

TALKING ABOUT



Pro-Voter Policies



INTRODUCTION

Voting is an important and deeply meaningful part of what it means to be an American. It's experienced as a right and a responsibility—a freedom and a privilege that gives the people a voice in the decisions that impact our lives, and a say in how we are governed.

As our nation has changed over the past decades, however, our election system has largely stayed the same. Many of the advances that have transformed the way we live have not been used to modernize the way we vote. And in an economy where many parents must work two or more jobs to provide for their families, limited hours and locations for voting only on Election Day can make it difficult if not impossible for many Americans to make their voices heard.

Fortunately, there are a number of proven policies—like Automatic Voter Registration, early voting, and more—that are helping ensure that our election system is secure *and* accessible, and that every eligible American has the opportunity to vote and to have that vote counted.

This guide provides approaches for effective conversations about voting and pro-voter policies. The guide is divided into three sections:

1. **Understanding How People Think & Feel About Voting** explores deeply held values and beliefs about voting and our elections—and how opponents of pro-voter efforts can create fear and concern in our audiences.
2. **Talking About Voting & Pro-Voter Policies** provides approaches for framing conversations in ways that help engage with shared values, calm concerns, and create and sustain support for secure, fair and accessible elections.
3. **Things to Avoid** highlights some language that can unintentionally make it harder for people to engage in these discussions—or even move progress further from our grasp.

UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE THINK & FEEL ABOUT VOTING

Before starting a discussion about pro-voter policies, it's important to step back and understand the values, priorities and concerns that our Conflicted Middle audience (a vast and diverse swath of the electorate who are generally supportive but often torn or divided on these issues) brings to these conversations.

First, voting is important and deeply meaningful for most Americans. It's one of our most fundamental freedoms, an important part of our heritage, and a core underpinning

of our democracy. Voting is seen as both a right and a privilege—one that is tied to a sense of responsibility and a civic duty to participate in our system of self-government. Voting is also deeply tied to the idea of having a voice and making that voice heard. As a result, people believe that voting should be both fair and accessible, and that politicians should not be creating unnecessary barriers that keep Americans from voting.

Second, people prioritize the security and integrity of our elections. Alongside the belief that our election system should be free and fair is a strong desire to safeguard the integrity and accuracy of that system. For many, however, confidence in our elections has been shaken. Concerns are wide-ranging and include worries about hacking of state election databases, foreign interference with our elections, vote tampering, and fraud. When opponents of pro-voter policies (who want to make it harder for certain groups of Americans to vote) gin up fears about fraud, those fears can override all other values unless they are addressed, as we discuss later in this guide.

Third, there is strong support for making voting more accessible and fair, and for removing barriers to voting for eligible Americans. Many voters experience voting as easy for them personally, particularly those who have lived in the same home or city for many years, or who have access to voting by mail or early voting. At the same time, they are concerned about the ways that barriers to voting can hurt a myriad of everyday Americans, from working parents, to rural voters, to military service members and their families, to seniors who do not drive, and more. And they support pro-voter policy solutions to lift those barriers and safeguard the integrity and accuracy of our elections. But these same people do not always come to our conversations with these barriers and concerns top-of-mind.

Taken together, these shared values and priorities form not only the starting point for our audience, but also the central themes for our effective conversations about voting and pro-voter policies.

TALKING ABOUT PRO-VOTER POLICIES

There are three essential approaches for effective discussions about pro-voter policies. First, we start by connecting on shared values around voting and addressing concerns about the security of our elections. Second, we make the case for concrete solutions (like Automatic Voter Registration) that are rooted in fairness, accessibility *and* security. And third, we illustrate how these solutions help everyday Americans cast their vote and make their voices heard.

