PENNSYLVANIA STANDS UP

Voters Report Challenges in PA Primary

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ADAMS

Advocates Demand Action Ahead of November Election

Pennsylvania Primary 2020

UNDERSTANDING VOTING CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Pennsylvania held its primary elections on June 2, 2020, during a variety of extraordinary circumstances. Act 77, signed into law on October 31, 2019 by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf, introduced no-excuse mail-in voting for Pennsylvania voters for the first time ever.
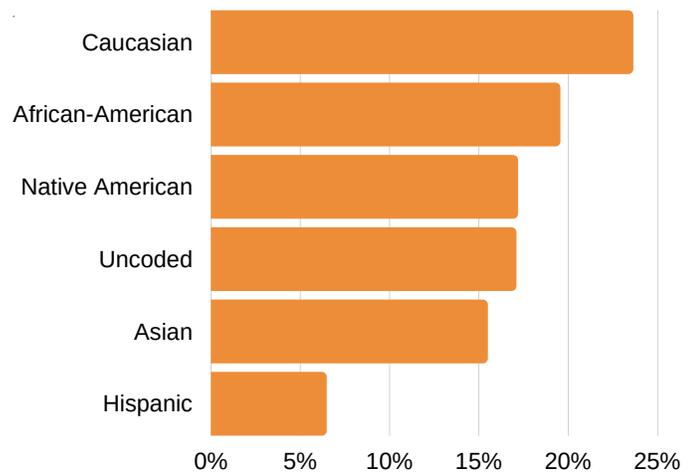
At that time, no one could have anticipated the widespread need for mail-in voting as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting challenges that posed for counties across the Commonwealth. Widespread media reports have highlighted delays in mailing ballots and tallying votes, closed polling locations and long lines, and inadequate PPE for some poll workers.

Pennsylvania Stands Up, a grassroots group of working people across the state of Pennsylvania, surveyed over 1,000 of our community members to find out more about the barriers voters encountered at the mailbox and the ballot box this primary. Their stories are shared against the backdrop of systemic racism and voter suppression efforts targeting voters of color, many of whom live in urban centers that were most affected by closed polling locations, long lines, and the Covid-19 pandemic.
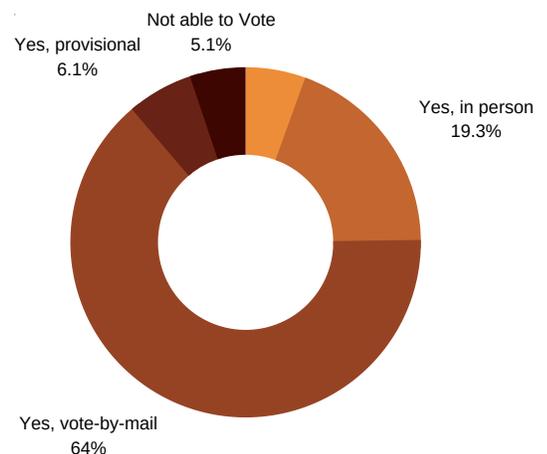
1.9M

Voters Requested a Mail in Ballot During the 2020 PA Primary

Percent of voters who requested mail in ballots by self-reported race, according to state voter file data

Source: (Top) As reported by Philadelphia Inquirer on June 1; (Bottom) PA Stands Up analysis of state voter file data
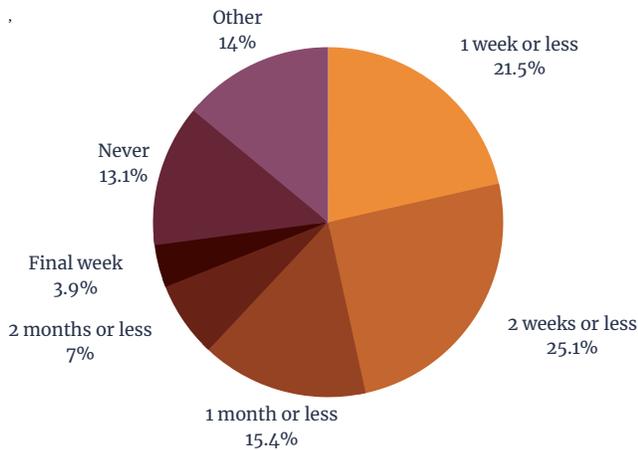
WERE YOU ABLE TO VOTE?

