AMERICA
Goes to the Polls 2020
Policy and Voter Turnout in the 2020 Election
AMERICA GOES TO THE POLLS

A report on Voter Turnout and Election Policy in the 50 States for the 2020 Election – March 2021

NONPROFIT VOTE REPORT TEAM:

George Pillsbury, Senior Policy Consultant
Caroline Mak, Field & Research Coordinator
Brian Miller, Executive Director

America Goes to the Polls 2020 represents the 7th edition in our biennial series based on the final certified voter turnout collected by the U.S. Elections Project. The report provides the official state rankings in voter turnout and turnout growth compared to the last presidential election in 2016. This ranking provides clear insights into the impact of election policies on state-by-state voter turnout.

Nonprofit VOTE partners with America’s nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. We are the leading source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.

The U.S. Elections Project, founded and directed by Dr. Michael McDonald at the University of Florida, seeks to provide timely and accurate election statistics, electoral laws, research reports, and other useful information regarding the United States electoral system. In doing so, the project informs the people of the United States on how their electoral system works, how it may be improved, and how they can participate in it. It serves as the official source for national and state turnout rates for biennial national elections.

Special thanks to the National Vote at Home Institute team for reviewing our findings for clarity and accuracy.

Designed by Robert Calmer, Adgraphics911.com; Kimberley Carroll-Cox, Nonprofit VOTE
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

4    Introduction  
5    Executive Summary  

**HOW WE VOTED AS A NATION**

7    2020 National Turnout  
9    50 State Turnout Ranking – 2020 Election Voter Turnout  

**HOW POLICIES DRIVE TURNOUT DIFFERENCES**

11    Top 10 States vs Bottom 10 States  
12    Top 10 Highest Growth in Turnout Since 2016  

**GROWTH OF MAIL AND EARLY VOTING**

14    Early Voting - Mail Ballots and Early In-person  
15    Vote at Home - Mail Ballots  
17    Benefits of Vote at Home  
18    Mail Ballot Usage Map  

**GROWTH OF SAME DAY REGISTRATION**

20    Same Day Registration  
21    Same Day Registration States Map  
22    Benefits of Same Day Registration and Other Policies That Increase Access to Registration  

**COMPETITION AND THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE**

24    Competition and the Electoral College  
25    Alternative to the Electoral College  

28    METHODOLOGY  
30    APPENDIX
INTRODUCTION

The November 2020 election was historic. Faced with the ongoing pandemic, many states expanded access to mail ballots, as well as options for early in-person voting. A new generation of poll workers was recruited to work at socially distanced polling locations. Meanwhile, many states had already implemented new policies prior to the pandemic, like Same Day Registration, that would help after months of DMV closures and a backlog of outdated registrations. America rose to the challenge. And voters, with expanded options for voting, turned out in numbers not seen in over a century. We extend our gratitude to the many poll workers and election officials – including some of our own neighbors, co-workers, and family members – who made this election possible.

Amid the story of record turnout nationwide is also a story of differences. At the core of this report is a state-by-state ranking of voter turnout in all 50 states and DC – from the lowest-turnout state at 55% to a record-shattering 80% in the highest-turnout state. This 50-state ranking provides a powerful tool for examining the impact of state election policies. States in the top 10 of the ranking have markedly different policies than states in the bottom 10. Same Day Voter Registration states and “Vote at Home” states that mail every registered voter their ballot were consistently at the top of the turnout rankings. Those at the bottom generally made both registration and use of mail ballots harder. The report also looks at the role of competition and the Electoral College in shaping turnout.

By lifting up policies that have a proven, real-world track record of increasing voter turnout, we aim to provide a blueprint for policy makers, advocates, and all Americans who care about a healthy democracy. Despite our differences, or perhaps because of those differences, our democracy works better when more people participate and vote. Only then can our democracy truly represent the will of the people. So let’s draw on the lessons of 2020 to build a stronger, more inclusive democracy.