1. Connect on Shared Values

Effective conversations start with what we have in common—and when it comes to voting, that common ground centers on two key beliefs. First, we evoke the deep meaning that voting has for so many Americans—as a right, a privilege and a responsibility of citizenship:

- *“As Americans, our right to vote is a privilege and a responsibility.”*

Second, we meet our audiences where they are at and show that we also support the integrity of our election system:

- *“The integrity and fairness of our election system is important to all of us.”*
- *“We all care about the integrity and fairness of our election system.”*

With those two beliefs, we can connect with the shared desire to ensure that our voting and elections are secure, free, fair, and accessible—not just as ends unto themselves, but as our way of ensuring that every eligible American has the opportunity to vote and make their voice heard.

- *“As Americans, our right to vote is a privilege and a responsibility—and the integrity and fairness of our election system is important to all of us. **We need to take that responsibility seriously, ensure that our elections are free and fair, and safeguard our voting system—while also working to make voting more accessible so every eligible American can make their voice heard.**”*

But these messages are just the start of the conversation. Next, we need to build a case for solutions that build on these values and ensure that this fundamental freedom is accessible to all eligible voters.

2. Focus on Solutions Rooted in Fairness, Security & Accessibility

At their core, pro-voter policies are about fairness, security and accessibility. From Automatic Voter Registration (where voter eligibility is automatically verified and eligible Americans are registered to vote when they interact with a state agency like the DMV) to expanded voting windows and polling hours (like weekend voting), making our elections fairer and more secure helps ensure that every American who is eligible to vote has a chance to make their voice heard, and to know that their vote has been counted.

However, there are some who do not share these values. Opponents of pro-voter policies have a vision of security that’s fundamentally about exclusion—a desire to make voting as hard as possible for people who don’t share

their views, in order to exclude as many of those people as possible from voting. As a result, it becomes especially important for us to help people understand that our election systems can be secure *and* accessible. Safeguarding our elections doesn’t happen through the exclusion of eligible voters; rather, it happens when our elections are fair, accessible and accurate—and when we can protect our system from foreign interference, hacking and tampering.

When we layer this emphasis on security and accessibility alongside the shared values discussed previously, we can speak effectively about an array of pro-voter policies. By emphasizing how these common-sense updates make the system better, more secure, and more accessible, our core message can reassure and motivate those who might initially be unsure what pro-voter policies might involve:

- *“As Americans, our right to vote is a responsibility and a privilege—and the integrity and fairness of our election system is important to all of us. **We can make common-sense updates so every eligible American can register, vote, and have their voice heard, while also safeguarding our elections with mandatory audits and better technology to protect against hacking and tampering.**”*

When we make the case that pro-voter policies not only increase voting accessibility for eligible Americans, but also safeguard our elections against tampering and hacking, we help soothe a common concern: that efforts to safeguard our elections against hacking and tampering might reduce accessibility (and vice versa—that efforts to increase accessibility might open the door to hacking and tampering). The good news is that pro-voter policies like Automatic Voter Registration both increase accessibility *and* safeguard our elections—and emphasizing both of those benefits in our messaging is vitally important.

“As Americans, our right to vote is a responsibility and a privilege—and the integrity and fairness of our election system is important to all of us. We need to take that responsibility seriously, ensure that our elections are free and fair, and safeguard our voting system—while also working to make voting more accessible so every eligible American can make their voice heard.”

3. Illustrate How Pro-Voter Solutions Help Everyday Americans

Finally, making the case for pro-voter reforms involves helping people understand whom these policies help—working parents, rural voters like farmers, seniors, and military families who move frequently:

- ***“Voting should be accessible for every American, whether they’re a parent working two jobs, a farmer who lives far away from the polls, a senior, or a military family who moves frequently or faces deployment.”***

While many people think primarily about how pro-voter policies make voting more accessible for these kinds of everyday Americans, some audiences (particularly African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos) also think about accessibility in terms of ensuring that eligible Americans have the ability to vote no matter where they live:

- ***“Voting should be accessible for every American, whether someone lives in a rural area, suburban town, or crowded city.”***

Finally, our focus on everyday Americans can be combined with an emphasis on voting values to drive home not only who is helped, but why it’s important to do so:

- ***“This policy protects the fundamental right of every eligible American to vote by making sure that their registration is accurate and up-to-date, and by making voting more accessible for working families, rural voters, seniors, and military families.”***

Note that focusing on specific voter groups that are generally thought to favor one political party (e.g., African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, younger voters) can lead to partisan divisions, instead of common ground. Similarly, it can be less effective to focus on an individual story if the circumstance could be seen as unique or rare. Instead, focus on examples of everyday Americans who are seen as non-partisan and also not unique—such as a parent working two jobs who struggles to get time off to vote.

