

# The 2020 Minnesota Primary

**Aug 6, 2020**

Minnesota held its presidential primary on March 3, just three days before the state confirmed its first COVID-19 case. With its upcoming August 11 primary for state and federal legislators, Minnesota can test new measures to address COVID-19 and identify issues before the November general election. Given the state’s historically high voter turnout, Minnesota will need to prepare for a significant increase in mail-in ballots while maintaining in-person polling options despite a reduced workforce, centralization of polling locations, and social distancing requirements. To address some of these concerns, Minnesota has already instituted changes to its mail-ballot procedures and passed legislation to give more time and resources to local election officials. But challenges remain, especially given inconsistent messaging on new election procedures from Minnesota’s counties, which are largely responsible for administering the elections.

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## Summary

Minnesota held its 2020 presidential primary on March 3. Three days later, Minnesota’s [first](#) coronavirus case was confirmed. A statewide stay-at-home order was issued less than a month later. Though the order has been lifted, Minnesota is still imposing certain COVID-19 restrictions. COVID-19 will affect Minnesota’s August 11 primary election for state offices and most federal congressional representatives, as well as the November 3 general election.

Minnesota is better positioned than other states to run an election during a pandemic. Minnesota has allowed no-excuse absentee voting [since 2014](#), and a state statute allows certain small cities and townships to hold mail-only elections. From 2014 to 2018, the state saw a 142 percent increase in absentee ballot requests and a 177 percent increase in accepted absentee ballots. Minnesota voters thus seemingly embraced absentee voting. In late March, Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon emphasized the need for swift decisions to take advantage of the state’s head start for the upcoming elections.

Political disagreements and legal challenges have prevented some additional reforms. Secretary Simon and Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party (DFL) lawmakers favored shifting to a

mail-only election, but the Republican Party of Minnesota opposed the change. The parties compromised, and the Minnesota legislature passed [HF 3429](#), increasing funding for safer polling places while providing more resources to meet the expected demand for more absentee ballots.

However, HF 3429 fails to address the lack of adequately staffed polling locations due to COVID-19. While [Secretary Simon hopes](#) to see 50 to 60 percent of voters use absentee ballots to reduce in-person voting, staffing for the remaining in-person voters will still be difficult. Finding elections judges will be especially challenging for the August 11 primary: the primary source of judges are retirees, many of whom are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 and might be uncomfortable participating.

The lack of poll workers has also led some counties to reduce the number of polling locations. HF 3429 further exacerbates the issue by prohibiting election officials from using schools as polling sites unless no other location is reasonably available. These factors have forced some cities (e.g. [Brainerd](#) and [Austin](#)) to consolidate their polling sites. While Minnesota has seen a significant increase in absentee ballot requests for the August 11 primary, it is unclear whether the reduction in polling locations will result in longer waits and crowding on Election Day.

Within a month of the bill's signing, Secretary Simon faced three lawsuits challenging absentee ballot requirements in the face of the pandemic. In response, on June 16, 2020, Minnesota joined a consent decree that suspended the witness requirement for absentee voting and extended the time by which absentee ballots can be received for the August 11 election. On August 3, 2020, Minnesota entered a separate consent decree to suspend the witness requirement for absentee voting for the November 3 general election and accept ballots for that election received within one week of election day.

The first consent decree was approved just over a week before early voting for Minnesota's August 11 primary began, leading to a rush to alert voters to the changes. This quick turnaround has resulted in inconsistencies in the dissemination of voter information. The Secretary of State website outlines the changes, but the [linked paper absentee ballot application](#) still says ballots must be returned by Election Day to be counted. Minnesota county websites are even more varied. Very few list the consent decree changes on the websites themselves—many merely link to the Secretary of State website without mentioning COVID-19, while others erroneously list the witness signature as a current requirement. It is unclear if work is being done to standardize online information.

The consent decrees also raise concerns regarding the timing of announcing the results of both the August 11 primary and November 3 general elections. Because the consent decrees allow for two

additional days to count ballots for the August 11 primary and seven additional days to count ballots for the November 3 general election, election officials will likely have to delay announcing their results on election night. Due to COVID-19, more Minnesotans will likely vote by mail, and election officials will need more time to process and count the influx of absentee ballots.

Minnesota has the benefit of its August 11 primary to evaluate its current measures to address COVID-19 and identify and resolve new problems in advance of the November 3 general election.

*This analysis highlights four key obstacles from Minnesota's experience:*

- 1. Resource constraints:** Limited local resources and election judges to staff polling locations.
- 2. Reduction in polling locations:** Some counties have reduced the number of polling locations due to restrictions against using schools as polling sites.
- 3. Confusion regarding witness requirement and mail deadline for absentee ballots:** Minnesota law requires voters to find a qualified witness to sign their absentee ballot envelopes and make sure that their ballots are received by Election Day. These requirements were waived for the August 11 primary (and later for November 3 general election), but have not been accurately publicized on county websites as of the date of this memo.
- 4. Delay in declaring a winner on election night:** Minnesota will count ballots postmarked on Election Day and received up to two days after the August 11 primary or up to one week after the November 3 general election. Because the state anticipates an increase in absentee voting due to fears of COVID-19, election officials and local news likely will not be able to announce official winners on election night given the extra time needed to count all ballots.

#### A. Key Resources:

- [MNVotes.org](https://mnvotes.org): Minnesota Secretary of State's voter page
- [Vote.org Minnesota Election Center](https://vote.org/minnesota-election-center): information and deadlines for absentee voting and Election Day
- Minnesota [2020 Combined Elections Calendar](#)
- [Minnesota Secretary of State YouTube](#): videos about voter registration, absentee voting, and pandemic updates

**B. Relevant Minnesota Election Laws Summary (Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights)**

<b>Citation in Minnesota Statutes</b>	<b>Law</b>
§ 201.054 § 201.061	<i>Mail-in registration deadline:</i> 21 days prior to Election Day.
§ 203B.02	<i>Qualifying for Mail-In / Absentee Ballot:</i> No excuse needed.
§ 203B.04 § 203B.08	<i>Absentee Application Submission by Mail Deadline:</i> Postmarked 1 day prior to Election Day and received by Election Day.
§ 203B.08	<i>Method for Returning Ballots:</i> By mail or in-person to the local elections office. In special circumstances, a voter may ask an agent to pick up and return an absentee ballot.
§ 203B.07 § 203B.121	<i>Proof of Identity/Witness Requirements:</i> No proof of identity requirement.  Absentee ballot envelopes must be signed by a registered Minnesota voter, or a notary or other officer authorized to administer oaths.
§ 203B.081 § 203B.085	<i>Early Voting:</i> Begins 46 days prior to Election Day until 5:00 PM the day before Election Day.
§ 204B.14 § 204B.175	<i>Election Emergency:</i> In the event of an emergency, local officials may consolidate polling places or designate new ones if they provide notice on the original polling place.

## II. Background to Minnesota's March 3 Presidential Primary Election

### A. Elections in Play

As prescribed by a state law passed in 2016, Minnesota held a primary specifically for the presidential nomination on March 3, 2020. [Minn. Stat. § 207A.11](#). [The March 3 Presidential Primary results can be found here](#). Minnesota will hold its second primary election this year on August 11. Voters will select candidates for the U.S. Senate, [most](#) of the state's U.S. House seats, and dozens of state legislative seats. Unlike the 2018 election, the [August 11 primary](#) will likely lack any competitive statewide races.

