V. Early Voting, Unrestricted Absentee Voting, and Voting by Mail

Early Voting, Unrestricted Absentee Voting, and Voting by mail

Task Force on the Federal Election System
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Summary of conclusions

1. In the last 20 years, states have expanded the availability of early voting, voting by mail, and absentee voting. Twenty-six states with 45 percent of the voting age citizens of the United States offer one or more. Voters' use of opportunities to vote before Election Day has doubled since 1980.

2. Older voters, younger voters, retirees, students, disabled persons, and members of the armed forces make greater use of absentee balloting. Whites are about twice as likely as blacks to vote by absentee. Early voters are older, more interested, and more partisan than Election Day voters.

3. Ten years' experience with voter participation outside Election Day suggests that early voting and voting by mail have boosted voter turnout, though modestly. Unrestricted absentee voting by and large has not, or has but by less. It is unclear whether the gains will endure, because voters could be responding more to the novelty and the publicity than the convenience. Both might ultimately increase turnout by a small amount, by making it less likely that habitual voters will fail to turn out because of Election Day exigencies.

4. Early voting, voting by mail, and unrestricted absentee voting have won enthusiastic endorsement from the public. The evidence of savings in elections costs, however, is mixed.

5. In the longer term, some argue, early voting, voting by mail, and unrestricted absentee voting might undercut voter participation by discouraging campaigns and advocacy groups from efforts to mobilize voter turnout. Widespread voting before Election Day might alter the dynamics of election campaigns. Finally, early voting, voting by mail, and unrestricted absentee voting might undermine the public's sense of participation in common in one of our few important civic rites.

In the last decade, states have adopted a number of measures to allow citizens more easily to vote other than on Election Day. Many states, especially in the West, have followed the lead of California in 1978 and liberalized access to absentee ballots. Altogether, 22 states now make an absentee ballot available to any registered voter who requests one, without need to show cause. Thirty-two percent of the voting age citizen population lives in a state that provides an absentee ballot automatically upon request.

Fourteen other states have adopted what has come to be called "early voting." Pioneered in Texas in 1991, early voting evolved from in-person absentee voting but is now distinct from it. In-person absentee voters must apply for an absentee ballot; early voters must simply report to an early voting station, sign the pollbook, and have registration verified. Absentee ballots cast in person are usually enclosed in a sealed and signed envelope; early voting ballots cannot be identified individually. In-person absentee voting, finally, takes place only within the regular hours of the

elections office; early voting programs often provide extended hours on both weekdays and weekends. Twenty-five percent of the voting age citizen population lives in a state with early voting.

Finally, in 1995, Oregon became the first state to implement voting by mail (VBM) in statewide elections, employing it first in special partisan primary elections and soon after in a special general election to fill a vacant United States Senate seat. In 1998, by more than a two-to-one margin, Oregon voters approved an initiative to extend vote by mail permanently to statewide primary and general elections.

Early voting programs overlap significantly with liberalized absentee laws. All but four of the states that provide early voting also provide absentee ballots automatically upon request. Taking the three provisions together, 26 states with 44.5 percent of the voting age citizen population make it easy for voters to cast their ballots before Election Day.[1]

The effect of early voting and liberalized absentee voting has been dramatic. In 1980, just as the movement toward liberalization of access to absentee ballots was begun, five percent of voters nationwide cast their votes by absentee ballot. In 1996, 10 percent nationwide voted prior to Election Day, either by mail (8 percent), mostly by absentee voting, or in-person before Election Day (3 percent), mostly by early voting. In states with liberal access to voting before Election Day, the percentages are still higher. Thirty-nine percent of the 2000 presidential vote in Texas was cast early, and 24.6 percent of the 2000 vote in California was by absentee.[2] And in Oregon, of course, every statewide election since 1995 has used a mail-in ballot.

Who votes early, by absentee, and by mail?

Even though both are means by which voters can cast their ballots prior to Election Day, early voting and absentee voting make significantly different demands on voters.

First, absentee voting requires that voters exercise foresight. Registered voters must make an application for an absentee ballot anywhere from a day to five days in advance of Election Day, on average, and up to three weeks in advance in one state.[3] Second, in most states, voters who wish to obtain an absentee ballot must give a reason for needing to vote absentee, most often on the grounds of travel, disability, and educational and occupational circumstances. In contrast, early voting requires only the voter's conviction that he has made up his mind already.

