



Election Policy Briefing

The Bipartisan Truth About By-Mail Voting

State-Level Actions in Response to COVID-19 — Pragmatism, Not Politics

Prepared For:

Public Policy Leadership, U.S. Election Administrators & Interested Citizens

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Introduction

On March 13, President Donald Trump proclaimed that the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States constituted a national emergency, beginning March 1, 2020.¹ Arriving in the midst of the Presidential Primary season, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly disrupted numerous state elections.² In the early days of the outbreak, during the March 17 primaries, Arizona, Florida, and Illinois did their best to quickly modify voting practices, with varying success.³ Illinois and Florida made last-minute changes in polling place locations that posed risks for vulnerable populations (e.g., senior centers), and both states experienced reduced turnout for in-person voting due to public fears of illness. On the other hand, Arizona reported few problems, because many voters cast by-mail ballots early.

Since those early primaries in the most intense initial days of the pandemic, COVID-19 has resulted in swift and widespread changes in how states administer elections during the public health crisis. Although it may seem hard to believe that it has been only two-and-a-half months since the president declared a national emergency, many states have moved rapidly to postpone scheduled primaries and to modify their election policies and practices in order to provide voters with more choices for casting a ballot, especially in light of social distancing practices and reduced in-person voting.

Increased access to by-mail voting in response to COVID-19 has been a central part of the changing landscape. As this practice has received more attention, it has also become the subject of fierce political debate between the Republican and Democratic parties at the national level.

The Bottom Line

The untold story is that while the national parties engage in debates, attacks, and counterattacks about the expansion of by-mail voting, state governors and election officials from both parties and in most states have been methodically expanding access to by-mail voting in response to COVID-19.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-declaring-national-emergency-concerning-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/article/2020-campaign-primary-calendar-coronavirus.html>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/us/politics/primary-voter-turnout-2020.html>

If the actions of public officials are any guide, the truth is that by-mail voting has broad bipartisan support at the state level. This Briefing presents a detailed and comprehensive look at what red and blue state election officials are actually implementing for by-mail voting—and they have much in common.

Through the D.C. Looking Glass: By-Mail Voting as a Political Flashpoint

The narrative about by-mail voting emanating from the halls of the White House and Congress is currently loud and divisive. On one side, although the president himself voted absentee by-mail in the Florida primary, he has called by-mail voting “horrible” and “corrupt,” and most recently, “rigged”—without offering evidence.^{4 5} Most recently, the president has also issued attacks via Twitter on Democratic-led states like Michigan⁶ and Nevada,⁷ claiming that their efforts to encourage voters to cast a by-mail ballot are “illegal” actions that contribute to “voter fraud.” On the other hand, a recent Democratic-led stimulus bill that includes sweeping changes in federal election law in response to COVID-19 (including universal by-mail voting and early voting) has been dismissed as a “Democratic agenda,” a political blunder, and a non-starter by Republican critics.⁸ All in all, the current state of discord about by-mail voting among Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill is very high.⁹

The Reality on the Ground: By-Mail Voting is Common, with Diverse Approaches

By-mail voting is *not* new. Every state offers provisions for certain voters to receive and cast an absentee ballot by-mail if they cannot vote in person; for decades, military and overseas voters have also voted by-mail; and currently, some states (led by both Republican and Democratic governors) have all-mail elections, where all registered voters automatically receive a ballot in the mail for each election.

By-mail voting is also increasingly popular; according to the latest U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS), one-quarter of voters cast their ballots by mail in 2018.¹⁰ Reputable studies have also shown that by-mail voting has a very, *very* low rate of fraud.¹¹ And finally, recent research from Stanford University also found that by-mail voting does not offer a partisan advantage to either party; researchers found that the introduction of mail-in voting did not have an effect on the share of voter turnout for either Republicans or Democrats, and they also found that expanding by-mail voting does not appear to increase the vote share for candidates of either political party.¹²

In sum, notwithstanding the noisy debate in Washington over by-mail voting, the practice is well established; increasingly popular; reliable; and neutral in its partisan effects.

