

# Vote-by-Mail FAQ



*Voting by mail has been a part of our election system for many years*

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Every year in the United States, millions of voters cast their ballots by mail. Since 2000, one-quarter of a billion mail-in ballots have been cast nationally according to the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#). In 2016, roughly two-fifths of all voters, either voted early, absentee or by mail. This LRO Snapshot will answer frequently asked questions about vote-by-mail systems.

## **Is voting by mail new?**

No. Voting by mail and absentee voting has been a part of our election system for many years. Citizens away from their home state, such as our military and overseas voters, have long been able to cast votes safely and securely in the mail. The Election Assistance Commission, the Federal Voting Assistance Program and the United States Postal Service have worked hard to ensure voting by mail works safely and smoothly.

## **What states authorize voting by mail?**

Every state allows some form of vote by mail. Generally there are two types of vote-by-mail systems used by states.

1. **Absentee ballot** systems exist in every state. In two-thirds of states, any qualified voter may vote absentee without offering an excuse. In one-third of states, voters are required to provide a reason why the absentee ballot is necessary. Nebraska is what's called a "no-excuse" state, which means any registered voter may request an early-voting or absentee ballot, and is not required to provide a reason ([Neb. Rev. Stat. sec. 32-941](#)).

2: **All-mail elections** are elections conducted entirely by mail. Currently, five states conduct all elections entirely by mail: Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington and Utah.

## **Does Nebraska conduct all-mail elections?**

Yes. Since 2005, [Neb Rev. Stat. sec. 32-960](#) has given Nebraska counties with fewer than 10,000 residents the option to conduct all-mail elections. At this point, eleven Nebraska counties have decided to conduct all-mail elections, including: Boone, Cedar, Cherry, Clay, Dawes, Dixon, Garden, Knox, Merrick, Morrill, and Stanton

## **How do all-mail elections work?**

Ballots are mailed out well ahead of Election Day. Statutes prescribe a certain time period by which ballots must be mailed, as well as a deadline by which ballots must be postmarked to be counted. The voter marks the ballot, signs the included oath, puts it in an envelope, and returns it via mail or by dropping it off. County election officials verify the signature and address of the voter by means of a barcode on the return envelope.

## **Does an all-mail election mean I cannot go to the polls?**

It depends on the law. The all-mail elections happening in some Nebraska counties do not provide for physical polling places. However, some states with expanded vote-by-mail options also allow for in-person voting on and before Election Day. For example, despite the fact that all registered voters in Colorado are mailed a ballot, voters can choose to cast that ballot in-person during the early voting period or at a polling place on Election Day.

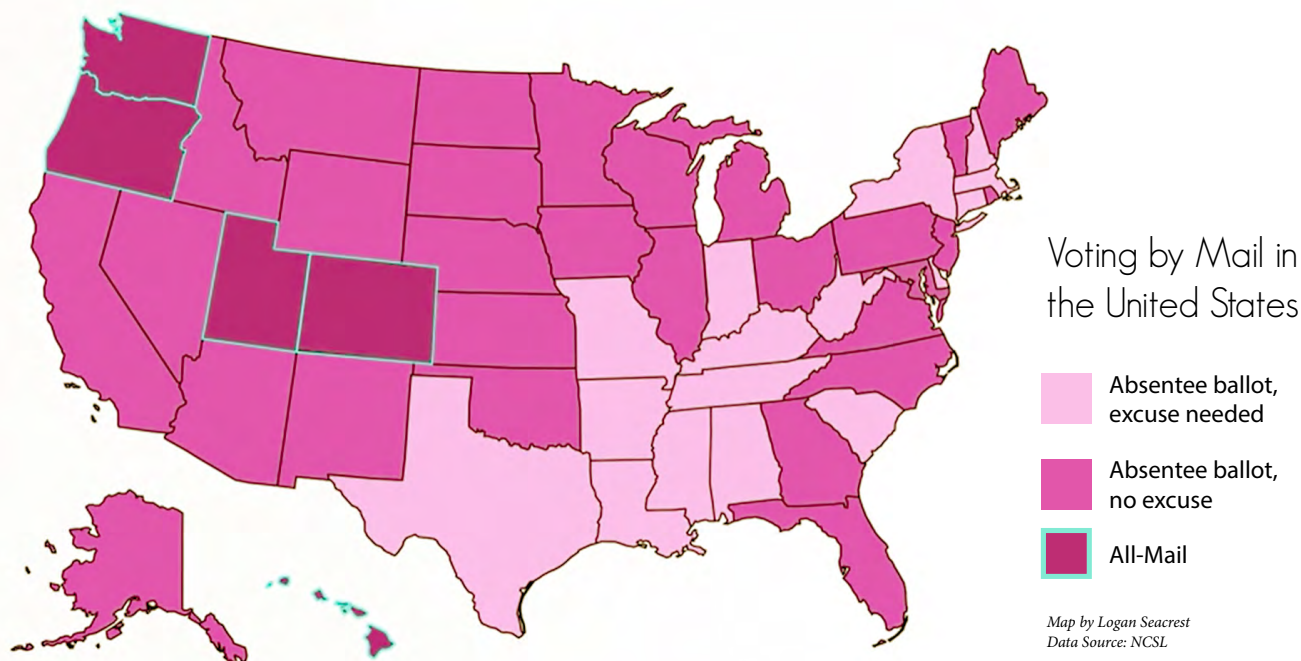
## **Do all-mail elections increase turnout?**

