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CONTACT:

Frederick J. Boehmke, co-director of the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab, 319-335-2342 (office), 716-866-9277 (cell), frederick-boehmke@uiowa.edu.

Elisabeth Oster, COVID-19 group assistant leader of the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab, 612-590-1361 (cell), elisabeth-oster@uiowa.edu.

Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab Poll: Iowans Support Workplace Vaccine Exemptions but Split on Mask and Vaccine Mandates

According to a recent Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab Poll, Iowans are split on whether mask and vaccine mandates should be present in businesses, but a large majority are in favor of vaccine exemptions for medical and religious reasons. The online poll, designed by University of Iowa faculty and students as a research project, surveyed 883 voting-age Iowans between Feb. 10 and Feb. 25, 2022.

Those in favor of a ban on employee vaccine mandates in workplaces (39.9%) were almost evenly split with those opposing a ban (41.2%). Additionally, 18.9% of Iowans reported feeling neutral on the policy or declined to answer.

Among demographics, difference in support and opposition of a ban on employee vaccine mandates varied with self-reported political affiliation and community. Republicans were more likely to support the mandate ban at 61.2% of Republican respondents, (42.6% in strong support). In contrast, a majority of Democrat respondents opposed a ban on the mandate with 60.6% opposing (39.7% strongly opposing). Respondents who identified as Independent were more evenly split in opinion with 41.8% in support of a mandate ban (25.7% strongly supported) and 40.9% opposed (21.1% strongly opposing). Respondents living in an urban region saw the lowest ban support 34.1% support (17.0% strongly supporting), compared to 41.4% support from suburban respondents (24.9% strongly supporting), and 42.7% of rural respondents (30.4% strongly supporting).

Age also produced significant differences with a consistent trend of decreased “strongly support” responses and increased “strongly opposed” responses among older age groups. The 18-34 age group had 25.7% strongly supporting and 35.3% in support of a mandate ban. The percentage of strong support for a mandate ban decreases steadily among older age groups, decreasing to 14.5% among those 70 and older, an 11.2 percentage-point decrease. However, overall support for a ban on employee vaccine mandates differs only slightly with 35.3% support or strong support from the 18-34 age group and 39.1% support or strong support among respondents 70 and older.

Iowans polled on whether business should be banned from requiring patrons to wear face coverings leaned slightly toward opposing this restriction, with 43.9% of Iowans opposing a ban on customer mask mandates. One-quarter of those in opposition said they strongly oppose. Alternately, 33.5% of Iowans reported support for a ban on mask mandates, with 20.6% of those strongly supporting. Additionally, 22.5% of respondents were neutral on the subject or declined response.

Support for a mask mandate ban varied most by sex and party affiliation. A majority of females opposed a ban on mask mandates at 50.1% (28.3% strongly opposing) while 37.6% of males opposed a ban (22.3% strongly opposing). Of males, 38.5% were in support of a mask mandate ban (25.5% strongly supporting) whereas 28.7% of females reported support for a ban (15.8% strongly supporting).

When it came to party identification, the majority of Republican respondents, 52.8%, supported support for a ban, with 34.5% strongly supporting. Conversely, the majority of Democrats were in opposition to a mask mandate ban, with 64.0% overall opposition (43.8% strongly opposing). Respondents who identified as Independent were more even split with 32.4% ban support (22.0% strongly supporting) and 42.3% opposing a mandate ban (19.8% strongly oppose). Across age groups, opposition toward a mask mandate ban increased by 10.6 percentage points between the youngest age group, ages 18-34, and the oldest age group, 70 and older. Of 18-34-year-olds, 40.7% opposed the ban (22.8% strongly opposing) compared to 51.3% of respondents 70 and older (30.3% strongly opposing).

A majority of Iowans, 52.2%, support exemptions to workplace COVID-19 requirements for medical and religious reasons, with 28.8% strongly supporting. About one-quarter of Iowans (25.9%) oppose vaccine exemptions, with 12.6% strongly opposing. Additionally, 22.0% of respondents were neutral on the policy or declined to answer.

Significant difference was observed by political affiliation and age categories when it came to vaccine exemptions. A large majority of Republican respondents, 67.2%, supported supporting exemptions, with 44.9% strongly supporting. Conversely, 13.8% of Republicans opposed exemptions (6.4% strongly opposing). A smaller share of Democrat respondents, 44.2%, opposed exemptions, with 23.3% strongly opposed, and 29.3% of Democrats supported exemptions (11.6% strongly supporting). The majority of Independent respondents, 58.4%, supported exemptions (30.2% strongly supporting) and 21.2% opposed (9.3% strongly opposing).

Support for exemptions decreased as age increased. Of the 18-34 category, 52.3% supported exemptions (28.8% strongly supporting). The age group of 70 and older reported 43.3% support (22.1% strongly supporting). Comparing youngest to oldest age category indicates a 9.0 percentage-point decrease in support; with the exemption reaching its highest support among 35-54-year-olds at 57.4%, this decrease is steady. The same trend is present with increased exemption opposition with older age, showing 23.5% of 18-34-year-olds opposing (12.8% strongly opposing) and 33.0% of respondents 70 and older opposing (20.1% strongly opposing). The difference between youngest and oldest age categories produces a 9.5 percentage point increase in opposition with a steady trend upward.

Respondent identification: The Iowa Social Science Research Center (ISRC) contracted with a respected web panel vendor to field the survey to a demographically representative sample of up to 900 respondents. Respondents invited to complete the web survey were Iowa adults, aged 18-120 years, recruited for participation via web panel. To obtain a census-representative sample, quotas were set on the following demographics: sex, age, and urbanicity.

Sample: 883 voting-age resident in Iowa, margin of error +/-3.4%.

Weighting: Reported results are weighted by age, sex, and party identification.

About the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab

The poll was designed by the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab, comprised of University of Iowa faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab is co-directed by Frederick J. Boehmke, professor of political science and Kajsa Dalrymple, professor of journalism and mass communication. The poll is a teaching, research, and service project, and was implemented in collaboration with the Iowa Social Science Research Center directed by Frederick J. Boehmke. The University of Iowa Public Policy Center provided support for this poll as part of its student success mission, intended to expand experiential policy-relevant research for UI students.

Olivia Bull, Elisabeth Oster, Kathleen Hubeli, and Caleb McCullough, research fellows for the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab assisted with the preparation of this release.

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