### B. Minnesota Government's Response to COVID-19

Minnesota took a gradual approach that slowly ramped up its response to the coronavirus pandemic. Health officials confirmed the state's [first case](#) on March 6. Governor Tim Walz issued [an order](#) to close all schools on March 15 and a second [order](#) to close all non-essential businesses on March 16. On March 25, Governor Walz issued Minnesota's first statewide stay-at-home order. The order instructed residents to shelter-in-place, with exceptions for outdoor activities, grocery store trips, essential work, and relocation for victims of domestic violence and abuse. The order was extended until May 17. At the time the government announced the stay-at-home order, there were about 287 confirmed cases in the state. However, health officials estimated that the number of cases was likely "[at least 10 times as high](#)."

Though the shelter-in-place order has been lifted, the government is still imposing certain [restrictions](#). Non-critical businesses, like retail stores and salons, must operate at 50 percent capacity. In addition, outdoor gatherings of more than 25 people and indoor gatherings of more than 10 people are prohibited. As of July 8, 2020, Minnesota has [40,163 confirmed cases and 1,490 deaths](#). The state has not delayed its August 11 primary in response to the pandemic.

## IV. Preparations for the Presidential Primary

### A. Vote by Mail

Minnesota allows voters to vote by mail. Minnesota does not require an excuse for voters to request an absentee ballot. [In 2018](#), roughly a quarter of Minnesota voters, or [637,244 voters](#), cast their ballots by mail. The rules for voting by mail in the March 3 Presidential Primary were as follows:

- The [Secretary of State website](#) provided no deadline to submit absentee ballot requests. However, the website [recommended](#) applying at least 7 days before Election Day.
  - For the August 11 primary, voters are advised to apply [before July 10](#).
  - For the General Election, voters are advised to apply [before October 2](#).
- **There were three options for applying to vote absentee:**
  - (1) Submit [an online application](#) on the Minnesota Secretary of State website.
  - (2) Mail, email, or fax an [absentee ballot request form](#) from MNVotes.org.
  - (3) Call the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State Election to request absentee applications in an alternative format (i.e., Braille).
- Voters were required to provide either their Minnesota driver's license number, Minnesota ID card number, or the last four digits of their SSN on their absentee ballot request.
- Minnesota residents who were not yet registered to vote received a registration application with their absentee ballot.
- Minnesota had a witness requirement for absentee ballots for the March 3 primary, which requires voters to fill out their ballots in the physical presence of a witness. Under Minnesota law, a witness must be a registered Minnesota voter, a notary, or another person authorized to administer oaths. Minn. Stat. § 203B.07, subdiv. 3; Minn. Admin. R. 8210.3000. Further, witnesses must sign the signature envelope and list their address. [Though 11 states have a witness requirement, Minnesota is the only one that requires the witness to be a registered voter \(with limited exceptions\)](#).
- Voters began casting their absentee ballots 46 days before Election Day.
- All absentee ballots needed to be postmarked on or before Election Day for the March 3 primary. Voters could also return their ballots in person to the election office that sent the ballot no later than 3 p.m. on Election Day. Voters were not allowed to drop off their absentee ballots at a polling location.
- Some voters (i.e. those living in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, or battered women's shelters) could request [agent delivery](#) of their absentee ballot form. To qualify, agents needed

to be at least 18 years old and have a pre-existing relationship with the voter. Agents could not be a candidate nor serve as an agent of more than three voters in an election.

Minnesota voters could [track](#) the status of their ballots on the Minnesota Secretary of State website by entering the ID number provided on their absentee ballot. Voters could also have an absentee ballot application automatically mailed before each election.

### **COVID Preparations:**

[Secretary Simon](#) has encouraged voters to submit their ballots by mail in the upcoming August 11 primary to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Since mid-May, voters have been able to request ballots for the August 11 primary. In the first week alone, [more than 36,000 Minnesota voters submitted a request for an absentee ballot](#), compared to just 170 in 2016. As of [June 26](#), more than 207,000 residents requested absentee ballots, up from roughly 8,000 at the same time in 2018. Furthermore, Secretary Simon suspended the witness requirement for absentee ballots for the August 11 primary and extended the deadline to receive and count ballots to two days after the August 11 primary. For the November 3 general election, Secretary Simon waived the witness requirement for absentee ballots and agreed to count absentee ballots that are postmarked on or before Election Day and received up to one week after.

### **B. Polling Place Voting**

The March 3 presidential primary was held before Minnesota Governor Tim Walz issued a shelter in place order effective March 27. Because the March 3 primary occurred before an uptick in coronavirus cases, voters were [advised](#) to “vote at their usual polling place” on March 3.

### **COVID Preparations:**

[Secretary Simon](#) has said that the state will need around 30,000 poll workers, but that the state anticipates a shortage of poll workers. For the August 11 primary, Secretary Simon has encouraged voters to vote by mail.

During a meeting with the Minnesota House Elections Subcommittee, Secretary Simon urged state legislators to pass a [bill](#) that would allow every registered voter in Minnesota to automatically receive a ballot in the mail. Republican state lawmakers [opposed](#) automatic mailing of ballots and



instead proposed spreading voters across additional polling places. [Democratic state lawmakers](#) have expressed their support for a mail-in voting bill. The legislature has yet to pass such a bill.

On May 14, 2020, Governor Tim Walz signed [HF 3429](#) into law. The bill, which had passed the Minnesota Senate in a 66-1 vote, opens up \$17 million in federal aid to allow the state to invest in greater safety and sanitation practices at in-person polling locations, add more polling places to reduce crowding, and meet the increased demand for vote-by-mail. The legislation also gives state and local elections officials more flexibility to find new polling locations until July 1, 2020.

However, the bill has several shortcomings. It fails to address the state's diminishing population of willing and able poll workers. The bill also prohibits counties from using schools as polling sites unless no other public or private locations are reasonably available for use. Because of this new regulation and a dearth of poll workers, several cities (e.g. [Brainerd](#) and [Austin](#)) have reduced the number of polling places. Others (e.g. [Winona](#) and [Northfield](#)) have changed polling locations without adding or decreasing polling sites.

Secretary Simon [encourages](#) special election jurisdictions and voters to follow the guidance [provided by](#) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on August 11. This includes social distancing of six feet between voters, equipment sanitization, and hygienic measures such as providing masks, hand sanitizer, and no-touch trash cans. The CDC also suggests the use of cloth face coverings as an additional measure, but not as a replacement for social distancing. The Minnesota Department of Health provides additional guidance on [when to wear a mask](#).



Signs in the voting booth note whether or not they are sanitized for use.

MinnPost photos by Peter Callaghan

Additionally, jurisdictions are encouraged to increase their curbside voting operations. Secretary Simon states that [curbside voting will be available](#) for anyone unable to enter a polling place for any reason. If a voter opts for curbside voting, two election judges will bring a ballot to the voter's vehicle. If a voter needs to register or update registration, they will also bring an application. After the voter is done voting, the judges will return the ballot to the polling place and put it in the ballot box for the voter.

