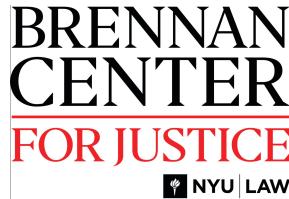


Winning the Narrative for Our Freedom to Vote

**VOTING
RIGHTS
LAB**



END CITIZENS UNITED
— ACTION FUND —



THE LANDSCAPE



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After Record 2020 Turnout, State Republicans Weigh Making It Harder To Vote

February 7, 2021 · 7:00 AM ET

[STEPHEN FOWLER](#)[ABIGAIL CENSKY](#)[BEN GILES](#) [BRETT NEELY](#)**DAILY COMMENT**

STATE REPUBLICAN LEADERS ARE RUSHING TO EXPLOIT TRUMP'S BIG LIE



By Steve Coll

February 2, 2021

State GOPs have already introduced dozens of bills restricting voting access in 2021

A new Brennan Center report shows an unprecedented amount of legislation seeking to restrict voting access has been introduced in state legislatures this year.

By Gabby Birenbaum | Jan 29, 2021, 10:50am EST

It's worth knowing what's really going on. [Subscribe today for 99¢.](#)



Ga. bills would end no-excuse absentee voting, automatic registration

Credit: JOHN SPINK / AJC

THEY ARE TRYING TO...

- Limit who can vote by mail
- Add barriers to casting your absentee ballot (e.g. witness, id, or notary requirements)
- Enact stricter voter id requirements
- Reduce voter registration opportunities
- More aggressive voter purging

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

For the People Act (HR 1 / S 1)

- Guarantee that voting options, such as early and mail voting, are equally accessible across all 50 states
- Prevent attempts to erect deliberate barriers to voting for Black, young, and new Americans
- Restrict lobbying and money in politics
- Guarantee that congressional districts are drawn to ensure fair representation for all

John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (HR 4)

- Restore and strengthen the Voting Rights Act to make sure that any changes to local or state elections are federally reviewed

