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**THE COVID STATES PROJECT:  
A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY  
REPORT #53: PUBLIC SUPPORT  
FOR VACCINE PASSPORTS**

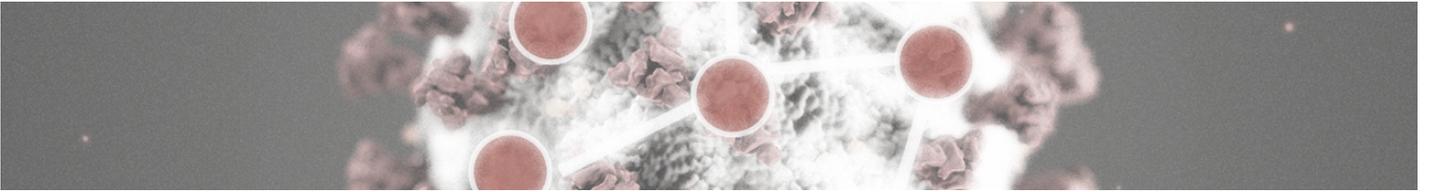
USA, May 2021

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**Report of May 17, 2021, v.1**

***The COVID States Project***

**From:** The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public’s Policy Preferences Across States

***A joint project of:***

Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

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# COVER MEMO

Summary Memo — May 17, 2020

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From April 2020 through May 2021, we conducted multiple waves of a large, 50-state survey, some results of which are presented here. You can find previous reports online at [covidstates.org](https://covidstates.org).

### **Note on methods:**

Between April 1 and May 3, 2021, we surveyed 21,733 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted by PureSpectrum via an online, nonprobability sample, with state-level representative quotas for race/ethnicity, age, and gender (for methodological details on the other waves, see [covidstates.org](https://covidstates.org)). In addition to balancing on these dimensions, we reweighted our data using demographic characteristics to match the U.S. population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, education, and living in urban, suburban, or rural areas. This was the latest in a series of surveys we have been conducting since April 2020, examining attitudes and behaviors regarding COVID-19 in the United States.

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## Public Support for Vaccine Passports

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[“Vaccine certification”](#) requirements were first introduced in the United States in response to smallpox in the 1800s. Today, physicians routinely provide certification that students have received an array of vaccinations that are required in order to attend school or summer camp, or to participate in sports or other group activities. A similar concept -- recently labeled [“Vaccine Passports”](#) (“VPs”) -- has been suggested with respect to COVID-19 vaccination, requiring individuals to provide proof of vaccination in order to engage in certain activities, such as indoor dining or shopping, flying on an airplane, or attending school. However, requiring that Americans prove that they have been vaccinated in order to participate in such activities has generated fierce [opposition](#). The success or failure of these initiatives likely rests on a better understanding of the breadth and depth of this opposition, and its basis. Is it simply that the term “vaccine passport” has been politicized? Or is the underlying concept viewed by Americans as problematic? Or, in the wake of a year of lockdowns and mask mandates, are Americans concerned about yet another government mandate?

The purpose of this report is thus to explore two questions. First, is public resistance to vaccine passports mainly due to the politicization of the term itself, or is the public genuinely opposed to any sort of vaccine mandate? Second, do those who oppose vaccine passports object only to the *government* requiring them, or do they object to *any* institution, public or private, making them a requirement?

To explore the public’s support for vaccine mandates in general, and the notion of “vaccine passports” in particular, we embedded an experiment within our April 2021 survey wave (N=12,900 respondents), in which we asked respondents whether or not they supported businesses requiring proof of vaccination for admission to their premises. We randomly varied two parts of the question: *Should businesses be [“required” vs. “allowed to require”] that customers prove [“that” vs. “with a vaccine passport that”] they have been vaccinated in order to enter the premises of the business?* Participants were randomly assigned to one of four versions of the question (see Table 1), thus allowing us to measure: 1) how much difference the government requiring these passports makes, and 2) how much difference the term “vaccine passport” makes, and. In this report, we describe the differences in responses depending upon which version of the question a respondent answered, both in the aggregate and broken out by demographic characteristics.

**Table 1. Experimental Design for Vaccine Passport Study**

	“Required”	“Allowed to Require”
“that”	“Should businesses be <u>[required]</u> that customers prove <u>[that]</u> they have been vaccinated in order to enter the premises of the business?”	“Should businesses be <u>[allowed to require]</u> that customers prove <u>[that]</u> they have been vaccinated in order to enter the premises of the business?”
“with a vaccine passport that”	“Should businesses be <u>[required]</u> that customers prove <u>[with a vaccine passport that]</u> they have been vaccinated in order to enter the premises of the business?”	“Should businesses be <u>[allowed to require]</u> that customers prove <u>[with a vaccine passport that]</u> they have been vaccinated in order to enter the premises of the business?”