## C. Primary Preparations By County

Counties adopted somewhat different procedures to comply with the state's directions. Complete results of the counties' procedures are presented in the Appendix below.

### **In-Person Voting:**

- Under [Minn. Stat. § 204B.45](#), cities and townships under 400 residents may elect to hold mail-only elections. One administrative services director for **Crow Wing County** [has already seen](#) an increase in the number of townships shifting to all-mail elections, but there is no information on the county website. **Rice County's** website includes notices for its cities that have elected to vote entirely by mail.
- While the majority of county websites link to the updated SoS website, many do not include any guidelines or updates on in-person voting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Voter information on these websites is often provided with no reference to COVID-19 at all (e.g. **Carver County, Faribault County**). Some counties generally reference COVID-19 but do not provide specific information, instead linking to the SoS website (e.g. **Ramsey County**). Very few counties provide specific COVID-19 guidelines on their websites (e.g. **Hennepin County**).
- Some cities (e.g. Austin in **Mower County**) have reduced the number of polling sites because of a lack of poll workers and suitable locations.

### **Applying for an Absentee Ballot:**

- Minnesota voters may apply for an absentee ballot [online](#) or using a [mail application](#).
- Minnesota's 2020 absentee ballot application requires voters to indicate which election(s) for which they are requesting an absentee ballot. Voters may indicate that they are requesting an absentee ballot for both the August 11 primary and November 3 general election.

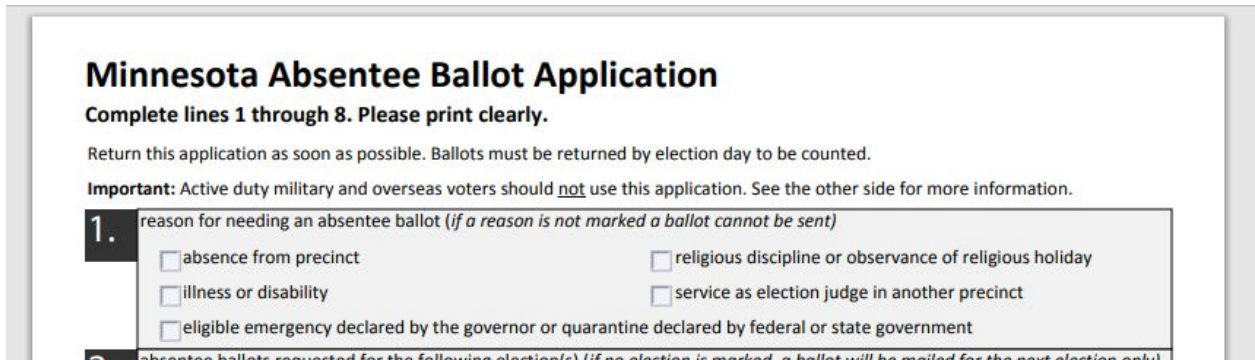
### **County Innovations:**

- **Anoka County** provides one of the most comprehensive overviews of election information, including an informative COVID-19 specific elections webpage. The absentee voting webpage emphasizes the August 11 primary changes to the witness requirement and Election Day deadline.
- **Wright County** allows voters to sign up for 15-minute slots to submit early in-person ballots, allowing residents to vote efficiently while maintaining social distancing. The county also built an absentee ballot [drop box](#), anchored in concrete and monitored by video surveillance, at the Wright County Government Center.

- **Wabasha County** features videos from the [Minnesota Secretary of State's YouTube page](#) on its website, which informs residents how to vote. The video is provided in several different languages, including Spanish, Somali, and Hmong.
- Minneapolis, located in **Hennepin County**, runs an active Twitter account ([@VoteMpls](#)) that provides residents with helpful reminders and early voting options. The account also featured changes to voting by mail requirements pursuant to the June 16 consent decree. *See infra* Section III.A.

**County Concerns:**

- As of the date of this memo, almost all of Minnesota's 87 counties mention neither the suspension of the witness requirement nor the extension of the deadline to receive ballots under the consent decrees. *See infra* Section III.A. Some counties only mention one of the two changes. For example, **Carver County** and **Cass County** mention that witnesses are no longer required but do not mention the deadline extension.
- Several county websites contained important links that did not work or were outdated. For example, **Yellow Medicine County's** link to the absentee ballot application ran a 404 error. **Martin County** used an old version of the absentee ballot application that erroneously required a reason for the request, even though Minnesota now has no-excuse absentee voting:



- **Washington County** does not allow voters to drop off absentee ballots on Election Day.

### III. Challenges Faced in Transitioning to Vote-by-Mail

#### A. Legal Challenges

Minnesota agreed to suspend the witness requirement and accept ballots received after both the August 11 primary and November 3 general election. On June 16, 2020, in response to three lawsuits, Minnesota [agreed](#) to suspend the witness requirement for absentee ballots of registered voters for the upcoming August 11 primary. Under the [consent decree](#), absentee voters will receive notices regarding the suspension of the witness requirement, and the Secretary of State will educate the public about this temporary change. Further, counties will count [all ballots received up to two days after Election Day](#) so long as they are postmarked on or before Election Day. The Secretary of State, according to the decree, will take reasonable steps to inform the public of these changes. A [separate consent decree](#) was entered for the November 3 general election. The second consent decree also suspends the witness requirement, and provides that the Secretary of State will count ballots that are postmarked on or before Election Day and received up to one week afterwards. These changes are displayed on the Minnesota Secretary of State website under its [“Vote Early by Mail” page](#). However, these changes are not yet reflected on its [“Vote Early by Absentee Ballot” factsheet](#) on the same website.

The consent decrees followed three lawsuits against the Secretary of State. On May 13, 2020, the **Minnesota Alliance for Retired Americans Educational Fund** and [four voters](#) filed a [state lawsuit](#) in the Ramsey County District Court. Plaintiffs sought to strike down two Minnesota laws: one that requires that absentee ballots be witnessed by a Minnesota voter, notary, or person authorized to administer oaths before submission; and another requiring that absentee ballots be received by certain times on Election Day, depending on the delivery method. Plaintiffs alleged that the search for witnesses placed unconstitutional burdens on voters and the increased danger of contracting COVID-19. They also argued that the time deadline relied too heavily on the timeliness of the U.S. Postal Service, even though the postal service has suffered significant pandemic-related delays. The consent decrees were formally entered in this case.

On May 19, 2020, the **League of Women Voters of Minnesota Education Fund** (LWVMN) and an individual Minnesota voter filed a [federal lawsuit](#) in the U.S. District Court of Minnesota. Plaintiffs sought to suspend Minnesota’s witness requirement for absentee ballot submissions in the August 11 Primary and 2020 Presidential Election. The complaint alleged that the witness requirement makes social distancing impossible and creates a substantial risk of COVID-19

transmission, especially amongst older voters, unless the voter and witness already live together. Plaintiffs also sought permanent relief from Minnesota's qualification requirements for who may serve as a witness for absentee ballots. On June 23, 2020, the judge overseeing the litigation [said](#) that the first consent decree entered in the state lawsuit went "well beyond" the concerns raised in the LWVM case because it applied to both voters with COVID-19 concerns and those who could safely secure a witness signature. The judge suggested that only a more narrowly tailored agreement was required in the LWVM case. Secretary Simon's office has confirmed this statement does not affect the consent decrees and that they will still waive the witness requirement for all voters, regardless of their ability to safely secure a witness signature.