TIMELINE

**For the
People Act**

March
S1 Rules hearing

April
S1 Markup/cmte

May/June
Floor vote



**John Lewis
Voting Rights
Advancement
Act**

Spring
Hearings

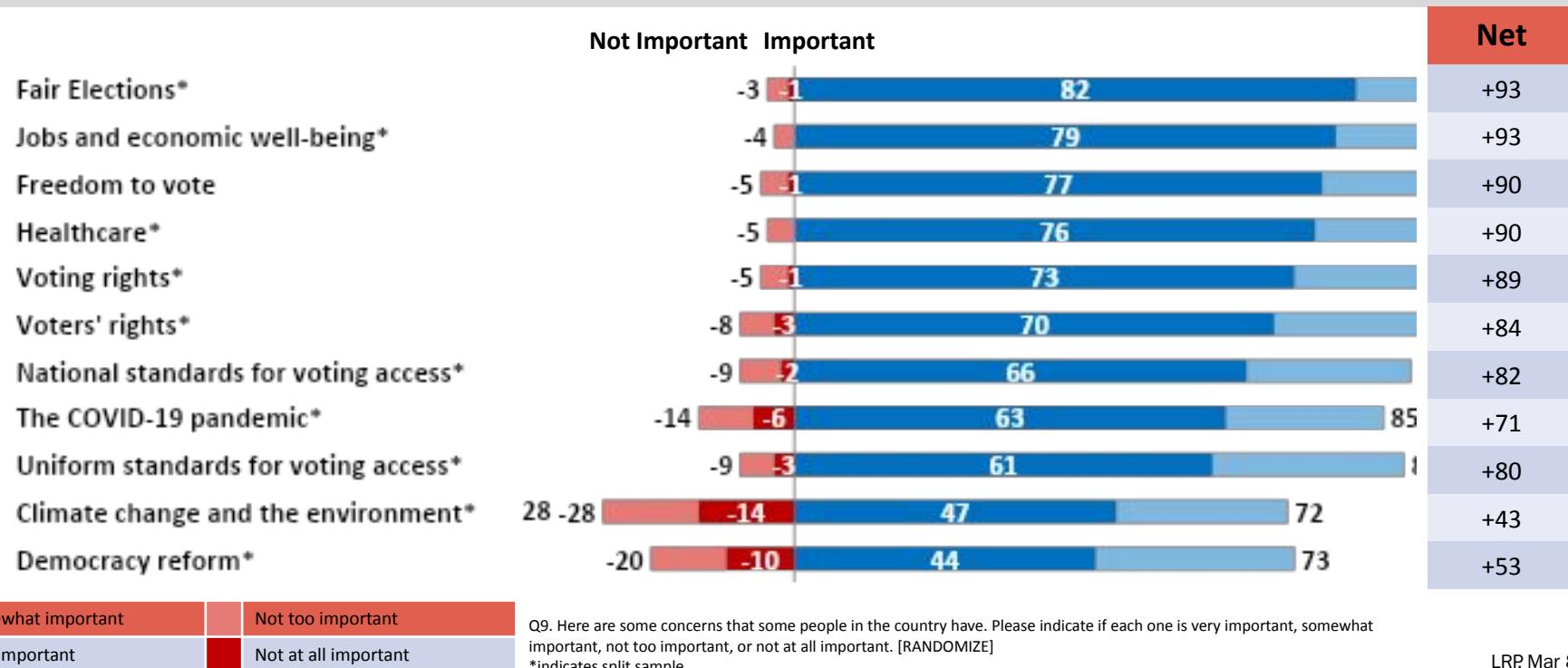
June/July
Introduction

Fall
Committee/Floor

PUBLIC OPINION

