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## Supermajority of voters want lawmakers to take action to address workplace sexual harassment

Findings from a national survey of voters  
July 31, 2019

In the nearly two years since #MeToo went viral, the power of individuals sharing their stories about sexual assault and harassment has changed the way that women are heard and believed and begun to reshape our institutions and culture. The country has been having important and necessary conversations about workplace sexual harassment -- including how legal protections have failed to protect working people in industries ranging from fast food to tech. Our laws are falling short of the task of shifting workplace culture and providing justice.

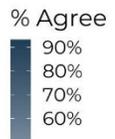
New survey data<sup>1</sup> show a supermajority of voters across party lines and sex want lawmakers to change the law to better address and prevent sexual harassment on the job. **A full two thirds of voters surveyed (66 percent) agree lawmakers must take action to address workplace sexual harassment.**

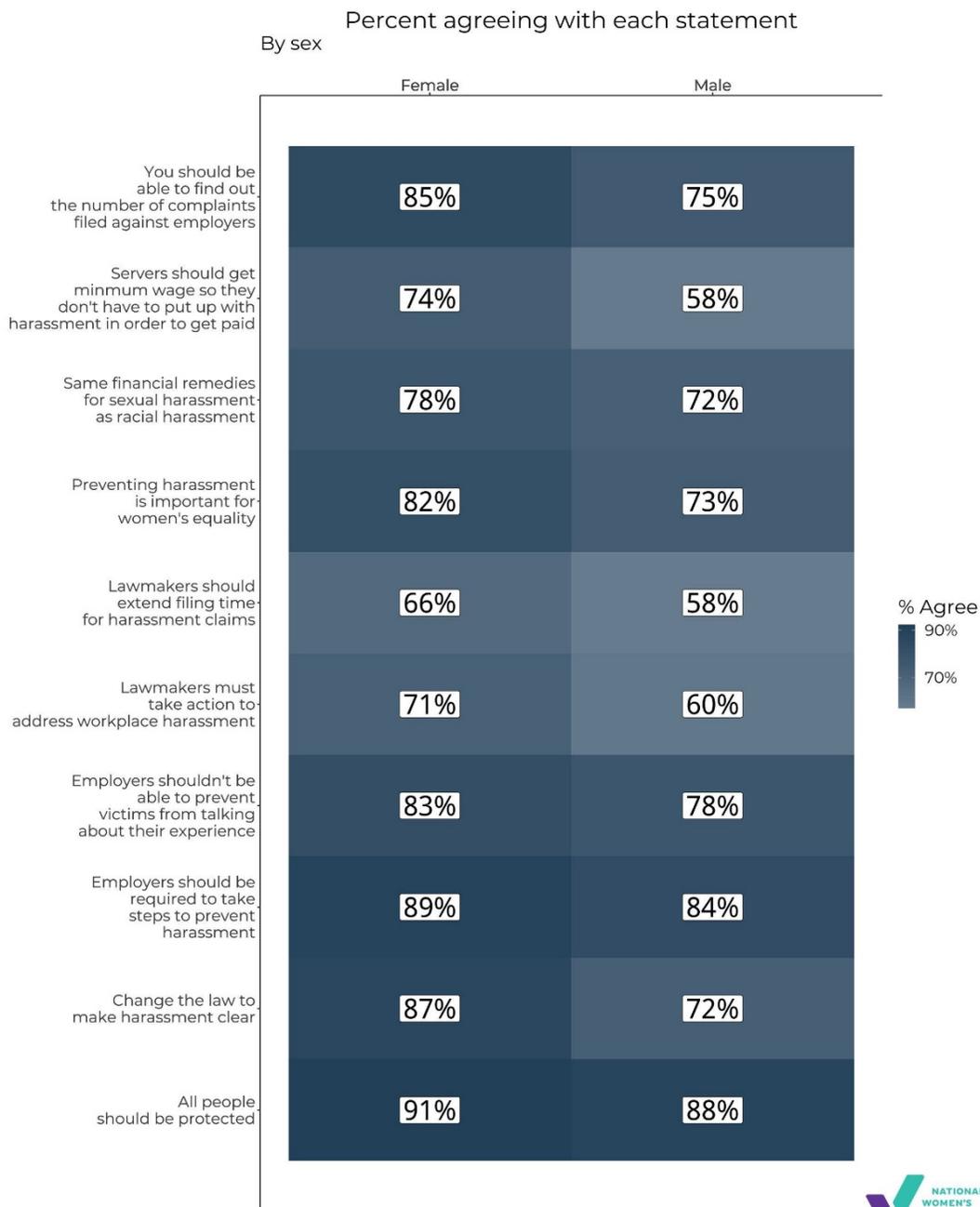
**The survey reveals strong—and in many instances overwhelming—support across party lines and sex for a number of specific reforms to strengthen workplace sexual harassment law,** including: ensuring *all* workers are protected from sexual harassment (90 percent); ending employer-imposed secrecy about sexual harassment (80 percent); ensuring that tipped workers are not paid a lower minimum wage by their employers than other workers (66 percent); making it easier for workers to come forward to report sexual harassment (62 percent), seek justice for egregious conduct that constitutes harassment (80 percent), and be made whole for the harm they have suffered (75 percent); and requiring employers to take steps to prevent sexual harassment (87 percent).

