

# Winning the Narrative on Voting Rights

Research Briefing on Proactive and Defensive  
Messaging Strategies for State Legislators

PRESENTED BY

State Innovation Exchange

Future Now

Voting Rights Lab

The Impact Project

## Lauren Bealore

**Democracy Director, SiX** | she/her

lauren@stateinnovation.org

## Mandara Meyers

**Chief Programs Officer, Future Now** | she/her

mandara@futurenow.org

## Jiggy Athilingam

**Senior Director of National Programs,  
Voting Rights Lab** | she/her

jiggy@votingrightslab.org

## Rep. Athena Salman

**Arizona House of Representatives** | she/her

asalman@azleg.gov

# Who We Are

## **Our Goal**

To equip legislators with messaging guidance and strategies to advance and defend voting rights, in the face of unprecedented attacks.

## **Introduction**

## **Voting Rights Poll & Messaging Briefing**

## **Conversation with AZ Rep. Athena Salman**

## **Action Items for Legislators**

## **Q&A**

# **Agenda**

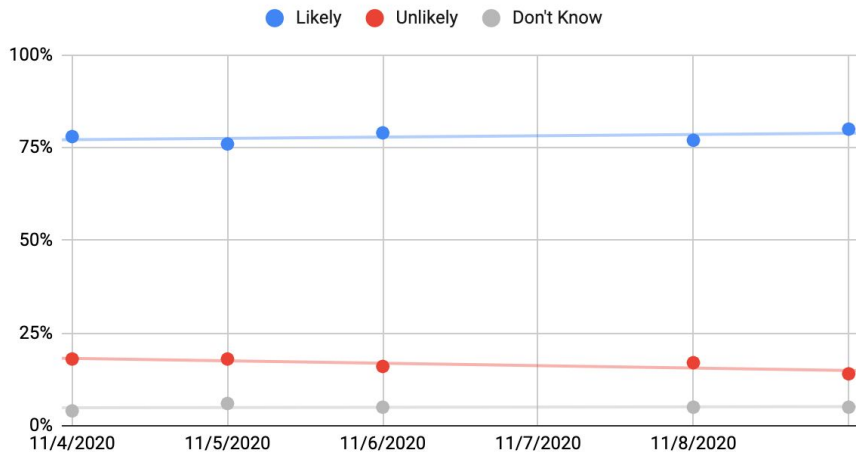
# THE LANDSCAPE



# Americans Living in Alternate Realities

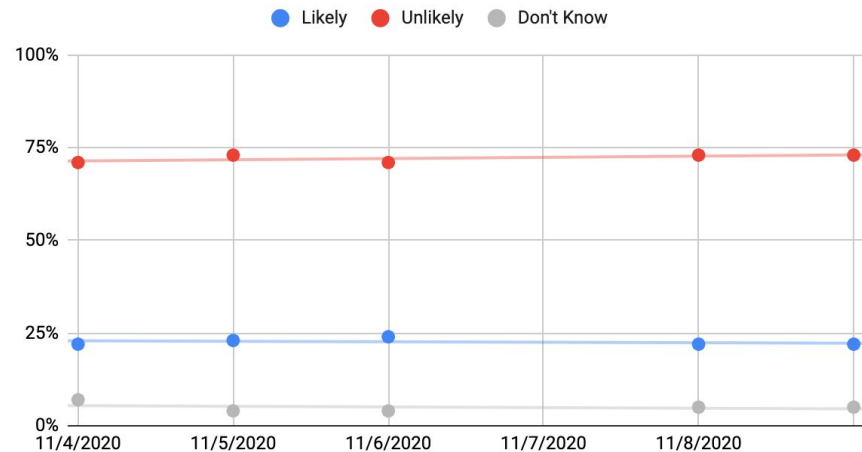
## TRUMP VOTERS

[Trump Voters] How likely do you think it is that massive voter fraud has been committed in states across the country?



## BIDEN VOTERS

[Biden Voters] How likely do you think it is that massive voter fraud has been committed in states across the country?