⁴ <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/491674-trump-defends-his-mail-in-ballot-after-calling-vote-by-mail-corrupt>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1264558926021959680>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1263170880298942464>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1263094958417985538>

⁸ <https://apnews.com/3c1ea3456f7d906dabf3ed336f6c1ad0>

⁹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/13/vote-mail-poll-255281>; see also

<https://www.npr.org/2020/05/02/849090889/the-legal-fight-over-voting-rights-during-the-pandemic-is-getting-hotter>

¹⁰ https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/2018_EAVS_Report.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

¹² <https://siepr.stanford.edu/news/new-research-voting-mail-shows-neutral-partisan-effects>

Given those facts, it is essential to note:

The fact is, by-mail voting has found a home with state governors and election officials on both sides of the political aisle precisely because there is no single “one size fits all” method for expanding access to mail ballots for all voters.

Although all states offer either “absentee” by-mail voting options or “all-mail” elections, the diverse choices that state and local officials can make to implement by-mail voting actually support the federalist system of election administration in the United States. The Constitution provides that each state decides for itself how to administer elections, not the federal government; and that has allowed the states to expand access to by-mail voting during the COVID-19 pandemic in accordance with each state’s own laws, policies, preferences, and political culture. Below are some important distinctions that shape different approaches in different states.

Absentee Voting: Excuse required, or no excuse? An important distinction among the states is the question of who is “allowed” to vote a by-mail ballot. Is it only some voters, who meet certain qualifications (typically older age, infirmity, disability, work demands, being at a location outside the jurisdiction, or affiliation with the U.S. armed forces)? Or is by-mail voting permitted for all registered voters? This is the critical difference between those states classified as requiring an “excuse” to vote by-mail, versus those “no excuse” states where *any* registered voter may request a by-mail ballot, without needing to provide an “excuse” or explanation for why they will not or cannot vote in person. Finally, some states also offer a “permanent absentee list,” so that once a voter asks to be added to the list, he or she will automatically receive an absentee ballot for each election, without needing to go through the process to request an absentee ballot.¹³

Absentee Voting vs. “All-Mail” Elections: Must the voter request a by-mail ballot? Even in states that have “no excuse” absentee voting, it is still the case that in order to receive an absentee by-mail ballot, the voter must request one, typically with an “absentee ballot application.” Applications to receive an absentee by-mail ballot require the voter to provide a variety of personal information, including name, address, election(s) for which the ballot is requested, party affiliation in a primary election, and, perhaps most important, a signed attestation that the voter is eligible to vote and that the information provided is true and correct. Absentee ballot applications provide a regular opportunity to cross-reference personal and address information for each voter against the jurisdiction’s voter registration database. However, in states that administer “all-mail elections,” the need for voters to submit a request or application is removed (as is the “absentee” designation); instead, with all-mail elections, every registered voter will be automatically be issued a blank by-mail ballot for each election, without needing to request one.

OSET Institute Research and Methods

To produce this Briefing, the OSET Institute performed comprehensive research and analysis on the current state of election policy and practice regarding by-mail voting in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with a particular eye toward any recent changes precipitated by the COVID-19 public health crisis. The majority of this research is based on primary investigation of state websites offering election-related information, including by-mail voting policies; recently-changed orders or directives; any voter-facing tools to request by-mail ballots, including electronically-fillable absentee requests, or

¹³ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>

downloadable PDF forms for printing at home. In addition, we surveyed recent media stories from national and local reporters, as well as official social media communications from governors, secretaries of state, and other officials. Our research summarizes the following variables for each state:

Current classification for by-mail voting:

- **All by-mail:** States with “universal all-mail elections,” whereby all registered voters automatically receive blank ballots for each election, without needing to make a request.
- **Mostly by-mail:** States with “no excuse” by mail voting that have already reached historic milestones of approximately 70% of all ballots cast by-mail.
- **Already “no excuse” absentee by-mail voting** (i.e., before COVID-19): States that allow any voter to request an absentee by-mail ballot, without needing to provide a justification or reason for not voting in-person.
- **“Excuse required” states that recently relaxed requirements:** States that previously required an “excuse” to be able to obtain an absentee by-mail ballot, but that have recently officially stated that COVID-19 concerns are a valid reason for any voter to request an absentee ballot.
- **“Excuse required” states, with no changes:** States that have still not changed policies or stated that COVID-19 concerns are a valid reason for any voter to request an absentee ballot.

