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**THE STATE OF THE NATION:  
A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY  
REPORT #3: SUPPORT FOR VOTE BY MAIL**

USA, May 2020

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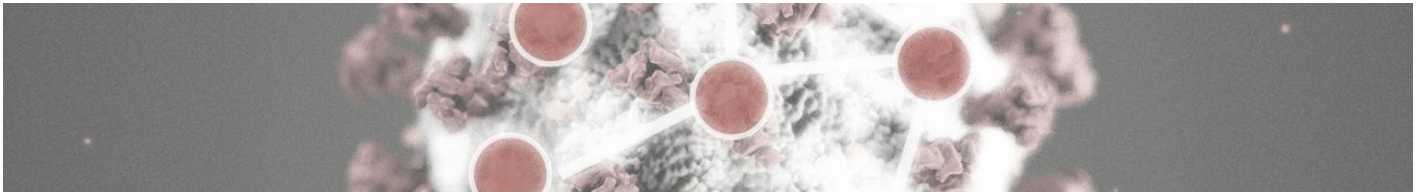
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THE STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF NEW JERSEY



**Report of May 27, 2020, v.1.0**

**From:** The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States

*A joint project of:*

Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

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## Contents

Contents	3
COVER MEMO	4
1. Support for vote by mail	5
2. Likelihood of voting in November	6
3. Understanding how vote by mail works	7
4. Current status of voting by mail	8
5. Other factors linked to VBM attitudes	9
6. State tables	12

## COVER MEMO

### Summary Memo—May 27, 2020

*The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States*

**Partners:** Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

**Authors:** Matthew A. Baum (Harvard University); Katherine Ognyanova (Rutgers University); David Lazer (Northeastern University); John Della Volpe (Harvard University); Roy H. Perlis (Harvard University); James Druckman (Northwestern University); and Mauricio Santillana (Harvard University)

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From May 2 to 15 we conducted a large, 50 state survey, results of which are available at [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org). As part of the survey, we asked respondents about their attitudes regarding voting by mail (VBM). This report focuses on those questions, both nationally and across individual states.

#### Note on methods:

We surveyed 20,333 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted on 2-15 May 2020 by PureSpectrum via an online, nonprobability sample, with state-level representative quotas for race/ethnicity, age, and gender. In addition to balancing on these dimensions, we reweighted our data using demographic characteristics.

Note that a number of states in the data, including Alaska, Hawaii, North Dakota, New Mexico, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming have relatively smaller sample sizes (under 250 respondents) and larger margins of error. Results concerning those states are marked with an asterisk (\*) throughout the report and should be interpreted with caution.

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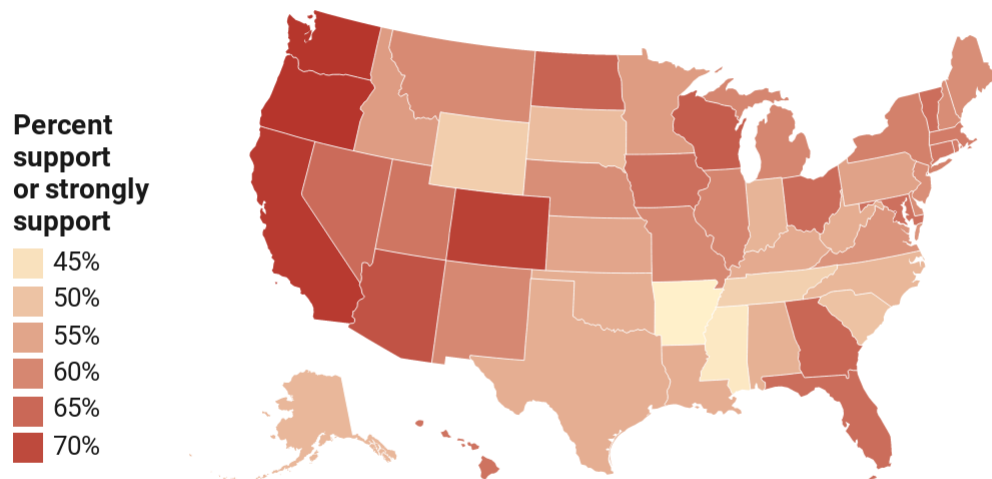
# 1. Support for vote by mail

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**A strong majority of Americans support making it easier to vote by mail (VBM).** Three-in-five (60%) Americans support making it easier to vote by mail this November, while only 16% oppose (24% neither support nor oppose). Majorities of Americans in all but four states -- Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Wyoming\* -- support making VBM easier. At the other extreme, over 70% of Americans in four states (Oregon, Washington, California, Colorado) and the District of Columbia\*, support making VBM easier.