CNN politics The Biden Presidency Facts First US Elections LIVE TV Editor

### THE POINT

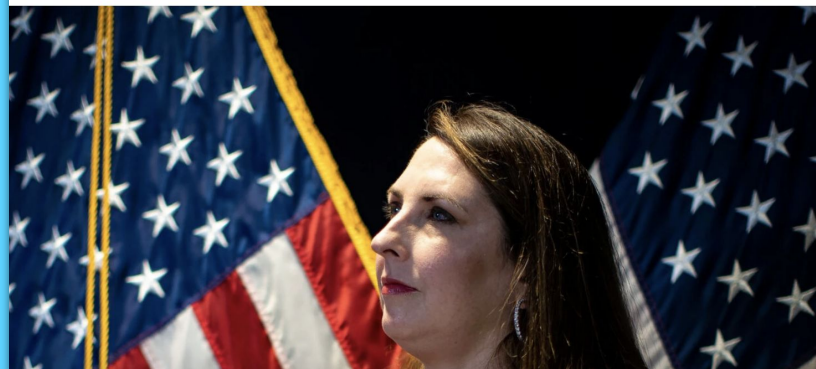
WITH CHRIS CILLIZZA

## Three-quarters of Republicans believe a lie about the 2020 election

Analysis by Chris Cillizza, CNN Editor-at-large  
Updated 2:48 PM ET, Thu February 4, 2021

## *An Emboldened Extremist Wing Flexes Its Power in a Leaderless G.O.P.*

As more far-right Republicans take office and exercise power, party officials are promoting unity and neutrality rather than confronting dangerous messages and disinformation.



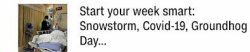
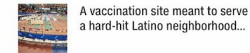
## Georgia's secretary of state remains under enormous political pressure from his fellow Republicans