On June 4, 2020, the **ACLU**, on behalf of the NAACP and two individual voters, also filed a [federal lawsuit](#). The complaint sought a court order directing Minnesota to suspend the witness requirement for submitting absentee ballots and to mail absentee ballots to every registered voter. In addition, the complaint sought a court order compelling the state to conduct a public information campaign about the elimination of the witness requirement.

## B. Logistical Challenges

The number of absentee ballot applications for the August 11 primary has soared compared to previous years. On June 26, [Secretary Simon reported](#) that his office had received 207,835 absentee ballot applications statewide, compared with 7,939 in 2018 and 8,964 in 2016. In Minneapolis alone, 24,000 ballots have been prepared for August 11 voters. In comparison, only 1,350 total ballot requests were made in Minneapolis for the entire 2016 primary season.

This surge in absentee ballot applications has significantly increased the workload of state and local elections officials. [HF 3429](#) was signed to provide polling places with increased funding to better manage in-person and absentee voting during the pandemic. The [average amount](#) each county will receive from the bill is \$54,000. Additionally, local officials are now allowed to begin processing mailed ballots and in-person early votes 14 days before Election Day, rather than the typical period of 7 days.

Even with support from HF 3429, concerns and logistical issues remain. For example, because the first consent decree was approved just over a week before early voting in Minnesota [started](#), [officials needed to quickly replace](#) the voting instructions in thousands of ballot envelopes that had already been prepared. Secretary Simon had [previously said](#) that the logistical challenge of more mail ballots would require contracting an envelope vendor by early May in order to have time to complete printing for the August 11 election.

There are also concerns of poll worker shortages. [Secretary Simon estimates](#) the state will need about 30,000 workers to staff polls statewide for the August primary. But he [and local officials](#) are concerned that finding election judges—a challenge under normal circumstances—will become even more difficult. The primary source of judges is retirees, many of whom are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 and might be wary of participating. [Some poll workers have already informed](#) election officials that they are not comfortable working during the August 11 election. State Senator [Mary Kiffmeyer has called](#) for younger people to apply to be elections judges or poll workers.

The consent decree poses additional logistical challenges. Because election officials are allowed to count ballots that are postmarked on or before Election Day and received up to two days after the August 11 primary or up to one week after the November 3 general election, Minnesota will likely need to delay announcing any results. An increase in mail-in ballots due to COVID-19 may also warrant such a delay to ensure that all votes are accounted for. Secretary Simon has echoed this [warning](#), cautioning that the August 11 primary will be a “different kind of election night” and that Minnesotans will not “get that instant gratification that [they’re] used to.”

## IV. Presidential Primary Results Post-Mortem

### A. Summary

Minnesota has [historically](#) enjoyed high voter turnout and has instituted measures to increase voter participation. For example, [voter turnout increased by 177 percent](#) after the state switched from a party-run caucus system to a state-administered primary election in 2016. Unlike the seventeen states that still require voters to provide an excuse when requesting an absentee ballot, [Minnesota has offered “no-excuse absentee voting”](#) since 2014. Since then, [absentee voting has become increasingly popular amongst Minnesota voters](#). Though Secretary Simon has urged voters to submit their ballots by mail for the August primary due to concerns about COVID-19, Minnesota held its March 3 primary before it confirmed its [first coronavirus case](#). Notably, Minnesota [Senator Amy Klobuchar](#) dropped out of the presidential race one day prior to her state’s presidential primary.

### B. Absentee Ballot Process



As of February 28, [94,287 voters](#) applied for absentee ballots to vote in the March 3 presidential primary. By comparison, [only 41,989 voters submitted absentee ballots in the 2016 state primary](#). However, it is difficult to compare these data sets because this year was the first time Minnesota held a state-administered presidential primary since 1992.

Minnesota did not report any difficulties with processing absentee ballots from the March 3 primary. However, because state and local officials have encouraged voters to vote by mail for the August 11 primary, increased absentee turnout is foreseeable. More than [207,000 residents requested absentee ballots](#) as of June 26.

### C. Voter Turnout

According to the Minnesota Secretary of State's office, [884,235 ballots were cast](#) in the March 3 primary from Minnesota's 3.36 million registered voters – about 26.31 percent of Minnesota's registered voters. By contrast, only 318,000 Minnesotans participated in the 2016 caucus. As of February 28, [66,135 voters had cast absentee ballots for the March 3 primary, and 28,152 ballots were outstanding](#) (requested by voters but not yet returned).

Primary turnout significantly increased this year because Minnesota switched from a caucus system to a primary election after the 2016 election. [Local journalists](#) estimate that the state received more than 3.5 times the number of ballots from the DFL and 23 percent more ballots from the Republican Party than in 2016. Minnesota turnout figures and election results are available for every statewide primary and general election going back to 1992 on the Secretary of State [website](#).

### D. In-Person Voting Experience

Registered voters were able to vote at their [usual polling place](#) on March 3. Most polling places were open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Because Minnesota's first coronavirus case was not officially confirmed until three days after the presidential primary, there were no reported COVID-19-related difficulties with in-person voting in Minnesota for the March 3 primary.

### E. Secretary of State Website Issues

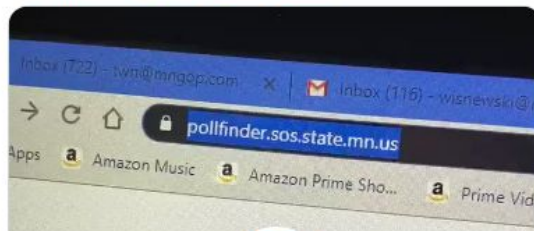
On [March 3](#), Minnesota voters discovered that a link on the Secretary of State's website sent voters to another website that supported Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren. When voters



Tyler Newcombe  
@tylernewcombenn



When an official government website for voting redirects people to a liberal website... [@MNSecofState](#) should not be redirecting voters to a webpage of a group that has supported [@ewarren](#). #sham #mnvotes #MNprimary #SuperTuesday



attempted to find their local polling places (at [pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us](http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us)), they were redirected to [BoldProgressive.org](http://BoldProgressive.org), a progressive political action committee.

Secretary Simon released a [statement](#) to address the situation and acknowledged that the redirect was a result of a “serious lapse of judgment” by a staff member, who had linked Bold Progressive’s polling place information. The redirect was up on the Secretary of State’s website for 17 minutes until it was pulled down.

Some government officials and voters went to Twitter to criticize the Office of the Secretary of State for redirecting voters to a progressive website.

## F. Voter Privacy Issues

Minnesota’s shift to a presidential primary election from a caucus system raised novel privacy issues prior to the March 3 primary. The [issue](#) arose out of the shift to a presidential primary system, which required voters to submit their party affiliation to obtain a ballot. The Secretary of State would then be required to submit a list of voters and their party affiliations to the DFL and GOP.

Before the March 3 primary, voters had raised concerns over publicizing their political data. [Several lawmakers](#) also argued that such privacy concerns would deter voters from voting in the primary. In response, Secretary Simon had proposed [a plan](#) to restrict how voter data is used, classify party preference as private data, and allow voters to opt out of the list. State Democrats supported Simon’s proposal, while some Republican lawmakers suggested not recording the voter’s party preference in the first place. However, national parties insisted on asking for party preference to protect against cross-party voting.

