



NALC Fact Sheet

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The 2020 General Election: America Can Count on the U.S. Postal Service

The United States Postal Service, founded in 1775, is one of America's greatest democratic institutions. It has been central to our democracy from the beginning when it served as a disseminator of the Federalist Papers and promoted widespread citizen literacy via the low-cost distribution of newspapers and books. Starting during the Civil War, Americans have used the mail to vote, and the Post Office has been essential to our system of elections ever since.

In the Covid-19 Election of 2020, the Postal Service will be more important than ever when tens of millions of Americans will stay safe by casting ballots distributed by mail. Indeed, at least ten states and jurisdictions (CA, DC, CO, HI, MT, NV, OR, UT, VT and WA) will send all registered voters their ballots by mail this fall, while most other states will permit absentee voting without any "excuse." Further, several of the 15 states that require such an approved excuse to vote by mail have either waived the requirement this year or explicitly authorized "concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic" as a legitimate excuse to vote by mail.

The Postal Service's role in American elections goes far beyond the distribution of mail ballots, however. The 8,500 election boards that oversee and conduct our elections rely on the Postal Service for the entire process. They use it to register voters, certify candidates, provide voter guides, distribute sample ballots, notify citizens of their polling places, and to inform voters of their early voting options. Meanwhile, candidates, parties, civic groups and organizations of all kinds use the Post Office to disseminate information and campaign literature – a function that will take on added importance in a year in which physical canvassing will be difficult.

USPS has the capacity to deliver

In 2016, 139 million Americans voted in the general election – and nearly one-fourth (32 million) voted on mailed-out ballots. This year, total turnout could surpass 150 million voters and vote by mail volume could double or more. Although millions of Americans drop off their ballots in person (in drop boxes, at polling places or at voting centers), millions also return their ballots by mail. This has raised questions for some about whether the Postal Service has the capacity to deliver such a high volume of ballots this fall. But even if every American voter returned his or her ballot by mail, the Postal Service has more than enough capacity to deliver the extra volume. Consider the facts:

- In 2019, the Postal Service delivered an average of 470 million pieces per day, six days a week – and scaled up to deliver more than 650 million pieces of mail per day during the peak holiday period in December.
- Currently, with the economy depressed by the coronavirus pandemic, USPS is delivering about 350-400 million pieces of mail per day – meaning that it has considerable excess capacity to handle any surge in mail volume.
- There have been neither lay-offs nor any kind of downsizing of our processing or delivery networks during the crisis – barring any adverse decisions by postal management, the Postal Service can meet any increased demand this Fall for political mailings and mail ballots.

The Postal Service affirmed its capability in a statement issued on August 3, 2020: "The Postal Service has ample capacity to adjust our nationwide processing and delivery network to meet projected Election and Political Mail volume, including any additional volume that may result as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Although the recession and the public health crisis have reduced its letter mail revenues and raised its costs for personal protective equipment and other safety measures, the Postal Service has cash reserves that are more than enough to permit uninterrupted services through the election. Meanwhile, Congress is debating proposals to appropriate funds to the Postal Service to help it weather the negative impact of the pandemic.

USPS election mail protocols

The Postal Service has always given election mail priority treatment, and postal employees have embraced an ironclad commitment to ensure every ballot is delivered safely and securely to voters and returned to election officials.

USPS has [well-established protocols](#) in place for handling election mail. There is a National Election Mail team based in Washington that oversees a network of state and local election mail coordinators who work election boards. They help design mailed ballots, aiming to speed delivery by encouraging the use of Intelligent Mail Barcodes and special visual identifiers that improve mailed ballot visibility in the mail stream. This allows election boards and voters to identify and track ballots and improves the public's confidence in the vote by mail process.

Every election cycle, the USPS distributes an official [Election Mail tool kit](#) to election boards and maintains a special [website](#) for local and state election officials to report Election Mail concerns directly to USPS, allowing a rapid response team to resolve such concerns. It also conducts training for employees that come into contact with election mail and monitors its service performance for election mail, aiming to surpass its normal 96% on-time goal for First Class Mail delivery.

