

# California Voter Messaging in the Time of COVID-19



## EVIDENCE-BASED ACTIONS FOR INFORMING VOTERS ABOUT THE NOVEMBER 2020 ELECTION

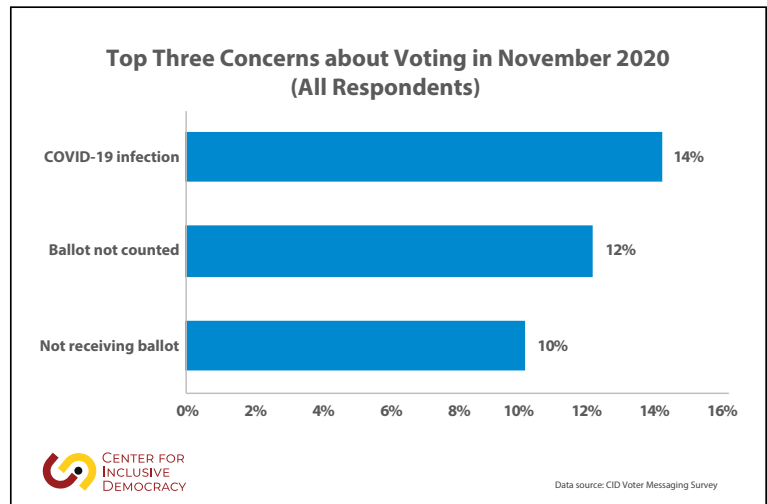
To prepare for the November 2020 general election, election officials and community advocates must effectively inform eligible voters (adult citizens) about voting during a pandemic. The following recommendations are based on findings from a recent 2020 survey of a diverse sample of nearly 12,000 eligible voters in California.

*This action summary provides research-based information on Californians' voting concerns and preferences about the November 2020 election. This document is a companion to the report [Voter Messaging in the Time of COVID-19](#), by Dr. Mindy Romero, Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy.*

### Recommendation: Address voter concerns about voting in a pandemic.

Survey findings highlighted that voters have specific concerns about voting in a pandemic. Addressing these concerns can help voters feel more confident about casting their ballot.

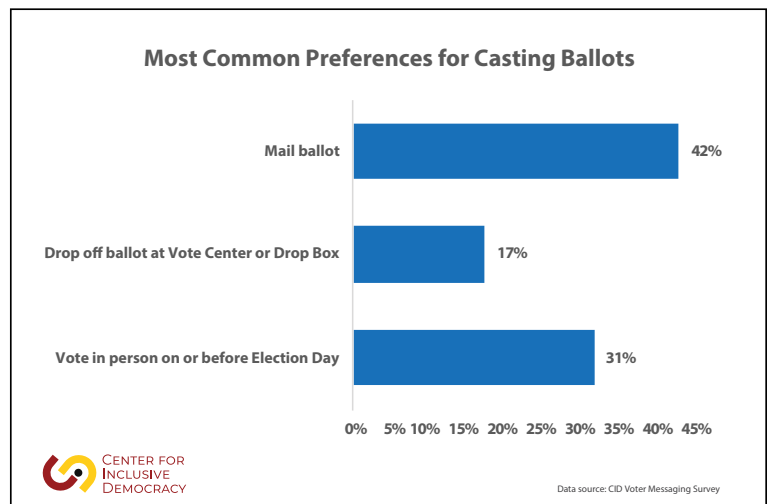
- **Nearly one third of eligible voters have concerns about voting.** 31% of all respondents have concerns about casting a ballot this November, most commonly regarding COVID-19.
- **COVID-19 concerns are more common among African Americans, younger voters, and people with disabilities.** Compared to eligible voters overall, contracting COVID-19 while voting is a more common concern among African-Americans, people under age 45, and people with disabilities.



### Recommendation: Consider group differences in voter preferences on how and when to vote.

Understanding eligible voter preferences for how and when to vote can help prioritize messages about voting options.

