

To: VPC and CVI  
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Re: Key Takeaways from a Voter Behavior Survey of Young Unmarried Women and Women of Color in Battleground States  
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Recently, LRP conducted an online survey on voter choices and behavior in battleground states among unmarried women under age 55 and women of color.<sup>1</sup> This survey looked at voter behavior – how they plan to cast their ballot, why they plan to vote that way, their concerns about the different voting methods in the upcoming election, and how we might reassure voters that they can safely and successfully vote by mail if they want to. Outlined below are the major takeaways and recommendations for communicating to voters that exercising their right to vote does not have to mean physically going to the polls if they feel unsafe.

### Major Takeaways Heading Towards Elections

- Women of color and young unmarried women are both very motivated groups, but older/married women of color are the most motivated at 69% very motivated, compared to young, unmarried women of color and young, white unmarried women (46% and 56%, respectively).
- Despite these differences in motivation, these groups have similar priorities and concerns.
- They similarly want to use their vote to change politics and the direction of the country, and they are committed to doing so.
- That being said, they have several concerns about the upcoming election, from President Trump trying to delay it, to ballots not being counted, to long lines at the polls, to the risk of contracting the coronavirus while voting.
- To reassure these voters that voting by mail or absentee is a reliable option, they need to hear that it is safe and that it is not a new practice and has in fact worked in states across the country. And, they need to hear that voting by mail is a good option for those who may otherwise consider skipping the election due to COVID-19.

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## Barriers Heading Towards November

1. ***This group of voters has a deep concern about the likelihood of their ballots being counted if they vote by mail.*** While favorability of the U.S. Postal Service is high, with 51% of voters saying they are very favorable towards it (second only to the Obamas), only 28% are very confident in its ability to deliver their ballots to be counted on time. Two of these voters' top concerns going into the election are mail-in ballots being lost (44% very concerning) or not being counted (42% very concerning). The concern that ballots will not be counted is especially high among young, unmarried women of color (52% very concerning). And, regardless of race, marital status, or what method they plan to vote by for the election, the most convincing reason for voting in person is to see their ballot being counted (46% very convincing).
2. ***While a plurality of voters in this group say that they will vote by mail (39%), 35% still say they will vote in person on Election Day, largely driven by white women.*** It will be a challenge to get those voters to trust the vote-by-mail/absentee system. White women primarily distrust this system due to the potential for voter fraud (14% reason for not voting by mail and higher among Trump voters), and women of color are more concerned about their ballots being counted (11%). Not only are they worried about their ballot being counted, but they are concerned that the system will be tampered with somehow.
  - a. When asked whether they thought that shortages of ballot-drop boxes were deliberate or the result of budget shortfalls, 55% said the shortages were deliberate, compared to only 22% who said it was a budget issue. Black women are especially likely to believe that the shortages are deliberate (66%).
  - b. Moreover, the top concern for these voters in the upcoming election is the idea that Trump may try to delay it, with 48% saying this is a very concerning scenario. This is a top-ranking concern among all racial and marital groups, but Black women are especially concerned, with 57% saying it is a very concerning scenario.
3. ***Coronavirus is the number one concern across race, age, and marital status when it comes to the logistics of the upcoming election.*** The most convincing reasons for voting by mail are those relating to coronavirus, including contracting it (61% very convincing), spreading it to family (59%), and spreading it to other people (57%). Safety concerns around the virus is also the main reason that voters give for choosing not to go in person, whether early (22%) or on Election Day (44%). The challenge is to ensure that these voters know that they have options for casting a ballot, what those options are, and the dates and deadlines associated with their chosen method.

## Opportunities to Support Voters Inclined to Vote by Mail

*Despite doubts and concerns, many voters appear to want to vote by mail, and the research provides guidance on how to help them get confidence in that choice.*

1. **Messages emphasizing the safety of voting by mail are convincing to these voters.** They are more convinced to vote by mail once they hear that other states have been conducting elections entirely by mail for years (41% very convincing).<sup>1</sup> Hearing that states which have expanded access to vote-by-mail have historically seen record turnout after implementing is also convincing, with 41% of voters saying this is very convincing.<sup>2</sup>
2. **This group is less concerned about the threat posed by vote-by-mail fraud than they are about long lines at the polls.** When asked whether lack of social distancing at the polls or ballot fraud was more of a risk, 53% of voters picked the former, compared to just 35% who chose the latter (these numbers are flipped for Trump voters, with 65% saying they are more concerned about fraud). Thirty-five percent of these voters are very concerned that lines at the polls will be too long because of the pandemic (62% total). So, while these voters do have real concerns about vote-by-mail, concerns over fraud are not insurmountable and can be addressed with the right messaging. Additionally, after viewing the envelope and mailer that focused on the long lines at the polls, voters expressed a higher likelihood to vote by mail than they did after viewing the mailer that focused more exclusively on the comfort of voting from home – 57% to 54% likely for the envelope and 51% to 44% for the mailer.
  - a. Older Black women were by far the most responsive to each mailer and envelope tested.
3. **By far, the number one emotion these voters feel when it comes to the upcoming election is, “hopeful,” with 46% of voters describing their emotions this way.** The next highest-ranking response is, “committed,” with 33% of voters choosing this term. This means that this group of voters is largely already planning on casting a ballot; it is just a matter of convincing them that, should they feel unsafe going to the polls on Election Day, there are other options for voting that are reliable and relatively simple.

## Recommendations Looking Ahead

1. **Communicate to these voters that mail-in ballots, whether mailed directly or personally delivered to a drop-off box, are reliable.** They want to vote, but they need to be convinced that voting doesn't have to mean masking up and waiting in line on

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<sup>1</sup> Five states already conduct their elections entirely by mail and have not reported any major incidences of fraud, tampering, or votes being miscounted.

<sup>2</sup> States that have recently expanded access to voting by mail have seen record turnout in their elections, drastically increasing the number of registered voters who are able to cast a ballot.

Election Day if this doesn't feel like a good option for them. This can be done by emphasizing the success of other states have implemented vote-by-mail options.

- 2. Provide information to voters on the how-to of alternative voting methods like voting absentee or voting early in person.** Sixty-five percent of voters say knowing how to check that their ballot has been received would be very useful in making their decision on how to vote. Sixty-two percent of voters say that knowing the deadline of mailing a ballot would be very useful, and 61% say knowing where to return their ballot would be very useful. These voters are very interested in alternatives to Election Day voting, they just need to know what those alternatives entail.
- 3. Acknowledge a significant share of these voters might not vote by mail given concerns, and therefore election officials and civic leaders should prepare to help those voters participate safely on election day or vote early in person where they can.**

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<sup>i</sup> Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey with 1,133 unmarried women under age 55 and women of color in select battleground states. This survey was conducted online from a national sample of registered voters. The survey was conducted from August 17 – 27, 2020. The data were weighted slightly by age, region, party ID, race, education, marital status, and parental status. The margin of error for the total sample is +/- 2.9% and larger for the sub-groups (5.6% for unmarried women of color under age 55, 5.0% for women of color who are married or age 55+, 4.6% for white unmarried women under age 55, and 5.0% for Black women).