Some key findings are as follows:

- Depending on the specific question, pluralities or weak majorities of Americans oppose VPs. The precise percentage varies with whether they are labeled as such and whether businesses are or are not required to utilize them.
- Overall, support for VP requirements is higher when presented as a voluntary option that businesses would be *allowed* to adopt, rather than as a requirement that businesses *must* adopt.
- There is no consistent pattern across demographic groups with respect to the term “vaccine passport” itself; some groups are more supportive when the term is explicitly mentioned, while others are more supportive when it is not. This suggests that the name is not an important limitation on public support for mandatory proof of vaccination.
- Men are more supportive than women of VPs, especially when characterized as optional and explicitly labeled as VPs.
- Democrats are far more supportive of VPs than Republicans or independents, especially when the question indicates that businesses would be *allowed* to require VPs rather than *mandated* to require them. Republicans and independents are least supportive when VP policies are characterized as a requirement for businesses.

- Respondents who have been vaccinated are considerably more supportive of VPs than respondents who have not been vaccinated, regardless of question wording. However, they are most supportive when VPs are neither mandated by the government nor explicitly labeled as such.
- College-educated respondents are far more supportive of VPs than their less-educated counterparts, regardless of question wording. However, highly educated respondents are especially supportive of VP policies when businesses are “allowed” to require them, rather than mandated to do so.
- White respondents are the racial/ethnic group least supportive of VPs, whether or not they are mandatory, and regardless of whether or not the term VP is explicitly mentioned (see Appendix).
- Wealthy respondents are more supportive of VPs than their less wealthy counterparts. Among wealthy respondents, support for VPs is highest when they are neither required nor explicitly mentioned, and lowest when they are both required *and* explicitly mentioned (see Appendix).

We note that the support levels described in this report are significantly lower than in our [“Public Support for Vaccine Requirements”](#) report (#52), which was based on the same survey. We further investigated – both using the same survey and through a separate, follow-on survey experiment – a variety of potential explanations for this gap. Our findings suggest that this is a real difference and not an artifact of the details of the questions we asked. Americans appear to generally support vaccine mandates issued by local, state, and federal governments, but they appear to be less comfortable with such mandates being imposed by businesses.

*Note: All charts presented below show a bar representing the best (mean) estimate, surrounded by a line to indicate uncertainty (a 95% confidence interval). All differences reported in the text are statistically significant unless otherwise noted.*

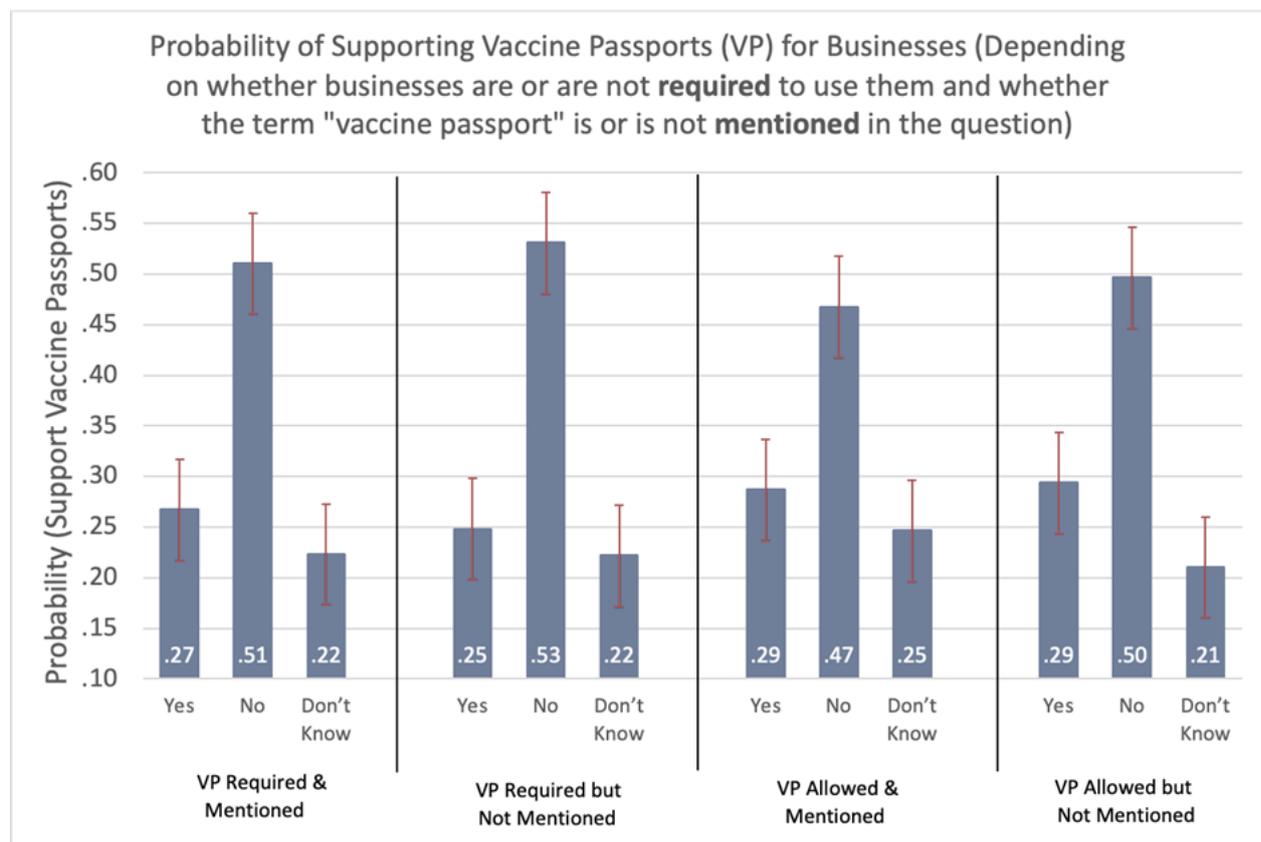
## **Overall Support for Vaccine Passports (VPs)**

