

Defying the Rally During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Regression Discontinuity Approach

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Abstract

Objectives: Do people set aside their partisan differences and rally around elected officials during a pandemic? President Trump’s delegation of responsibility to the states during the COVID-19 pandemic placed governors on the front lines of the battle, some have shined and garnered positive national attention, others have wilted under the pressure of the national spotlight.

Methods: We use regression discontinuity design and exploit a discontinuity in the state’s political events to assess the support of a governor’s response to the pandemic.

Results: Using survey data from Florida’s registered voters, we find that Governor DeSantis’ approval dropped by 7 percentage points following his “Safer at Home” order press conference on April 1.

Conclusion: Our results suggest that under certain circumstances partisanship can blunt a “rally around the flag” effect. This finding provides context to understanding when and under which circumstances elected officials can expect increases (or decreases) in public support.

Key words: Governor support, partisanship, rally, COVID-19

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In times of crisis, the American public sets aside their differences and rally with their leader (Mueller 1970, 1973; Lee 1977; Kernell 1978; MacKuen 1983; Kam and Ramos 2008). Kam and Ramos (2008) argue that there are two phases of the rally. The first stage is rally formation, caused by patriotism, and the second one is rally depression, which occurs when the “political entrepreneurs make partisan identities more salient” (Kam and Ramos 2008, 619). However, Brewer and Brown (1998, 581) argue that when a superior category such as the nation-state becomes salient “group members are more likely to think of themselves as ‘one unit’ rather than two separate groups.” For the public to think as ‘one unit’, regardless of party affiliation, people have to agree or hold consistent perceptions on what is at stake during the crisis. All of this often depends on the interaction of the event, political elites, and the media (Groeling and Baum 2008).

Amid the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Trump has continually shifted responsibility toward the states, and governors in particular (Blake 2020). As a result, governors have emerged as the main political leaders making decisions to protect the citizens and fight the virus. Therefore, the media and public attention has shifted from the President towards governors across the country, praising or holding them accountable for their decisions (Scher 2020). This has *mutated* the traditional “rally around the flag” effect. Throughout March of 2020, governors across the United States began canceling events with more than 500 people, closing theme parks and shifting schools to online learning as the pandemic escalated, “stay-at-home” orders were finally issued in a desperate attempt to ensure social distancing and slow the spread of the virus. However, the timing of when these orders were issued varied by state. Governors of large states such as California and New York announced their “stay-at-home” orders on March 19th and 20th, while Florida’s Governor waited until Surgeon General Adams urged all states to follow suit (Daugherty 2020). Finally, on April 1, 2020 at 12:00pm DeSantis announced the issuing of Executive Order 20-19 “Safer at Home”. We use this event in Florida politics to analyze how the public reacted to the preventative measures taken by the Governor.

Using an original survey of Florida registered voters, the main question we address in this study is how the Florida Governor’s announcement of the “Safer at Home” order affected his public support? Did Floridians set aside their partisan views and rally around the Governor during the pandemic? We employ a regression discontinuity design to compare the public’s support of how the Florida Governor is managing the pandemic before and after the press

conference. We find that, even in times of unprecedented crisis, partisanship affects people’s perceptions of COVID-19. Partisanship shapes the perception of whether the pandemic is more of an economic or public health threat. And most importantly, we find that support for the Governor dropped by 7 percentage points after his announcement. This effect is primarily driven by a decrease in Democratic support.

1 Survey Design and Florida Context

For this study, we conducted an email survey of registered Florida voters. The data collection began on March 31 and concluded on Saturday, April 4, 2020. It was administered via Qualtrics and had a 1.1 percent response rate. The sample frame is comprised of 3,244 registered Florida voters, 18 years of age or older. The email addresses used for this survey were obtained from the Florida Division of Elections’ February update and were selected using probability sampling among registered voters in the Florida voter file. The margin of sampling error for the total sample is ± 1.7 percentage points. Variables such as partisan registration, sex, race, and age come from the voter file list. To ensure a representative sample of registered voters, the 10 Florida designated market areas were stratified. Quotas were placed on each of these stratified areas to ensure a proportionate number of completed surveys from across the state. Due to the unique population of Miami-Dade County, it was separated to create an 11th strata from the 10 designated media markets.

Since the beginning of his term in January 2019, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, has had a high approval rating among both Republicans and Democrats in the state, in March 2019, October 2019 and even February of 2020 DeSantis’ job approval was a double digit net positive among Democrats. Unlike other US Governors, whose approval ratings have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, DeSantis’ approval rating dropped by 7 points (Mehta 2020). In an effort to take both health preventative measures and continue to keep the economy open, Governor DeSantis’ strategy of handling the pandemic has been criticized as slow and confusing (Rohrer 2020). Pictures of Florida’s crowded beaches with Spring Breakers had deadly consequences and garnered national ridicule (Schorsch 2020; Mazzei and Robles 2020), escalating Floridians’ anxiety of a severe virus outbreak in the state. “Nearly 2,000 Florida healthcare professionals signed an open letter to DeSantis pleading with him to take more aggressive actions to hinder the spread of the virus, including enacting a statewide shelter-in-place order” (Allyn 2020). DeSantis had also been criticized for lacking an original strategy for

Florida while being labeled “a ‘mini-Trump’ governor who borrowed the president’s playbook” (Luscombe 2020). This media coverage and elite discourse likely played into DeSantis’ divergent approval ratings (Brody 1991; Zaller et al. 1992; Groeling and Baum 2008).