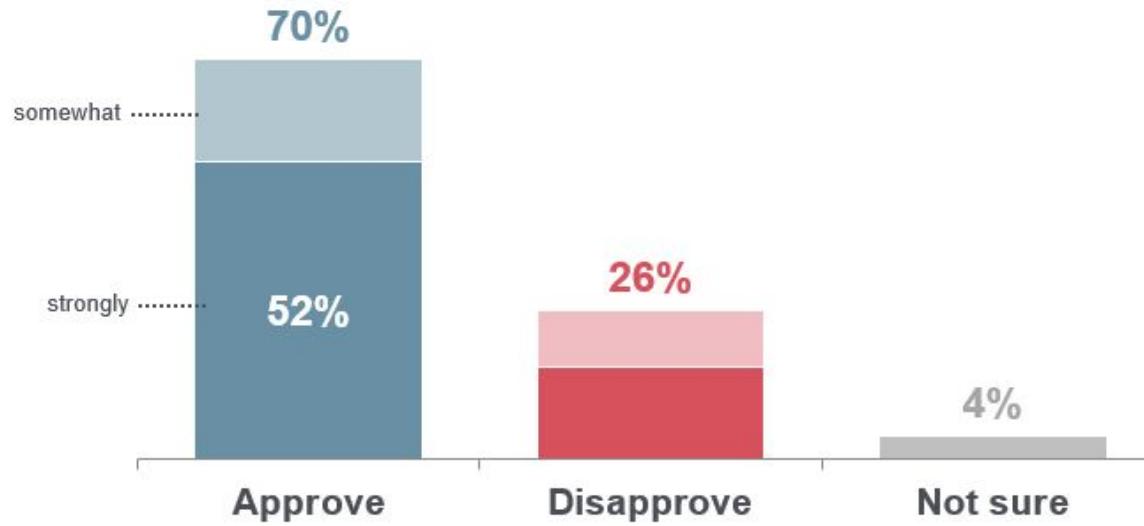
FAIR ELECTIONS + FREEDOM TO VOTE ARE TOP CONCERNS

Top Concerns in the Country

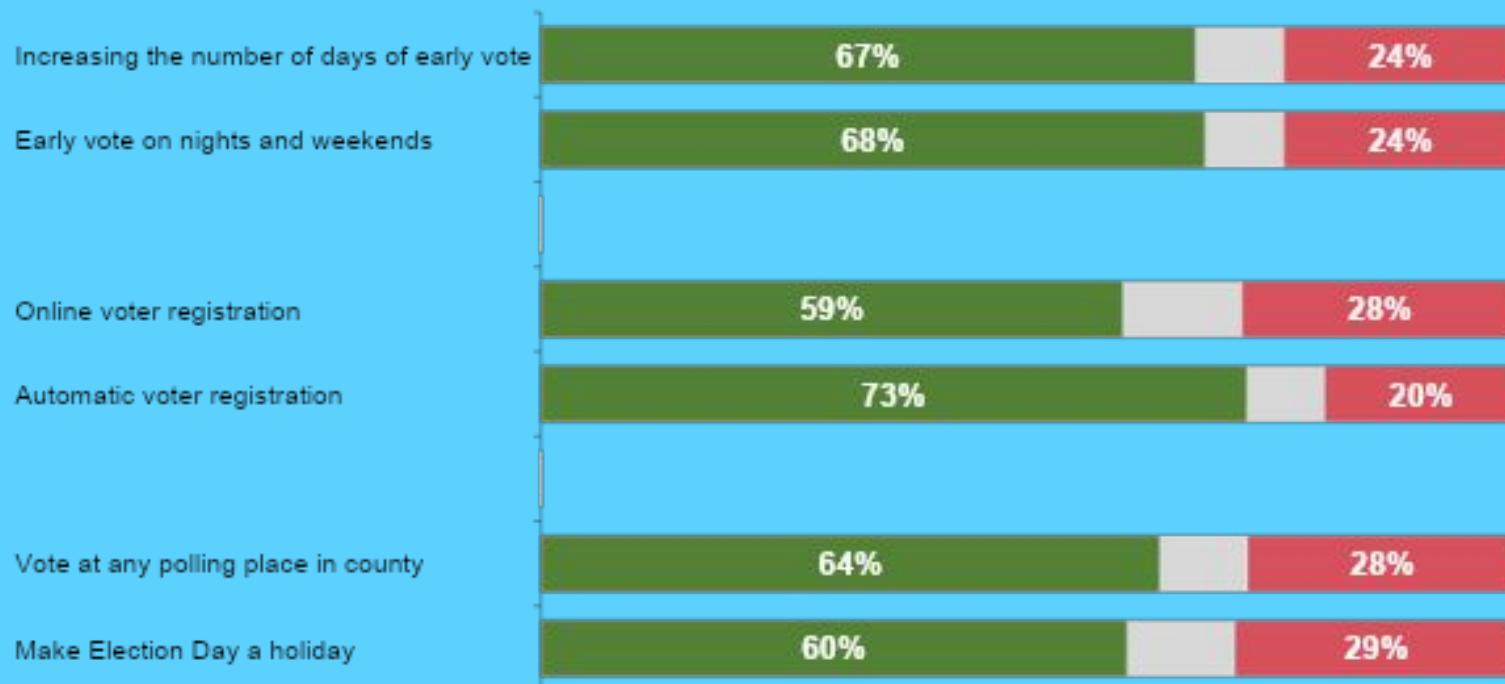


AMERICANS SUPPORT VOTING CHANGES

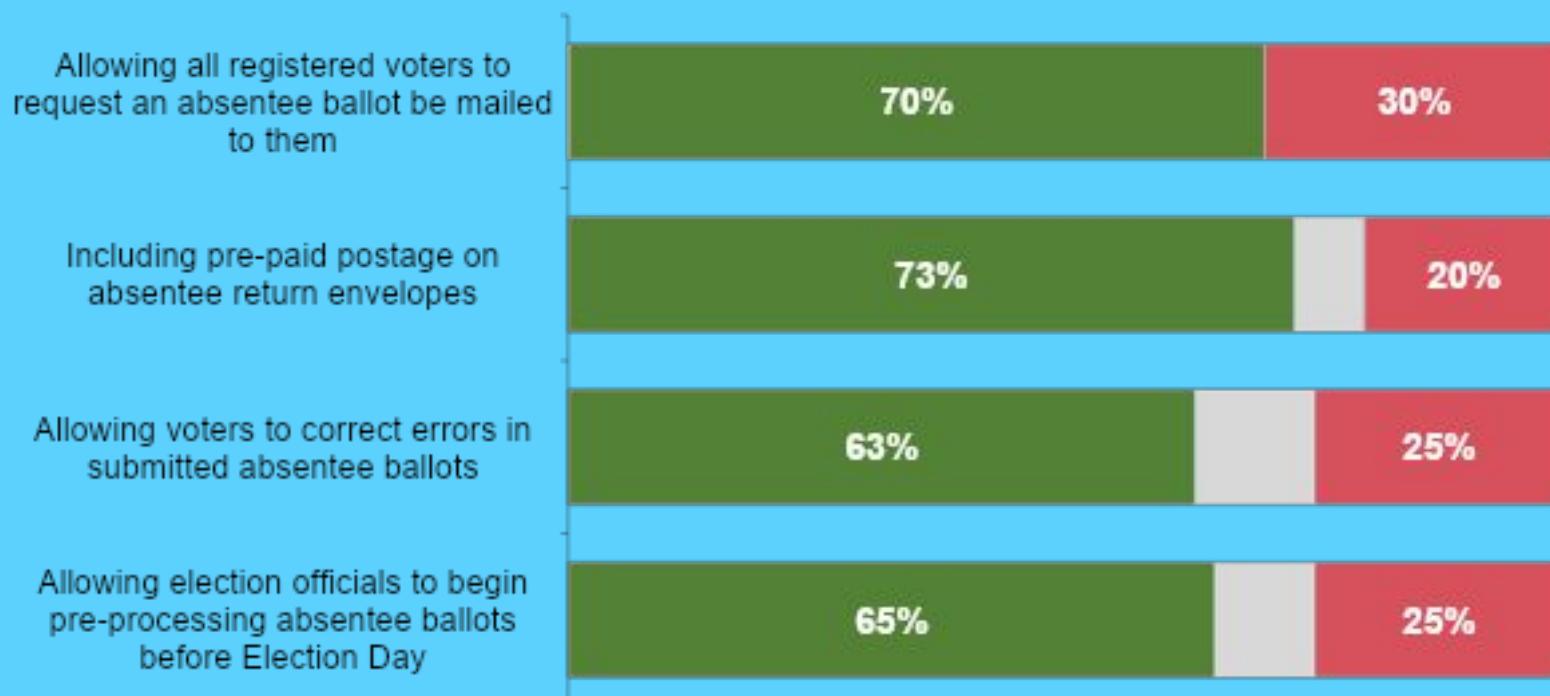
Approval of 2020 state voting law changes