## Support for vote by mail

Would you support making it easier to vote by mail in November?  
[Percent respondents who said "Support" or "Strongly support"]



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org)  
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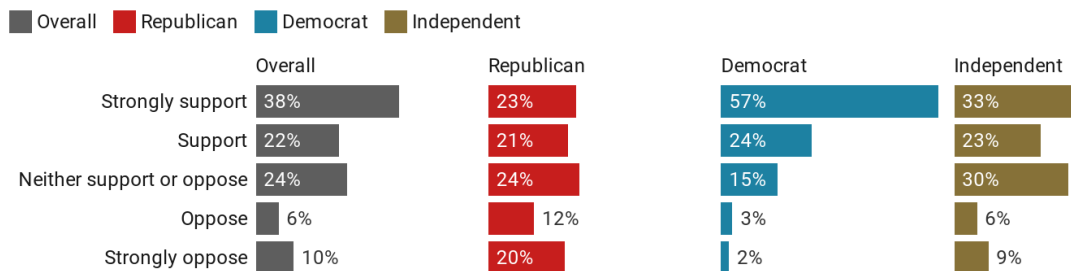
**Democrats and residents of battleground states are more likely to support making mail ballots easier.** Overall, 80% of Democrats support making it easier to vote by mail, 5% oppose; for Republicans, 45% support and 32% oppose. Independents, by a large margin, also support greater access to mail balloting (56% support, 14% oppose). Americans in red states were less likely to support an easier vote by mail in November (53% support, 20% oppose) compared to those living in blue states (65% support, 12% oppose) or battleground<sup>1</sup> states (61% support, 16% oppose).

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<sup>1</sup> Red, blue and battleground states are defined as the states listed as "Likely/Leans Trump", "Likely/Leans Biden", "toss-ups" respectively by [RealClearPolitics](https://www.realclearpolitics.com) on May 27, 2020.

## Partisan differences in support for making voting by mail easier

Would you support making it easier to vote in November by mail?



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

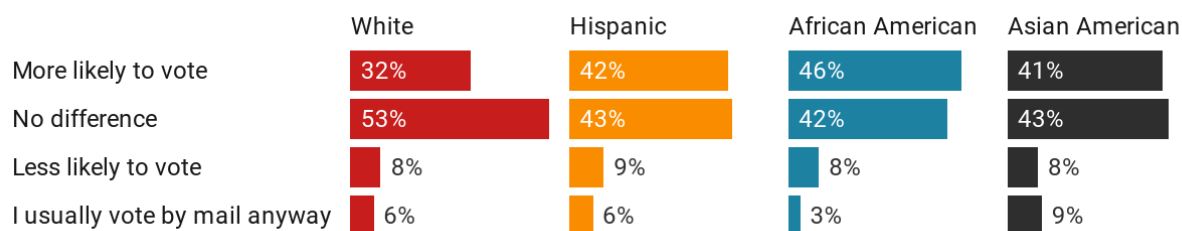
Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org)  
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## 2. Likelihood of voting in November

**A considerable proportion of Americans say they would be more likely to vote if mail were an option.** Overall, 36% of adults surveyed indicated that they would be more likely to vote if they had the option to vote for president by mail. We also found significant differences by race, ethnicity, and party affiliation. African Americans (46%), Hispanics (42%) and Asian Americans (41%) were more likely to vote if mail were an option, compared to 32% of Whites. Democrats, at 47%, had a much higher probability of saying they would be more likely to vote under this scenario compared to Republicans (28%) and independents (33%).

### Likelihood of voting if mail ballots are made easier

In November, if you had the option of voting for president by mail, would you be more likely to vote, less likely to vote, or would it make no difference to you?