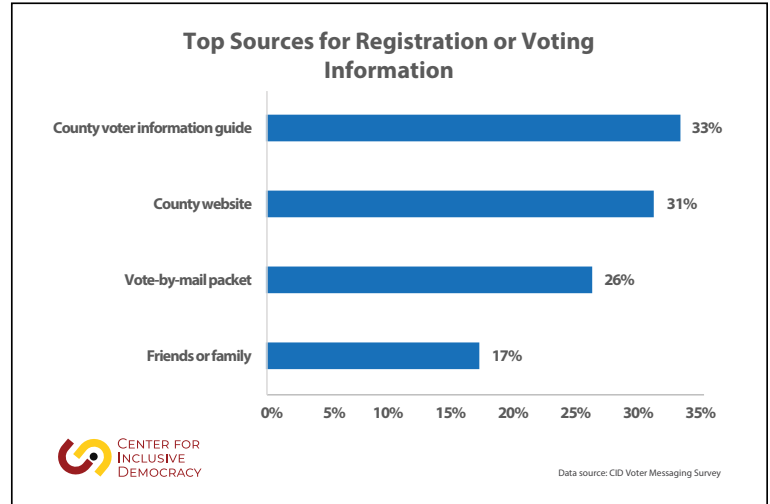
- **Mailing a ballot is the most common voting preference.** 42% of respondents said that they prefer to mail in a vote-by-mail ballot.
- **Some historically underrepresented groups more frequently prefer in-person voting this November.** In-person voting is more frequently favored by African Americans, youth, and people with a disability.
- **Many in-person voters want an early voting option.** Of those who prefer voting in person, nearly half prefer to vote during the week leading up to Election Day, rather than on Election Day itself. Preferences for early voting in person are more common among African-American and Asian American eligible voters than others.



## Recommendation: Educate voters proactively and through information sources they trust.

Surveyed eligible voters shared where they find information about registration and voting—including reporting if they did not know where to find such information.

- **Many voters need active outreach.** Over a quarter (26%) of California’s eligible voters are unsure where to find information about in-person voting locations. Asian-American, Latino, and young (18-24) voters more commonly report not knowing where to find their polling place information.
- **Official materials should be easy to use.** High use of materials from county elections offices, particularly by voters of color and seniors, underscores the need for plain and accessible language, quality translation, and readability by voters with visual disabilities.
- **Friends and family are a key information source, particularly for Latino voters and young voters.** Latino and younger eligible voters turn to friends and family for information at higher rates than other groups do. More older eligible voters rely on the county voter information guide.



## Recommendation: Use tested voter messages.

The survey tested six messages about available voting options to see which had the greatest effect on the likelihood of voting.

- **These tested messages increased voters’ reported likelihood of voting in November:**
  - A core message explaining voting options;
  - The core message plus community empowerment language (“The future is ours to build by voting together. We have work to do. The first step is to vote. We must vote for our families. Vote for our communities. Vote for our future.”); and
  - A core message emphasizing safety, but only when delivered by a trusted messenger (“A message from California civil rights organizations.”).

### Core Voting Options Message

*Voting is easier than ever before. You choose how and when to vote. Every registered voter in California will automatically get a ballot in the mail, even if they did not request one. You have three options to return your ballot. You can return it by mail, drop it off at a ballot drop-box or a voting location near you. You can also vote in person at a voting location starting the weekend before Election Day and through Election Day.*

## Conclusion

Although many eligible voters in California have concerns about contracting COVID-19 while voting, a large percentage prefer to vote in person this November. Many with a preference to vote in person want to do so prior to Election Day. Concerns about COVID-19 and changes to the election system for November 2020 make aggressive outreach essential. Many eligible voters do not know where to get information about their voting options. These survey findings provide critical information to adjust planning and outreach to account for significant differences in underrepresented groups’ preferences and informational resources.