**On average, only 27% of our respondents support businesses’ use of vaccine passports, compared to 50% who oppose.** In Figure 1, we present the main results from our experiment testing first, whether this level of opposition varies depending on whether or not businesses are required to utilize them, and second, whether the term “vaccine passport” itself has become a liability. (Note that in Figure 1 we present the probabilities of supporting or opposing VPs, or of responding “don’t know”; for readability, all other figures present only the probability of supporting VPs.)

In fact, **the idea of mandating that businesses require or allowing them to require proof of vaccination for entry remains unpopular, regardless of whether “vaccine passports” are mentioned. We find that fewer than 30% of respondents (ranging from 25% to 29%, depending on the specific question) support businesses requiring customers to show a vaccine passport, regardless of whether they are forced to do so.** We do, however, find some differences, depending on question wording. **The highest support level (29%) emerges for the case where businesses would be *allowed* to require vaccines to gain admission, whether or not the term VP is explicitly mentioned in the question.**

Conversely, the lowest level of support (25%) emerges for requiring that businesses mandate vaccines, but without explicitly mentioning VPs. (The 4 percentage point gap, despite being modest in size, is statistically significant).

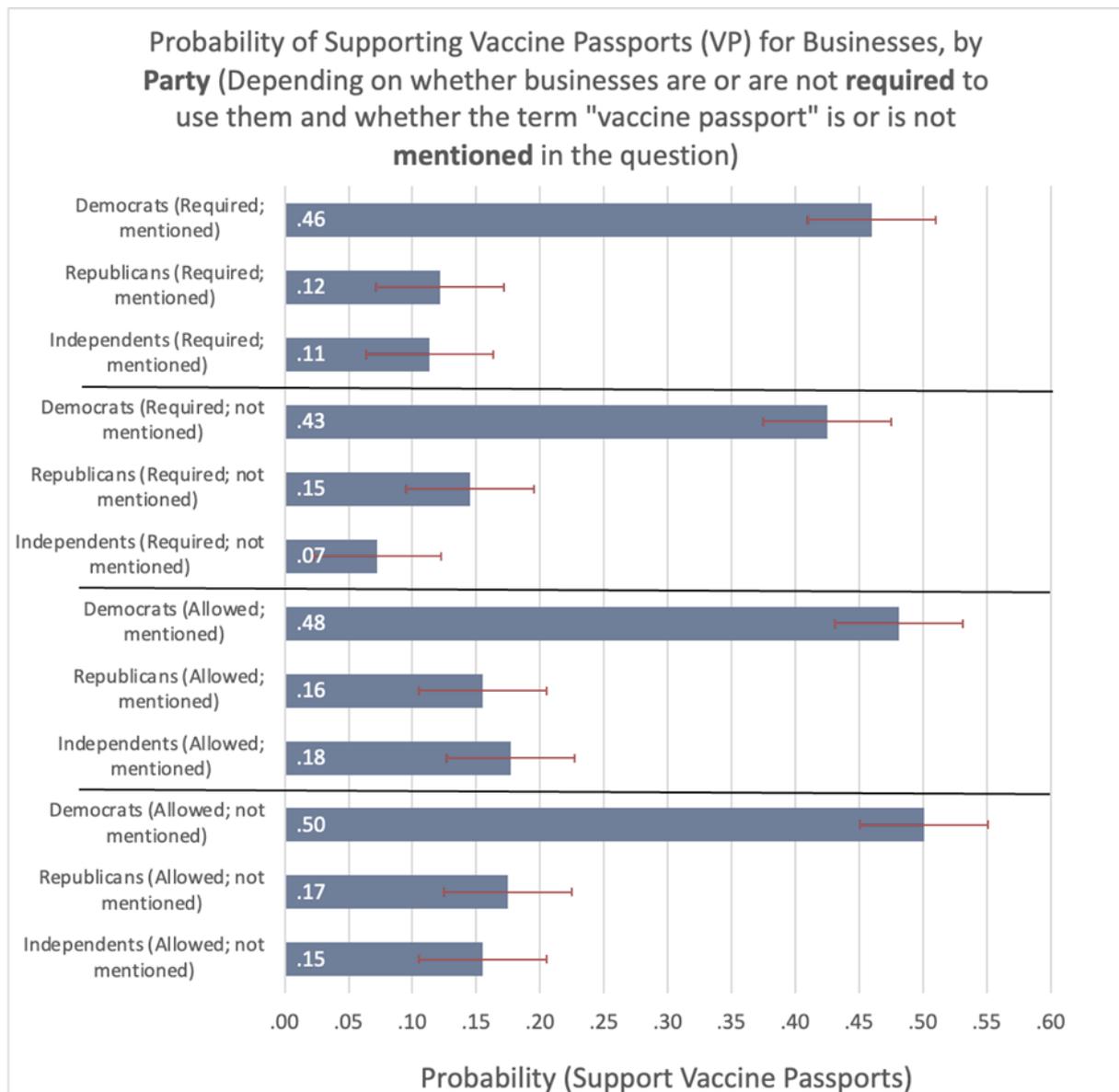
We also see greater opposition to vaccine mandates for businesses when they are presented as required, rather than as an option for businesses (henceforth “required” vs. “allowed”). The largest such gap is 6 percentage points, between the “required” and “VPs not mentioned” condition (53% opposition) and the “allowed” and “VPs mentioned” condition (47% opposition).



