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FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



2020

Report to Congress

This report fulfills the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) requirement under section 20308(b) of title 52, United States Code. The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense is approximately \$2,224,000 in Fiscal Years 2020 - 2021. This includes \$2,163,000 in expenses and \$60,000 in DoD labor. Generated on July 27, 2020, RefID: F-7417DD1

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Executive Summary

This report fulfills the reporting requirements of the Secretary of Defense, as the Presidential designee under the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*, at sections 20301(b)(6) and 20308(b) of Title 52, United States Code. It includes findings from the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) post-election surveys and provides an assessment of activities supporting the 2020 elections for federal office. FVAP is an assistance program; its mission is to inform voters covered by *UOCAVA* of their right to vote and provide the tools and resources to help those who want to vote do so successfully from anywhere in the world.

FVAP continues to press forward with the following objectives: reducing obstacles to *UOCAVA* citizen voting success, expansion of *UOCAVA* voter awareness and outreach initiatives, and enhancing measures of effectiveness and participation. The 2020 election cycle represented unique challenges with the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Throughout the year, FVAP staff continued operations and successfully supported military members, their families, and overseas citizens. The most significant impacts to FVAP operations during the pandemic centered on its inability to support Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) earlier in the process with in-person training opportunities, and on FVAP's capacity to directly engage state and local election officials. The entire election community found itself responding to a dynamic environment with moving primary election dates and contingency operations. Meaning, as traditional opportunities for direct outreach became reduced, FVAP pivoted to a virtual support role. FVAP personnel remained resilient and committed to customer service and raising awareness of available resources across the Department of Defense (DoD), such as FVAP.gov and military and Department of State VAOs in the field.

This continued support for the *UOCAVA* absentee voting process in the face of the pandemic was only possible through the collaborative efforts provided by FVAP's stakeholders: state and local election officials, Military Departments and Uniformed Services, Department of State, U.S. Postal Service, Department of Homeland Security, overseas citizen organizations, and other key stakeholders dedicated to supporting military members, their families, and overseas citizens.

Observations from the 2020 General Election

After the November 3, 2020, general election, FVAP conducted post-election surveys of active duty military (ADM), overseas citizen voters, VAOs, and state election officials. The survey data yielded the following findings:

- The 2020 voter registration rate for ADM was 69 percent, a three-point increase from 2016.
- The 2020 voter participation rate for ADM was 47 percent, on par with the 46 percent voter participation rate for the 2016 General Election.
- The 2020 estimated ballot request rate for overseas citizens was 11.7 percent, similar to the 2016 estimated ballot request rate of 11.1 percent.
- The 2020 estimated voter participation rate for all overseas citizens was 7.8 percent, which is the same as the estimated voter participation rate for the 2016 General Election.
- ADM who received assistance from a DoD resource (e.g., FVAP, Unit Voting Assistance Officers, and Installation Voter Assistance Offices) were significantly more likely to submit an

absentee ballot than ADM who did not receive such assistance. This consistent finding across the last five General Elections (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020) speaks to the importance and effectiveness of efforts by FVAP and the Military Departments and Services to raise awareness of available resources and provide direct assistance.

- ADM who needed assistance were nearly twice as likely to report returning their absentee ballot when they sought assistance from a DoD resource.
- The proportion of ADM voting by absentee ballot rose two percentage points from 2016 to 81 percent in 2020.
- UOCAVA voters requested their ballots earlier than they did in 2016 and general election ballots were returned earlier than they were in the 2016 and 2018 General Elections.
- The 2018 “Overseas Citizen Population Analysis” conducted by FVAP estimated 4.8 million U.S. citizens living overseas in 2018. This represents an increase of almost one million U.S. citizens (23 percent) since 2010.
- The most frequently reported challenge experienced by U.S. voters living overseas was that they had difficulty with the international mailing system.

Recommendations from the 2018 Report to Congress and Results of Activities in 2020

FVAP’s activities fulfill the Secretary of Defense’s responsibilities under *UOCAVA*. These activities raise awareness of the right to vote among *UOCAVA* citizens and seeks to reduce or eliminate barriers for those who choose to exercise that right. FVAP’s 2020 activities made important advancements towards implementing the recommendations in FVAP’s 2018 Report to Congress:

Reduce Barriers for UOCAVA Voters to Successfully Vote Absentee

- FVAP experienced a 42 percent increase in Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) transactions on FVAP.gov in 2020 as compared to 2016.
- FVAP distributed 28,909 hardcopy FPCAs and FWABs as well as 169,436 pieces of other educational and outreach materials to voters in 66 countries and 105 military installations.¹
- Thirty percent of visits to FVAP.gov resulted in a “conversion,”² which falls in the top 10 percent of conversion rate benchmarks for high-traffic internet sites. This is a 2.1 percent increase over 2016 (27.9 percent).

Increase Awareness About Absentee Voting

- FVAP.gov achieved a 63 percent increase in total visitors and a 67 percent increase in visits in 2020 when compared to 2016.
- 57 percent of ADM were aware of FVAP. Among experienced ADM absentee voters, 74 percent reported being aware of FVAP, as compared to 51 percent of ADM first-time absentee voters.
- 21 percent of FVAP.gov sessions originated from paid media advertising, as compared to just

¹ These numbers only include the forms and materials that were distributed directly by FVAP staff. They do not incorporate the number of FVAP branded materials that were distributed directly by the Military Services or the Department of State.

² “Conversion” occurs when a website visitor performs a desired action. On FVAP.gov, conversions are actions taken by a visitor that represent a first step toward registering and requesting a ballot or using the backup ballot if necessary.

six percent in 2016, indicating more effective FVAP information awareness.

- FVAP personnel conducted VAO training workshops, both virtually and in-person, at 76 locations representing 37 U.S. military installations and 38 U.S. embassies and consulates in 27 countries.
- VAOs' overall workshop satisfaction score of 4.57 out of 5.00 represents a slight decrease from 2016 when all workshops were done in person.
- Overall, FVAP customer inquiries totaled 44,096 representing an 183 percent increase compared to 2016.

Enhance Measures of Effectiveness and Participation

- FVAP continued to enhance its Effective Voting Assistance Model (EVAM) to track effectiveness and identification of best practices for VAO responsibilities across the Services.
- FVAP continued to leverage the Council of State Governments' efforts to implement a reporting data standard for states to assess and more effectively report the impacts of Federal legislative reforms passed as part of The Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act in 2009.³ The data collected from states and jurisdictions represents approximately 40 percent of the UOCAVA voter population.

FVAP will incorporate its lessons learned from 2020 and leverage new opportunities as part of its ongoing efforts to increase awareness of DoD voting assistance resources and longer-term implementation of the FVAP Strategic Plan for 2022.⁴

Recommendations for the 2022 Election Cycle

Goal 1: Be a highly valued customer service program to military members, their eligible family members, voting assistance officers, overseas voters, and election officials.

- Implement an aggressive engagement strategy for state and local election officials to raise awareness of core responsibilities under federal law.
- Educate states on how to enhance the usability of the absentee voting process for ADM by authorizing acceptance of electronic signatures from the DoD Common Access Card (CAC) in the election process, based on the Council of State Governments' Overseas Voting Initiative recommendations.
- Support the implementation of ballot tracking to support overseas military and overseas citizens in response to Executive Order (E.O.) 14019, "Promoting Access to Voting" March 7, 2021.
- Leverage the Council of State Governments' ongoing work to expand implementation of a national data standard to more effectively report the impacts of Congressional reforms passed in the 2009 MOVE Act while reducing the post-election reporting burden on the states in partnership with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

³ The MOVE Act amended provisions of UOCAVA, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (Pub. L. No. 111-84).

⁴ https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Policies/StratPlanFINAL_20200806.pdf

Goal 2: Reduce obstacles to military and overseas absentee voting success.

- Increase availability of election materials in alternative languages pursuant to E.O. 14019.
- Continue to review and update as necessary the FPCA and the FWAB to focus on core Federal election eligibility requirements to enhance usability and maximize benefits codified under *UOCAVA*.
- Maintain continued alignment across the DoD enterprise to support Military Service-level voting assistance programs.
- Expand use of virtual training opportunities to support VAOs, voters, and stakeholders throughout the calendar year and within closer proximity to the general election.
- Refine and improve upon EVAM to track changes to VAO responsibilities across the Services for effectiveness and identification of best practices.

Goal 3: Increase *UOCAVA* voter awareness of available tools and resources.

- Continue to use paid media and social media outlets to focus on population segments who lack awareness of available resources through FVAP, especially first-time absentee voters.
- Examine the potential for expanding the Voting Assistance Ambassador program.
- Create and effectively distribute innovative content that resonates with the military, their families, and overseas citizens.

Based on these goals for 2022, FVAP will continue to work on reducing barriers for all *UOCAVA* voters to successfully vote absentee and increase awareness about voting among the *UOCAVA* population. Pursuant to E.O. 14019, FVAP will support expanded opportunities to raise awareness on voting resources for all DoD personnel to include both absentee voting and traditional opportunities to register and vote, including offering election materials in alternative languages as appropriate.

Message from the FVAP Director

It is my distinct pleasure to present FVAP's 2020 Post-Election Report to Congress. This report includes findings from our post-election surveys and provides an assessment of our activities supporting the 2020 elections for Federal office. It is important to remember that FVAP is an assistance program – our mission is to inform citizens covered by *UOCAVA* of their right to vote and provide the tools and resources to help those who want to vote do so successfully from anywhere in the world.



