



Texas Election 2020

Voting in the Age of COVID-19
and Election Reforms

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Introduction

The Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston conducted an online survey among likely Texas voters to identify leading candidates in the 2020 election and to examine opinions about voting during a pandemic and media bias in political reporting. The survey was fielded between October 13 and October 20 with 1,000 YouGov respondents, resulting in a confidence interval of +/-3.1%. The results of this survey will be presented in three separate reports. The first report found at uh.edu/hobby/election2020 focuses on vote intention as well as favorability ratings and confirmation of the next U.S. Supreme Court Justice. This report looks at the 2020 voting experience in Texas and potential election reforms. A third report will explore attitudes about media bias in political coverage.

THE IN-PERSON EARLY VOTING EXPERIENCE IN THE TIME OF COVID

One third (33.3%) of the 1000 respondents reported that they had already voted in-person. These individuals were asked about their in-person voting experience in five respects. Respondents could strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with five statements. They also had the option of responding that they did not remember.

The statements included the following:

- Six feet social distancing was maintained between voters.
- Voters wore masks when inside the polling place.
- Poll workers wore masks when inside the polling place.
- Voters were provided with gloves or finger gloves to avoid having to touch the voting machine or writing instruments with their bare skin.
- My county has an app that allowed me to find an early voting site with short wait times.

Table 1 highlights the level of respondent agreement with the five statements. An overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed (strongly agree, agree) that poll workers (97.4%) and voters (94.7%) wore masks at the polling site where they voted early. A similarly high, albeit not as high, proportion (87.2%) also agreed that six feet social distancing was maintained by voters at their polling location. Three out of five (61.5%) early voters agreed that voters were provided with gloves to avoid having to touch public surfaces with their bare skin.

A little more than two-fifths (41.4%) of early voters agreed that curbside voting was available where they voted, with a little less than two-fifths (36.7%) disagreeing, and

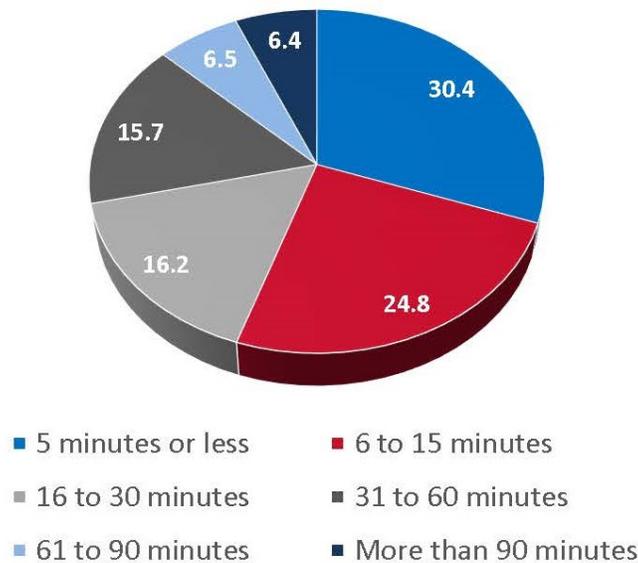
Table 1: The In-Person Experience at Early Voting Sites

Experience	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Remember
Poll Workers Wore Masks	71.8	25.6	0.9	1.2	0.4
Voters Wore Masks	65.6	29.1	3.6	1.1	0.7
6 ft Social Distancing Maintained	52.3	34.9	7.4	3.3	2.1
Voters Provided With Gloves	39.7	21.8	14.6	18.4	5.6
Curbside Voting Available	26.8	14.6	18.1	18.6	21.9
App With Wait Times Available	26.1	16.9	10.6	11.5	35.0

the remaining 21.9% not remembering. A little more than two-fifths (43.0%) of the early voters agreed that their county had an app that allowed them to find an early site with short wait times, while one-fifth disagreed (22.1%), with more than one-third (35.0%) not remembering.