Given that there is variation across different subgroups of the public on how they react to elected officials, often dependent on their level of economic, political, and personal considerations (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991; Krause 1997; Baum and Kernell 2001; Baum 2002), we analyze the heterogeneity of the rally around the flag effect across different subgroups of the constituency. In Table 1, we show whether Democrats and Republicans hold similar perceptions of COVID-19. Referring to Table 1, we find that 83% of Democrats consider COVID-19 to be a greater public health impact than economic threat compared to 52.2% of the Republicans. Apparently, partisanship is affecting the public’s perceptions of COVID-19 as these numbers show that respondents are aligning their perceptions with their respective party’s rhetoric. Does partisanship affect their support for the Governor’s job in handling the virus? Table 2 shows support among a majority of Republicans regardless of whether they consider COVID-19 to be a greater economic or public health threat. For example, 82.8% of Republicans, who consider the virus to be an economic threat, support the Governor’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to 73.5% of the those who think it is more of a public health risk. Conversely, 49.5% of Democrats, who think that the virus is more of an economic threat, support the Governor handling of it, compared to only 26.4% of those who think it is a greater public health risk. Clearly partisanship has impacted the assessment of the Governor’s job in this circumstance. Did the press conference and the DeSantis’ “Safer at Home” order affect the Governor’s support? To answer this question our identification strategy utilizes a sharp regression discontinuity design as explained below.

2 Identification Strategy: Regression Discontinuity Design

We use a quasi-experimental regression discontinuity design to test how the approval of the Governor’s response to COVID-19 discretely changed following the “Safer at Home” executive order. Let each voter i in our random sample be characterized by a vector (y_i, w_i, d_i) , where the scalar y_i denotes the governor’s support, the vector w_i captures the individual-level characteristics, $d_i = \mathbb{1}[x_i > 0]$ our treatment variable is an indicator function equal to one if the bracketed logical condition holds, and zero otherwise, and x_i is our forcing variable. The forcing variable runs from -25 hours to 65 hours, where 0 (cutoff point) denotes the time when the governor

held the “Safer at Home” order press conference, April 1, 2020 at 12:00pm. The regression discontinuity approach assigns observations to the *treatment* group and *control* group based on a discrete threshold of our continuous forcing variable x_i . That is, we assign observations to the *treatment* group if $x_i > 0$ and to the *control* group if $x_i < 0$.

The main identification assumption required for the regression discontinuity design is that the conditional expectation functions of the potential outcomes are continuous on the support of the running variable x_i .¹ Hence we can test the approval of the Governor’s response to COVID-19 by the value of the discontinuity of the expected value of the response at $x_i = 0$ (Angrist and Pischke 2008). We specify the parametric model at the individual-level, estimating the local average treatment effect (LATE), as follows

$$y_i = \psi_0 + \psi_1 x_i + \tau d_i + \psi_2 (x_i \times d_i) + w_i' \gamma + \nu_i \quad (1)$$

where τ is our parameter of interest that captures the approval of the Governor’s response to COVID-19. We also estimate a more flexible local regression model

$$y_i = \psi_0 + f(x_i) + \tau d_i + w_i' \gamma + \eta_i \quad (2)$$

where f is a function of x_i , and we model f using a second and third order degree polynomials.

3 Analysis

In Figure 1, we plot the support for the Governor before and after the press conference. The cut-off is the time of the press conference, April 1, 2020 at 12:00pm. In Figure 1 we plot Floridian’s support for the Governor before and after the press conference. As shown in Figure 1, Floridians who responded to our survey before the Governor’s press conference to address the “Safer at Home” measure showed a greater support for the Governor compared to their counterparts who completed the survey after the state address. To be more concrete, the support for the Governor after the press conference dropped by 7 percentage points among all

¹We conduct a thorough analysis; (i) plot the response against the forcing variable where we find evidence of a jump in the conditional mean of the response, (ii) for each individual covariate we find no discontinuity at the cut-off point, and (iii) we test the null hypothesis of continuity of the forcing variable using McCrary (2008) test and find no evidence of discontinuity in the forcing variable at the cut-off point.

respondents. Figure 1 provides a general overview of Governor’s support among all respondents but it does not highlight how partisanship is affecting this relationship.

To understand which subgroup of Floridians is responsible for this shift in the Governor’s support, we replicate Figure 1 using split-sample analysis by party affiliation. Referring to Figure 2(a), we find that Republicans, as expected, had a high support rate for the Governor before the press conference, about 80 percent, and after the press conference it marginally dropped to 74 percent. A similar pattern is observed with no party affiliates in Figure 2(b). As shown in Figure 2(b), no party affiliates support for the Governor before the conference was about 54 percent and after the conference it dropped to about 47 percent. It should be highlighted that the decrease in Governor’s support after the press conference is not statistically significant for both Republicans and no party affiliates compared to their respective pre-conference support levels. The slight decline in Governor’s support, in both Figure 2(a) and Figure 2(b), bounced back up to its pre-announcement levels several hours after the event.

Completely different support patterns are observed for Democrats in our sample. As shown in Figure 2(c), Democrats’ support for the Governor was significantly lower compared to Republicans and no party affiliates. Democratic support for the Governor seemed to have had an increasing pattern prior to the announcement and was followed by a drastic drop right after, Figure 2(c). Referring to Figure 2(c), Democratic support for the Governor dropped immediately after the press conference and stayed stagnant for the next sixty-five hours post announcement.