Brian Miller,
Executive Director
Nonprofit VOTE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With high voter interest and a global pandemic, 2020 was a high point for mail ballots, early voting, and policies like same day voter registration that gave voters more and better choices to register and vote, helping fuel record voter turnout.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

For the first time ever, more people voted early with a mail ballot or in-person than filled out a ballot at the polls on Election Day

- 70% of voters voted early with a mail ballot or in-person vs 30% of voters who voted in person on Election Day.
- A record 111 million voted with either a mail ballot or early in-person, more than double the number who voted in person on Election Day.
- 28 States changed their policy to make it easier to use a mail ballot.

National voter turnout at 67% of eligible voters was the highest in 120 years

- It set the modern record for turnout since 1900 and the expansion of the electorate with women’s suffrage, the Voting Rights Act, and lowering the voting age to 18.
- All 50 states increased their turnout over 2016.

Despite the record national turnout, there are still wide differences in voter turnout between states that make it easier or harder to vote

- Turnout in the top 10 states averaged 17 percentage points higher than the bottom 10.
- The top 10 turnout states either sent all their voters a mail ballot, have Same Day Registration that allows voters to register or update their registration when they vote, or both.
- All but one of the bottom 10 turnout states cut off voter registration four weeks before the election or required an excuse to use a mail ballot.
States that sent mail ballots to all voters had an advantage in turnout

- In the top 10 states for their voter turnout, half were states that proactively mailed ballots to all registered voters (a.k.a Vote at Home states).
- In the top 10 states for increase in voter turnout over 2016, six mailed ballots to all voters for the first time in a presidential election.

States with Same Day Registration also saw a big turnout advantage

- Eight of the top 10 voter turnout states had Same Day Registration.
- States with Same Day Registration had an average turnout five percentage points higher than states that did not.
- With eight more states adding Same Day Registration since 2016, this was a landmark year for the growth in the number of states adopting this time-tested policy.
- Nearly half of all states now offer Same Day Voter Registration.
- Despite nearly doubling the number of states with Same Day Registration since 2016, we still see a consistent turnout advantage of at least five points higher than states without it.

Competition and the Electoral College impact the state turnout

- Competition is a big driver of voter turnout. When it comes to the presidential race, the Electoral College divides the country into battleground (competitive) and non-battleground states.
- Voter turnout in the 36 non-battleground states was four percentage points lower than that of the battleground states. All but one of the bottom 10 states in turnout were non-battleground states.
- The two major candidates made 98% of their limited campaign visits to these 14 battleground states and gave the bulk of their campaign money to these 14 battleground states.
2020 had the highest turnout of eligible voters for a presidential election since 1900.

National turnout over time - marks the modern record for turnout after major historic expansions.

Every state increased their turnout over 2016.

Over 159,690,000 votes were cast, 23.8 million more than 2016.

For the first time in recent history, 20 states had voter turnout over 70 percent.

Minnesota led the way with 80% voter turnout.
The 50 State Ranking—2020 Election Voter Turnout

Voter turnout is calculated in each state as

\[
\frac{\text{The total number of votes}}{\text{The number of people eligible to vote}}
\]

The number of people eligible to vote is determined by the Census data for the number of citizens 18 and over, then adjusted for those prohibited from voting due to a past conviction, depending on state law.

Since the 1980s, the U.S. Elections Project has provided the official estimate of each state’s voter eligible population (VEP) as the most accurate method to meaningfully compare voter turnout between states.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank 2020</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage Turnout</th>
<th>Rank 2020</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage Turnout</th>
<th>Rank 2020</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Dist. of Columbia</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2
Source: U.S. Elections Project, 2020 General Election Turnout
The Top 10 States VS The Bottom 10 States

Despite the record nationwide turnout, there are still wide differences in voter turnout between states that make it easier or harder to vote.