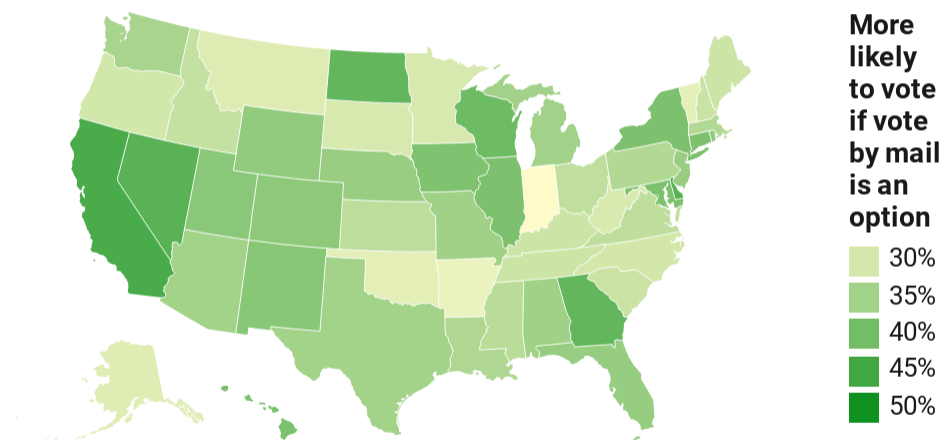
National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

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**In all 50 states, more respondents say that a VBM option would *increase* than say it would *decrease* their likelihood of voting for president in November.** The gap varies from a low of 16 percentage points in Arkansas (29% say more likely, 13% say less likely) and Mississippi (33% say more likely, 17% say less likely) to a high of 49 points in Washington, DC.\* Other states with large gaps include California and Delaware (39 points each), Hawaii\*, Iowa, Maryland, and Utah (34 points each).

## Over a third of Americans say they would be more likely to vote if it could be done by mail

In November, if you had the option of voting for president by mail, would you be more likely to vote, less likely to vote, or would it make no difference to you?  
[Percent respondents who said "More likely to vote"]



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University)

[www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org)

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## 3. Understanding how vote by mail works

**Four out of ten young Americans are not sure how to vote by mail.** Despite an interest in voting by mail, 44% of adults under 25 and 41% of those between 25 and 44 report that they are "not at all" or "not very" confident that they know how the process works. Less than one-fifth (18%) of those under 25 describe themselves as "very confident."

We also found that Republicans (43% not confident) are far less confident in this process than Democrats (25% not confident) at this time.

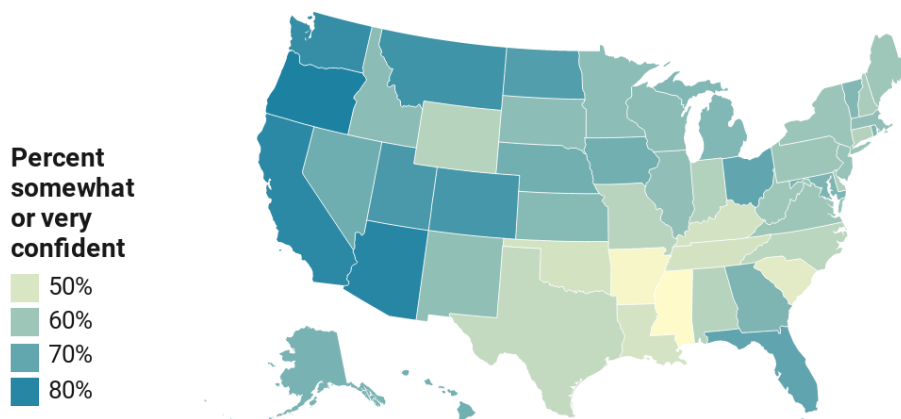


**Majorities of respondents in all but three states (South Carolina, Arkansas, and Mississippi) indicate that they were somewhat or very confident that they understood the VBM process.** There is, however, wide variation across the states, with just over half of respondents in five Southern states (Louisiana, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Texas) expressing confidence, compared with, at the other extreme, over three-quarters of respondents in four Western states (Washington, California, Arizona, and Oregon).