On February 26, the Minnesota House passed [a bill](#) that would “restrict the list to a designated representative of a party’s national committee, require that person to submit a written request for the list, and share the voter’s information only with the party whose ballot they selected.” Furthermore, the new legislation prohibits parties from using the voter list except to verify compliance with national party rules. However, the Minnesota Senate was [unable to pass](#) the privacy bill into law in time prior to the March 3 primary. Though the state legislature had ten weeks after the primary to pass a privacy bill, there has been no further progress towards passage.



## G. Next Steps

In response to the increasing average number of COVID-19 diagnoses, Minnesota has been [encouraging voters to vote by mail](#). Minneapolis alone is [planning](#) for up to half of the city's electorate to vote early or by mail in the August primary and up to 70 percent to vote by mail in the November general election. Voters have been heeding the state's advice, with the Secretary of State reporting that, as of June 26, more than 207,000 residents requested absentee ballots, up from roughly 8,000 at the same time in 2018. To meet this new demand for absentee ballots, counties have used funds from HF 3429 to increase staff and purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) for their election workers.

The new absentee voting procedures under the consent decrees also demand an increase in election staff. The consent decrees, the first of which was entered into right before early voting began for the August 11 primary, requires state and local elections officials to notify voters of the changes to the witness requirement and deadline to receive ballots. In [Minneapolis](#), for example, election staff had to mobilize and quickly replace the voting instructions for thousands of ballot envelopes that they had prepared to send voters. The need for more election staff comes at a time when the usual source of staff—senior citizens—is especially vulnerable to COVID-19. Minnesota has called for younger people to help mitigate the loss of polling staff, but it may be more difficult to find people willing to work during a pandemic.

The sudden changes implemented by the first consent decree have also resulted in the dissemination of inconsistent information. While the Secretary of State [website](#) correctly cites the changes on its “Vote Early by Mail” page, as of the date of this memo, the website's “Vote Early by Absentee Ballot” [factsheet](#) and linked paper absentee ballot application do not. Most county websites also provide links to the Secretary of State's website and/or fail to cite any of the changes provided by the first consent decree. Because so many counties rely on the Secretary of State website, it will be instrumental for the Secretary of State office to maintain accurate information. Though absentee voters will receive a notice informing them of the changes with their ballots, Minnesota may want to more prominently feature any future changes on its websites at both the state and county level.

During a meeting with the Minnesota House Elections Subcommittee on April 8, Secretary Simon proposed several measures to combat election challenges posed by COVID-19. Secretary Simon's [proposal](#) includes:

- 1) Automatically sending mail-in ballots to every registered voter;
- 2) Allowing extra time for election administrators to process ballots;
- 3) Accepting candidate filings by email, fax, or U.S. mail;

- 4) Agreeing to ballot-access petitions with digital signatures; and
- 5) Reducing polling locations to centralized locations and moving them out of vulnerable areas (e.g. senior care facilities).

[Governor Tim Walz](#) also supports universal mail-in voting for the 2020 elections. Since Minnesota legislatures struck a similar clause from HF 3429, it is likely that such a measure would only be possible by executive action by Governor Walz. Unlike Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Governor Walz has yet to mandate mail-in voting.

## Additional News Articles & Reports

### **Before March 3 Presidential Primary**

- [Primary election privacy concerns are getting attention at the Minnesota Legislature. Is it too late to do anything?](#) – Minnesota Post
- [More than 36,000 Minnesotans have already voted in presidential primary](#) – MPR News

### **After March 3 Presidential Primary**

- [Biden wins Minnesota presidential primary, in wake of Klobuchar endorsement](#) – MPR News
- [Turnout strong for Minnesota's first Super Tuesday vote](#) – Pioneer Press
- [Minnesota Poll: Majority support mailing ballots to voters](#) – The Star Tribune
  - 59% of Minnesota voters back a proposal to mail ballots to every registered voter in the state for the November elections.

## Appendix: Review of Procedures Listed on County Election Websites

*Information from Minnesota's county websites was gathered in the days leading up to the August 11 primary election. Information on websites was not always indicative of policies followed; some website information may have been inaccurate or outdated.*

County	County Seat	Population (2019)	Website	Election Procedures + Analysis
Aitkin County	Aitkin	15,896	<a href="https://www.co.aitkin.mn.us/">https://www.co.aitkin.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Contains link to general absentee voter information on the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not generally reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting. The only reference is one sentence that notes over half of the county's precincts have changed to mail balloting, while only 15 precincts are Election Day precincts.</p>
Anoka County	Anoka	357,851	<a href="http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/">http://www.co.anoka.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Includes a comprehensive page on elections &amp; COVID-19 and links to the absentee ballot application on the SoS website. Some of the COVID-19 information seems to be copied and pasted from the SoS website. The county also has its own page on absentee voting.</p> <p>The website reflects the 2020 changes to the witness requirement and Election Day deadline, along with encouraging voters to adhere to CDC guidelines on social distancing, masks, and hand hygiene.</p>
Becker County	Detroit Lakes	34,420	<a href="http://www.co.becker.mn.us/">http://www.co.becker.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. There is a link to the proper paper absentee ballot application but no links to the SoS website's online application.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Beltrami County	Bemidji	46,834	<a href="http://www.co.beltrami.mn.us/">http://www.co.beltrami.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides some general voter registration information and a link to the absentee ballot application on the SoS website.</p>

				Website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Benton County	Foley	40,452	<a href="http://www.co.benton.mn.us/">http://www.co.benton.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Contains links to online and proper paper absentee ballot application on the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting, but there is a general notice that information is subject to change due to the pandemic.</p>
Big Stone County	Ortonville	5,000	<a href="http://www.bigstonecounty.org/">http://www.bigstonecounty.org/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, the elections page only provides links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Blue Earth County	Mankato	67,785	<a href="http://www.blueearthcountymn.gov/">http://www.blueearthcountymn.gov/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Includes list of polling places that moved or changed to mail-ballot precincts due to COVID-19. The absentee voting page directs readers to the SoS website.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Brown County	New Ulm	25,325	<a href="http://www.co.brown.mn.us/">http://www.co.brown.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. The county home page encourages voters to vote by mail in order to minimize exposure to COVID-19. No specific information is provided, only links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Carlton County	Carlton	35,923	<a href="http://www.co.carlton.mn.us/">http://www.co.carlton.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information: only includes a link to the paper absentee ballot application and links to the SoS website for all other inquiries.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Carver County	Chaska	105,970	<a href="http://www.co.carver.mn.us/">http://www.co.carver.mn.us/</a>	<p>The general absentee ballot information page is outdated and states that absentee ballots must be received by last mail delivery on Election Day. Includes links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Under the Latest News section on the home page, there is a link to an article on in-person absentee voting. The article notes that witness</p>