The average turnout in the Top 10 states (76%) was 17 percentage points higher than the bottom 10 states (59%).
Every state in the top 10 makes voting easier by either allowing voters to register or update their registration when they vote, sending all voters a mail ballot, or both.

Top 10 highest turnout states using Voting Eligible Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Same Day Registration</th>
<th>Vote At Home</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3  
Source: U.S. Elections Project

Only five of the top 10 states were battleground states. (see page 24)

Nine out of the bottom 10 states make voting harder by cutting off voter registration four weeks before the election, requiring an excuse to use a mail ballot, or both.

Bottom 10 states using Voting Eligible Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 WEEK</th>
<th>Excuse</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓*</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓*</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓*</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excuse states include those that made temporary COVID exceptions but still had other mail ballot restrictions

Figure 4  
Source: U.S. Elections Project
More than half of the highest turnout growth states are not battleground states. Only four were:

**Arizona, Texas, Michigan, and Nevada.** (see page 24)

*Montana* operated like a Vote at Home state in 2020. Counties had the option to mail ballots to all voters. 46 of 56 counties chose this option and 99% of Montana voters used a mail ballot.

**Arizona** was the first state that allowed voters to permanently sign up for mail ballots and provide online voter registration. As a result, they were more prepared for remote registration and mail ballot voting.
Growth of Mail and Early Voting

For the first time in US Election history, over twice as many people voted early with a mail ballot or in-person at an early voting site than filled out a ballot on Election Day at the polls.

The majority of voters chose to vote with mail ballots when all three voting methods were available in their state.

Among the states, no policy had a greater impact on increasing voter participation than proactively mailing all voters a ballot, often referred to as Vote at Home.
70% of voters voted early with a mail ballot or early in-person instead of in-person on Election Day. Voters largely chose how they voted by convenience, not "concerns about coronavirus." 66% said "most convenient" was "a major reason" for choosing their method of voting. Only 24% chose "concerns about coronavirus" as a major reason.

A record 111 million voted with either a mail ballot or early in-person more than double the number who voted in person on Election Day.

Voting early increased over 30 percentage points since the 2016 presidential election.

2 Nonprofit VOTE analysis of voting method data – see methodology.
VOTE AT HOME - VOTE BY MAIL

Vote at Home states proactively mail a ballot to every registered voter two to three weeks before the election.

Each state provides voters convenient options to return their ballot at a secure local drop box, vote center or poll location, or by mail.

In all Vote at Home and many other states, voters also have the option to track their ballot online from when their ballot was sent out to when it was officially counted by their election office.

All Vote at Home states were either among the top 10 voter turnout states or the top 10 states in turnout growth over 2016.

In addition to the Vote at Home states, many other states encouraged the use of mail ballots. Efforts to expand mail ballot usage included mailing ballot request forms to all registered voters and making it easy to apply.

Vote at Home states had nearly twice the growth in turnout over other states.

Average percent growth in Voting Eligible Population turnout

5% Other States
9% Vote at Home

States with the highest percent mail ballot usage had the highest percent turnout growth.

Average percent growth in Voting Eligible Population turnout

* operated like Vote at Home, see methodology
MAKING VOTE AT HOME EASIER

Mail ballot usage increased nationwide. While many states expanded access to mail-in ballots, others retained restrictive policies like excuse requirements, notary or witness signatures, and submitting a copy of one’s ID. In the scatterplot below, states with the highest use of mail ballots correlated with higher voter turnout.

States with the highest use of mail ballots correlate with high voter turnout in 2020.

Percent of voters using a mail ballot vs percent of VEP voter turnout by state ($R^2 = 0.2596$)

Figure 11

Source: Nonprofit VOTE analysis of method data – see methodology
BENEFITS OF VOTE AT HOME

- **Ballots are automatically sent to all registered voters** - Voters are not required to locate, fill out, and return a ballot request application form.