By Michael Warren, CNN  
Updated 3:35 PM ET, Mon January 4, 2021



### MORE FROM CNN



Ad Luxury Travel Van Deals



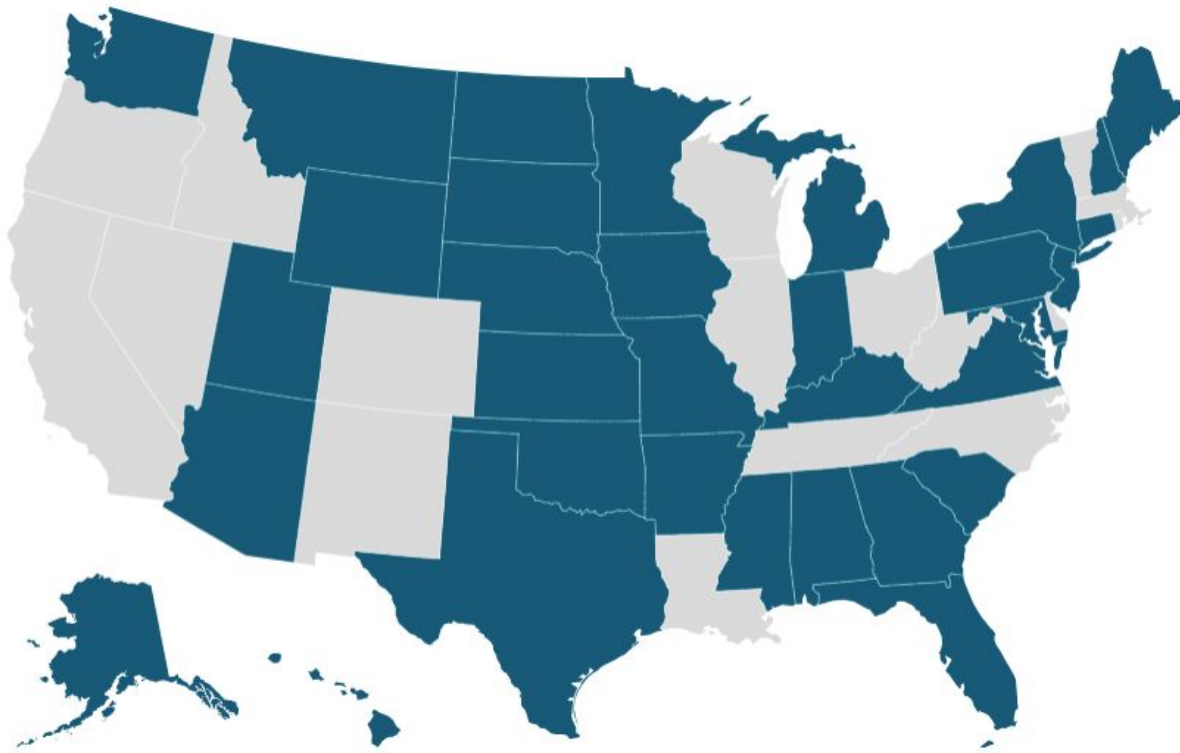
### The New York Times

## *Arizona G.O.P. Censures Three Top Members Criticized by Trump Loyalists*

The party rebuked Gov. Doug Ducey, former Senator Jeff Flake and Cindy McCain, all of whom have been criticized by some Trump supporters as insufficiently loyal to the former president.

# 33 STATES, 165 BILLS INTRODUCED

2021 Restrictive Bills





# **GOP IS TRYING TO...**

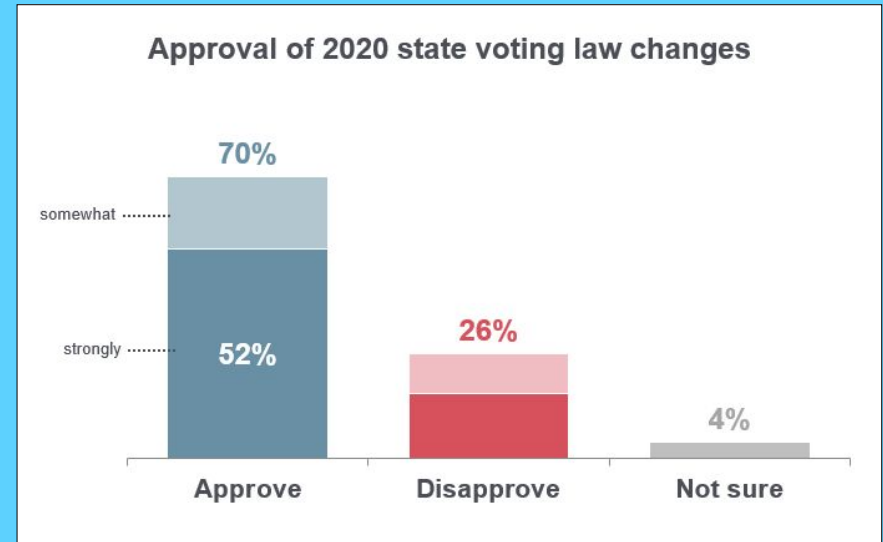
- **Limit** who can vote by mail
- **Add barriers** to casting your absentee ballot (e.g. witness, id, or notary requirements)
- Enact stricter **voter id** requirements
- **Reduce voter registration opportunities**
- **More aggressive voter purging**