				signatures are no longer required. However, it is not mentioned that ballots can be received up to two days after Election Day. Besides this article, the website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Cass County	Walker	29,470	<a href="http://www.co.cass.mn.us/">http://www.co.cass.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. The general absentee voting webpage redirects readers to the News &amp; Legal Notices section for current election updates. This section includes a links to recent notices and election updates. One notice lists mail ballot precincts, including new precincts due to COVID-19, but it erroneously states that ballots must be witnessed and received no later than 8:00pm on Election Day in order to be counted.</p> <p>The most recent notice, released on June 30, 2020, announces the suspension of the witness requirement but does not mention the deadline extension. Both this notice and the prior notice are posted on the same page and present conflicting information.</p>
Chippewa County	Montevideo	11,965	<a href="http://www.co.chippewa.mn.us/">http://www.co.chippewa.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. The home page links to a brief news announcement that the county is preparing to conduct voting as safely as possible during the pandemic. The news announcement and general elections webpage provides links to the SoS website and absentee ballot application.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Chisago County	Center City	55,955	<a href="http://www.co.chisago.mn.us/">http://www.co.chisago.mn.us/</a>	The absentee voting webpage is outdated and specifically mentions the witness and Election Day deadline requirements. Links to the SoS website are provided, but there is no COVID-19 information as it relates to elections.
Clay County	Moorhead	63,963	<a href="http://www.co.clay.mn.us/">http://www.co.clay.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides links to the SoS website for absentee ballot information and applications.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Clearwater County	Bagley	8,815	<a href="http://www.co.clearwater.mn.us/">http://www.co.clearwater.mn.us/</a>	Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only provides links to the SoS website.

				Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Cook County	Grand Marais	5,390	<a href="http://www.co.cook.mn.us/">http://www.co.cook.mn.us/</a>	Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only provides links to the SoS website.  Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Cottonwood County	Windom	11,293	<a href="http://www.co.cottonwood.mn.us/">http://www.co.cottonwood.mn.us/</a>	Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only provides a link to the candidate filing periods on the SoS website. There is no absentee ballot information provided or linked.  Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Crow Wing County	Brainerd	64,975	<a href="http://www.crowwing.us/">http://www.crowwing.us/</a>	The elections webpage includes a video filmed on May 14th that is meant to explain how voting by mail works. It erroneously emphasizes the witness requirement and Election Day deadline.  Links to the SoS website are provided for more absentee ballot information.
Dakota County	Hastings	428,558	<a href="http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/">http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/</a>	The absentee voting webpage is outdated and mentions the witness and Election Day deadline requirements. The linked Dakota County absentee ballot application also states that ballots must be returned by Election Day. A link to the online application on the SoS website is provided.
Dodge County	Mantorville	20,842	<a href="http://www.co.dodge.mn.us/">http://www.co.dodge.mn.us/</a>	Follows state procedures. Election information is difficult to find as it is only accessible through the general finance webpage. Most of the information on absentee ballots is provided via links to the SoS webpage. The only Dodge-specific link on absentee voting is from the 2016 General Election.  Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Douglas County	Alexandria	38,041	<a href="http://www.co.douglas.mn.us/">http://www.co.douglas.mn.us/</a>	The absentee voting webpage is outdated and mentions the Election Day deadline requirement. Links to the SoS website are provided for more information.  Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.

Faribault County	Blue Earth	13,649	<a href="http://www.co.faribault.mn.us/">http://www.co.faribault.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only information is via links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Fillmore County	Preston	21,063	<a href="http://www.co.fillmore.mn.us/">http://www.co.fillmore.mn.us/</a>	<p>Election information is outdated. Includes absentee ballot information from 2015 and states the Election Day deadline requirement.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Freeborn County	Albert Lea	30,495	<a href="http://www.co.freeborn.mn.us/">http://www.co.freeborn.mn.us/</a>	<p>The absentee voting webpage is outdated and includes a 2014 video that mentions the witness and Election Day deadline requirements. There are links to paper and online applications—the former mentions the Election Day deadline.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Goodhue County	Red Wing	46,540	<a href="http://www.co.goodhue.mn.us/">http://www.co.goodhue.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Includes a news flash on the home page that directs readers to the absentee ballot application on the SoS website.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Grant County	Elbow Lake	5,975	<a href="http://www.co.grant.mn.us/">http://www.co.grant.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only information is via links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Hennepin County	Minneapolis	1,261,104	<a href="http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/">http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Election page includes a COVID-19 response section that encourages voters to vote absentee by mail. In-person voters are required to follow county or city policies including wearing a face covering and following social distancing guidelines.</p> <p>The website includes the 2020 changes to the witness requirement and election day deadline, though the waived witness requirement is somewhat hidden within the absentee voting FAQ.</p>



Houston County	Caledonia	18,659	<a href="http://www.co.houston.mn.us/">http://www.co.houston.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only information is via links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Hubbard County	Park Rapids	21,350	<a href="http://www.co.hubbard.mn.us/">http://www.co.hubbard.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only information is via links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Isanti County	Cambridge	39,932	<a href="http://www.co.isanti.mn.us/">http://www.co.isanti.mn.us/</a>	<p>The absentee voting webpage is outdated and mentions the witness and Election Day deadline requirements.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Itasca County	Grand Rapids	45,191	<a href="http://www.co.itasca.mn.us/">http://www.co.itasca.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. There is no webpage on absentee ballots, only general information on voter registration that redirects the reader to the SoS website.</p> <p>Under the County Spotlights section on the homepage, there is an announcement that information on when ballots are available and can be submitted. It notes that ballots can now be received on August 13, 2020, but it does not mention the waived witness requirement.</p>
Jackson County	Jackson	9,934	<a href="http://www.co.jackson.mn.us/">http://www.co.jackson.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only information is via links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Kanabec County	Mora	16,213	<a href="http://www.kanabeccounty.org/">http://www.kanabeccounty.org/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. The elections page simply redirects readers to the SoS website for all voter information. There is an elections FAQ but the answers do not appear.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Kandiyohi County	Willmar	42,924	<a href="http://www.co.kandiyohi.mn.us/">http://www.co.kandiyohi.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only information is via links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>

Kittson County	Hallock	4,260	<a href="http://www.co.kittson.mn.us/">http://www.co.kittson.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only information is via links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Koochiching County	International Falls	12,630	<a href="http://www.co.koochiching.mn.us/">http://www.co.koochiching.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Includes a message from the SoS office encouraging voters to vote by mail due to COVID-19. All other information is provided via links to the SoS website. One of the SoS election links is broken.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Lac qui Parle County	Madison	6,662	<a href="http://www.lqpco.com/">http://www.lqpco.com/</a>	<p>Almost no information on voting. There is only one register to vote link that redirects to the SoS website. The only other election-related information is a general description of the auditor's duties</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Lake County	Two Harbors	10,590	<a href="http://www.co.lake.mn.us/">http://www.co.lake.mn.us/</a>	<p>The absentee voting webpage is outdated and mentions the witness and Election Day deadline requirements.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Lake of the Woods County	Baudette	3,801	<a href="http://www.co.lake-of-the-woods.mn.us/">http://www.co.lake-of-the-woods.mn.us/</a>	<p>Almost no information on voting. The elections link redirects to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Le Sueur County	Le Center	28,432	<a href="http://www.co.le-sueur.mn.us/">http://www.co.le-sueur.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Website encourages voters to apply for an absentee ballot due to COVID-19.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Lincoln County	Ivanhoe	5,679	<a href="http://www.co.lincoln.mn.us/">http://www.co.lincoln.mn.us/</a>	<p>Almost no information on voting. The website incorrectly states that absentee ballots must be received by Election Day.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>