The 2020 election cycle represented a unique set of challenges and opportunities for FVAP, just as it did for the cadre of election administrators across the United States. The COVID-19 global pandemic directly impacted FVAP's traditional operations beginning in the spring of 2020 when various countries became subject to travel restrictions. In the past, FVAP leveraged these early months in the calendar year to provide in-person training opportunities and support for military and Department of State Voting Assistance Officers worldwide. In response to global conditions, FVAP quickly developed and implemented a plan consisting of the following:

- Shifting traditional in-person training for Voting Assistance Officers to a virtual environment;
- Engaging stakeholders across the DoD, United States Postal Service, and the Military Postal Service Agency to ensure overseas military ballots continued to move while monitoring and raising awareness of international mail disruptions;
- Alerting covered voters of the need to prepare and take early action to receive balloting materials electronically and recognize all available options for returning voted ballots by alternative means, if authorized by the states;
- Adjusting FVAP's digital media campaign to support messaging aligned with the global pandemic; and
- Adjusting all outreach activities, including FVAP's Voting Assistance Ambassador pilot program, to virtual platforms.

All of these shifts reflect the agility of Voting Assistance Officers across the DoD, the talented team of individuals within FVAP, and the support provided by its command, the Defense Personnel and Family Support Office.

Despite the focus on continuity of operations, FVAP still demonstrated significant movement in the establishment of a new state data reporting standard to better assess the impact of *UOCAVA* requirements. For the first time in this report, we are pleased to feature not only analysis of this new data standard, but both the registration and participation rates for covered voters.

Thanks to its collaboration with our many stakeholders, especially those providing direct assistance to voters, FVAP made important strides in fulfilling its past recommendations despite the unique challenges of 2020 and looks forward to leveraging new opportunities in 2022.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "David Beirne". The signature is fluid and stylized.

David Beirne, Director

Background

This report fulfills the reporting requirements found in sections 20301(b)(6) and 20308(b) of Title 52, United States Code (U.S.C) for quadrennial and biennial reports following elections.

The Law and its Requirements

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) (Chapter 203 of Title 52, U.S.C.) and sections 1566 and 1566a of Title 10, U.S.C., provide authority for establishment of voting assistance programs for members of the Uniformed Services, their eligible family members, and U.S. citizens residing abroad.

E.O. 12642, "Designation of the Secretary of Defense as the Presidential Designee Under Title I of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act," June 8, 1988, identifies the Secretary of Defense as the Presidential designee for administering UOCAVA. Further, the Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1000.04, "Federal Voting Assistance Program," updated in November 2019, directs the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness to perform the responsibilities of the Presidential designee and identifies responsibilities to be carried out by the Director of FVAP. Under these authorities, FVAP provides voting information and assistance to those eligible under UOCAVA to vote in U.S. elections for federal office.

In October 2009, UOCAVA was amended by the *Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act* Title V, Subtitle H of P.L. 111-84, National Defense Authorization Act Fiscal Year 2010. Among its provisions, the amended UOCAVA:

- Requires states to transmit ballots at least 45 days before Federal elections;
- Requires states to offer electronic transmission of voting information and blank ballots;
- Expands the use of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) for all Federal elections;
- Prohibits notarization requirements;
- Requires the Secretaries of the Military Departments to establish voting assistance through Installation Voter Assistance (IVA) Offices, and authorizes the Secretary of Defense to authorize the Secretaries of the Military Departments to designate IVA Offices as voter registration

facilities under section 7(a)(3)(B) (ii) of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993, P.L. 103-31; and

- Requires the Department of Defense (DoD) to field a number of online tools for FVAP-prescribed forms.

Section 20301(b)(6) of Title 52, U.S.C., requires a quadrennial report to the President and Congress concerning the effectiveness of assistance under *UOCAVA*, including a statistical analysis of uniformed services voter participation, a separate statistical analysis of overseas nonmilitary participation, and a description of State-Federal cooperation.

Section 20308(b) of Title 52, U.S.C., requires a biennial report to the President and Congress concerning:

- The effectiveness of FVAP activities carried out under section 20305 of *UOCAVA*;
- An assessment of voter registration and participation by absent Uniformed Services voters;
- An assessment of voter registration and participation by overseas citizens not members of the Uniformed Services;
- A description of cooperation between states and the Federal Government in carrying out the requirements of *UOCAVA*;
- A description of the utilization of voter assistance under section 1566a of Title 10, U.S.C. to include a description of the specific programs implemented by each military department of the Armed Forces and the number of absent uniformed services voters who utilized voter registration assistance provided under such section; and
- A description of the utilization of the procedures for the collection and delivery of marked absentee ballots established pursuant to section 20304 of *UOCAVA*.

Observations from the 2020 General Election

The Active Duty Military Population

FVAP seeks to ensure that all *UOCAVA* voters who want to vote are able to do so. To achieve this goal, FVAP must measure and evaluate obstacles to participation faced by the *UOCAVA* ADM population. In this context, participation refers to the act of submitting a voted ballot.

FVAP collects the active duty military (ADM)⁵ data referenced in this section through the Post-Election Voting Survey of the Active Duty Military (PEVS-ADM). One of the main objectives of the PEVS-ADM is to gather the data needed to estimate the *UOCAVA* Gap: The percentage of *UOCAVA* ADM who would have voted, but did not due to *UOCAVA*-specific obstacles to voting.

Historically, communications to ADM about the PEVS-ADM referenced voting within the survey's mail and email invitations and reminders and in the survey's title. In an effort to reduce survey respondent bias, starting with the 2016 PEVS-ADM, FVAP transitioned away from including voting language. By not referencing voting language within the survey title or survey communications, the survey encourages a broader range of survey respondents, and does not discourage those ADM who did not participate in the election or who do not have an interest in voting from taking the survey. Since it was not until the 2020 PEVS-ADM that all voting language was removed from the survey's communications in its entirety, there is the possibility of increased survey bias within previous versions of the PEVS-ADM, therefore one must be aware of this nuance when comparing the 2020 PEVS-ADM results with those of prior election years. This is especially the case when comparing the 2020 PEVS-ADM data with that of the 2016 PEVS-ADM. For the 2016 PEVS-ADM data, since 85 percent of the 2016 survey respondents received communications that included voting language, one can expect to see higher percentages when it comes to questions related to interest in voting, knowledge about voting processes, and awareness of voting assistance resources.

⁵ Active duty military participation rates remain limited to the Military Services only as historically reported by FVAP.

Registration and Participation Rates

Election observers make direct comparisons between ADM voter registration and participation rates and those of the non-UOCAVA citizen voting age population (CVAP). However, the ADM population differs from CVAP in a wide variety of ways including age, sex, education, and mobility. To make useful comparisons of these two populations, FVAP controls for these demographics to provide greater insight into how ADM registration and participation rates compare with the rates of the CVAP that most closely resembles the military population.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate voter registration and participation rates for the following groups:

ADM: FVAP's ADM survey population includes active duty members of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard. The percentages listed below for 2020, and in figures 1 and 2 are for all ADM, not just those that voted by absentee ballot.

In 2020:

- 69 percent of ADM were registered to vote, compared to 66 percent in 2016.⁶
- 47 percent of ADM participated, compared to 46 percent in 2016.

CVAP: The CVAP consists of employed native and naturalized U.S. citizens who are 18 years of age or older, which is the U.S. Census Bureau's standard baseline measurement used when comparing voting statistics. Reported proportions are of a sample of CVAP with necessary demographic and geographic data to match them to a comparable sample of ADM.

Modeled CVAP: The modeled CVAP is the CVAP population adjusted to reflect greater demographic alignment with ADM to provide a more accurate portrayal of military voting participation rates in comparison to CVAP.

Figure 1 compares the population groups based on overall registration rates between 2016 and 2020. While the ADM and CVAP registration rates showed increases of similar magnitude (three and four percentage points respectively), the modeled

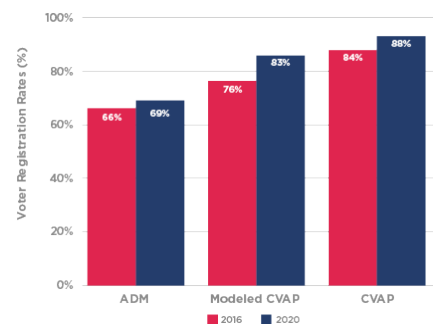


Figure 1. Comparison of 2016 and 2020 voter registration rates of ADM with those of CVAP and Modeled CVAP

⁶2016 and 2020 numbers differ here from previous reports, as it was calculated differently in 2016. In the 2016 Report to Congress, the registration rate calculation only includes UOCAVA ADM. While in the 2020 Report to Congress, the calculated rate includes both UOCAVA and non-UOCAVA ADM.

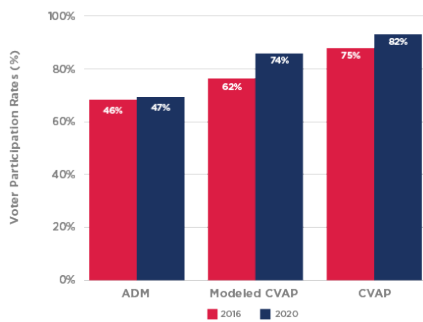


Figure 2. Comparison of 2016 and 2020 voter participation rates of ADM with those of CVAP and Modeled CVAP

CVAP registration rate, which reflects participation among CVAP who are demographically and geographically similar to ADM, was approximately 14 percentage points greater than that of ADM in 2020. This number is calculated by deducting the ADM participation rate of 69 percent from the Modeled CVAP participation rate of 83 percent. Both the CVAP and modeled CVAP registration rates were greater than that of ADM in both 2016 and 2020.⁷

Figure 2 compares total ADM and CVAP voting participation rates in 2016 and 2020. The rates shown encompass all methods of voting (e.g., in-person on Election Day, early voting, and absentee). Since available data sources do not adequately isolate voting methods, total participation is the best measure of comparison to the CVAP.

