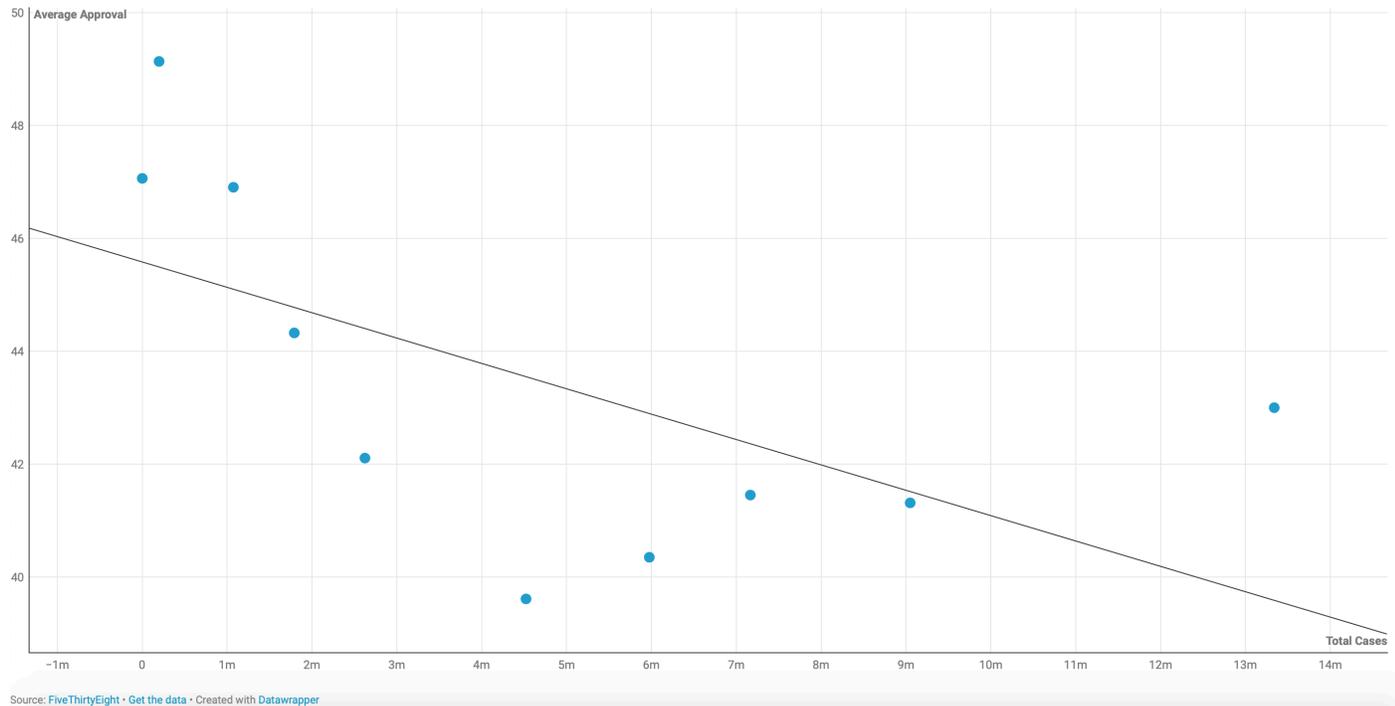


Lead Image/ Data viz:

Relationship Between Covid-19 Cases and Trump's Approval Rating of his Handling of the Pandemic



Headline: Approval rating of Trump's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic went down as cases went up, but did it matter in the election?

By Rebecca Crosby
American University

WASHINGTON – The United States is now nearing 14 million coronavirus cases, with over 270,000 deaths, and cases are continuing to rise.

[VIZ 1] <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/g94m9/3/>

In the past nine months, all eyes have been on the Trump administration as economic effects and individual state mandates have caused the pandemic to become an increasingly polarized issue.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, President Trump's average approval rating of his handling of the pandemic dropped six percentage points across all parties.

[VIZ 2] <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/gwBUj/1/>

The severity of the pandemic became a key issue in the 2020 Presidential election, and some argue that Trump's handling of the pandemic played a role in his loss.

“It was a very different election because of Covid, not just as an issue, but as something that has fundamentally changed the mechanics of the election,” said Dhrumil Mehta, a data journalist at FiveThirtyEight that created the data tracking the approval rating of Trump's handling of the coronavirus.

The pandemic was not only a huge topic in the election, but also led to more mail-in and early voting, changing how the election process was conducted altogether, said Mehta.

Even though many did not approve of Trump's handling of the pandemic, it is unclear whether he really lost many of his own loyal supporters.

The polls have shown that citizens have become less satisfied with Trump's handling of the pandemic over the past few months as cases have risen.