**PUBLIC OPINION**

# AMERICANS SUPPORT VOTING REFORM

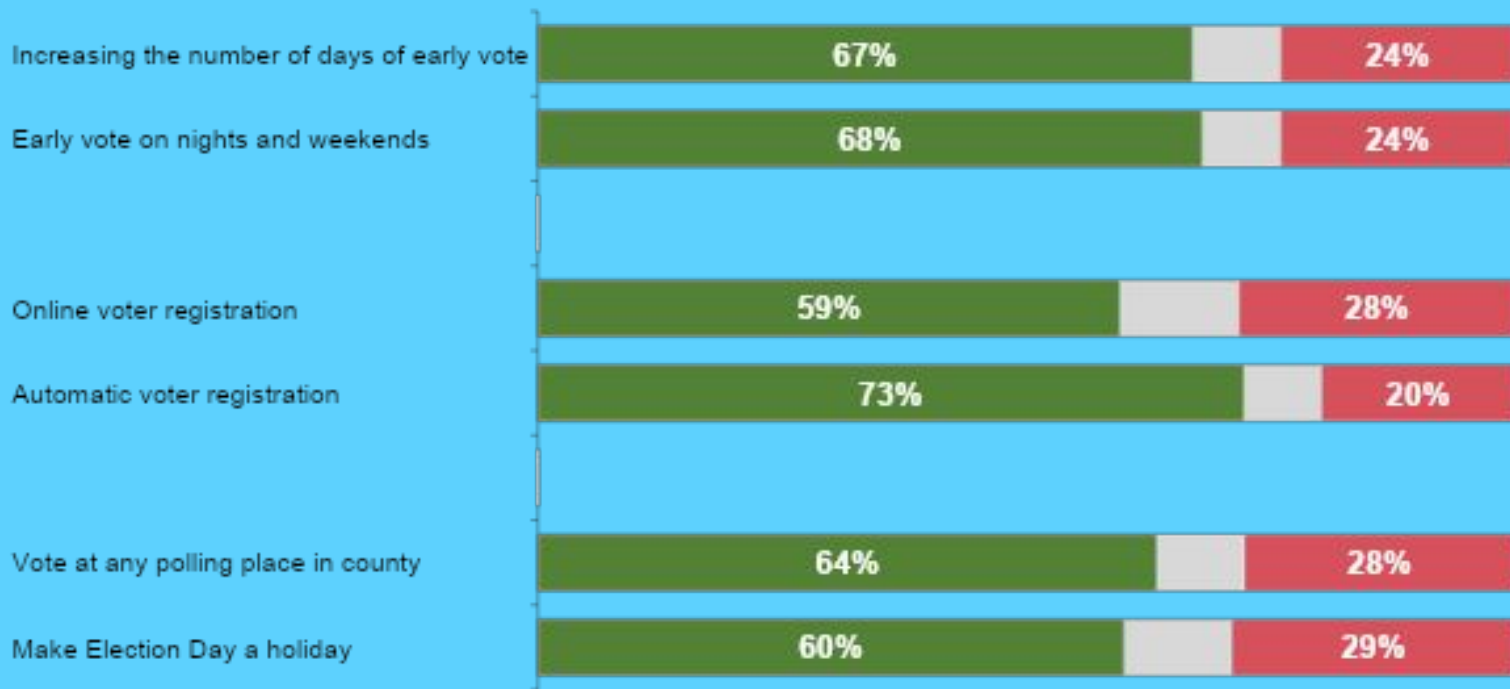
No matter who you supported for president, the problems our country faces are too pressing to remain at odds with each other. We can all agree that we need to improve our elections, including ensuring people can vote securely, allowing early votes to be counted immediately, and expanding voter access so every eligible American can take part in our democracy. For now, as the courts continue to dismiss Trump's election lawsuits, confirming that the election results are legitimate, it's time to acknowledge Joe Biden won and transition to new leadership.

