The Virus and the Vote: COVID-19 and the 2020 Election

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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 Solutions

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

- *Not so easy.*
- *Continuum, not choice.*
- *Almost all jurisdictions will and should have some mix of the two.*
The Constraints

- Time & Money
- People, Places, and Things
- Structural Impediments
  - Decentralization
  - Contracting/procurement process
  - Ill-fitted law/regulations
- Politics/Polarization/Partisanship
- Unpredictability
Trends in the Way Americans Vote
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 (2020)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>2,748,232</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>4,841,431</td>
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<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>3,953,613</td>
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<tr>
<td>UT</td>
<td>1,658,457</td>
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<td>AZ</td>
<td>4,276,891</td>
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<td>MT</td>
<td>706,173</td>
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<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>25,167,218</td>
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<td>NM</td>
<td>1,261,639</td>
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<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>756,751</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>4,590,196</td>
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<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>14,126,722</td>
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<td>WY</td>
<td>283,941</td>
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<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>N/A**</td>
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<td>ME</td>
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<td>OH</td>
<td>8,070,917</td>
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<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>1,835,473</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Vote by Mail
- **Vote by Mail**: All voters can vote by mail on or before election day.
- **Vote by Mail**: At least one county offers mail-in voting.
- **Vote by Mail**: Postal ballots requested in writing.
- **Vote by Mail**: Available online.
- **Vote by Mail**: Available in-person.
- **Vote by Mail**: Accepted at the polls.
- **Vote by Mail**: Accepted on election day.
- **Vote by Mail**: Accepted for early voting.
- **Vote by Mail**: Accepted during regular registration.

### In-Person Early or Absentee Voting
- **In-Person Early or Absentee Voting**: Available in-person.
- **In-Person Early or Absentee Voting**: Available absentee.
- **In-Person Early or Absentee Voting**: Available in-person.
- **In-Person Early or Absentee Voting**: Available absentee.

### Online Voter Registration
- **Online Voter Registration**: Available online.
- **Online Voter Registration**: Accepted in-person.
- **Online Voter Registration**: Accepted during regular registration.

### Same Day Registration
- **Same Day Registration**: Accepted in-person.
- **Same Day Registration**: Accepted during regular registration.

### Source: Brennan Center
Challenges with Vote By Mail

- Fraud and Perception of Fraud
- Disenfranchisement and Bias
  - Bias in absentee participation
    - Who votes absentee?
    - Who needs/wants a polling place?
      - Voters reluctant to change
      - Distrust of Mail
      - Voters with Disabilities
      - Same Day Registrants
      - Failsafe
    - Lost votes – Late, challenged, errors
Challenges to Creating Safe Polling Places

- **People**
  Older people account for large shares of poll workers and voters in U.S. general elections

- **Places**

- **Things**

National Guard has delivered PPE to Iowa poll workers

Stanford University
What is to be done?

- **Education/Outreach**
  - Voter education
  - Pollworker Recruitment
- **Temporal and Physical Spacing**
- **Reimagine polling places**
  -社ocially distant voting – curbside, arena, “Take a number”
  - Sterilization/Disinfectant/PPE
- **All hands on deck!**
  - Corporate role
  - Intergovernmental coordination (esp. USPS)
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.

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.

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

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

Patrick Marley, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel  Published 10:28 a.m. CT April 1, 2020 | Updated 11:25 a.m. CT April 1, 2020
Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project

HealthyElections.Org
AND AWAY WE GO...
COVID-19 and the 2020 Election

Preparing to Vote in the Midst of a Pandemic

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