



## Voting by Mail | Brief Report | October 2020

There are multiple reasons why Americans vote by mail. In five states (Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington), mail in voting is the primary method of voting. While in 28 additional states, all voters have had the right to vote by mail ballot if they choose, without having to provide any reason or excuse.”<sup>1</sup> Arguments against expanding voting by mail often center around the concerns with voter fraud, while “Supporters of voting by mail (VBM)—systems where voters receive and return their ballots by mail—argue that VBM increases turnout and produces a more reflective, thoughtful electorate, reduces administrative costs, and produces a more accurate ballot count.”<sup>2</sup>

How common is voting by mail in the United States? “In the last two federal elections, roughly one out of every four Americans cast a mail ballot.”<sup>3</sup> This number has been steadily increasing, and since 2000 “more than 250 million votes have been cast via mailed-out ballots, in all 50 states...and in 2018, more than 31 million Americans cast their ballots by mail, about 25.8% of election participants.”<sup>4</sup>

The majority of Democrats (72%) and Republicans (65%) support a requirement for mail in ballots as of April 2020.<sup>5</sup> “There Is No Evidence That Voting by Mail Gives One Party An Advantage” and those who vote by mail reflect a wide range of demographics and therefore certain political affiliations. A study done by Charles Stewart III from MIT found that “there is very little demographic difference in the use of mail ballots,”<sup>6</sup> the one exception being that those 65 and older tend to not support voting by mail. However, research has also found that “Nationwide, voters who cast a ballot by mail express lower levels of confidence that their vote will be counted as cast.”<sup>7</sup>

One of the main concerns about voting by mail is fraud. Yet, “none of the five states that hold their elections primarily by mail has had any voter fraud scandals since making that change.”<sup>8</sup> The Brennan Center for Justice claims “it is still more likely for an American to be struck by lightning than to commit mail voting fraud.”<sup>9</sup> Colorado Senator, Michael Bennet, noted that “We’ve had vote by mail in Colorado for years. We don’t have fraud. But we do have the second highest turnout in America.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gronke and Peter Miller (2012) *Voting by Mail and Turnout in Oregon: Revisiting Southwell and Burchett*, American Politics Research 40(6), 976

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-poll-idUSKBN21P3GO>

<sup>6</sup> <https://electionupdates.caltech.edu/2020/03/20/some-demographics-on-voting-by-mail/>

<sup>7</sup> Paul Gronke and Peter Miller (2012) *Voting by Mail and Turnout in Oregon: Revisiting Southwell and Burchett*, American Politics Research 40(6), 978

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

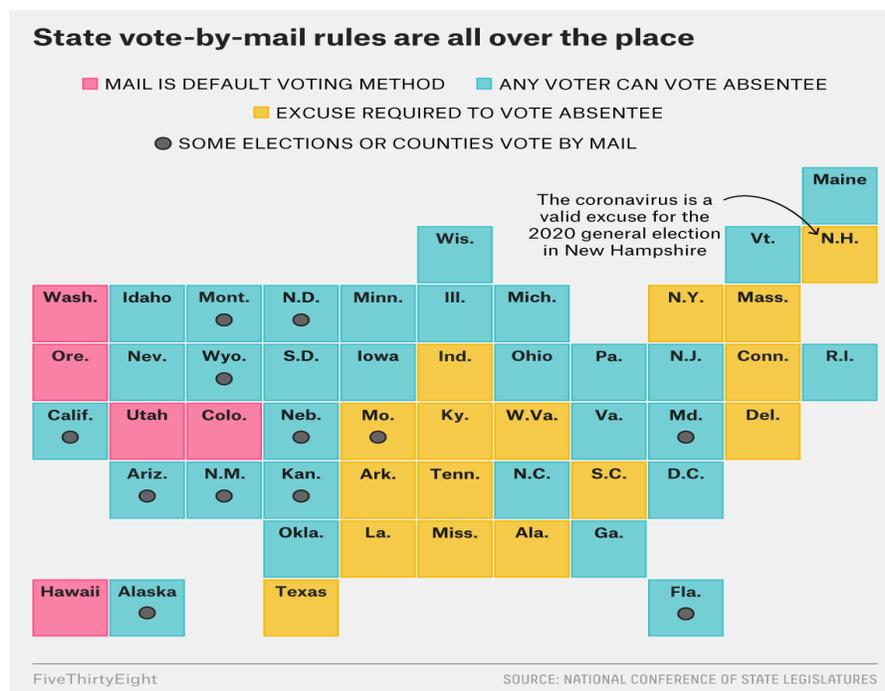
<sup>9</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/why-vote-mail-option-necessary>

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In response to these issues, “States have multiple tools to address valid security concerns and protect election integrity when it comes to mail ballots. And recent technologies and strategies have significantly enhanced the security of mail balloting.”<sup>11</sup> These include identity verification, bar codes, ballot tracking through the U.S. Postal Service, secure drop-off locations and drop boxes, harsh penalties, postelection audits, and polling sites as a fail-safe.<sup>12</sup>

Covid-19 has created a multitude of issues for states when it comes to elections. During the primaries in the spring and summer of 2020, “the results were unsettling: resource-strapped election officials struggled to handle a surge in demand for absentee and mail ballots, and voters – disproportionately Black and Latino voters, according to reports – faced hours-long waits at polling places”<sup>13</sup> Legislatures were trying to quickly pass into law new rules to allow for more widespread voting-by-mail options, as well as rendering legal barriers, such as “notary and witness requirements and documentary identification requirements”<sup>14</sup> In May 2020, voting by mail rules in the U.S. looked like this:



Source: <https://53eig.ht/36Z9YMg>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