Governor’s Party Affiliation

- **Democratic or Republican**

Statewide Absentee Ballot Request Available?

- **Yes or No** – Does the state provide a single website that provides all voters in the state with an electronically fillable or downloadable absentee ballot request form? States that do not have a single online form typically direct voters to contact their local election office.

Recent or Upcoming Election Actions Due to COVID-19

- **Noteworthy recent changes**, including for example, recent postponements of primary elections, and actions to mail absentee ballot applications to all voters.

Summary results of our research are provided in a table at the end of this Briefing.

Additional Detailed Supporting Data available upon request:

1. A detailed data set, which includes filters for sorting and URLs for relevant state websites, media stories, and references to relevant state election law.
2. Representative samples of recent social media communications from Republican-led states that have chosen to expand access to by-mail voting.

Findings: A Bipartisan Landscape

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, 46 of 50 states and the District of Columbia currently offer some form of by-mail voting for all voters. This includes Democratic- and Republican-led states that already offered widespread access to by-mail voting without excuses, as well as Democratic- and Republican-led states that recently issued policy changes to loosen restrictions on “excuses” required to obtain an absentee ballot, directly in response to COVID-19 concerns.

Here are the details:

1. 46 of 50 states currently offer some form of by-mail voting that is available to all voters.
 - Five states are all by-mail (CO, HI, OR, UT, WA).
 - Two states are heavily by-mail (CA, MT).
 - 27 states already provided “no excuse” absentee by-mail voting, before the pandemic (AK, AZ, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, KS, MD, ME, MI, MN, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NM, NV, OH, OK, PA, RI, SD, VA, VT, WI, WY).
 - 12 states require an “excuse” to vote absentee, but have relaxed restrictions to make COVID-19 concerns a valid excuse to request an absentee ballot (AL, AR, CT, DE, IN, KY, LA, MA, NH, NY, SC, WV).
2. The group of 46 states that currently offer by-mail voting options to all voters is strongly bipartisan in its composition.
 - 24 have Democratic governors (CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, IL, KS, KY, LA, ME, MI, MN, MT, NC, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OR, PA, RI, VA, WA, WI).
 - 22 have Republican governors (AK, AL, AR, AZ, FL, GA, IA, ID, IN, MA, MD, ND, NE, NH, OH, OK, SC, SD, UT, VT, WV, WY).
3. The group of 27 states that already provided “no excuse” absentee by-mail voting options prior to the COVID-19 pandemic is strongly bipartisan in its composition.
 - 14 have Republican governors (AK, AZ, FL, GA, IA, ID, MD, ND, NE, OH, OK, SD, VT, WY).
 - 13 have Democratic governors (IL, KS, ME, MI, MN, NC, NJ, NM, NV, PA, RI, VA, WI).
4. The group of 12 states that require an “excuse” to vote absentee by-mail, but have relaxed restrictions to make COVID-19 concerns a valid excuse, is strongly bipartisan in its composition.
 - 7 have Republican governors. (AL, AR, IN, MA, NH, SC, WV).
 - 5 have Democratic governors. (CT, DE, KY, LA, NY).
5. Four states still currently require an “excuse” to vote absentee by-mail, and they have not yet made official changes to allow COVID-19 concerns as a valid excuse.
 - All are led by Republican governors (MO, MS, TN, TX).
 - At the time of this writing, there is an ongoing federal court case involving expanded access to absentee voting in Texas.¹⁴
 - At the time of this writing, the Republican-led Missouri legislature has passed legislation to loosen the state’s rules for voting absentee, due to the COVID-19 crisis. Although the legislation has been presented to Governor Mike Parson for his signature, he has not yet indicated whether he will approve the legislation or not.¹⁵

¹⁴ <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/05/20/federal-appeals-court-temporarily-blocks-voting-mail-expansion-texas/>

