



DEBUNKING VOTE-BY-MAIL MYTHS

Vote-by-mail has been in the news a lot lately, and dispelling some of the myths about it can help people take advantage of this safe and secure voting method. In 2018, 42 million ballots were mailed-out nationally, versus 33 million in 2014. In 2018, a full 69% of all votes cast in the West were from mailed ballots. In 2020 we expect even more voters to utilize this method of voting.¹

Due to COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines, it's critical to ensure that there are expanded voting options. We are advocating for safe in-person voting, including expanded early voting days, hours, and locations. We also support vote-by-mail options. This guide will address some of the most common questions and myths about vote-by-mail and describe how Democrats are fighting to expand voting access.

What is vote-by-mail?

Vote-by-mail is a method of voting that allows voters to request a ballot be mailed to them, oftentimes weeks before Election Day. The voter can fill out the ballot at their convenience and return it in person or by mail.

How does vote-by-mail work?

Vote-by-mail works differently in each state. Some states automatically send ballots out to every registered voter. Other states have a Permanent Early Voting or Absentee List. Once a voter asks to be added to the list, they will automatically receive a vote-by-mail or early vote ballot for all future elections. Still, other states require voters to request a vote-by-mail ballot for each election.

Some states allow voters to complete a vote-by-mail ballot request online, while other states require the voter to submit an application in person at their elections office, or by mail, fax or email. If you have questions about whether your state allows voting by mail and how you can request a ballot, call the DNC's voter assistance hotline at 833-336-8683.

What's the difference between vote-by-mail and absentee voting?

The difference between vote-by-mail and absentee voting varies by state, and sometimes the names are used interchangeably to mean the same method. In some states, voters are required to have an excuse to

¹ The organization Vote at Home reported that in 2018, 42 million ballots were mailed-out nationally, versus 33 million in 2014. In 2018, a full 69% of all votes cast in the West were from mailed ballots. <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/VAH-Annual-report-2019-v-1.0.pdf>



vote absentee, such as having a disability, being out of the state for Election Day, or being over a certain age, while voting by mail often does not require an excuse at all.

I've heard that vote-by-mail only helps Democrats.

This is simply not true. While Trump falsely claims mail ballots are “very dangerous” and “fraudulent,” he and those in his inner circle have a long history of using vote-by-mail. Republicans in Florida and Arizona, states with large numbers of retirees who tend to lean Republican, have long pushed to expand vote-by-mail. Vote-by-mail is designed to make sure every voter can vote in a safe and secure way and is not designed to give any party an advantage over the other. In fact, a recent study from Stanford’s Democracy and Polarization lab found that voting by mail didn’t give either party an advantage over the other.

What do I do if I request my ballot in time but don't receive it in time enough for it to count for this election?

In many states, if you receive your ballot before Election Day but too late to mail it in on time, you can drop the ballot off at your elections office or at a secure drop box. In other states, if you have not received your vote-by-mail ballot you can usually still vote in person. Call 833-336-8683 to find out more about the options in your state.

I prefer to vote in-person early or on Election Day. Why should I vote-by-mail?

Voting by mail can help you vote safely and securely while practicing social distancing and avoiding crowds. Your ballot will be delivered directly to your home. This can be a great option if you will not be in town on Election Day, have to work on Election Day, or are physically unable to make it to your polling location on Election Day.

I need assistance voting. Can I receive assistance voting by mail?

Yes! You can receive assistance when voting by mail. In many cases, a family member or someone you trust can help you fill out your ballot and even deliver it for you to make sure it arrives on time. Call 833-336-8683 to find out more about the options in your state.

I don't really use or trust the mail to deliver things important to me. Do I have to mail my vote-by-mail ballot, or can I hand it in?

- You do not have to use the postal service to deliver a ballot.
- You can hand deliver it to your local election official.
- Many voters can also drop ballots off in person during early voting or on Election Day.
- Some states may have secure drop-boxes placed in convenient locations to return ballots.

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- In Colorado, a state that does their whole election by mail, over 70% of voters hand deliver or deposit their ballots in drop-boxes without ever placing it in the mail.²
- Call 833-336-8683 to find out more about the options in your state.