**FIGURE 1. Aggregate Patterns**

## Support for VPs by Party

By far the largest gaps we found in the survey in support for VPs emerge across party lines (Figure 2). Depending on the specific question, Democrats are between 28 and 34 percentage points more supportive of VPs than Republicans. Democrats are particularly supportive when vaccine mandates are optional for businesses (allowed rather than required), though there are no significant differences among Democrats between explicitly mentioning or not mentioning VPs in the question. Republicans are most supportive (17%) in the “allowed” and “VPs not mentioned” condition and least supportive (12%) in the “required” and “VPs mentioned” condition. While these are low numbers across the board, the 5 point gap among Republicans is nonetheless statistically significant, indicating that the details of vaccine requirements do appear to matter.

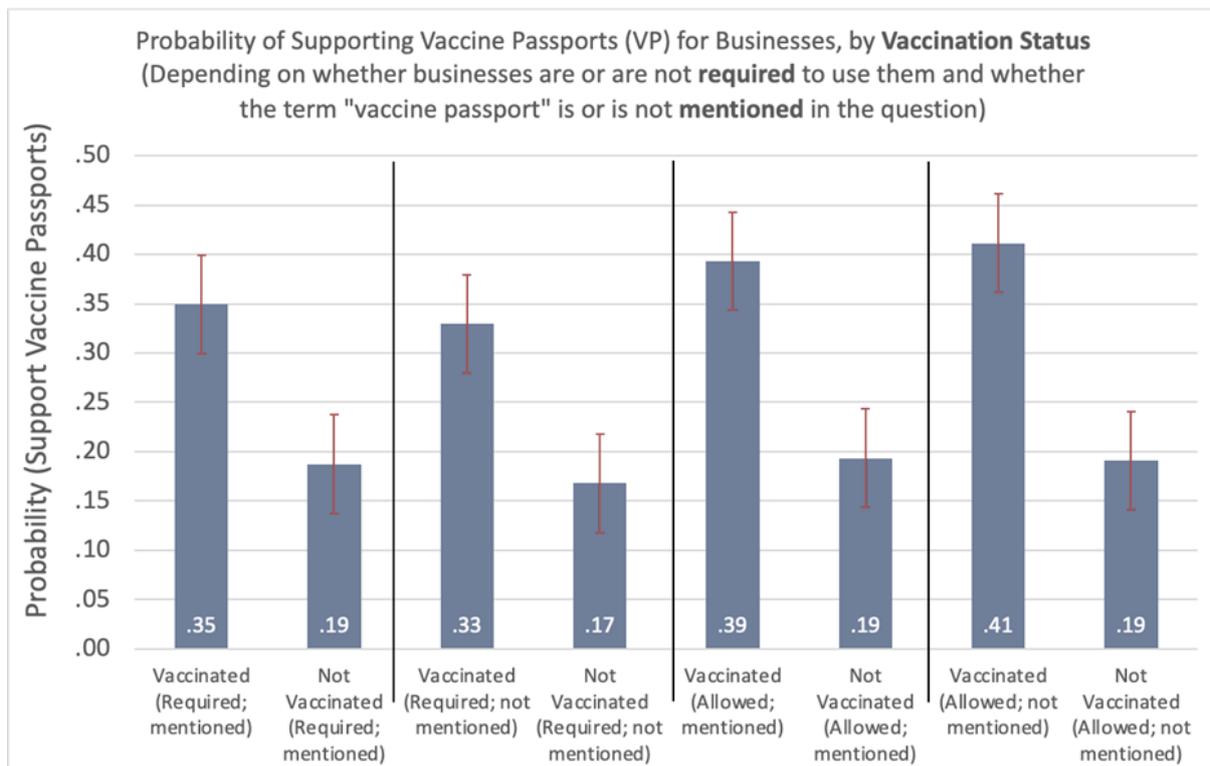


**FIGURE 2. Partisan Differences**

**Independents are even less supportive than Republicans (albeit not significantly so), especially in the “required” conditions**, where independent support varies from 11% if VPs are mentioned to 7% if they are not. In the “allowed” conditions, independent support is somewhat higher: 18% when VPs are mentioned; 15% when they are not, though these latter two percentages are not statistically distinct.