¹⁵ <https://www.kansascity.com/news/politics-government/article242741961.html>

6. The states' preferred method to provide access to by-mail voting for all voters appears to be the removal or relaxation of "excuse" requirements – but *not* the approach of automatically sending blank ballots to all registered voters, which is sometimes referred to as "universal all-mail voting."
 - Except for states with all-mail elections (CO, HI, OR, UT, WA), most states typically require voters who wish to vote by-mail to submit an application to request an absentee by-mail ballot.
 - Additional requirements for absentee by-mail voting may also apply in some states, including the possibility that a notary or witness signature is required with the absentee ballot return, as well as different state statutes that address requirements for verification of voter signatures and "curing" signature discrepancies.¹⁶
7. The diverse manner in which different states have expanded access to by-mail voting is reflective of the United States' federalist tradition.
 - Some states have taken steps to engage in voter education and outreach about expanded by-mail voting options.
 - Other states have gone farther, by proactively mailing absentee ballot applications to every registered voter (and some even partially pre-fill the application with voter information, for greater convenience).¹⁷
 - In exceptional instances, some states with absentee ballot procedures have automatically mailed blank ballots to voters for specified elections, but this is not the norm.
8. The states' bipartisan support for expanded access to by-mail voting during the COVID-19 pandemic is in strong contrast to the national narrative being reinforced by the White House and the national parties in Congress.

Analysis and Conclusion

In summary, the states' implementation of expanded access to by-mail voting for all voters illustrates strong bipartisanship. Again, 46 out of 50 states currently offer such options, either due to existing policy and practice, or due to recent policy changes in direct response to the COVID-19 crisis. Of those 46 states, 24 are led by Democratic governors, and 22 are led by Republican governors. Despite the partisan rancor over by-mail voting that exists in the White House and Congress, state and local officials are behaving differently. They have demonstrated pragmatism, flexibility and responsive problem-solving during the current pandemic crisis, in order to better serve voters and protect public health.¹⁸ The nation owes them all a debt of gratitude.

¹⁶ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/verification-of-absentee-ballots.aspx>. Legal requirements for verification of ballots can be complex, and the validity of returned ballots and signatures is likely to become a point of legal contention between lawyers from both parties in future elections. An analysis of the legal requirements for verification in different states is beyond the scope of this Briefing.

¹⁷ See, for example, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/05/21/vote-mail-efforts-democrats-republicans-move-ahead/5235610002/>. "Nebraska, a no-excuse absentee state, sent absentee ballot applications to every registered voter before its May 12 primary. More than 75% of the 471,000 votes were mailed in, helping break the state's 48-year-old record for turnout in a primary. Historically, around 25% of Nebraska voters vote by mail."

¹⁸ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/05/21/vote-mail-efforts-democrats-republicans-move-ahead/5235610002/>

Unfortunately, the tension that exists between the efforts of some to undermine by-mail voting and the reality that many states and voters are growing increasingly accustomed to it is likely to create more damaging friction between now and November.¹⁹ Ultimately, voters might be left caught in the middle, as pawns in an increasingly legalistic political fight.²⁰ The national parties are investing more and more in budgets for lawsuits over voting laws,²¹ as if girding for war, and the future of by-mail voting policies (among others) hangs in the balance.

It is unknown whether many states' recent policy changes concerning access to by-mail voting in response to the COVID-19 crisis will still be in effect for the November 2020 Presidential Election. For example, in several states that recently issued policies stating that COVID-19 health concerns (including the desire to self-isolate) are valid reasons to request an absentee ballot, the states also placed a "sunset" on those policies, to clarify that they are valid only for elections before November. What happens in the November presidential election still remains unclear.

Nevertheless, the practical and symbolic importance of so many states— Republican and Democratic alike —taking meaningful action in response to the COVID-19 health crisis should not be discounted. Furthermore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict what public health conditions on the ground will look like in October and November, during the presidential election; it is possible that even if recent laws and/or executive orders applied only to recent elections, new emergency measures might be necessary to protect public health and extend additional voting options into the November election. And finally, even if conditions *are* improved by November, and even if public fears are relatively mitigated by then, it is still reasonable to assume that some portion of the (likely millions) of voters who vote by-mail for the first time this year might never want to go back to in-person voting. Indeed, taking away voting options that were previously granted might create new political headwinds; state officials who resist renewals of expanded access to by-mail voting for November might face new pressure from voters.

