Election Lessons from 2020: Absentee/Mail Voting

Charles Stewart III

NCSL 2021 Legislative Summit
November 3, 2021
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2020 ELECTION

REPORT TO THE U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/lessons-learned-2020-election
Before 2020, Mail and In-Person Early Voting Were growing Steadily
Things Really changed in 2020
Some Other Ways 2020 Was Different
Ballots Were Returned More Quickly

Source: Survey of the Performance of American Elections
The Rejection Rate was Lower

+ As a percentage of mail ballots returned
  • 0.80% in 2020
  • 0.96% in 2016

+ As a percentage of all ballots cast
  • 0.36% in 2020
  • 0.24% in 2016

Source: Election Administration and Voting Survey
### Drop Box Use Climbed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All States</th>
<th>Excluding CO, OR, &amp; WA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailed back</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop boxes</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election office</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey of the Performance of American Elections
## Partisan Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 65</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 65</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With disabilities</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without disabilities</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Future?
Voting by Mail in Virginia
Voting by Mail in Virginia
Voting by Mail in Virginia
Voting by Mail in Virginia
Voting by Mail in Virginia

![Graph showing voting by mail in Virginia from 2016 to 2021. The graph indicates a significant increase in voting by mail from 2016 to 2020, peaking around 2020, and a subsequent decrease towards 2021.](image-url)
Some Legislative Issues to Consider

+ Excuse/no excuse
+ Support for online capabilities
  - Applications
  - Tracking
+ Deadline/timelines
  - Deadlines for requesting
  - Deadlines for return
  - Window for processing
+ Uniformity in verification requirements
+ Separate reporting of actual mail ballots