Earlier this year, the Postal Service affirmed its commitment to deliver any mailed ballot back to its destination election board, even if it does not have proper postage. (USPS generally seeks reimbursement from election officials, budgets permitting.)

Ballot safety and security

American voters can have complete confidence in vote by mail, both in how the Postal Service handles ballots and how election boards manage the process.

Within USPS, protecting the sanctity of the mail, regardless of the type of mail, is the highest priority. Tampering with any piece of mail – ballots included – is strictly prohibited. Employees who do so face federal prosecution and risk being fined and/or jailed. Indeed, the USPS polices its commitment to mail security with an internal security workforce, the [Postal Inspection Service](#).

As a result, the Postal Service is among the most trusted companies in America when it comes to [protecting privacy](#) and is by far the public's [favorite agency in the federal government](#), with an approval rating of 91 percent.

Election boards have also developed methods to minimize the possibility of voter fraud with mail ballots. Such fraud is [exceedingly rare](#) according to data compiled by the Heritage Foundation. In most states there are more security checks on mail-in votes than on in-person votes, according to Neal Kelley, the Republican Registrar of Voters in Orange County California. When it comes to ballot security, there is no discernible difference between “mail-in” ballots and “absentee” ballots. Ballots mailed to all registered voters, like those sent to voters who have applied for absentee ballots, are handled with all the same strict security protocols. For more information on how election boards use tried-and-true methods to make vote by mail safe and secure for all American voters, see the attached FAQ sheet or visit the [National Vote at Home Institute](#) website.

Federal action needed

America's 210,000 city letter carriers and their union are totally committed to performing at the highest level when our country votes this fall. NALC is urging the U.S. Postal Service to create a special joint task force with the postal unions to overcome the unique challenges of serving America's voters and election boards during the current public health crisis. As we did during the primaries this year – when about

half of all votes cast involved mailed out ballots – we intend to meet these challenges.

Of course, the sudden and unplanned shift to the use of absentee voting in response to the Covid-19 crisis did not occur without logistical problems for local election boards and the USPS. In many cases (in Wisconsin, Maryland and Georgia), the surge in demand for absentee ballots overwhelmed under-resourced election boards, causing many such ballots to arrive late or not at all. Some voters were disenfranchised, even as overall turnout increased dramatically. It is imperative that these boards – and, where relevant, the Postal Service – learn from and correct any shortcomings in their operations before the November general election. **But state and local election bodies must have the resources to do so.**

The federal government must act. Congress must provide states the funding they need to make in-person voting safe in November and to expand their election boards' capacity to efficiently and expeditiously process the surge in mail ballots expected this year. The HEROES Act adopted by the House of Representatives in May provided \$3.6 billion for elections support. The Senate should embrace this funding proposal to protect our democracy, and the Trump Administration should approve it. With the loss of local tax revenues hampering state and local government budgets, only the federal government can fill the gap. At a minimum, Congress should take two actions:

- First, the U.S. Treasury should pay for or reimburse all American election boards for the cost of postage for all domestic mail ballots, both outgoing and return postage, using the excellent system we have in place for overseas voters under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA). This would cost no more than \$150 million.
- Second, to promote faith in our democracy and to prevent destructive political polarization, Congress should use its Constitutional authority to regulate the conduct of federal elections to ensure that all votes cast by Election Day are counted. That means that all ballots in the possession of the Postal Service at the end of November 3, 2020 should be counted, regardless of when they are received by election boards. Any funding approved for the 2020 election should mandate this.

Conclusion

The United States is one of the world's greatest and oldest democracies, of which every American can be proud. The peaceful transfer of political power following elections has been a hallmark of our democracy for more than two centuries.

Voters in the United States can count on the Postal Service and its employees to honor that heritage in November. But Congress must do its part too to ensure a smooth 2020 election. The future of our country and the health of our democracy depend on it.