The difference suggests that absentee voting will be highest among people who meet the conditions for use of an absentee ballot and who have the resources to know to arrange to vote in advance. And indeed, as the table shows, use of absentee voting is highest among the oldest voters,

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[1] Among the states that do not offer unrestricted absentee voting, Oliver names Michigan and Ohio as the two that have "expanded" eligibility for absentees. Michigan and Ohio provide an absentee ballot for any voter over the ages of 62 and 65, respectively, who requests one. As the table shows, Michigan and Ohio are the two states among those without "liberalized" absentee voting that have the highest rates of absentee voting. Adding Michigan and Ohio to the list brings the percentage of the voting age citizen population that lives in a state that makes it easy to vote before Election Day to 52.8.

[2] Texas law requires early voting only in the larger jurisdictions in the state and requires satellite polling stations with extended hours only in the largest jurisdictions. Accordingly, early voting is even more common in the larger counties. In 1992, 52.5 percent of the vote in Bexar County (San Antonio) and over 40 percent in El Paso, Jefferson (Beaumont), Travis (Austin), and Galveston was by early ballot.

[3] Ten states maintain "permanent" absentee voter lists. In four of the states, Oregon, Washington, New Jersey, and selected jurisdictions in Utah, the list is unrestricted, that is, any voter can ask to be placed on it. In the other six states, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and California, the list is restricted and voters must show cause to be entered onto it. (Maryland League of Women Voters, "LWVMD Voter Participation Study 1999-2000," 2000.)

who often have physical infirmities that make it difficult to turn out in person, followed closely by the youngest voters, who are often in school. One of every six voters over the age of 75 votes absentee.

Certain types of people are very prone to vote absentee out of sheer necessity. Students, retirees, persons with permanent disabilities, and members of the armed forces are all several times more likely to vote absentee than other Americans.

Use of absentee ballots also has a class bias. People with better educations, higher incomes, and more prestigious jobs are more likely to vote absentee. The highest rates of absentee usage are among holders of graduate and professional degrees and among persons with the very highest family incomes. Finally, in analysis not shown, people in managerial and professional occupations are the most likely to use absentee voting. Citizens of higher social and economic status are not only more likely to need to vote absentee—because they are traveling on business, for instance—but also more likely to know that they will have to plan ahead to obtain an absentee ballot.

Finally, use of absentee ballots varies by race. Blacks are only half as likely as whites to vote absentee. Absentee usage among Latinos is right about in between.[4] Usage of absentees is highest among Americans of Asian descent, which probably owes to the concentration of the Asian population on the Pacific Coast, where unrestricted absentee balloting has the longest history and the greatest popularity.[5]

Use of absentee (by mail) and early (in person) voting, by demographic characteristics, 1996

Characteristic	Voted in person on election day	Voted in person before election day	Voted by mail
Age			
18–24	87	2	11
25–34	93	2	5
25–64	91	3	6
65–74	85	3	12
75 +	81	3	16
Education			
No diploma	90	3	7
High school diploma	91	2	7
Some college	89	3	8
Bachelor's degree	89	3	8
Graduate degree	87	3	9
Family income			
< $20,000	89	3	8
$20–29,999	90	2	8
$30–49,999	91	2	7
$50–74,999	90	3	7
$75,000 +	87	3	10
Race			

[4] Absentee usage among Latinos was much closer to usage among blacks in 1980. Presumably, the increase owes to the concentration of the Latino population in states that have liberalized absentee voting and implemented early voting.

[5] Thirty-seven percent of the Asian population of the United States resides in California. The Pacific Coast states together account for 41.5 percent of the Asian population.

White	89	3	9
Black	95	2	4
Latino	90	4	6
Asian	87	2	11
Other	92		8

Source: Bureau of the Census, 1996 Current Population Survey Voter Supplement, by courtesy of Raymond E. Wolfinger

As the table shows, fewer patterns in usage of early voting present themselves. Early voting is still fairly rare.[6] A better sense of the demographic composition of early and Election Day voters comes from a study of Texas by Robert Stein. The Texas investigators interviewed voters as they exited polling sites on Election Day and as they exited early voting stations during the three-week period of early voting in 1994.