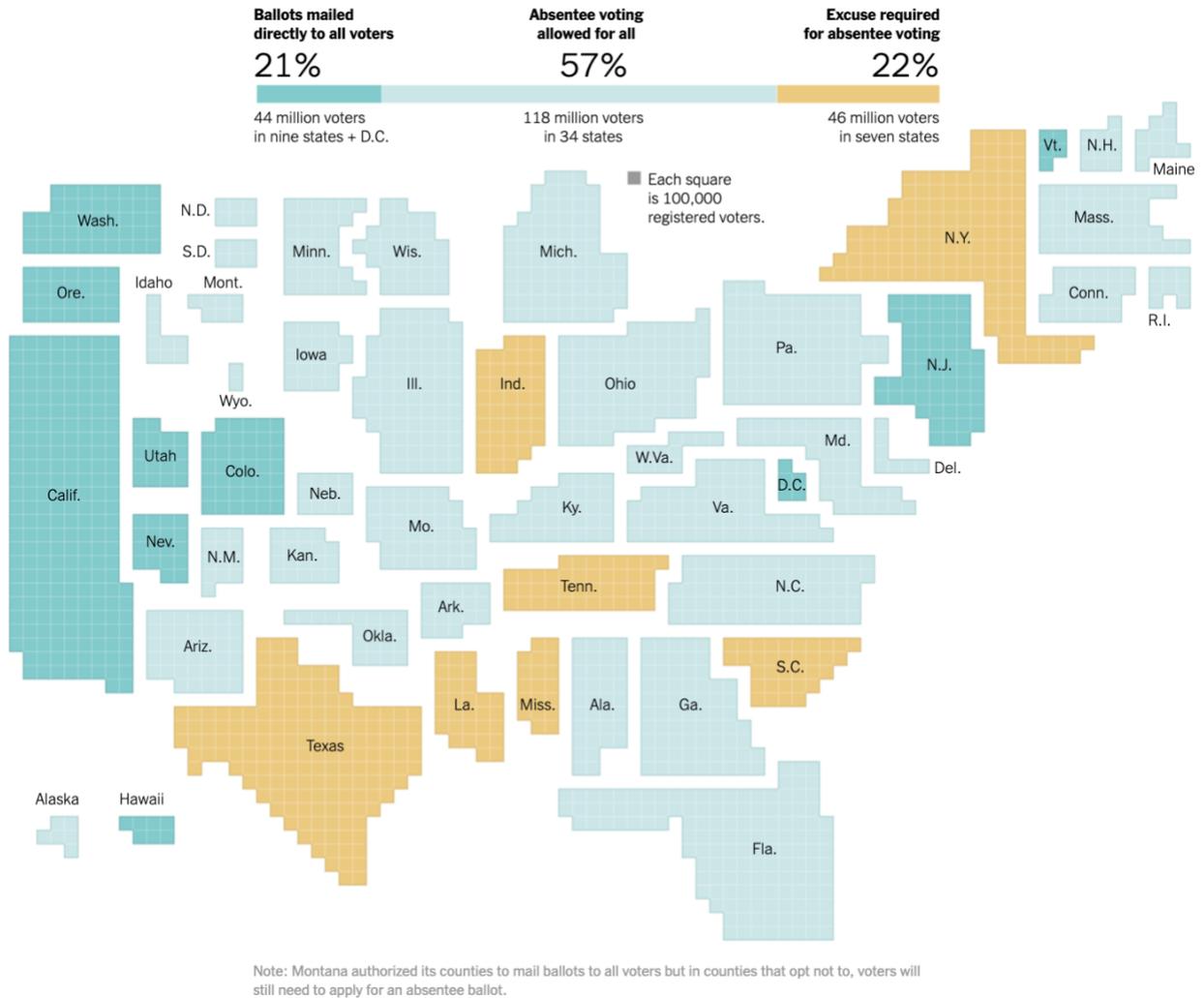
<sup>12</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/false-narrative-vote-mail-fraud>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/protect-democracy-expand-vote-mail>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/mail-voting-what-has-changed-2020>

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By August 2020, voting by mail in the U.S. looked like this:



Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/08/11/us/politics/vote-by-mail-us-states.html>

In May, 16 states required an excuse to vote by mail as an absentee; however, that number decreased to 7 in August. Also, in May, there were 5 states where vote by mail was the default method; however, as of August, 10 states mailed ballots directly to all voters.



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These changes did not come without criticism. “At least 182 voting rights cases were filed between January 1 and September 15, 2020. Of those, 167 pertain to the pandemic, 147 involve vote-by-mail issues, and 41 involve polling place issues.”<sup>15</sup> The greatest concerns seem to be funding and time. While the general election in November cannot be pushed back, states require an estimated \$4 billion in extra funding for voting by mail.<sup>16</sup> “Some states, such as Georgia, that mailed ballot applications for the primaries have announced that a lack of funds will preclude them from doing the same for the November election.”<sup>17</sup>

Matthew Harwood of the Brennan Center for Justice writes, “Since our founding, neither war nor pestilence has ever prevented Americans from voting. We can’t let the coronavirus break that streak.”<sup>18</sup> A poll in March 2020 found that four out of five Americans believe states should give all voters the option to vote by mail, without needing an excuse, during the November 2020 election.”<sup>19</sup> Americans want to increase the accessibility of every eligible voter to carry out their civic duty, and voting by mail seems a feasible way to do so.

***If you are interested in learning further about election compliance, connect with the compliance experts at [TransTechSol.com](https://www.TransTechSol.com).***

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/mail-voting-what-has-changed-2020>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/protect-democracy-expand-vote-mail>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/mail-voting-what-has-changed-2020>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/why-vote-mail-option-necessary>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/bipartisan-support-expanded-mail-voting-2020-elections>