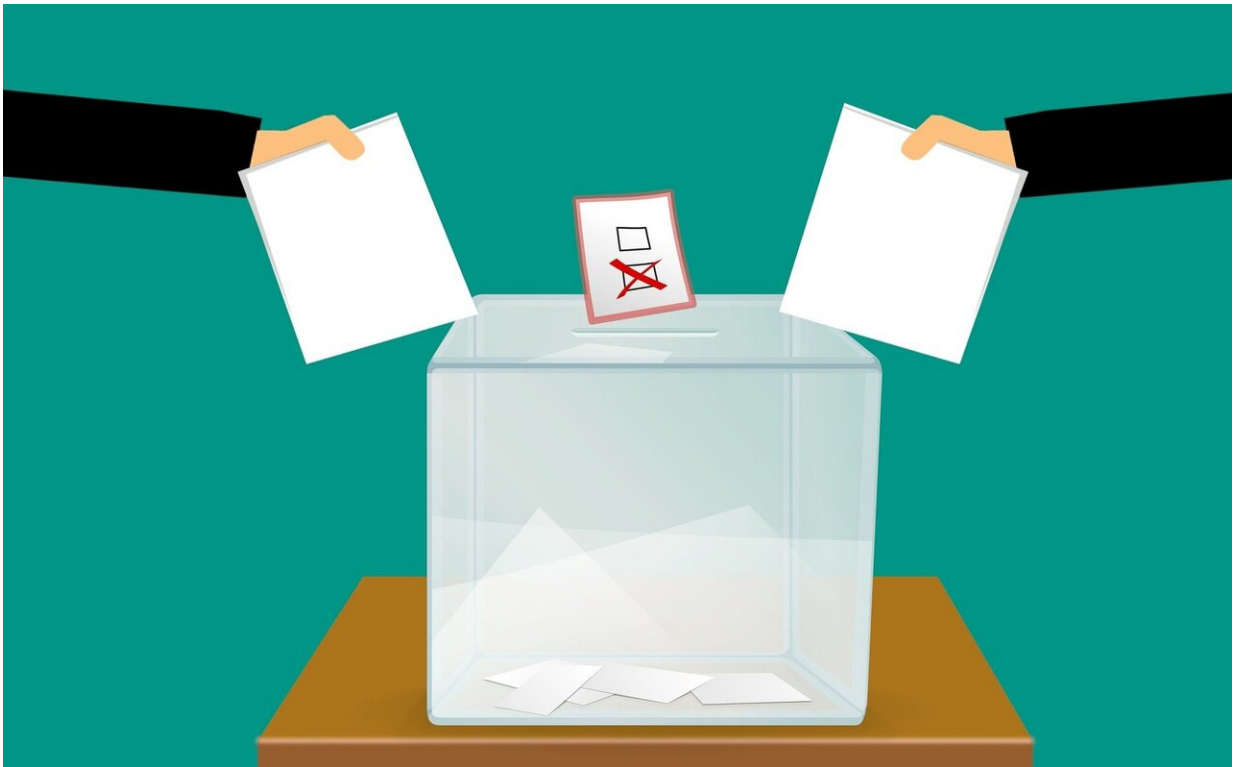


Survey finds election concerns vary by race, education levels, party affiliation

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Although most voters say they believe that voting will be safe and that their ballot will be counted despite the coronavirus pandemic, those who question election safety and some who question election integrity appear less likely to vote, according to a new RAND Corporation survey.

In addition, people who identify as Republicans are more likely to express concerns about the integrity of the 2020 elections, while Democrats are more likely to be concerned about safety—underscoring the need for [election officials](#) to communicate to the public about both issues.

Researchers found that Black and Hispanic respondents tended to be less likely than White respondents to expect their [vote](#) to be counted accurately given the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. Hispanic respondents also were less likely to report confidence in the preparedness of local officials.

Despite misgivings among some groups, the survey found that for most people there is no major change in their intention to vote in November. However, a smaller group of respondents reported that they were less likely to vote—these same people are more likely to be those with safety concerns and in some cases integrity concerns.

"Many respondents are making plans to vote using remote methods—such as vote-by-mail—where they are available," said Jennifer Kavanagh, lead author of the study and a senior political scientist at RAND, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization. "We found that overall few people who voted in 2016 plan to opt out in 2020, but vote intentions do appear to be lower on average among those with safety concerns."

The survey found widespread support for sanitation and social distancing at poll locations, but lower support for sending mail-in ballots to all registered voters or using online voting.

Researchers say that policymakers who are interested in ensuring that pandemic-related concerns do not deter people from voting should prioritize safety and [election](#) integrity equally and clearly communicate

with constituents about the steps being taken.

The study reports results of a survey of 2,389 people conducted during May and June about [public safety](#), election integrity and preparedness of local officials to manage the November 2020 election during the pandemic.

Some of the participants, who are all part of RAND's American Life Panel, took part in a RAND election survey during 2016, allowing researchers to track attitudes over time. An update to the survey conducted in August is currently being completed.

Other finding from the survey include:

- All else being equal, older voters had higher perceptions of safety and preparedness, and more confidence in election integrity than did younger voters.
- Respondents who reported higher levels of education tended to be more supportive of social distancing and sanitation at the polls, as well as of expanded distribution of mail-in ballots to all registered voters as a way to address pandemic-related risks.
- About one-third of survey participants reported they had some concerns about public safety, election integrity and preparedness of local officials to conduct elections during the pandemic.

Respondents who said they do not expect elections to be physically safe also were more likely to question whether their vote will be counted accurately and whether officials will be prepared.

"Different groups have different perceptions of safety, election integrity and preparedness of local officials for the 2020 election, and the relationship between perceptions and intention to vote similarly varies across demographic groups," Kavanagh said.

Although election officials and other policymakers might wish to communicate broadly about their preparations for the 2020 election, the RAND analysis suggests that the effects of such a campaign would be maximized by targeting messages at specific groups that seem most prone to such concerns.

"Elections pose major challenges to local officials, even under the best of circumstances," Kavanagh said. "On top of the regular challenges election officials face, this year they will also have to manage issues like sanitation, ensuring social distancing, and processing larger numbers of absentee ballots. In addition, a significant number of people have concerns about [safety](#) and security of the elections.

"Those who are interested in ensuring that voters are not deterred by such concerns should consider targeted messages to different groups in order to best address their concerns."

More information: The report, "Attitudes on Voting in 2020: Preparing for Elections During a Pandemic," is available at www.rand.org

Provided by RAND Corporation

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