

# Vote by Mail in Washington

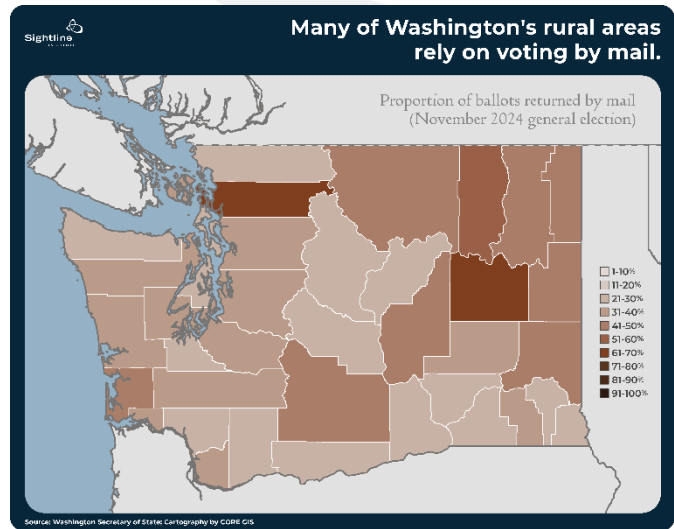
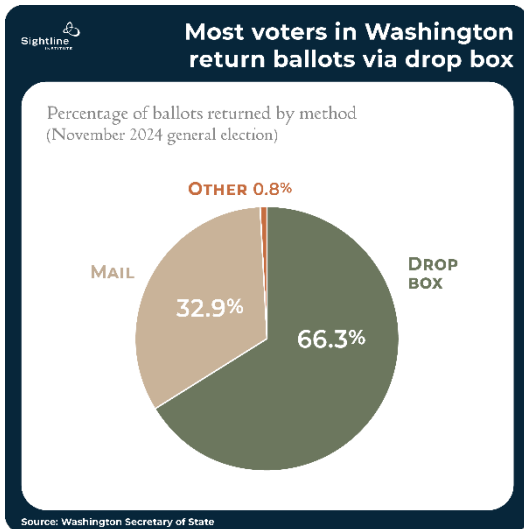
Usage data and impacts of potential changes | May 2026

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 including, Washington, conduct all-mail elections, and all states offer absentee options for at least some voters.

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.

<h1>1 in 3</h1> <p>Washington voters return their ballots by mail</p>	<h1>21</h1> <p>Days after election that a ballot will be accepted</p>
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All Washington voters receive ballots by mail. Most (66 percent in 2024) return them to drop boxes, and 33 percent return by mail, with rural voters especially relying on mail services. Washington has the [longest grace period of any state](#), 21 days, and from 2019 to 2025, elections offices received an average of 16 percent of ballots after Election Day. That means as many as one in six voters will have to adapt if the US Supreme Court mandates Election Day returns.

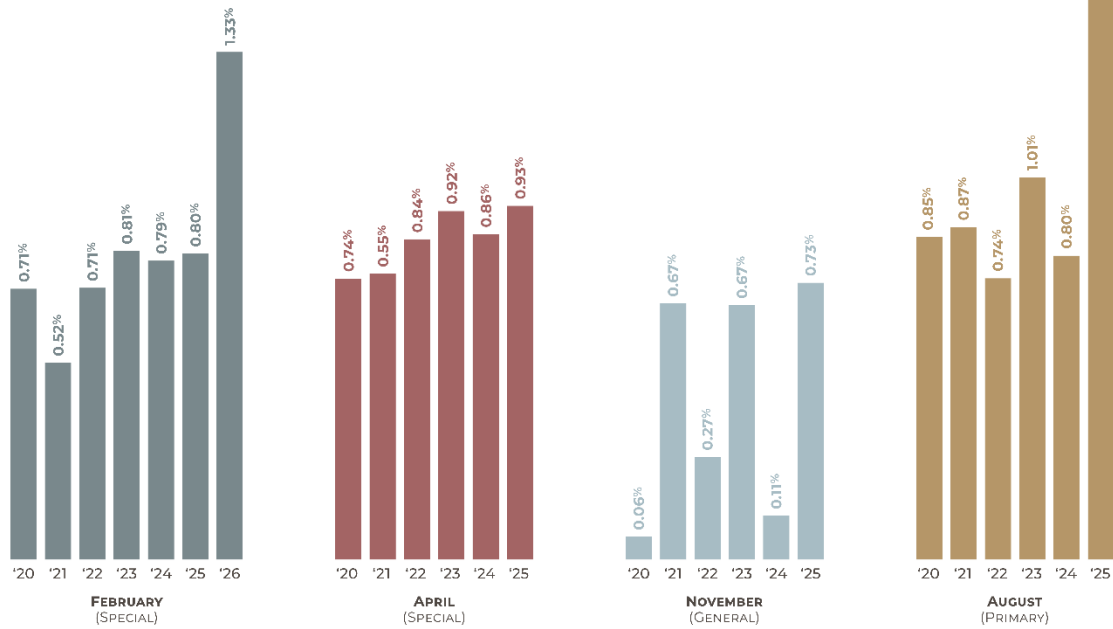


In addition, Washington's rate of late-rejected ballots increased dramatically in 2025 and 2026, showing that USPS delays are already besetting voters.



## Ballots rejected for late postmark increased dramatically in the 2025 primary and 2026 special election.

Percentage of Washington ballots returned rejected for late postmark, by election



Source: Washington Secretary of State.

## 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)
- Most **Montana** voters (70 percent) rely on mailed ballots
- All **Oregon** voters receive ballots in the mail—voters utilize drop boxes (60 percent) and mail return (33 percent)

## 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 and use of drop boxes**

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, drop boxes are a more reliable and assured method of return. Election administrators can plan comprehensive education efforts to encourage using drop boxes where available and to send mailed ballots as soon as possible, and [many already are](#).

### ✓ **Voters can request a manual postmark at a local post office in states that accept postmarks**

In Alaska, Oregon, and Washington, voters who get delayed sending their ballots by mail and can't use a drop box can request a manual postmark at a local post office (if they have one) before Election Day, acknowledging custody of the mail before it travels to a central processing facility. This method will not be effective, however, if SCOTUS changes the ballot receipt deadline.

### ✓ **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.