In Table 3, we show the marginal effect for support for the Governor by party affiliation. All estimates shown in Panel A are estimated controlling for the respondent’s age, race, gender, income, education, virus perceptions, risk of contracting the virus, financial concerns, and county fixed-effects.² While, in Panel B we replicate the same models without county fixed-effects to see how much of the effect is driven by county differences.³ As shown Table 3, Democrats’ support declined by 9 percentage points after the press conference on April 1st. To make sure that the effects we find are not due to non-linearity in the data (Angrist and Pischke 2008), we run sensitivity check estimations shown in Model (2) to Model (4) in Appendix A and Appendix B.

As shown in Table 3, the Republican decline in support for the Governor is not statistically significant. In addition, the drop in support among no party affiliates is statistically significant,

²See Appendix A for full tables.

³In Appendix B we replicate our models without county fixed-effects.

but the effect goes away when we run sensitivity checks for non-linearity.⁴ Our results are consistent when we replicate our analysis without controlling for county fixed-effects, as shown in Table 3 Panel B.

4 Discussion

To sum up, we find that people are still using their party identification lenses to view the world and form political expectations during this pandemic. Florida Democrats did not rally and their support for the Governor dropped after the “Safer at Home” announcement. Apparently, the media and elite discourse (Groeling and Baum 2008) blunted DeSantis’ potential job approval gains. The fact that Democratic Governors, such as Andrew Cuomo of New York and Gavin Newsom of California, reacted faster and the timing of the “Safer at Home” announcement coincided with the White House’s marching orders, likely increased the partisan division between Democrats and Republicans in the state. Overall, 70% (2264 respondents) of our respondents considered COVID-19 to be a greater public health issue than economic threat and 43% of respondents thought the state government’s actions had not gone far enough to help fight the pandemic. Leading up to the issuance of the “Safer at Home” announcement there was uncertainty about how best to handle this novel pandemic, it is likely that Floridians were holding out hope that a shelter in place order was not necessary. However, as soon as DeSantis finally issued the order, Democrats blamed the Governor for delaying the response to put in place preventative measures to protect public health. The decision to prioritize the economy over health and delaying the “Safer at Home” order likely hurt Governor DeSantis’ support most among Democrats.

Moreover, Baker and Oneal (2001, 682) argue that “what appears to matter most in regard to the size of the rally effect is not the nature of the dispute itself but how effectively the White House manages the presentation of the dispute through presidential statements, prominent media coverage, and the garnering bipartisan support.” Even though, Florida was not hit as hard from the virus, Governor DeSantis’ handling of the situation has been heavily criticized. “DeSantis’ bizarre decision to don just one glove during a recent briefing, drawing ridicule from the internet at large questioning whether he understood how to properly use protective gear” (Schorsch 2020). Hindering the public perceptions of the DeSantis’ efforts also included banning reporters from the Governor’s briefings, inaccurate reporting of COVID-19 cases and a

⁴See Appendix C for question wording and variable information.

reliance on a very partisan president’s statements. This combination of actions, elite criticism and media coverage (Groeling and Baum 2008) has led to a stark partisan divide and blunted positive reviews that typically accompany statewide or national emergencies.

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Table 1: COVID-19 Perceptions by Party

	Democrat		Republican		No Party Affiliate	
	Observations	Percent	Observations	Percent	Observations	Percent
Economic threat	200	16.93	533	47.80	284	31.24
Public health threat	981	83.07	582	52.20	625	68.76

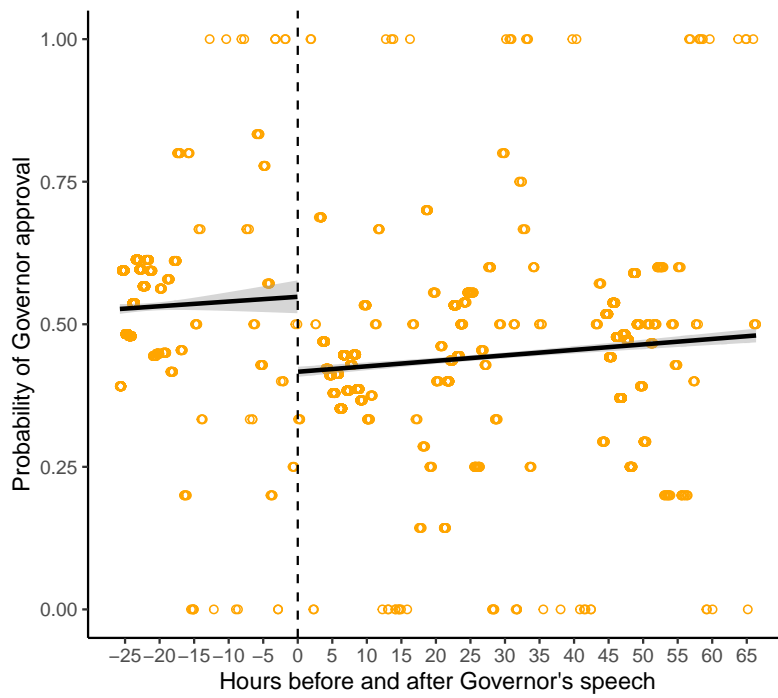
Note: Weighted descriptive statistics with column percentages.

