

# Avoid the Lines: Where and When to Vote

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We can expect record turnout in this election; coronavirus precautions will slow down the in-person voting process; and the last general election showed a troubling side effect of countywide vote centers. These factors will probably result in record waiting times at some polling places.

This article looks at voter behavior on Election Day 2019, explains changes to polling places for this election and gives some guidance for selecting a polling place on Election Day. Then it looks at how voting varied over time in this year's primary election and gives some guidance for picking a date and time to vote in this election.

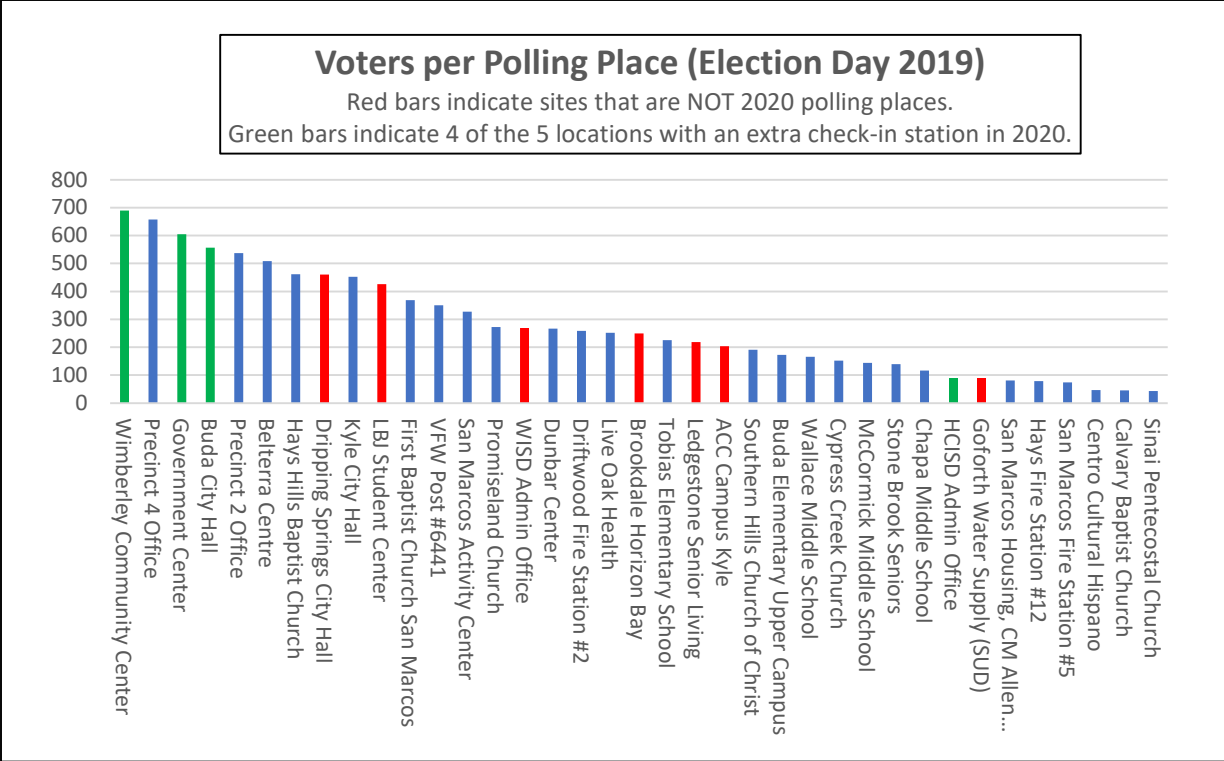
You can vote by mail and avoid this problem altogether. But if you do choose to vote in person, you should choose your time and place wisely. Not only will this reduce your own waiting time, it will help to reduce the worst-case lines for others.

## Where to Vote

### What Happened on Election Day 2019?

Before the November 2019 election, Hays County residents had to vote in their own precinct on Election Day. Last November was the first election that allowed any Hays voter to vote at any polling place in the County. While the old system was inconvenient, it did have one advantage – it tended to evenly distribute the load across all polling places. Now that any voter can go to any polling place, what would happen if they all went to the same one? To a large extent, this happened last November. Even though it was an “off year” election, people had to wait on line for hours at the popular polling places. Other polling places were virtually deserted.

The chart below shows the number of voters at each location on Election Day 2019. (It does not include early voting.) There is a 16-to-1 difference between the busiest and the quietest vote center. (The color coding will be explained in *What Has Changed for 2020?*)



The Wimberley Community Center (WCC) was the busiest (and had the longest lines) of all polling places on Election Day 2019. The WCC is not the closest polling place for very many people. Where did all those other voters come from? Here are the closest polling places for people who wound up voting at the WCC:

WISD Admin Office	32.5%
Cypress Creek Church	28.9%
VFW Post #6441	15.8%
Hays Fire Station #12	7.9%
<b>Wimberley Community Center</b>	<b>7.9%</b>
Other	7.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

92% of WCC voters lived closer to a different polling place. Most people on line at the WCC drove past a relatively deserted polling place to get there.

### What Has Changed for 2020?

Largely due to coronavirus issues, seven of the 2019 polling places cannot be used in 2020. Those locations have red bars in the graph above. Six new Election Day polling places have been added this year. Four of these are somewhat close to polling places that were eliminated.

