

Assuring a vibrant democracy in Ohio

The State of Ohio must act to assure that voting is accessible by all.

The right to vote is the foundation of democracy and must be protected for all Americans. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in 1964 (Reynolds v. Sims) that “The right to vote freely for the candidate of one’s choice is of the essence of a democratic society, and any restrictions on that right strike at the heart of representative government.”

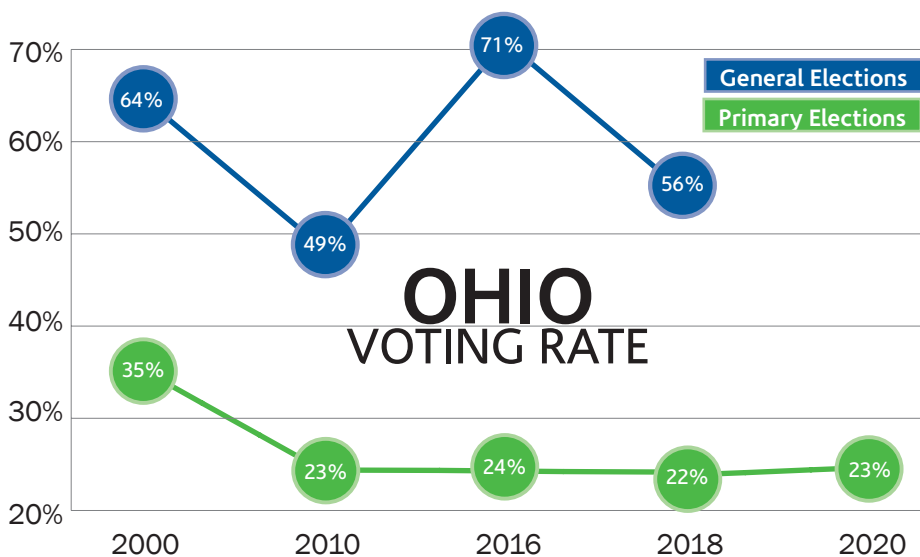
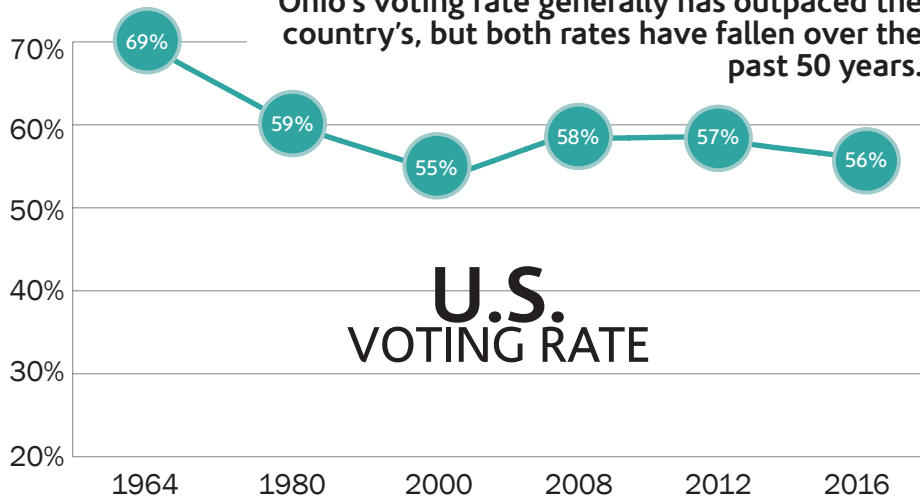
Ensuring that all can exercise that right in every election is paramount to a healthy civil society and Philanthropy Ohio urges our state officials to take actions to assure that all eligible voters can vote without hindrance – despite pandemics, disasters or other circumstances that might appear to warrant limiting physical access and processes – and whether the individual chooses to vote in person or via an absent voter’s ballot (as spelled out in the Ohio Revised Code). While in-person voting is the strong

preference, we recognize that individual or collective circumstances have led to the widely accepted absent voter’s ballot that allows full participation while protecting the integrity of an election.

We are most concerned by the cancellation of the March 2020 primary by the Ohio Director of Health, followed by the proclaiming of a new election date of June 2 by the Secretary of State – both well-intentioned decisions – before the General Assembly stepped in to exercise its authority by deciding that Ohioans would vote only absent voter’s ballots through April 28. This brief lays out recommendations for policymakers as they consider how to conduct future elections, particularly in light of COVID-19’s unpredictable path as we look ahead to November 2020 election.

BY THE NUMBERS

Ohio’s voting rate generally has outpaced the country’s, but both rates have fallen over the past 50 years.



In May 2020, Michigan became the latest state to allow all voters to vote absentee in the November 2020 election and will provide applications to all registered voters. Prior to COVID-19, five states held elections using mail-only: Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington, all of which mail ballots to all registered voters. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many more states to debate and change voting procedures to address possible health and safety concerns.

Increased or widespread levels of voter fraud where absentee voting occurs has not been documented; political scientists, journalists and election experts agree that the amount of voter fraud in the U.S. is miniscule in relation to the number of ballots cast, with rare cases related to absentee ballot systems.

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Ohio's decision to go to absentee voting for the March 2020 primary was fraught with problems, from the initial cancelation to rescheduling and implementation. As the General Assembly members, Secretary of State and Governor DeWine deliberate about how to conduct the November 2020 election, we offer these recommendations to help assure that all eligible Ohioans can equitably, safely and securely exercise their right to vote, using the long-established mechanism of "no-fault" absent voter's ballots with expanded access and improved processes to assure election both access and integrity – an important balance that should be the goal of all political parties.

Recommendation #1

Provide an online system for requesting an absent voter's ballot. Philanthropy Ohio supports S.B. 191, which would require the creation of a secure online process for applying for an absent voter's ballot.

Recommendation #2

Establish more than 1 early voting location in each of Ohio's 88 counties.

Recommendation #3

Provide absentee ballots with a return, self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Voting should not entail any cost, regardless of how modest.

Recommendation #4

Establish more than one secure drop-off location for ballots.

Recommendation #5

Use CARES Act funding to assure the integrity and robustness of the November 2020 election, identifying its best uses and areas of greatest need.



Empowering Change

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ABOUT PHILANTHROPY OHIO

Philanthropy Ohio is an association of foundations, corporate giving programs, individuals and organizations actively involved in philanthropy in Ohio. Its mission is to lead and equip Ohio philanthropy to be effective, powerful change agents in our communities. It provides the network, tools and knowledge to help people engaged in philanthropy become more effective, powerful change agents in their communities. Together, its more than 220 members hold over \$50 billion in as-sets and provide over \$4 billion in grants to nonprofit organizations that work to improve the lives of community residents.