

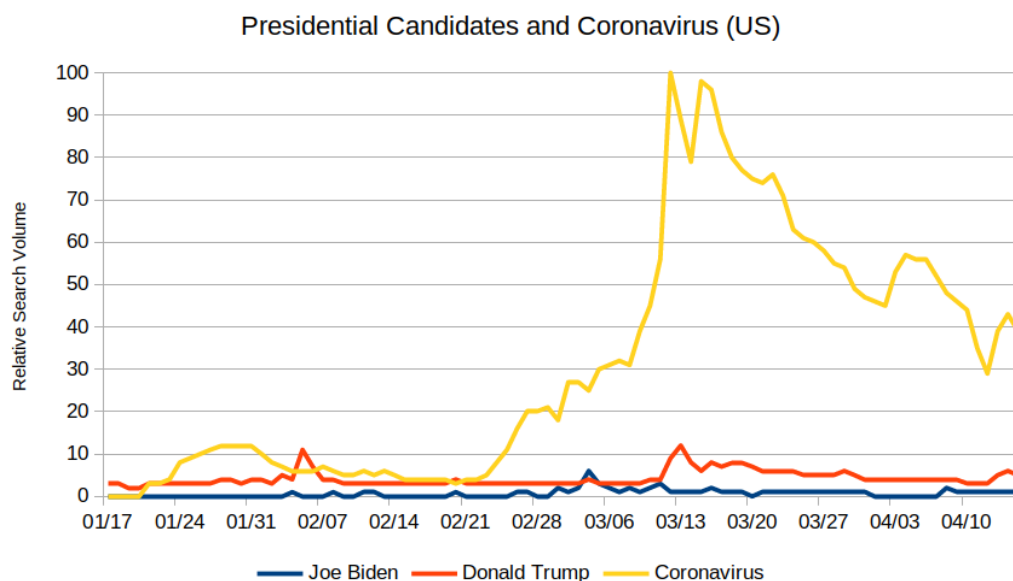
May 15, 2020

COVID-19 and the Crisis in Voter Registration

VVN has conducted a preliminary study of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on voter registration. In many jurisdictions new registrations plummeted in April in the wake of stay-at-home orders and the closure of Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) offices. Indeed, the numbers are so grim that many organizations may need to rethink or expand voter registration strategies to cover shortfalls in key demographic clusters nationwide.

COVID-19 presents ongoing uncertainty as we approach what are typically the high-registration summer months. Progressive non-profits are grappling with far fewer opportunities to conduct site-based or door-to-door registration work. In addition, the relatively early choice of a Democratic Presidential nominee is deflating voter registration in states that have not yet held their primaries. Declines in voter registration are not a blue or red state phenomena, declines are nationwide. The impact on voter participation in the November general election among the progressive New American Majority (young voters, women voters, and voters of color) could well be profound.

Currently 37 states sport online voter registration, but even online systems have not cushioned the blow of the pandemic. Typically in a Presidential election year, interest in political candidates is high. COVID-19 has dampened public interest, as the chart below from Google trends clearly demonstrates:



Generally, voter rolls swell in Presidential election years. In states in which reliable monthly Secretary of State registration reports were available, VVN examined the monthly net growth of the state voter files from January 2016 to December 2016 and for January through April in 2020. We calculated the median voter file growth for the months in question, and found that voter registration activity in April, 2020 showed drastic declines. In Nevada, facing unprecedented unemployment rates with the closure of the state's casinos and resorts, the decline was staggering.

State	2016 & 2020 Median Voter File Growth	April 2020 Voter File Growth
AK	1,774	149
CO	20,444	8,037
DE	2,304	-201
NC	33,790	9,744
NJ	25,992	8,002
NM	5,051	1,644
NV	17,018	3,302
OR	26,050	8,140
SD	1,269	224
WY	961	-4

Large-scale state voter file purges, to remove voters who may have moved or died, only occur once every several years. However, in intervening months, counties often use DMV or other state data sets to routinely remove voters who may have moved. Typically, the relatively small number of voters culled is more than compensated for by new voters coming on to the rolls. In April, in **Delaware** and **Wyoming**, however, even the small number of routine deletions was not recouped by new registrations, causing a small net decline in the number of citizens on the voter rolls.

An examination of voter files in **Pennsylvania** and **Rhode Island** in 2020 showed a significant drop in new registrations in April. We see a partial rebound, so far, for the first 12 days in May for Pennsylvania.

PENNSYLVANIA

County	Metro	January	February	March	April	May 1 - 12
Allegheny	Pittsburgh	2,177	3,279	4,154	1,997	2,367
Bucks	Philadelphia	1,758	1,431	1,773	1,106	983
Delaware	Philadelphia	815	1,359	1,789	751	913
Philadelphia	Philadelphia	7,705	4,337	5,145	2,118	2,145
Washington	Pittsburgh	278	526	665	331	456

RHODE ISLAND

County	January	February	March	April
Bristol	197	280	258	70
Kent	839	1,031	1,103	157
Newport	409	415	460	106
Providence	2,992	3,351	3,597	748
Washington	526	705	749	149

An analysis of **Montana** voter rolls also show a slowed pace of new registrants in April, a state with a June 2 primary, although the decline is less severe than in other states studied by VVN:

Month	New voters
January	3,552
February	3,734
March	3,265
April	2,505

In **Wisconsin**, a state with election-day voter registration, safety concerns and fears of standing in crowded lines without adequate social distancing lowered both turnout and same-day registrations. At the end of April, 2016, the state reported 3,481,754 enrolled voters. In 2020, just 3,397,693 voters appeared on the rolls, 84,061 lower than in 2016!

Registration even cooled in hyper political **Washington, DC**:

Month	Total New Registrants
January	2,865
February	3,088
March	1,818
April	509

Progressives are confronted with unprecedented hurdles in registering and turning out voters in 2020. VVN will produce periodic, timely reports on voter registration and turnout trends that will help practitioners hone their strategies in the coming months.