



We Shouldn't Be Promoting Voting By Mail

COMMENTARY BY

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Key Takeaways

Why would we want to encourage voters to cast their ballots through the mail or place them in unsupervised, unsecured “drop” boxes instead of voting in person?

The worst mail-processing facilities in the country only managed to deliver this very important election mail 84.2 percent of the time.

Given the inherent security problems with mail-in ballots, their use should be very limited, and states should protect the integrity of the absentee-voting process.



Ask yourself: If you won \$500 million in the Powerball lottery, would you put your winning ticket into an envelope and trust the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to deliver it to the state agency that administers the lottery? Or would you want to deliver your ticket personally to lottery officials to ensure that they received it and acknowledge that you are the owner of that ticket?

The answer is pretty obvious to just about anyone. So why would we want to encourage voters to cast their ballots through the mail or place them in unsupervised, unsecured “drop” boxes instead of voting in person in a polling place?

A polling place under the bipartisan supervision of election officials and the observation of poll watchers has numerous advantages. It helps ensure not only that the ballots are completed by the registered voters and deposited in a locked, sealed ballot box, but also that the voters' eligibility and identity are verified; that no voters are pressured or coerced to vote a particular way by candidates, party activists, and political guns-for-hire, who are all prohibited from being inside the polling place; and that no ballots get “lost” in the mail or not delivered on time.

To the average person, a ballot may not be as valuable as a \$500 million lottery ticket, but securing our ballots so that every eligible citizen can vote in a secure, fair, and honest election is worth quite a bit. In fact, it is essential to maintaining our democratic republic. Mail-in or absentee ballots are the ones most susceptible to being misdelivered, stolen, altered, and forged, and to having the voters be pressured or coerced when voting, because they are the only type of ballots marked in an unsupervised, unobserved setting. The many cases of proven absentee ballot fraud in the Heritage Foundation's Election Fraud Database demonstrate and underscore the reason why Florida's Department of Law Enforcement concluded in a 1998 report that the “lack of ‘in-person, at-the-polls’ accountability make absentee ballots the ‘tool of choice’ for those inclined to commit voter fraud.”

This problem is made worse in the many states like California that allow vote trafficking, which proponents of mail-in voting call “vote harvesting” because that sounds better. Every state allows absentee ballots to be mailed back or delivered personally to election officials by the voters or, usually, members of their immediate family or a designated caregiver. But vote-trafficking states allow any third-party stranger to go to voters' homes to pick up and deliver their ballot. In other words, these states give political actors with a stake in the outcome of the election the ability to handle a very valuable commodity—the ballots that can ensure the victory (or defeat) of their election or the election of the candidates who they work for and support, giving them the opportunity to complete, alter, or simply fail to deliver those ballots.

That is an unwise, reckless policy. Numerous cases show that, too, such as the Ninth Circuit congressional race in North Carolina in 2018, which was overturned by the state board of elections due to “concerted fraudulent activities related to absentee by-mail ballots,” including illegal vote trafficking by a political consultant and his associates.

The targets of these types of schemes are often the most vulnerable voters. A trial court described the “predatory pattern” in

an absentee ballot fraud conspiracy in a Democratic mayoral primary in East Chicago, Indiana, in 2003. The fraudsters targeted “first-time voters or [those] otherwise less informed or lacking in knowledge of the voting process, the infirm, the poor, and those with limited skills in the English language.” That election was overturned in a decision upheld by the state Supreme Court.

But even when fraud doesn't occur, mail-in voting is still a bad idea for several reasons. The Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Postal Service released a report in 2019 on its delivery of election-related mail—including mail-in ballots—in the 2018 election. Its goal was timely delivery of absentee/mail-in ballots 96 percent of the time—not 100 percent. That means that even if the Postal Service met its goal, 4 percent of all voters would potentially not have their mailed ballots delivered on time to be counted. The report said that on average nationally, the service achieved its goal 95.6 percent of the time.

