



To: Members of Congress and State Legislators
From: Jason Snead, Executive Director
Date: 23 March 2021
Re: Injecting Reality into the Election Reform Debate

American democracy is suffering from a credibility crisis. The 2020 election was marred by confusion, haphazard changes to voting laws, and a progressive legal blitz that used courts to undemocratically weaken voting safeguards and skew the rules for partisan advantage. Millions of voters harbor doubts about the legitimacy of future elections. Left to linger, that distrust may harden into apathy and disengagement, and drive public discord to alarming new heights.

The top priority of election reform must be to restore public trust in our electoral system, but the voices of regular voters are too often ignored or drowned out by activists advancing their own agendas. To rectify that, HEP and HEP Action launched a nationally representative survey of 1,200 voters.¹ The results show that, overwhelmingly, voters want stronger safeguards and ballot protections. Liberal activists and politicians reflexively attack any policy they disagree with—voter ID laws and ballot trafficking bans, for instance—as “voter suppression,” and have created a misleading narrative that frames these policies as unpopular, unnecessary, and discriminatory. In reality, these are the very policies that most voters want, including moderates and liberals, low-income, and minority voters.

Congress is considering legislation to eliminate or weaken protections against voter fraud, but most voters want lawmakers to take the opposite approach. Large majorities rejected both particular provisions and the overall direction of H.R. 1, the “For the People Act.” Only 29% of voters know anything at all about this expansive legislative attempt to reshape American elections, but when they are informed, only 28% support its passage. If Congress passes the “For the People Act,” it will do so in spite of them.

This is a dose of reality for the political debate over H.R. 1 and the broader effort in states across the country to reform and improve elections. Voters want credible elections that balance access and security.

Voters want it to be easy to vote, but also hard to cheat.

Most voters (64%) want to strengthen voting safeguards to prevent fraud, rather than eliminate them to make voting “easier.” Fifty-one percent of Black voters and 66% of Hispanics agree, as do 59% of Urban voters and 61% of Independents. Only 21% want to make voting “easier” by getting rid of the precautionary measures that prevent fraud.

Moreover, Americans take fraud seriously and recognize the damage it causes when it occurs. Eighty percent of voters believe that election fraud disenfranchises voters and casts doubt on the legitimacy of the democratic process, including majorities across all gender, racial, age, and income demographics.

¹ Online survey among 1,200 registered voters nationwide conducted March 4 – 10, 2021. Respondents were selected randomly from opt-in panel participants. Two oversamples were also conducted, one of 1,200 self-identified Republicans and one of 1,200 self-identified Independents. Sampling controls were used to ensure that a proportional and representative number of respondents were interviewed from such demographic groups as age, gender, race, and geographic region. Gender breakdown: 48% men – 52% women. $\pm 2.83\%$ overall margin of error at the 95% confidence interval for overall survey. M.O.E.s for subgroups are larger.

Some politicians and the media frequently characterize election integrity laws as unnecessary, unpopular, and serving only to make voting more difficult. Most Americans disagree, and view voter ID laws and other anti-fraud prophylactics as necessary parts of a credible and legitimate voting system. Voting must be accessible, but it also must be secure.

The public overwhelmingly backs voter ID requirements, even as Congress considers restricting them.

Americans of all backgrounds and political persuasions overwhelmingly favor requiring that voters show ID to vote. Over three-quarters (77%) want people to show a photo ID to cast a ballot, while only 14% oppose it. Voters who supported Joe Biden in the 2020 election back ID requirements by nearly 40 points (62% vs. 24%). Majorities of Republicans (92%), Independents (75%), and Democrats (63%) all support voter ID.

Some politicians and progressive activists frequently malign voter ID laws as discriminatory, but by huge margins both Black and Hispanic voters favor them (for Black voters, 64% vs. 22%; for Hispanic voters, 78% vs. 16%). Similarly, 64% of Black voters, 77% of Hispanics, and 76% of low-income voters reject the notion that showing an ID is a “burden,” despite frequent claims from the left.

Voters want absentee voting to have meaningful protections against fraud.

Absentee ballots are widely recognized as the most vulnerable form of voting. Only 7% of voters back keeping or expanding absentee voting without counterbalancing safeguards that preserve the integrity of these ballots. Even as states consider applying voter ID requirements to absentee ballots—an approach backed by two-thirds (66%) of voters—H.R. 1 expressly blocks absentee voter ID and other successful safeguards that shield elections against fraud.

Progressives assert that absentee voter ID laws will make it difficult for particular demographic groups to vote, yet most voters in these groups actually favor absentee voter ID, including young (18-24, 64%) and senior voters (56%), Black (58%) and Hispanic (68%) voters, and low-income voters (62%). Moreover, 72% of voters say it would be easy to comply with an ID law that requires absentee voters to provide their driver’s license or partial Social Security number.

Americans do not want political operatives harvesting and trafficking ballots.

Only 11% of voters think that vote trafficking should be legal. Nearly two-in three (62%) think it should be illegal for political operatives and paid organizers to have direct access to absentee voters as they vote, and then take unsupervised possession of their ballots.

H.R. 1 nevertheless forces every community in the nation to allow it. Progressives often tout vote trafficking as helping poor and minority voters, yet 54% of low-income voters and 66% of Hispanic voters think the practice should be illegal. Vote trafficking has been used to intimidate and disenfranchise voters, and several states have banned it. H.R. 1 expressly overrules these sensible and popular laws.

The requirements imposed by HR 1 are not supported by voters.

H.R. 1 is out of sync with American voters. Few embrace its particular provisions, or its guiding principle that election integrity and voter confidence measures make voting “hard” and that Congress must impose new laws that eliminate them. In fact, voters overwhelmingly prioritize maintaining confidence in elections over making voting “easier.” Most Americans want credible elections backed up by fair rules that make voting both accessible and secure, and only 28% of voters support H.R. 1’s final passage once they are provided with an understanding of its provisions.