- **More choice in returning mail ballots** - Voters can choose between returning ballots by mail or in-person at secure drop boxes or vote centers open before and on Election Day. The large majority opt to return their mail ballot in person³.

- **Turnout benefits across all demographics** - While voting from home contributed to higher voter turnout for everyone, research in Washington and Colorado showed that voters least likely to vote saw the highest growth in participation, helping to narrow participation gaps⁴.

- **Higher turnout in down ballot races** - In studies of Vote at Home states, voters are more likely to vote in races further down the ballot⁵. With a mail-in ballot in hand, voters have time to study down-ballot races and vote with confidence as opposed to seeing those down-ballot races for the first time on Election Day.

- **Ballot tracking** - Most states, including all Vote at Home states, have ballot tracking technology to let voters track their mail or absentee ballot. Ballot tracking, much like tracking a package, makes it easy for voters to know the location of their ballot at each stage in the voting process.

More resources: National Vote at Home Institute - voteathome.org

³ Vox, *Oregon already votes by mail. Here's what it can teach us in 2020*, (63 % put ballots in drop boxes or returned them to county officials)

CO: Hill et al, *All-Mail Voting in Colorado Increases Turnout and Reduces Turnout Inequality*, 2020

⁵ Marble, William, *Mail Voting Reduces Ballot Roll-Off*, 2017 and *
James Szewczyk, *How Electoral Institutions Affect Political Accountability*, 2018
MAIL BALLOT USAGE

Percent of total state voter turnout that used mail ballots

Figure 12

Source: Nonprofit VOTE analysis

- > 70% Mail Ballot Usage
- 50% - 70% Mail Ballot Usage
- 20% - 49% Mail Ballot Usage
- < 20% Mail Ballot Usage

Link to National Vote at Home Institute mail ballot access by state map.
Growth of Same Day Registration

Same day registration is a time-tested policy of over 40 years that allows voters to register or fix a problem with their registration when they vote in-person on Election Day or in early voting.

This voter friendly policy has long been cited in political science research as likely to increase voter turnout by three to seven percentage points once implemented.  

6 National Conference of State Legislatures - SDR.
SAME DAY REGISTRATION

With Same Day Registration (SDR) – also known as Election Day registration – voters may register or update their registration when they vote in-person on Election Day or in early voting. States differ in how it’s implemented.

For more visit Nonprofit VOTE’s Voting in Your State tool or the resource page of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

In 2020, voter turnout in Same Day Registration states was five percentage points higher than states without.

Same Day Registration states consistently show turnout advantages.

Eight of the top ten voter turnout states have Same Day Registration.

In general more than half of Same Day Registrations are updates (change of name, address, etc.), not new registrations.\(^7\)

Turnout advantage persists with increased adoption of Same Day Registration.

Number of states that implemented Same Day Registration

\(^7\) MassVOTE: Interviews with Election Directors, 2018
SAME DAY REGISTRATION STATES

24 States and the District of Columbia Have Same Day Registration

North Carolina and New Mexico had SDR in early voting only for 2020. New Mexico will include Election Day starting in 2021

New York (pending voter approval) and Virginia will start in 2022

Before 1990
- Maine
- Minnesota
- North Dakota
- Wisconsin

1990-2008
- Idaho
- Iowa
- Montana
- New Hampshire
- North Carolina
- Wyoming

2010-2018
- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Dist of Columbia
- Hawaii
- Illinois
- Utah
- Vermont

2019-2022
- Maryland
- Michigan
- Nevada
- New Mexico
- New York
- Virginia
- Washington

Source: National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) State Election Resources, Prepared by Nonprofit VOTE
BENEFITS OF SAME DAY REGISTRATION

☑ No eligible voter is turned away by fixable voter registration issues - Voters still have a chance to fix mistakes or update the address of a previous registration when they vote. This is especially beneficial for new voters.

☑ Safeguards voters - Voters who are removed from the voter roll, due to inactivity or other reason, and don’t know that their registration is no longer valid until Election Day, can still re-register.