As the national numbers suggest, there is evidence in the state-level data of a partisan dimension in confidence in understanding the VBM process. On average, as a state’s partisan leaning -- defined as the percent of respondents identifying as Democrat minus the percent identifying as Republican -- becomes increasingly pro-Democratic, the percentage of respondents indicating that they are somewhat or very confident that they understand the VBM process increases<sup>2</sup>.

## Understanding the vote by mail process

On the issue of voting by mail in your state, are you... (not at all/not very /somewhat/very)... confident that you know how the process works?  
 [Percent respondents who said "Somewhat confident" or "Very confident"]



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public’s Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org)  
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## 4. Current status of voting by mail

**Residents in states that have at least some experience with VBM are more likely to support making VBM easier than their counterparts in states that do not**, though the difference is not large (62% vs. 57%). Support is especially high (69% on average) for respondents in the five states which already conduct all elections by mail: Colorado, Hawaii\*, Oregon, Utah, and Washington.

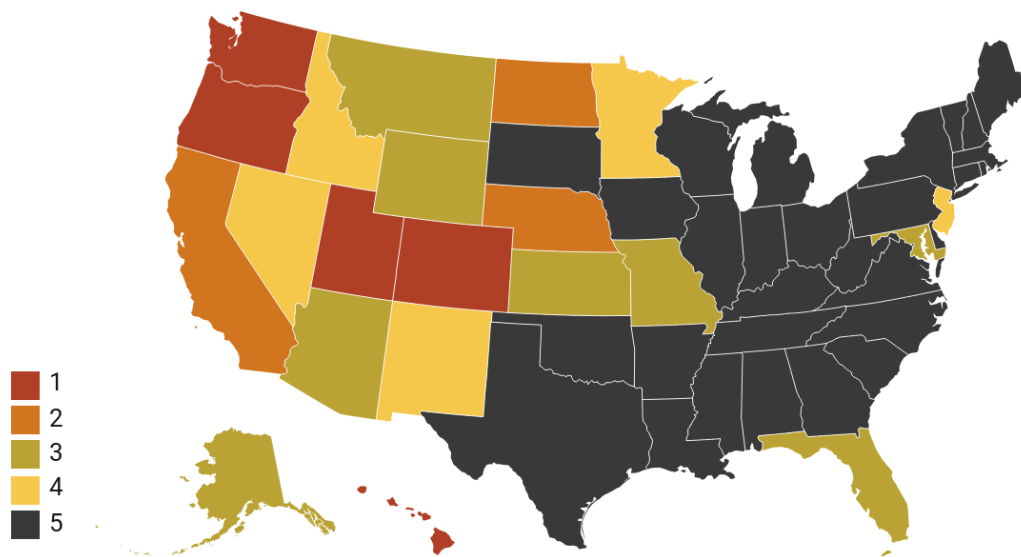
<sup>2</sup> Correlation coefficient = .25



**Prior experience with VBM matters a lot with respect to people’s confidence in knowing how voting by mail works.** Average levels of confidence in understanding the VBM process among respondents in states with prior VBM experience is 11 percentage points higher than in states without any experience with VBM (69 vs. 58% of respondents expressing confidence).

## Vote by mail state statutes

1. States that conduct all elections by mail
2. States that permit counties to opt into conducting all elections by mail
3. States that permit some elections to be conducted by mail
4. States that permit certain jurisdictions or portions of a jurisdiction to be designated as all-mail based on population
5. All other states



Map: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public’s Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org)  
• Source: National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) • Created with Datawrapper