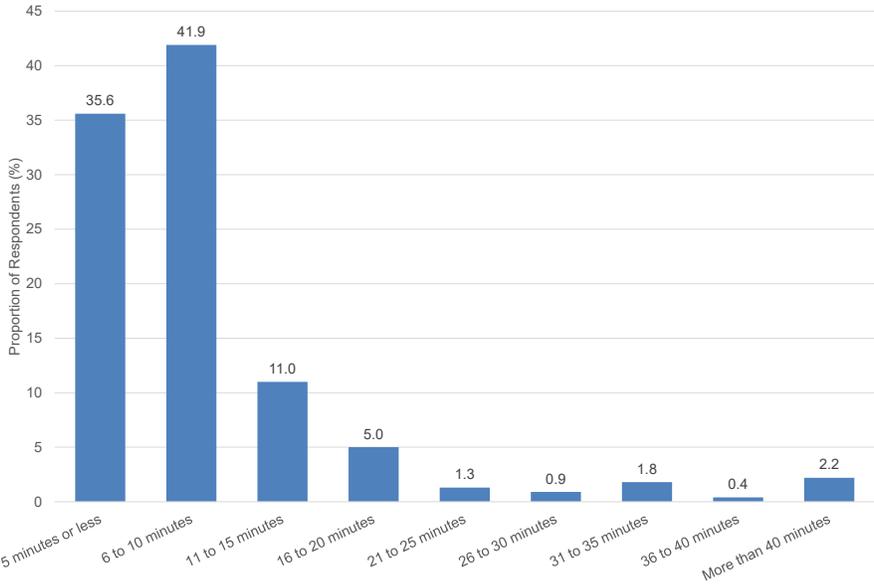
The in-person early voters were also asked how long they had to wait between the moment they arrived at their polling location and the time they were able to sign in to vote. As Figure 1 details, more than half (55.2%) of early voters either waited 5 minutes or less (30.4%) or between 6 and 15 minutes (24.8%) when signing in to vote. At the other end of the spectrum, 12.9% of the respondents had to wait more than an hour, 6.5% for between 61 and 90 minutes and 6.4% for more than 90 minutes.

Figure 1: Wait Time to Sign In to Vote Early In-Person



Once voters signed in and entered the polling booth, the median time it took them to vote was between 6 and 10 minutes. As can be seen in Figure 2, more than three-fourths (77.5%) of the early voters voted in 10 minutes or less, with 35.6% voting in 5 minutes or less and 41.9% voting in between 6 and 10 minutes. Another 11.0% voted in 11 to 15 minutes and 5.0% in 16 to 20 minutes.

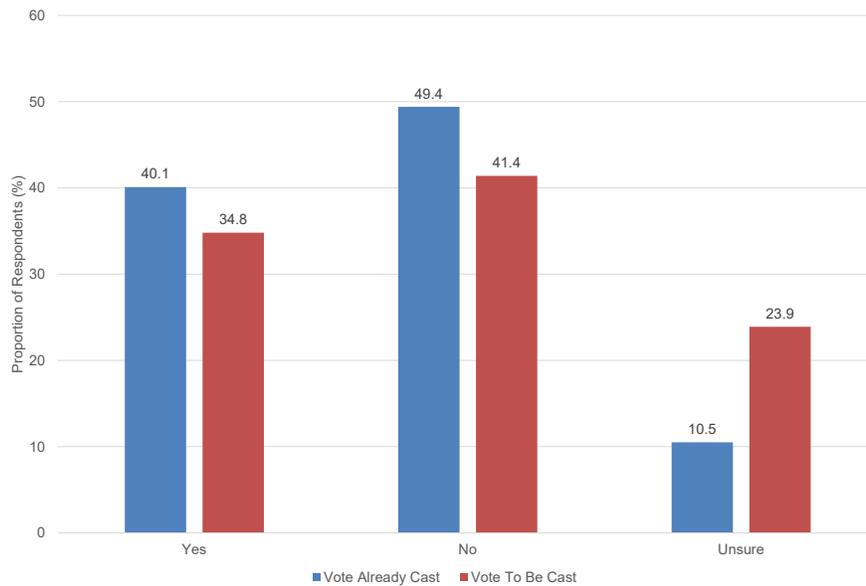
Figure 2: Time Taken to Vote In-Person: From Entering Polling Booth to Finishing Voting



2020, THE FIRST ELECTION SINCE THE END OF STRAIGHT TICKET VOTING

The 2020 election is the first election in which Texas voters will not have the option of utilizing the straight ticket option on the ballot to automatically cast a vote for all of one party's candidates. In spite of the fact that straight ticket voting was abolished during the 2017 legislative session, more than one-third of likely Texas voters (40.1% of those who had already cast a ballot and 34.8% of those who had not yet voted) planned to utilize this option, an option that in reality they did not have this year (see Figure 3).