☑ Increases accuracy of registration rolls - All Same Day Registrations are overseen by election officials and processed immediately, ensuring more accurate rolls.

☑ Reduces need for provisional ballots - Allows voters to feel more confident in their vote and reduces administrative overhead of processing provisional ballots.

Resources - National Conference of State Legislatures - SDR

OTHER POLICIES THAT INCREASE ACCESS TO VOTER REGISTRATION

Automatic Voter Registration (19 states): Eligible voters that interact with motor vehicles and select government agencies are automatically registered to vote unless they opt out.

- Once registered the voter is more likely to vote and also to be contacted about voting by others.

Resources: NCSL State Election Resources-AVR; Brennan Center For Justice

Preregistration for 16- and 17-year old Voters (21 states): Voters 16 or 17 may preregister so once they turn 18, they are automatically registered and eligible to vote.

- Young voters are welcomed earlier and more informed as a full participant in democracy.

Resources: NCSL State Election Resources-Pre-Reg; FairVote

Online Voter Registration (40 states): Voters register or update their registration online. Most states, but not all, require a driver's license or state ID.

- Makes it easier to register, especially for more mobile and younger voters to keep their registration up-to-date.

Resources: NCSL State Election Resources-OVR; Vote.Gov
Competition and the Electoral College

Political competition is seen as a foundation of a healthy democracy. It impacts voter mobilization, media coverage, voter interest, and of course, voter turnout. As election policies impact access to the ballot box, they also frame whether voters have meaningful choices.

While competition in local, state, and Congressional races impacts turnout, 2020 was dominated by the Presidential race with clear impacts on turnout across the nation. The Electoral College confines competition and voter engagement into a small number of battleground states.
**COMPETITION AND THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE**

14 Battleground States in 2020 include those with the most ad spending by campaigns.

Arizona  Michigan  Ohio
Florida  Minnesota  Pennsylvania
Georgia  Nevada  Texas
Iowa  New Hampshire  Wisconsin
Maine  North Carolina

These battleground states are almost identical to 2012 and 2016. Only Texas was a new battleground state. Colorado and Virginia moved from battleground to safe for Democrats.

*Battleground states* consistently show turnout advantages between four to eight percentage points.

**Turnout by presidential election**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Battleground States</th>
<th>Non Battleground States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The top six:** Money and attention of the national campaigns predominantly went to six states:


They accounted for 84% of campaign ad spending and 71% of candidate appearances.

Of all presidential campaign visits, 98% were to the 14 battleground states.

---

*Source: Campaign spending - Nonprofit VOTE analysis of data from AdImpact.com, National Public Radio, and New York Times; Campaign Visits-FairVote. See methodology, P 28*
ALTERNATIVE TO THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

Electing the President by a popular vote has long been proposed as a better way to reflect core principles of one person one vote where every citizen has an equal vote. All 50 states use the popular vote to elect their governor.

As recently as 1969, Congress came close to replacing the Electoral College with the popular vote. The House voted 338 to 70 for a constitutional amendment. Strong support in the Senate was blocked by a filibuster. In 2020, a Gallup poll showed bi-partisan support (61%) for the popular vote.

One way to move to a national popular vote is the National Popular Vote compact; an agreement among states to award all their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who wins the popular vote. The compact only goes into effect when enough states join whose Electoral College votes exceed the 270 electoral votes needed to win.

As of 2020, 15 states and DC have voted to join the compact, representing 196 electoral votes. It’s a shorter path than a constitutional amendment and, at minimum, brings electoral competition and the debate of every citizen having an equal vote to every state.

RESOURCES

- National Popular Vote
- FairVote
- Common Cause
- Why Do We Still Have the Electoral College?, Alexander Keyssar, 2020.
OTHER POLICIES THAT IMPROVE COMPETITION

Nonpartisan Redistricting (11 states): Generally described nonpartisan, multi partisan, independent, or citizen led commissions as solution to lawmakers drawing their own districts.

