Two myths

America should prepare now for voting by mail in November’s election

Opposition to absentee voting is based on a pair of misconceptions

Apr 18th 2020 |

ONE OF Donald Trump’s special talents is to hold every conceivable position on a given subject at the same time. So it is with voting by mail in American elections. The president used a postal ballot to vote in Florida’s Republican primary last month. He has also denounced postal voting as an invitation to fraud. He has said voting by mail “doesn’t work out well for Republicans”. And he has said that postal voting should be expanded for older voters and for members of the armed forces, two groups he assumes would favour him in November.

唐纳德•特朗普(Donald Trump)的特殊才能之一，是在同一时间对某一特定主题持有所有可能的立场。美国的邮寄选举也是如此。上个月，总统用邮寄选票的方式在佛罗里达州的共和党初选中进行了投票。他还谴责邮寄选举是欺诈行为。他曾表示，邮寄投票“对共和党人没有好处”。他还说，邮政投票应该扩大到老年选民和军队成员，他认为这两个群体在11月大选中会支持他。

The president’s interventions have turned something that should be uncontroversial into yet another excuse for partisan warfare. America has a presidential election this year. It also has thousands of congressional, state, county and mayoral elections. As the country with the most recorded cases of covid-19, it needs to start planning in case voters cannot get to polling stations. There is only one practical way to hold elections under these circumstances: to expand the use of voting by mail.

总统的干预已经把本应毫无争议的事情变成了党派斗争的又一个借口。美国今年将举行总统选举。它还有数以千计的国会、州、县和市长选举。作为新冠肺炎病例最多的国家，它需要开始规划，以防选民无法前往投票站。在这种情况下举行选举只有一个切实可行的办法:扩大邮寄投票的使用。

This ought not to be hard. All states let ill or absent voters post their ballots. Five states already allow everyone to post their vote in any election. A further 16 states allow it for some elections or in some remote counties where getting to a polling station requires a long drive. These states have accumulated experience that others can learn from, in particular when it comes to reducing the opportunities for voting fraud that can come with mail-in elections.

这应该不难。所有州都允许生病或缺席的选民邮寄选票。五个州已经允许每个人在任何选举中张贴自己的选票。另外还有16个州允许在一些选举中使用，或者在一些偏远的县，去投票站需要开很长时间的车。这些国家积累了其他国家可以借鉴的经验，特别是在减少邮寄选举中可能出现的选举舞弊的机会方面。

In 2018 a Republican strategist in North Carolina allegedly collected and spoiled absentee ballots, which led to a re-run of a congressional election. Back in 1998, 18 people were arrested over a scam involving postal votes in Miami’s mayoral election. Such incidents are serious but exceptionally rare. Between 2000 and 2012, a period in which billions of votes were cast, America saw 491 cases of absentee-voting fraud. During that same period 497 Americans were killed by lightning. In Britain, where anyone can request a postal vote, the electoral commission has warned of the possibility of electoral fraud, though it has not recently found much evidence of it actually taking place.

2018年，北卡罗来纳州的一名共和党战略家涉嫌收集和破坏缺席选票，导致国会选举重新进行。早在1998年，就有18人因涉及迈阿密市长选举邮寄选票的骗局而被捕。这类事件很严重，但极为罕见。从2000年到2012年，也就是数十亿张选票被投出的时期，美国发生了491起缺席投票欺诈案件。在同一时期，有497名美国人死于雷击。在英国，任何人都可以要求邮寄投票，选举委员会已经警告了选举舞弊的可能性，尽管最近还没有发现多少证据表明选举舞弊确实在发生。

If Americans had to choose between a slightly increased risk of electoral fraud or cancelling the elections altogether, it would be a straightforward decision. But they don’t. States such as Oregon and Colorado, which allow everyone to vote by mail in every election, have developed sophisticated techniques, which make fraud even more unlikely.

如果美国人必须在选举舞弊风险稍微增加和完全取消选举之间做出选择，这将是一个直截了当的决定。但他们没有。俄勒冈和科罗拉多等州允许每个人在每次选举中通过邮件投票，这些州已经开发出了复杂的技术，使欺诈变得更加不可能。

In Colorado, for example, voters can track their ballots through each stage of the electoral process, opting to receive a text message when their ballot is mailed, when it is returned, and when it has been counted. Oregon reckons that it has dispatched 100m postal ballots since 2000, and seen fewer than a dozen cases of electoral fraud.

例如，在科罗拉多州，选民可以在选举过程的每个阶段追踪自己的选票，选择在选票寄出、退回和计票时收到短信。俄勒冈州估计，自2000年以来，该州已经寄出了1亿张邮寄选票，而选举舞弊案件还不到12起。

The second argument against postal voting—that it is supposedly better for Democrats—ought not to matter. Both parties should want as many people as possible to participate in their democracy. Politically, though, it does—because if Republicans think that voting by mail will disadvantage them, they will block federal efforts to fund it, or state-level initiatives to introduce it.

第二个反对邮政投票的理由——据说邮政投票对民主党更有利——应该无关紧要。两党都应该希望尽可能多的人参与他们的民主。然而，从政治上来说，它确实起作用了——因为如果共和党人认为邮寄投票对他们不利，他们就会阻止联邦政府为其提供资金的努力，或者阻止州一级的引入邮件投票的倡议。

Fortunately the suspicion that postal voting is a Democratic plot is unfounded, too. The most comprehensive recent study of the political effects of introducing voting by mail, which comes from academics at Stanford, compared results from elections as absentee voting was rolled out across the states that now use it, between 1996 and 2018. It found that the reform increased turnout but did not benefit either party disproportionately.

幸运的是，认为邮寄投票是民主阴谋的怀疑也是没有根据的。最近，斯坦福大学(Stanford)的学者对邮件投票的政治影响进行了最全面的研究，比较了1996年至2018年期间，在所有使用邮件投票的州，缺席投票的选举结果。调查发现，改革提高了投票率，但对两党都没有太大的好处。

How to hold an election in less than seven months’ time might not seem like a pressing problem when there is so much else going on. Yet election officials from states that already know how to run socially distanced elections warn that it takes time to build the systems needed to make voting by mail secure, and to train people to use them. If America wants to be certain of carrying out a proper national election in November the time to start preparing is not October. It is now.

如何在不到7个月的时间内举行选举，似乎不是一个紧迫的问题，因为还有很多其他事情要做。然而，那些已经知道如何进行社会距离选举的州的选举官员警告说，要建立一个系统来保证邮件投票的安全，并训练人们使用邮件投票，是需要时间的。如果美国想确保在11月进行一次适当的全国选举，那么开始准备的时间就不是10月。这是现在。