The ADM 2020 participation rate of 47 percent was similar to 46 percent in 2016. During that same period, CVAP participation rates increased seven percentage points, from 75 percent to 82 percent. The modeled CVAP participation rate remained greater than ADM at 74 percent. Both the CVAP and modeled CVAP participation rates were greater than that of ADM in both 2016 and 2020.⁸

ADM Interest Compared to Participation

While Figures 1 and 2 are focused on comparing two populations and adjusting for demographics, Figure 3 shows ADM interest compared to participation from 2010-2020. The data points are not adjusted for demographics as this reflects survey responses for ADM. This demonstrates that participation fluctuates with motivation over time based on the type of election.⁹

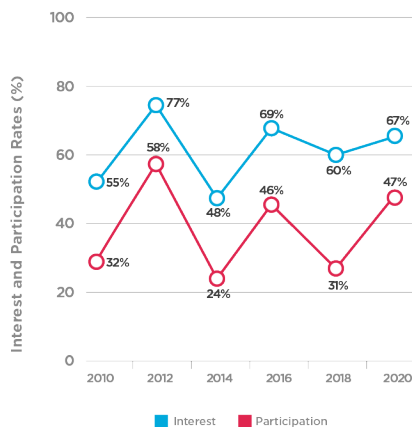


Figure 3. Active Duty Military interest compared to participation, 2010-2020

From 2016 to 2020, there was a two-percentage-point decrease in ADM-reported interest in the election (69 percent to 67 percent). However, overall participation in 2020 increased by one percentage point from 2016 (46 percent to 47 percent). This chart illustrates the relative gap for ADM in each election and the relative difference between interest and participation for each election cycle.

In further analyzing the issue of interest, it was found that in 2020 that 60 percent of ADM who did not vote said it was because of lack of motivation, with responses such as “I did not want to vote.”

⁷ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q5; 2016 PEVS-ADM, Q5

⁸ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q32; 2016 PEVS-ADM, Q31

⁹ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q30, Q33

While this represents an increase from 2018, these results are roughly in line with the 2016 General Election.¹⁰

The Overseas Citizen Voter Population

Historically, FVAP was unable to provide voter behavior data for U.S. citizens residing abroad due to challenges associated with quantifying and identifying the overseas citizen population. Following the 2014 election, FVAP conducted the first Overseas Citizen Population Analysis (OCPA) to determine the viability of a new methodology and statistical modeling approach to capture more information on the demographics of this population, as well as to estimate voter registration and participation rates. The OCPA combines data from U.S. and foreign governments and state records of ballot requests and voting. It also includes the only representative survey of registered U.S. citizen voters living abroad who requested a ballot for the biennial General Election.

In 2020, FVAP released the 2018 OCPA, which included new estimates of the numbers of overseas U.S. citizens of voting age (OCVAP) as well as revised estimates for the years 2000-2017. These estimates found in the 2018 OCPA are the same estimates that are included in the 2020 OCPA. These same estimates were used to calculate the registration and participation rates of overseas citizens for the 2020 General Election which are found in the 2020 OCPA. In the coming year, FVAP plans to rigorously assess and update its statistical estimation process and the data sources used, based on lessons learned from 2014-2020 and new 2020 foreign government estimates and other data that have become available.

The 2018 OCPA estimated 4.8 million U.S. citizens living overseas in 2018. These citizens are distributed across 186 countries, with the largest populations in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, including Canada. The greatest population growth since 2010 has been in Oceania, which had an estimated population increase of 39 percent from 2010 to 2018. The population in Europe also increased substantially, with the 2018 population estimated to be about 27 percent larger than in 2010. These same population estimates are also published within the 2020 OCPA.

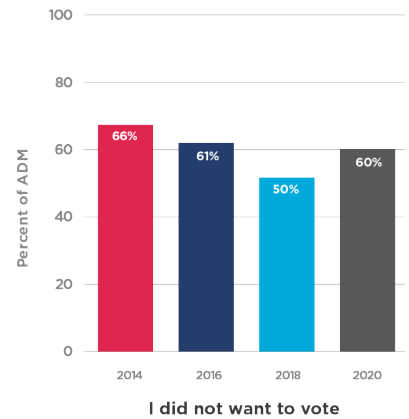


Figure 4. ADM motivation-related reasons for not voting among non-voters in 2016 and 2020

¹⁰ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q34; 2018 PEVS-ADM, Q34; 2016 PEVS-ADM, Q33 ;2014 PEVS-ADM, Q35

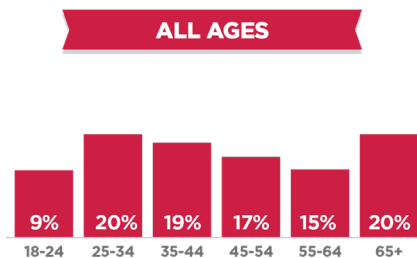


Figure 6. Ages of overseas voters from the 2020 OCPA

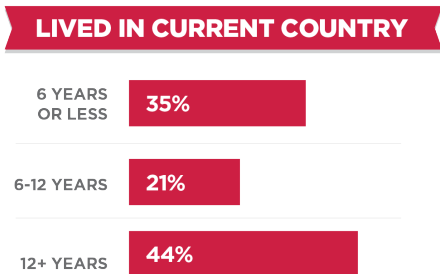


Figure 7. How long overseas voters lived in their current country from the 2020 OCPA

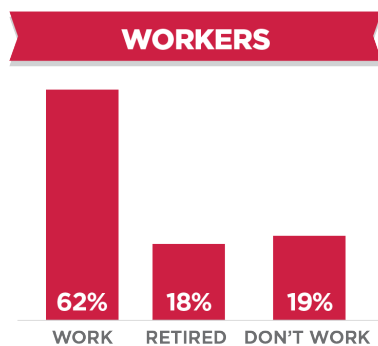


Figure 8. Employment status of overseas voters from the 2020 OCPA

COUNTRIES WITH THE LARGEST NUMBERS OF ADULT U.S. CITIZENS

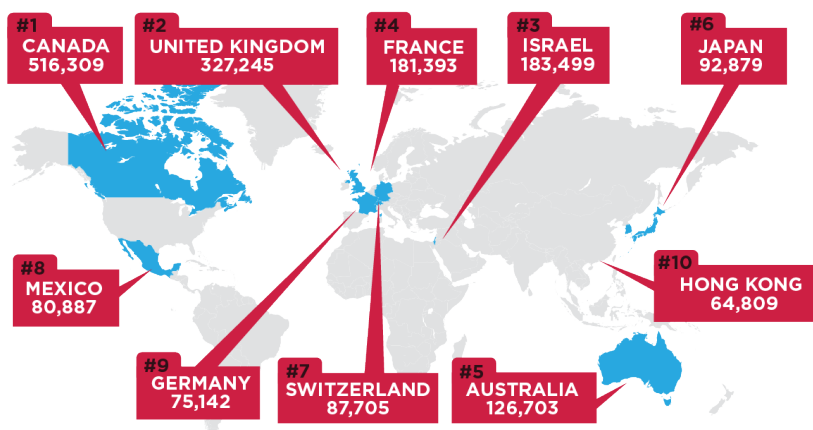


Figure 5. Top ten countries with the largest numbers of U.S. citizens over 18 years old.

For each foreign country, the study estimates the total number of U.S. citizens, how many are of voting age, and their voting rates. Countries with the highest numbers of voting-age U.S. citizens are Canada, the United Kingdom, Israel, France, and Australia. Figure 5 shows the overseas citizen population for the top ten countries with a high UOCAVA voter population.

Over one-third (37 percent) of Overseas Citizen Population Survey (OCPS) respondents said it was the first time they voted in a U.S. election from the country in which they were living.¹¹ While there is no typical overseas voter, the average respondent is 48 years old; has lived in the country for over 12 years¹²; nearly two-thirds of respondents are working¹³; and they are highly educated, with nearly half holding a graduate or professional degree and about a third holding a bachelor's degree.¹⁴



Figure 9. Reasons overseas citizens are living abroad from the 2020 OCPA

¹¹ 2020 PEVS-OCPS, Q10a

¹² 2020 PEVS-OCPS, Q43

¹³ 2020 PEVS-OCPS, Q50

¹⁴ 2020 PEVS-OCPS, Q48

citizens who requested and received an absentee ballot did cast that ballot in the 2020 election.¹⁵ Among overseas citizens who ultimately did not return their voted ballot, some did not want to vote while others had difficulty completing the process.¹⁶ Across all age groups, those who did not vote reported that difficulties completing the process prevented them from returning their absentee ballot. This was especially true for the oldest voters (65+), who were over six times more likely to have trouble completing the process than they were to report not wanting to vote. Not wanting to vote was most common in the 18 to 34 age group; about a third of these respondents selected that option.¹⁷ Figure 11 highlights those different reasons for not voting.

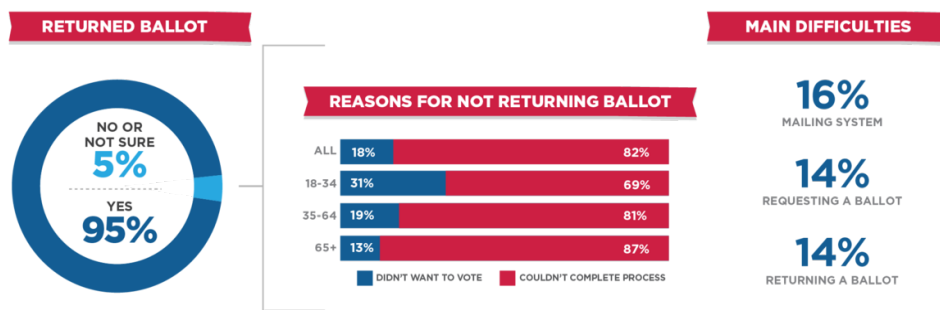


Figure 11. Reasons for not returning a ballot among overseas citizens by age range from the 2020 OCPA

In all, there was an estimated 7.8 percent voting turnout among eligible overseas citizens, which is the same as the rate estimated for the 2016 election. Figure 12 further breaks this down, showing the individual voting rates in countries with a large UOCAVA population.

