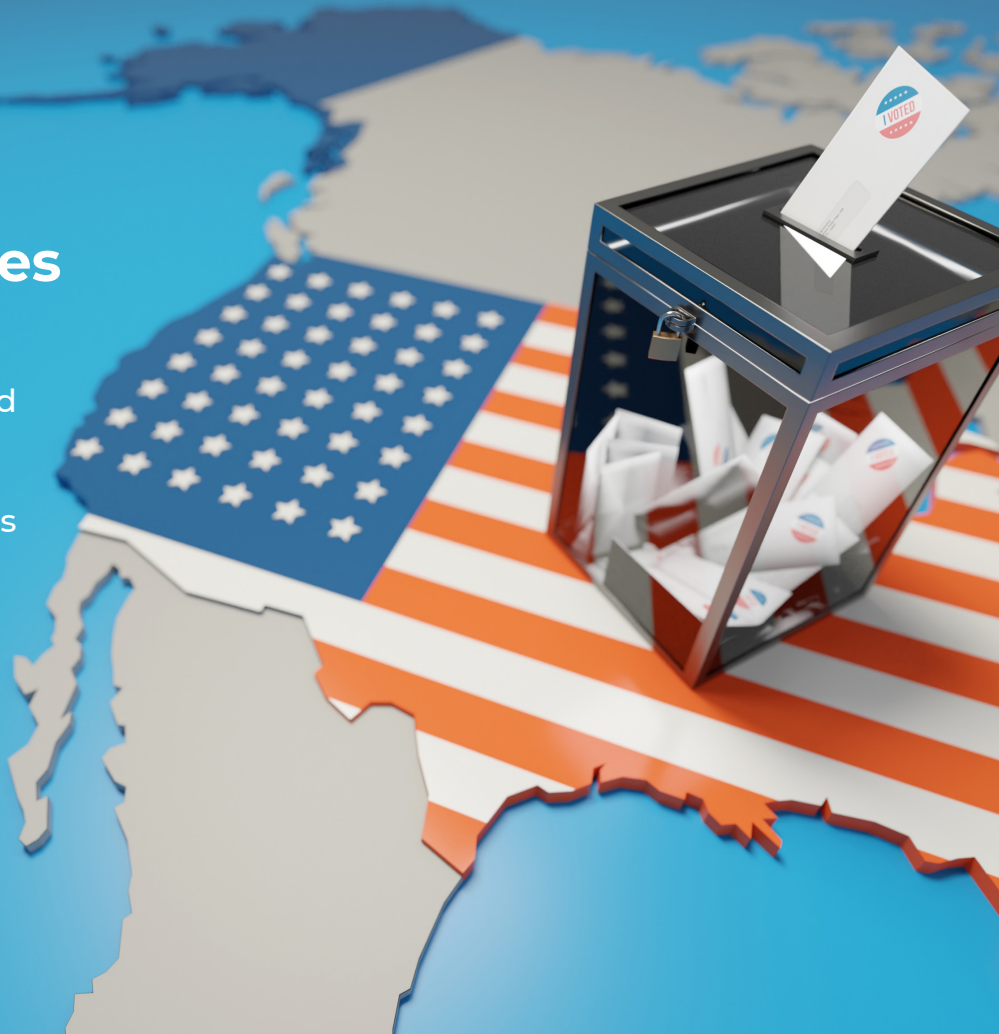# Elections are Right Around the Corner:
Are Jurisdictions Ready?

February 2022

Election Challenges Continue

Elections underwent a whirlwind of challenges and changes over the past two years and there is still more to come. As elections are right around the corner, are jurisdictions prepared for success?

First, let's take a look at some of the challenges and then consider the best approach for going forward.

