

## Making Sense of...The Vote-by-Mail Conversation

### Overview:

- Among the many disruptions caused by the coronavirus crisis, questions are now being raised about the safety and feasibility of 2020 voting processes. One proposed solution is the expansion of vote-by-mail options for voters.
- Two-thirds of states in the U.S. allow any qualified voter to vote absentee without an excuse, and one-third of states require an excuse before voters can vote via a mail-in absentee ballot. Five states currently conduct all elections entirely by mail (CO, HI, OR, WA, & UT).
- Due to public health concerns about the transmission risk of groups congregating during the coronavirus pandemic, on March 13th, 2020, Louisiana postponed its presidential primary. In total as of April 2020, [sixteen states and Puerto Rico have changed their presidential primaries from their previously scheduled dates](#). Of those, some states plan to run their elections almost entirely by mail.
- On March 18th, 2020, Senators Amy Klobuchar and Ron Wyden introduced the Natural Disaster and Emergency Ballot Act of 2020 which would expand early in-person voting to 20 days, standardize voter registration deadlines by mail and online, and expand no-excuse absentee vote-by-mail to all states.
- [The Supreme Court, in a 5-4 ruling](#), refused to extend the deadline for absentee voting for the April 7th elections in Wisconsin. As of April 6<sup>th</sup>, ~1.2 million absentee ballots were sent to voters in WI, [almost six times the amount of absentee ballots cast in WI's 2016 presidential primary](#). Citizens voting in-person in Wisconsin experienced long lines as polling places in cities such as Milwaukee were reduced from 180 to 5 due to a decrease in available poll workers.

### Readings:

- [Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options](#), National Conference on State Legislatures
- [Recommendations for Election Polling Locations](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Voting in Wisconsin During a Pandemic: Lines, Masks and Plenty of Fear](#), The New York Times
- [Voting by Mail Will Save the 2020 Election](#), The New York Times
- ["With Unprecedented Disruptions From Coronavirus, Klobuchar and Wyden Introduce Bill to Ensure Americans are Still Able to Vote"](#), Senator Amy Klobuchar
- ["Coronavirus could normalize voting by mail. That will create other problems"](#), Washington Post
- [Estimated Costs of Covid-19 Election Resiliency Measures](#), Brennan Center for Justice
- [New salvo in expanding political fight over vote-by-mail as Wisconsin results come in](#), Fox News

### Questions for discussion:

- Moving towards a system in which more people vote-by-mail may put a large strain on many election offices. On the state and local level, what resources are needed to expand vote-by-mail operations?
- Could a transition towards a vote-by-mail system exclude groups of voters? If so, who might be excluded? What steps could be taken to make sure those voters are included?
- Some college students, many of whom are already displaced, may also be new to the voting process and confused by the deadlines and voting procedures that are in flux due to the COVID-19 pandemic. How can colleges and universities make sure students receive the information they need to vote by mail?
- Should the federal government force state and local election officials to expand access to vote-by-mail for upcoming elections in 2020?
- If expansive changes are implemented, should they cease at the end of the pandemic or continue to be in place for future elections?