### Support for VPs by Vaccination Status

Perhaps predictably, **respondents who have been vaccinated are more supportive of vaccine mandates, regardless of question wording** (Figure 3). This gap varies from 16 to 23 percentage points and is statistically significant in every case. Vaccinated respondents register their highest support level (41%) when VPs are neither required nor mentioned, and their lowest support when they are required but not mentioned (33%). This 8 point gap is statistically significant. There are no significant differences among the unvaccinated, whose support for VPs is low and varies hardly at all across the four conditions (from 17% to 19%).



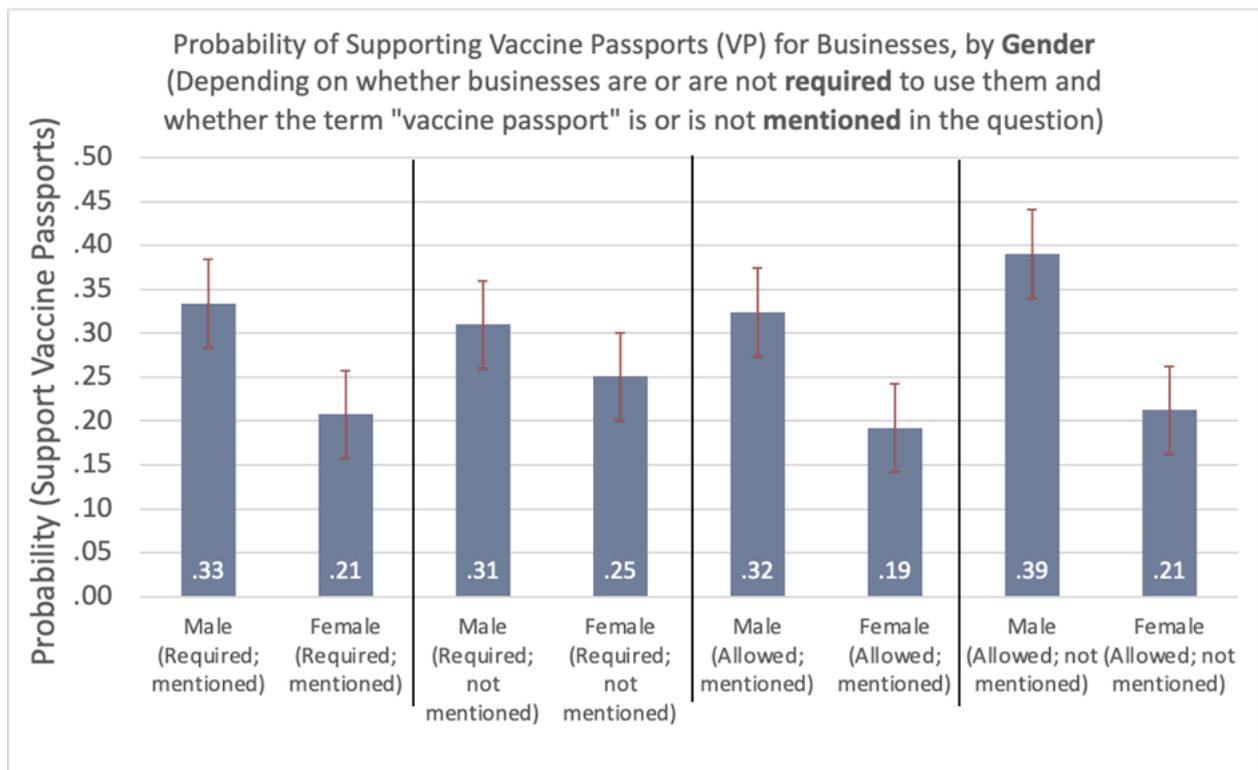
**FIGURE 3. Vaccination Status Differences**

## Support for VPs by Gender

The clearest pattern that emerges in Figure 4 is that **men are substantially more supportive of vaccine passports than women, regardless of the version of the question they received.**

Between 31% and 39% of men support VPs, with the lowest support for the “required” and “VPs not mentioned” condition and the highest for the “allowed” and “VPs not mentioned” condition. This last condition is statistically significantly higher than the other three conditions, indicating that **male respondents were most supportive of giving businesses the *option* to mandate VPs, but that their explicit mention reduced such support.**

Support among women ranges from a low of 19% (for the “allowed” and “VP mentioned” condition) to a high of 25% (for the “required” and “VP not mentioned” condition). This six point gap is statistically significant. The largest gender gap (18 points) emerges for the “allowed” and “VP not mentioned” condition, which was most popular among men, but not among women.



