



Mail Voting is Safe and Secure

By Elections Project Staff

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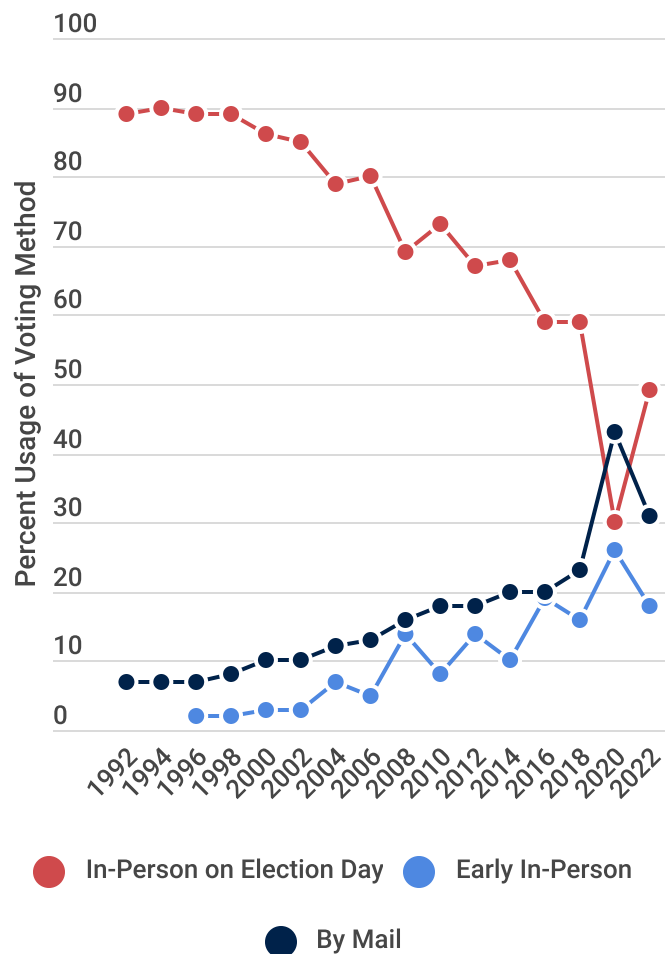
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Mail ballots submitted by voters who meet eligibility and validity requirements are counted in every election. Before they are counted, election officials vigorously verify the validity of every mail ballot submission, as explained below. Mail ballots suspected of fraudulent activity are set aside for further investigation and, when appropriate, are referred to law enforcement for prosecution.

History and Usage of Mail Voting

Mail voting, also referred to as absentee voting, has been in use since it helped soldiers cast ballots during the Civil War. Mail voting has been increasing in usage since the 1980s, with unprecedented expansions taking place since the COVID-19 pandemic. Mail voting is a safe, secure, and reliable voting method used by voters of all political parties.

Voting Method Usage Over Time



Sources: [Who Votes? Congressional Elections and the American Electorate: 1978–2014](#), United States Census Bureau, Issued July 2015. [Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2018](#), United States Census Bureau, April 2019. [Majority of Voters Used Nontraditional Methods to Cast Ballots in 2020](#), United States Census Bureau. [Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2020](#), United States Census Bureau, April 2021. [Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022](#), United States Census Bureau, April 2023.

All states offer some form of mail voting. The three types of mail voting are:

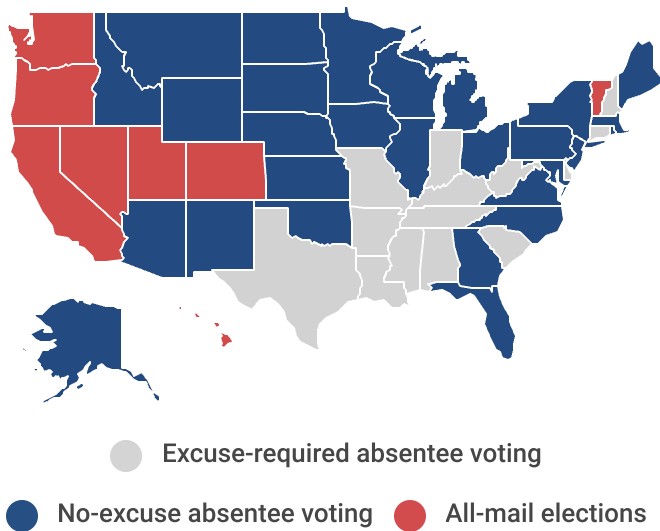
Excuse-required absentee voting refers to when registered voters that will be away from their jurisdiction on election day are permitted to request an absentee or mail ballot but must provide a

valid excuse in order to do so. Valid excuses often include age (being 65 years or older), disability, and travel outside of your jurisdiction on Election Day.

No-excuse absentee voting refers to when any registered voter can request an absentee or mail ballot without being required to provide an excuse.

All-mail elections refers to when all registered voters are sent a mail ballot without having to request one first. In jurisdictions offering vote-by-mail, voters still have the option to vote in-person at a voting site or election office.

Mail Voting Policies by State



Sources: [Table 1: States with No-Excuse Absentee Voting](#) & [Table 2: Excuses to Vote Absentee](#), National Conference of State Legislatures, Last Updated: February 29, 2024, Data Collected: July 2022.