In short, it is entirely possible that the COVID-19 crisis may result in some changes in voting that simply do not "go back to the old way." Just as many private companies have experienced and accepted what would previously be unthinkable, such as having a large workforce remain productive while working remotely, so too might COVID-19 permanently alter the way the country votes — but likely not without contentious legal clashes, which pose corrosive dangers for the public's faith in our democracy.

Although we can and should hope that the national parties will proceed judiciously, the current level of polarization does not inspire confidence. We will see, relatively soon; the November 2020 presidential election is anticipated to be like no other.

¹⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-cybersecurity-202/2020/05/21/the-cybersecurity-202-trump-s-mail-voting-attacks-put-him-at-odds-with-gop-election-officials/5ec58d5888e0fa6727001745/>

²⁰ <https://www.businessinsider.com/trumps-crusade-against-vote-by-mail-could-backfire-on-republicans-2020-5>

²¹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/07/trump-democrats-voting-laws-243517>

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4. Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR), *The Neutral Partisan Effects of Vote-By-Mail: Evidence from County-Level Rollouts* (<https://siepr.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/20-015.pdf>)
5. United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC), *2018 Election Administration and Voting Survey* (https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/2018_EAVS_Report.pdf)

Summary Table State-by-state By-Mail Voting Practices

State	Governor's Party Affiliation	Statewide absentee ballot request?	Recent or upcoming election actions, due to COVID-19 (Sources: Ballotpedia & NCSL)
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All by-mail: These states send blank ballots to all registered voters; voters not required to apply

CO	Democratic	N/A	
HI	Democratic	N/A	
OR	Democratic	N/A	
UT	Republican	N/A	
WA	Democratic	N/A	

Mostly "no excuse" by-mail: Approximately 70% of total ballots cast are by-mail in these states

CA	Democratic	Yes	By-mail ballots will be sent automatically to all voters in the November 3, 2020 general election.
MT	Democratic	Yes	Counties are authorized to send by-mail ballots automatically to all voters in the June 2, 2020 primary election.

Already "no excuse" absentee by-mail (before COVID-19)

AK	Republican	Yes	
AZ	Republican	Yes	
DC	Democratic (Mayor)	Yes	
FL	Republican	No	
GA	Republican	Yes	By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the June 9, 2020 presidential and state primary election. The presidential primary was originally scheduled for March 24 and the state primary for May 19.
IA	Republican	Yes	By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the June 2, 2020 primary election.

Summary Table
State-by-state By-Mail Voting Practices (continued)

State	Governor's Party Affiliation	Statewide absentee ballot request?	Recent or upcoming election actions, due to COVID-19 (Sources: Ballotpedia & NCSL)
Already "no excuse" absentee by-mail (before COVID-19)			
ID	Republican	Yes	The May 19, 2020 state primary was conducted by mail. The by-mail ballot return deadline is extended to June 2, 2020.
IL	Democratic	No	
KS	Democratic	Yes	
MD	Republican	Yes	By-mail ballots will be sent automatically to all voters in the June 2, 2020 primary election. The state and presidential primaries were originally scheduled for April 28. By-mail ballots were sent automatically to all voters in the April 28, 2020, special election for Maryland's 7th Congressional District.
ME	Democratic	Yes	
MI	Democratic	Yes	By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the August 4, 2020 primary election and the November 3, 2020 general election.
MN	Democratic	Yes	
NC	Democratic	Yes	
ND	Republican	Yes	Counties are authorized to conduct the June 9, 2020 election largely by mail. By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters.
NE	Republican	Yes	By-mail ballot applications were sent automatically to all voters in the May 12, 2020, election.
NJ	Democratic	Yes	By-mail ballots will be sent automatically to all registered active Democratic and Republican voters in the July 7, 2020 election. By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all unaffiliated and inactive voters. The state and presidential primaries were originally scheduled for June 2.
NM	Democratic	Yes	

