COVID-19 and the 2020 Election

PREPARING TO VOTE IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

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The Problem

What steps should states and localities take now for the likelihood that sizeable shares of the population might not be able to vote safely in 2020 in the same way as recent elections?
The Constraints

- Time
- Money
- People*
- Resources/Materials*
- Politics/Polarization/Partisanship
- Structural Impediments
  - Federalism/decentralization/uneven geographic distribution of resources/expertise
  - Contracting/procurement process*
  - Existing law/regulations
- Unpredictability

*Same forces making business difficult in general during pandemic, also make election preparation difficult.
The Solutions

- Move to vote by mail where possible.
- Retrofit as many polling places as possible to avoid risk to voters and poll workers.

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{This is not as easy as people think.} \\
\text{These options represent points on a continuum, not a dichotomous choice.} \\
\text{Almost all jurisdictions will and should have some mix of the two.}
\end{align*} \]
Trends in the Way Americans Vote

![Graph showing trends in voting methods from 2004 to 2016. The graph indicates an increase in the percent of absentee ballots and a decrease in the percent of vote by mail and early vote over time.](image-url)
The Vote By Mail Landscape

Source: National Vote-at-Home Institute, https://www.voteathome.org/
### Preparing for an Election Under Pandemic Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Registered Voters (2018)</th>
<th>Mail Ballots Returned as Percent of Turnout (2018)</th>
<th>Mail Ballots Request Available Without an Excuse</th>
<th>Online Absentee Ballot Returns Available in at Least Some Counties</th>
<th>Vote Centers in Person Early or Absentee Voting</th>
<th>Online Voter Registration</th>
<th>Same Day Registration</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>2,748,232</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>4,841,431</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>3,953,613</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>UT</td>
<td>1,658,457</td>
<td>90%</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>4,276,891</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>706,173</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>25,167,218</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>NM</td>
<td>1,261,639</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>HI</td>
<td>756,751</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>4,500,196</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>14,128,722</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<td>WY</td>
<td>283,941</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>N/A**</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>1,057,967</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>594,453</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<td>MI</td>
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<td>25%</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td>3,422,515</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>2,193,813</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>NE</td>
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<td>24%</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>OH</td>
<td>8,070,917</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>1,835,473</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>7,095,209</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>No Implement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>1,786,840</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Not Implemented</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>TN</td>
<td>4,163,359</td>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
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<tr>
<td>KY</td>
<td>3,402,905</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Not Implemented</td>
<td>Vote by Mail*</td>
<td>No Implement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brennan Center
Moving to Vote-By-Mail

- Procedures:
  - Change legal rules/deadlines predicated on polling place balloting
  - Change all notifications on websites

- Procurement:
  - Ballot paper, envelopes
  - Expanded automation equipment for vote-by-mail processes (sorters, scanners, signature verification software)
  - Protective equipment
  - Expanded warehouse space to process materials under social distancing conditions
  - Ballot drop-off boxes

- People:
  - Hire temporary staff
  - Train staff on new equipment and processes

Vote-by-Mail Processes

Pre-Election Preparations
- Adjust Legal Rules & Deadlines Predicated on In-Person Voting
- Site Expanded Facilities
- Site Ballot Drop-Boxes
- Candidate Certification
- Estimate Numbers of Voters & Required Materials

Voter Registration / Ballot Application
- Design/Update Online Registration
- Distribute Vote-by-Mail Request Forms
- Clean Voter Address Lists
- Know which Ballot, in which Language, goes to which Voter

Outbound Ballots
- Ballot Design
- Ballot Delivery
- Election Mail Coordination with USPS
  - Ballot Tracking
  - Coordinate Assistance for Limited English Proficiency Voters and Voters with Disabilities
  - Contact Voters with Undeliverable Ballots

Inbound Ballot Processing
- Ballot Drop-Box Collection
- USPS Ballot Pickup
- Coordination with Neighboring Counties for Wayward Ballot Delivery
- Ballot Envelope Sorting
- Ballot Envelope Signature Scanning

Signature Verification & Ballot Count
- Signature Comparisons
- Mismatched Signature Notification
- Cure Procedures
- Envelope Extraction
- Ballot Tally
- Ballot Status Reporting to Voters
- Results Publication
- Risk-limiting audits

Procurement & Staffing
- Hiring Temporary Staff
- Expanded Warehouse / Processing Facilities
- Website Design Services
- Expanded Cyberprotection Services
- Vote-by-Mail Request Materials
- Voter Signature Database Software
- Postage Costs
- Ballot Materials & Design Services
- Ballot Drop-Boxes
- Language Translation Services
- Staff Retraining
- Ballot Materials & Design Services
- Hiring Temporary Staff
- VBM Processing
  - Automated Envelope Sorters & Scanners
  - Expanded Processing Facilities
  - Protective & Sanitation Equipment
- Signature Verification Technology
- Automated Envelope Extractors
- Automated Ballot Scanners
- Vote Tally Software
- Website Design Services
- Expanded Cyberprotection Services
- Vote-by-Mail Request Materials
- Voter Signature Database Software
- Postage Costs
- Ballot Materials & Design Services
- Ballot Drop-Boxes
- Language Translation Services
- Staff Retraining
- Ballot Materials & Design Services
- Hiring Temporary Staff
- VBM Processing
  - Automated Envelope Sorters & Scanners
  - Expanded Processing Facilities
  - Protective & Sanitation Equipment
- Signature Verification Technology
- Automated Envelope Extractors
- Automated Ballot Scanners
- Vote Tally Software

