

Push for mail-in vote gaining steam, and scrutiny

Updated May 11, 2020, 5:06 p.m.



ADOBE

Key problem with remote vote: It cannot ensure a secret ballot

Re [“Universal mail-in voting could cost \\$30m in Nov., report says”](#) (Metro, May 6): Matt Stout explains some consequences of voting by mail, and I write to add a crucial one. The all-mail vote cannot ensure a secret ballot, which is the cornerstone of democracy.

Much mail voting takes place at the kitchen table, with family members filling out their ballots together. The elderly and disabled cast their votes alongside their caretakers.

The more timid or needy or financially dependent family members, and those in nursing homes, will often follow the advice or expectations of those on whom they depend in order to gain sympathy or favor or to avoid conflict, intimidation, ridicule, or dislike.

When voters expect their vote to be revealed, some of them vote differently. Even the slightest doubt about secrecy will affect their choices. Many people are unwilling to bear the potential social costs associated with having their private political preferences revealed.

Get Today in Opinion

Globe Opinion's must-reads, delivered to you every Sunday-Friday.

Enter Email


[Sign Up](#)

The United States, international organizations, and election observers have fought for decades around the world to make sure that women, dutiful sons and daughters, the elderly, and the disabled may all vote in privacy, without a husband or family head looking over their shoulder, because such a circumstance cancels the free and honest expression of a voter's convictions.

Voting online or by mail may increase turnout, but it skews the result.

Jurij Toplak

New York

The writer, a visiting professor at Fordham University School of Law, has worked as an election law expert and election observer in 15 countries.

It's urgent that we understand and embrace voting by mail

In your May 1 editorial [“State voting reforms can't wait,”](#) you helped bring to light the urgency of strengthening our elections during the coronavirus pandemic.

In our policy brief, [“Bracing Our Elections for COVID-19: Understanding Vote-By-Mail and How It Can Thrive in Massachusetts,”](#) we strive to educate legislators, the media, and the general public on this very topic. Specifically, we aim to address four major areas of concern around voting by mail: accessibility, infrastructure, cost, and security.

This final area — security — deserves emphasis. Voter fraud cases [are extremely rare](#), and voting by mail would make the electoral process even more secure. States with a vote by mail use ballot-tracking systems that allow voters to follow their ballots throughout the mailing process. They also issue secure drop boxes, made of 1,000-pound, quarter-inch-thick steel, in which voters may deposit ballots. Their ballot counting centers also possess 24/7 video surveillance systems. Together, these tools balance transparency and security in the electoral process.

In ensuring the security and constitutionality of our elections in light of COVID-19, it is important to recognize practicality, but we must recognize boldness, too. Now is not the time to hesitate; it is the time to act.

Alex Psilakis

Policy and communications manager

MassVOTE

Boston

MassVote is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization dedicated to voting rights, voter education, and social justice.

Mass. should move on this

Amid a pandemic, democracy must persist. On Sept. 1 and Nov. 3, we shouldn't have to choose between our health and our vote. Instead, Massachusetts should expand vote-by-mail. The need is apparent: Following Wisconsin's April 7 primary, [more than 50 voters tested positive for COVID-19](#). And we can't count on Washington: [The Supreme Court voted 5-4 to block expanded vote-by-mail](#) just before Wisconsin's election.

Promising bills have been introduced here, notably Senator Becca Rausch and Representative Adrian Madaro's 2020 Vote by Mail Act.

Will it work? Evidence suggests yes: Oregon has voted by mail since a measure there was passed in 1998, which has increased participation (2018 turnout was a whopping 63 percent) and saved money (decreased election day costs have offset postage expenses). Polls have shown that as many as [70 percent of Americans favor vote-by-mail](#).

Beacon Hill recently addressed early voting and automatic registration. Now it's time for pragmatic measures to ensure safe, secure, and accessible voting.

Paul DePalo

Worcester

The writer is a candidate to represent Central Massachusetts on the Governor's Council.