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Public Supports Aim of Making It ‘Easy’ for All Citizens to Vote

Only one-in-five back mandatory voting

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Public Supports Aim of Making It ‘Easy’ for All Citizens to Vote

Only one-in-five back mandatory voting

As states around the country debate laws regarding access to the ballot – ranging from automatic voter registration to voter ID requirements – most Americans back making it easy for all citizens to vote. But they overwhelmingly reject the idea of requiring people to vote.

The right to vote is deeply valued by the public: An overwhelming 91% say that they consider the right to vote as essential to their own personal sense of freedom.

A 59% majority says that everything possible should be done to make it easy for every citizen to vote, while 39% say that citizens should have to prove they really want to vote by registering ahead of time.

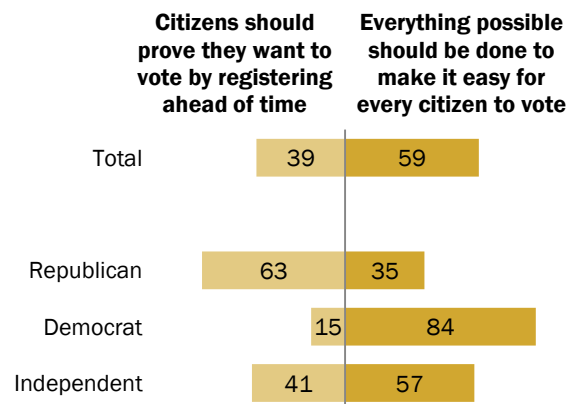
While the public thinks voting should be easy for citizens and prizes the right to cast a ballot, they oppose mandatory voting. Nearly eight-in-ten (78%) say that every citizen should be able to decide for themselves whether or not to vote in national elections, compared with just 20% who say that all citizens should be required to vote in national elections.

These questions were part of a survey conducted in conjunction with the Smithsonian National Museum of American History for its newly opened [American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith exhibition](#).

The national survey by Pew Research Center finds partisans are sharply divided over the question of how easy it should be for citizens to vote. A large majority of Democrats (84%) say that voting should be made as easy as possible for citizens. By contrast, just 35% of Republicans favor making voting as easy as possible, while 63% say citizens should have to prove they really want to vote by

Most say ‘everything possible’ should be done to make it easy for citizens to vote

% who say ...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted April 19-23, 2017.

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registering ahead of time. Among independents, more say it should be easy for citizens to vote (57%) than say they should have to prove they really want to vote (41%).

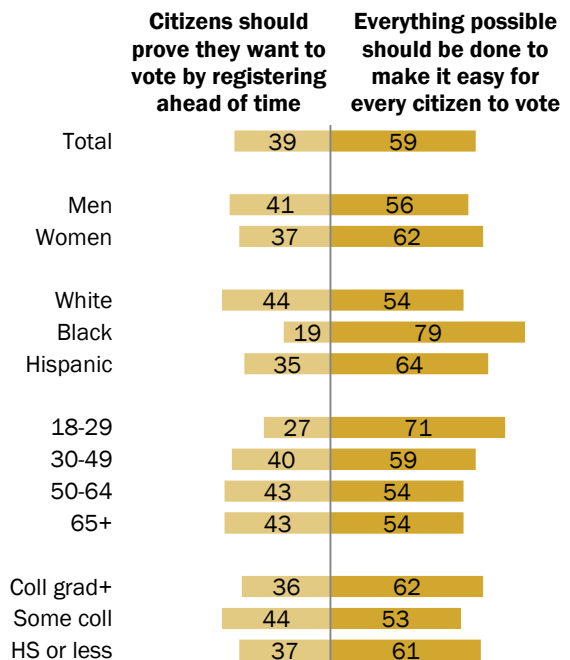
Views about ease of access to voting also differ by age and by race and ethnicity. About seven-in-ten (71%) adults under age 30 believe that everything possible should be done to make it easy for every citizen to vote, while only about a quarter (27%) say that citizens should have to prove they want to vote by registering ahead of time. Although a majority of adults 30 and older (56%) also support making it easy for citizens to vote, roughly four-in-ten (42%) think citizens should have to register in advance.

Blacks are more likely than either whites or Hispanics to say voting should be made as easy as possible for citizens: 79% of blacks say this, while just 19% say citizens should have to prove they really want to vote by registering ahead of time. Among whites, a much narrower majority (54%) support making voting as easy as possible for all citizens (44% say citizens should prove they want to vote by registering ahead of time). By 64%-35%, most Hispanics support taking steps to make voting easy for all citizens.

There is little difference in views on this question by gender or level of education. Majorities of men and women and those with more and less education say everything possible should be done to make it easy for every citizen to vote.

Blacks broadly supportive of making it easy for every citizen to vote

% who say ...



Notes: Don't know responses not shown.

Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic;

Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted April 19-23, 2017.

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Little support for mandatory voting

While there is support for making it easy for citizens to vote, the public is largely opposed to making voting required in national elections. Only two-in-ten (20%) would favor mandatory voting, while nearly eight-in-ten (78%) says citizens should be able to decide for themselves whether or not to vote in national elections.