Stanford University
Concerns with Vote By Mail

• Fraud
  • Very rare, but more common than in-person fraud

• Disenfranchisement
  • Failure to receive ballots
  • Errors in casting ballots
  • Errors in rejecting ballots

• Discrimination
  • Older, whiter, more educated voters more likely to navigate vote by mail
  • Democrats more likely to use as well

• Perception of wrongdoing
• Blue shift
Need for Safe Polling Places, in Addition to Mail

- Voters, in general, **reluctant to change** (especially far in advance of election)

- Mail voting requires **training and education** over time

- **Voters with disabilities**, in particular, face challenges with mail

- All major election admin changes need one election to work out problems.
Challenges to Creating Safe Polling Places

• People
  • Poll workers = older, more at risk
  • Need for specialized training
  • Unpredictable labor force

• Places
  • Inevitable consolidation for cost-saving with increased mail
  • Fewer facilities willing and suitable to be polling places

• Things
  • Must preserve functionality while limiting risk of contagion.
  • Supply chain issues
What is to be done?

• **Education/Outreach** -- Robust public education efforts to inform voters and poll workers of changes.

• **Lengthen voting period** – Avoid surges/lines; promote early voting, appointment voting, vote centers.

• **Reform Check in and Voter Verification Process** - “Take a number” instead of wait in line, PPE for Poll workers, sterilize pens for sign-in.

• **Voting with Physical Distance** – spacious facilities, curbside voting, pre-voting with ballot drop off.

• **Casting Ballots** – Limit physical contact with machines and surfaces, provide disposable or disinfected supplies.
Best Practices for COVID-19

Best Practices for Cleaning & Disinfecting Equipment

Caution
For the ExpressVote XL, the touch screen manufacturer recommends disinfectants do NOT touch the black sensor tracks along the edges of the screen. Exposing the sensors to disinfectants may damage the entire touch screen.

Instead, focus cleaning on the areas where voters come in contact with the touch screen.

Important
Be careful not to scratch touch screens.

Warning

- Do NOT use full-strength, harsh detergents, liquid cleaners, aerosols, abrasive pads, scouring powders, or solvents, such as benzene, unless otherwise noted. Disinfectant sprays, such as Lysol, are not permitted and will damage the touch screen.
- Avoid highly concentrated solutions (alcohol exceeding 70%, bleach or ammonia) as these may cause discoloration.
- Liquids should never be applied directly to the unit.
- Do not soak the cloth with solution so that moisture drips or lingers on the external surface.

Caution
Prolonged exposure to alcohol will disinfect the equipment, but may remove the sheen on plastic surfaces. This will not effect the structural integrity of the equipment.

Important
Do not allow cleaning solutions to come in contact with ballot stock.

Important
ES&S cannot make a determination of the effectiveness of a given disinfectant product contained herein in fighting pathogens, such as COVID-19. Please refer to federal and local public health authority’s guidance on how to stay safe from potential infection.
Recommendations for Election Polling Locations

Interim guidance to prevent spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Updated March 27, 2020

Actions for elections officials in advance of election day

- Encourage voters to use voting methods that minimize direct contact with other people and reduce crowd size at polling stations.
  - Encourage mail-in methods of voting if allowed in the jurisdiction.
  - Encourage early voting, where voter crowds may be smaller throughout the day. This minimizes the number of individuals a voter may come in contact with.
  - Encourage drive-up voting for eligible voters if allowed in the jurisdiction.
  - Encourage voters planning to vote in-person on election day to arrive at off-peak times. For example, if voter crowds are lighter mid-morning, advertise that in advance to the community.
  - Encourage relocating polling places from nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and senior living residences, to minimize COVID-19 exposure among older individuals and those with chronic medical conditions.
  - Consider additional social distancing and other measures to protect these individuals during voting.
South Korea

Voting with Coronavirus

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, South Korea is proceeding with its national election on April 15. Confirmed patients vote by mail, while those in self-quarantine can do so after the general polls close.

People with coronavirus can vote by mail.

People without symptoms and family members of confirmed sick people are allowed to leave quarantine to vote.

1. Workers spray a disinfectant in the polling station.
2. Door handles and handrails are cleaned and windows opened.
3. Voters must stand at tape-marked spots spaced 1 meter apart.
4. When voters arrive, their temperature is checked.
5. Voters are first given hand sanitizer, then gloves.
6. Voters submit an ID to the poll worker and then pull down their mask to verify their identity and then sign. Normally, verification is done with a fingerprint. A ballot is printed.
7. Voters take the ballot to the voting booth, make their selections, and drop the ballot in a box.
8. Voters discard their gloves as they leave.

Source: South Korean government
The Most Important Resource: Time

• More time to vote
• More time to administer election
• More time to count votes
• More time to announce results…

Judge signals he will expand voting but not delay Wisconsin's election amid coronavirus outbreak
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cambridge, Massachusetts & Stanford, California

April 8, 2020

Launch of Stanford-MIT Project on a Healthy Election

HealthyElection.Org

Stanford University