

# Standards for Absentee Ballots and All-Mail Elections: Doing It Right...and Doing It Wrong

## THE ISSUE

Residents of some states may be forced to vote using mail-in ballots during the current health emergency.

Absentee ballots are vulnerable to intimidation, fraud, and chaos as all-mail elections move behind closed doors beyond the oversight of election officials, along with prolonged counting and potentially lengthy delays in certifying questionable results.

Election officials must keep in mind that:

- **Absentee ballots compromise the secret ballot process**, a hallmark of U.S. elections for over 100 years.
- **Voters are vulnerable to intimidation and pressure tactics by campaigns** because these ballots are being filled out without the supervision of election officials.
- **Absentee ballots are “the tool of choice” of vote thieves** and those willing to compromise the election process.
- According to U.S. Election Assistance Commission surveys, **millions of mailed ballots have been misdirected or gone missing in prior elections.**
- **Electronic signatures are too imprecise and easily duplicated**, and should not be accepted.

## HOW MAILED BALLOTS SHOULD—AND SHOULD NOT—BE HANDLED

- **States should require voters to register prior to Election Day**, with sufficient time to verify identity, residence, and citizenship status.
- **Voter registration lists are notoriously inaccurate and out of date**, with multiple registrations by the same individual;

registrants who have died, moved, or are not U.S. citizens; and registrations lacking complete addresses.

- **States must review voter rolls to ensure accuracy**, including verification through state and federal databases, such as the databases of state social service agencies, tax authorities, DMVs, corrections departments, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Homeland Security.

## STATES MUST PREVENT FRAUDULENT VOTING ACTIVITIES

- **Automatically mailing a ballot to all registered voters is an open invitation to fraud and abuse.**
- **Not every new resident at an address throws out the ballot that is still being automatically mailed to a former resident**, and third parties may canvass neighborhoods looking for those “extra” ballots—with some being tempted to cast those extra votes.
- **States should ban “vote harvesting”** and not allow candidates, party activists, or political consultants who have a stake in the outcome, to collect absentee ballots from voters.

## ENSURING ELECTION INTEGRITY BY MAIL

- **Voters should be required to request an absentee ballot with a signed form** that can be authenticated.
- **States should require a photocopy of an ID** or the serial number of a driver’s license or state ID card from all absentee voters.
- If states insist on contacting all registered voters, active (not inactive) **voters should**

- be sent an absentee ballot request form by First Class mail, not an absentee ballot**, which reduces the opportunity for an unauthorized person to complete an unsolicited ballot.
- **By sending the request via First Class mail, election officials will receive notice from the U.S. Postal Service if the voter is no longer at his registered address**, providing valuable information for the accuracy of the registration list.
  - On Election Day:
    - **Only absentee ballots officially postmarked** by the U.S. Postal Service by the end of Election Day should be accepted.
    - **Simply requiring a signature by the end of Election Day provides no way for officials to verify** that the ballot was actually completed before polls closed and preliminary results were being reported.
    - **When processing returned absentee ballots, states must have strong authentication standards**, including comparing signatures on ballot envelopes with voter registration signatures.
  - **Absentee ballots should not be processed and tabulated until the end of Election Day**; starting that process early risks leaks that could deter individuals from voting or provide information to candidates or vote harvesters that allows them to manipulate close races after the polls have closed.
  - Election officials must:
    - **Work with local U.S. Postal Service authorities to ensure integrity** in the mail system and prevent delayed delivery of ballots.
    - **Coordinate with federal, state, and local prosecutors to ensure that law enforcement is ready to move quickly to enforce federal and state laws** against intimidation of voters, as well as other election crimes.
- For more information, go to <https://www.heritage.org/election-integrity>.*