Evidence from recent elections in Nebraska indicates it does. According to the [Nebraska Secretary of State](#), six of the ten counties with the highest voter turnout in the 2020 primary election were all-mail elections. In total, average voter turnout in all-mail counties was 60%, nearly 20 points higher than average turnout statewide.

## **Does voting by mail increase voter fraud?**

Fraud is a legitimate concern when conducting elections by mail. Mail ballot fraud usually entails a criminal fraudulently obtaining ballots, illegally filling them out and forging voter signatures. Like all forms of election fraud, this is rare. A study of election fraud by [Arizona State University](#) found only 491 cases of absentee ballot fraud out of billions of votes cast in U.S. elections since 2000.

Mail ballot fraud is rare in part because states have spent years developing systems and processes to prevent theft and forgery of absentee ballots. Most ballot envelopes have a barcode that election officials and the US Postal Service can track. These barcodes serve a dual purpose. They allow voters to check that their ballots have been processed and also help states eliminate duplicate ballots because a unique code is assigned to each voter.



## What is ballot harvesting?

Ballot harvesting is where individuals or groups go door-to-door and offer to turn in ballots for voters — often dozens or hundreds at a time. Some place ballot collection boxes in high-concentration areas, such as college campuses, and take the ballots to election offices when the boxes are full. Ballot harvesting, which has been connected to instances of [voter fraud](#) in the past, remains legal in some states. However it is illegal in most states, in which only a family member or guardian is allowed to drop off absentee ballots for a voter.

## What are some disadvantages of voting by mail?

Voting by mail can have a disenfranchising effect on certain populations. Mail delivery is not uniform across the country, particularly on Native American reservations. Low-income citizens move more frequently and keeping addresses current can pose problems.

Results in all-mail elections are usually reported slower. Ballots may continue to arrive up to and even slightly after Election Day (depending on state law), so it can take some time before all the ballots are in and the count is verified. It is worth noting that states with traditional systems take some time to count their provisional and absentee ballots as well.

## What are some advantages of voting by mail?

Preserving access to the ballot for voters unable to physically go to the polls makes voting by mail well-suited to a public health crisis or other state emergency.

Voting by mail can also be more convenient. Unlike other countries that hold elections on national holidays, many voters in the United States must take time off work to vote. Voting by mail allows individuals to vote on their own

schedule, while not sacrificing other professional or family commitments.

Lt. Governor Spencer Cox in Utah has said that voting by mail also [improves civic education](#) “because [voters] have the opportunity to research what is on the ballot — instead of just getting in the ballot booth and finding out there are three constitutional amendments they had never heard of.” Voting by mail also has the potential to improve election security by eliminating the risk of tampering or hacking into voting machines.

## Does Voting by Mail Help One Party over the Other?

A [national study](#) from April 2020 found that on average, all-mail elections do not provide an advantage for Republicans or Democrats. Similarly, in Nebraska, partisan turnout has remained unchanged in counties after transitioning to all-mail elections. However, local data is limited because as of now, counties with populations over 10,000 [are excluded](#) from holding all mail elections.

## Do Americans want to vote by mail?

A [Pew survey](#) from April 2020 found that 70% of likely voters would support holding the 2020 election by mail.

## How can a voter get a mail-in ballot in Nebraska?

Any registered voter can obtain a ballot by contacting your [county election office](#). You can print an online [early-voting application](#), complete the form, and then mail, fax, or scan/take a picture of your application and email it to your county election office. The last day for an early-voting application to be received is 6 p.m. on the second Friday preceding the election.