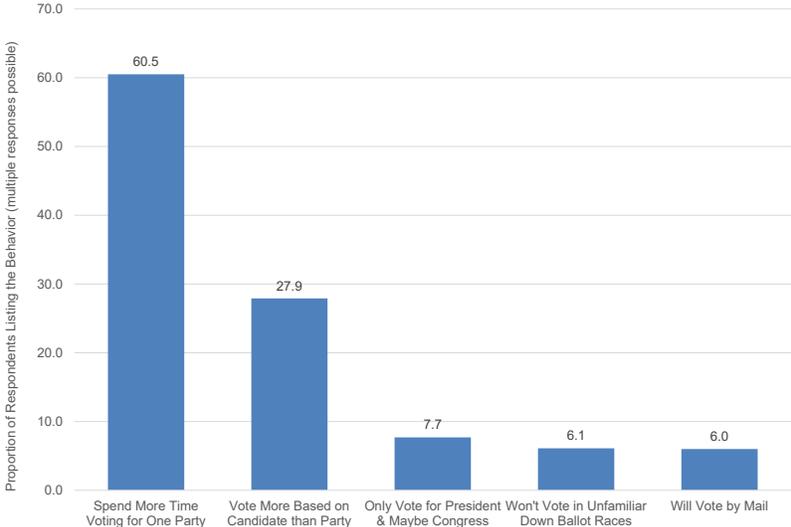
Figure 3: Did You Plan/Do You Plan to Use the Straight Ticket Option to Vote this Year



After being asked about whether they intended to utilize the straight ticket option, the respondents were informed that the straight ticket option would not be available to them in 2020, and they were then presented with five possible behaviors and asked if they would engage in that behavior as a result of the absence of the straight ticket option in 2020.

Figure 4 underscores that the most common response to the end of straight ticket voting is that three-fifths (60.5%) of the voters planned on spending more time in the polling place voting up and down the ballot for the candidates of a single party. In sharp contrast, only 7.7% implied that they would either only vote for president and maybe the U.S. Senate and U.S. House at the top of the ballot and 6.1% said they would not vote in down ballot races where they were not familiar with the candidates. Another 6.0% responded that they would vote by mail, while more than one in four (27.9%) likely Texas voters said that in the absence of the straight ticket voting option, they would this year vote more based on who the candidates are rather than on party.

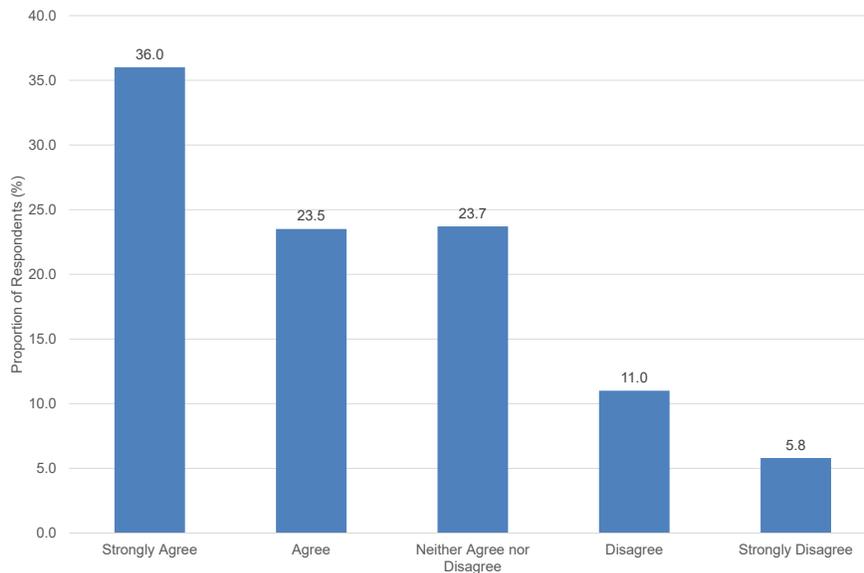
Figure 4: Impact of Absence of Straight Ticket Voting Option in 2020 on Voters



THE SAFETY OF VOTING IN PERSON IN THE COVID-19 ERA

Regarding the safety of voting this year, the likely Texas voters were asked whether they believed voting in person this year was as safe or safer than going to the grocery store, a location that all but 2.7% of them have frequented in recent weeks. Figure 5 reveals that three-fifths (59.5%) either strongly agreed (36.0%) or agreed (23.5%) that voting in person was as safe or safer than going to the grocery store. In contrast, one in six (15.8%) either disagreed (11.0%) or strongly disagreed (5.8%) with this statement.