Many states have changed their mail voting laws since the 2020 election. Check with your local election office to learn about which voting options are available to you and what the deadlines are to apply for and cast a mail ballot.

Will my ballot only be counted if the contest is close?

All valid mail ballots are counted in every election.

Election night vote totals are unofficial pending the *canvass and official certification* [<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/behind-the-curtain-of-elections/>] which includes a thorough review and verification process that takes place in the days and weeks following an election. Because mail ballots take additional time to process, verify, and count, the unofficial results you see on election night may not include all mail ballot totals.

Final, certified election results include all valid ballots cast during the election, including those submitted by mail.

How are mail ballots verified?

Every mail ballot is verified for eligibility after it is returned by the voter.

Mail ballot envelopes typically require a voter's signature, identification number, or other identifying information. Before a ballot is counted, election officials check to make sure that the signature or identification number matches that which is on file. The mail ballot also must be postmarked, received by an election official, or both by a date set in state law. Once validated, the ballot is separated from its envelope and sorted for counting.

Mail ballots suspected of fraudulent activity are set aside for further investigation and, when applicable, are referred to law enforcement for prosecution.

In addition to verifying the identity of mail voters, many election officials also take the following precautions to ensure the security of mail voting:

Using an election management system to track every ballot issued and prevent double voting.

Updating voter registration lists daily to ensure the voter's correct residence address and mailing address is on file so that the correct ballot is sent to the voter.

Balancing the number of ballots received against the number of voters who applied for a ballot.

If a voter submits more than one mail ballot or tries to vote in person after already voting by mail, only one ballot will be counted and the instance of double voting will be flagged for further investigation.

How can I be sure my ballot was received by the election office?

At least *46 states* [<https://www.vote.org/ballot-tracker-tools/>] enable voters to track the status of their mail ballot online.

Ballot tracking typically utilizes both election office and U.S. Postal Service data to supply voters with the following information:

When the election office has sent you your mail ballot and when it is expected to arrive.

When your completed mail ballot has been received by the election office.

Whether your mail ballot meets all eligibility requirements. Eligibility requirements include: all necessary information supplied on the ballot envelope, any required documentation, a valid signature and secrecy envelope where applicable, and eligibility to vote in that jurisdiction.

When your ballot has been counted.

To find information on how to track your mail ballot, contact your local election office or find state-specific information here: <https://www.vote.org/ballot-tracker-tools/> [<https://www.vote.org/ballot-tracker-tools/>]

What options do I have if there is an issue with my mail ballot?

To ensure all eligible voters have their voices heard, *30 states* [<https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-15-states-with-signature-cure-processes>] and some local jurisdictions rely on a process called curing to give voters a chance to fix—or “cure”—problems on their ballot envelope and have their vote counted.

Typically, election officials contact the voter by email, phone, or mail if there is an issue with the eligibility of their mail ballot. To have their ballot counted, voters must provide a new signature or other identifying information to verify their ballot’s eligibility. Turnaround times are often short, and curing timelines vary by state and locality. Voters who need to cure their ballot envelope should respond quickly to requests from their local election office.

Can I vote in person if I’ve already received a ballot in the mail?

You may have options available to you if you decide that you would prefer to vote in-person after requesting an absentee or mail ballot. Some states require voters who have already been issued a mail ballot to

surrender that ballot when voting in-person, or to vote by provisional ballot. Provisional ballots are set aside for additional verification when a voter's eligibility is in question.

If you choose to vote in-person, your mail ballot will not be counted, and vice versa. Only a small minority of states permit you to vote in-person after already submitting a mail ballot; in those states, your previously submitted mail ballot is voided upon voting in-person.

Because state rules vary, it's best to contact your local election office for guidance on how to vote in-person after requesting or receiving a mail ballot.

What's the difference between absentee and mail voting?

States vary in how they refer to ballots that are submitted outside of a polling place.

'Absentee voting' and 'mail voting' are typically synonymous and interchangeable. Absentee or mail voting is a catch-all term used to refer to any voting that takes place outside of the polling place, including ballots transmitted through mail, submitted into a drop box, or filled out and placed into an envelope at an election office before Election Day.

Several types of mail voting are available to voters in the 2024 elections, depending on the laws in their state.

Excuse-required absentee voting refers to when registered voters that will be away from their jurisdiction on election day are permitted to request an absentee or mail ballot but must provide a valid excuse in order to do so. Valid excuses often include age (being 65 years or older), disability, and travel outside of your jurisdiction on Election Day.

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While all states offer some form of mail voting, many states have changed their mail voting laws since the 2020 election. Check with your local election office to learn about which voting options are available to you and what the deadlines are to apply for and cast a mail ballot.

Are drop boxes a valid mail ballot return method?

Mail ballots can be returned through the mail, at an election office, and, in some states, in an official drop box.

Drop boxes are secure locations where you can safely submit a completed mail ballot. They are put in place by government officials and are often under 24-hour video surveillance. Only election officials can access a ballot once it's placed in a drop box.

Using an official drop box can be a more reliable option when there are concerns about the time it may take a ballot to go through the U.S. Postal Service, especially in the last two weeks before election day. A ballot submitted to an official drop box before the deadline will reach an election official in time to be counted.

Official ballot drop boxes provided by government representatives are secure and reliable. Not all jurisdictions offer drop boxes. When in doubt, confirm official drop box availability and locations with your local election office.

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