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<sup>1</sup> The National Women's Law Center commissioned YouGov to conduct public opinion research to understand voters' policy preferences and attitudes towards workplace sexual harassment. The survey items were included in YouGov's biweekly registered voter omnibus. The survey is based on 1,014 interviews conducted by YouGov on the internet of self-identified registered voters between June 27 and June 30, 2019. The sample was weighted according to sex, age, race, education, Census region, and 2016 Presidential vote choice. Respondents self-identified their sex as either male or female. Respondents were selected from YouGov's panel to be representative of registered voters. The weights range from 0.2 to 6 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.7.

Percent agreeing with each statement  
By party identification





## KEY FINDINGS

### 1. Voters overwhelmingly agree that all people, no matter where they work, should be protected from sexual harassment (90 percent agree).

Many working people are not protected under our current federal laws, such as individuals in workplaces with fewer than 15 employees (such as domestic workers), independent contractors, many gig economy workers, unpaid interns, and others.

Voters' support for protecting all workers is consistent among women and men (91 percent of women, 88 percent of men). There is also strong bipartisan consensus on the issue, with 91 percent of Democrats agreeing, 88 percent of Republicans, and 92 percent of Independents.

**2. An overwhelming majority of voters believe that preventing and addressing sexual harassment is important for women's equality in the workplace (78 percent agree).**

This support cuts across sex (82 percent of women, 73 percent of men). It also cuts across party lines with 88 percent of Democrats agreeing, 66 percent of Republicans, and 78 percent of Independents.

**3. Critically, voters recognize that protecting workers and ensuring equality means changing the law. A strong majority of voters surveyed believe lawmakers should take action to address workplace sexual harassment (66 percent agree).**

Support for lawmakers taking action cuts across sex (71 percent of women, 60 percent of men). Majority support also cuts across party, with 81 percent of Democrats agreeing, 51 percent of Republicans, and 61 percent of Independents.

**4. There is overwhelming voter support by party and sex for lawmakers to end employer-imposed secrecy around sexual harassment that helps keep it in the shadows.**

Employers and harassers use a variety of legal tools, like nondisclosure agreements and forced arbitration, in order to limit how, when, why, and to whom a worker can disclose details about harassment. This secrecy can isolate victims, shield serial predators from accountability, and allow harassment to persist unchecked at a company.

- **80 percent of voters surveyed agree that employers shouldn't be able to prevent victims of sexual harassment from talking about their experience.** This was consistent across sex (83 percent of women, 78 percent of men) and party, with 80 percent of Democrats agreeing, 78 percent of Republicans, and 83 percent of Independents.
- **Similarly, 80 percent of voters surveyed agree that workers should be able to find out the number of sexual harassment complaints filed against an employer.** This was consistent across sex (85 percent of women, 75 percent of men) and party, with 84 percent of Democrats agreeing, 76 percent of Republicans, and 79 percent of Independents.

**5. There is a strong bipartisan consensus in support of one fair wage, a policy change that would reduce vulnerability of tipped workers -- the majority of whom are women -- to sexual harassment (66 percent agree).**

Sixty-six percent of voters surveyed, including 78 percent of Democrats, 56 percent of Republicans, and 63 percent of Independents, agree that tipped workers should be paid at least the same minimum wage as other workers, so they don't have to put up with sexual harassment from customers in order to get paid. Similarly, 74 percent of women and 58 percent of men agree with this change.

**6. Voters strongly believe legislators should change the law to make it easier for workers who experience sexual harassment to report harassment and obtain justice.**

- **There is overwhelming support across party lines and sex for changing the law to make clear that a broad spectrum of egregious behavior is sexual harassment (80 percent agree).** A number of lower court decisions have interpreted the relevant legal standard very narrowly, so that conduct most people would find egregious is not considered sexual harassment. Support for changing the law on this issue cuts across sex (87 percent of women, 72 percent of men). It also cuts across party lines, with 84 percent of Democrats agreeing, 76 percent of Republicans, and 78 percent of Independents.
- **Voters believe lawmakers should extend the very short time limits -- as little as six months in many states -- to file a sexual harassment claim (62 percent agree).** Extending the time limits has bipartisan support, with 72 percent of Democrats agreeing, 56 percent of Republicans, and 58 percent of Independents. Support was also consistent by sex, with 66 percent of women and 58 percent of men agreeing that time limits should be extended.
- **Voters strongly believe that victims of workplace sexual harassment should be able to access the same financial remedies as those who experience racial harassment (75 percent agree).** Right now, individuals who win a sexual harassment lawsuit are rarely made whole for the harms they have suffered, because the law caps the damages they can recover based on the size of their employer. Support for access to the same remedies in racial and sexual harassment cases extends across sex (78 percent of women, 72 percent of men) and party, with 82 percent of Democrats agreeing, 67 percent of Republicans, and 74 percent of Independents.

