

April 30, 2020

**VOTING
RIGHTS
LAB**



TO: Interested Parties

FR: Strategies 360 Research

RE: Rare Bipartisan Consensus Among Voters on Adapting Election Laws to the Coronavirus

On behalf of the Voting Rights Lab, Strategies 360 conducted a large-scale survey¹ of over 2,800 registered voters from April 16-21st to assess voters' opinions about voting and elections in the face of an unprecedented public health threat. The research finds that Americans largely agree about the urgent need to adapt the nation's elections to prevent voters from having to choose between exercising their right to vote and protecting their and their community's health and safety.

More than 80% of voters call for changes to the way the country conducts its elections in response to the coronavirus outbreak and nearly three-quarters of respondents endorse adopting a vote-by-mail option, where in-person polling places would remain open but all voters would be mailed their ballot and could choose to return it in the mail, leave it at a secure ballot drop-box, or vote with it in-person at a polling place.

The desire for change is broad and bipartisan, marking a rare moment of consensus for a country that is often bitterly divided by partisanship.

KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ **Nearly half of voters say they would feel unsafe voting in person in this environment, even with personal protective equipment (PPE).** When it comes to their personal health, 45% of voters – representing roughly 70 million Americans – would feel unsafe voting in-person at a polling place using personal protective equipment like a mask if there was an election this week. Voters have no such concerns when it comes to voting absentee: over 80 percent feel safe receiving a paper ballot sent to their home and returning it in the mail or at a drop-box.
- ❖ **Voters overwhelmingly endorse changing the way elections are conducted in their state and at the national level.** Eighty (80) percent of voters think their state needs to change how it conducts its elections in response to coronavirus. This sentiment is bipartisan, with Democrats (88%), independents (71%), and Republicans (75%) all endorsing the need for changes to voting laws in their states. An even greater proportion – 83% – believe the country as a whole needs to change how it conducts elections, including a 53% majority who say the country needs to make major changes.
- ❖ **Nearly 3 in 4 support adopting vote-by-mail policies in response to coronavirus, including broad majorities across demographic, geographic, and ideological lines.** A proposal to send every registered voter their general election ballot in the mail and allow voters to return it in the mail, leave it at a secure ballot drop-box, or instead choose to vote with it in-person at a polling place, earns 72% support, including 42% who strongly favor it. Large majorities of both Democrats (82%) and Republicans (63%) back the proposal, as do large shares of young voters (71%) and seniors (70%). Voters of color

¹ Strategies 360 conducted a survey of 2,883 registered voters nationwide from April 16-21, 2020. Interviews were conducted online and the sample was weighted to accurately represent the national registered voter electorate. The margin of error for a survey of 2,883 interviews is ±1.8% at the 95% confidence level for each individual sample. The margin of error is higher for subsamples.

are particularly supportive (79% among Latino voters and 74% among African Americans), and an overwhelming 70% of white voters agree as well. While voters in the West (78%) are most supportive, super-majorities in the Northeast (73%), Midwest (73%), and South (67%) also back the proposal.

- ❖ **Voters recognize the need to act quickly to prepare for November.** A full two-thirds of voters (67%) agree that *“we should be proactive and start planning for possible changes to the way we conduct elections in response to the coronavirus outbreak so that states have enough time to execute the November election properly.”* Again, voters across party lines support making proactive changes: 73% of Democrats, 66% of independents, and 61% of Republicans. Just a third of voters believe *“we may need to make some changes to the way we conduct our elections down the road in response to the coronavirus outbreak, but it’s too early. We should take a wait-and-see approach for now.”*
- ❖ **Most voters report that a ballot mailed to their home would make them more likely to vote.** A 56% majority of voters say they would be more likely to vote if a ballot was mailed to their address; just 3% would be less likely. Again, the positive impact on turnout extends across demographic, geographic, and ideological lines. Voters who feel unsafe voting in person report the greatest influence on their vote likelihood.
- ❖ **Voters support an additional set of pro-voter policy changes in response to the coronavirus outbreak.** A set of additional policy priorities emerge:
 - **Expanding early voting** earns 83% support with just 12% opposed. Voters recognize that a longer early voting period reduces crowds on Election Day.
 - **Immediately notifying voters if there is a problem with their submitted absentee ballot and giving them the opportunity to correct it** is a priority when considering a vote-by-mail system and garners 82% support, including 52% who strongly favor it.
 - **Accepting absentee ballots postmarked by Election Day** is supported by 73% of registered voters even if the ballot arrives at the county election office a few days after Election Day. Just 18% oppose this policy, including fewer than a quarter of Republicans.
 - **Including pre-paid postage with absentee ballots** generates 80% support, including 53% who strongly favor this policy.