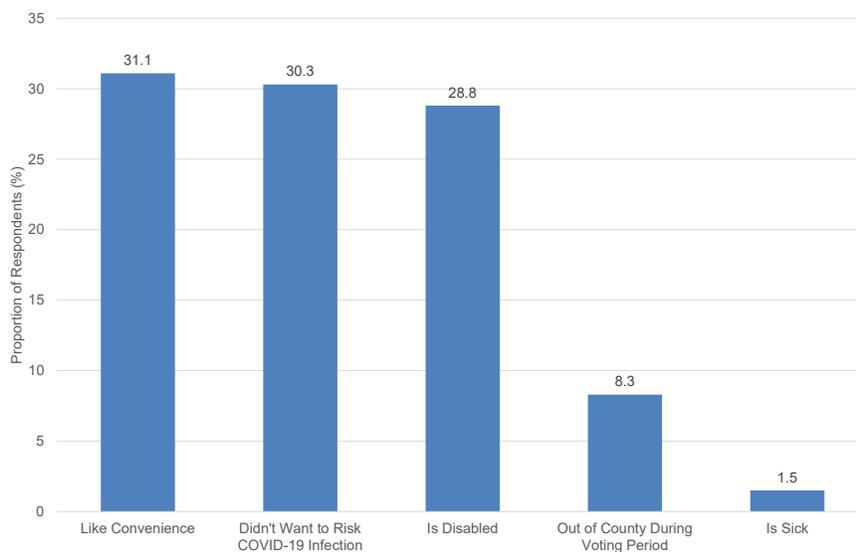
Figure 5: Voting In Person This Year As Safe or Safer Than Going to Grocery Store



CHOOSING TO VOTE BY MAIL IN THE COVID-19 ERA

A little more than one in ten voters (11.5%) indicated that they either have already voted by mail or intend to vote by mail. These voters were asked what reason best explains their decision to vote by mail instead of voting in person. The results are displayed in Figure 6. Three responses shared equal billing, two of which are common explanations for mail voting and one of which is unique to 2020. The two common explanations are that the voter likes the convenience of voting by mail (31.1%) and that they are disabled (28.8%). The response that is new for 2020, provided by 30.3% of likely Texas voters, is that they did not want to risk being infected with the COVID-19 virus.

Figure 6: Which Reason Best Explains Why Voted/Will Be Voting by Mail



MAIL BALLOTS AND THE POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED ELECTION FRAUD

The respondents were also asked the extent to which they were concerned that an increase in the use of mail ballots in Texas could lead to an increase in election fraud. Figure 7 shows that a majority (57.9%) were either very concerned (28.8%) or concerned (29.1%) about the rising use of mail ballots resulting in more election fraud, while 15.7% were not concerned and an even larger 26.4% were not at all concerned.

Figure 7: How Concerned That Increase in Mail Ballot Use Will Increase Election Fraud

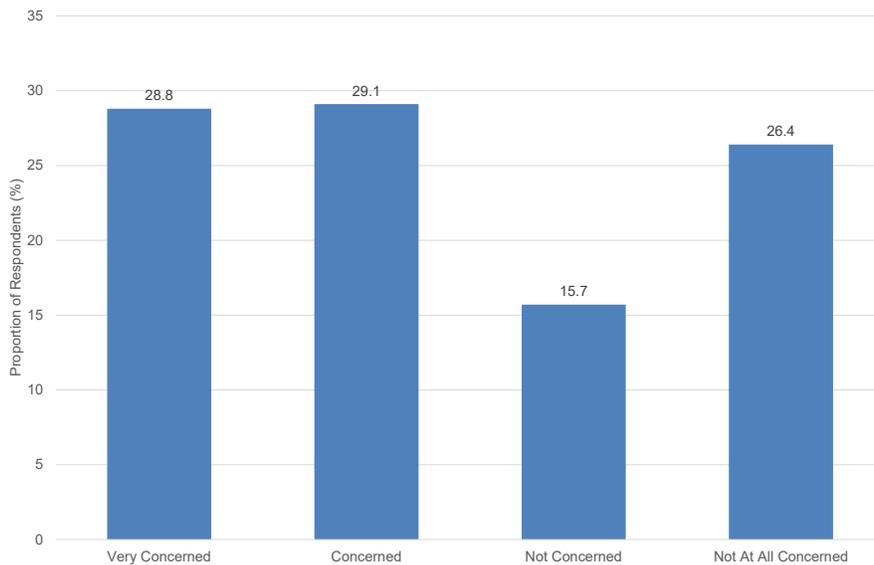


Table 2 reveals a strong partisan split in regard to concern about the increase use of mail ballots leading to an increase in election fraud in Texas. More than four-fifths (83.4%) of Republicans were concerned, including 45.1% very concerned, compared to only 16.7% who were unconcerned. Conversely, 70.2% of Democrats were not concerned about the rising use of mail ballots increasing the amount of election fraud in Texas, compared to only 29.9% who were concerned. Independents are intermediate between Republicans and Democrats, with 59.0% concerned and 41.0% not concerned.