Stein found some significant differences between early and Election Day voters. The most important was age: Just as older voters tend to vote absentee so older voters tend to vote early. In fact, more than a third of the early voters in 1994 were over the age of 60 and more than half were over 50. In contrast, the youngest voters, who are overrepresented among absentee voters, were underrepresented among early voters. The circumstances that cause absentee usage among the youngest voters, absence from the jurisdiction during Election Day, are also the circumstances that preclude early voting. Stein also found some small differences in early voting by gender, with men more likely to be early voters than women, and by income, with poorer voters more likely to turn out early (the opposite of the pattern for absentee voters).[7]

The main factors that discriminated between early voters and Election Day voters, however, were motivational. People who professed a great deal of interest in politics were more likely to turn out early than people who professed little. More strikingly, people who were strong partisans—in Stein's study, people who claimed identification with the Republican or Democratic party and who reported having voted a straight ticket—were overrepresented among early voters. Both interest in politics and strong identification with a political party foster voter turnout, suggesting that early voting simply allows people who are highly motivated to vote to vote sooner. But strong partisans are also much more likely to make their election choices early, on the basis of their partisanship and regardless of the particular candidates and the particular circumstances of the campaign. Strong partisans vote early because they have already made up their minds and see nothing to gain from waiting.

Voting by mail differs significantly from early voting and absentee voting. Voting by mail requires no extraordinary action on the part of registered voters, to whom the State of Oregon mails the ballot.[8] Analysis of the Oregon experience by Michael Traugott of the University of Michigan suggests that vote by mail increased the representation in the electorate of newer residents and registrants with a weaker sense that they could affect what government does, but in both cases only

[6] The only difference that looks at all striking is the peak rate of in person voting before Election Day by Latinos. Most probably, this small difference emerges because of a heavy concentration of Latinos—19.3 percent of all Americans of Hispanic descent—in Texas, the state with the most extensive program of early voting.

[7] Stein found no racial differences, although blacks were slightly more represented among early voters than among Election Day voters. He also found no appreciable differences in partisan identification or candidate choice, although early voters tended to be more conservative than Election Day voters.

[8] The only exception is people who cannot receive mail at their registration address, but they have the option of specifying a different address to which the ballot may be mailed.

slightly. Because vote by mail was the only election game going in Oregon, the overall vote by mail electorate did not differ markedly from the electorate that voted in person on Election Day.

The effect of early voting and liberalized absentee voting on voter turnout

The stated rationale for the extension of early voting, vote by mail, and the liberalization of access to absentee voting was to make it easier for people to vote. Studies of voter turnout and surveys of non-voters have both found that large numbers of people do not vote because it is costly or inconvenient for them. By making it easier to vote, the argument went, participation in elections would surely increase.

By the standard of promoting turnout, however, the innovations have been either a modest success or a modest disappointment, depending upon expectations. The consensus among analysts is that liberalized absentee voting has had a very small positive effect on voter participation, at best. The most careful study of the effect of liberalized absentee voting, by Eric Oliver of Princeton University, found increases in voter turnout in states that had liberalized. But the increases in turnout depended wholly upon the ability of political parties to mobilize voters. In states with closed primaries and therefore with registration of voters by partisanship, turnout increased modestly, by just over 2 percent. In states with open primaries and therefore no easy identification of voters by partisanship, turnout increased far less and maybe even not at all. All in all, liberalized access to absentee balloting increases voter turnout by perhaps a small amount.

Studies of early voting have tended to find larger but still modest effects on voter participation. A study of Tennessee found a 5 percentage point increase in turnout in the first early voting election, 1994, compared to nine earlier midterm congressional election years. Another study of Texas found that increases in levels of early voting across counties in 1992 correlated positively with increases in voter turnout. These studies, at best, are suggestive of a relationship between early voting and voter turnout, but there is still much to be learned. It is hard to tell whether increases in voter turnout, if there are some, are the permanent result of greater ease of early voting or instead are the temporary result of the novelty of early voting. Moreover, it is difficult to assess whether the increases in turnout that analysts have seen in aggregate turnout figures are the result of early voting or the result of other steps that states have taken simultaneously to promote voter turnout (e.g., easing access to voter registration or more strongly encouraging people to vote in publicizing early voting) or the result of other features of the counties or elections that were compared (e.g., more competitive elections coincident with the introduction of early voting or political characteristics of counties that cause them to have higher rates of early voting and higher rates of voter turnout). In fact, a recent report of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate makes the contrary claim for the 2000 election. Basing its argument on the same kind of aggregate, state-level voter turnout data, the Committee contends that early voting and liberalized absentee voting have actually depressed voter turnout.[9]