- Commission rules and composition facilitate and encourage negotiation and compromise. They value fair redistricting principles, political competition, transparency, and public input.

Resources: [All About Redistricting](https://www.allaboutredistricting.org), [NCSL Congressional Redistricting](https://www.ncsl.org/research/redistricting/congressional-redistricting.aspx)

 Ranked Choice Voting (22 states): Voters rank candidates in order of preference. This gives voters more choice, and lets more candidates run while ensuring the winner has majority support. Ranked Choice Voting is used in local and state races, party primaries, and for overseas voters to vote in two round elections.

- It frees voters to vote their top choice with the safety of backup choices. It allows more competition among candidates and incentives for less polarizing politics.

Resources: [FairVote](https://www.fairvote.org), [Ranked Choice Voting Center](https://www.rankedchoicevoting.org)
Methodology

America Goes to the Polls reports official voter turnout in national elections as reported by the 50 states. Certified election results were collected by the U.S. Elections Project from state election offices in the months following the 2020 election.
VOTER TURNOUT

Voter Turnout is the number of certified ballots cast and counted divided by the voting-eligible population. (Full definition on page 7)

Ballots Cast

Voting-Eligible Population

BALLOTS CAST

In 2020, 40 states and the District of Columbia reported official ballots cast. For the states that did not report total turnout, the U.S. Elections Project estimates total ballots cast based on the total votes reported for the state office that attracts the most votes (i.e. U.S. Senate, Governor, or At-large seat for Congress, called “highest office” turnout). The Elections Project will update total ballots counted as states report data later this year, but a handful of states never report this statistic.

VOTING-ELIGIBLE POPULATION (VEP)

Since 1980, the Elections Project has provided the official estimate of voting-eligible population. It includes the number of citizens over 18, except for those who cannot vote due to a past felony conviction. It uses current data from the U.S. Census and other government sources.

POLICY DIFFERENCES IN THE STATES WITH THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST VOTER TURNOUT

On page 11, the report highlights two election policies for the 10 states with the highest percent voter turnout; states that have same day voter registration and/or Vote at Home where states proactively send mail ballots to all registered voters. It associates 10 states with the lowest percent turnout with the negative impact seen in previous research.

Four-Week Advance Voter Registration Deadlines: Considered to be states that maintain their primary registration deadlines 25 to 31 days before the election. These states do not offer same day registration. The data for 2020 deadlines is compiled by Ballotpedia.

Excuse Needed for Mail Ballot: Includes states that continue to require an excuse to apply for a mail or absentee ballot, including states that made limited temporary COVID exceptions (Alabama, Arkansas, and West Virginia). These states also maintained other special restrictions such as requiring the returned ballot to have two witnesses or be notarized. These states were also among the lowest 10 states in use of mail or absentee ballots in 2020.

Overview of how the voting-eligible population (VEP) is constructed, U.S. Elections Project.
VOTING METHOD: MAIL, EARLY IN-PERSON, OR ELECTION DAY

Data for voting method came from Nonprofit VOTE analysis of public data reported by the states on their websites on how they assigned voting method of ballots returned and counted. For states that did not publish voting method on their election websites, the report used data from their state voter files. The underlying voter data for state-by-state aggregations were supplied by Citizen Data, a public benefit.

The data was obtained from their national voter file, which undergoes various processing procedures making it clean and reliable. At the time of release of this report, updated data from Kansas, Kentucky, New Jersey, and New York was not available so it was sourced from an analysis of voter file data by TargetSmart, published by NBC. For any preliminary numbers, the US Elections Assistance Commission will also be reporting final numbers in the 2020 Election Administration and Voting Survey.

GROWTH IN EARLY VOTING

On page 14 total early voting in 2020 is compared to prior years based on voting method estimates from the U.S. Census biennial report on voting and registration in the Current Population Survey.

