

Quite possibly my last in-person ballot for a long time

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Most parts of the state of Washington have switched to all-mail voting. No more standing in line at the polling place and casting your vote in person. This is certainly a convenience, but to me, it dilutes the voting experience.

Part of the experience is the sense that you're part of a process, and standing in a room full of voters certainly drives that point home. You may come from all walks of life, but you all have one thing in common: You all want to vote.

Also concerning to me is the loss of the guaranteed secret ballot in a mail-in election. With a mail-in ballot, you have the problem that an overbearing family member can dictate how the rest of the family shall vote, and can even oversee the process as the rest of the family members dutifully fill in the dots, then seal and sign the envelope. A family member who wants to cast a vote differently really has no chance. But with an in-person election, the voter goes into a voting booth, and nobody is permitted to go in with that person (with a few exceptions). You know that the vote cast is the voter's true intentions. The overbearing family member has no way of confirming that the vote was cast according to his or her orders.

(Actually, in my voting district, that's not really true with in-person voting even today. We don't use pull-the-lever voting booths; we use fill-in-the-dots forms, and after filling in the dots, you *take your ballot from the voting booth to the scanner*. During that walk, the overbearing family member can inspect your ballot to make sure you filled it out "correctly".)

My voting district is scheduled to switch to all-mail voting next year, and this morning, I stood in line for what is quite possibly the last time. The poll worker for my precinct is a nice Chinese woman. She used to try to speak Mandarin with me whenever I came in, and I would respond with a few set phrases before explaining, “不會說。” (Getting the sentence wrong helps drive the point home.) Now she recognizes me and knows better.

I noted, “Lots of people here today.”

She replied, “Yeah, really busy. More people here now than we used to get all day.” She may have been exaggerating, but it was definitely more crowded than it usually is.

I forgot to say good-bye to her as I left. We may never see each other again.

(Raymond predicts that the comments will be taken over people discussing electronic voting.)

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