[9] The CSAE study illustrates some of the difficulties of evaluating the effect of early and absentee voting by comparing aggregate voter turnout between elections. The Committee found that states with early and liberalized absentee voting posted smaller increases in voter turnout in 2000 than states without. But two problems hamper the interpretation of this comparison. First, the Committee calculated turnout as votes cast in the presidential race divided by voting age population. Because the voting age population includes non-citizens who are not eligible to vote, the ratio underestimates the increase in turnout in states in which the non-citizen population is increasing rapidly, like Texas, an early voting state, and California, a liberalized absentee state. Second, the Committee did not take into account the competitiveness of the presidential races in states with and without early and liberalized absentee voting. As it happened in 2000, the competitive presidential races (and competitive other races) were in more and bigger states without early and liberalized absentee voting—for example, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Florida—than in states with them. (Oliver counts Michigan as a state with "expanded" eligibility for absentee voting, but CSAE counts it as a state that has not liberalized.)

The adoption of vote by mail statewide in Oregon followed a very successful experiment with VBM in substate and local elections in Oregon and elsewhere. In these low-interest and low-stimulus contests, with notoriously low voter participation, vote by mail often produced double digit increases in turnout. Unsurprisingly, the effects on turnout have been much more modest in elections that draw more interest from voters, parties, mobilizers, and the mass media. In the statewide mail-in balloting of the last six years, Traugott and other analysts have found significant but small increases in voter turnout in Oregon, with the estimates in the range of 5 or 6 percent, although he also found signs that the stimulus of vote by mail might be wearing off as the publicity over its implementation fades.

Using survey data, Traugott found that mail-in balloting had the greatest influence on voters who were less likely to turn out, on recent residents and citizens with a weak sense of their ability to influence government. But in the main, vote by mail stimulated voter turnout by making it easier for people who tend to participate to continue to participate rather than by mobilizing people who tended not to participate into the electorate. The demographic composition of early and absentee voters suggests that the same is also true of early and liberalized absentee voting. By making it easier to vote, early voting, mail-in voting, and unrestricted absentee voting make it easier for habitual voters to carry through on their intentions to exercise their franchise. But the greater ease of voting does little to bring people who are less interested in elections or people who feel little obligation to vote into the electorate.

In sum, the balance of the evidence indicates that opportunities to vote before Election Day are associated with a positive but modest increase in voter turnout. But it is not clear that the increase is due entirely to early, mail, and absentee voting per se. Implementation of early voting and voting by mail has been accompanied by unusually much publicity, and voters may also have been stimulated either by the publicity itself or by the desire to try something new. Liberalized absentee voting appears to have had very little effect on voter turnout, except possibly in states in which it has become a strategy of campaign mobilization.

Considerations for and against

Early voting, vote by mail, and unrestricted absentee voting spread rapidly in the 1990s. In 1992, Oliver counted two states with early voting, Texas and Oklahoma. In 2000, the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate found 14. In 1992, Oliver identified 10 states with "universal" eligibility for absentee voting and six more states (plus the District) with "expanded" eligibility. In 2000, CSAE found 20 states (and the District) with liberalized absentee requirements, even missing Nevada and not counting two states with "expanded" eligibility, Michigan and Ohio. And Oregon in 1998 went entirely to voting by mail in statewide elections.

A key factor in the spread of early, mail, and absentee voting has been the enthusiasm of the public. Despite the misgivings of many election administrators, nobody seems to believe there is any chance of repeal in the states that now have the provisions, so popular are they with voters. Voters appear to appreciate the convenience of early, mail, and absentee voting.

A second factor in the adoption was the genuine desire to promote voter participation in the electoral process, which experiment has, as indicated, been either a cautious success or a limited disappointment.