Summary Table
State-by-state By-Mail Voting Practices (continued)

State	Governor's Party Affiliation	Statewide absentee ballot request?	Recent or upcoming election actions, due to COVID-19 (Sources: Ballotpedia & NCSL)
(Cont.) Already "no excuse" absentee by-mail (before COVID-19)			
NV	Democratic	Yes	By-mail ballots will be sent automatically to all voters in the June 9, 2020 primary election.
OH	Republican	Yes	
OK	Republican	Yes	
PA	Democratic	Yes	
RI	Democratic	Yes	By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the June 2, 2020 presidential preference primary. The primary was originally scheduled for April 28.
SD	Republican	Yes	By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the June 2, 2020, election.
VA	Democratic	Yes	The Virginia Department of Elections announced that all voters would be permitted to cast absentee/by-mail ballots in municipal elections scheduled for May 2020. A federal court approved a partial settlement suspending the witness requirement for absentee ballots cast in the June 23, 2020, primary. The state primary was originally scheduled for June 9.
VT	Republican	Yes	
WI	Democratic	Yes	
WY	Republican	Yes	

Summary Table
State-by-state By-Mail Voting Practices (continued)

State	Governor's Party Affiliation	Statewide absentee ballot request?	Recent or upcoming election actions, due to COVID-19 (Sources: Ballotpedia & NCSL)
“Excuse required” absentee by-mail states that recently relaxed restrictions due to COVID-19			
AL	Republican	Yes	Secretary of State John Merrill has said COVID-19 concerns are an acceptable reason for voters to request an absentee by-mail ballot. ^A
AR	Republican	Yes	Governor Asa Hutchinson issued executive orders to allow all voters to request absentee by-mail ballots for the March primary runoff election, and he extended those orders to apply to the June 9 special election as well. ^B
CT	Democratic	Yes	Governor Ned Lamont signed an executive order allowing all eligible Connecticut residents to vote absentee in August 11 Primary Elections. ^C By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the August 11, 2020 primary and the November 3, 2020 general election. The presidential primary was originally scheduled for April 28.
DE	Democratic	Yes	Governor John Carney issued new orders permitting absentee voting due to COVID-19. ^D By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the July 7, 2020 presidential primary election. The primary was originally scheduled for April 28, postponed to June 2 and then postponed again to July 7.
IN	Republican	Yes	The Indiana Election Commission has authorized "no excuse" voting due to COVID-19. ^E Absentee by-mail voting eligibility requirements are suspended, allowing all voters to cast ballots by mail in the June 2, 2020 primary election. The state and presidential primaries were originally scheduled for May 5.
KY	Democratic	No	Governor Andy Beshear and Secretary of State Michael Adams reached an agreement on April 27, saying registered voters in Kentucky can vote absentee by-mail due to COVID-19. ^F Absentee by-mail voting eligibility requirements are suspended, allowing all voters to cast ballots by mail in the June 23, 2020 primary election. The state and presidential primaries were originally scheduled for May 19.

Summary Table
State-by-state By-Mail Voting Practices (continued)

State	Governor's Party Affiliation	Statewide absentee ballot request?	Recent or upcoming election actions, due to COVID-19 (Sources: Ballotpedia & NCSL)
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“Excuse required” absentee by-mail states that recently relaxed restrictions due to COVID-19

LA	Democratic	Yes	Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin has created a new "COVID-19 Emergency Application" for absentee ballot requests; it allows voters to request absentee ballots due to being at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, or subject to a medically necessary quarantine or isolation order as a result of COVID-19; or advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to COVID-19 concerns, among other reasons. ^G
MA	Republican	Yes	Secretary of State Bill Galvin has said COVID-19 concerns are an acceptable reason to request absentee ballots. ^H Absentee by-mail voting eligibility is extended to “any person taking precautions related to COVID-19” in elections taking place on or before June 30, 2020.
NH	Republican	No	Governor Chris Sununu announced that the state will allow voters to cast by-mail ballots due to COVID-19 concerns. ^I Absentee by-mail voting eligibility in the September 8 primary and the November 2020 general election is extended to any voter who is unable to vote in person because of illness resulting from COVID-19 or “who fears that voting in person may expose himself/herself or others to COVID-19.”
NY	Democratic	Yes	Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order suspending a portion of state election law and modifying it "to provide that due to the prevalence and community spread of COVID-19, an absentee ballot can be granted based on temporary illness” for elections on or before June 23 of this year. ^J By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the June 23, 2020 primary. The primary was originally scheduled for April 28