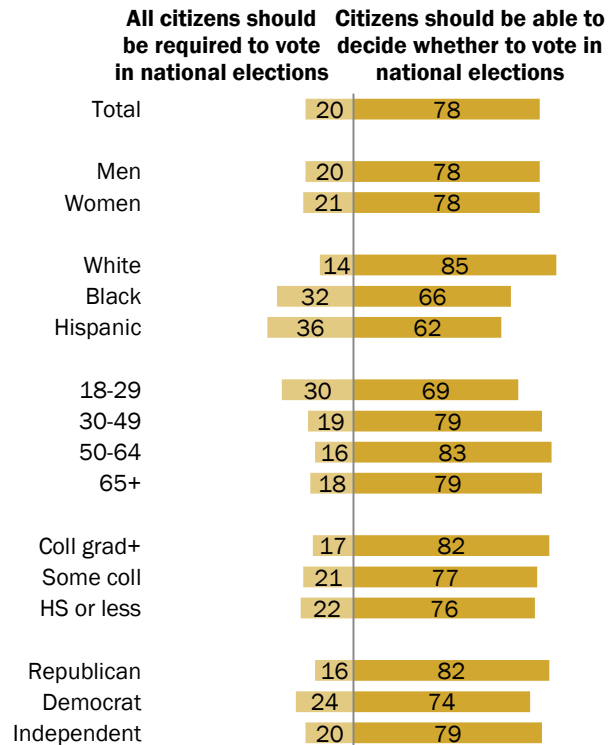
Notably, there are no significant differences on this question by partisan affiliation: Large majorities of both Republicans (82%) and Democrats (74%) favor letting citizens decide for themselves whether or not to vote.

Majorities across racial and ethnic groups say that citizens should be able to decide for themselves whether they want to vote or not, though support for mandatory voting is higher among Hispanics (36%) and blacks (32%) than among whites (14%).

Younger adults (ages 18 to 29) are slightly more likely than those in older age groups to favor making voting in national elections a requirement. However, at least two-thirds of all age groups say citizens should be able to decide whether or not to vote in national elections.

Both Republicans and Democrats oppose making voting mandatory

% who say ...



Notes: Don't know responses not shown.

Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted April 19-23, 2017.

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Voting widely seen as an ‘essential’ right

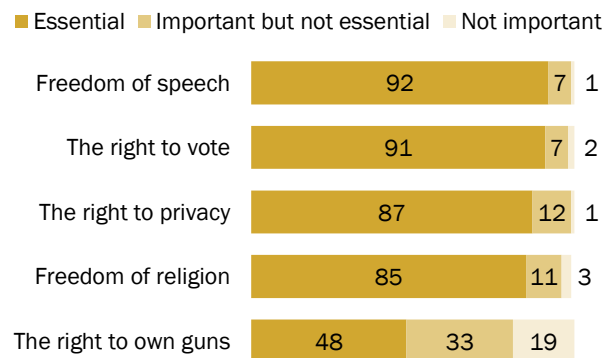
The public places a great deal of personal importance on the right to vote. When asked about the importance of five rights and freedoms, the right to vote ranks about as high as any item on the list. Overall, 91% of Americans say that the right to vote is essential to their sense of freedom. Only 7% say it is important but not essential, and just 1% says it is not important. A comparable share (92%) considers freedom of speech to be essential to their own sense of freedom.

Large majorities also say the right to privacy (87%) and freedom of religion (85%) are essential to them. Views are more mixed when it comes to the right to own guns: 48% say this is essential, while 33% say it is important but not essential and 19% say it is not important.

The importance of the right to vote is widely shared across partisan lines: 96% of Democrats and 91% of Republicans consider it essential to their own sense of freedom.

Americans view the right to vote as essential to their sense of freedom

% who say each is _____ to their own sense of freedom ...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted March 13-27, 2017.

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Acknowledgements

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

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Methodology

Most of the analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted April 19-23, 2017 among a national sample of 1,028 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states (414 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 614 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 383 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted under the direction of Social Science Research Solutions (SSRS). A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Marketing Systems Group. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see

<http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the March 2016 supplement of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2016 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

One of the questions in this report is based on a survey conducted March 13-27, 2017 which was previously released. Methodology for that survey can be found [here](#).

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Survey conducted April 19-23, 2017

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,028	3.7 percentage points
Republican	249	7.5 percentage points
Democrat	314	6.7 percentage points
Independent	398	6.0 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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Appendix: Topline Questionnaire

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April 19-23, 2017 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,028

ASK ALL:

PEW.1 I'm going to read you some pairs of statements that will help us understand how you feel about a number of things. As I read each pair, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views — even if neither is exactly right. The first pair is **[READ AND RANDOMIZE AND RANDOMIZE STATEMENTS WITHIN PAIRS]**. Next, **[NEXT PAIR] [IF NECESSARY: "Which statement comes closer to your views, even if neither is exactly right?"]**

a.	Citizens should have to prove they really want to vote by registering ahead of time	Everything possible should be done to make it easy for every citizen to vote	(VOL.) Both/Neither/ DK/Ref
Apr 19-23, 2017	39	59	2
b.	All citizens should be required to vote in national elections	Every citizen should be able to decide for themselves whether or not to vote in national elections	(VOL.) Both/Neither/ DK/Ref
Apr 19-23, 2017	20	78	1
c.	I am willing to give up some of my personal privacy if it helps keep the country safe	I'm not willing to give up any of my personal privacy, even if it helps keep the country safe	(VOL.) Both/Neither/ DK/Ref
Apr 19-23, 2017	54	42	4

ITEM d HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

e.	If the gap between the rich and poor continues to grow, it will pose a threat to American democracy	American democracy can function well even if the gap between the rich and poor continues to grow	(VOL.) Both/Neither/ DK/Ref
Apr 19-23, 2017	64	29	7

ASK ALL:

PEW.2 Thinking about when people are called for jury duty, which comes closer to your view? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

Apr 19-23
2017

67	Serving on a jury is part of what it means to be a good citizen
31	Serving on a jury does not have much to do with being a good citizen
1	Neither/Both equally (VOL.)
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)