A third significant argument for expansion of opportunities to vote before Election Day was to economize on the cost of elections. By dispensing entirely with staffed polling sites, Oregon claims to have saved about a half million dollars in election expenses, or about 17 percent, in the 2000 primary, after VBM, compared to the 1998 primary, before. The experience with early voting in Texas is apparently more mixed. A 1994 FEC study found that early voting actually increased

election costs in the largest counties, which offered extended hours and satellite stations, but maintained or decreased costs in counties that did not have to make such accommodations. Early voting seems to reduce election expenses only insofar as it is essentially the same as in-person absentee voting. A 1987 FEC report notes that per-vote processing costs for absentee ballots are several times the expense for ballots cast at the polls. All three systems help to spread administrative effort from a single Election Day into a couple of weeks, with savings in aggravation if not in cost.

On the other side, critics voice three prominent concerns. The first is a worry that early, mail, and absentee voting might ultimately erode voter turnout by discouraging campaigns, parties, and advocacy groups from making the effort to get people to the polls. A considerable body of research has found that mobilization has a significant positive effect on voter participation, but campaigns, parties, and groups undertake it only when the benefit, to them, is greater than the cost at the margin. The concentration of mobilization on a single day plausibly allows campaigns, parties, and groups to realize economies of scale in their efforts. By having to sustain mobilization efforts over a longer period of time for early, mail, and absentee voting, groups might be dissuaded from investing as much as they do in stimulating voter turnout.

The argument that greater access to voting before Election Day might discourage mobilization of voters is difficult to assess. In many states, and especially in those states where third parties can request an application for an absentee ballot on a voter's behalf, liberalized absentee laws have fostered the development of sophisticated efforts, mostly partisan, to acquire, distribute, and in some cases collect and return absentee ballots. In other cases, the argument seems plausible. In states with early voting, for instance, the expense of standing at the ready to ferry voters to the polls must be greater when the election is spread over weeks rather than concentrated on a single day.

Critics also voice a second concern, that early, mail, and absentee voting allow people to make their choices before campaigns have run their full course. By making their choices early, voters make selections that they might not have made had they been exposed to information that issued only at the very end of the campaign. This line of argument assumes, of course, that the voters who make their decisions early could still be influenced by late campaign developments, an assumption that is by no means obvious. People who decide early in the campaign tend, as Stein shows of early voters, to have stronger partisan attachments than people who decide at the last minute. It is less likely the case that the rock-ribbed Republicans and yellow-dog Democrats who make their choices early could so easily be swayed from them by information that arises late in the campaign.

But this possibility leads to a second variant on the same argument: that early, mail, and absentee voting might change the dynamics of campaigns themselves, in particular to insert the pattern of early gestures to the partisan base followed by late moves to the center into the last few weeks of the race. It is unclear, however, that campaigns could make such a strategy work: it is difficult enough to soften strident partisan images over a period of months, let alone over a few days. Moreover, even if they could, it is not obvious that a change in campaign dynamics would necessarily be a bad thing.

Finally, the most forceful argument made against the extension of opportunities to vote before Election Day emphasizes the way in which early, mail, and absentee voting undermine participation in common in an important civic ritual. Election Day is one of the few opportunities Americans have to do something important together as a nation. It is the one time when the American people come together to govern themselves through the choice of their leaders. To critics, to make participation in this important civic rite a matter to be pursued at an individual's convenience is to undermine the sense of our nationhood, our common experience in the government of, by, and for the people.

Early, mail, and absentee voting compared

There are serious arguments for and against broadening the opportunities of Americans to vote before Election Day. For liberalization, the strongest argument is the popularity of early, mail, and unrestricted absentee voting. The citizens of states that have adopted these policies show broad enthusiasm for them. Against liberalization, the most compelling argument is that the freedom to vote other than on Election Day might loosen Americans' attachments to each other, and to the common purpose of self government.

If, on balance, greater opportunities to vote before Election Day are deemed desirable, the relative attractiveness of early, mail, and unrestricted absentee voting might be evaluated on three different dimensions, in addition to those discussed already.

First, early voting and mail voting place fewer demands on voters than participating by absentee. Except in a few states that allow registrants to apply for an absentee ballot even on Election Day itself, voters must exercise forethought to obtain and vote an absentee ballot. In contrast, early voting and mail voting require no more of voters than is demanded by voting on Election Day.