Accusations over Security and Accuracy

The 2020 presidential election outcome led to countless accusations of voter fraud. Since then, there have been dozens of studies conducted by reputable sources that showed there was no evidence of voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election. One of the most notable studies, Proceedings from the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS), used a combination of statistical reasoning and original data analysis to assess the claims of voter fraud and again showed there is no evidence for systematic voter fraud. A guide to statistical claims about the 2020 election can be found here: https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/118/45/e2103619118.full.pdf

Yet, in the current state of political discord, no study, statistical data or facts have changed the minds of those that continue to question the security and accuracy of our voting process, especially the vote-by-mail process. Knowing the speculations of voter fraud will most likely remain for the upcoming election cycle, it is more important than ever that jurisdictions are prepared and ready to deliver successful, transparent and foolproof elections.

81%

of voters that cast their ballot by mail said they were likely to do so again

Changes in Voting Practices

Roughly half of all voting Americans cast their ballots by mail in 2020. Of those that voted by mail, 81% said they would do so again.[1]

While some states are restricting voting, lawmakers in many states responded to Americans' eagerness to vote by making it easier for eligible voters to cast their ballots. In 2021 between January 1 and September 27 at least 25 states enacted 62 laws with provisions that expand voting access.[1]

These expansive policies ease the processes for requesting and casting a mail-in ballot, expand early voting time periods, lengthen the deadline by which elections officers must receive and count mail ballots after Election Day, improve access for disabled voters and strengthen language access provisions, among other measures. Nearly 1,000 bills with expansive provisions have been introduced in 49 states in the 2021 legislative sessions.[2]

As changes in voting practices become law, jurisdictions need to be prepared and ready to offer a variety of voting options to meet the new regulations and laws being enacted.

1 December 2020 survey by MIT Election Data and Science Lab
2 October 2021 Brennan Center for Justice

Printing Supply Chain Concerns

Supply chain issues will remain a concern for the upcoming election cycle. The election industry faced challenges procuring raw materials, equipment and personnel in 2020 and 2021, and all indicators point to supply chain issues and product shortages continuing in 2022. The supply chain problems will make printing and mailing ballots challenging, making preparation as far in advance as possible essential to a timely election process.

Shortages and issues with paper, envelopes and ink supplies have been widespread since the pandemic started and will most likely continue at least into the near future. The key to overcoming potential gaps in the supply chain is planning ahead and procuring materials early.

If jurisdictions have not already done so, we highly recommend that you inventory your needs for paper and look to purchase required or expected supplies now. Consider warehousing products and supplies or utilizing partners that have an inventory of products available or better access to the supplies needed. As many products are built to specification, jurisdictions need to place orders as soon as possible so they are ready for primaries and midterm elections. Jurisdictions will need to factor in the time required to comply with their state and local procurement procedures.

Regardless of changes in voting, scrutiny over security and gaps in the supply chain, jurisdictions have ways to ensure that their elections are run successfully.

Proper planning now will result in successful 2022 elections.

Here are seven areas of consideration for how jurisdictions can prepare for the upcoming elections:

① Accountability at all Levels

Every aspect of the voting process is being analyzed and reviewed to ensure accuracy. Accountability needs to be met at all stages of the process. If jurisdictions are using multiple partners and processes, achieving accountability at all levels is difficult. In all likelihood, you'll be best served by a single-source election process, whether you are doing ballot production and mailing in-house or relying on a partner.

② Reporting Ensures Transparency

Better reporting will be essential to track and trace exact information at each and every stage of the ballot production, mailing and tabulating processes. Jurisdictions should require a real-time reporting methodology for the entire election process. That process should have a complete audit trail in place that includes checkpoints, verifications, notifications and reports for all significant aspects and milestones of the program. Knowing precisely where components are throughout each step of the process will create transparency that keeps all parties informed and up to date, leaving no surprises and ensuring that everyone is accountable for their roles and responsibilities.

3 Voter Database Improvements

Keeping voter registration rolls accurate and current is an important part of holding efficient and secure elections. Accurate data not only protects against fraud but can also help jurisdictions better plan for election day and minimize wait times at the polls. Improving voter registration data now will help to ensure that any voting by mail will be more accurate. Run your voter registration database through CASS and NCOA now and at least quarterly, and make updates regularly. If possible, consider sending out test mailers now to confirm voters' addresses. Be sure to utilize online verification tools whenever possible. This will allow voters to check their voter registration status online, rather than having to contact the election office directly.