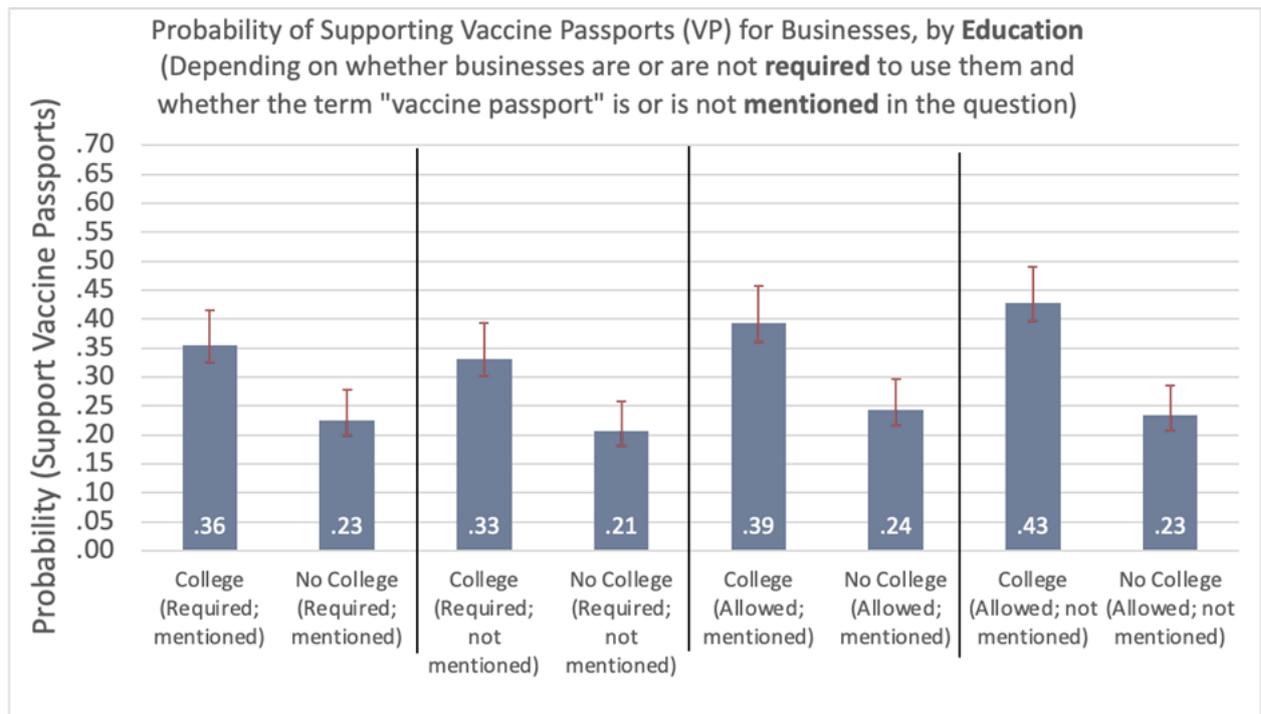
**FIGURE 4. Differences by Gender**

## Support for VPs by Education

Figure 5 indicates that **respondents with a college or graduate school education are substantially and significantly more supportive of businesses imposing vaccine mandates than their less educated counterparts, regardless of whether such mandates are required or allowed, or whether or not they are labeled as VPs.**

Among more highly educated respondents, support ranges from a low of 33% (“required” and “VP not mentioned”) to a high of 43% (“allowed” and “not mentioned”). **These respondents are more supportive when vaccine mandates are allowed rather than required, whether or not VPs are mentioned.**

Less educated respondents are much less supportive across the board, ranging from 21% to 24% across the four conditions. The differences in support across the four conditions are insignificant.