New in 2020	Somewhat close to...
Hays County Transportation — Yarrington Building	
Live Oak Academy High School	
Scudder Primary School	WISD Admin School
Texas State University Performing Arts Center	LBJ Student Center
Uhland Elementary School	Goforth Water Supply (SUD)
Dripping Springs Ranch Park	Dripping Springs City Hall

Each 2020 polling place will have as many voting machines as the site will accommodate, up to the design limit of 12. In addition, five locations will have a second voter check-in station. This will reduce the number of times that special circumstances (“problem voters”) slow down the line. The five polling places with dual check-in stations are as follows:

Buda City Hall
Dripping Springs Ranch Park (new this year)
Hays County Government Center
HCISD Admin
Wimberley Community Center

These locations are highlighted in the graph above with green bars (except for Dripping Springs Ranch Park, which is a new location).

## Where Should I Vote?

Expect long lines at 2019’s busiest stations. The dual check-ins may shuffle the order of the half-dozen or so busiest places, but they will still be in the top tier of long lines. Look for a less busy polling location that may be closer to you. Even if you have to go out of your way, fifteen minutes of extra driving (in the controlled environment of your car) might save you hours on line (in a large crowd with no mask mandate).

The Election Department’s map of 2020 polling places can be found [here](#).

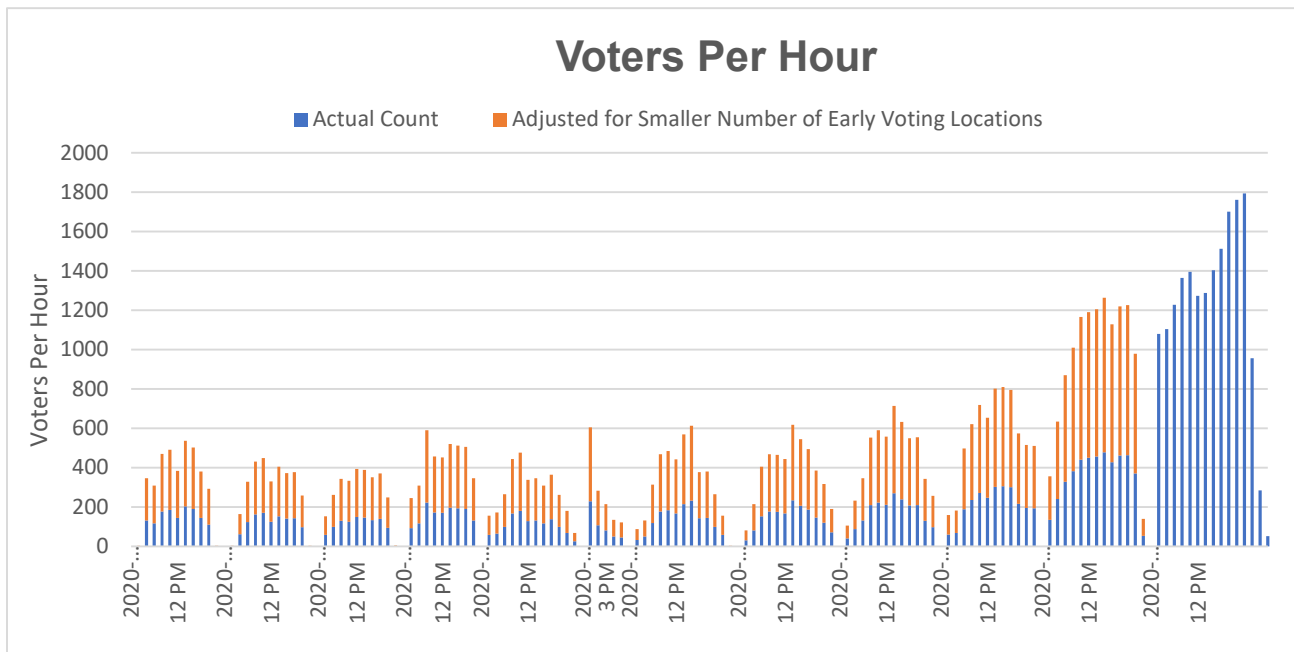
## When to Vote

### What Happened in the 2020 Primaries?

The chart below shows the number of voters per hour during the March 2020 primaries. (Voter check-in times are not available for the 2019 general election.) The July runoff had fewer voters, but the shape was almost exactly the same.

These numbers are the totals across all polling places. The blue bars are actual counts. They are misleading because there were many more polling places on Election Day. The orange bars adjust the early voting counts to make them comparable (in terms of likely wait times) to the Election Day counts.

Note that February 23<sup>rd</sup> was a Sunday with reduced voting hours.



The numbers were smaller in the runoff, but the pattern was the same:

- Turnout is fairly constant until the last two days of early voting. Then it increases dramatically every day.
- With two exceptions, the lowest turnout is in the earliest hours of voting.
  - The polls didn't open until 1 PM on Sunday, and there was a big surge at that time.
  - There was a relatively high turnout in the first hour of the first day. Actually, it is a little surprising that there wasn't a bigger surge, but maybe the primary was a low salience election. There may be a greater pent-up demand for this election, resulting in a bigger surge when the polls open on October 13<sup>th</sup>.
- Turnout usually peaks around midday until the last two days.
  - There is not as much late-day drop-off on the last day of early voting.
  - Turnout climbs steadily all day on Election Day.
  - The low numbers at the tail end of the last two days were actually after the official closing time. People who were on line at closing time still got to vote.

## What Has Changed for 2020?

We will have an extra week of early voting this year, and its profile will probably resemble the middle of the graph above.

## When Should I Vote?

Take advantage of early voting. You might pass on the first day, but do not wait until the last two or three days of early voting. Vote early in the morning or near the end of voting hours. If you vote on Sunday, do not show up right at opening time.

## Summary

If you act promptly, voting by mail is still the best way to avoid lines. If you decide to vote in person, pick a less-utilized vote center. Take advantage of early voting, but don't wait until the last few days. Avoid the mid-day if practical. But whatever time and place you choose, VOTE!