

DATA STANDARDIZATION AND THE UOCAVA VOTING PIPELINE

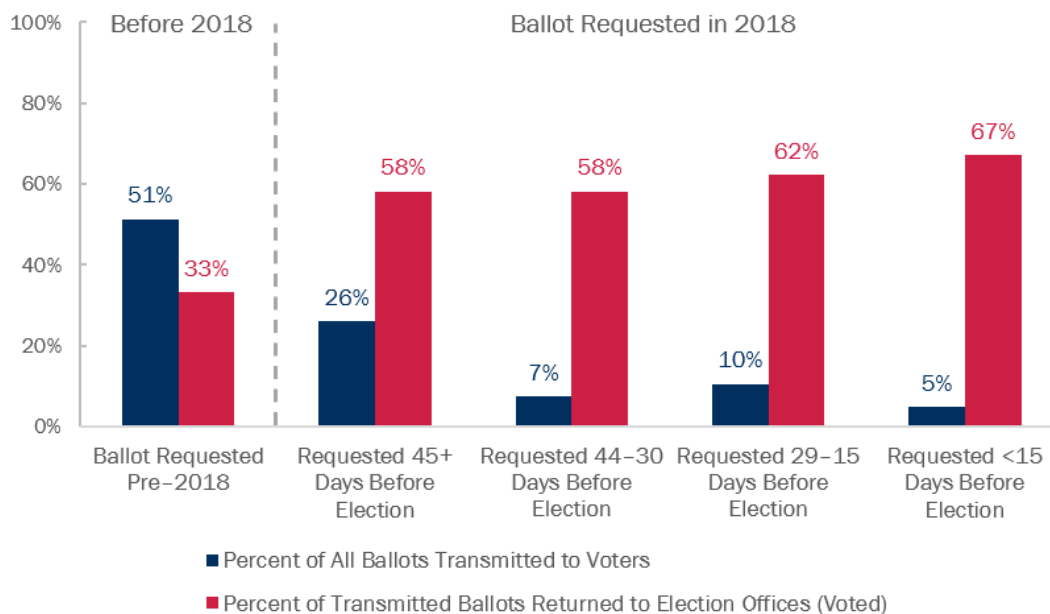
ESB Data Standard shows the dynamics of UOCAVA voting and how the timing of ballot requests and modes of transmission influence ballot return.

The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* and the *Military and Overseas Voting Empowerment (MOVE) Act* are the two pillars protecting the voting rights of military members, their families, and overseas citizens. This research note uses 2018 data from the ESB Data Standard to detail the voting process for the UOCAVA population and show the importance of UOCAVA and the MOVE Act in the voting process, as well as the importance of states and localities adhering to these mandates.

Background and Methods. Since 2015, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) has been working with The Council of State Governments (CSG) Overseas Voting Initiative (OVI) to develop a standardized format that captures transactional-level data about military and overseas voters in the Election Administration and Voting Survey Section B (ESB) Data Standard. The data resulting from this effort provides information about how and when voting transactions (e.g., voter registration, ballot transmission, ballot receipt) occur and allows tracing of a voter’s journey. Unlike traditional survey-based or aggregate data sets, transactional data can better follow the behaviors of individuals and can be used to help identify the potential challenges they encounter in the voting process. Currently, fourteen states and local jurisdictions participate in the ESB Data Standard.

Results. Among jurisdictions participating in the 2018 ESB Data Standard, about half of the ballot requests were received before 2018, as some states allow for ballot requests to remain active for more than one election cycle. Figure 1 shows that ballot requests that were sent during the election year were returned at higher rates (60%) compared to older ballot requests (33%). This result supports FVAP’s recommendations that UOCAVA voters send their ballot requests every election year to confirm that the information on record is up to date and they are able to receive and return their absentee ballot ahead of state return deadlines.