## 5. Other factors linked to VBM attitudes

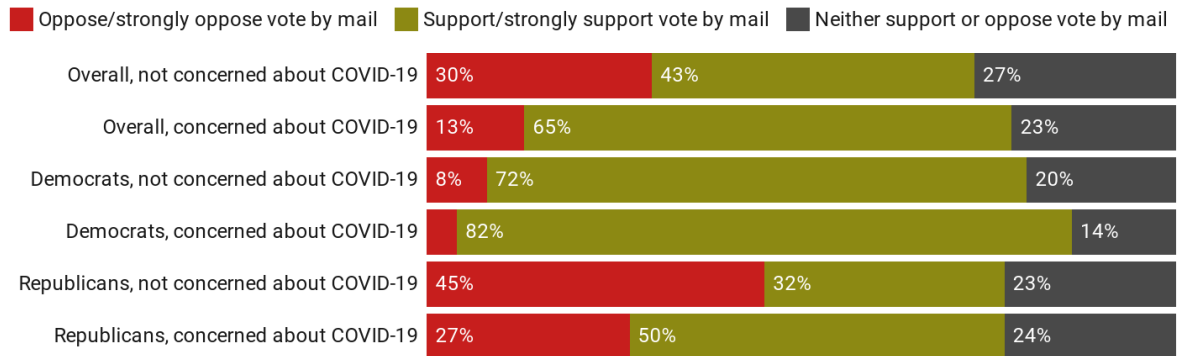
**Concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic are related to attitudes toward VBM.** People who reported being “somewhat” or “very” concerned about getting COVID-19 were significantly more likely to support voting by mail (67%) compared to those who did not share those concerns (48%). The same was true for people who reported being concerned that a family member might get sick: 65% of them supported voting by mail compared to 43% who did not have such concerns.

Interestingly, those patterns held across party lines and were more pronounced among our Republican respondents. We found that 82% of Democrats who had concerns about the health of their family supported vote by mail, compared to 72% of those who did not express such

concerns. For Republicans, 50% of those concerned about COVID-19 affecting their loved ones supported making voting by mail easier compared to 32% of those who were not concerned.

## Support for voting by mail linked to concerns about COVID-19

How concerned, if at all, do you currently feel about the following: Family members getting coronavirus [Respondents who said by they were not at all/not very concerned vs. somewhat/very concerned]  
 BY Would you support making it easier to vote by mail in November?



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org)  
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In most cases, **Americans who trust institutions and experts were more likely to support voting by mail.** Respondents who reported trusting their city government (“some” or “a lot”) to handle the COVID-19 pandemic were more likely to support making VBM easier (64% support). Among those who did not think their city government could be trusted, less than half (46%) supported voting by mail. We found similar patterns for trust in state government (64% support among those who trust the state government vs. 46% among those who do not), Congress (65% vs. 54%), hospitals and doctors (61% vs. 40%), the Centers for Disease Control (64% vs. 37%) and scientists/researchers in general (62% vs. 36%).

This trend was notably reversed with regard to the White House. Among Americans who said they trusted Donald Trump, 46% supported an easier vote by mail process. Among those who did not trust the current president, 73% were in favor of easier mail ballots.

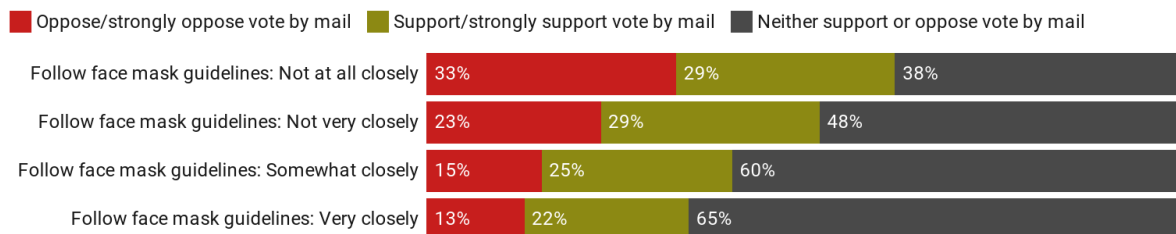
**Americans who approve of Donald Trump’s handling of the current crisis and those who watch the president’s press briefings show lower levels of support for mail-in voting.**

Among respondents who said they “strongly approve” or “approve” of the way Donald Trump is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, 46% support making voting by mail easier, compared to 78% support among those who disapprove of the president’s handling of the pandemic. Support for VBM was at 52% among those who reported watching Trump’s briefings compared to 63% among those who did not. The numbers were similar among Americans who reported watching Fox News in the 24 hours before responding to our survey: 52% supported easier mail-in voting compared to 65% among those who did not watch the network. We found even larger differences in support for VBM, but in the opposite direction, among people who watched CNN (73% support VBM) vs. those who did not (53% support) and those who watched MSNBC (77%) vs. those who did not (56%).