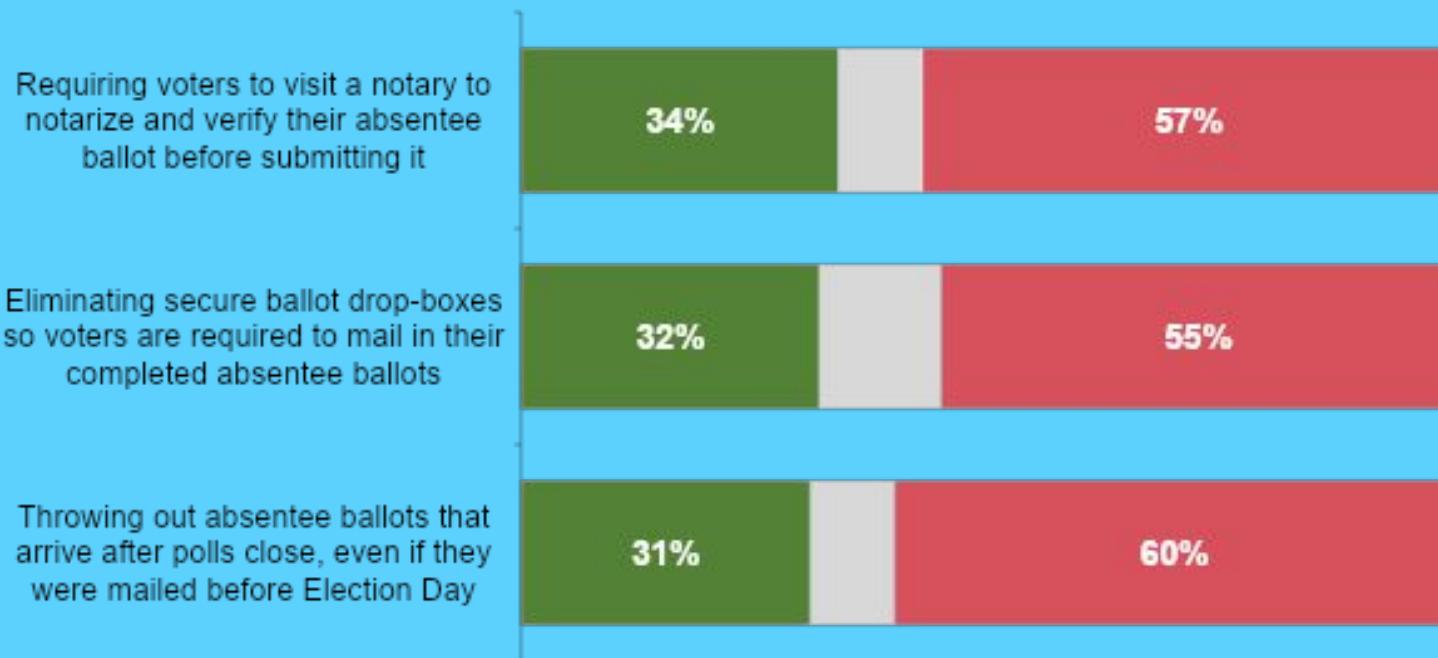
AMERICANS SUPPORT PRO-VOTER POLICIES



AMERICANS SUPPORT PRO-VOTER POLICIES

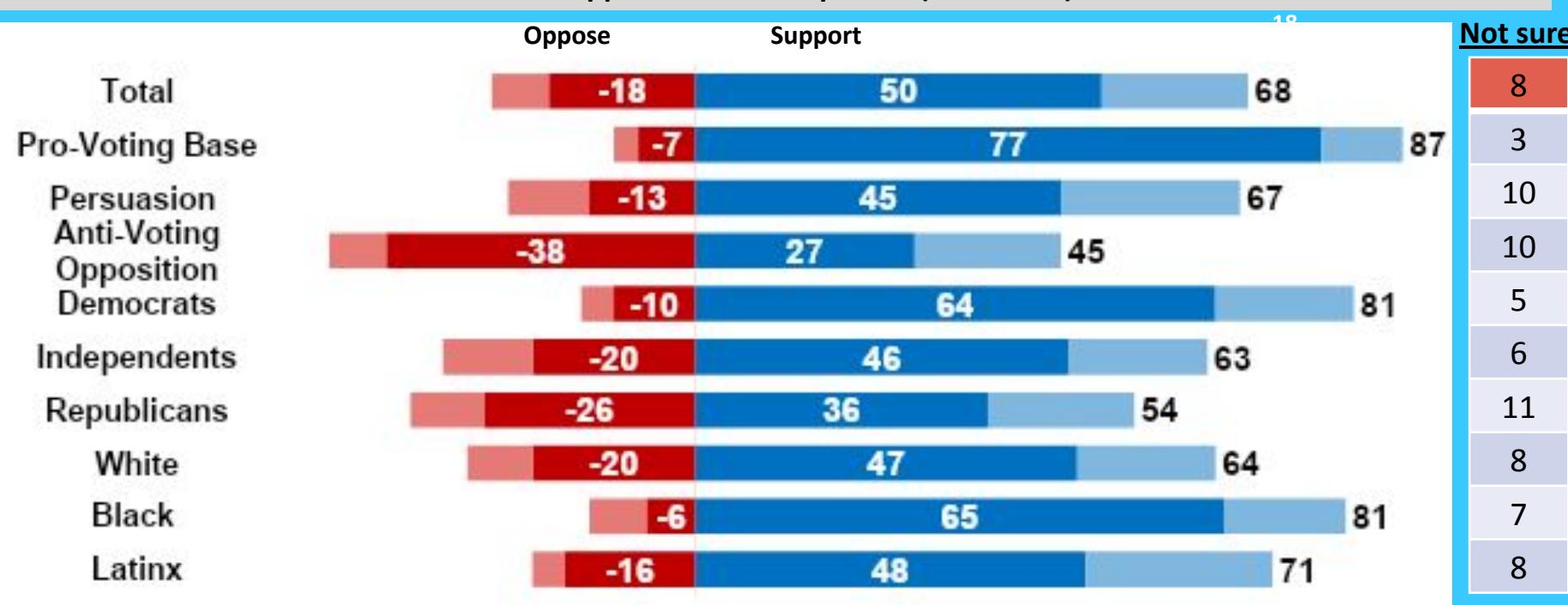


AMERICANS OPPOSE ANTI-VOTER POLICIES



STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

Initial Support For the People Act (Combined)



Q15/16/17. As you may know, Congress is currently considering another piece of legislation related to voting and elections called the For the People Act, which would [Q15 establish national standards/ Q16 guarantee voting options, Q17 freedom to vote] that make voting options, such as early and absentee voting, equally accessible across all 50 states, restrict lobbying and money in politics, and guarantee that congressional districts are drawn by independent commissions. Please indicate if you [ROTATE] support or oppose the For the People Act? If you support or oppose, please indicate if you feel that way strongly or not-so-strongly.

Support – not so strongly

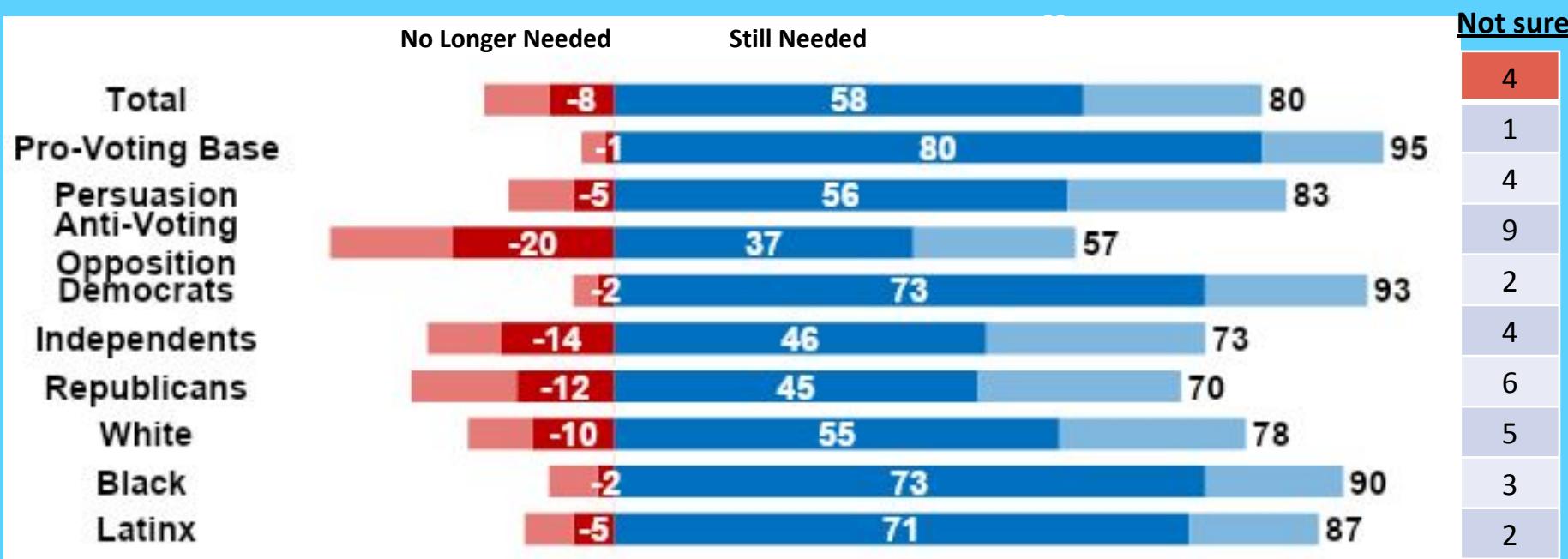
Support – strongly

Oppose – not so strongly

Oppose – strongly

VOTING RIGHTS ACT STILL NEEDED TODAY

Voting Rights Act 1965 Still Needed?



