

# 69.4% of Voters in 2020 Did Not Vote in Person

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**By Terence P. Jeffrey**

FALLS CHURCH, Va.—A large majority of the people who voted in the 2020 presidential election, according to the Census Bureau, did not do so by physically going to their precinct on Election Day and casting a ballot there.

"For the first time on record, a majority (69.4 percent) of voters cast ballots by a nontraditional method in the 2020 presidential election," the bureau said in a report released today.

"This represents a dramatic increase in nontraditional voting since 2004, when only 20.7 percent of voters reported voting by a nontraditional method, and over the prior presidential election in 2016, when 40.1 percent of voters cast ballots by a nontraditional method," said the report.

"Policies in place in many states allowed eligible voters to cast ballots before Election Day, either during an early voting period, by voting with an absentee ballot (i.e., by mail) or both," the bureau explained.

Only 7 out of 50 states required voters to use only traditional voting methods.

"There were seven states in which permanent policies as of 2020 only permitted 'traditional' methods of voting—that is, early voting was not offered, and an excuse was required to vote with an absentee ballot," the Census Bureau said. "These states were Alabama, Connecticut, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, and South Carolina."

All but 8 of the states allow no-excuse early in-person voting.

"In 42 states and the District of Columbia," said the Census Bureau, "permanent policies as of 2020 allowed any qualified voter to cast a ballot in person during a designated period prior to Election Day. No excuse or justification was required."

"In 34 states and the District of Columbia," said the bureau's report, "permanent policies as of 2020 permitted any qualified voter to vote absentee without offering an excuse."

"In some states," the bureau added, "a ballot was automatically mailed to every eligible voter—no request or application was necessary. Permanent policies in Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington sanctioned all-mail voting in all

national elections as of 2020. A number of additional states sent all registered voters a ballot by mail for the 2020 election in response to the covid-19 pandemic.”

The net result of these changes in the allowable methods of voting was that only 30.6 percent of those who voted in the presidential election actually voted in-person on Election Day, according to the Census Bureau’s estimate. Meanwhile, 43.2 percent voted by mail and 26.2 percent voted in-person but before Election Day.

- In the 2004 election, according to the Census Bureau, 79.3 percent of voters had voted in-person on Election Day.
- That dropped to 69.3 percent in 2008.
- The number was 67.2 percent in 2012.
- The number was 59.9 percent in 2016.
- The number hit a low of 30.6 percent in 2020.

The Census Bureau published a disclaimer in its report noting that, historically, the estimated voting numbers from its Current Population Survey (CPS), which were used in this report, differ from the actual voting records gathered by the states.

“Voting estimates from the CPS and other sample surveys have historically differed from those based on administrative records, such as the official reports from each state disseminated collectively by the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Federal Elections Commission,” said the Census Bureau report. “In general, sample surveys like the CPS tend to yield higher voting rates than official results. Potential explanations for these differences include question misreporting, problems with memory or knowledge of others’ behavior, and methodological issues related to question wording, method of survey administration, and survey nonresponse bias.

“Despite these observed differences between CPS estimates and official tallies,” the bureau said, “the CPS remains the most comprehensive data source available for examining the social and demographic composition of American voters in federal elections, particularly when examining broad historical results.”