**States where VBM support is highest tend to have higher rates of compliance with public health guidelines for mitigating the spread of COVID-19.** Across the five guidelines we included in the survey -- wearing a mask outside the home, frequent hand washing, avoiding public or crowded places, avoiding contact with other people, and disinfecting often-touched surfaces -- we see generally strong, positive relationships between attitudes toward making VBM easier and (somewhat or very close) compliance with public health guidelines, though the differences vary widely across the states. To estimate these differences, we compared average compliance levels across the five guidelines in each state for strong supporters vs. strong opponents of making VBM easier. Comparing across states, strong supporters of making VBM easier are, on average, 14 points more likely than strong opponents to report compliance. That said, this overall average obscures large differences across states. At one extreme, in Wyoming\*, strong VBM supporters report being over 40 points more likely than strong VBM opponents to comply with public health guidelines. The corresponding gaps exceed 20 percentage points in eight additional states: New Mexico\* (32 points), Nebraska (27 points), Illinois (25 points), Oregon (24 points), Wisconsin (24 points), Arizona (23 points), Kansas (22 points) and Minnesota (21 points). At the other extreme, we see smaller than a three percentage point gap in three states (Delaware, Washington, and Connecticut) and the District of Columbia,\* indicating that in these states, attitudes toward VBM appear largely unrelated to compliance with public health guidelines for mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

### Vote by mail support and following face mask guidelines

In the last week, how closely did you personally follow the health recommendations listed below:  
 - Wearing a face mask when outside of your home  
 BY Would you support making it easier to vote by mail in November?



National sample, N = 20,333, Time period: 5/2/2020-5/15/2020

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) [www.covidstates.org](http://www.covidstates.org)  
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Zooming in on one such guideline -- wearing a face mask in public -- the compliance gap between strong VBM supporters and strong VBM opponents ranges from a low of a one percentage point gap in Delaware and Connecticut -- where in both cases nearly all respondents report wearing a mask, regardless of attitudes toward VBM (Washington is nearly tied with Hawaii\* for the third smallest gap) -- to highs of over 50 percentage points in Indiana (51%), Wyoming\* (53%), and New Mexico\* (62%). In these latter states, support for making VBM easier strongly predicts compliance with public health guidelines on mask wearing.

## 6. State tables

### Would you support making it easier to vote in November by mail?

State	Strongly oppose	Oppose	Neither support or oppose	Support	Strongly support	Error Margin	N
AK	11	9.4	27.7	18.7	33.2	9.8	139
AL	15.9	5.9	25.1	20.9	32.1	5.9	385
AR	20	5.7	31.8	22.4	20.1	6.6	363
AZ	7.3	3.9	20.3	25	43.5	7.6	317
CA	4.6	3	19.8	20.7	52	4.5	729
CO	5.2	3.8	19.4	24	47.6	5.8	390
CT	10.8	5.3	21.3	27.1	35.4	6.2	358
DC	4.1	7.6	14.2	29.4	44.8	10.3	169
DE	11	6	24.1	17.2	41.8	6.4	340
FL	6.5	7.2	22.1	22.3	42	4.4	664
GA	8.9	6.1	19.7	22.9	42.4	5.3	495
HI	2.7	3.2	30.9	22.1	41.2	8.8	215
IA	5.9	4.1	26.1	22.9	41	5.9	386
ID	10.2	10.2	23.4	22.9	33.5	5.9	358
IL	12.1	6.2	21.4	21.8	38.5	4.7	530
IN	13.1	7.4	26.9	22.5	30	5.2	442
KS	12.5	6.8	25.8	17.2	37.7	5.8	442
KY	11.9	9.5	24.5	20.6	33.5	5.5	400
LA	18.5	5.1	22.8	26.4	27.2	5.9	391
MA	7.7	6.3	24.4	26.6	35.1	4.7	475
MD	8.8	5.4	22.1	20.9	42.8	5.6	402
ME	12.6	8.9	19.6	22.1	36.7	5.5	373
MI	10.1	8.5	21.3	19.9	40.2	4.8	526
MN	10.8	6.3	26.4	25.9	30.6	5.2	421
MO	12.7	6.6	21	22.3	37.4	5	478
MS	17.2	8.1	30.8	19.3	24.6	6.8	348
MT	8	7.9	24.6	14.8	44.7	7.5	257
NC	15.4	9.8	22.9	23	29	4.5	525
ND	9.4	5.9	19	25.4	40.3	8.4	212
NE	12.6	6.6	22	19.9	38.9	7.4	263
NH	12.1	6.3	22.7	21.7	37.2	5.6	369
NJ	9.3	7.6	24.5	26.3	32.4	4.5	537
NM	8.8	7.3	24.3	31.1	28.6	9.7	211
NV	8.5	8.1	18.9	23.4	41.1	5.8	398
NY	9.6	4.1	25.5	24.2	36.8	4.3	620
OH	8.2	5.2	22.2	22.2	42.2	4.7	530
OK	9.4	8.4	28.7	20.3	33.2	6.9	332