Talking About Our Voting Heritage

Another approach that can work alongside the core case for pro-voter reform is one that places our right to vote in a historical context as part of our American heritage.

“Generations of Americans fought and died for our right to vote, the freedom to choose our leaders, and the right to speak up for our beliefs. Restricting a person’s vote is taking away their freedom. This policy would ensure that every eligible American has the freedom to vote, and that their vote will be accurately counted.”

This emphasis on **freedom**—the freedom to choose our leaders, the freedom to vote, and the importance of not allowing anyone to take away that hard-won freedom—can be particularly powerful not only with older Americans and more conservative audiences, but also with African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos.

Language Nuances

The messages in this guide provide general guidance for talking about pro-voter policies, but there are some audience-specific nuances that can help make those conversations even more effective.

For some conflicted/persuasion audiences, focusing on Americans’ **freedom to vote** can be more resonant than talking about the **right to vote**. Also, while most people agree that **“We need an election system that works for all Americans,”** that idea can gain even greater traction with conservatives when we say, **“We need an election system that works for working Americans.”**

We also find that conservatives and older voters tend to respond very strongly to language like **“freedom and democracy are sacred,”** though younger voters are often put off by what they see as the loftiness.

For many African Americans and Hispanics, pointing toward security as a shared value (e.g., **“The security and fairness of our election system is important to all of us”**) can resonate slightly better than **“The integrity and fairness of our election system is important to all of us,”** which is marginally more compelling for white audiences.

Understanding Pro-Voter Policies

Pro-voter policies improve access to voting and registration for eligible Americans, which makes our elections more representative of what the people actually want. States across the country have successfully implemented various pro-voter reforms, which include:

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR). A process that many states are adopting to replace outdated paper-based registration with secure, modern, electronic systems that help election officials maintain accurate lists so that every eligible voter can make their voice heard, while using multiple layers of verification to ensure accurate and up-to-date voter lists. States with AVR allow eligible individuals to automatically register to vote and update their registration information when they apply for or renew their driver's license or change their address. Several states are also introducing key security features such as automatic audits of election results to prevent tampering, and secure electronic transfer of voter registration data to protect the privacy of voters' personal information from hacking.

Early Voting allows voters to cast ballots before the scheduled Election Day. Depending on the state, early voting can involve voting by mail, absentee ballot and/or at designated voting centers. Early voting helps ensure that people who work multiple jobs, seniors who have limited access to transportation, students, people with disabilities, and others can cast their ballots. It also alleviates long lines and congestion at polling places on Election Day.

Same-Day Registration lets eligible individuals register and vote at the same time. Eligible voters must provide proof of identity and meet residency requirements in order to be registered. Same-day registration can aid those who have moved into a new voting district in the days and weeks prior to an election, and reduces provisional voting as a result.

No-Excuse Absentee Voting by Mail. While states are required to allow absentee voting for those who cannot vote in-person on Election Day, a growing majority of states also allow voters to request a mail-in ballot without an excuse, allowing those who live far from the polls—or who might work multiple jobs or long hours—to cast their ballots conveniently and without standing in long lines.

THINGS TO AVOID

Don't use terms like "innovation" or "modernization" unless they are paired with pro-voter values. Using this kind of language in isolation can suggest that pro-voter policies are about technology for its own sake, when it's really about using these tools to make voting more accessible and secure. Focus on how common-sense updates can help more eligible Americans register, vote, and make their voices heard (see "Focus on Solutions Rooted in Fairness and Security" on page 2) or pair these terms with pro-voter values (e.g., how modernizing our registration not only safeguards against hacking and tampering, but also ensures that voting is accessible for working families).

