

Voting by mail, where voters receive and can return ballots through the postal service, is popular throughout the US: close to one-third of American voters take advantage of it. Eight states conduct all-mail elections, and all states offer absentee options for at least some voters, including overseas and military personnel.

Recent changes to USPS processing and the pending US Supreme Court case *Watson v. RNC*, which could mandate all ballots to be in by Election Day, may require voters to mail in ballots earlier than in past elections or use other return methods such as drop boxes to ensure their votes can count.

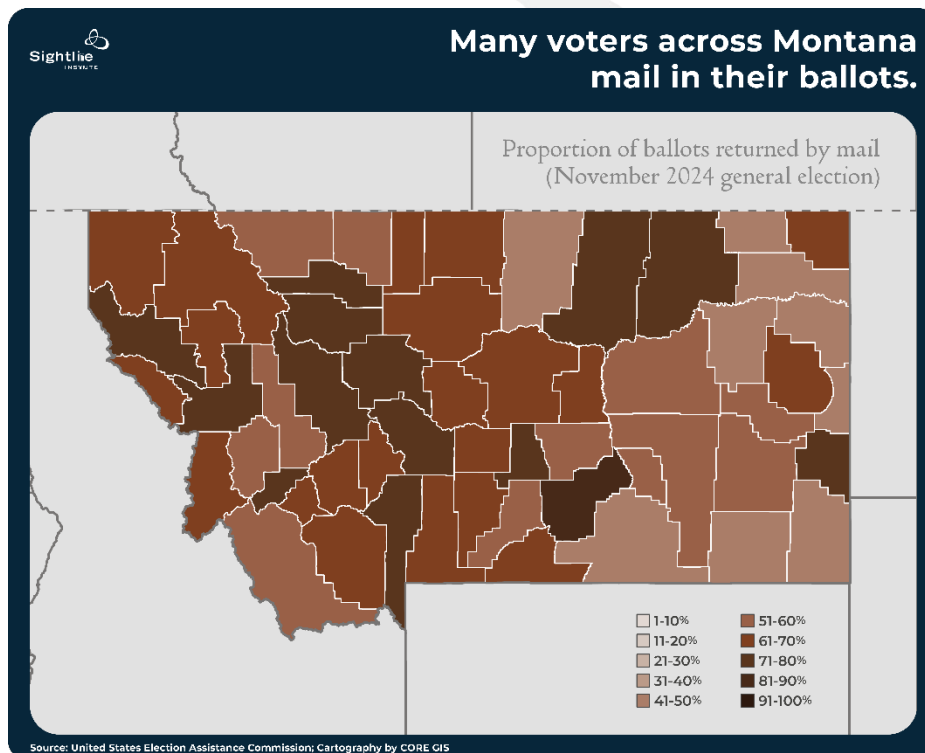
7 in 10

Montana voters return their ballots by mail

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Days after election that a ballot will be accepted

More than two-thirds of Montana's voters rely on mailed ballots, including those in rural and urban counties. Montana already requires ballots to be returned by Election Day, so would not be affected by any changed deadlines.



Northwest at a glance

Eighty-four percent of voters living in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington combined received a ballot by mail for the most recent federal election in 2024. Read more about vote-by-mail elections impacts from [Sightline Institute](#) or see fact sheets for other Northwest states:

- **Alaska** mostly votes in person, but mailed ballots (14 percent) are particularly prevalent in remote areas
- Rural and urban **Idaho** voters use the mail-in option (20 percent)
- All **Oregon** voters receive ballots in the mail—voters utilize drop boxes (60 percent) and mail return (33 percent)
- All **Washington** voters also receive ballots in the mail, and late postmark rejections are already rising statewide

How to mitigate the impact of impending challenges

Elections officials, voters, and lawmakers can help make sure votes count in upcoming elections.

✓ **Election administrators can encourage early mail returns**

Voters who return ballots by mail will need to send them earlier than in past years to ensure they will be counted. Amid postal delays, returning ballots to a voting center is more reliable. Election administrators can plan comprehensive education efforts to encourage sending mailed ballots as soon as possible.

✓ **Voters can track their ballots**

In most states, and in some places at the county level, election administrators have set up ballot tracking services. Voters can confirm when their ballot is accepted by Election Day and request a substitute ballot at an election office if not.

✓ **Lawmakers can provide additional funding to elections offices**

Elections offices are often strapped for resources even when managing normal operations. These shifts add more needs, such as staffing for press outreach, printing inserts, adding drop boxes or voting locations, and collecting ballots from post offices. During legislative sessions, lawmakers can ensure that elections offices have adequate funding to address and respond to these and other issues.