Table 2: COVID-19 Perceptions and Governor Support by Party

	Democrat		Republican		No Party Affiliate	
	Observations	Percent	Observations	Percent	Observations	Percent
Governor Support (Economic threat)	90	49.50	420	82.80	159	63.60
Governor Support (Health threat)	248	26.40	411	73.50	264	44.90

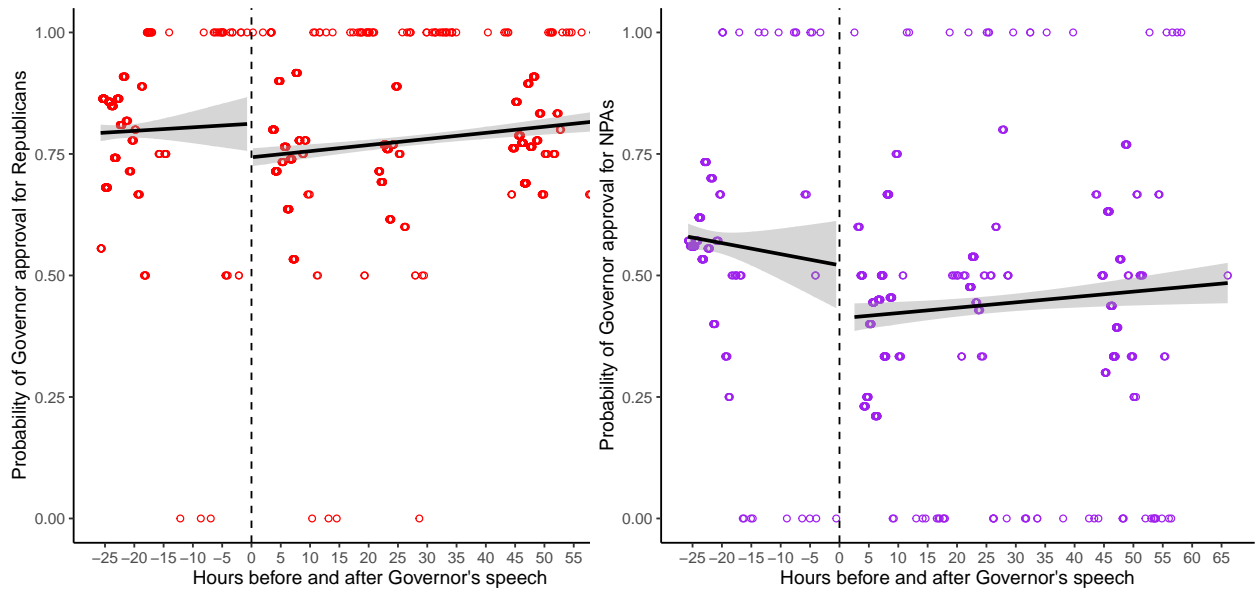
Note: Split-sample weighted descriptive statistics with column percentages.

Figure 1: General Support for Governor Before and After the Announcement



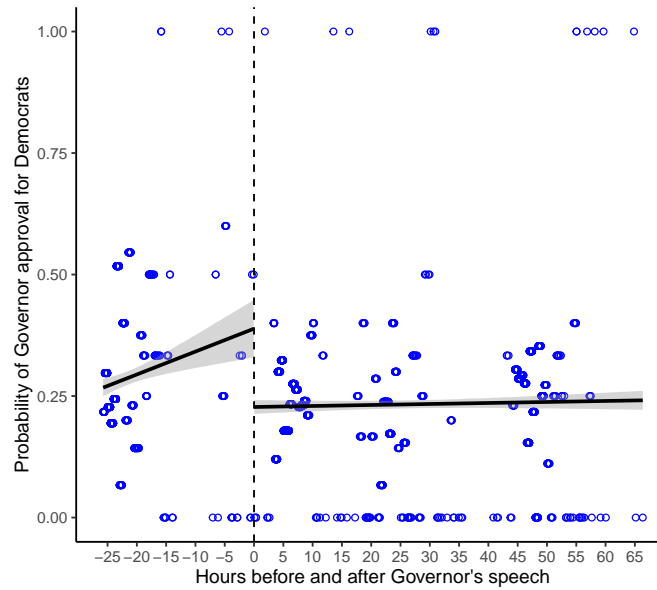
Note: The dotted line is the cut-off point at the time when the Governor held the press conference, April 1, 2020 at 12:00pm.

Figure 2: Governor Support Before and After the Announcement by Party



(a) Republican

(b) No Party Affiliate



(c) Democrat

Note: The dotted line is the cut-off point at the time when the Governor held the press conference, April 1, 2020 at 12:00pm. Each graph shows the split-sample description of the data patterns.

Table 3: Marginal Effects for Governor Support

	Democrat	Republican	No Party Affiliate
	$\beta(se)$	$\beta(se)$	$\beta(se)$
<i>Panel A</i>			
Post announcement	-0.090** (0.045)	-0.028 (0.056)	-0.128* (0.073)
<i>Panel B</i>			
Post announcement	-0.100* (0.044)	-0.056 (0.054)	-0.143* (0.070)
Controls	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,313	889	671

Note: The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent supported Governor's response to COVID-19 and 0 if they did not. Control variables include respondent's age, race, gender, income, education, virus perceptions, risk of contracting the virus, and financial concerns. In Panel A, we show marginal effects with county fixed-effects for Model (1) in Table A1 - A3 in Appendix A. In Panel B, we show marginal effects without fixed-effects for Model (1) in Table B1 - B3 in Appendix B. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Appendix A: Full Models with County Fixed Effects