4 Automated Production Workflows Ensure Security

If your jurisdiction hasn't automated your production process or you aren't working with a partner that offers an automated production workflow, you are at risk of a security breach. Integrating scanning and tabulating workflows (including the newest scanning-security offerings) to the entire production workflow can provide greater assurance of security through the entire election process. If jurisdictions are unaware of new scanning technologies, talk to your scanning and tabulating partners. Some companies are offering advanced scanning technology and security ballot paper stock that provides an additional layer of security to the vote-by-mail process.

Automated workflows provide a higher level of security and ensure a 100% chain of custody of all sensitive data and information.

5 Technology to Guarantee Accuracy

Jurisdictions that are still manually inserting ballot packets are at risk of human errors that can disrupt and delay the election process and cause greater concern over the accuracy and security of the election as a whole. There are new technologies available that provide more accurate review and verification of information. Data verification software can improve data accuracy and ensure better delivery of mail-in ballots. Technology to assign and read unique barcodes takes human error out of the production and printing process. When producing mail-in ballots in bulk, intelligent inserters with multi-staged, closed-loop cameras provide the assurance that all information is accurate and all materials are correctly being mailed to each voter. Whether you are working with a partner or producing and mailing ballots in-house, you need the most up-to-date technology to guarantee accuracy.

6 Equipment that Improves Efficiencies

When a jurisdiction's election responsibilities include printing (and/or mailing) hundreds of thousands or millions of ballots, you cannot rely on manual inserting. It is not only a risk for errors, but it is far too slow a process to meet the timelines of the election cycle. For example, an efficient jurisdiction is printing and mailing vote-by-mail packets within 24-hours upon receiving voter requests. Jurisdictions need equipment that ensures output that can meet the stringent timelines and demands of the voting by mail process. This equipment includes high-speed intelligent inserters on the production side of the process to quickly and accurately compile, address and mail all the components of a ballot packet, as well as ballot-scanning and sorting equipment for the inbound receipt of ballots that offers high-speed sorting, scanning and signature validation. Speed and accuracy, faster turnarounds and better delivery can only be guaranteed if jurisdictions have the equipment that can offer these efficiencies.

7 Tracking is Essential for Building Confidence

One area that has advanced due to the concern over security and transparency of elections is the ability for election officials and voters to track ballots. For election officials, it is important that they can track all aspects of the printing, mailing and tabulating process. In addition, and especially after the 2020 election cycle, it is extremely important that voters know that their vote has been counted. Be sure you are using tracking technologies in the upcoming election. It is a relatively easy process that integrates directly with your election website. Allowing voters to log in and see where their ballot is throughout the entire process – including when it has been mailed to them, sent back in the mail stream and received by the election office – is paramount to voter confidence.

There are still many challenges facing the election industry, including security and accuracy concerns, changes in voting practices and serious supply chain issues. The good news is there are solutions available to help jurisdictions overcome the challenges and have a successful and secure election. The goal of this paper is to highlight several processes and procedures that jurisdictions need and should consider now to best prepare for the upcoming primary elections. Review all your options and please let us know if we can be of help in any way.

You can reach us at election@fortorangepress.com or by calling 800-777-3233.

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For more than 100 years, Fort Orange Press has been a trusted election partner and is the leading ballot printing and mailing expert. In the past decade, Fort Orange Press escalated investments in technology and personnel to provide the most efficient, accurate and secure election program available anywhere. Fort Orange Press continues to expand its service footprint as more jurisdictions are looking for an end-to-end solution that includes data management and processing, intelligent printing and mailing, as well as transparent tracking and reporting tools.

Election officials today need a partner with deep experience in the election industry, a partner who understands that every ballot counts.

That partner is Fort Orange Press.

For more information, visit www.fortorangepress.com/election. Email us at election@fortorangepress or call (800) 777-3233.

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