Figure 1. Ballots Transmitted and Returned by Request Date—Later Request is Associated with Higher Likelihood of Return



RESEARCH SUMMARY

UOCAVA voters have special protections and are eligible to use Federal Post Card Applications (FPCAs) as both a voter registration and a ballot request form, rather than registering to vote and submitting a separate state application for an absentee ballot. Analysis of ESB data shows that ballot return rates are higher among voters who used the FPCA rather than a state application to request their ballots. This relationship holds even for those using the FPCA to request a ballot during the years previous to the election.

The *MOVE* Act requires ballots to be sent to *UOCAVA* voters at least 45 days before Election Day to provide enough time for these voters to receive, complete, and return their ballots by state deadlines. Among states and localities participating in the 2018 ESB Data Standard, 97% of all ballots requested before the 45-day deadline were sent to voters by that date. The *MOVE* Act also requires that states provide an option for *UOCAVA* voters to receive blank ballots by at least one electronic method (i.e., email, online, or fax). This protection is particularly critical for those *UOCAVA* voters who requested their ballots after the 45-day deadline. Among these “late” requesters, those receiving their ballot electronically are over 10 percentage points more likely to return their ballot (see Figure 2), and the rate of returned ballot rejection due to missed deadlines or other issues is more than four times lower than among those who received their absentee ballot by mail (see Figure 3)

Figure 2. Ballot Return Rate by Transmission Mode and Request Timing—Early Request is Key for Ballots Transmitted by Mail, and Electronic Transmission Helps Voters Overcome Time Barriers

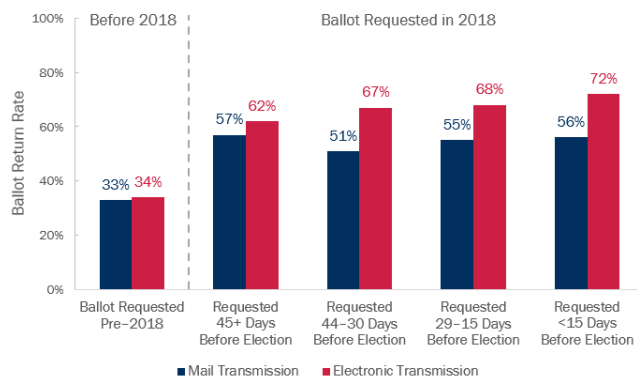
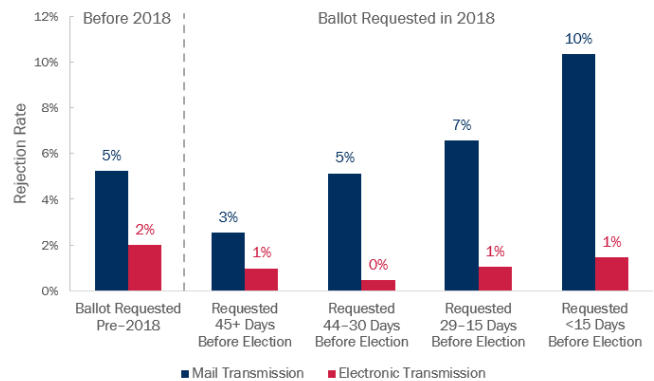


Figure 3. Returned Ballot Rejection Rate by Transmission Mode and Request Timing—Late Request is Associated with Higher Rejection Rates for Ballots Transmitted by Mail, but Not Electronically



Data from the participating states and jurisdictions showed different voting behaviors between active duty military (ADM) and overseas citizens. ADM tended to request their ballots earlier than overseas citizens; 62% of ADM requested a ballot by the 45-day deadline compared to 53% of overseas citizens, and ballots were generally transmitted by mail to ADM (85%) compared to overseas citizens (57%), who relied more on electronic modes of ballot transmission (43%).

Conclusions. Overall, this research note further demonstrates the importance of the *UOCAVA* and *MOVE* Acts—and states’ adherence to these acts—in protecting the participation of ADM and overseas citizens in the voting process. It also provides empirical data supporting FVAP’s recommendations that *UOCAVA* voters use the FPCA to register to vote and request an absentee ballot, and that they submit one FPCA at least every election year to ensure their data is up to date and that they take advantage of their special protections under *UOCAVA*.