Table A1: Democrats' Governor Approval Before and After COVID-19 Announcement

	DV: Governor Job Approval Addressing the Pandemic			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	0.696*** (0.121)	0.806*** (0.149)	0.797*** (0.139)	0.785*** (0.134)
Post-announcement	-0.090** (0.045)	-0.193* (0.103)	-0.189** (0.095)	-0.168** (0.081)
Time (hours)	0.001 (0.001)	0.006 (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)	0.001 (0.002)
Age 25-34	-0.080 (0.058)	-0.079 (0.058)	-0.080 (0.058)	-0.079 (0.058)
Age 35-44	0.046 (0.057)	0.047 (0.057)	0.047 (0.057)	0.047 (0.057)
Age 45-54	0.019 (0.057)	0.020 (0.057)	0.020 (0.057)	0.020 (0.057)
Age 55-64	0.070 (0.056)	0.068 (0.056)	0.068 (0.056)	0.068 (0.056)
Age 65+	0.087 (0.054)	0.087 (0.054)	0.087 (0.054)	0.087 (0.054)
Black	0.209*** (0.040)	0.207*** (0.040)	0.207*** (0.040)	0.207*** (0.040)
Hispanic	0.069* (0.033)	0.068* (0.033)	0.069* (0.033)	0.068* (0.033)
Race other	0.019 (0.050)	0.018 (0.050)	0.018 (0.050)	0.019 (0.050)
Female	0.041 (0.024)	0.040 (0.024)	0.040 (0.024)	0.040 (0.024)
Public health concern	-0.204*** (0.032)	-0.205*** (0.032)	-0.206*** (0.032)	-0.206*** (0.032)
COVID-19 at-risk	-0.045 (0.027)	-0.043 (0.027)	-0.042 (0.027)	-0.043 (0.027)
Income 50-75K	0.036 (0.036)	0.037 (0.036)	0.037 (0.036)	0.037 (0.036)
Income 75-100K	-0.004 (0.036)	-0.003 (0.036)	-0.004 (0.036)	-0.003 (0.036)
Income 100+K	-0.011 (0.033)	-0.012 (0.033)	-0.012 (0.033)	-0.011 (0.033)
Some college	-0.153* (0.067)	-0.155* (0.067)	-0.156* (0.067)	-0.156* (0.067)
College degree	-0.148* (0.065)	-0.151* (0.065)	-0.152* (0.065)	-0.152* (0.065)
Graduate degree	-0.218** (0.066)	-0.219** (0.066)	-0.219*** (0.066)	-0.220*** (0.066)
Finance concerns	-0.037 (0.032)	-0.037 (0.032)	-0.038 (0.032)	-0.038 (0.032)
Post-announcement × One degree polynomial of hours		✓		
Post-announcement × Two degrees polynomial of hours			✓	
Post-announcement × Three degrees polynomial of hours				✓
County fixed-effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313

Note: Cell entries are split-sample local linear regression estimates for Democrats with robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent supported Governor's response to COVID-19 and 0 if they did not. Control variables include respondent's age, race, gender, income, education, virus perceptions, risk of contracting the virus, and financial concerns. Model (2), (3), and (4) are sensitivity checks for any possible non-linearity in the data. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table A2: Republicans' Governor Approval Before and After COVID-19 Announcement

	DV: Governor Job Approval Addressing the Pandemic			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	0.631*** (0.181)	0.605** (0.200)	0.596** (0.193)	0.598** (0.189)
Post-announcement	-0.028 (0.056)	0.002 (0.114)	0.026 (0.109)	0.023 (0.093)
Time (hours)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.000 (0.003)
Age 25-34	0.018 (0.095)	0.016 (0.095)	0.014 (0.095)	0.014 (0.095)
Age 35-44	0.005 (0.092)	0.004 (0.092)	0.004 (0.092)	0.003 (0.092)
Age 45-54	0.160 (0.089)	0.159 (0.089)	0.158 (0.089)	0.157 (0.089)
Age 55-64	0.218* (0.087)	0.217* (0.087)	0.217* (0.087)	0.217* (0.087)
Age 65+	0.247** (0.088)	0.247** (0.088)	0.247** (0.088)	0.248** (0.088)
Black	-0.262* (0.119)	-0.258* (0.120)	-0.257* (0.120)	-0.257* (0.120)
Hispanic	-0.063 (0.047)	-0.063 (0.047)	-0.063 (0.047)	-0.063 (0.047)
Race other	0.089 (0.074)	0.089 (0.074)	0.089 (0.074)	0.089 (0.074)
Female	0.003 (0.029)	0.003 (0.029)	0.003 (0.029)	0.003 (0.029)
Public health concern	-0.142*** (0.029)	-0.142*** (0.029)	-0.142*** (0.029)	-0.142*** (0.029)
COVID-19 at-risk	0.048 (0.033)	0.048 (0.033)	0.047 (0.033)	0.047 (0.033)
Income 50-75K	0.003 (0.044)	0.002 (0.044)	0.002 (0.044)	0.002 (0.044)
Income 75-100K	0.046 (0.047)	0.046 (0.047)	0.046 (0.047)	0.046 (0.047)
Income 100+K	-0.018 (0.041)	-0.018 (0.041)	-0.019 (0.042)	-0.019 (0.042)
Some college	-0.113 (0.058)	-0.113 (0.058)	-0.114* (0.058)	-0.114* (0.058)
College degree	-0.038 (0.056)	-0.039 (0.056)	-0.040 (0.056)	-0.041 (0.056)
Graduate degree	-0.105 (0.058)	-0.106 (0.058)	-0.107 (0.058)	-0.107 (0.058)
Finance concerns	-0.026 (0.038)	-0.027 (0.038)	-0.026 (0.038)	-0.026 (0.038)
Post-announcement × One degree polynomial of hours		✓		
Post-announcement × Two degrees polynomial of hours			✓	
Post-announcement × Three degrees polynomial of hours				✓
County fixed-effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	889	889	889	889