**FIGURE 5. Differences by Education**

## **APPENDIX: Additional demographic analyses by race/ethnicity and income**

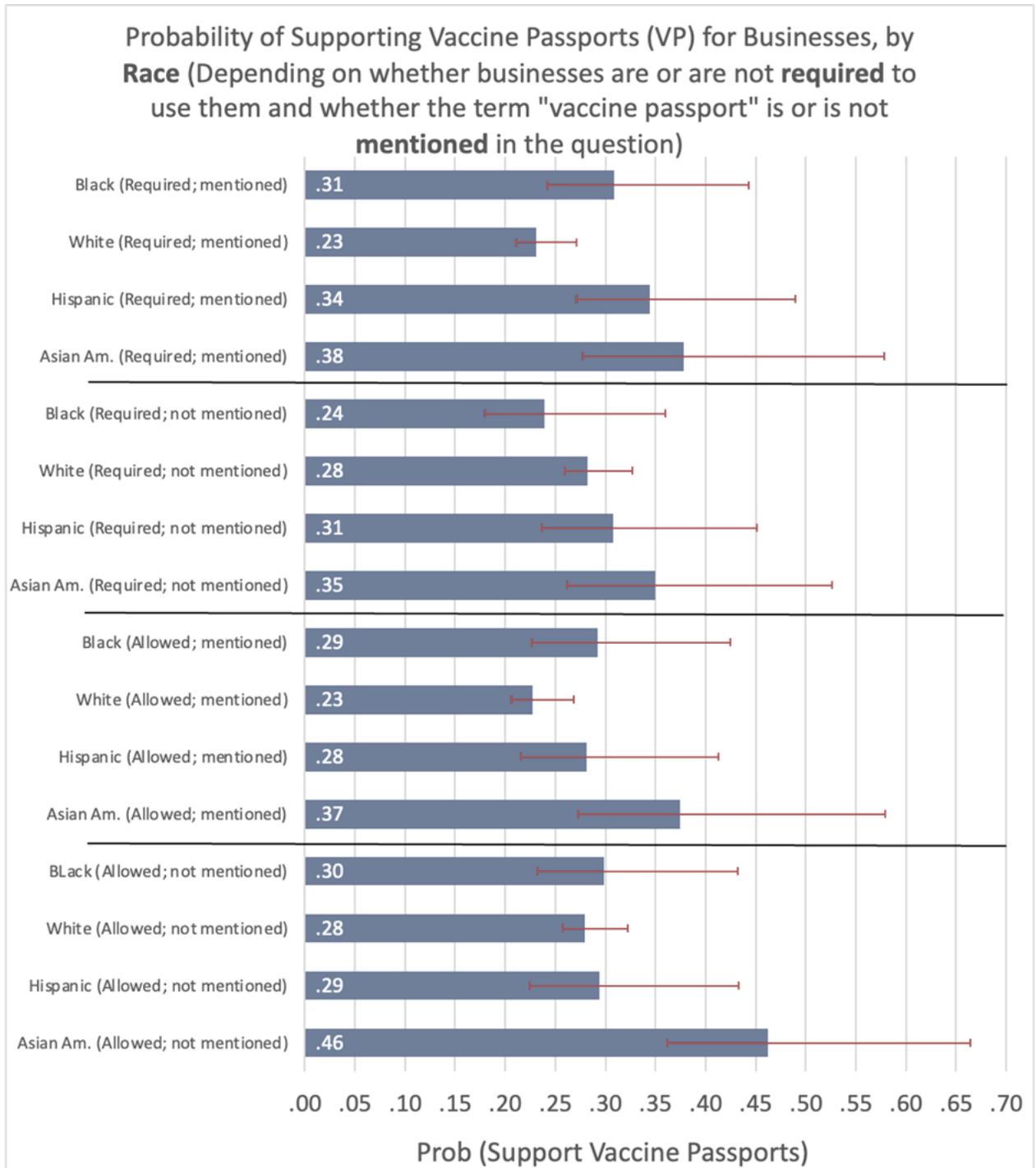
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### **Support for VPs by Race/Ethnicity**

Figure 6 shows substantial differences across racial/ethnic groups. Looking at the top panel, among respondents who received the “required” and “VP mentioned” version of the question, **white respondents are significantly less supportive of vaccine mandates than the other groups** (23%, compared to 31% among Black respondents, 34% among Hispanics and 38% among Asian Americans). Among Black respondents, in the “required” condition, mentioning VPs reduces support (24% without mentioning VPs vs. 31% with VPs mentioned). The opposite pattern, also significant, emerges for white respondents (28% without mentioning, 23% when mentioned).

Among Hispanics and Asians, mentioning VPs, or not, has no significant effect in the required condition. Interestingly, among whites in the “allowed” condition we find the identical (and significant) effect of mentioning VPs: 23% support if VPs are mentioned and 28% support if not mentioned. For the other three groups, mentioning VPs has no significant effect when the question asks if businesses should be allowed to require vaccines for admission (the “allowed” condition).