- 58% convincing, 48% very convincing

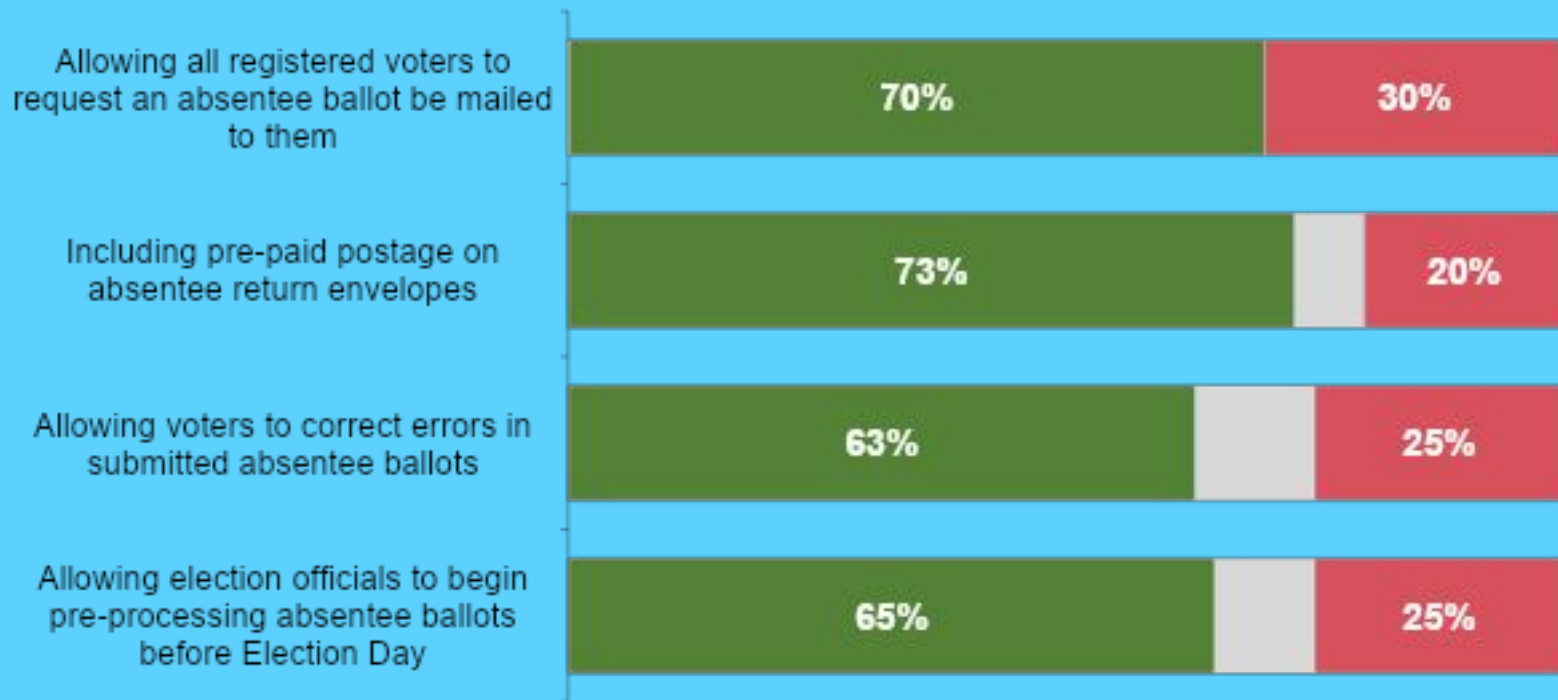


Our imperative: Define “reform” on OUR terms

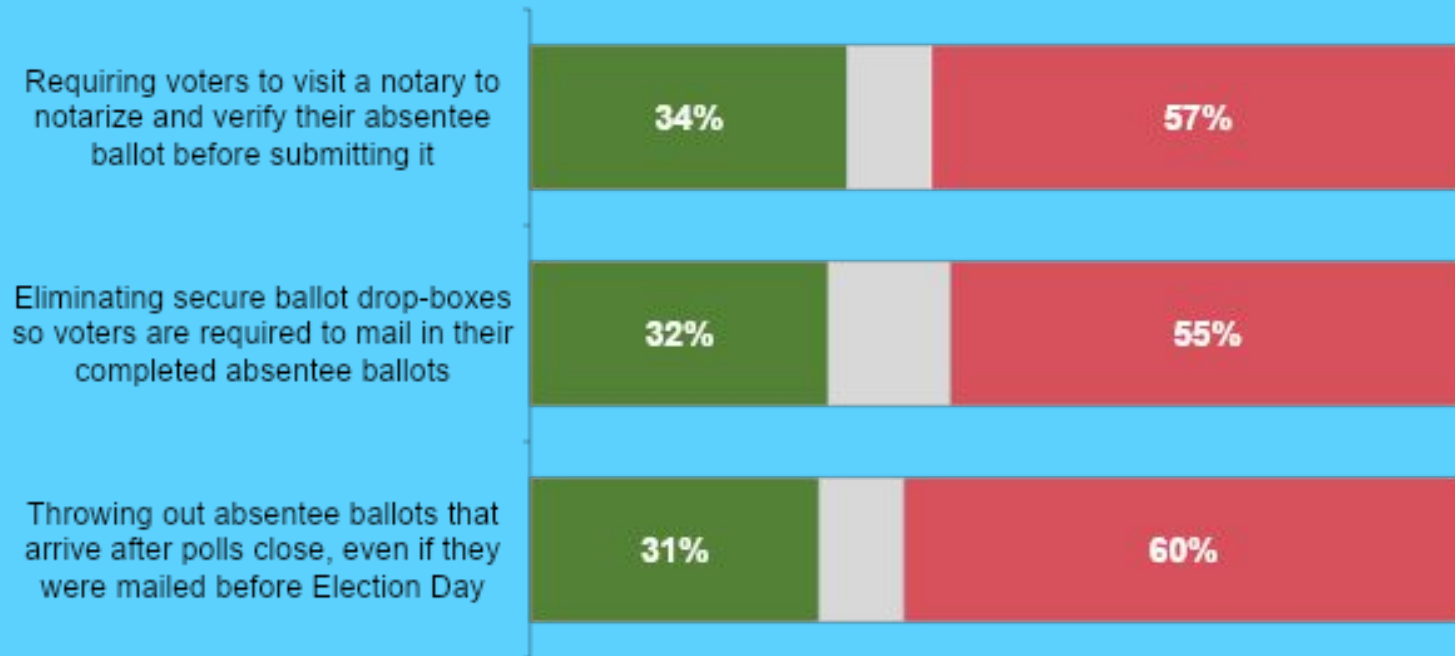
# AMERICANS SUPPORT PRO-VOTER POLICIES



# AMERICANS SUPPORT PRO-VOTER POLICIES



# AMERICANS **OPPOSE** ANTI-VOTER POLICIES



# SUPPORT HIGH BUT AWARENESS LOW OF EXISTING ELECTION INTEGRITY MEASURES

<b>45%</b>	believe their state currently	<b>allows poll watchers from both parties to observe the vote counting process</b>	but	<b>90%</b>	support the practice
<b>32%</b>	believe their state currently	<b>conducts an election audit to ensure that voting machines worked properly and every vote was counted accurately</b>	but	<b>90%</b>	support the practice
<b>47%</b>	believe their state currently employs	<b>a process of verifying that the signatures on each absentee ballot match the voter's signature on file</b>	but	<b>88%</b>	support the practice
<b>43%</b>	believe their state currently employs	<b>a ballot tracking system which allows voters to know the status of their absentee ballot at any time</b>	but	<b>83%</b>	support the practice
<b>18%</b>	believe their state currently	<b>allows the public to watch the vote counting process online</b>	but	<b>82%</b>	support the practice

**MESSAGING**



- Always lead with and emphasize shared **VALUES**
- Center the voters / **PEOPLE** that will be impacted
- Go on **OFFENSE**, do not spend all your time reacting defensively to their narrative
- Highlight the **POSITIVE VISION** you will achieve

# **BEST PRACTICES**

- **ANIMATE** people on our side
- **PERSUADE** those are conflicted
- **ALIENATE** our opposition

