

Don't be a Lab Rat: Why You Should Vote in Person

Voting. It's full of important decisions including not only who you'll vote for, but how you'll do it. Will you vote at your kitchen table and drop your ballot in the mail? Or will you go to the polls? Which option best ensures your vote will be counted?

According to election expert Hans von Spakovsky, voting in person on Election Day, while seemingly outdated, is still the best bet for voters.

One of the key takeaways from von Spakovsky's new study, "[Four Stolen Elections: The Vulnerabilities of Absentee and Mail-In Ballots](#)" is "[u]niversal absentee or mail-in voting leaves America's electoral system vulnerable to fraud, forgery, coercion, and voter intimidation." It also leaves voters more vulnerable to plain-old honest human error, both their own and others.

If von Spakovsky and other experts are right, why are so many politicians pushing for vote by mail? We have been sliding in this direction for years; COVID just gave us a big push toward accepting this temptation.

There are fifty unique and quickly changing approaches to how America votes. This is federalism, that "laboratory of democracy," at its best – and unfortunately, at its very worst. After all, not all lab experiments work. Some kill the rat.

Setting aside COVID concerns, why don't Americans just vote in person? Have the civic tradition of Election Day and that "I Voted" sticker lost their appeal?

Americans are a busy and impatient lot. Sometimes we're just

plain lazy. We don't like standing in line. We want our rights, but we also want convenience – now! So experimental ways of “exercising the right of franchise” have popped up.

The drift from in-person voting started with absentee ballots which are cast early to accommodate those unable to vote at their assigned poll on Election Day. Some states require voters to offer a reason (e.g., I am traveling for work), others do not require an excuse. Sounds good and reasonable, right?

Absentee ballots morphed into early voting, starting weeks before Election Day. This is a major departure from past practices and began in earnest in 2016. [Still very experimental](#), 40 states and the District of Columbia allow some form of no-excuse early voting. In Minnesota, for example, voters can cast a vote 46 days before the general election (by mail or in person).

Citing COVID, Congress and many states are now considering universal vote by mail. To say that this controversial idea is explosive is an understatement. But is it a good idea?

Only five states – Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington – vote primarily by mail. Unlike absentee voting where the voter requests a ballot, those states automatically send ballots to “eligible voters” – which can include people who are not eligible at all, such as those who used to live at that address but moved out of state.

States certainly are meeting Americans' demands for convenience. Yet if most states already offer some form of mail-in voting, why shouldn't all states adopt that approach, at least while we sort out COVID?

Among other reasons, universal voting by mail takes years, not months, of planning and voter education. Even when done well, any kind of voting by mail raises the chance that your vote will not be counted.

As *The Washington Post* put it, [“Here’s the problem with mail-in ballots: They might not be counted.”](#) Among other problems, voters do not always fill out the ballots properly. I recall with horror the first time I voted absentee; I forgot to sign the envelope. My vote was not counted.

Not only does vote by mail increase voter error and opportunities for fraud, but it means you are counting on the U.S. Postal Service. How is that working out?

According to von Spakovsky, [a report on the Wisconsin primary](#) by the inspector general said 3,500 absentee ballots were never delivered to voters, and hundreds were not counted because they did not have a postmark. Additionally, as von Spakovsky notes:

In the last four federal elections, more than two million absentee ballots were misdelivered; 1.3 million were rejected by election officials; and over 28 million were categorized as ‘unknown’ by state election officials, i.e., they don’t know what happened to the ballots after they handed them over to the U.S. Postal Service to deliver.

That might be good enough for junk mail, but it is not good enough for my ballot.

Samuel Adams was passionate about our duties as a free people. He [wrote this during](#) the Revolutionary War:

I hope the great Business of Elections will never be left by the Many, to be done by the Few; for before we are aware of it, that few may become the Engine of Corruption... Let each Citizen remember, at the Moment he is offering his Vote... that he is executing one of the most solemn Trusts in human Society, for which he is accountable to God and his Country.

If you could discuss all your voting options over a pint of beer with Adams, what do you think he’d say (after he called you impatient and lazy and threw you into the Boston Harbor)?

I think Mr. Adams would say if you are young and healthy, go to the polls. Feed your ballot into the voting machine yourself and wear your sticker proudly.

If you cannot vote on Election Day for health or other reasons, vote absentee, but bring your ballot to your clerk or arrange for your ballot to be delivered by someone you know and trust.

And do not vote too early. Things can change quickly around here.

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