I am homeless or have an inconsistent address. Can I still vote-by-mail?

While homelessness and inconsistent housing can create hurdles to registering and voting by mail, several states have policies to make sure that these voters can cast a ballot.³ For example, in Colorado, voters can also obtain ballots from a shelter or local clerk's office.

How will I know that my ballot was actually delivered or accepted?

Many voters can track their ballot online to see when it leaves your mailbox and is deposited in the ballot box. You can also call your local election official to check your ballot's status.

What if there's a problem with my ballot? Will I get a chance to fix it? Will my ballot count?

Vote-by-mail ballots are reviewed by election officials to make sure they have been filled out correctly. If your ballot is missing any required information you may be notified. To learn how to confirm that your ballot will be counted in your state, please call 833-336-8683.

I've heard that some ballots may be challenged? What does this mean?

Some states allow election observers to challenge vote-by-mail ballots while officials are processing ballots. If you are curious about the status of your ballot, you can call the DNC's hotline at call 833-336-8683 to learn more about the process in your state and confirm that your ballot will be counted.

How do I know my vote will be secure once I submit it? What's to stop somebody from manipulating my vote?

Vote-by-mail ballots are counted under the same public procedures as other ballots, where the actions of election officials are closely observed and challenged at the first sight of any mistakes or wrongdoing.

Donald Trump said that vote-by-mail is "corrupt" and rampant with fraud. Is this true?

No. All forms of voter fraud are incredibly rare. There is no evidence of widespread voter fraud with vote-by-mail or absentee voting. The president's own voter fraud investigatory committee disbanded without producing evidence of any systemic issues. Donald Trump and those in his inner circle have a long history of using vote-by-mail as well.

² The Brennan Center reported that 73% of voters in CO, 65% in WA, and 59% in OR returned their ballots by drop box rather than mail: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/why-vote-mail-option-necessary>

³ National Coalition for the Homeless resources page on voting: <https://nationalhomeless.org/campaigns/voting/>



What happens if I make a mistake on my ballot?

A spoiled ballot may be one a voter marked incorrectly, or is somehow unusable, perhaps because it is improperly printed, torn, or soiled. In many states, if a voter makes a mistake or a ballot is unusable they can request a replacement ballot or vote in person. The process to replace a spoiled ballot varies by state. Call 833-336-8683 to find out more about the options in your state.

I heard that Native Americans living on tribal land cannot vote-by-mail. Can Native Americans utilize vote-by-mail?

Many homes on reservations do not have addresses or have non-traditional addresses without a street name. Some states will allow Native American voters to use a PO Box to receive their vote-by-mail ballot. Democrats are pushing for additional protections for Native American voters to ensure they can vote safely and securely. The Natural Disaster and Emergency Ballot Act of 2020, introduced by Senators Amy Klobuchar and Ron Wyden calls for “additional accommodations for Native American voters including allowing tribes to designate ballot pickup and drop-off locations and not requiring residential address for election mail.” Mail delivery on reservations is often slower than traditional mail service, potentially disenfranchising many Native American voters, due to their ballots not being received in time. Many states require that ballots be received by Election Day, instead of being postmarked by Election Day. Democrats are fighting across the country for postmark deadlines rather than receive-by deadlines to ensure all ballots are counted. In addition to vote-by-mail, Democrats are also fighting to expand early and in-person voting opportunities, advocating for adequate staffing at the polls, expanding curbside voting to ALL ages, allowing early voting on weekends, adopting vote-anywhere rules, and creating systems for voters to vote at non-peak times to reduce lines.

Additional Steps to Improve vote-by-mail

There are definitely improvements that could be made to vote-by-mail. Additional safeguards we’re pushing for include:

- providing pre-paid postage envelopes to return ballots,
- having common sense standards when matching a voter’s signature,
- allowing community groups to collect and deliver sealed ballots, and
- counting ballots postmarked by Election Day.

It means providing more drop-boxes for voters, especially in places with no or unreliable mail service. It also means ensuring voters who are homeless or have inconsistent housing can participate. Voters should also be able to hand in their ballots at a polling place, and there should be more transparent systems for tracking ballots to make sure that they never “get lost,” and are actually included in the final vote.

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