

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Geoff Garin and Guy Molyneux
DATE: May 6, 2020
RE: Survey Finds Bipartisan Opposition to Guaranteeing Businesses Immunity from COVID Lawsuits

Our recently completed survey among a nationally representative sample of 1,202 voters finds that there is broad bipartisan opposition to legislation that would give guaranteed immunity to companies from lawsuits in cases involving coronavirus infection. Large majorities of voters believe that some companies will try to cut corners in protecting their workers and customers from the coronavirus and that guaranteeing businesses immunity from lawsuits would result in more people getting the coronavirus, with fewer companies taking precautions to keep people safe from the coronavirus.

When weighing the benefits of letting businesses reopen and putting people back to work against the risk of companies not taking proper precautions if they know they cannot be held accountable, voters across party lines say that it is a bad idea to guarantee businesses immunity from coronavirus lawsuits.

These findings are based on interviews with voters conducted online from April 28 to April 30, 2020. The party identification of respondents in the national sample is 42% Democratic, 20% independent, and 38% Republican.

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

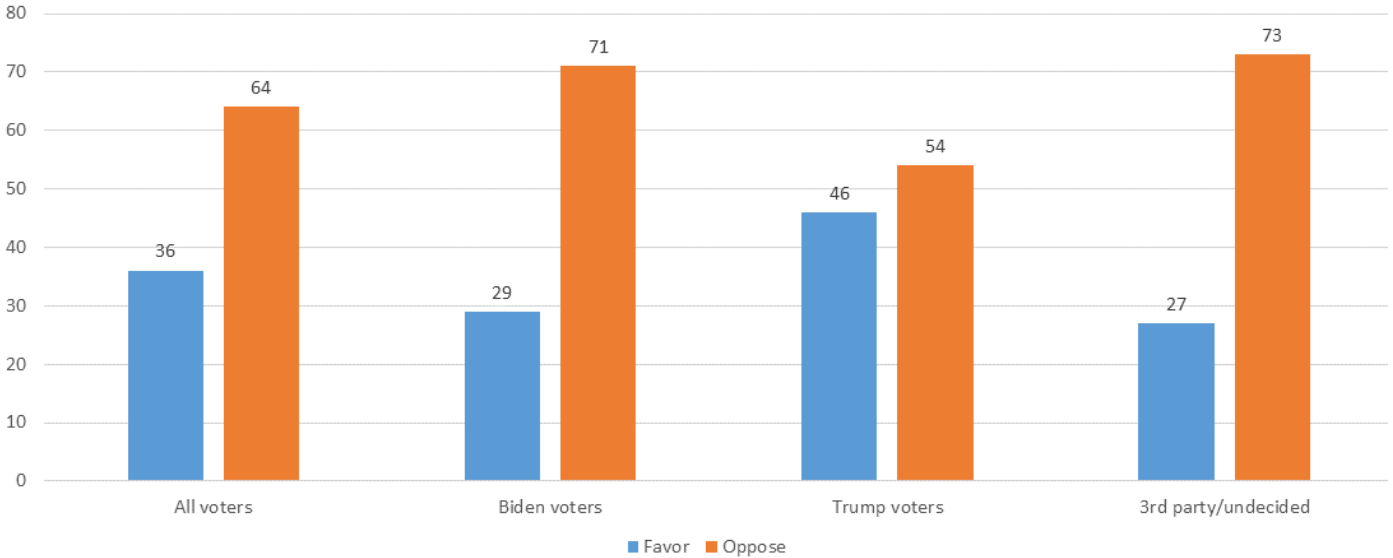
1. By 64% to 36%, voters oppose giving guaranteed immunity to companies from lawsuits in cases involving coronavirus infection.

Granting guaranteed immunity in these cases is opposed by majorities of Democrats (72% oppose), independents (64% oppose), and Republicans (56% oppose). Over half of voters who support President Trump over Joe Biden oppose lawsuit immunity in coronavirus cases (46% favor, 54% oppose). Among those who are undecided for president or who are inclined to

support a third-party candidate, 73% oppose giving businesses guaranteed immunity from lawsuits in coronavirus cases.

Corporations and businesses want the federal government to give them guaranteed immunity from lawsuits by workers or consumers who believe they became infected with the coronavirus as a result of unsafe practices by a company. By giving companies guaranteed immunity, workers and consumers who become infected with the coronavirus would be prevented from bringing a lawsuit even if they could demonstrate that the company engaged in unsafe practices.

Do you favor or oppose giving guaranteed immunity to companies from lawsuits in cases involving coronavirus infection?



Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents who are currently in the labor market say that they have lost their job or lost income as a result of the coronavirus crisis. *Presumably, these voters are the most eager to get back to work, but they oppose lawsuit immunity by 63% to 37%.*

Opposition to lawsuit immunity in coronavirus cases is correlated with the view that if the economy starts to reopen in the next few weeks, some companies will try to cut corners with regards to precautions to protect workers and customers from the coronavirus. Among the 64% who expect that some businesses will cut corners, 77% oppose guaranteed immunity from lawsuits. Even among those who say that all businesses will take needed precautions, 42% still oppose lawsuit immunity in coronavirus cases.

2. Three in five voters believe that giving corporations and other businesses immunity in coronavirus cases would result in more people getting the coronavirus.

Overall, 61% say that giving corporations and businesses immunity from lawsuits in coronavirus cases would result in more people getting the virus, while just 12% say it would reduce the number of infections and 27% say it would not make much difference either way in the number of people becoming infected. A majority of voters across every key demographic group expect that guaranteeing businesses immunity from liability would lead to more people getting sick. This is consistent with the view held by 60% of respondents that companies would take fewer precautions to keep people safe if they knew they could not be sued.

3. The idea that some companies would not take proper precautions if they knew they could not be held accountable is compelling for voters, and is more persuasive than the pro-immunity argument that businesses could reopen and put people back to work without being liable for coronavirus exposures.

Voters were asked which of the following two statements they find more convincing.

- a) *It is a good idea to give corporations and businesses guaranteed immunity from coronavirus lawsuits, because businesses could reopen and put people back to work without being liable if their customers or workers are exposed.*
- b) *It is a bad idea to give corporations and businesses guaranteed immunity from coronavirus lawsuits, because some companies would not take the proper precautions if they knew they could not be held accountable.*

After seeing both arguments, 69% of voters come down on the side that giving corporations and businesses guaranteed immunity from coronavirus lawsuits is a bad idea. In this final reading, 60% of Republicans and 58% of Trump supporters are more convinced that lawsuit immunity in these cases would be a bad idea.

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This finding is in sync with what we and other researchers are consistently finding in terms of voters prioritizing precautions to protect people from becoming infected over a desire to reopen the economy. Support for lawsuit immunity would put senators and members of Congress on the wrong side of this divide.