

## VOTE AT HOME

### THE CONVENIENCE OF GETTING YOUR BALLOT IN ADVANCE... AND RETURNING IT WHEN AND HOW YOU WANT.

In the 2018 election, a record 42 million ballots were mailed out to voters in all 50 states. In three states (Colorado, Oregon, and Washington), every active registered voter was automatically mailed a ballot, as were 100% of voters in nearly 70 counties in California, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Utah where 98% of voters received ballots in advance.

- Since the first three states adopted the Vote at Home program, this promising reform has received high marks from voters and election administrators alike. Now it's spreading to other states.
- Voters like getting their ballots in advance at home. It gives them time to review and understand their choices and the convenience of returning it the way they want; at a nearby drop box, by mail, or at a voting location on Election Day.
- VAH should not be confused with absentee voting. Standard absentee voting requires voters take the added step of applying for an absentee ballot every election or every year with more limited options, mainly mail, to return it. Some states also offer voters the option of permanent absentee status.

### How it Works

- Registered voters automatically receive their official ballot 2-4 weeks before the election by mail, with each envelope bar coded (both outbound and return) to the individual voter. If needed, they can order a replacement ballot online.
- Voters may return the ballot to a secure and convenient local drop-box or by mail. Colorado also allows voters to register as well as vote or drop off their ballot on Election Day or in early voting at vote centers. See a report on Mailed-Out Ballot Return Choices. <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Optimizing-ballotreturn-choices.pdf>

### Turnout Impact

There is mounting evidence of its impact in state turnout rankings, with a growing body of supporting research.

#### TURNOUT RANKINGS AND GROWTH

- In the 2018 midterms, three of the four Vote at Home (VAH) states that mail all voters their ballots before the election – Colorado, Oregon, and Washington, were in the top seven of turnout. The three states had over 10% higher turnout on average than the remaining 47 states.
- In the 2018 state primaries, the broader range of VAH-centric states exceeded the median turnout of the polling place states on average by 15.5 percentage points.<sup>6</sup>

#### RESEARCH

- *Utah*: A study of Utah's 2016 election showed the 21 counties that mailed ballots to all registered voters before the election outperformed the eight counties with traditional polling place-based voting by five to seven percentage points in turnout. Low-propensity voters, including young voters, showed the greatest increase at a 10% lift. In 2018, Utah expanded VAH to 98% of the state, one reason Utah led the nation in overall turnout growth.<sup>7</sup>
- *California*: In five of its 58 counties, California started the roll-out of sending all voters ballots automatically in 2018. These counties used the "Colorado model" and let voters return ballots by mail at drop boxes or voter centers that also offered same day registration. Together, the five counties – with a combined population larger than many states – had the second highest turnout in the 2018 state primaries. In the general election, these counties easily beat the average turnout rates in the rest of the state. It is expected the roll-out will include include 10-15 counties in 2020.
- *Washington*: A 2013 study in Washington found that the state's adoption of Vote-by-Mail (VBM) increased turnout in all types of elections by an aggregate of two to four percent.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Primary turnout in "ballot-delivery" states 2018 <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018-Primary-turnout-graph.pdf>

<sup>7</sup>Utah 2016: Evidence for the positive turnout effects of "Vote At Home" <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Utah-2016-Voter-File-Analysis-Pantheon-Analytics.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>Gerber, et al, Identifying the Effect of All-Mail Elections on Turnout, Political Science Research and Methods, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2013.5>

- For more results from *Alaska, New Mexico, Nebraska* and other states go to: [voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/What-a-Year-for-VAH.pdf](https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/What-a-Year-for-VAH.pdf).

### Benefits and Attributes

- Receiving a ballot at home 2-4 weeks before Election Day means that voters have more time to study and understand their choices.
- It can increase “down ballot” voting for state or local races, especially among regular voters. A Utah study showed a 5.5% increase in down-ballot voting in VAH counties.
- Transportation and polling place challenges are mitigated.
- It lowers costs and reduces the need for provisional ballots<sup>9</sup>. It also reduces difficulties related to finding one’s polling place and navigating the voting process.
- Young and diverse voters may participate at higher rates, since they’ve been shown to participate at equal or higher rates in VAH states<sup>10</sup>, often increasing their participation at every level of election <sup>11</sup>.

### Recommended Practices

- Provide convenient secure drop boxes that are open 24 hours and near places of business, (e.g., malls and libraries) to maximize opportunities to return the ballot. Voters often prefer the in-person drop-off option to mail.
- Maintain in-person voting options in early voting and on Election Day. In addition to drop boxes and mail, the “Colorado model” provides options for in-person voting at early voting sites or at voter centers. At these locations, a person can both fix a registration issue and vote on a regular ballot or just return a filled out mail ballot. For this reason, Same Day Registration and Vote-at-Home are policies that work well together.
- Address the cost of postage which can be an issue for those unable to get to a local drop box. States should consider a postage-paid return like Washington and California.<sup>12</sup>
- Offer a tool that allows voters to track their mail ballot. Ballot tracking tools like [Ballot Trace](#) used by Denver and Ballot Scout let voters follow their ballot through the entire process. They are well tested and help voters feel confident that their vote will be counted.