[VIZ 3] <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/q7GvN/1/>

[VIZ 4] <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/dqY0J/1/>

Even though his overall approval rating has remained relatively consistent, Trump's approval rating of how he handled the pandemic has decreased by six percentage points and his disapproval rating of his handling of the coronavirus has increased by 10 percentage points.

Tim Malloy, an analyst for the Quinnipiac University poll, said the polls act as a reflection of what the public is concerned about and seeing the drop in approval rating of Trump's handling of the pandemic was significant.

"That was important, it wasn't just the experts telling us this, it was other Americans telling us to be concerned, and people tend to listen to their fellow Americans," said Malloy.

Although the total average approval rating dropped, when the data is broken down between democrats and republicans, the ratings are very different.

By November, the approval rating for Trump's handling of the pandemic among democrats was only seven percent, dropping 14 percentage points from earlier this year when it was 21 percent in February.

In contrast, Trump's approval rating of the pandemic handling among republicans rose 5.6 percent to 86.5 percent.

[VIZ 5] <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/IVfFZ/1/>

This shows the drastic divide between political parties when it comes to opinions on the pandemic, as many republicans chose to continue to support Trump in the 2020 election.

For Nicholas Bicho, 21, a student studying finance, the pandemic made him think harder about who he was going to vote for.

"I think I would have definitely been more clearly Trump if the pandemic didn't happen ... even though I did ultimately vote for Trump," said Bicho.

Although Bicho stated that he was concerned about the pandemic and wanted a mask mandate, he did approve of many of the measures that the Trump administration put in place, such as the stimulus package and closing the border between China.

Along with the change in approval rating, Trump's disapproval rating of his handling of the pandemic also went up 10.5 percent between the months of March and November.

Among democrats, Trump's average disapproval rating of his handling of the pandemic jumped from 56 percent to 92.5 percent, resulting in a 36 percentage point increase.

Among republicans, his disapproval rating rose 4.6 percentage points, from 7.9 percent in February to 12.5 percent in November.

[VIZ 6] <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/M8w56/1/>

This could relate to how Trump spoke about the coronavirus to his supporters, by putting emphasis on the economy instead of the virus itself.

“Trump very much framed it as the economy versus controlling the virus, and he chose the economy,” said Peter Aldhous, a science reporter at BuzzFeed News.

Because of this, many republicans were more concerned about the unemployment rate and the failing economy than the virus itself, causing a divide between parties on how they wanted the virus to be handled.

“There is this dichotomy between democrats and republicans. If you have the virus under control, you can run the economy and do both, but that was not the narrative that was formed in the media and among politicians,” said Mehta.

As the approval and disapproval ratings of the Trump administration’s handling of the coronavirus have changed throughout the year, so has the general concern about the coronavirus.

From January to November, the number of Americans that said they were very concerned about the coronavirus went up 23 percentage points.

The number of Americans who said they were somewhat concerned has dropped 3.5 percentage points over the course of the year, resulting in 33 percent of Americans identifying as somewhat concerned.

The percent of not very concerned Americans went down 10 percentage points over the course of the year, along with 10.5 percent of Americans saying that they were not at all concerned about the coronavirus.

[VIZ 7] <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/4626225/>

Although the general concern about the coronavirus has fluctuated over the year, it has remained somewhat steady throughout recent months.

“As it’s progressed, I see it now as more concerning thing because of the way that case levels have risen, but I personally feel less anxious about it,” said Meredith Goyette, 19.

“I think this is in the American consciousness right now, we’ve really just kind of normalized living with it, said Goyette, a student at American University who has been continuing her studies online as a result of the pandemic.

Even though both Trump’s approval rating and disapproval rating of his handling of the pandemic correlated with the rise in coronavirus cases, Trump was still able to maintain support, even in southern states where the number of cases was high.

“It doesn’t look, especially at the local level, like Trump was being specifically punished for his response to Covid-19,” said Aldhous, who studied how Trump lost few votes in the counties where more people died of Covid-19.

Even with poor approval ratings, Trump was able to maintain his loyal supporters and receive over 70 million votes in the 2020 election. This could be because Trump repeatedly told his supporters that the coronavirus was not something to fear, even going as far as to spread misinformation and call it a hoax.

“If we had from the beginning not focused on downplaying the virus. I feel like if we hadn’t had the tension, we might have been much better off,” said Dr. Jolynn Gardner, Director of the Public Health Program at American University.

Despite this, as cases continue to rise, people are looking to see how the Biden administration will handle the coronavirus pandemic differently, while also looking at how we can better prepare as a society in the future.

“That might be the lesson in the debate that goes on, is that what do we as a nation do when this next one comes out?” said Anastasia Snelling, Chair of the Department of Health Studies at American University. “If we do value people’s health, what are the strategies that we’re going to use to avoid having a health issue politicized?”