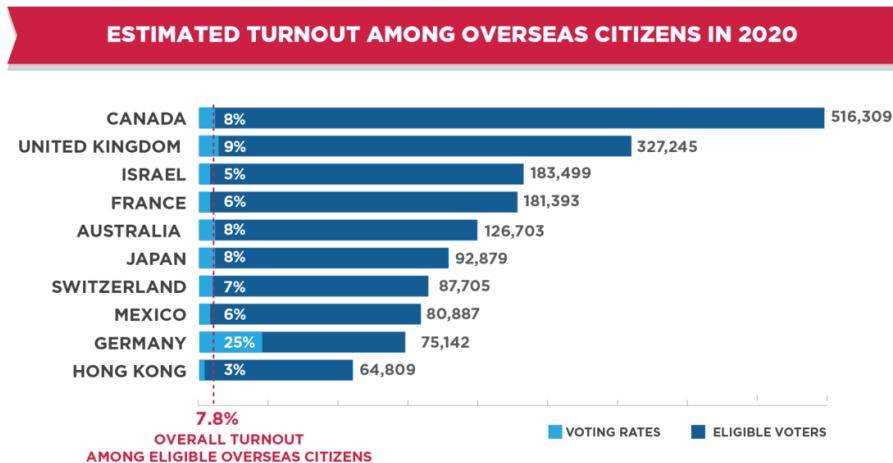


Figure 12. Voting Rates of overseas citizens in countries with large UOCAVA populations from the 2020 OCPA

The 7.8 percent of eligible overseas voters who returned a ballot

WELL EDUCATED

LESS THAN BACHELOR'S DEGREE **20%**

BACHELOR'S DEGREE **35%**

MORE THAN BACHELOR'S DEGREE **45%**

Figure 10. Educational status of overseas voters from the 2020 OCPA

"FVAP's survey further showed that greater than 9 in 10 overseas citizens who requested and received an absentee ballot did cast that ballot in the 2020 election."

¹⁵ 2020 PEVS-OCPS, Q13

¹⁶ 2020 PEVS-OCPS, Q18

¹⁷ 2020 PEVS-OCPS, Q15

during the 2020 General Election is significantly lower than the 79.2 percent of domestic voters. The OCPA indicates that much of this voting gap is an effect of the obstacles experienced by many overseas voters. This Voting Gap is broken down into an Obstacle Gap and a Residual Overseas Gap.

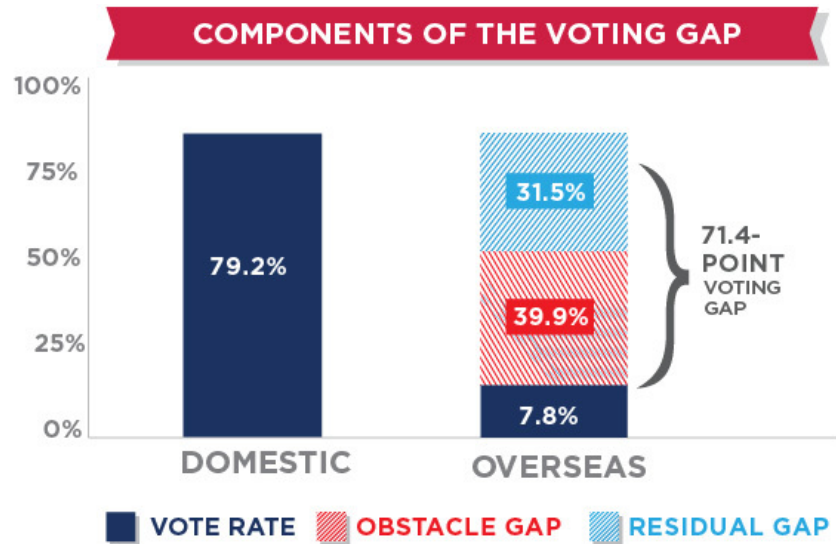


Figure 13. Components of the Voting Gap from the 2020 OCPA

The Obstacle Gap includes those overseas U.S. citizens who wanted to vote or tried to vote in 2020, but were unsuccessful. An example of an obstacle experienced by a voter is a mailing delay due to a slow or unreliable foreign postal service. In countries with the highest obstacles, voters who received their ballot electronically (rather than mailed) were more than 68 percent more likely to vote successfully. Figure 8 highlights the gap by showing these rates for 2020.

The Residual Overseas Gap consists of voters who did not vote due to factors that are more indicative of motivation and level of interest in the election.

Since FVAP remains focused on raising awareness of available resources and is not involved in driving participation, FVAP will continue to evaluate ways to expand its educational and outreach initiatives to address how voters can take action early and leverage all available return methods to successfully navigate the absentee voting process.

The Impact of COVID-19 and FVAP's Response

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) began spreading across the world in early 2020, coinciding with the U.S. presidential primary season. This pandemic most notably affected UOCAVA voters' ability to receive direct assistance and use international mail.

As the pandemic spread to different hotspots around the world, countries responded with various levels of movement, travel, and business restrictions through lockdowns and required quarantine periods. International mailing disruptions occurred, but all overseas military mail continued to move throughout the year. FVAP coordinated monitoring activities with the Military Postal Service Agency (MPSA), the United States Postal Service (USPS), and the State Department to assess impacts to the voting process throughout the federal primary election season and leading into the general election.

Also, in response to the United States' possible withdrawal from the Universal Postal Union in late 2019, state and local election officials encouraged overseas Americans to leverage electronic options for receiving blank ballots in preparation for 2020. With the onset of the pandemic, this communication effort from state and local election officials may have mitigated some of the impact from international mail disruptions - at least in the process of receiving blank ballots.

From March through September 2020, it was apparent that international mail access would vary based on health conditions in each respective country. FVAP, USPS, and MPSA collaborated to establish a central COVID-19 resource page for voters and election officials to use for monitoring international mail conditions and to identify all available options for returning voted ballots.

FVAP launched its public facing "COVID-19 Updates" page in March 2020. The page served as a key resource for information for UOCAVA voters, Voting Assistance Officers, and election officials. FVAP's reference page included links to up-to-date USPS information on international or domestic postal delays and local election official and Installation Voting Office contact information. The page also featured Department of State country-by-country guidance on the level of service provided or temporary closures at embassies and consulates based on current local conditions. FVAP also ensured its content reflected the latest election dates



Screenshot of FVAP's COVID-19 Updates page for voters that provides important links for UOCAVA voters voting in the global pandemic.

and deadlines, as well as changes to state FPCA and ballot/FWAB submission methods, which were displayed in easily referenced maps.

Overseas voters normally have several options for the mail return of a voted ballot. Military members and their families stationed overseas have access to a military post office. All overseas military mail continued to move throughout 2020 despite global pandemic conditions. Overseas citizens with no U.S. Government affiliation; however, have three basic options: use the local country's governmental mail service to the United States, use the diplomatic pouch service by dropping their completed ballot package at a U.S. embassy or consulate, or use a private commercial carrier. The availability of these options varied and constantly changed throughout 2020 based on country-level pandemic conditions.

For U.S. citizens who vote in states requiring postal return of voted ballots and who were residing in countries experiencing international mail disruptions, the ability to drop off voted ballots for return through the diplomatic pouch became a critical resource. Embassies and consulates worldwide provided the latest information for voters to drop off ballots for return to the United States throughout the 2020 election year. At one point, international mail disruptions were occurring simultaneously in over 140 countries. Additionally, during the peak of the pandemic, voters in certain cities reported being unable to traverse from one side of the city to another to visit an embassy or consulate to drop off a voted ballot as this type of travel was prohibited by the host country's health guidelines. Figure 14 shows a snapshot of postal delays and suspensions for international mail (excluding overseas military) leading up to the 45 days before the 2020 General Election, the deadline for local election offices to start sending ballots to *UOCAVA* voters as mandated by the *MOVE Act*.

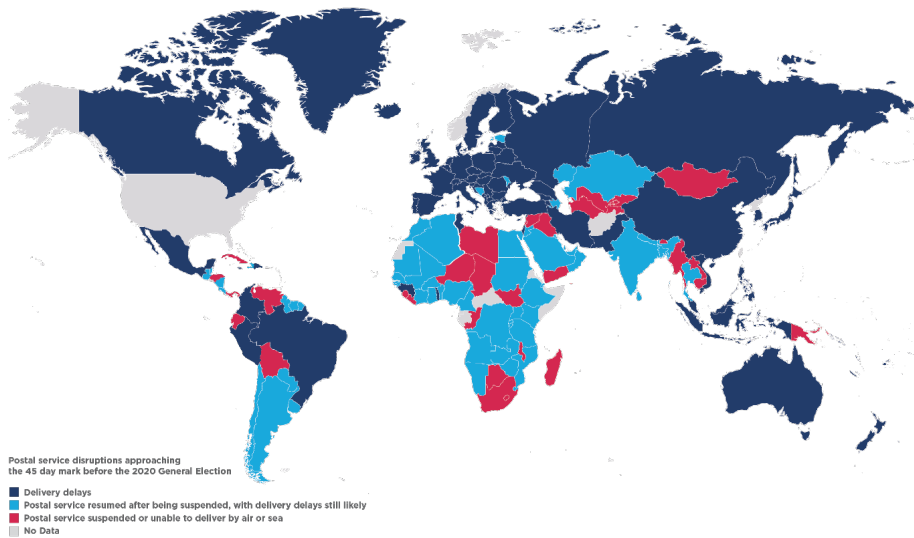
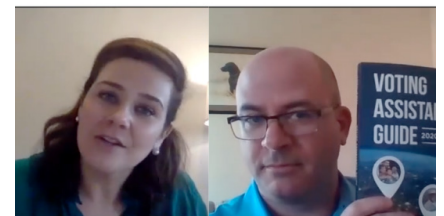


Figure 14. Map of postal service disruptions approaching the 45 day mark before the 2020 General Election

Simultaneously, many state and local election officials in the U.S. were grappling with changes to election dates and corresponding voter registration and absentee ballot request deadlines—all of which needed to be communicated to military and overseas voters worldwide. Given the issues faced by U.S. citizens overseas, some states also considered the use of emergency authority or changes to administrative rules to expand the transmission methods available to overseas voters.