We asked 1,000 of our community members if they were able to vote in the June 2020 primary. While the majority were able to vote-by-mail, over 5% of voters surveyed could not vote at all. An additional 6% were forced to vote with a provisional ballot in person, introducing additional exposure risk to voters.

Percentage of voter who reported being able to cast a ballot

Not able to Vote 5.1%
Yes, provisional 6.1%
Yes, in person 19.3%
Yes, vote-by-mail 64%

Vote by mail issues

VOTE BY MAIL WAS THE MOST POPULAR VOTING METHOD –
BUT WAS RIFE WITH CHALLENGES

Other
14%

1 week or less
21.5%

Never
13.1%

Final week
3.9%

2 months or less
7%

2 weeks or less
25.1%

1 month or less
15.4%

DELAYS IN MAILING OUT VOTE-BY-MAIL BALLOTS WERE WIDESPREAD

More than 13% of our community members surveyed never received their ballots at all. Fewer than half of voters we surveyed got their mail in ballot in 2 weeks or less. In our survey, Black voters were disproportionately likely to be impacted by these problems.

VOICES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

"**Horrible experience for the black community.** People were turned away and not directed ... where to go to vote. My community does not have access to transportation and due to the constant changes of location people were not able to get to polls." – Anonymous (Philadelphia, PA)

"The ballot never came in the mail even though it was approved and the status said it was mailed. I never received it. I live with an immunocompromised person and I couldn't risk the in person poll. **Disappointed doesn't begin to cover my experience.**" – Mariel Q. (Delaware County, PA)

"**I reached out to so many people to try to rectify the situation.** Apparently, there was an issue with the post office prioritizing the distribution of ballots. It really worries me that I never received it. Even if I don't feel safe in November, know that I will vote." – Jill M. (Montgomery County, PA)

13.1%
of voters we surveyed requested but did not receive their mail in ballot
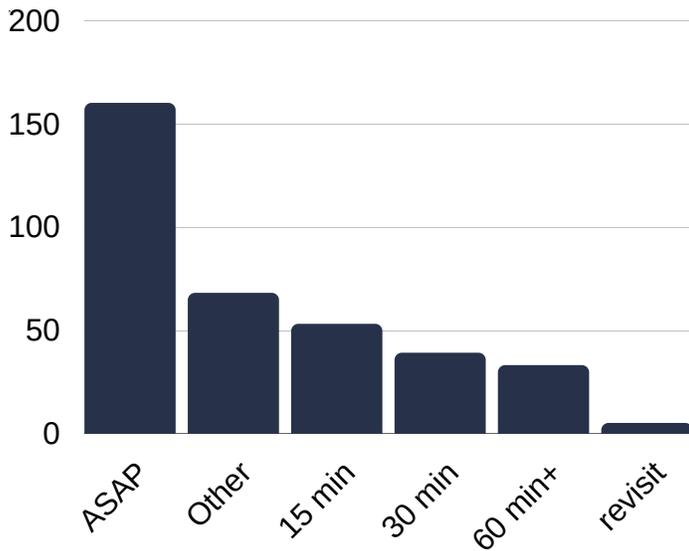
3.67X
Provisional ballots were up 3.67 times in Lancaster county, up to 2200 from 600 in 2016, likely due to voters who did not receive mail in ballots attempting to vote in person (1).

64%
of voters we surveyed voted by mail

1. Source: https://papost.org/2020/06/04/provisional-ballots-adding-to-delay-in-pennsylvania-primary-results/

In person voting barriers

THOSE WHO VOTED IN PERSON FACED DELAYS, SAFETY RISKS AND CONFUSION

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO VOTE IN PERSON

Polling location closures collided with voter confusion, making in person voting challenging at some polling locations. While most voters we surveyed were able to vote quickly, some polling locations had long wait times, particularly in urban centers. Voters in Philadelphia County were only 60% of survey respondents, but 91% of voters who reported having to wait more than 30 minutes or revisit their polling location.