VOTE AT HOME STATES

Vote at Home states are defined as those that proactively send mail ballots to all registered voters, including California, Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, Utah, and the District of Columbia. It includes states that adopted Vote at Home for the 2020 election, including New Jersey, Nevada, and Vermont, but have not yet decided to make the policy permanent. "Full" Vote at Home states were defined as states that proactively sent mail ballots to 100% of registered voters. Montana also operated like a Vote at Home state in 2020 with 46 of 56 counties proactively mailing ballots to voters and 99% of Montana voters using a mail ballot.

SAME DAY REGISTRATION

The report looks at the 21 states that had Same Day Registration policies fully implemented for 2020. Figures 13, 14, and 15, do not include New Mexico and North Carolina, which limited SDR to early voting only. It also excludes the District of Columbia (D.C) because it doesn't have the comparable election or competition for state or federal offices outside of the vote for president. D.C. is included in the national turnout and role in the Electoral College and cited as having SDR and Vote at Home policies.

ELECTORAL COLLEGE

The battleground states were the 14 most heavily targeted by the presidential campaigns as evident from campaign spending and visits. Campaign spending was based on a Nonprofit VOTE analysis of data from 14 states where campaigns spent the most money according to AdImpact.com (formerly Advertising Analytics) as reported by National Public Radio, and the New York Times. The number of campaign visits to states was compiled by FairVote.
## APPENDIX

### CHANGE IN VOTER TURNOUT AND RANK: 2016 – 2020 GENERAL ELECTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total Ballots 2020</th>
<th>VEP Percent Turnout 2020</th>
<th>Total Ballots 2016</th>
<th>VEP Percent Turnout 2016</th>
<th>Percent Turnout Change 16-20</th>
<th>2020 Rank (2016 Rank)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>2325000</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>2134061</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>42 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>361400</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>321271</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>23 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>3420565</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>2661497</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>30 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>1223675</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>1137772</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>50 (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>17783784</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
<td>14610509</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>24 (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>3295666</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>2859216</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>1861086</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>1675955</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>16 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>509241</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>445228</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>20 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>346491</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>312575</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>40 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>11144855</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>9580489</td>
<td>65.6%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>15 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>5000511</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>4165405</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>26 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>579784</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>437664</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>49 (51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>878527</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>710545</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>25 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>6050000</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>5666118</td>
<td>63.1%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>28 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>3068542</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>2807676</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>43 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>1700130</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>1581371</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>11 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>1375125</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>1225667</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>31 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>2150954</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>1955195</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>35 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>2180000</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>2049531</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>36 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>828305</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
<td>771892</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>3066945</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>2807322</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>18 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>3658005</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>3378801</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>14 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>5579317</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>4874619</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>10 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>3292997</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>2968281</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Total Ballots 2020</td>
<td>VEP Percent Turnout 2020</td>
<td>Total Ballots 2016</td>
<td>VEP Percent Turnout 2016</td>
<td>Percent Turnout Change 16-20</td>
<td>2020 Rank (2016 Rank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>814499</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>755850</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>7 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>4635585</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>3957303</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>8 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>928230</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>804043</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>44 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>8661735</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>7786881</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>41 (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>5545847</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>4769640</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>17 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>364251</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>349945</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>39 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>5974121</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>5607641</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>27 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>1565000</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>1452992</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>51 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>2413890</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>2056310</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>6 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>6950000</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>6165478</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>19 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>525000</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>469589</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>33 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>2533010</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>2123584</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>38 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>427529</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>378995</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>29 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>3065000</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>2545271</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>47 (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>11350000</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>8975000</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>45 (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>1515845</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>1152369</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>22 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>370968</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
<td>320467</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>9 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>4523142</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>3984631</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>13 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>4116894</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>3363440</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>5 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>802726</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>714423</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>48 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>3310000</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>2976150</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>4 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>278503</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>258788</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>37 (30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>