Lyon County	Marshall	25,700	<a href="http://www.lyonco.org/">http://www.lyonco.org/</a>	<p>The website is outdated and mentions the witness requirement and Election Day deadline.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Mahnomen County	Mahnomen	5,526	<a href="http://www.co.mahnomen.mn.us/">http://www.co.mahnomen.mn.us/</a>	<p>The website incorrectly states absentee ballots must be received by Election Day.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Marshall County	Warren	9,384	<a href="http://www.co.marshall.mn.us/">http://www.co.marshall.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Minimal election information, only information is via links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Martin County	Fairmont	19,822	<a href="http://www.co.martin.mn.us/">http://www.co.martin.mn.us/</a>	<p>Contains various links to the SoS website but no information regarding changes to procedures due to COVID-19.</p> <p>Under the Auditor/Treasurer page (after selecting “Elections / Voter” under the “Services” tab), the links to the absentee ballot application and important election dates are broken. The links work under the “Elections / Voter Reg” page. Unlike the application on the state’s website, the absentee ballot request form linked on the county’s website requires a reason for needing an absentee ballot.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
McLeod County	Glencoe	35,959	<a href="http://www.co.mcleod.mn.us/">http://www.co.mcleod.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Voters who are disabled can apply to automatically receive absentee ballot applications for all elections.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Meeker County	Litchfield	23,169	<a href="http://www.co.meeker.mn.us/">http://www.co.meeker.mn.us/</a>	<p>Provides a list of cities that will vote entirely by mail, a link to the absentee ballot application, and election dates for 2020.</p> <p>Election information is difficult to find since it is nestled within the “Auditor” link under “Government.” Fails to provide information about how to actually vote or submit an absentee ballot prominently on its website.</p>

				Information about how to return absentee ballots is nestled within a PDF that lists cities voting entirely by mail. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Mille Lacs County	Milaca	26,080	<a href="http://www.co.mille-lacs.mn.us/">http://www.co.mille-lacs.mn.us/</a>	<p>Contains links to the SoS website to find a polling place and voter registration status. Provides no information regarding voting procedures except for an FAQ and voter registration information.</p> <p>On June 10, 2020, the county provided a notice to residents that it received 12 new voting machines (DS200 precinct scanners and tabulators) to replace the legacy m100 ballot counter machines. Residents are invited to observe a demonstration and accuracy testing of the new machines. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Morrison County	Little Fields	33,191	<a href="http://www.co.morrison.mn.us/">http://www.co.morrison.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Contains links to the SoS website to register to vote, find an absentee ballot application, etc.</p> <p>The county does not list important 2020 election dates on its website nor on its “County Events Calendar.” Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Mower County	Austin	40,017	<a href="http://www.co.mower.mn.us/">http://www.co.mower.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Contains links to the SoS website. Provides detailed instructions for requesting an absentee ballot, which do not list the witness requirement (though it is unclear whether it was omitted on accident or on purpose due to COVID-19 changes). Lists in-person polling locations with address and opening times by city/township.</p> <p>Difficult to navigate website. Election information is nestled within the “Auditor/Treasurer’s Office” page under the “Directory” tab.</p>
Murray County	Slayton	8,293	<a href="http://www.murraycountymn.com/">http://www.murraycountymn.com/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Contains links to the SoS website but no additional information.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>

Nicollet County	St. Peter	34,189	<a href="http://www.co.nicollet.mn.us/">http://www.co.nicollet.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Contains links to the SoS website and instructions for how to register to vote or to become an Election Judge.</p> <p>Provides no information about absentee ballots other than a link to the absentee ballot status checker on the SoS website. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Nobles County	Worthington	22,021	<a href="http://www.co.nobles.mn.us/">http://www.co.nobles.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Contains links to the SoS website, including the 2020 absentee ballot application. Provides drop off location, mailing address, email address, and fax number for absentee ballot applications.</p> <p>Difficult to navigate website. Election information is nestled within the “Auditor/Treasurer’s Office” page under the “Department” tab. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Norman County	Ada	6,518	<a href="http://www.co.norman.mn.us/">http://www.co.norman.mn.us/</a>	<p>Contains links to the SoS website and a “FAQ” section with information regarding voter registration, absentee voting, and polling locations.</p> <p>Election information is nestled within the “Auditor/Treasurer’s Office” page under the “Department” tab. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Olmsted County	Rochester	157,446	<a href="http://www.olmstedcounty.com/">http://www.olmstedcounty.com/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides links to the SoS website. Has lots of information regarding voter registration, polling locations, and absentee voting (including that they made “additional arrangements to make the drop-off process quicker and safer”). Also features the election office’s new location prominently on multiple webpages.</p> <p>Good website overall but otherwise does not contain any COVID-19 updates.</p>
Otter Tail County	Fergus Falls	58,735	<a href="https://ottertailcountymn.us/">https://ottertailcountymn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides very thorough instructions about how to apply for an absentee ballot. Voters can also request an absentee ballot application over the phone, and the county will mail a hard copy. Website notes that voters who are submitting their</p>

				<p>applications or ballots in-person must maintain social distancing. Also contains a “Quick Guide to Voting for College Students.”</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Pennington County	Thief River Falls	14,276	<a href="http://co.pennington.mn.us/">http://co.pennington.mn.us/</a>	<p>Provides almost no instructions regarding voter registration, absentee ballot, or important 2020 election dates. Provides a link to the absentee ballot application on the SoS website.</p> <p>Link to “Voter Registration Card” does not work. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Pine County	Pine City	29,490	<a href="http://www.co.pine.mn.us/">http://www.co.pine.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Only contains information about absentee and early voting with a link to the absentee ballot application on the SoS website. Provides earliest dates to submit an absentee ballot for the August 11 primary and General Election.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Pipestone County	Pipestone	9,100	<a href="http://www.pipestone-county.com/">http://www.pipestone-county.com/</a>	<p>Contains links to the SoS website but no county specific information. Link to find polling locations does not work. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Polk County	Crookston	31,627	<a href="http://www.co.polk.mn.us/">http://www.co.polk.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides links to SoS website.</p> <p>Has information about absentee voting but no link to absentee ballot application. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Pope County	Glenwood	11,046	<a href="http://www.co.pope.mn.us/">http://www.co.pope.mn.us/</a>	<p>Provides no information regarding election procedures except for a link for election results on the SoS website and campaign finance reports.</p>
Ramsey County	Saint Paul	552,232	<a href="http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/">http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Reflects extension of deadline for receiving absentee ballots. Provides extensive information and rules for absentee ballots, voting in person, and voter registration, with links to the SoS website. Lists information about polling locations for the August 11 primary (address, hours, and dates).</p>