Second, early voting and its close cousin, in-person absentee voting, typically offer greater administrative support for voters as they cast their ballots. Early and in-person absentee voters make their decisions in election offices and satellite sites staffed by election workers, who can offer immediate assistance to voters who encounter difficulties. In fact, one election administrator told us that she liked unrestricted participation in in-person absentee voting because she could serve voters with her own elections staff, who are much more experienced and much better trained than Election Day poll workers.

Finally, early voting and in-person absentee voting occur in controlled sites under the supervision of elections officials, diminishing the opportunities for fraud. Critics of voting by mail and absentee voting by mail raise two concerns about security. The first is absentee ballots obtained and completed by someone other than the voter herself. The second is absentee and mail voters' being coerced or influenced in settings that lack the fundamental privacy of the voting booth.

The election officials from whom the Commission has heard, all from states with expanded eligibility for absentee and mail voting, have felt confident that the first concern is not very serious. Oregon describes a rigorous protocol by which officials check return signatures on VBM ballot envelopes against registration signatures. As of 1987, seven states required that signatures on absentee ballots be checked against registration signatures, and fourteen states required that ballot signatures be checked against signatures on absentee applications. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, five states require absentee ballots to bear the signature of a witness and another eight states require that absentee ballots either be witnessed or notarized.[10] But in fact, for practical reasons, most states do not routinely check signatures either on applications or on returned ballots, just as most states do not verify signatures or require proof of identity at the polls. Judging from what the Commission has heard, the consensus among election administrators in states that promote absentee voting and voting by mail is that absentee ballots are no less secure against fraud than in-person voting. Administrators in other states, and Justice Department investigators, are less sanguine. Certainly, the potential for fraud is present, and all the more so because so much of the process is beyond the supervision of election officials.

The potential for violation of privacy in vote choices is also difficult to assess. Oregon cites a survey study that found only a tiny proportion of VBM voters who felt they had been subject to pressure in marking their ballots. The 1987 FEC study of absentee voting suggested that the potential

[10] Fifteen states require a witness's signature if the absentee voter has been assisted in voting.

for invasion of privacy was greatest in states that allowed public access to applications for absentee ballots. In the last twenty years, during which access to absentee ballots has been expanded, political parties in many states have undertaken concerted efforts to mobilize their partisans to vote absentee, with the purpose, critics charge, of exercising influence over vote choices. The potential for violations of privacy is obviously greater for mail and absentee ballots than for ballots cast in voting booths at polling sites.

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Days in advance of Election Day that absentee ballots must be requested, by state

State	Days in advance	State	Days in advance
Alabama	5/5	Nebraska	2 after/4
Alaska	8/4	Nevada	8/7
Arizona	12/4	New Hampshire	0/3
Arkansas	8/1	New Jersey	8/1
California	8/7	New Mexico	3/3
Colorado	4/4	New York	8/1
Connecticut	8/1	North Carolina	1/4
Delaware	3/1	North Dakota	None specified/1
D.C.	8/1	Ohio	3/3
Florida	12/0	Oklahoma	6/1
Georgia	18/1	Oregon	22/vote by mail
Hawaii	8/7	Pennsylvania	4/7
Idaho	0/1	Rhode Island	22/21
Illinois	5/1	South Carolina	3/1
Indiana	9/1	South Dakota	0/0
Iowa	1/0	Tennessee	0/0
Kansas	4/1	Texas	8/7
Kentucky	8/7	Utah	4/4
Louisiana	1/1	Vermont	1/1
Maine	8/0	Virginia	5/3
Maryland	9/7	Washington	0/1
Massachusetts	1/1	West Virginia	6/3
Michigan	6/1	Wisconsin	1/1
Minnesota	1/1	Wyoming	NA/1
Mississippi	1/3		
Missouri	6/1	U.S. Average	5.4/2.8
Montana	0/1	U.S. Median	5/1

Source: Information is discrepant. Before slash: www.election.com/us/deadlines.htm. After slash: League of Women Voters Education Fund, "Absentee Voting: Vote: The First Steps," 1996.