To ensure the greatest distribution possible of this complex and frequently changing messaging, FVAP pinned posts on its social media profiles to link audiences to the “COVID-19 Updates” page. The page was also promoted in previously scheduled monthly posts, emails to FVAP.gov subscribers, and in response to direct messages and inquiries from UOCAVA voters, VAOs, and election officials. FVAP will continue to maintain the page as long as necessary.

FVAP leveraged its creativity to provide effective information to voters and conduct educational outreach in 2020. Traditionally, FVAP conducts its operations in early months of an election year by conducting in-person training workshops for VAOs across the Military Services. In March, these operations ceased as various countries became categorized as “Level 4-Do Not Travel” and domestic and international restrictions brought on by the pandemic ended in-person VAO workshops for the year. Shortly thereafter, the entire FVAP staff began a full-time telework schedule that lasted through and past the November general election in response to agency guidelines. Throughout this



A still from the training video created by FVAP as a response to the spread of COVID-19 in early 2020

period, FVAP was able to maintain full continuity of operations for core services including all customer service inquiries received by phone, email, or fax.

To ensure VAOs could still provide effective support, FVAP developed a short training video for both Military Services and State Department Voting Assistance Officers. After viewing the video, VAOs attended a brief virtual session where an FVAP trainer would answer questions, create discussion, and expand upon more complicated concepts such as voter residency while ensuring VAOs understood how to fulfill their responsibilities.

Throughout the pandemic, FVAP collaborated across the Federal Government to provide the best information possible to help military members, their families, and overseas citizens continue to vote successfully from anywhere in the world. FVAP recognizes the special role that the State Department played in support of Americans overseas as well as the value of the MPSA to ensure continued mail operations for overseas military personnel and their families. FVAP remained constrained in its ability to assist with state-level contingency planning since each state is responsible for authorizing acceptable methods for returning voted ballots. FVAP worked through the Council of State Governments to identify the need for contingency planning for states to consider in preparation for the general election. This effort resulted in a series of task force recommendations from state and local election officials on the need to develop contingency operations for traditional polling place activities.

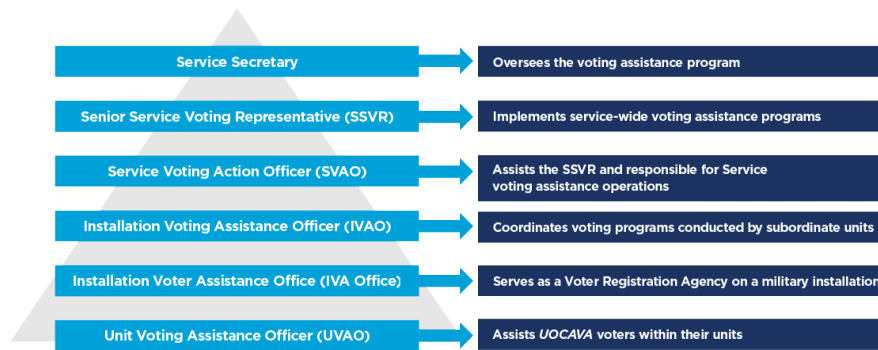
In order to evaluate the possible effects of COVID-19 on ballot requests, ballot transmissions, and ballot returns, FVAP and the Council of State Governments collected transactional data from 18 participating states and jurisdictions as part of a broader research initiative discussed later in this report. Based on the data collected, data electronic ballot requests were more frequent than mail ballot requests for both ADM and overseas citizens in 2020. There was also an increase in the use of electronic ballot return by voters from those states that allowed for it. In addition, *UOCAVA* voters in 2020 requested their ballots earlier and returned them earlier than they did in 2016—possibly due to the expected processing delays caused by the pandemic. More analysis from the collection of this transactional data and supporting analysis is featured later in this report.

Military Voting Assistance Programs

Each Military Service Voting Action Officer (SVAO) serves as the voting program manager, working directly with FVAP to provide Installation Voting Assistance Officers (IVAO), Installation Voter Assistance (IVA) Offices, and Unit Voting Assistance Officers (UVAO) with Military Service-specific support to develop programs and policies for their respective programs. The Military Services are responsible for execution and compliance and are required to submit annual reports outlining the effectiveness of their programs.

No major structural changes were made within the Military Services to their military voting assistance programs for 2020. Below is the basic outline the Military Services follow with only small differences (e.g. assigning secondary UVAOs).

Service Voting Assistance Program Key Members



Service voting assistance program key members

Unit Voting Assistance Officers

VAOs are designated individuals who provide nonpartisan voting information and assistance to military voters, their spouses, and eligible dependents on installations or in units. DoDI 1000.04 requires that a VAO is assigned to each unit. The Military Services establish ratios of personnel to VAOs and designate additional VAOs based on operational conditions or program effectiveness.

FVAP's Post Election Voting Survey of Voting Assistance Officers (PEVS-VAO) data shows that in 2020, 67 percent of VAOs were assigned to their position, while 33 percent volunteered. These numbers represent a slight decrease from the number of VAOs who were assigned to their position in 2016 (69 percent), and a slight increase from the number that volunteered in 2016

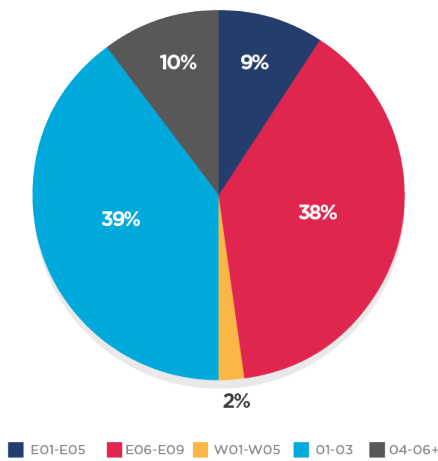


Figure 15. 2020 paygrades of VAOs

(31 percent).¹⁸ Also in 2020, 47 percent of VAOs were enlisted members, and 49 percent were officers, representing a decrease of one percentage point (48 percent) and increase of two percentage points (47 percent) respectively from 2016. Figure 15 illustrates a breakdown of VAOs in 2020 by paygrade.¹⁹ To support UVAOs and IVAOs in providing the best possible assistance, FVAP offers in-person and online training, a VAO-dedicated section at FVAP.gov, and voting assistance materials such as posters, banners, forms, outreach materials, and the Voting Assistance Guide (the Guide). PEVS-VAO data shows that VAOs found FVAP's materials useful and shared them with military members.

Installation Voting Offices

Section 1566a of Title 10, U.S.C., in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Defense, directs the Secretaries of the Military Departments to designate offices on military installations as Installation Voter Assistance Offices under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (Chapter 205 of Title 52, U.S.C.). The *MOVE* Act amendments to *UOCAVA* require these offices to provide information and direct assistance on voter registration and absentee ballot procedures to Uniformed Services members and their family members when a Service member:

- Undergoes a permanent change of duty station;
- Deploys or returns from deployment; or
- Requests such assistance.

DoDI 1000.04 establishes specific IVA Office requirements in greater detail. IVA Offices may leverage UVAOs to meet staffing requirements or directly assist with meeting processing milestones. However, it is the responsibility of the individual in charge of the IVA Office to require that UVAOs are in full compliance with applicable voter assistance responsibilities.

Across all the Military Services, 58 percent of VAOs reported that they provided a briefing at either in-processing or out-processing of Service members from the unit concerned. The Marine Corps was the most likely to provide a briefing at in-processing or out-processing at 89 percent, compared to 78 percent for Navy, 53 percent for Air Force, and 42 percent for Army. Overall, 28

¹⁸ 2020 PEVS-VAO, Q5; 2016 PEVS-VAO, Q5

¹⁹ 2020 PEVS-VAO, Q47; 2016 PEVS-VAO, Q49

percent of VAOs provided a briefing for ADM when they changed their address. Navy was most likely to brief voting-related issues during change-of-address events at 37 percent, compared to 30 percent for Marine Corps, 27 percent for Army, and 26 percent Air Force.

The Active Duty Military Absentee Voter

FVAP examined the use of DoD voting resources among ADM who reported voting absentee to better understand these specific voters who are eligible under *UOCAVA* and represent FVAP's key customer base. As shown in Figure 16, 35 percent of ADM voted absentee in 2020 compared to 31 percent in 2016.²⁰

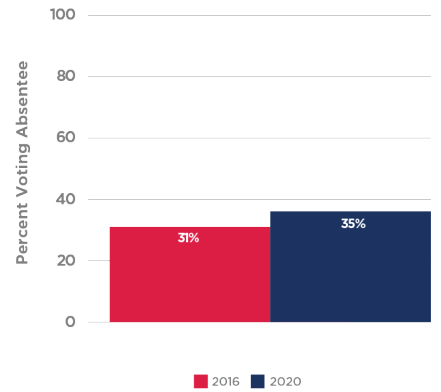


Figure 16: ADM absentee voting rates for 2016 and 2020

Ballot Request, Receipt, and Return Rates

As shown below in Table 1 below, absentee ballot request, receipt, and return rates in 2020 were largely in line with the 2016 General Election. In total, 33.7 percent of ADM indicated that they requested a ballot in 2020. Additionally, 6.78 percent said they did not request a ballot, but automatically received a ballot, and 10.79 percent indicated they had expected to get a ballot, but did not receive it.