In a letter to U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy on September 11, 2024, The National Association of Secretaries of State and the National Association of State Election Directors, said local election officials “in nearly every state” are receiving timely postmarked ballots after Election Day and outside the three to five business days USPS claims as the standard for first-class mail.

Kansas Secretary of State Scott Schwab, the recent past president of the National Association of Secretaries of State, sent his own letter in recent days to DeJoy. He said nearly 1,000 ballots from his state's Aug. 6 primary election couldn't be counted because they arrived too late or without postmarks — and more continue to come in.

Schwab and other Kansas election officials also have said some ballots arrive on time but without postmarks, which keeps them from being counted under Kansas law. What's more, Schwab told DeJoy, local postal clerks have told election officials that they can't add postmarks later even if it's clear that the Postal Service handled the ballot ahead of the mail-in deadline.

Kansas will count ballots postmarked on or before Election Day if they arrive within three days of the election. The Republican-controlled Legislature created that grace period in 2017 over concerns that mail delivery had slowed after the Postal Service shut down seven mail-processing centers in the state. That left much of the state's mail handled through larger centers in Denver, Amarillo, Texas, and Kansas City, Missouri.

Schwab has long said voting early in person or dropping ballots off at the count office is more secure than ever trusting the U.S. mail. The USPS has often had problems including reports of carriers not paid overtime which incentives them to throw out mail they failed to deliver during their shift.

“Keep your ballot out of the hands of the federal government!” Schwab advised voters in a post on the social media platform X after the August 2024 primary. “The Pony Express is more efficient at this point.”

But the worst mail-processing facilities in the country in places like California, Illinois, and New Jersey only managed to deliver this very

important election mail 84.2 percent of the time. Imagine the screaming headlines if a jurisdiction was rejecting 16 percent of all of the ballots cast by voters in person in a particular polling place or region. Everyone would rightfully be upset, but the fact that this is happening with mail-in ballots according to the Postal Service's own inspector general doesn't even raise a murmur.

Mail-in ballots also have a higher rejection rate than ballots cast in person. There is no election official in voters' home to answer questions or remedy potential problems. In 2012, before the progressive love affair with mail elections started, even the *New York Times* published a critical report that concluded that “votes cast by mail are less likely to be counted, more likely to be compromised and more likely to be contested than those cast in a voting booth.” What's changed? Nothing.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission publishes a report after every federal election. Its report on the 2020 election shows that more than 500,000 of the absentee/mailed ballots returned by voters to election officials were rejected and not counted. But even more disturbing is that of the almost 91 million mailed ballots sent to voters by election officials in all states, only 70 million were returned. What happened to those other 20 million-plus ballots? Did voters simply decide not to return them? Did they never get them because they were delivered to an incorrect address? Were they picked up by vote traffickers who then trashed them because they realized that particular voters had a history of voting for candidates of the opposite party? We don't know.

Again, there would be screaming headlines if in-person polling places across the country had records showing that 20 million ballots were missing and hadn't been counted and election officials had no idea what happened to them.

Democratic vs. Undemocratic

No one is arguing that we get rid of absentee voting entirely. Some individuals are too disabled or ill to vote in person or may be unable to do so for other valid reasons, such as our military personnel and their families who are stationed abroad. But given the long periods of early, in-person voting available in most states today, it is difficult to imagine that there are many other individuals who need to vote through the mail because they are out of town or unavailable on Election Day or the many other days they can vote in person. Given the inherent security problems with mail-in ballots, their use should be very limited, and states should protect the integrity of the absentee-voting process by ensuring accurate voter-registration rolls, requiring voter identification, banning permanent absentee-ballots lists that risk ballots being mailed by election officials to voters who have died or moved out of state, and prohibiting vote trafficking.

One final note. Maintaining public confidence in the integrity of the election process is essential to ensuring that citizens participate. Processing and counting mail-in ballots takes longer than processing ballots cast in person, especially when states imprudently allow absentee ballots to be returned days after Election Day. A recent poll by the Trafalgar Group shows that the longer it takes for election officials to report election results, the less likely the public is to trust the results.

That is just another reason for minimizing mail-in balloting and making it more secure. 🇺🇸