Summary Table
State-by-state By-Mail Voting Practices (continued)

State	Governor's Party Affiliation	Statewide absentee ballot request?	Recent or upcoming election actions, due to COVID-19 (Sources: Ballotpedia & NCSL)
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“Excuse required” absentee by-mail states that recently relaxed restrictions due to COVID-19

SC	Republican	Yes	Governor Henry McMaster signed a bill into law allowing absentee by-mail voting for all voters for the June primaries, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. State lawmakers fast-tracked legislation allowing registered primary voters to request an absentee ballot while the state is under an emergency order. The legislation sunsets on July 1, meaning it will not apply to the November general election. ^K
WV	Republican	Yes	Secretary of State Mac Warner announced that due to COVID-19 concerns, all voters in West Virginia are eligible to vote absentee in the 2020 Primary Election. ^L By-mail ballot applications will be sent automatically to all voters in the June 9, 2020, primary election. Primary was originally scheduled for May 12.

“Excuse required” absentee by-mail states that have NOT relaxed restrictions for COVID-19

MO	Republican	Yes	At the time of this writing, the Republican-led Missouri legislature has passed legislation to loosen the state’s rules for voting absentee, due to the COVID-19 crisis. Although the legislation has been presented to Governor Mike Parson for his signature, he has not yet indicated whether he will approve the legislation or not. ^M
MS	Republican	No	
TN	Republican	Yes	
TX	Republican	Yes	At the time of this writing, there is an ongoing federal court case involving expanded access to absentee voting in Texas. ^N

End Notes to Summary Table

- A <https://www.sos.alabama.gov/newsroom/secretary-state-shares-guidance-absentee-voting-upcoming-july-14-primary-runoff-election>
- B https://governor.arkansas.gov/images/uploads/executiveOrders/EO_20-26_.pdf
- C <https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2020/05-2020/Governor-Lamont-Signs-Executive-Order-Allowing-All-Eligible-Connecticut-Residents-to-Vote-Absentee>
- D <https://governor.delaware.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2020/03/Sixth-Modification-to-State-of-Emergency-03242020.pdf>
- E https://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/elections/all-indiana-voters-can-choose-to-cast-ballot-by-mail/article_25b2a732-f994-51a0-bb9c-7207bda0d56f.html
- F <https://www.wkms.org/post/kentucky-secretary-state-encourages-absentee-ballots-all-voters#stream/0>
- G [https://www.sos.la.gov/OurOffice/PublishedDocuments/COVID-19%20VR2%20Absentee%20by%20Mail%20Application%20\(Rev.%204-20\)%20Ver.%201.pdf](https://www.sos.la.gov/OurOffice/PublishedDocuments/COVID-19%20VR2%20Absentee%20by%20Mail%20Application%20(Rev.%204-20)%20Ver.%201.pdf)
- H <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/covid-19/covid-19.htm>
- I https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/new-hampshire-gov-sununu-to-allow-absentee-voting-in-november-because-of-coronavirus-outbreak/2020/04/09/d0aa21c8-7aa2-11ea-a130-df573469f094_story.html
- J <https://www.gothamgazette.com/state/9299-cuomo-expands-absentee-voting-june-2020-what-to-know-new-york>
- K <https://www.thestate.com/news/politics-government/article242681531.html>
- L <https://sos.wv.gov/elections/Pages/AbsenteeVotingInformation.aspx>
- M <https://www.kansascity.com/news/politics-government/article242741961.html>
- N <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/05/20/federal-appeals-court-temporarily-blocks-voting-mail-expansion-texas/>