Note: Cell entries are split-sample local linear regression estimates for Republicans with robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent supported Governor's response to COVID-19 and 0 if they did not. Control variables include respondent's age, race, gender, income, education, virus perceptions, risk of contracting the virus, and financial concerns. Model (2), (3), and (4) are sensitivity checks for any possible non-linearity in the data. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table A3: No Party Affiliates' Governor Approval Before and After COVID-19 Announcement

	DV: Governor Job Approval Addressing the Pandemic			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	0.545*	0.441	0.468	0.468
	(0.224)	(0.274)	(0.253)	(0.243)
Post-announcement	-0.128*	-0.028	-0.067	-0.060
	(0.073)	(0.143)	(0.141)	(0.121)
Time (hours)	0.000	-0.004	0.002	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.004)
Age 25-34	-0.118	-0.118	-0.118	-0.118
	(0.101)	(0.101)	(0.101)	(0.101)
Age 35-44	-0.043	-0.042	-0.041	-0.040
	(0.097)	(0.097)	(0.098)	(0.098)
Age 45-54	-0.044	-0.045	-0.045	-0.044
	(0.096)	(0.096)	(0.096)	(0.096)
Age 55-64	0.098	0.098	0.099	0.100
	(0.097)	(0.097)	(0.097)	(0.097)
Age 65+	0.204*	0.207*	0.207*	0.209*
	(0.098)	(0.098)	(0.099)	(0.099)
Black	-0.032	-0.030	-0.028	-0.027
	(0.080)	(0.080)	(0.081)	(0.081)
Hispanic	0.016	0.017	0.018	0.019
	(0.051)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.052)
Race other	0.106	0.109	0.112	0.113
	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.075)	(0.075)
Female	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.070
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)
Public health concern	-0.281***	-0.281***	-0.281***	-0.282***
	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
COVID-19 at-risk	-0.042	-0.040	-0.040	-0.040
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.044)
Income 50-75K	-0.011	-0.013	-0.013	-0.014
	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.060)	(0.060)
Income 75-100K	0.069	0.070	0.071	0.070
	(0.062)	(0.062)	(0.062)	(0.062)
Income 100+K	0.007	0.007	0.008	0.008
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.054)
Some college	-0.015	-0.018	-0.020	-0.020
	(0.087)	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.088)
College degree	-0.105	-0.106	-0.108	-0.108
	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.085)
Graduate degree	-0.094	-0.095	-0.097	-0.097
	(0.087)	(0.087)	(0.088)	(0.088)
Finance concerns	-0.029	-0.028	-0.027	-0.027
	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)
Post-announcement × One degree polynomial of hours		✓		
Post-announcement × Two degrees polynomial of hours			✓	
Post-announcement × Three degrees polynomial of hours				✓
County fixed-effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	671	671	671	671

Note: Cell entries are split-sample local linear regression estimates for no party affiliates with robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent supported Governor's response to COVID-19 and 0 if they did not. Control variables include respondent's age, race, gender, income, education, virus perceptions, risk of contracting the virus, and financial concerns. Model (2), (3), and (4) are sensitivity checks for any possible non-linearity in the data. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Appendix B: Full Models Without County Fixed-Effects

Table B1: Democrats' Governor Approval Before and After COVID-19 Announcement

	DV: Governor Job Approval Addressing the Pandemic			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	0.623*** (0.090)	0.720*** (0.124)	0.705*** (0.112)	0.695*** (0.106)
Post-announcement	-0.100* (0.044)	-0.191* (0.091)	-0.173* (0.088)	-0.159* (0.075)
Time (hours)	0.001 (0.001)	0.005 (0.004)	0.000 (0.004)	0.000 (0.002)
Age 25-34	-0.111* (0.056)	-0.111* (0.056)	-0.111* (0.056)	-0.110* (0.056)
Age 35-44	0.017 (0.055)	0.018 (0.055)	0.018 (0.055)	0.018 (0.055)
Age 45-54	-0.013 (0.056)	-0.013 (0.056)	-0.012 (0.056)	-0.011 (0.056)
Age 55-64	0.044 (0.054)	0.043 (0.054)	0.043 (0.054)	0.043 (0.054)
Age 65+	0.066 (0.053)	0.066 (0.053)	0.066 (0.053)	0.066 (0.053)
Black	0.209*** (0.039)	0.208*** (0.039)	0.208*** (0.039)	0.208*** (0.039)
Hispanic	0.082** (0.031)	0.082** (0.031)	0.082** (0.031)	0.081** (0.031)
Race other	0.017 (0.050)	0.016 (0.050)	0.017 (0.050)	0.017 (0.050)
Female	0.047* (0.024)	0.047* (0.024)	0.046* (0.024)	0.046 (0.024)
Public health concern	-0.210*** (0.031)	-0.211*** (0.031)	-0.211*** (0.031)	-0.211*** (0.031)
COVID-19 at-risk	-0.043 (0.027)	-0.041 (0.027)	-0.041 (0.027)	-0.041 (0.027)
Income 50-75K	0.033 (0.035)	0.033 (0.035)	0.034 (0.035)	0.034 (0.035)
Income 75-100K	-0.007 (0.036)	-0.007 (0.036)	-0.006 (0.036)	-0.006 (0.036)
Income 100+K	-0.015 (0.033)	-0.016 (0.033)	-0.016 (0.033)	-0.016 (0.033)
Some college	-0.132* (0.066)	-0.133* (0.066)	-0.134* (0.066)	-0.134* (0.066)
College degree	-0.135* (0.064)	-0.137* (0.064)	-0.138* (0.064)	-0.138* (0.064)
Graduate degree	-0.207** (0.065)	-0.208** (0.065)	-0.208** (0.065)	-0.209** (0.065)
Finance concerns	-0.043 (0.031)	-0.043 (0.031)	-0.043 (0.031)	-0.043 (0.031)
Post-announcement × One degree polynomial of hours		✓		
Post-announcement × Two degrees polynomial of hours			✓	
Post-announcement × Three degrees polynomial of hours				✓
Observations	1,313	1,313	1,313	1,313

