



Chapter 5: Voting in a Pandemic

The pandemic has affected US voting processes ahead of the 2020 election. Learn how voting methods changed for primary and local elections thus far, how regulations impact different communities, and what preparations are in place to ensure the integrity and safety of the November election.

Conversation Questions

1. What responsibilities do voters, local election boards, state legislatures and/or the Federal Government have in retaining voter integrity and safety in a pandemic?
2. What processes must be considered for drastically increasing vote-by-mail?
3. How does the media influence voter attitudes about election processes?

Key Definitions (adapted from *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*)

- *Absentee voting* – alternative to in-person voting, also known as vote-by-mail; processes vary by state for applying, receiving, and submitting valid absentee ballots
- *Universal vote-by-mail* – election officials mail ballots to all registered voters ahead of the election; only provided in six states (Utah, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Hawaii, California), and Washington, D.C.
- *Gerrymandering* – the practice of dividing or arranging a territorial unit into election districts in a way that gives one political party an unfair advantage in elections; form of voter suppression
- *Voter ID law* – a law requiring a voter to provide proof of their identity as a registered voter before casting a ballot; varies state by state
- *Voter suppression* - tactics by local or state legislatures to prevent voting; includes reducing the number of polling places, voter ID laws, purging voter rolls, voter registration restrictions, lack of early voting options

Read

“Will Americans Lose Their Right to Vote in the Pandemic?” by Emily Bazelon for *The New York Times Magazine*





<https://nyti.ms/32DvHac>

This article recounts measures taken for the Wisconsin primary and local election in April and identifies opportunities and obstacles in addressing the November national general election in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Why does voting during the pandemic seem to be going badly in so many places?” by Amber Phillips for *The Washington Post*

<https://wapo.st/2OKVMMk>

With insights from election experts, Amber Phillips offers an analysis of recent primary elections in Georgia, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Nevada and concludes with potential steps states can take now to prepare for the general election.

“Voter Suppression Is Still One of the Greatest Obstacles to a More Just America” by Rev. Jesse L. Jackson and David Daley for *Time*

<https://bit.ly/2ZNS4It>

Authors Jackson and Daley suggest a citizen movement, much like the one we are seeing with current protests during the pandemic, is needed to protect voting rights and, as a result, our democracy.

“Are American elections pandemic-proof? A state-by-state scorecard” by Elaine Kamarck, Yousef Ibreak, Amanda Powers, and Chris Stewart for *Brookings*

<https://brook.gs/2OJPdKd>

Based on survey results of all fifty states and D.C., authors assessed and graded states by their readiness to vote from home during the pandemic.

“In 2013 the supreme court gutted voting rights – how has it changed the US?” by Sam Levine and Ankita Rao for *The Guardian*

<https://bit.ly/3jpEPW8>

The 2013 *Shelby County v Holder* Supreme Court decision removed a key clause from the 1965 Voting Rights Act that protected Black, Latinx, and other marginalized communities





from voter disenfranchisement. Now, the impact of this decision is inflating due to COVID-19.

“COVID-19 Changed How We Vote. It Could Also Change Who Votes.” by Michael Wines for *The New York Times Magazine*

<https://nyti.ms/3jmEmE0>

New voter registration has declined during the pandemic due to social distancing requirements and may reduce the overall voter outcome, as well as exclude potential new voters like high school graduates, people who move, and people who have been purged from the voter registration rolls.

Watch

“Election 2020: Longer voting lines may be a sign of voter suppression” from *USA Today*

<https://bit.ly/2CvcPzH>

From Just the Facts series, this quick video provides a visual of modern voter suppression in the form of longer lines in BIPOC communities following the 2013 Supreme Court decision that removed an election laws provision from the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Listen

“Chaos in Primary Elections Raises Fears for November” from *Morning Edition* for NPR

<https://n.pr/2ZLxxUT>

This short listen from *Morning Edition* explores voter experiences from the primary elections and how they are influencing plans for November’s general election.

The “Vote by Mail” Edition from *Political Gabfest* for *Slate*

<https://bit.ly/2CUZNet>

This podcast episode discusses security challenges for 2020 elections, including signature verification.