OR	3.8	3.5	19.1	19.1	54.4	5.4	408
PA	13.6	7.9	23.1	20.8	34.6	4.3	566
RI	8.2	6.6	23.5	19.7	42	6.5	318
SC	15.8	9.2	24.9	20.8	29.3	5.5	422
SD	12.8	7	29.1	22.5	28.6	7.2	229
TN	15.8	9.3	27.1	22.1	25.7	5	456
TX	9.6	9.2	27.8	22.4	31.1	4.9	581
UT	5.4	4.4	27.3	19.7	43.1	6.9	312
VA	14.3	5.8	22.1	23.2	34.6	4.6	512
VT	7.6	4.2	24.2	22.4	41.6	7.4	242
WA	4.8	4.1	17.7	17.5	55.9	5.4	435
WI	9.5	3.8	19.7	22	44.9	4.9	550
WV	11.2	9.7	25.4	26.2	27.5	6	327
WY	22.6	6.2	23	14.9	33.3	12.2	114

**In November, if you had the option of voting for president by mail, would you be more likely to vote, less likely to vote, or would it make no difference to you?**

State	More likely	Less likely	No difference	I usually vote by mail anyway	Error Margin	N
AK	28.9	7.2	58.2	5.6	10.2	139
AL	35.3	11.2	52	1.6	6.3	385
AR	27.7	12.2	59.6	0.5	7	364
AZ	35	6.4	35.3	23.2	7.3	319
CA	44	4.9	35.2	15.9	4.5	728
CO	37.1	4.8	38.4	19.6	5.6	390
CT	38.9	7.4	52.9	0.8	6.5	357
DC	51.5	2.1	44.1	2.2	10.3	169
DE	42.8	4.1	51	2.2	6.5	341
FL	36.2	8.6	46.4	8.8	4.4	666
GA	41.5	9.1	45.9	3.5	5.3	494
HI	39	5.2	43.3	12.4	8.8	217
IA	38.7	5.2	51.4	4.7	6	387
ID	31.6	10.4	55.8	2.3	6.3	357
IL	38.9	9	50.5	1.6	4.8	531
IN	25.8	9.1	62.8	2.3	5.5	442
KS	32.4	9.3	55.8	2.5	5.9	442
KY	30.8	6.9	61.4	1	5.7	401
LA	33.8	13.7	50.5	2	6.6	391
MA	33.5	8.5	55.6	2.5	5	473
MD	39	5.5	53.6	1.8	5.7	400
ME	30.9	7.3	57.2	4.5	5.7	372
MI	35.1	6.5	49.6	8.9	4.9	528