"Since they consolidated voting places due to Covid there were a ton of different people from different districts. Staff were not wearing masks. It took over an hour to vote and we got there when they opened. The polling place was fairly far from where we live and I know many people who don't drive could not get there." – Kelly C. (Philadelphia, PA)
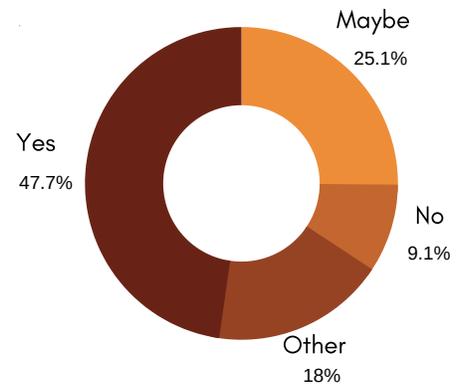
WAS YOUR VOTING LOCATION COVID SAFE?

*"**The whole process systemically disenfranchised older voters and caused difficulty for those without adequate transportation or knowledge of the change in poll location.** There were NO safety precautions in regards to the pandemic– voters were massed together, in close contact, and the area(s) was/were not sanitized once in the 2 hours it took for me to vote." – Rhamoana G. (Philadelphia, PA)*

"Poll workers at my polling place vocally refused to wear masks throughout the day and openly encouraged voters to remove their masks. At least one person who came to vote and saw this situation left the polling place without voting." – Deb M. (Lehigh, PA)

Percentage of voter who reported that their voting location was safe

Maybe 25.1%

Yes 47.7%

No 9.1%

Other 18%

11.4%
Of voters waited longer than 60 minutes to cast their vote

48%
of voters in Philadelphia county voted in person. Philadelphia county has the highest portion of non-white voters in the state.

47%
Less than half of the voters we surveyed, that voted in person, thought that their voting location was safe

Community Advocates Demand Action
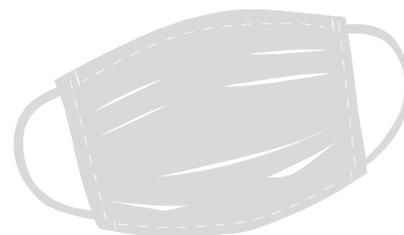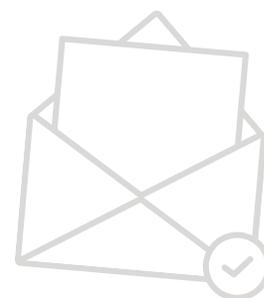
SAFEGUARDING OUR DEMOCRACY

Voting is a central democratic right. Generations of abolitionists, civil rights leaders and women's suffragists fought tooth-and-nail to expand the right to vote so that Black Americans, women, and Native peoples could have a voice in our democracy. Unfortunately, a handful of wealthy, white Americans have long sought to restrict democratic participation, blocking the full realization of our nation's founding ideals.

Today, with a president testing authoritarian tactics, seeking to undermine confidence in voting, and launching brazenly racist attacks on people of color and immigrants, it's more important than ever that we safeguard our elections to ensure all people - Black, white and brown - can participate safely and easily.

Pennsylvania Stands Up is calling on all elected officials of good faith, no matter their party, to join us in protecting the right to vote in this crucial election. We're calling for urgent reforms and action from state legislators and county officials, including:

1. Send every registered voter a paper mail in ballot request form
2. Provide paid postage for returning ballots
3. Adequately promote vote by mail options, changes to in-person voting locations
4. Seek procurement of ballot counting machines, additional temporary staff for counting
5. Create more (and more equitable) drop-boxes for in person ballot drop off
6. Satellite offices for full service voting
7. Recruit more poll workers and obtain PPE and other safety equipment necessary during a pandemic for in person voting
8. Require County Board of Elections to begin tallying ballots as soon as they are received to avoid reporting delays on election night

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PENNSYLVANIA STANDS UP

JULY 2020