Still needed – not so strongly

Still needed – strongly

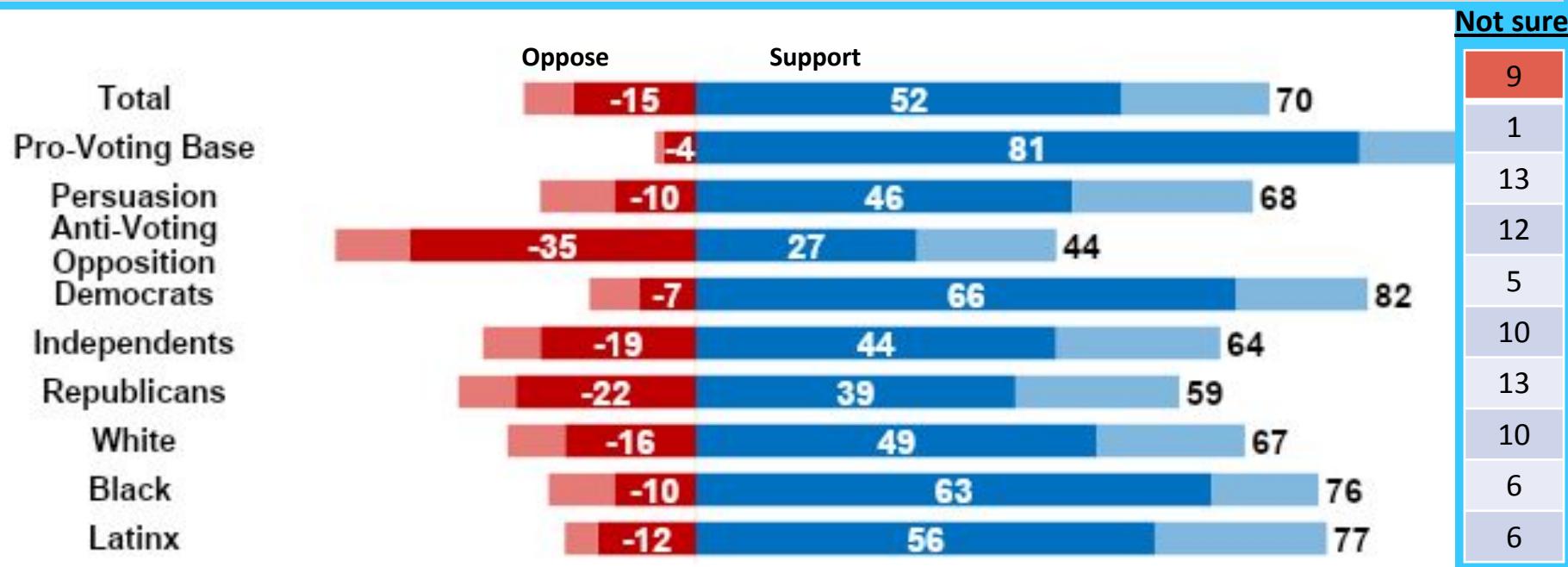
No longer needed – not so strongly

No longer needed – strongly

Q13. The Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965 to end racial discrimination in voting by eliminating practices like literacy tests, poll taxes, and drawing districts that reduce the voting strength of minorities. Thinking about today, do you think that the Voting Rights Act is still needed or not?

STRONG SUPPORT FOR JOHN LEWIS BILL

Initial Support John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act



Support – not so strongly

Oppose – not so strongly

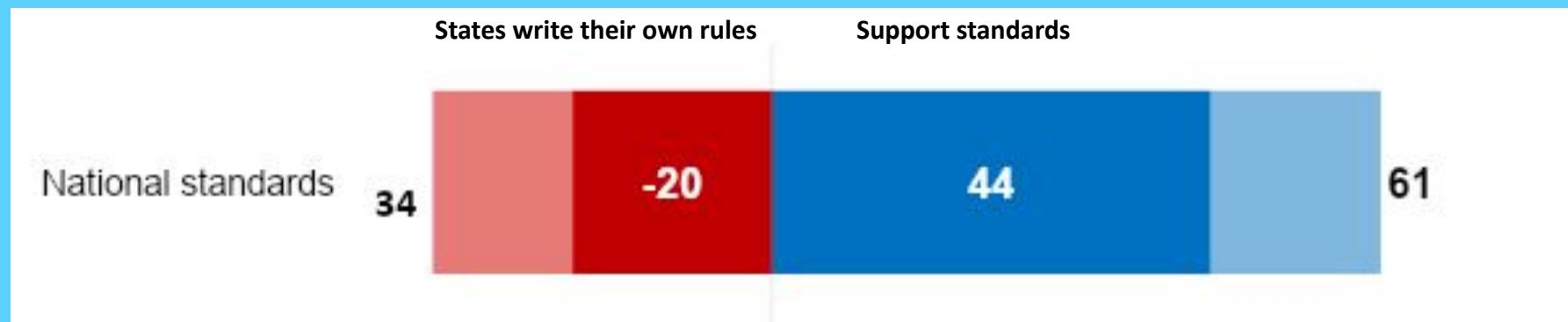
Support – strongly

Oppose – strongly

You may know, Congress is currently considering a piece of legislation related to voting and elections called the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, which would restore and strengthen the Voting Rights Act to make sure that any changes to local or state elections are federally so that everyone's equal right to vote is protected. Please indicate if you [ROTATE] support or oppose the passage of the Voting Rights Act? If you support or oppose, please indicate if you feel that way strongly or not-so-strongly.

