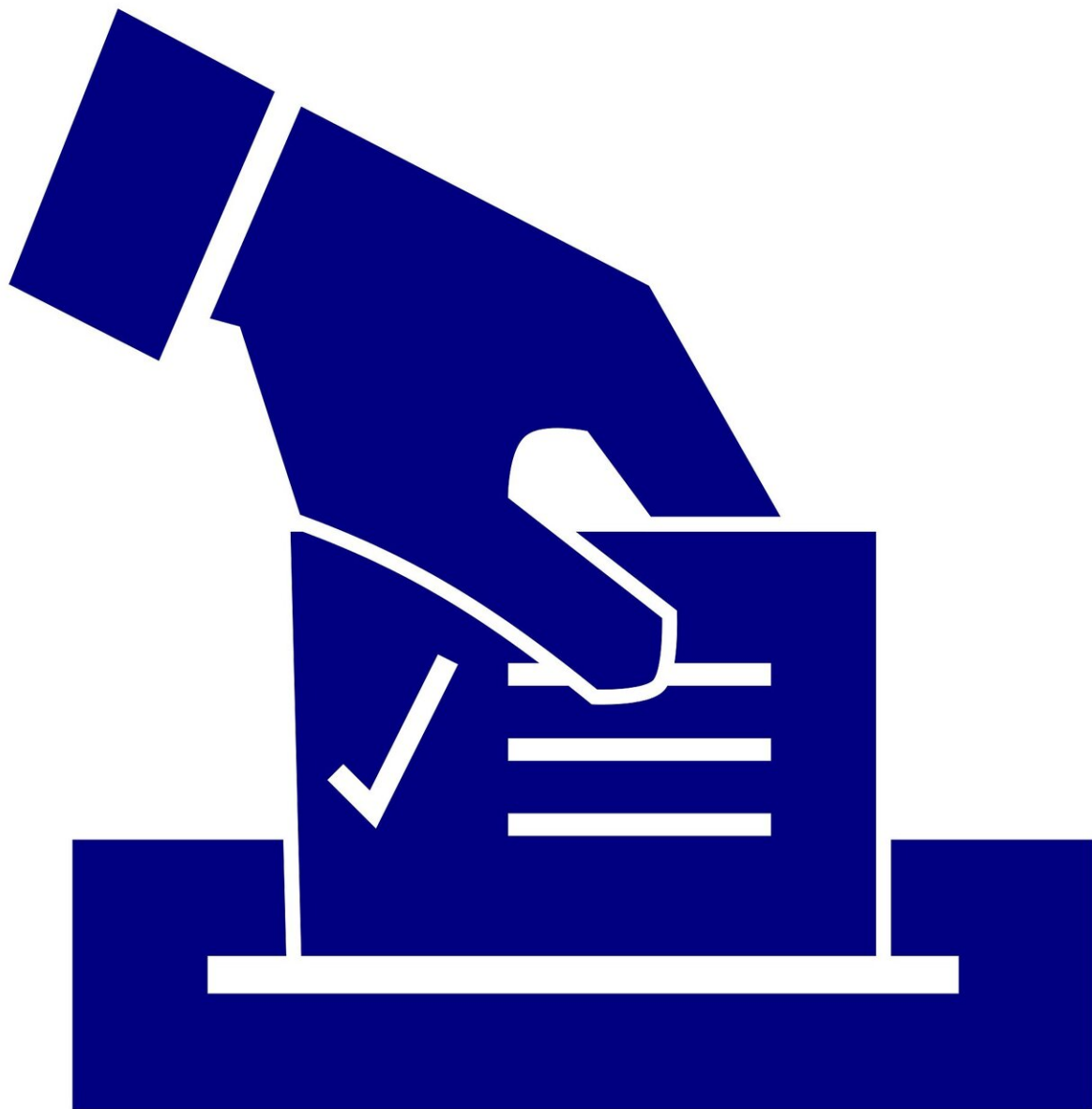


# Study finds technology increased voter turnout—and concerns about security

July 31 2019, by David Stone

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New research by a University of Chicago scholar found that the ability to vote with a mobile device increased turnout by three to five percentage points in the 2018 federal election in West Virginia, suggesting that mobile voting has the potential to significantly boost turnout in future elections.

West Virginia became the first U.S. state to utilize mobile voting in a federal [election](#), allowing it for overseas voters from 24 of its counties in 2018. Anthony Fowler, associate professor in UChicago's Harris School of Public Policy, studied this trial to assess the likely effects of mobile voting on the size and composition of the voting population.

"When West Virginia registered voters living abroad had the opportunity to vote online, they were six to nine percentage points more likely to request a ballot, mobile or otherwise, and three to five percentage points more likely to actually cast a ballot," said Fowler, whose research uses econometric methods to study elections and political representation.

The research, presented at a recent University of Pennsylvania conference on election science, underscores that the ability to cast votes on a mobile device could potentially have a powerful effect on [voter](#) turnout while drastically lowering the cost of voting. At the same time, current survey data show that many Americans are wary of online voting.

"The effects of voting online could potentially be even greater if it were implemented in a more convenient way or for a population that didn't have to first submit a Federal Post Card Application in order to receive a

ballot." Fowler said. "Mobile voting could have a profound impact on increasing [voter turnout](#) and potentially reduce inequalities in participation."

Fowler's study found that:

- Among West Virginians living overseas, having mobile voting as an option made them six to nine percentage points more likely to request a ballot (mobile or otherwise) by submitting a Federal Post Card Application, and it subsequently made them three to five percentage points more likely to cast a ballot.
- Approximately half of the voters casting a ballot with the [mobile app](#) would not have otherwise voted if mobile voting were not an option.
- Mobile voting can increase turnout, and the estimated effects are greater than the effects of most other electoral reforms, such as early voting, vote-by-mail and election-day registration.
- Because the West Virginia trial was focused on overseas voters who had to request mobile voting by submitting a Federal Post Card Application, the effects on turnout could potentially have been greater if implemented in a more convenient way.
- Although many voters are understandably wary of online and mobile voting, when they actually have the opportunity to cast a vote online, many of them take it up, and a meaningful share of eligible voters are induced to vote who would not have otherwise cast a [ballot](#).

Although West Virginia's trial was small, only affecting overseas residents from some counties, and requiring individuals to first submit a Federal Post Card Application before utilizing mobile voting, the results suggest that mobile voting is more effective in increasing turnout than many other electoral reforms. Furthermore, if mobile voting were advertised on a larger scale or implemented in a more convenient way,

presumably, the effects would be even greater. At the same time, mobile voting raises new security risks that should be closely considered before being further adopted.

"Policymakers must consider the potential voting online offers to increasing the number of voters participating in elections while taking seriously the potential security risks," Fowler added.

Provided by University of Chicago

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