected official, such as your Mayor, Governor, Congressperson or the President, was moving government spending to programs that have been proven to work, how likely would you be to support and vote for that person in the next election?” A striking 89 percent answered that they were either very likely (38 percent) or somewhat likely (51 percent) to support that person, with just 10 percent noting they were either not very likely (7 percent) or not at all likely (3 percent) to support the official. As with the prior year’s question (86% likely, 13% not likely), this support was widespread and consistent across a host of demographic characteristics. In sum, the events of the past year, including the coronavirus pandemic, has not reduced American’s support for the use of data and evidence by

policymakers and elected officials. In fact, if anything, this support for data and evidence use by public officials has increased.



Conclusion

In the midst of a major economic and health crisis and increased societal awareness of systematic racial inequities, it may seem that few issues receive support across wide swaths of the American public. Yet, this recent nationally representative survey commissioned by Results for America showed that almost all Americans continue to agree that policy should be backed by data and evidence. This broad support is robust across a range of demographic metrics.

Public perception about how well federal, state and local governments are using data and evidence to manage the coronavirus outbreak varies. The public generally thought its state and local governments were relying on data and evidence the right amount, but the federal government was not using it enough. In both cases it is clear that the public wants its leaders to be making decisions grounded in data and evidence at this current moment. Political leaders of all stripes should recognize that Americans across the board support policy making based on evidence.

About Results for America

Results for America is helping decision-makers at all levels of government harness the power of evidence and data to solve our world's greatest challenges. Our mission is to make investing in what works the "new normal," so that when policymakers make decisions, they start by seeking the best evidence and data available, then use what they find to get better results.