

Most voters skipped 'in person on Election Day' when offered a choice of how and when to vote

October 27 2022, by Paul Herrnson

Voter turnout in 2020 was higher than in 2018 and 2016

Regardless of how their state governments responded – or didn't – to pandemic-era calls to make voting easier, more Americans **voted in the 2020 presidential election** than **in the prior midterm** and the **prior general election**.

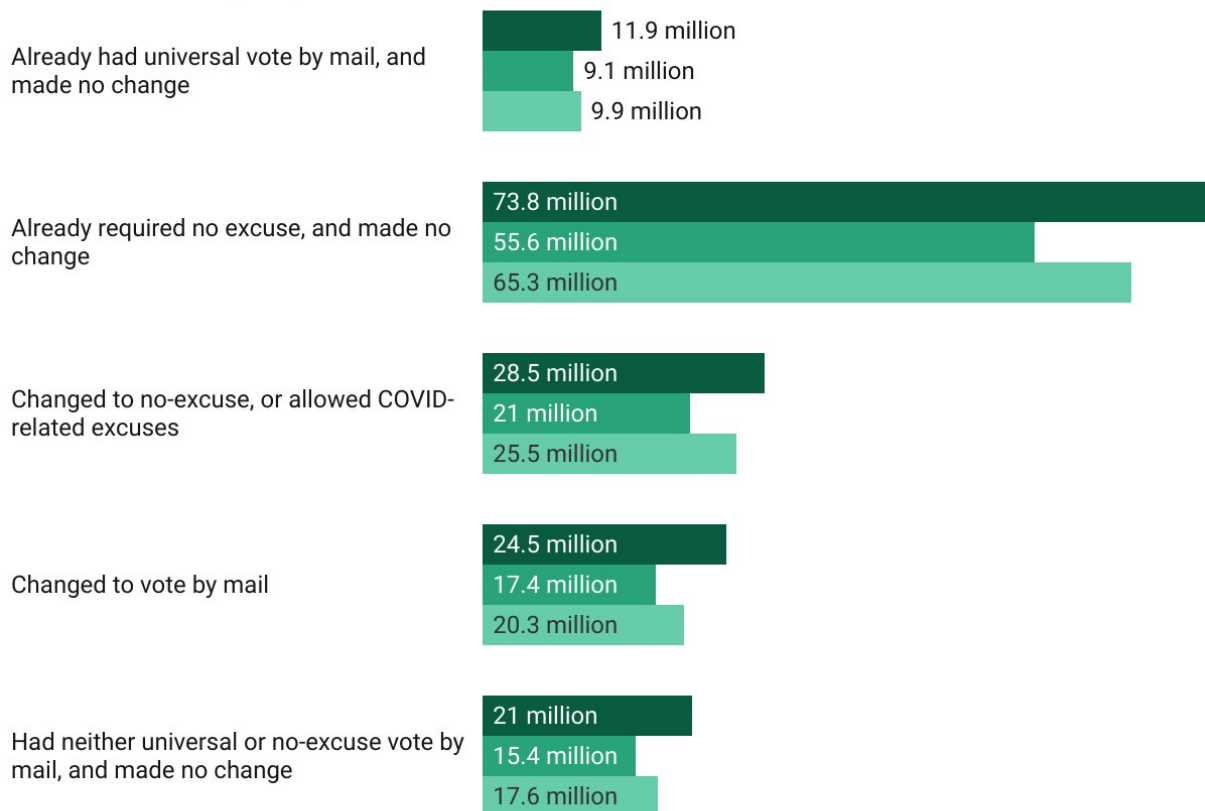


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: Categories by Herrnson et al.; turnout data from US Elections Project

Credit: Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND Source: Categories by Herrnson et

al.; turnout data from US Elections Project

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, state lawmakers, election administrators and others realized they had to move quickly. A presidential election was coming in just a few months, along with elections for every seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, one-third of the U.S. Senate, and all sorts of state and local positions. Primary season was already underway. And nobody was sure how safe it would be to vote in person at polling places.

Ultimately, the collective efforts of these public servants delivered an election with a [turnout rate higher than any in the past century](#). [Almost 67% of eligible voters](#) cast a ballot. This happened even as the [pandemic swept the nation—and the globe](#).