Of the 33.7 percent of ADM that requested a ballot, 86.6 percent indicated that they received one. Among ADM who received an absentee ballot, either because they requested one or because one was automatically sent to them by their election office, 81 percent indicated that they returned their ballot.²¹

	2014	2016	2018	2020
Requested an Absentee Ballot	16.95%	32.91%	16.97%	33.70%
Received an Absentee Ballot	75.32%	84.02%	82.53%	86.64%
Returned an Absentee Ballot	56.08%	79.44%	64.34%	81.04%

Table 1. Rates for ADM absentee ballots requested, received, and returned for 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020²²

While Table 1 above provides the key absentee ballot request, receipt, and return rates for 2014-2020, Table 2 below provides a more nuanced breakdown of the subgroups included within

²⁰ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q33; 2016 PEVS-ADM, Q32

²¹ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q13; 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q20; 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q24

²² The ballot request, receipt, and return rates that were reported in the 2018 Report to Congress were based of the voting language sample. The 2018 request, receipt, and return rates presented in this document are based on the non-voting language sample, consistent with how other metrics have been calculated throughout this report.

“ADM who needed assistance were nearly twice as likely to report returning their absentee ballot if they sought assistance from a DoD resource.”

these rates. Of note, ballot return rates remain high among those who requested a ballot and received it across each election cycle. Those who automatically received a ballot tend to return them at much lower rates. Additionally, the percentage of respondents saying they expected a ballot, but did not receive one, has declined steadily over time. A similar decline is also evident among respondents who indicated they automatically received an absentee ballot, but did not request it. Taken together, these results point to an overall positive trend since 2014 especially in regards to the percentage of ADM receiving and returning an absentee ballot.

	2014	2016	2018	2020
Ballot Request²³				
Requested a ballot*	16.95%	32.91%	16.97%	33.70%
Expected to get a ballot	18.62%	13.54%	15.82%	10.79%
Automatically received a ballot	11.07%	8.04%	7.58%	6.78%
Ballot Receipt²⁴				
Overall (all ADM)	NA	NA	20.65%	35.72%
Requested a ballot*	75.32%	84.02%	82.53%	86.64%
Ballot Return²⁵				
Overall (received a ballot, any reason) **	56.08%	79.44%	64.34%	81.04%
Requested a ballot (and received it)	82.28%	91.00%	84.28%	91.21%
Automatically received a ballot	25.95%	40.40%	35.32%	46.02%

Note: 'N/A' indicates that survey skip logic prohibited certain respondents from answering this question.

* Indicates the way this metric was reported in 2016 and earlier.

** Indicates the way this metric was reported in all previous years.

Table 2. Ballot Request, Receipt, and Return Rate Trends for ADM 2014-2020

²³ 2014 PEVS-ADM, Q17: “Did you request an absentee ballot? [All ADM]”; 2016 PEVS-ADM, Q12: “Did you request an absentee ballot for the November 8, 2016, election? [All ADM]”; 2018 PEVS-ADM, Q13: “Did you request an absentee ballot for the November 6, 2018 election? [All ADM]”; 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q13: “Did you request an absentee ballot for the November 3, 2020 election? [All ADM]”

²⁴ 2014 PEVS-ADM, Q24: “Did you receive your absentee ballot? [Active-duty members who answered the question, and automatically received an absentee ballot from a local election official or who requested and received an absentee ballot]”; 2016 PEVS-ADM, Q19: “Did you receive an absentee ballot for the November 8, 2020 election? [ADM eligible respondents who answered Q12=‘Yes’]”; 2018 PEVS-ADM, Q20: “Did you receive an absentee ballot for the November 6, 2018 election? [All ADM]”; 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q20: “Did you receive an absentee ballot for the November 3, 2020 election? [All ADM]”

²⁵ 2014 PEVS-ADM, Q27: “Did you complete and return your regular absentee ballot? [Active-duty members who answered the question and who automatically received an absentee ballot from a local election official or who requested and received an absentee ballot]”; 2016 PEVS-ADM, Q22: “Did you return your absentee ballot for the November 8, 2016 election? [All ADM eligible respondents who answered Q12=‘No, but I automatically received an absentee ballot from a local election official’ OR Q19=‘Yes’]”; 2018 PEVS-ADM, Q23: “Did you return your absentee ballot for the November 6, 2018 election? [All ADM eligible respondents who answered Q13=‘No, but I automatically received an absentee ballot from a local election official’ OR Q20=‘Yes’]”; 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q24: “Did you return your absentee ballot for the November 3, 2020 election? [Ask if Q13= ‘No, but I automatically received an absentee ballot from a local election official’ OR Q20=‘Yes’]”

In an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of DoD voting assistance resources, FVAP examined the relationship between those ADM who needed assistance and reported seeking information or assistance from a DoD resource (FVAP, UVAOs, or IVA Offices) and those ADM who needed assistance, but did not report seeking information or assistance from a DoD resource. This comparison was undertaken both for the overall population and for individual age groups and Military Services.

- Forty-one percent of ADM (regardless of their age or Military Service) who needed assistance returned their ballot if they reported seeking information or assistance from a DoD resource.
- Only 24 percent of ADM who needed assistance, but did not seek it from a DoD resource returned their ballot.
- ADM in 2020 who sought assistance from FVAP, UVAOs, or IVAOs decreased from 2016 levels.
- ADM who needed, but did not seek, assistance from at least one DoD resource in 2020 increased by roughly seven percentage points from 2016.²⁶

ADM who needed assistance were nearly twice as likely to report returning their absentee ballot if they sought assistance from a DoD resource. When comparing ADM in 2020 who sought assistance to 2016, it is important to note that 2016 results may be upwardly biased due to inclusion of voting language in survey communication materials (which may explain part of the decrease in the percentage of those seeking assistance and returning a ballot). Still, while the gap between the two is somewhat smaller than in 2016, those who sought assistance from a DoD resource in 2020 were significantly more likely to return a ballot than those not seeking assistance.²⁷ As depicted in Table 3, of those ADM who needed assistance and reported seeking assistance from FVAP in 2020, 42 percent returned their ballot. Of those ADM who needed assistance and reported seeking assistance from UVAOs or IVA Offices in 2020, 21 percent returned their ballot. Twenty-four percent of ADM needing, but not seeking, assistance from a DoD resource reported returning their absentee ballot.

²⁶ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q24, Q43, Q44, Q45; 2018 PEVS-ADM Q23, Q44, Q45, Q46; 2016 PEVS-ADM Q22, Q47, Q48, Q49

²⁷ The difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.38, p = 0.02$) when estimating a univariate logistic regression model with weighted cross-sectional data. This model does not control for other demographic variables that may be related to absentee voting.

	2014	2016	2018	2020
Need, but did not seek, assistance from DoD Resource	5.77%	17.81%	6.65%	24.30%
Sought Assistance from DoD Resource (FVAP/UVAOs/IVA Offices)	35.79%	51.91%	41.30%	41.15%
Sought Assistance from FVAP	38.51%	53.22%	45.79%	42.28%
Sought Assistance from UVAOs or IVAOs	27.99%	46.39%	20.46%	21.22%

Table 3. Percent of ADM who report returning absentee ballot by type of assistance required

Since the ADM population is much younger than the civilian voting-age population, FVAP examined whether different ADM age segments may be more in need of voting assistance. As depicted in Table 4 below, of all ADM who returned an absentee ballot, 59 percent sought assistance from a DoD resource. When comparing those who returned a ballot by age group, ADM aged 18 to 24 years had a higher absentee ballot return rate when seeking assistance from a DoD resource than those aged 25 years or older. Additionally, the difference in reported ballot return rates for those who sought assistance from a DoD resource, compared to those who needed assistance, but did not seek it, is more pronounced for 18- to 24-year-olds than for older ADM.²⁸ Additionally, when determining the significance of age on seeking assistance from a DoD resource, older ADM who returned a ballot in 2020 were significantly less likely to seek assistance from any DoD resource.²⁹ These findings also emphasize the importance of a voter's interest in an election and willingness to seek assistance, with FVAP's challenge remaining one of increasing awareness of absentee voting resources across the ADM population.

	Sought Assistance from DOD Resource and Returned Ballot	Did Not Seek Assistance from DOD Resource and Returned Ballot
Total ADM	59.00%	41.15%
18-24 Years Old	77.72%	22.28%
25 Years Old or More	55.75%	44.25%

Table 4. Percent of ADM who returned an absentee ballot, comparing those who sought assistance from a DoD resource, and those did not seek assistance from a DoD resource by age group

²⁸ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q24, Q43, Q44, Q45

²⁹ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q24, Q43, Q44, Q45

In 2020, ADM across all Services had a higher rate of absentee ballot return when seeking assistance from a DoD resource, compared to ADM who did not seek assistance. As shown in Table 5, the Navy had the highest absentee ballot return rates when seeking assistance, the Marine Corps and Army had roughly equal rates, and the Air Force had the lowest.³⁰

	Sought Assistance and Returned Ballot	Did Not Seek Assistance and Returned Ballot
Army	58.43%	41.57%
Marine Corps	58.79%	41.21%
Navy	66.00%	34.00%
Air Force	52.67%	47.33%

Table 5. Percent of ADM who returned an absentee ballot, comparing those who sought assistance from a DoD resource and those who did not seek assistance from a DoD resource by Service

As each Service branch will continue to exercise operational flexibility for its voting assistance program in 2022, 2020 findings were used to capture the current utilization rates for all voting assistance resources across the Services, which establishes a performance baseline going forward and isolates program impacts in anticipation of future changes.