# GOAL OF OUR MESSAGING

# DEFINING OUR AUDIENCE

## ANIMATE

28% ARE  
PRO-VOTER

### FREE AND FAIR ELECTION

- In America, every eligible American can cast a ballot and every eligible ballot is counted so that the will of the people prevails.
- In America, every voter can cast a ballot and every ballot is counted so that the will of the people prevails.

### PRIORITIES

- Making sure every eligible American can vote
- Ensuring every eligible American has the freedom to vote
- Making voting safe and accessible
- Making voting secure and accessible

## ALIENATE

34% ARE  
ANTI-VOTER

### FREE AND FAIR ELECTION

- In America, only legal votes are counted and we take every measure necessary to eliminate fraud

### PRIORITY

- Ensuring our elections are free of voter fraud and illegal voting

## PERSUADE

39% ARE  
CONFLICTED

MIX OF PRO-VOTING AND ANTI-VOTING  
OPINION, OR ARE UNSURE

- **LEAD** with shared values: democracy, freedom, integrity
- **REMIND** audiences of our legacy of expanding access to voting over time
- **POSITION** our work as moving us forward, while our opposition attempts to take us backward and silence us
- **HIGHLIGHT** what voting can deliver (and opponents are blocking – e.g. pandemic relief)
- **SHIFT** attention to the our future desired goals and reemphasize values
- **AVOID** the opposition frame (e.g. fraud) and **PIVOT** to our frame of freedom
- **DO NOT REPEAT** accusations, even to refute. (e.g. do not say “there is no evidence of fraud...”)

# KEY GUIDANCE

Talking About  
GOP Attacks on Voting

# MOVE FORWARD MESSAGE

No matter our race, background or zip code most of us believe that for democracy to work for all of us, it must include us all.