### Other Resources

- [Voteathome.org](https://www.voteathome.org): The leading source of Vote at Home resources and guidance.
- Vote at Home Reference Library: <http://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/NVAHI-Reference-Library-v2.pdf>
- Connecticut report on implementing Vote at Home (Vote by Mail): Assessing the requirements to implement a robust program. <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Voting-by-Mail-Report-Pursuant-to-CT-EO-64.pdf>
- Ballot Trace: <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/denver-elections-divison/voter-election-information/ballot-trace.html>

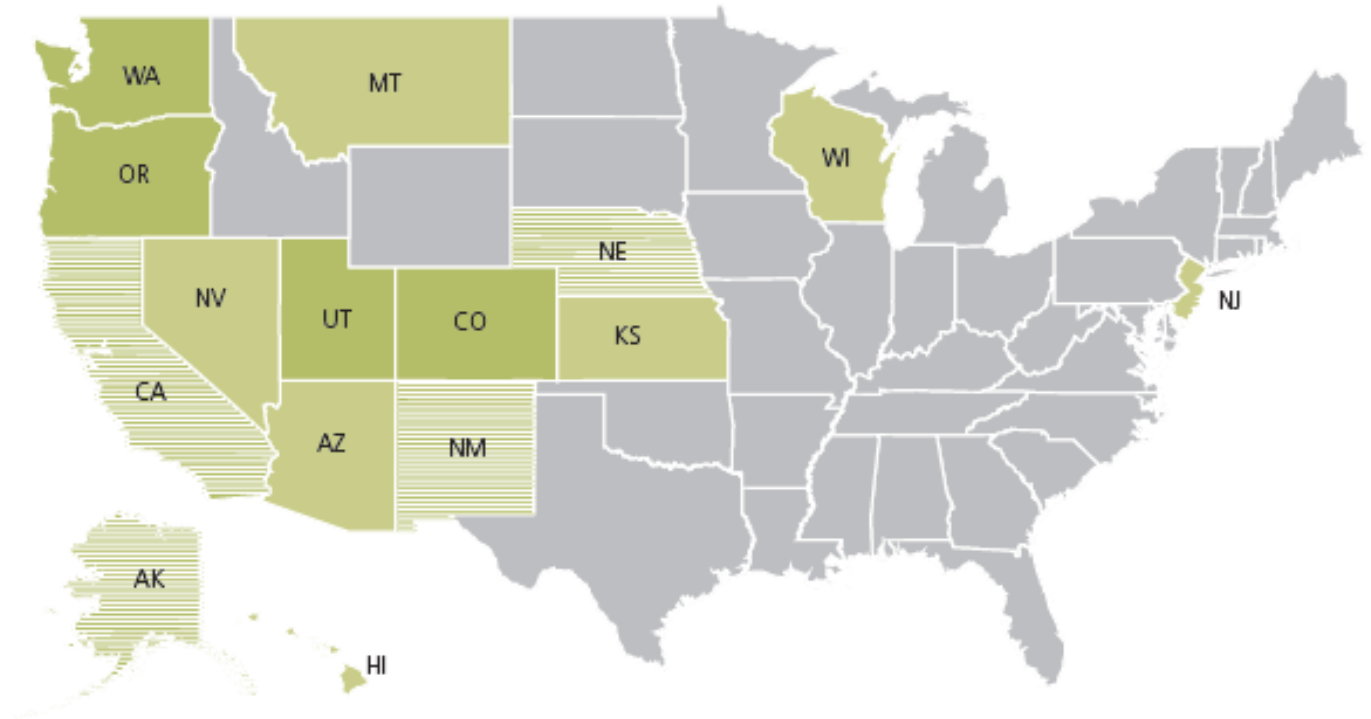
<sup>9</sup> Down Ballot Voting: <https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Utah-2016-Downballot-Analysis-FINAL-Pantheon-Analytics.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Cost Savings: <https://www.voteathome.org/project/cost-savings/>

<sup>11</sup> Gerber, et al, Identifying the Effect of All-Mail Elections on Turnout, op cit.

<sup>12</sup> New California ballot requires prepaid mail-in ballots, July 18, 2018 <https://www.kcra.com/article/new-california-bill-requires-prepaid-mail-in-ballots/22411967>

## VOTE AT HOME STATES



Source: Vote at Home, [voteathome.org/about/](http://voteathome.org/about/)

**Full Vote at Home States**

- Colorado
- Oregon
- Utah\*
- Washington

**States with Permanent Mail Ballot Option**

- Arizona
- Hawaii
- Kansas
- Montana
- Nevada
- New Jersey
- Wisconsin

**States with Counties or Cities Adopting or Piloting VAH**

- Alaska
  - California
  - Nebraska
  - New Mexico
- Partial list

\* 98% of voters sent ballots