Table 6 shows the differences in resource utilization across the Military Services in 2020. FVAP was the most utilized resource across the branches; 69 percent of ADM who were in the Navy reported they sought assistance from FVAP, compared to 62 percent in the Army, 59 percent in the Air Force and 49 percent in the Marine Corps. These findings align with FVAP's role of supporting and augmenting VAO responsibilities as the preeminent resource for voting assistance.³¹

	FVAP	UVAO	IVA Office
Army	62.80%	30.93%	23.97%
Marine Corps	48.58%	27.42%	14.97%
Navy	69.08%	27.43%	22.40%
Air Force	59.88%	18.18%	14.20%

Table 6. Percent of ADM who sought assistance from DoD resources by Service

³⁰ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q24, Q43, Q44, Q45

³¹ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q45

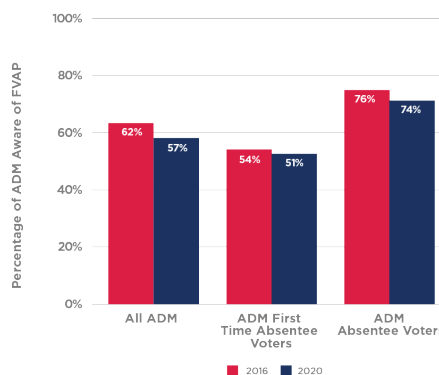


Figure 17. Percent of ADM that were aware of FVAP in 2016 and 2020, comparing all ADM, ADM first time voters, and ADM absentee voters

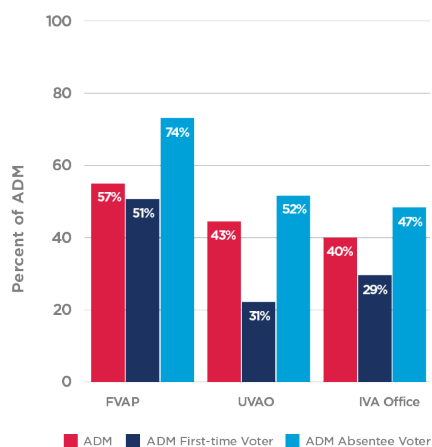


Figure 18. ADM awareness of DoD voting assistance resources

ADM Awareness of DoD Resources

One of FVAP's key metrics for program effectiveness is the overall awareness of such resources. In 2020, awareness of FVAP among all ADM was 57 percent as seen in Figure 17. However, among first time absentee voters, FVAP awareness remains lower than among all ADM absentee voters. When comparing ADM in 2020 who were aware of FVAP in 2016, it is important to note that the 2016 results may be upwardly biased due to inclusion of voting language in survey communication materials (which may explain the decrease in the percentage of those aware of FVAP).³²

The awareness of the different DoD resources (FVAP, UVAOs, and IVA Offices) in 2020 is shown in Figure 18. Fifty-seven percent of all ADM were aware of FVAP, compared to 51 percent of ADM first-time absentee voters and 74 percent of ADM absentee voters. When reviewing Figures 17 and 18, it can be concluded that more needs to be done especially when it comes to first-time absentee voters. This represents the ongoing need for FVAP to refine its communication initiatives to reach first-time absentee voters. To address this issue, FVAP has made increasing awareness for first-time ADM absentee voters one of its recommendations for the 2022 election cycle.

When we examine the level of awareness of DoD resources by Service, members of the Air Force had the highest levels of awareness for FVAP and the IVA Office, with 65 percent aware of FVAP and 53 percent aware of IVA Offices. High awareness of Air Force IVA Offices is likely due to the movement of IVA Offices to Airmen and Family Readiness Centers, which are well-established and well-known locations on Air Force installations. The Marine Corps had the highest awareness of UVAOs.³³

	FVAP	UVAO	IVA Office
Army	53.20%	41.50%	39.00%
Marine Corps	50.80%	50.00%	38.60%
Navy	54.20%	32.60%	30.60%
Air Force	65.40%	49.40%	53.40%

Table 7. ADM awareness of DoD voting resources by Service

³² 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q36, Q37, Q44, 2016 PEVS-ADM, Q32, 35, 36

³³ 2020 PEVS-ADM, Q44

In 2020, ADM who sought assistance from UVAOs and IVA Offices most frequently reported seeking assistance with finding information on voting deadlines, followed by obtaining voting forms, seeking assistance with websites, and completing voting forms, such as the FPCA, FWAB, and National Voter Registration Form (NVRF).

Usefulness of DoD Resources for VAOs

FVAP asked VAOs whether they heard or saw any FVAP advertising outreach materials such as radio, print, or online ads. In 2020, 61 percent of all VAOs indicated they were aware of these materials, a decrease of six percentage points from 2016 (67 percent). Additionally, 60 percent of UVAOs, and 66 percent of IVAOs and IVA Office staff were aware of these materials in 2020.³⁴ By and large, most VAOs who obtained FVAP's marketing materials had a positive view of them and shared them with others. Figure 19 presents the percentage of VAOs in 2020 who deemed outreach materials useful and shared them with ADM.³⁵

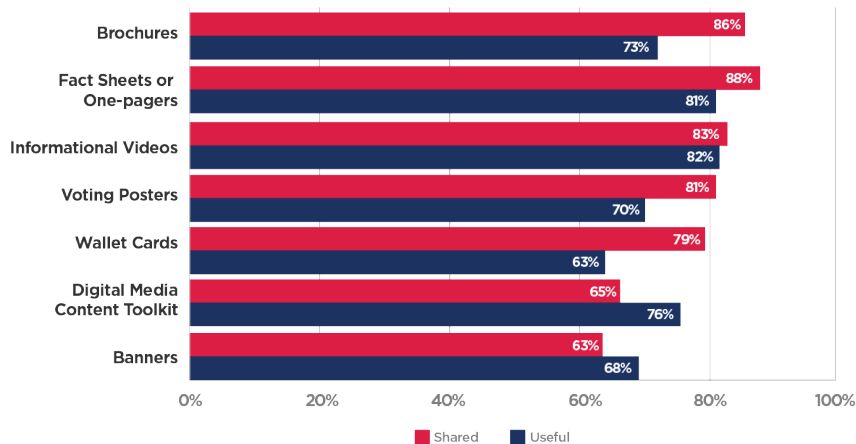


Figure 19. The percentage of VAOs who said that FVAP materials were useful and the percentage of VAOs that shared them with others

Establishing an Effective Voting Assistance Model by Service

In consideration of new DoD guidance codified in DoDI 1000.04 on the implementation of its voting assistance program, and as part of a deeper examination on how best to evaluate program effectiveness, FVAP is piloting a concept known as the Effective Voting Assistance Model (EVAM). The EVAM is an index that determines the ideal characteristics of voting assistance programs administered by Services and the corresponding requirements for VAOs at the unit or installation level, including

³⁴ 2020 PEVS-VAO, Q41; 2016 PEVS-VAO, Q42

³⁵ 2020 PEVS-VAO, Q43, Q44

those who work in an IVA Office. These ideal characteristics were identified from the results of the 2018 PEVS-ADM and PEVS-VAO, which showed 11 variables that are positively associated with effective voting assistance outcomes. Effective voting assistance outcomes include high numbers of people assisted, high FPCA awareness, perceived ease of voting assistance and registration rates.

The 11 variables positively associated with these outcomes include:

- Delivering a voting assistance briefing during in-processing and out-processing
- Delivering a voting assistance briefing at an ADM change of address
- VAOs trained with in-person or online FVAP training
- VAO use of FVAP's Voting Assistance Guide (the Guide)
- VAO use of the FVAP portal
- VAO conducting some type of outreach, such as carrying out a voting emphasis week or posting FVAP posters and banners
- Having an IVA office
- Locating the IVA office within walking or bicycling distance of ADM
- Locating the IVA office near two or more key installation landmarks
- Having VAOs with 12 months or more experience as a VAO
- Communicating with other VAOs (UVAOs, IVAOs, and IVA Office staff)

FVAP is continuing to explore the EVAM index to reconcile it with the DoDI and draw a better comparison between VAOs' required responsibilities versus best practices – which will become more important as each Military Service leverages greater operational flexibility when adhering to DoDI 1000.04.

The EVAM index varied across the Military Services in 2020. Scoring VAOs by the number of behaviors they exhibited out of the 11 identified, the average VAO scored 6.6 for Air Force, 6.7 for Marine Corps, 6.4 for Army, and 6.5 for Navy. When only UVAOs are examined, the average Marine Corps UVAO exhibited 6.6 of these behaviors; Army UVAO exhibited 6.4 behaviors; and Navy UVAO exhibited 6.8 behaviors. When limiting analysis to IVAOs, the average Army IVAO exhibited 7.7 of these behaviors, Air Force 8.7, Marine Corps 7.6, and Navy 6.5. When limiting the index to the six required behaviors, the Services' pattern of behavior is similar as seen in Figure 20.

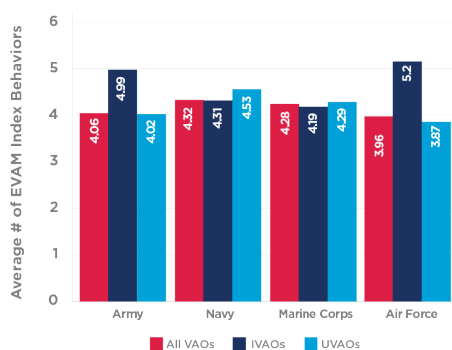


Figure 20. EVAM index (six required variables) by Service in 2020

Figure 21 displays the predicted probability of providing assistance to a high number of ADM based on the full EVAM index for each of the Military Services. For the most part, all see the same increase in VAOs having a higher probability of assisting more ADM as they demonstrate more of the ideal behaviors on the EVAM index. The positive association with EVAM variables to the number of ADM assisted helps to validate the approach of this model overall and the structure of VAO responsibilities in DoDI 1000.04. It is important to note that while the EVAM can identify the positive association between VAO actions and number of ADM assisted, it cannot be assumed that an increase in actions would result in increased participation. The EVAM index is strictly a tool to assist the Military Services with measuring overall performance and program effectiveness to achieve maximum awareness.