“STATES’ RIGHTS” NOT LANDING FOR THEM

Support national standards that states have to meet in their voting laws
or support system we currently have where states establish their own rules in elections?



Support [national] standards – not so strongly		Support states – not so strongly
Support [national] standards –strongly		Support states – not so strongly

Q18./Q19 Now thinking generally, do you support having [national standards/standards] that all 50 states have to meet in their voting laws and practices, or do you support the system we currently have where the states establish their own rules in elections? Please indicate if you [ROTATE] support enacting national standards or support a system where states establish their own rules? Please indicate if you feel that way strongly or not-so-strongly.

INSIDE THE KOCH-BACKED EFFORT TO BLOCK THE LARGEST ELECTION-REFORM BILL IN HALF A CENTURY

On a leaked conference call, leaders of dark-money groups and an aide to Mitch McConnell expressed frustration with the popularity of the legislation—even among Republican voters.

Kyle McKenzie, the research director for the Koch-run advocacy group Stand Together, told fellow-conservatives and Republican congressional staffers on the call that he had a “spoiler.” “When presented with a very neutral description” of the bill, “people were generally supportive,” McKenzie said, adding that “the most worrisome part . . . is that conservatives were actually as supportive as the general public was when they read the neutral description.” In fact, he warned, “there’s a large, very large, chunk of conservatives who are supportive of these types of efforts.”

As a result, McKenzie conceded, the legislation’s opponents would likely have to rely on Republicans in the Senate, where the bill is now under debate, to use “under-the-dome-type strategies”—meaning legislative maneuvers beneath Congress’s roof, such as the filibuster—to stop the bill, because turning public opinion against it would be incredibly difficult. He warned that the worst thing conservatives could do would be to try to “engage with the other side” on the argument that the legislation “stops billionaires from buying elections.” McKenzie admitted, “Unfortunately, we’ve found that that is a winning message, for both the general public and also conservatives.” He said that when his group tested “tons of other” arguments in support of the bill, the one condemning billionaires buying elections was the most persuasive—people “found that to be most convincing, and it riled them up the most.”

OUR IDEAS ARE POPULAR Y'ALL!



MESSAGING

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MESSAGING?

- Public-facing words / language that we use when we talk about voting
- The broader narrative around our work
- This is not necessarily what you will say in a closed door meeting with legislators, you may need more policy details or specific rebuttals to arguments.
- But you should incorporate these frames and ideas as much as possible

- **ANIMATE** people on our side,
who are pro-voter
- **PERSUADE** those are conflicted
- **MARGINALIZE** our opposition,
who are anti-voter

GOALS OF OUR MESSAGING

DEFINING OUR AUDIENCE

ANIMATE

28-30% ARE
PRO-VOTER

PERSUADE

39-44% ARE
CONFLICTED

MARGINALIZE

25-34% ARE
ANTI-VOTER

POLICY SUPPORT

- Support national standards
- Support strengthening and modernizing the Voting Rights Act

BELIEFS/PRIORITIES

- Need changes to reduce discrimination against some voters
- Changes to ensure freedom to vote
- Making sure every eligible American can vote if they desire to
- Making voting [safe / secure] and accessible
- In America, every voter can cast a ballot and every ballot is counted so that the will of the people prevails.

MIX OF PRO-VOTER AND ANTI-VOTER ATTITUDES, OR ARE UNSURE

POLICY SUPPORT

- Oppose national standards
- Oppose strengthening and modernizing the Voting Rights Act

BELIEFS/PRIORITIES

- Do not think we need changes to reduce discrimination against some voters
- Do not think we need changes to ensure our freedom to vote
- Preventing voter fraud and illegal voting

- **LEAD** with shared values:
 - Freedom
 - Voice
 - Inclusive democracy
 - Choice
- **REMIND** audiences of our **legacy** of expanding access to voting over time
- **CHARACTERIZE** opposition as erecting barriers to silence specific voices and render clear role of race
- **POSITION** voters as the protagonists who, by acting together, can move us forward as a country – in contrast to how opposition sets us back

KEY GUIDANCE

- **FOCUS** on the creation of good rather than the amelioration of harm
- **HIGHLIGHT** the tangible, positive outcomes voting can deliver
- **AVOID** the opposition frame and **PIVOT** to our frame of **freedom**
- **DO NOT REPEAT** accusations, even to refute.

KEY GUIDANCE

TALKING POINTS

- For democracy to work for all of us, it must include us all.
- Voters pick our leaders – leaders do not get to pick and choose their voters.
- No matter our color, party, or zip code, we all want an equal say in the decisions that shape our future.
- The For the People Act/The Voting Rights Advancement Act guarantees everyone the freedom to vote, no exceptions.
- The For the People Act/The Voting Rights Advancement Act will bring down the barriers erected to silence Black, Indigenous, young and new Americans and ensure equal voice in the decisions that impact our lives.

TALKING POINTS

- The For the People Act prevents billionaires from buying our elections and enables everyday voters to have an equal say in our government.
- Just as we have fought throughout our history for our freedom to vote, we are coming together today to ensure Americans are able to cast our vote and have it counted.
- Coming together to pass the For the People and Voting Rights Advancement Acts, we can ensure all of us - no matter our color, zip code or income - have an equal say in our democracy.
- Together, we can elect leaders who govern in our interests and make the promise of democracy real for us all.

FULL NATIONAL NARRATIVE

Whatever our color, background or zip code, most of us believe that voters pick our leaders – our leaders do not get to pick their voters. When it comes to our elections, we want a transparent process we can trust, where Americans have equal freedom to vote, whether we live in a small town or big city, the south or the north. But today, a handful of extremist politicians put up barriers to silence our voices based on what we look like or where we live. It's time to enact national standards for voting to ensure all of us have a say in key decisions like pandemic relief, health care, and bolstering our economy. Together, we can ensure Americans can safely and freely cast our ballots so that every voice is heard and our elections reflect the will of the people.