MN	29.7	8.4	58	3.9	5.6	421
MO	35.3	6	57.7	1	5.1	479
MS	32.7	17	48.5	1.8	7.3	350
MT	29	6.3	47	17.7	7.5	257
NC	30.2	10.9	56.9	1.9	4.9	523
ND	41.5	11.4	43.9	3.2	8.5	211
NE	36	6.5	48.3	9.2	7.6	263
NH	31.1	9.4	57.9	1.6	5.7	370
NJ	36	9.9	51.6	2.5	4.8	538
NM	37.7	6.4	53.8	2.1	10.5	210
NV	42.5	9.9	45.4	2.2	5.9	396
NY	38.9	9.3	50.7	1.1	4.5	619
OH	32.1	7	55.1	5.8	4.7	529
OK	28.4	8.1	60.1	3.3	7.2	333
OR	30.3	3.7	34.3	31.7	5.2	410
PA	33.5	12.8	52	1.7	4.5	566
RI	36.6	8.4	54.6	0.4	6.6	318
SC	31.1	8.8	58.2	1.9	5.9	424
SD	29.7	10.6	56.7	3	7.8	230
TN	30.8	11.1	56	2.1	5.5	455
TX	35	11	48.9	5.1	5.3	582
UT	37.5	4	47.9	10.6	7	313
VA	32.2	9.3	56.8	1.7	4.8	511
VT	28.3	6.4	60.3	5	7.3	242
WA	34.5	4.6	31.6	29.3	5.2	433
WI	40.5	7.8	49	2.7	4.9	550
WV	29.6	10.3	59.4	0.7	6.6	327
WY	36.7	7.4	54.1	1.9	12.9	115

**On the issue of voting by mail in your state, are you... (not at all / not very / somewhat / very) ...confident that you know how the process works?**

State	Not at all confident	Not very confident	Somewhat confident	Very confident	Error Margin	N
AK	17.6	16.3	31.6	34.5	9.8	139
AL	20.4	23.6	36.6	19.3	6.1	383
AR	30	25.1	29.1	15.9	6.5	363
AZ	9	10.9	27.3	52.8	7.6	316
CA	7.8	13.2	32	47	4.5	728
CO	7.9	17.4	25.1	49.6	5.8	390
CT	17.3	26.6	36.4	19.7	6.2	358
DC	10.5	27.8	37.1	24.6	10	169
DE	16.6	26.4	35.1	21.9	6.2	340

FL	11.4	18.1	34.2	36.3	4.3	664
GA	13.6	21.1	38.9	26.4	5.2	494
HI	12.3	20.5	39.2	28.1	8.7	216
IA	9.4	23.3	40.2	27.1	5.9	386
ID	16.1	20.8	30.6	32.5	5.9	358
IL	13	25.1	37.4	24.6	4.7	530
IN	18.9	24.9	33.1	23.2	5.3	442
KS	14.1	22.1	35	28.8	5.7	440
KY	21.9	27.1	35.5	15.6	5.6	399
LA	23.4	25.8	34	16.7	6.2	391
MA	12.4	25.5	39.8	22.2	4.9	475
MD	14.7	19.9	37.8	27.6	5.5	401
ME	18.9	21.4	31.8	27.8	5.4	371
MI	12.8	22.5	32.2	32.5	4.6	527
MN	14.1	23.1	41.9	20.9	5.6	419
MO	18.8	25.8	33.3	22.1	4.8	479
MS	29.5	26.9	30	13.6	6.8	347
MT	13.3	10.9	27.7	48	7.6	256
NC	19.7	25.4	34.9	20.1	4.8	522
ND	7.9	19.7	41.5	30.9	8.4	212
NE	16.4	16.5	36.4	30.8	7.3	263
NH	15.8	26.1	36.4	21.6	5.5	370
NJ	13.3	25.6	38.7	22.3	4.7	534
NM	20.3	17.6	44.4	17.8	10.5	209
NV	10.4	21.7	36.5	31.4	5.7	398
NY	16.6	23	38	22.4	4.4	618
OH	11.7	18.2	33.1	37	4.6	526
OK	18.7	30.4	34.8	16.1	7	333
OR	7	11.4	26.8	54.8	5.4	407
PA	17.8	22.2	35.5	24.4	4.3	565
RI	10.3	24.9	37.7	27.2	6.4	317
SC	22	29.6	27.5	20.9	5.5	422
SD	11.7	25.4	36.1	26.7	7.6	228
TN	24.3	24.7	33.8	17.1	5.3	455
TX	18.7	27.8	34.2	19.3	5.1	580
UT	13.1	12.8	36.9	37.2	6.8	310
VA	18.7	21.5	35.8	24.1	4.6	510
VT	13.4	22.1	36.6	27.9	7.2	241
WA	10	12.5	28.9	48.6	5.5	433
WI	14.2	22.7	32.4	30.7	4.6	549
WV	11.4	28.9	42.1	17.6	6.6	326
WY	18	26.2	33.4	22.4	12.2	114