Don't, when advocating for pro-voter policies, focus on "participation" and/or "turnout" as goals. Talking about turnout or participation can be useful in a number of contexts. But when it comes to pro-voter policies, those same concepts can be misinterpreted as suggesting that pro-voter policies are focused on getting more of a particular kind of voter to the polls, which can make audiences on both sides of the aisle nervous that they might be disadvantaged by these reforms. Instead, focus on making sure that voting is fair, secure and accessible, so that every eligible American can make their voice heard and have their vote counted.

Don't use other language that can activate partisan reactions. When advocating for pro-voter policies, certain references (e.g., to voter suppression or disenfranchisement, or to specific voter groups—like African Americans, Hispanics, and younger voters—who can be seen as more typically supporting one political party) can diminish support by leading people to inaccurately see these policies as partisan in nature. Also, because voting is experienced as a duty and a responsibility, avoid talking about making it "easy" or "easier" to vote, which could be seen as minimizing its importance. Instead, focus on how pro-voter policies make voting accessible for all eligible Americans (see "Illustrate How Pro-Voter Solutions Help Everyday Americans" on page 3).

Don't follow opponents down their rabbit hole on fraud. Many people are concerned about fraud, in no small part because opponents of pro-voter policies have aggressively ginned up those concerns to justify creating voting barriers that target Americans who disagree with them. Unfortunately, the fact that fraud is exceedingly rare is not persuasive in the face of the intense feelings people have about it. Rather than engaging with opponents' arguments about fraud (which also has the unhelpful effect of keeping fraud a focus of the conversation), help people understand that our election systems can be both secure *and* accessible, and that we don't need to sacrifice fairness to safeguard our elections from tampering and hacking.

TALKING POINTS AT A GLANCE

Talking About Pro-Voter Policies

Below are snapshots of approaches for talking about the importance of pro-voter policies that make voting more fair, secure and accessible. See pages 1-4 for detailed messaging guidance, and visit www.mapresearch.org/pro-voter-policies for more resources.

1. Connect on Shared Values

- As Americans, our right to vote is a privilege and a responsibility—and the integrity and fairness of our election system is important to all of us. We need to take that responsibility seriously, ensure that our elections are free and fair, and safeguard our voting system—while also working to make voting more accessible so every eligible American can make their voice heard.

2. Focus on Solutions Rooted in Fairness, Security & Accessibility

- We can make common-sense updates so every eligible American can register, vote, and have their voice heard, while also safeguarding our elections with mandatory audits and better technology to protect against hacking and tampering.

3. Illustrate How Pro-Voter Solutions Help Everyday Americans

- Voting should be accessible for every American whether they're a parent working two jobs, a farmer who lives far away from the polls, a senior, or a military family who moves frequently or faces deployment.
- Voting should be accessible for every American, whether someone lives in a rural area, suburban town, or crowded city. *(For use with certain audiences, see page 2.)*
- This policy protects the fundamental right of every eligible American to vote by making sure that their registration is accurate and up-to-date, and by making voting more accessible for working families, rural voters, seniors, and military families.

Examples of Effective Messaging in Print Creative

The first example below (left) blends all three approaches for talking about pro-voter policies, while the second example (right) supplements security-inclusive messaging to focus on how pro-voter solutions help everyday Americans.



Let's have a voting system that works for all Americans.

Safeguarding our elections means safeguarding every eligible American's right to vote.

While voting is easy for most people, for others it's really tough. Whether it's a parent juggling two jobs with no time off to vote, or a senior who doesn't drive, why wouldn't we set up our election system to work for all Americans?

We can also safeguard our elections through mandatory audits, better technology, and more accurate voting registration to protect our votes against tampering and interference.

Let's make sure all Americans can have confidence that their voice is heard and their vote is counted.



I shouldn't have to choose between voting and my job.

To me, voting is my duty as an American. I've voted in every election since I turned 18. Until last November.

I have two kids and work two jobs—and with the night shift, I just couldn't make it back home to vote.

This is America. I shouldn't have to choose between my job and my vote.

Let's fix our voting system so people like me aren't shut out of it.