Table 2: Partisan Identification and Concern About Mail Ballots and Election Fraud

Level of Concern	Total	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Very Concerned	28.8	45.1	25.7	12.0
Concerned	29.1	38.3	33.3	17.9
Not Concerned	15.7	8.1	16.2	22.6
Not At All Concerned	26.4	8.6	24.8	47.6

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ELECTION REFORMS

Looking ahead to future elections, the likely Texas voters were asked about their support for or opposition to five potential election-related reforms:

- Online voter registration for all eligible voters
- Automatic voter registration for all eligible voters
- No-excuse voting by mail for all registered voters
- Mail every registered voter a ballot for general elections
- Non-citizen eligibility to vote in municipal and school district elections

Table 3 provides the level of support for and opposition to these five potential reforms. The most popular reform is the adoption of online voter registration, which is strongly supported by almost two-thirds (65.6%) of voters and opposed by one fourth (27.5%) of voters. The only other reform that enjoys the support of an absolute majority (51.8%) of votes is automatic voter registration. No-excuse mail ballots for all registered voters and a reform to mail every registered voter a ballot are supported by a little more than two-fifths, 42.5% and 40.8% respectively, of voters, and opposed by modestly larger proportions of 44.9% and 51.4% respectively. The least popular reform was allowing non-citizens to vote in local elections, which was supported by one-fourth (24.9%) of likely voters and opposed by 61.8%, with nearly half (47.3%) of voters strongly opposed to this reform.

Table 3: Support for and Opposition To the Adoption of Election Related Reforms

Experience	Strongly			Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
	Agree	Disagree	Agree		
Online Voter Registration	38.0	27.6	10.2	15.3	8.9
Automatic Voter Registration	33.4	18.4	15.4	24.5	8.4
No Excuse Mail Ballots For All RVs	28.3	14.2	15.5	29.4	12.7
Mail Every Registered Voter a Ballot	26.1	14.7	15.0	36.4	7.8
Non-Citizen Voting in Local Elections	13.5	11.4	14.5	47.3	13.3

Table 4 breaks down support for these reforms based on the respondent's partisan identification. The likely Texas voters surveyed are distributed relatively evenly across the three main party identification categories: Republican (32.6%), Democrat (31.6%), Independent (31.9%). The remaining 3.9% of respondents were split among those who identify with another party and those who are unsure about their party identification.

Table 4: Partisan Identification and Support for or Opposition to Election Related Reform

Election Reform	Partisan Identification	Strongly			Strongly Oppose	No Opinion
		Support	Support	Oppose		
Online Registration	Democrat	66.5	21.3	4.9	3.3	3.9
	Independent	34.6	32.2	7.4	15.6	10.2
	Republican	14.4	30.2	18.0	24.4	13.0
	All	38.0	27.6	10.2	15.3	8.9
Automatic Registration	Democrat	64.3	19.9	5.6	3.3	6.9
	Independent	26.0	18.3	20.8	26.3	8.7
	Republican	10.9	17.9	19.4	41.7	10.1
	All	33.4	18.4	15.4	24.5	8.4
No Excuse Mail Ballots	Democrat	55.0	23.9	6.1	4.4	10.5
	Independent	23.7	9.6	18.9	34.2	13.6
	Republican	7.3	10.1	21.2	47.5	14.0
	All	28.3	14.2	15.5	29.4	12.7
Mail Ballots to All RV	Democrat	50.2	24.0	11.7	5.1	9.0
	Independent	18.5	12.6	16.0	43.0	10.0
	Republican	10.1	8.9	17.7	58.3	5.0
	All	26.1	14.7	15.0	36.4	7.8
Non-Citizen Local Vote	Democrat	25.1	22.3	17.9	13.5	21.2
	Independent	9.5	6.6	13.1	55.9	14.9
	Republican	6.2	6.0	12.3	70.7	4.8
	All	13.5	11.4	14.5	47.3	13.3

An overwhelming majority of Democrats either strongly support or support all of the proposed reforms except for the one that would permit non-citizens to vote in local

school board and municipal elections. The level of support ranges from highs of 87.8% and 84.2% in favor of Texas adopting online voter registration and automatic voter registration to lows of 78.9% and 74.2% who support reforms to provide all Texans with the opportunity to vote by mail for any reason and which would mail a general election ballot to every registered voter. Even for the final reform of permitting non-citizens to vote in local elections, significantly more Democrats support the reform (47.4%) than oppose it (31.4%).