Throughout our history, we have fought to ensure more Americans have our right to vote honored and that every eligible American is able to cast their vote and have it counted. But a handful of politicians want to take us backwards, making it harder to vote and creating barriers to register, instead of doing their duty and delivering pandemic relief and distributing the vaccine. To move forward together as a nation, we must ensure that every eligible American can cast a ballot so we are able to elect leaders who govern in our interests and make the promise of our democracy real for us all.

Lead with values

Remind about history

Frame us as forward, them backward

Highlight what we can deliver, their failure

Shift toward future goals and vision

# FREEDOM TO VOTE MESSAGE

Most of us, no matter our color, origin, or gender, want America to be a place where freedom is for everyone, we all have an equal say, and we can trust in the integrity of our elections. But today, when all voters should have the freedom to vote equally, a handful of politicians want to put up barriers to silence many of our voices based on what we look like or where we live. Together, we can ensure every eligible American has the freedom to vote and that the results of our elections reflect the will of the people.

Lead with values

Center freedom

Frame them as silencing us

Shift toward future goals and vision

- **Automatic Voter Registration**
- **Early Voting**
- **Ballot Cure Process**
- **Ballot Pre-Processing**
- **Ballot Tracking**
- **Online Voter Registration**
- **Election Day Holiday**
- **Voting Rights Restoration**
- **Pre-paid postage**

**COUNTER  
WITH  
PRO-VOTER  
POLICIES**

# LANGUAGE FOR RESTRICTIVE POLICIES

Policy	Language To Use	Best Practice
VOTER ID	<i>Restricting types of IDs you can use to vote</i>  <i>Forcing people to carry a specific type of ID to vote</i>	Do not specify or focus on the various types of ID that can be used
ABSENTEE WITNESS REQUIREMENT	<i>Requiring voters to get a witness to authorize their private ballot</i>	Emphasize <b><u>privacy</u></b> of your ballot and vote
ABSENTEE NOTARY REQUIREMENT	<i>Requiring voters to pay an officially authorized person, or notary, to sign their absentee ballot before submitting it to be counted</i>	Emphasize that notarization requires <b><u>payment</u></b>
EXCUSE- REQUIRED ABSENTEE VOTING	<i>Threatening voters who request an absentee ballot with felony prosecution if they cannot prove an excuse such as illness, active military status, or will be out-of-state at the time of election</i>  <i>Barring people from voting by mail unless they provide an excuse</i>	Use a negative frame to talk about restrictions instead of simply talking about the requirement of needing an excuse.



# LANGUAGE FOR RESTRICTIVE POLICIES

Policy	Language To Use	Best Practice
VOTER PURGING	<i>Purging people from the voter rolls after they miss voting in recent elections</i>	There's little difference in describing this as "purging" "deleting" and "eliminating." However, it's best to characterize folks not participating as "miss voting."
REDUCING EARLY/ IN-PERSON VOTING	<i>Reducing the number of locations where people can cast their ballots (early).  Restricting when early voting locations are open.</i>	Highlight policies that reduce access for everyday voters.
THIRD PARTY RETURN	<i>Community organizations assisting voters by returning their sealed ballot to the government</i>	Frame this positively as assistance instead of talking about banning this practice.

# Action Items for Legislators

## Playing Offense

**Introduce bills** to expand/protect voting rights, including automatic voter registration, same day registration, and early voting

**Stay vocal** and elevate what pro-voter reforms you are fighting for (via op-eds, LTEs, social media, press releases, press conferences)

**Engage with local advocates** to align on a voting rights agenda

**Connect with impacted constituents** to gather new ideas and build support for reforms

**Consult with election officials** to understand their concerns and build support for administrative or legislative action

# Action Items for Legislators

## Playing Defense

**Consider procedural rules** and tactics to defeat or stall bills that restrict voting rights (e.g., amendments, timing)

**Assess chamber dynamics** and lawmaker relationships

**Collaborate closely with advocates and peer legislators** on bill strategy and messaging

**Develop a coordinated communications strategy** around key bills

**Amplify issues with constituents** to spur engagement

**Reach out to SiX and Future Now** for direct support!

**Thank you!**

**And fill out our evaluation!**