				Ramsey County also put together a 72-page Voter Guide for 2020 – very informative.
Red Lake County	Red Lake Falls	3,981	<a href="http://www.co.red-lake.mn.us/">http://www.co.red-lake.mn.us/</a>	Follows state procedures. Provides links to the SoS website to register to vote, submit an absentee ballot request, find status of ballot, etc. (though it is hard to tell whether the text is hyperlinked or not). Election information was prominently featured on the home page and very easy to find.  Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Redwood County	Redwood Falls	15,252	<a href="http://www.co.redwood.mn.us/">http://www.co.redwood.mn.us/</a>	Follows state procedures. Provides links to the SoS website for absentee ballots, voter registration status, and ballot status. No county-specific instructions other than providing absentee voting hours at the county auditor's office.  Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Renville County	Olivia	14,674	<a href="http://www.renvillecountymn.com/">http://www.renvillecountymn.com/</a>	Follows state procedures. Provides links to the SoS website for poll locations, ballot information, voter registration status, and absentee status.  Displays information for candidates more prominently on the same page. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Rice County	Fairbault	66,364	<a href="http://www.co.rice.mn.us/">http://www.co.rice.mn.us/</a>	Follows state procedures. Provides links to the SoS website for poll locations, absentee voting, and voter registration status. Notices from the City of Dennison and Richland Township are displayed prominently, informing voters that their primaries and General Election will be held entirely by mail.  "Important Election Dates" link does not work. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Rock County	Luverne	9,435	<a href="http://www.co.rock.mn.us/">http://www.co.rock.mn.us/</a>	Provides no election information other than filing information for candidates.

Roseau County	Roseau	16,201	<a href="http://www.roseau.mn.us/">http://www.roseau.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides links to the SoS website to register to vote, vote by absentee, check registration, and find polling place hours. Lists 28 precincts that vote entirely by mail ballot.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Scott County	Shakopee	146,111	<a href="http://www.scott.mn.us/">http://www.scott.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Election information is very easy to find. Encourages voters to vote by mail due to COVID-19 (with a link to the absentee ballot request form on the SoS website).</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting but does encourage social distancing.</p>
Sherburne County	Elk River	96,208	<a href="http://www.sherburne.mn.us/">http://www.sherburne.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides a county-specific absentee ballot application (including the state-wide application). Absentee ballots can be submitted during the seven days before the election at a ballot box available at the Auditor/Treasurer's office. Informative and helpful website.</p> <p>Website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Sibley County	Gaylord	15,022	<a href="http://www.sibley.mn.us/">http://www.sibley.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Absentee ballots can be submitted during the seven days before the election at a ballot box available at the Auditor/Treasurer's office (which is also open on Saturdays).</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
St. Louis County	Duluth	200,261	<a href="http://www.stlouiscountymn.gov/">http://www.stlouiscountymn.gov/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides various links to the SoS website and a helpful map of mail ballot precincts.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Stearns County	Saint Cloud	159,258	<a href="http://www.stearns.mn.us/">http://www.stearns.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Very informative website. Prominently features "Absentee Voting for August Primary" on the front page of its website under "Recent News." County is actively encouraging voters to request an absentee ballot online due to COVID-19. Provides a list of mail ballot precincts.</p>



				<p>Residents are allowed to vote in-person at two locations. Website advises, in bold, that masks are not required but encouraged.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Steele County	Owatonna	36,933	<a href="http://www.co.steele.mn.us/">http://www.co.steele.mn.us/</a>	<p>Difficult to find election information without using the search bar. Provides links to the SoS website for voter registration/absentee ballot status, sample ballot, and absentee ballot application. Also provides notices for City of Ellendale and Berlin Township that their elections are held entirely by mail. Contains a link with a document listing all polling locations.</p>
Stevens County	Morris	9,680	<a href="http://www.co.stevens.mn.us/">http://www.co.stevens.mn.us/</a>	<p>Provides a “Notice of Mail Ballot Procedures” for 20 mail ballot precincts (which explicitly states instructions that contradict the consent decrees). Provides a map of voting locations and links to the SoS website.</p>
Swift County	Benson	9,374	<a href="http://www.swiftcounty.com/">http://www.swiftcounty.com/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Provides links to online and paper absentee ballot application on SoS website with the mailing address, fax, and email for the county’s auditor’s office.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Todd County	Long Praire	24,587	<a href="https://www.co.todd.mn.us">https://www.co.todd.mn.us</a>	<p>Contains links to the SoS website but no county specific information. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Traverse County	Wheaton	3,316	<a href="http://www.co.traverse.mn.us/">http://www.co.traverse.mn.us/</a>	<p>Contains links to the SoS website for voter registration, polling locations, and election results. Provides a “Notice of Mail Ballot Procedures” for 16 mail ballot precincts (which explicitly states instructions that contradict the consent decrees).</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Wabasha County	Wabasha	21,624	<a href="http://www.co.wabasha.mn.us/">http://www.co.wabasha.mn.us/</a>	<p>Follows state procedures. Contains links to the SoS website for polling locations, voter registration, absentee ballot application, etc. Also provides helpful maps of election districts and educational videos from the Minnesota Secretary of State Youtube account.</p>

				Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Wadena County	Wadena	13,774	<a href="http://www.co.wadena.mn.us/">http://www.co.wadena.mn.us/</a>	Website prominently features link to “Elections and Voter Registration” information on its main page. Notes that voters should request an absentee ballot 2-3 business days before Election Day to ensure that they receive their ballot in time. Contains links to the SoS website. Also had an app for the 2019 Election – unclear whether there is an updated one for the 2020 elections.  Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Waseca County	Waseca	18,738	<a href="http://www.co.waseca.mn.us/">http://www.co.waseca.mn.us/</a>	Contains links to the SoS website. Provides links to documents listing polling locations and the March 3 Presidential Primary ballot but no additional county-specific information.  Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Washington County	Stillwater	261,512	<a href="http://www.co.washington.mn.us/">http://www.co.washington.mn.us/</a>	Contains links to the SoS website. Website prominently features link to “Elections” information on its main page under the “Government” tab. Because the county suspended public facing services due to COVID-19, voters must ask all election-related questions by phone. “Election” page also prominently displays a link to an absentee ballot application. Absentee ballots cannot be dropped off on Election Day.  Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Watonwan County	Saint James	10,962	<a href="http://www.co.watonwan.mn.us/">http://www.co.watonwan.mn.us/</a>	Follows state procedures for voter registration. Contains links to the SoS and Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) websites. Provides a list for polling locations and mail-only precincts.
Wilkin County	Breckenridge	6,293	<a href="http://www.co.wilkin.mn.us/">http://www.co.wilkin.mn.us/</a>	Contains links to the SoS website but no county specific information. Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.
Winona County	Winona	50,798	<a href="http://www.co.winona.mn.us/">http://www.co.winona.mn.us/</a>	Absentee ballot instructions were last updated on July 1, 2015 and are outdated per the COVID-19 changes for the August 11 primary.

Wright County	Buffalo	136,510	<a href="http://www.co.wright.mn.us/">http://www.co.wright.mn.us/</a>	<p>Difficult to find election information without using the search bar. Voters can opt to submit an absentee ballot by mail or by scheduling an in-person appointment (15 minute slots) to help with social distancing. The county also added an absentee ballot drop box at the Wright County Government Center. Contains links to the SoS website.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>
Yellow Medicine County	Granite Falls	9,809	<a href="http://co.ym.mn.gov/">http://co.ym.mn.gov/</a>	<p>Difficult to find election information without using the search bar. Link to absentee ballot does not work.</p> <p>Otherwise, website does not reflect the recent COVID-19 changes to absentee voting.</p>