Lead with values

Shared goals

Name the villains

Highlight what voting can deliver

Shift toward future goals and vision

TALKING ABOUT THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

The For the People Act will

- protect our freedom to vote
- make voting options accessible to Americans across all 50 states
- give voters equal voice by preventing billionaires from buying our elections, and
- help elect leaders who govern in our interests by drawing congressional districts to give fair representation for all.

Incorporate values

Simplify policy provisions

TALKING ABOUT VR ADVANCEMENT ACT

The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would strengthen the freedom to vote for Americans across race and region by making sure that attempts to create barriers to voting [that discriminate against voters based on our color, background or zip code] get federal review, so we all have an equal say in our future.

Incorporate values

Simplify policy provisions

COMBATTING STATE ATTACKS

No matter our race, background or zip code most of us believe that for democracy to work for all of us, it must include us all.

Throughout our history, we have fought to ensure more Americans have our right to vote honored and that every eligible American is able to cast our vote and have it counted. But a

handful of politicians want to set us back, making it harder to vote and creating barriers to register for Black, young and new

Americans. They hope to divide and distract us while they block policies Americans favor, from providing economic support to delivering vaccines to restoring our infrastructure. To move

forward together, we must ensure that Americans can cast our ballot so we are able to elect leaders who govern in our interests and make the promise of our democracy real for us all.

Lead with values

Remind about history

Frame us as forward, them backward

Highlight what we can deliver, their failure

Shift toward future goals and vision

STATE POWER GRAB MESSAGE

No matter our race, party, or zip code, most of us believe voters pick our leaders – our leaders do not get to pick which voters to hear and which to silence. We turned out in record numbers last fall, so now certain politicians in states like Georgia, Arizona, and Florida want to shut down polling places, ban our First Amendment right to assemble, and erect new barriers to voting in order to hold onto power and govern only for the wealthiest few. Together, we can ensure our freedom to vote so we can elect leaders that act in our interests, delivering the pandemic relief, health care and jobs our families need.

Lead with values

Remind people of our power

Name the villains and their motivation

Shift toward future goals and vision

Highlight what our leaders can & should deliver

MESSAGING FOR BUSINESS

THE FREEDOM TO VOTE IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

In America, we value our freedom. The freedom to have a great idea and turn it into a business that employs millions. The freedom to develop a product that changes lives across the world. And the freedom to have your voice heard and your rights respected. Real businesses believe in everyone having the equal freedom to vote, because the freedom to vote is everyone's business.

AVOID: "Democracy is good for business"

EMBRACE	REPLACE	WHY
Deliberate barriers to voting	Obstacles/hurdles to voting	"Voter suppression" is a phrase that is unfortunately not understood by many. We can make this issue more concrete for our audiences by naming how certain politicians erect "deliberate barriers to voting." It's best to frame as "barriers" which seem imposed and more difficult to overcome than "obstacles" and "hurdles."
Denying/Protect our freedom to vote	Voter suppression	
Anti-voter bills	Fight voter suppression	
Freedom to vote	Voting rights	Freedom to vote is a very strong frame for us, garnering greater support and intensity across measures. Safety - especially in our present pandemic context - was also deeply resonant; as was situating voting within the frame of equality either by simply calling for it or evoking it.
Cast our ballots freely, safely and equally		
[The principle of] one person, one vote		While personalizing voting as "my right" resonated, voting rights is a more abstract phrase that dampens emotion and sense of immediate impact for listener.
Right to vote		

EMBRACE	REPLACE	WHY
Safe and accessible elections [for all] Transparent process we can trust	Election security Election integrity	While voters register agreement with messages that try to reclaim “election security” and “integrity” for our side, our research showed that this approach backfires by actually increasing support for anti-voter policies. The phrase “election security” evokes a conservative law enforcement frame that feeds our opposition’s narrative.
Americans	Citizens	
Voters	Eligible citizens	
Eligible Americans*	Eligible voters Every American	When we qualify “voter” with a word like “eligible,” we reinforce a right-wing frame suggesting there are ineligible voters who cast “illegal” ballots. Because our elections are conducted properly, people who are voting are eligible, so we should simply call them “voters.” When talking about the broader pool of people who are eligible to vote but might or might not be participating, we are best served most of the time by simply saying “Americans.” The exception is when we are specifically discussing voter registration or other more challenging policy specifics, when the phrase “eligible Americans” is helpful.

* only in certain circumstances

EMBRACE	REPLACE	WHY
Make voting safe and accessible	Make it easier to vote	Unfortunately, many people do not think it should be “easy” to vote. However, the concept of voting as safe and accessible is a highly rated value across the board.
Vote by mail	Vote absentee	In our survey, enabling voters to “vote by mail in every state” significantly outperformed enabling voters to “vote absentee in every state” with our base and persuadables in both support and intensity. Voting by mail became familiar to most voters as another safe simple way to cast a ballot in the 2020 election, whereas “absentee” implies some sort of aberrant circumstances and even voter neglect or failure to vote the “normal” way.
National standards for voting access	Uniform standards Minimum standards	In our survey, voters enthusiastically embraced “national standards for voting access” and overwhelmingly rejected right-wing arguments that states should establish their own rules in elections.

EMBRACE	REPLACE	WHY
Fair Representation Make the promise of democracy real for us all	Democracy reform Fix our democracy Restore democracy Revive democracy Fix our broken system	<p>“Democracy reform” is a non-starter for our base and persuadables, who rank it last in a broad list of priorities for the country. We generally use the word “reform” to describe altering something undesirable rather than creating something good.</p> <p>“Democracy reform” also, along with phrases like “fix our democracy,” suggests that democracy has already been fully established in the U.S., as opposed to being an ideal we have yet to ever reach.</p>
Guarantee that Americans have a say in key decisions that impact our lives [like pandemic relief, health care, and our families economic well-being]	Improve our democracy Fix our democracy	In emphasizing why we need to pass progressive policies around voting and elections, our conflicted voters were significantly more likely to rank it as urgent and necessary when tied directly back to having a say in tangible outcomes, rather than broad notions of improving democracy.