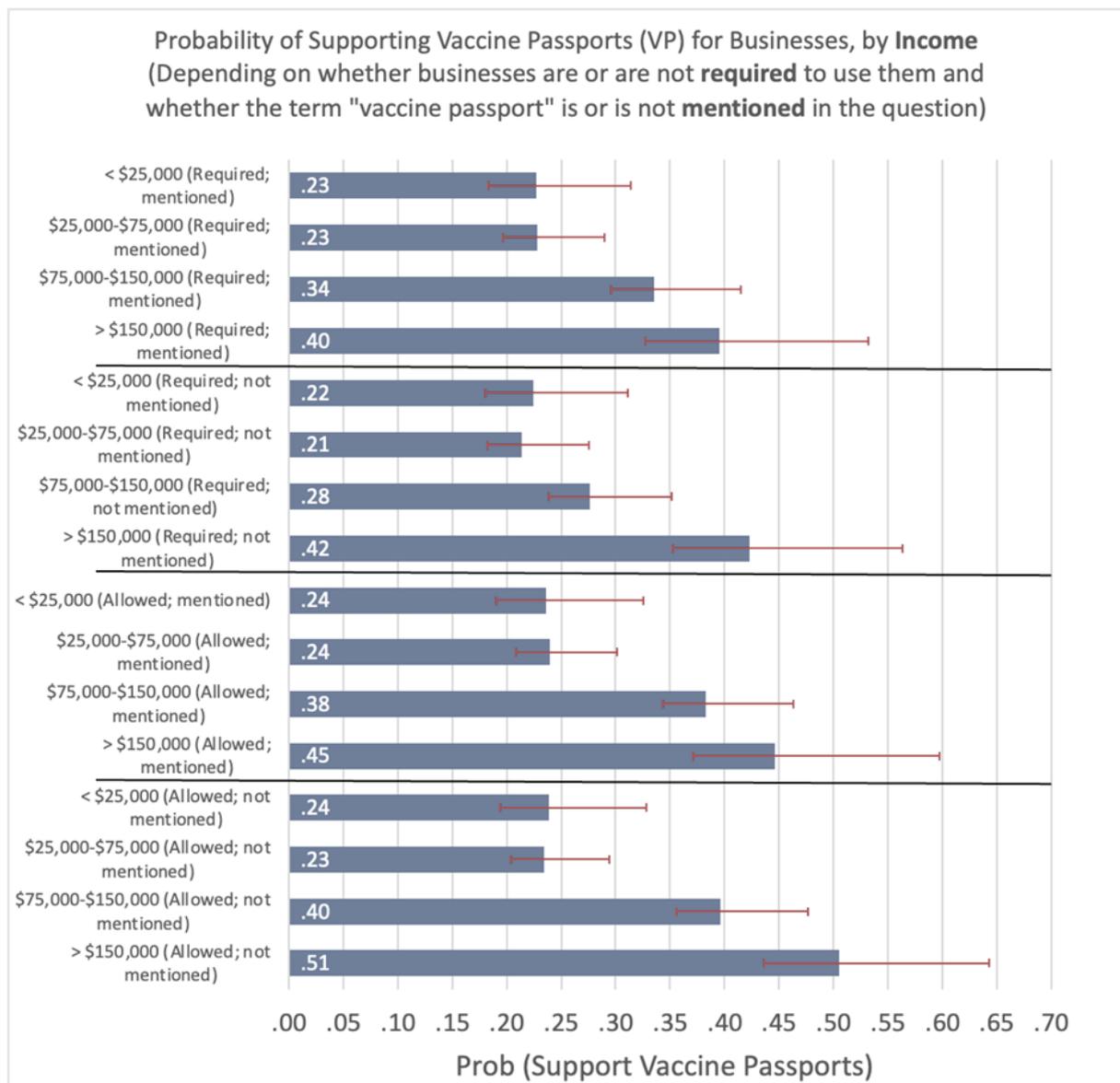
The effects of varying between the “required” and “allowed” conditions are generally insignificant, regardless of whether or not VPs are mentioned. The exception is among Asian Americans who, when VPs are mentioned, are 11 percentage points more likely (statistically significantly so) to support businesses requiring vaccines if they are “allowed” to initiate such mandates rather than required to do so (46% vs. 35% support). Also among Asian Americans, when VPs are allowed and not mentioned, the probability of approval is a statistically significant 8 points higher (46% vs. 38%) than when such mandates are required rather than allowed and mentioned.



**FIGURE 6. Differences by Race/Ethnicity**

## Support for VPs by Income

Figure 7 shows that **income is also strongly positively related to support for vaccine mandates for businesses**. Across all four conditions, we see a clear divide between the two lowest income groups (those earning less than \$75,000 per year) and the two highest (earning over \$75,000 per year), with the wealthiest respondents (earning over \$150,000 per year) substantially and significantly more supportive than other groups. **Among the wealthiest respondents, support is 11 points higher (statistically significantly so), when vaccine passports are neither mentioned nor required compared to when they are both mentioned and required (51% vs. 40%).** Additionally, when VPs are not mentioned, the 9 point gap between the allowed and required conditions (51% vs. 42%, respectively) is also statistically significant.



**FIGURE 7. Differences by Income**

Another noteworthy pattern emerges for respondents with incomes between \$75,000 and \$150,000. Here, support for businesses mandating vaccines when VPs are not explicitly mentioned is significantly higher, by 12 points, when they are allowed rather than required (40% vs. 28%). Among these same respondents, explicitly mentioning vaccine passports when they are presented as “required” is associated with a (significant) 6 point increase in support (34% vs. 28%).