A key factor in that success was adaptability—of elected officials, election administrators and voters themselves. Officials knew they had to make changes so people could vote safely, and they had to find ways to protect the integrity of the process.

Partisan politics played a role, too.

Many Democrats [support a range of options for voting](#), such as early in-person voting and voting by [mail](#). Many Republicans [oppose these options](#). President Donald Trump especially objected to mail voting, tweeting, "[Mail boxes will be robbed](#), ballots will be forged & even illegally printed out & fraudulently signed." Numerous GOP leaders followed his lead, though no fraud sufficient to change the [election results was ever found](#).

Research my colleagues and I have conducted has found that when it

came down to the people's choice, there was a clear outcome:

[Alternatives to traditional in-person gathering](#) at a polling place on Election Day are becoming more common, and more popular. Of the [158.4 million votes cast](#) in the 2020 election according to the Federal Election Commission, [at least 101.2 million](#)—64% of them—were cast by mail or by early in-person voting. A [similar trend is underway](#) for the 2022 midterms.

Options for voting

Even before the pandemic, most states offered one or more of what are sometimes called "convenience voting" options—alternatives to showing up in person on the [Tuesday after the first Monday](#) in November.

[Early in-person voting](#) lets someone come to a government office, school, shopping mall or other designated site and cast a ballot in the days or weeks before Election Day.

With [mail voting](#), election officials use the U.S. mail to send ballots to voters, who fill out their ballots at home and either mail them back or drop them off at a designated location.

Before 2020, [16 states](#) required a voter to provide a specific reason, such as age or disability, to receive a ballot by mail. Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia required no excuse. And the five states where elections were conducted by mail automatically sent a ballot to each registered [voter](#).

Before the 2020 election and afterward, Trump and many of his allies questioned the integrity of mail voting. They filed court cases, called for recounts, and even conducted a partisan review of votes cast in Arizona, which was widely discredited. [Despite the news coverage devoted to their efforts](#), little evidence of fraud in mail voting—or in any other type

of voting—was uncovered. Even U.S. Attorney General William Barr, a Trump appointee, conceded there was insufficient evidence to cast doubt on the election outcome.

Instead of injecting fraud, mail ballots have made it easier for people to cast a ballot and play a role in charting the course of our nation's future.

States made changes

Data my colleagues and I collected from states' websites and other sources shows [16 states introduced new mail ballot policies](#) in 2020. The result was that registered voters in nine states and the District of Columbia were automatically mailed a ballot. In 36 states, voters could successfully apply for a mail ballot without providing an excuse or listing COVID-19 as an excuse.

Voters in the remaining five states qualified for a mail ballot only if their application included a sanctioned excuse, such as out-of-town travel on Election Day, that did not include concerns about contracting COVID-19.

Our analysis found that partisanship played a role in which voters had which options. States with Democratic governors and Democratic-controlled legislatures were the most likely to adopt mail voting, followed by states where party control was divided. Republican-controlled states were the least likely to make changes. Indiana and three of the four conservative Southern states that continued to require a non-COVID excuse for a mail ballot were under Republican control. Louisiana, the other state maintaining an excuse requirement, had a Democratic governor and a GOP-controlled legislature.

How Americans voted

[State policies affected](#) how people voted, we found.

[Most voters in the 2020 election cast ballots in other ways](#) than showing up on Election Day 2020.

Voters' familiarity with the options affected their choices. In the 25 states that had a history of no-excuse mail voting (excluding the five that switched to automatically mailing registered voters a ballot), voters were [about 22 percentage points more likely](#) to use a mail [ballot](#) in 2020 than voters first given a no-excuse option that year.

And voters in these same 25 no-excuse states were almost 27 points more likely to vote by mail than voters in the five states that continued to require an excuse.

We also found that partisanship played a role in what methods people chose to vote. Democratic voters were [13 points more likely](#) to vote by mail than independents, and a whopping 26 points more likely to vote by mail than Republicans. GOP voters vastly preferred going to the polls on Election Day, and more of them voted early in-person than by mail.

In addition to selecting a president, the 2020 [election](#) made clear that many Americans—all across the nation and of all political stripes—prefer to cast their ballots by methods other than showing up on Election Day itself.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Most voters skipped 'in person on Election Day' when offered a choice of how and

when to vote (2022, October 27) retrieved 23 June 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2022-10-voters-person-election-day-choice.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.