SELLING OUR SOLUTIONS

Policy	Language To Use
HONEST ADS	<i>Create an "Honest Ads" policy so that online political ads disclose clearly who is paying for them</i>
EARLY VOTING	<i>Ensure that early voting is equally available in every state</i>
VOTE BY MAIL / ABSENTEE VOTING	<i>Enable voters to vote by mail in every state</i>
PAPER BALLOTS	<i>Ensure votes are recorded on paper ballots that can be accurately recounted</i>
PUBLIC NOTICE	<i>Require reasonable public notice for changes to voting laws</i>
BALLOT CURE PROCESS	<i>Provide voters the opportunity to correct errors in submitted absentee ballots, commonly called a 'ballot cure' process</i>
BALLOT PRE-PROCESSING	<i>Enable election officials to begin processing mail ballots before Election Day</i>

SELLING OUR SOLUTIONS

Policy	Language To Use
BALLOT TRACKING	<i>Implement an electronic ballot tracking system which allows voters to know the status of their mail-in ballot at any time until it's verified and counted</i>
PREPAID POSTAGE	<i>Provide pre-paid postage on mail-in ballot return envelopes</i>
ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION	<i>Enable eligible Americans to register to vote online</i>
AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION	<i>Register eligible Americans to vote automatically when they interact with a government agency like the DMV, unless they opt out</i>
SAME DAY VOTER REGISTRATION	<i>Enable eligible Americans to register to vote at any time, including on Election Day</i>
ELECTION DAY HOLIDAY	<i>Make Election Day a holiday</i>
VOTING RIGHTS RESTORATION	<i>Restore the voting rights of people who have completed a prison sentence</i>

DESCRIBING THE PROBLEM

Policy	Language To Use	Best Practice
VOTER ID	<i>Restricting types of IDs you can use to vote</i> <i>Forcing people to carry a specific type of ID to vote</i>	Do not specify or focus on the various types of ID that can be used
ABSENTEE WITNESS REQUIREMENT	<i>Requiring voters to get a witness to authorize their private ballot</i>	Emphasize <u>privacy</u> of your ballot and vote
ABSENTEE NOTARY REQUIREMENT	<i>Requiring voters to pay an officially authorized person, or notary, to sign their absentee ballot before submitting it to be counted</i>	Emphasize that notarization requires <u>payment</u>
EXCUSE- REQUIRED ABSENTEE VOTING	<i>Threatening voters who request an absentee ballot with felony prosecution if they cannot prove an excuse such as illness, active military status, or will be out-of-state at the time of election</i> <i>Barring people from voting by mail unless they provide an excuse</i>	Use a negative frame to talk about restrictions instead of simply talking about the requirement of needing an excuse.

DESCRIBING THE PROBLEM

Policy	Language To Use	Best Practice
VOTER PURGING	<i>Deleting people from the voter rolls after they miss voting in recent elections</i>	There's little difference in describing this as "purging" "deleting" and "eliminating." However, it's best to characterize folks not participating as "miss voting."
REDUCING EARLY/ IN-PERSON VOTING	<i>Reducing the number of locations where people can cast their ballots (early).</i> <i>Restricting when early voting locations are open.</i>	Highlight policies that reduce access for everyday voters.
THIRD PARTY RETURN	<i>Ensure voters can have necessary assistance from community organizations returning their sealed ballot</i>	Frame this positively as assistance instead of talking about banning this practice.

TAKEAWAYS

- **FOCUS on the big picture / values**
 - In public messaging, always circle back to values, instead of getting bogged down in policy
- **FOCUS on freedom, voices, rights, choices**
 - Freedom frame is our strongest. People want to feel like their voice is heard. Voters want choices in the way they cast their ballot.
- **CENTER voters / people impacted**
 - As much as possible, make the voters the protagonist, as opposed to the policy
- **NAME the villains and whom they target**
 - Anti-voter policies are racially targeted and we must name that
- **TIE voting to the outcomes that impact people's lives**
 - Anchor the outcome to other top-of-mind issues
- **REPEAT**
 - If you feel like you've been saying the same thing over and over, good! That's how it spreads.



bit.ly/FreedomToVote



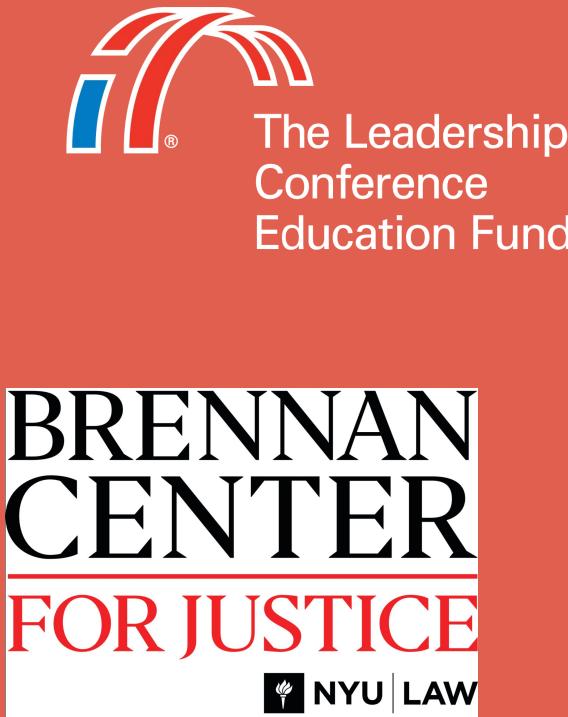
WE
MAKE
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VOTING
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THANK YOU PARTNERS

**VOTING
RIGHTS
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The Leadership
Conference
Education Fund



**END CITIZENS UNITED
— ACTION FUND —**



**LET AMERICA VOTE
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THANK YOU RESEARCHERS



QUESTIONS?