Early voting and liberalized absentee voting provisions, by state

State	Total percentage of votes cast before Election Day, 1996	Early Voting, 2000	Percentage of votes cast in person before Election Day, 1996	Liberalized Absentee Voting (CSAE), 2000	Percentage of votes cast by absentee ballot, 1996
Alabama	3		0		3
Alaska	9		4	•	5
Arizona	24	•	2	•	22
Arkansas	14	•	9	•	5
California	19		0	•	19
Colorado	20	•	11	•	10
Connecticut	7		0		7
Delaware	6		0		6
D.C.	4		1		3
Florida	7		1		7
Georgia	3		1		2
Hawaii	12	•	1	•	11
Idaho	7	•	1	•	6
Illinois	4		1		4
Indiana	6		1		5
Iowa	11	•	3	•	9
Kansas	15		5	•	11
Kentucky	6		1		5
Louisiana	3		1		2
Maine	5		1	•	5
Maryland	3		1		3
Massachusetts	4		1	•	3
Michigan	14		1	‡	14
Minnesota	7		1		6
Mississippi	3		1		2
Missouri	3		1		3
Montana	9		1	•	8
Nebraska	6		0	•	6
Nevada	11	•	5	•†	6
New Hampshire	7		1		6
New Jersey	3		0		3
New Mexico	15	•	10	•	6
New York	3		0		3
North Carolina	4	•	1	•	3
North Dakota	6		1		5
Ohio	9		2	‡	7
Oklahoma	5	•	2	•	3
Oregon	46	Vote by mail	0	Vote by mail	46
Pennsylvania	4		0		4
Rhode Island	3		0		3
South Carolina	2		0		2
South Dakota	8		3		6
Tennessee	21	•	19		2

Texas	26	•	23		4
Utah	4		1	•	3
Vermont	7		1	•	7
Virginia	5	•	1		3
Washington	37		0	•	37
West Virginia	3		1		2
Wisconsin	3	•	0	•	3
Wyoming	13		1	•	12
United States	10	14 states	3	22 states	8

† This omission is in error in the original source.

‡ Oliver classifies Michigan and Ohio as states with "expanded" eligibility for absentee voting.

Source: Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, "Two Pro-Participation Reforms Actually Harm Voter Turnout," 9 January 2001; J. Eric Oliver, "The effects of eligibility restrictions and party activity on absentee voting and overall turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 40 (May 1996): 501–02; Bureau of the Census, 1996 Current Population Survey Voter Supplement, by courtesy of Raymond E. Wolfinger.

Accepted reasons for requesting absentee ballots, by state, 1996

State	No reason necessary	Absent on business	College student	Disabled or ill	Prevented by employment	Religious reasons	Elderly	Out of jurisdiction for any reason
Alabama		•	•	•	•			•
Alaska	•							
Arizona	•							
Arkansas	•							
California	•							
Colorado	•							
Connecticut		•	•	•		•		•
Delaware		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
D.C.		•	•	•			•	•
Florida			•	•	•	•		•
Georgia				•	•	•		•
Hawaii	•							
Idaho	•							
Illinois		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Indiana			•	•			•	•
Iowa	•							
Kansas	•							
Kentucky			•	•			•	
Louisiana			•	•	•	•		•
Maine	•							
Maryland		•	•	•				•
Massachusetts	•							
Michigan		•	•	•		•	•	•
Minnesota		•	•	•		•		•
Mississippi		•	•		•		•	•
Missouri				•	•	•	•	•
Montana	•							
Nebraska	•							
Nevada	•							
New Hampshire		•	•	•		•		•
New Jersey		•	•	•	•			•
New Mexico	•							
New York				•				•
North Carolina	•							
North Dakota		•	•	•				•
Ohio				•		•	•	•
Oklahoma	•							
Oregon	•							
Pennsylvania		•	•	•	•			•
Rhode Island		•	•	•		•		•
South Carolina		•	•	•	•	•		•
South Dakota		•	•	•	•	•		•
Tennessee			•	•		•	•	•
Texas				•			•	•
Utah	•							

Vermont	•							
Virginia		•	•	•	•	•		•
Washington	•							
West Virginia		•	•	•		•	•	•
Wisconsin	•							
Wyoming	•							
United States	22 states	18 states	23 states	27 states	13 states	18 states	12 states	28 states

Source: League of Women Voters Education Fund, "Absentee Voting, Vote: The First Steps," 1996, updated from Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, "Two Pro-Participation Reforms Actually Harm Voter Turnout," 9 January 2001.