



OPINION

OTHER VOICES



In this March 29, 2020, file photo Vice-President Mike Pence arrives at a coronavirus task force briefing in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington. Pence says the US response to the coronavirus pandemic is 'a cause for celebration', but a new poll finds more than half of Americans calling it fair or poor. (AP)

Sweeping change in US views of police violence

Americans not buying White House COVID spin

WASHINGTON, June 18, (AP): Vice-President Mike Pence says the US response to the coronavirus pandemic is "a cause for celebration," but a new poll finds more than half of Americans calling it fair or poor.

The Gallup and West Health survey out Thursday found that 57 percent of US adults rated the national response to COVID-19 as fair or poor, particularly in light of the fact that America has the world's most expensive healthcare system.

The numbers amount to a flashing warning for President Donald Trump and his White House team, eager to change the narrative from projections that show a growing number of US pandemic deaths to a story of American resilience and economic revitalization that reinforces his reelection bid.

In a Wall Street Journal opinion article published Wednesday, Pence castigated the news media for focusing on rising COVID-19 cases in states like Texas and Arizona.

"We've slowed the spread, we've cared for the most vulnerable, we've saved lives, and we've created a solid foundation for whatever challenges we may face in the future," wrote Pence, who leads the White House coronavirus task force. "That's a cause for celebration, not the media's fear mongering."

The poll found that only 23 percent of adults rated the national response as excellent or very good, while an additional 20 percent rated it as good.

"We always assumed that we have the best — how could the US not have enough masks, and gloves, and gowns?" asked Dr Georges Benjamin, head of the nonprofit American Public Health Association.

"The answer is that we have always made the assumption we had all that stuff without properly planning," added Benjamin, who reviewed the results of the poll.

The survey comes at a time of uncertainty about the future of the pandemic in the US.

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington is now projecting about 200,000 deaths by Oct 1, a sizable upward revision from an organization whose modeling has gotten favorable reviews from White House experts. Several states that embraced reopening are seeing increases in coronavirus cases, and there's concern that massive demonstrations over police killings of African Americans may also accelerate the spread.

"I think what we observed in terms of the COVID response is a divided and distracted leadership, and what these numbers reflect is that America woke up to that," said Tim Lash, president of the West Health Policy Center, which focuses on lowering healthcare costs.

Gallup survey director Dan Witters said the lackluster reviews of the coronavirus effort are pronounced among people with higher levels of education. Sixty-five percent of college graduates rated it fair or poor, compared with 49 percent of people with a high school diploma or less.

"As you move into the more educated stratum of the population... the response becomes significantly more negative," Witters said. Among people with a postgraduate degree, 72 percent said the COVID-19 effort was fair or poor.

Throughout the pandemic, Trump has been at odds with many scientists, at first downplaying the potential impact of the virus and later promoting treatments that turned out to be risky and ineffective.

The poll also indicated a split by race and ethnicity. Witters said black people and other minorities were significantly more likely to give the national response low marks (66 percent) compared to white people (51 percent). African Americans have experienced a disproportionate share of deaths and serious complications from the virus.

The survey reinforces public perceptions of a partisan divide over COVID-19, with 44 percent of Republicans calling the government's response excellent or very good, compared to only 6 percent of Democrats. Among political independents, 57 percent rated the response as fair or poor, while 20 percent said it was excellent or very good.

There was widespread agreement, however, on one point: By 88 percent to 11 percent, Americans want the government to negotiate the prices of coronavirus treatments with the pharmaceutical industry. That sentiment cuts across party lines.

The Gallup and West Health survey is based on telephone interviews from May 11 to 22 with a random sample of 1,016 adults ages 18 and older in all 50 states and Washington, DC. For results based on the entire sample, the maximum margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

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Biden calls on President to 'wake up' to virus havoc

Wartime Trump surrenders the fight

DARBY, Pennsylvania, June 18, (AP): Joe Biden unleashed a stinging critique Wednesday of President Donald Trump's response to the coronavirus, calling on Trump to "wake up" to the havoc caused by the pandemic and do more to prevent further harm.

"Donald Trump wants to style himself as a wartime president," the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee said at a recreation center in the Philadelphia suburbs. "Unlike any other wartime leader, he takes no responsibility, he exercises no leadership. Now he has just flat surrendered the fight."

Biden has steadily stepped up his attacks on Trump's leadership in recent weeks. But his remarks Wednesday were especially sharp, trying to counter the populism Trump hopes to ride to reelection with stern warnings about how dangerous such an approach would be.

At times pounding his lectern for emphasis, Biden said the Republican president wants to declare the pandemic over even as the outbreak continues to kill Americans and disrupt the economy.

"We may lose some of the progress we've begun to make, all because he's lost interest," Biden said.