In sharp contrast, more Republicans oppose than support the reforms, with one exception. A narrow plurality (44.6%) of Republicans support the adoption of online voter registration. The remaining reforms face a level of opposition that ranges from highs of 83.0% and 76.0% for the reforms of allowing non-citizens to vote in local elections and mailing a ballot to all registered voters to lows of 68.7% and 61.4% of providing the option of no-excuse mail ballots to all voters and the automatic registration of all eligible voters.

Independents are located in between the two partisan camps. A majority of Independents (66.8%) are in favor of online voter registration. Independents oppose the remaining reforms at levels which range from lows of 47.1% and 53.1% for automatic voter registration and no-excuse absentee voting for all to highs of 59.0% and 69.0% for mailing ballots to all registered voters and non-citizen voting in local elections.

Table 5 breaks down the support for these same five reforms based on the respondent's generation. Texas voters belong to one of five generational groups: Silent Generation (those born before 1946), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996), Generation Z (1997-2012). In the analysis, the members of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers (45.0% of the survey population) are examined together as are the Millennials and members of Generation Z (31.3%), while members of Generation X (23.8%) are examined separately.

Table 5: Generations and Support for or Opposition to Election Related Reforms

Election Reform	Generation	Strongly Support	Support	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	No Opinion
Online Registration	Silent/Boomers	30.1	28.8	11.4	21.6	8.1
	Generation X	37.3	29.1	8.7	14.1	10.9
	Millennials/Generation Z	49.7	24.8	9.7	7.1	8.7
	All	38.0	27.6	10.2	15.3	8.9
Automatic Registration	Silent/Boomers	26.8	16.8	17.5	33.5	5.4
	Generation X	30.2	19.7	13.6	22.4	14.2
	Millennials/Generation Z	45.3	19.6	13.9	13.1	8.2
	All	33.4	18.4	15.4	24.5	8.4
No Excuse Mail Ballots	Silent/Boomers	23.2	9.8	19.6	38.0	9.5
	Generation X	28.4	14.2	13.4	26.4	17.6
	Millennials/Generation Z	35.5	20.4	11.1	19.5	13.5
	All	28.3	14.2	15.5	29.4	12.7
Mail Ballots to All RV	Silent/Boomers	22.1	9.6	15.6	49.4	3.3
	Generation X	21.7	16.7	14.8	35.2	11.7
	Millennials/Generation Z	35.1	20.6	14.3	18.7	11.4
	All	26.1	14.7	15.0	36.4	7.8
Non-Citizen Local Vote	Silent/Boomers	7.9	7.4	13.8	61.0	10.0
	Generation X	11.6	9.9	14.6	48.1	15.8
	Millennials/Generation Z	22.9	18.3	15.4	27.1	16.3
	All	13.5	11.4	14.5	47.3	13.3

Absolute majorities of Millennials and Generation Z support four of the five reforms. The strongest support is for online voter registration (74.5%), followed by automatic voter registration (64.9%), no excuse mail ballots for everyone (55.9%), and mailing ballots to all registered voters (55.7%). The generation is deadlocked on the reform permitting non-citizens to vote in local elections, with 41.2% supporting the reform and 42.5% opposing the reform.

Absolute majorities of the members of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers oppose all of the reforms except online registration, which they support by a 58.9% to 33.0% margin. Opposition to the other four reforms ranges from highs of 74.8% and 65.0% to permit non-citizens to vote in local elections and provide mail ballots to all registered voters to lows of 57.6% and 51.0% for no excuse mail ballots and automatic voter registration.

Generation X is the Goldilocks generation in regard to support for and opposition to these reforms. Majorities (or at least pluralities) of Generation X support online voter registration (66.4%), automatic voter registration (49.9%), and no excuse ballots for everyone (42.6%), and oppose mailing ballots to all registered voters (50.0%) and permitting non-citizens to vote in local elections (62.7%).