

COVID-19 Election Guide — Executive Summary

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of our democracy. No citizen should have to choose between exercising their right to vote and protecting their health. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to force exactly that choice in November if we do not plan ahead to mitigate the potential for a crisis.

The National Task Force on Election Crises is a diverse, cross-partisan group of experts formed to ensure a free and fair 2020 presidential election. In light of the challenges already posed by COVID-19, the Task Force has issued this [policy guide](#) to address how state and local officials can use both ordinary and emergency election laws to ensure that eligible voters are able to participate in the general election without undue risk to their own health or to the broader community. We also recommend that states consider emergency legislation where necessary.

This guide is grounded in important shared principles:

- ✓ Government Actions Should Be Grounded in Law
- ✓ Emergency Measures Should Be Justified by Facts
- ✓ Transparency and Communication Are Critical
- ✓ Emergency Efforts Should Be Bipartisan

The recommendations included in the guide generally fall into three categories:

Preparing to conduct wide-scale voting by mail. Depending on the state, this may include proactively mailing absentee ballot request or application forms to all voters; ensuring that the pandemic qualifies as an “excuse” for absentee voting where necessary; extending the deadlines for requesting and returning absentee ballots; waiving witness and notary requirements; and planning ahead to secure adequate supplies and other resources.

Ensuring that in-person voting is as safe and accessible as possible. This includes maximizing early voting days and hours; increasing access to alternatives like curbside voting; reconsidering the number and location of polling places; sanitizing polling places and enforcing social distancing; and recruiting more poll workers.

Communicating proactively and transparently with voters. This includes publicizing (and explaining) any changes to election rules or processes early and often; making information available in multiple languages and on multiple platforms; and preparing the public for likely delays in reporting election results.

With advance planning, it is possible to ensure a free and fair general election despite the unprecedented challenges we now face as a country. In fact, our democracy depends on it.