



As the coronavirus pandemic heightens, there are concerns about participation in November's general election. Ideas are circulating on how to protect voters best. Although some alternative voting methods exist, most citizens still vote by visiting polling places where they can cast their ballots. If the pandemic still required the maintenance of social distancing as much as possible in November, thereby forcing millions of Americans to choose between skipping voting or risking the spreading of infectious disease, what would the alternative be? Could the U.S. delay the election until pandemic-related restrictions had been eased? Or should federal and state governments change policies to increase voting by mail?

Postpone the Election?

The pandemic has prompted the postponement of primary elections in some states. This event brought a question to many Americans: Could the U.S. presidential election scheduled for November 3rd be delayed if necessary? This option would be improbable, but our Founding Fathers addressed this issue in our guiding principles.

The process by which states appoint those electors are laid out both in Article II of the U.S. Constitution, which requires states to set a number of electors equal to the number of their representatives in the U.S. House and Senate "in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct," and in Chapter 1 of Title 3 of the United States Code, which sets the timing of that appointment.

To change the date of the election, Congress would have to vote to alter Section 1 of the code, which stipulates: "The electors of President and Vice President shall be appointed, in each State, on a Tuesday next after the first Monday in November, in every fourth year succeeding every election of a President and Vice President." The 20th amendment of the U.S. Constitution states that the current president's four-year term expires at noon on January 20th. So the election could not be delayed for long without the United States' risk of operating without a president or vice president.

Increase the Vote by Mail Option?

In a recent poll, nearly three-in-five voters nationwide said they strongly or somewhat support a federal law that would mandate that states "provide mail-in ballots to all voters for elections occurring during the coronavirus pandemic." Just a quarter of voters either somewhat or strongly oppose the idea, with the remainder not having an opinion. The health crisis could lead to a surge of absentee ballot requests. The federal government, along with the states, need time to prepare and revise laws and policies as required.

Some states have programs in place to support the mail-in option, others are making necessary changes to deal with current situation. California, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Utah, and Hawaii will take the step of mailing an absentee ballot with pre-paid postage to every single voter this November. In addition to those six states, 28 states allow all voters to cast absentee ballots without a documented excuse, including five states and the District of Columbia that offer a permanent vote-by-mail option. Seven more states only allow elderly voters above a certain age cut-off, often 60 or 65, to request an absentee ballot without an excuse.

In two-thirds of the states, any qualified voter may vote absentee without offering an excuse, and in one-third of the states, an excuse is required. The six battleground states likely to decide the election — Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania — all have no-excuse absentee voting.

Presidential Election Results

With or without significant changes, there will be an increase in voters casting ballots by mail. Americans probably won't know who the winner of the presidential race is for days or even weeks after the election. The results of the presidential races in 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016 were called on the night of the election, with relatively little controversy over their outcomes.

QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE? Write a **T** or **F** in the space provided.

1. The Constitution does not address election dates.
2. The next Presidential Election will take place on Tuesday, November 3, 2020.
3. Two-thirds of the states have a "no excuse" absentee ballot.
4. A president's term ends the day after the election.
5. A majority of voters support a federal law that allows vote-by-mail in national elections.

Answers: 1-F, 2-T, 3-T, 4-F, 5-T