The US has topped 2 million confirmed coronavirus infections, and some states are reporting increases in cases after reopening their economies. A surge has been reported this week in Florida and Arizona, likely political battlegrounds in the November election.

Still, Trump is eager for the country to return to normalcy. He's hoping that the reopening of businesses and other aspects of life will revive the economy — and his reelection prospects.

Trump will be in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Saturday for his first major campaign rally in months despite concerns from local health officials.

Biden is taking a much different course. He's spent much of his time inside his Delaware home to prevent the spread of the virus. Most campaign activities, including fundraisers, have moved online, a strategy that probably will continue in the coming weeks.

Biden has announced a virtual fundraiser next week with former president Barack Obama, the first time the two have appeared together in months.

When Biden does make public appearances, they usually are limited to locations in Delaware or nearby Pennsylvania. Those events have included strict rules for wearing masks and practicing social distance.

He hasn't taken questions from reporters since April 2. Beyond Pennsylvania, Biden hasn't visited any of the premier battleground states such as Michigan and Wisconsin since the pandemic struck.

Biden's toned-down campaign style was on display before his Wednesday remarks when he appeared at a nearby soul food restaurant and bar to participate in a socially distanced listening session to hear how the pandemic has affected small businesses.

Sitting 6 feet (1.8 meters) from one another around tables outdoors, local business owners expressed concerns over a lack of guidance from the federal government on reopening.

Scott Richardson, the owner of Occasionally Yours Cafe and catering company in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, said he cut his workforce from 12 employees to four. He told Biden that he voted for Trump in 2016, but now he says the president is more interested "in day trading" than long-range planning to combat the coronavirus.

Biden told the group that "no one" in the Trump administration "is taking responsibility" during the outbreak.

Biden's campaign has pledged to resume a normal campaign schedule that will take him around the country, but not before authorities and health officials deem it safe. Trump officials have argued that Biden is using the pandemic as an excuse for holding heavily controlled events.

Neither Trump nor Biden engages in many unscripted moments with voters. But Tim Murtaugh, a spokesman for the president's reelection campaign, slammed Biden for preferring "campaigning from the comfort of his basement" rather than "traveling the country meeting voters and making the case for his candidacy."

"These events have been either tightly controlled or covered by press in a pool arrangement," Murtaugh wrote of the former vice-president's recent stops. "At what point will Biden subject himself to the scrutiny American voters deserve when considering the next President of the United States?"

Detroit: A dramatic shift has taken place in the nation's opinions on policing and race, as a new poll finds that more Americans today than five years ago believe police brutality is a very serious problem that too often goes undisciplined and unequally targets black Americans.

The new findings from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research suggest the death of George Floyd and the weeks of nationwide and global protests that followed have changed perceptions in ways that previous incidents of police brutality did not.

About half of American adults now say police violence against the public is a "very" or "extremely" serious problem, up from about a third as recently as September last year. Only about 3 in 10 said the same in July 2015, just a few months after Freddie Gray, a black man, died in police custody in Baltimore.

In the latest poll, roughly 3 in 10 said police violence is a moderately serious problem. Those who say it is not a serious problem has declined from a third in 2015 to about 2 in 10 today.

Floyd, a black man, died in late May after a police officer in Minneapolis pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for several minutes. Experts say the dramatic change in opinion about police violence that has followed is an indication the country is grappling with how to confront centuries of structural racism and inequity.

"I have long argued that we cannot have a racial reconciliation in the United States because there's not been an admission of what has gone on,"

said Wornie Reed, director of the Race and Social Policy Research Center at Virginia Tech. "The nation is constructed on (racism). ... It's not an accident or something that America decided to do on the way to its greatness. It's the means by which it became great."

The new AP-NORC poll finds that more Americans now think police in most communities are more likely to use deadly force against a black person than a white person, 61 percent, up from 49 percent in July 2015. Only about a third say the race of a person does not make a difference in the use of deadly force against them, compared with roughly half in 2015.

And Americans are far more likely now than they were five years ago to say that police officers who cause injury or death in the course of their job are treated too leniently by the justice system, 65 percent vs. 41 percent, rather than too harshly or fairly. Fewer now think they're treated either fairly or too harshly.

Changes in opinions about social issues are more often slow and incremental, said Jennifer Benz, the deputy director of the AP-NORC Center. Benz said such significant changes can often indicate meaningful or lasting change has taken place in public awareness and attitudes.

"The data show noteworthy changes of a magnitude we don't see very often, especially on long-standing cultural or social issues," Benz said. "While this poll was certainly conducted at a moment of tremendous attention on racism in our society, we have empirical signals from other data to suggest that these changes are not purely a reaction to the current events."

editor's choice