Note: Cell entries are split-sample local linear regression estimates for Democrats with robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent supported Governor's response to COVID-19 and 0 if they did not. Control variables include respondent's age, race, gender, income, education, virus perceptions, risk of contracting the virus, and financial concerns. Model (2), (3), and (4) are sensitivity checks for any possible non-linearity in the data. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table B2: Republicans' Governor Approval Before and After COVID-19 Announcement

	DV: Governor Job Approval Addressing the Pandemic			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	0.821*** (0.107)	0.789*** (0.139)	0.775*** (0.127)	0.781*** (0.121)
Post-announcement	-0.056 (0.054)	-0.023 (0.107)	0.012 (0.105)	0.001 (0.090)
Time (hours)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.000 (0.003)
Age 25-34	-0.026 (0.092)	-0.027 (0.092)	-0.029 (0.092)	-0.029 (0.092)
Age 35-44	-0.010 (0.088)	-0.012 (0.088)	-0.011 (0.088)	-0.011 (0.088)
Age 45-54	0.130 (0.084)	0.128 (0.084)	0.128 (0.084)	0.128 (0.084)
Age 55-64	0.188* (0.083)	0.187* (0.083)	0.188* (0.083)	0.188* (0.083)
Age 65+	0.200* (0.083)	0.199* (0.083)	0.201* (0.083)	0.201* (0.083)
Black	-0.256* (0.118)	-0.252* (0.119)	-0.251* (0.119)	-0.251* (0.119)
Hispanic	-0.037 (0.039)	-0.037 (0.040)	-0.038 (0.040)	-0.038 (0.040)
Race other	0.080 (0.073)	0.079 (0.073)	0.079 (0.073)	0.079 (0.073)
Female	-0.012 (0.028)	-0.012 (0.028)	-0.013 (0.028)	-0.012 (0.028)
Public health concern	-0.148*** (0.028)	-0.149*** (0.028)	-0.148*** (0.028)	-0.149*** (0.028)
COVID-19 at-risk	0.048 (0.032)	0.048 (0.032)	0.047 (0.032)	0.047 (0.032)
Income 50-75K	-0.010 (0.043)	-0.010 (0.043)	-0.011 (0.043)	-0.011 (0.043)
Income 75-100K	0.043 (0.046)	0.043 (0.046)	0.042 (0.046)	0.042 (0.046)
Income 100+K	-0.034 (0.040)	-0.034 (0.040)	-0.035 (0.040)	-0.035 (0.040)
Some college	-0.101 (0.055)	-0.102 (0.055)	-0.104 (0.055)	-0.104 (0.055)
College degree	-0.051 (0.054)	-0.053 (0.054)	-0.054 (0.054)	-0.054 (0.054)
Graduate degree	-0.113* (0.055)	-0.114* (0.055)	-0.115* (0.055)	-0.115* (0.055)
Finance concerns	-0.020 (0.037)	-0.020 (0.037)	-0.019 (0.037)	-0.019 (0.037)
Post-announcement × One degree polynomial of hours		✓		
Post-announcement × Two degrees polynomial of hours			✓	
Post-announcement × Three degrees polynomial of hours				✓
Observations	889	889	889	889

Note: Cell entries are split-sample local linear regression estimates for Republicans with robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent supported Governor's response to COVID-19 and 0 if they did not. Control variables include respondent's age, race, gender, income, education, virus perceptions, risk of contracting the virus, and financial concerns. Model (2), (3), and (4) are sensitivity checks for any possible non-linearity in the data. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table B3: No Party Affiliates' Governor Approval Before and After COVID-19 Announcement