**7. There is overwhelming support for requiring employers to take steps to prevent workers from being sexually harassed on the job (87 percent agree).**

Employers currently aren't required by federal law to take steps to prevent sexual harassment, and as a result, sexual harassment persists in every industry. Voluntary human resources or diversity initiatives alone cannot fix the problem. Employers must be required to take steps to prevent sexual harassment, and that means changing the law.

Voters' support for requiring employers to take action is consistent among men and women (89 percent of women, 84 percent of men). There is also strong bipartisan consensus on the issue, with 89 percent of Democrats agreeing, 82 percent of Republicans, and 89 percent of Independents.

(Poll questions and answers on the next page)

Sample                    Online sample of 1,014 voters fielded 6/27/19-6/30/19  
Margin of Error        ±3.6%

1. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: Lawmakers must take action to address workplace sexual harassment

Strongly agree .....	42%
Somewhat agree .....	24%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	15%
Somewhat disagree .....	9%
Strongly disagree .....	8%
Don’t know .....	3%

2. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: Preventing and addressing sexual harassment is important for women’s equality in the workplace

Strongly agree .....	50%
Somewhat agree .....	28%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	11%
Somewhat disagree .....	5%
Strongly disagree .....	4%
Don’t know .....	2%

3. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: All people, no matter where they work, should be protected from sexual harassment

Strongly agree .....	71%
Somewhat agree .....	19%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	6%
Somewhat disagree .....	1%
Strongly disagree .....	2%
Don’t know .....	1%

4. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: People who get tips, like servers, should be paid at least the same minimum wage as other workers, so that they don’t feel like they have to put up with sexual harassment from customers in order to get paid

Strongly agree .....	43%
Somewhat agree .....	24%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	12%
Somewhat disagree .....	10%
Strongly disagree .....	9%
Don’t know .....	4%

5. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: Employers should be required to take steps to prevent workers from being sexually harassed on the job

Strongly agree .....	65%
Somewhat agree .....	22%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	7%
Somewhat disagree .....	3%
Strongly disagree .....	1%
Don’t know .....	3%

6. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: Employers shouldn’t be able to prevent a victim of sexual harassment from talking about his or her experience

Strongly agree .....	64%
Somewhat agree .....	16%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	8%
Somewhat disagree .....	4%
Strongly disagree .....	4%
Don’t know .....	4%

7. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: You should be able to find out the number of sexual harassment complaints filed against an employer

Strongly agree .....	58%
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Somewhat agree .....	23%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	10%
Somewhat disagree .....	3%
Strongly disagree .....	2%
Don’t know .....	5%

8. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: Lawmakers should extend the very short time limits that workers currently have – as little as six months in many states – to file a sexual harassment legal claim

Strongly agree .....	42%
Somewhat agree .....	21%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	15%
Somewhat disagree .....	10%
Strongly disagree .....	8%
Don’t know .....	5%

9. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: People who experience sexual harassment at work should be able to access the same financial remedies as people who experience racial harassment at work

Strongly agree .....	51%
Somewhat agree .....	24%
Neither agree nor disagree .....	12%
Somewhat disagree .....	6%
Strongly disagree .....	2%
Don’t know .....	5%

10. For the following statements, please report whether you agree or disagree, are unsure, or if you have no opinion: Some courts have said that it wasn’t sexual harassment when a male worker forced his hand under a female co-worker’s sweater and fondled her breast because it only happened once, or when a worker repeatedly made sexual comments to a co-worker and suggested she be spanked, because it wasn’t serious enough. Lawmakers should change the law to make it clear that this kind of behavior is sexual harassment.

Strongly agree .....	60%
Somewhat agree .....	20%

Neither agree nor disagree .....	9%
Somewhat disagree .....	4%
Strongly disagree .....	3%
Don't know .....	5%

This survey is based on 1,014 interviews conducted by YouGov on the internet of self-identified voters. The sample was weighted according to gender, age, race, education, Census region, and 2016 Presidential vote choice. Respondents were selected from YouGov's panel to be representative of registered voters. The weights range from 0.2 to 6 with a mean of 1 and a standard deviation of 0.7.

The *margin of error* (a 95% confidence interval) for a sample percentage  $p$  based upon the entire sample is approximately 3.6%. It is calculated using the formula

$$\hat{p} \pm 100 \times \sqrt{\frac{1 + CV^2}{n}}$$

where CV is the coefficient of variation of the sample weights and  $n$  is the sample size used to compute the proportion. This is a measure of sampling error (the average of all estimates obtained using the same sample selection and weighting procedures repeatedly). The sample estimate should differ from its expected value by less than margin of error in 95 percent of all samples. It does not reflect non-sampling errors, including potential selection bias in panel participation or in response to a particular survey.