	DV: Governor Job Approval Addressing the Pandemic			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	0.799*** (0.126)	0.773*** (0.185)	0.782*** (0.162)	0.775*** (0.151)
Post-announcement	-0.143* (0.070)	-0.117 (0.150)	-0.135 (0.143)	-0.125 (0.121)
Time (hours)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)	0.001 (0.004)
Age 25-34	-0.105 (0.096)	-0.105 (0.097)	-0.106 (0.097)	-0.106 (0.097)
Age 35-44	-0.018 (0.092)	-0.018 (0.092)	-0.018 (0.092)	-0.018 (0.092)
Age 45-54	-0.034 (0.091)	-0.034 (0.091)	-0.035 (0.091)	-0.035 (0.091)
Age 55-64	0.117 (0.092)	0.117 (0.092)	0.118 (0.092)	0.118 (0.092)
Age 65+	0.215* (0.094)	0.215* (0.094)	0.215* (0.094)	0.215* (0.094)
Black	-0.055 (0.077)	-0.054 (0.077)	-0.053 (0.077)	-0.053 (0.077)
Hispanic	0.019 (0.046)	0.019 (0.046)	0.020 (0.046)	0.020 (0.046)
Race other	0.093 (0.070)	0.094 (0.070)	0.095 (0.071)	0.096 (0.071)
Female	0.067 (0.038)	0.066 (0.038)	0.067 (0.038)	0.067 (0.038)
Public health concern	-0.270*** (0.042)	-0.270*** (0.042)	-0.270*** (0.042)	-0.270*** (0.042)
COVID-19 at-risk	-0.053 (0.042)	-0.053 (0.042)	-0.053 (0.042)	-0.053 (0.042)
Income 50-75K	0.006 (0.057)	0.006 (0.057)	0.006 (0.057)	0.005 (0.057)
Income 75-100K	0.076 (0.060)	0.076 (0.060)	0.077 (0.060)	0.076 (0.060)
Income 100+K	0.018 (0.052)	0.018 (0.052)	0.018 (0.052)	0.018 (0.052)
Some college	-0.028 (0.084)	-0.029 (0.084)	-0.030 (0.084)	-0.030 (0.084)
College degree	-0.104 (0.082)	-0.104 (0.082)	-0.105 (0.082)	-0.105 (0.082)
Graduate degree	-0.106 (0.084)	-0.106 (0.084)	-0.108 (0.084)	-0.108 (0.084)
Finance concerns	-0.035 (0.053)	-0.035 (0.053)	-0.034 (0.053)	-0.034 (0.053)
Post-announcement × One degree polynomial of hours		✓		
Post-announcement × Two degrees polynomial of hours			✓	
Post-announcement × Three degrees polynomial of hours				✓
Observations	671	671	671	671

Note: Cell entries are split-sample local linear regression estimates for no party affiliates with robust standard errors clustered by county in parenthesis. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent supported Governor's response to COVID-19 and 0 if they did not. Control variables include respondent's age, race, gender, income, education, virus perceptions, risk of contracting the virus, and financial concerns. Model (2), (3), and (4) are sensitivity checks for any possible non-linearity in the data. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Appendix C: Survey Questions

1. There has been a lot of talk lately about the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and the national emergency, I'd like you to tell me whether you approve or disapprove of the job Governor Ron DeSantis is doing to address the pandemic.
 - Strongly Approve
 - Somewhat Approve
 - Somewhat Disapprove
 - Strongly Disapprove
 - Don't Know
2. How concerned are you personally about contracting the coronavirus (COVID-19)?
 - Very Concerned
 - Somewhat Concerned
 - Not Very Concerned
 - Not at all Concerned
3. Are you, or is someone in your household, considered higher risk for developing severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19)?
 - Yes, I am higher risk
 - Yes, someone in my household is higher risk
 - Yes, both myself and someone in my household are higher risk
 - No, nobody in my household is higher risk
4. How concerned are you about the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on your personal finances?
 - Very concerned
 - Somewhat concerned
 - Not too concerned
 - Not at all concerned
5. Which is a bigger concern for you, the public health effects or the economic impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19)?
 - Public health effects

- Economic effects
6. What is the highest grade in school or year of college you have completed?
- Less than High School Degree
 - High School Graduate
 - Some college
 - College Graduate
 - Post Graduate
7. What is your annual household income?
- Less than \$25,000
 - \$25,000 to \$50,000
 - \$50,000 to \$75,000
 - \$75,000 to \$100,000
 - Above \$100,000

Variable Information

- **Dependent variable:** Coded 1 if respondent approved of the job Governor Ron DeSantis is doing to address the pandemic and 0 if disapprove.
- **Independent variables:**
 - Coronavirus perceptions is coded 1 if the respondent thinks it will have a higher impact in the public health and 0 if it will have a higher impact on the economy.
 - Risk of contracting the virus, is coded 1 if the respondent and someone in their household is at higher risk of contracting the virus and 0 if nobody in their household is at higher risk.
 - Financial concerns is coded 1 if the respondent is concerned about personal finances and 0 otherwise.
 - Education is coded 0 if the respondent has a high school or lower degree, 1 some college degree, 2 college degree, and 3 a graduate degree.
 - Household income is coded 0 if the respondent's household income is up to \$50,000, 1 if the income varies from \$50,000 - \$75,000, 2 if the income varies from \$75,000 - \$100,000, and 3 if it is higher than \$100,000.

- Party of registration is coded 0 for Democrats, 1 for Republicans, and 3 for no party affiliates.
- Race is coded 1 for whites, 2 for blacks, 3 for hispanics, and 4 other race.
- Age is coded 1 for 18-24 years old, 2 for 25-34 years old, 3 for 35-44 years old, 4 for 45-54 years old, 5 for 55-64 years old, and 6 for 65 years old or older.
- Gender is coded 0 for male and 1 for Female.