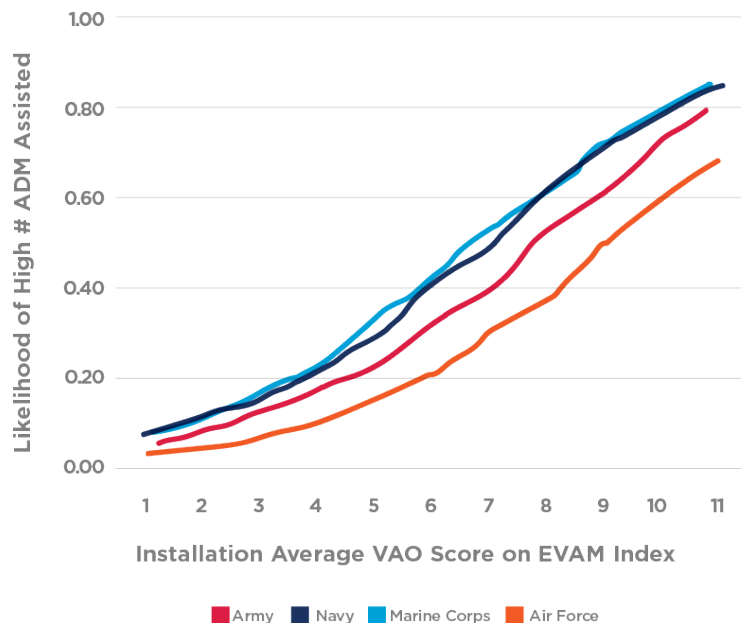


Figure 21. Likelihood of high number of ADM assisted by Service in 2020

Figure 22 displays, by Military Service, the relationship between an installation's score on the full EVAM index and the likelihood that the installation will have a high level of FPCA awareness. FPCA awareness is a critical metric for FVAP because the FPCA simplifies and expedites the voting process for UOCAVA voters. It is accepted in all states, territories, and the District of Columbia, and it both registers ADM and allows them to request an absentee ballot for all federal elections within a calendar year.

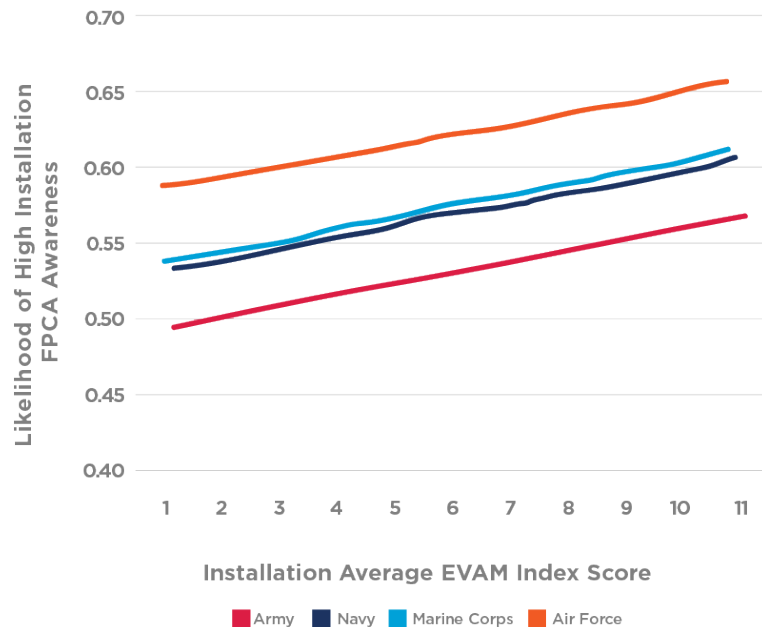


Figure 22. Likelihood of high FPCA awareness among ADM by Service in 2020

Military Service-Reported Metric

The Military Services are required to report on the voting assistance provided to Service members, their eligible family members, and other eligible U.S. citizens residing overseas. Using the FVAP portal, VAOs in the Military Services input metrics reflecting the measures of effectiveness prescribed by the FVAP Director and codified in DoD Instruction 1000.04.

These standardized metrics provide a comprehensive overview of the voting assistance provided across the Military Services on a quarterly basis and enable DoD to better assess the levels of voting assistance provided during the election year. These metrics include:

- Total number of FPCAs distributed per Military Service per year in both hard copy and electronic form;
- Number of people who received voting assistance per Military Service; and
- Number of people who received voting assistance at IVA offices, including ADM, their spouses and eligible family members, and other eligible U.S. citizens including DoD civilian employees.

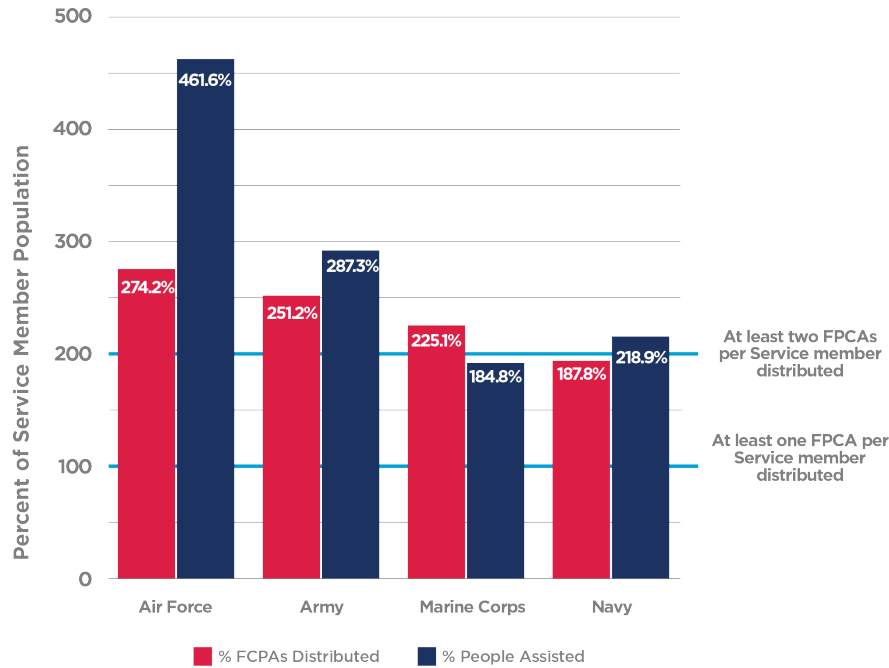


Figure 23. Percentage of each Service that received an FPCA or received voting assistance in 2020

The metrics reported per Service for 2020 are in Figure 23. The results show the percentage of each Military Service’s population that received an FPCA or voting assistance in 2020. VAOs are required to distribute FPCAs to every active duty member twice a year during even-numbered years, and once during odd-numbered years. Figure 23 shows that the Army and the Air Force exceeded this requirement in their FPCA distribution. The Military Services may have also provided force-wide emails with links and information on completing the forms in addition to the mandated monthly email blasts from FVAP which included links, instructions, and deadlines for form completion and submission. The Military Services collectively distributed approximately three million FPCAs and provided four million assistance sessions.

Figures 24-27 below demonstrate the Department’s ongoing improvements and success supporting the ADM population since 2015 with notable increases occurring since 2018.

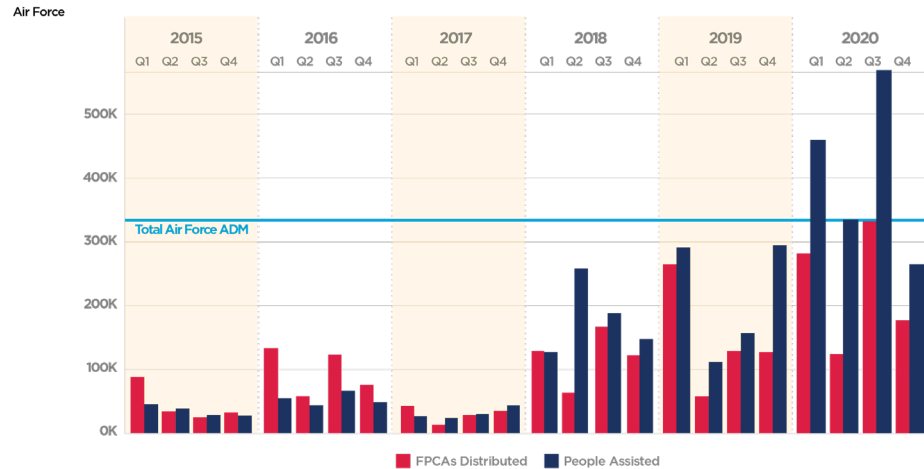


Figure 24. Air Force metrics for FPCAs distributed and people assisted since 2015

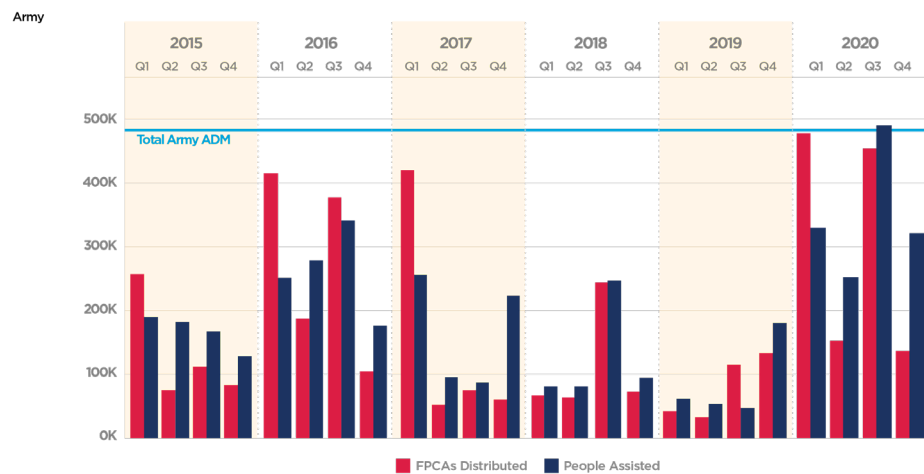


Figure 25. Army metrics for FPCAs distributed and people assisted since 2015

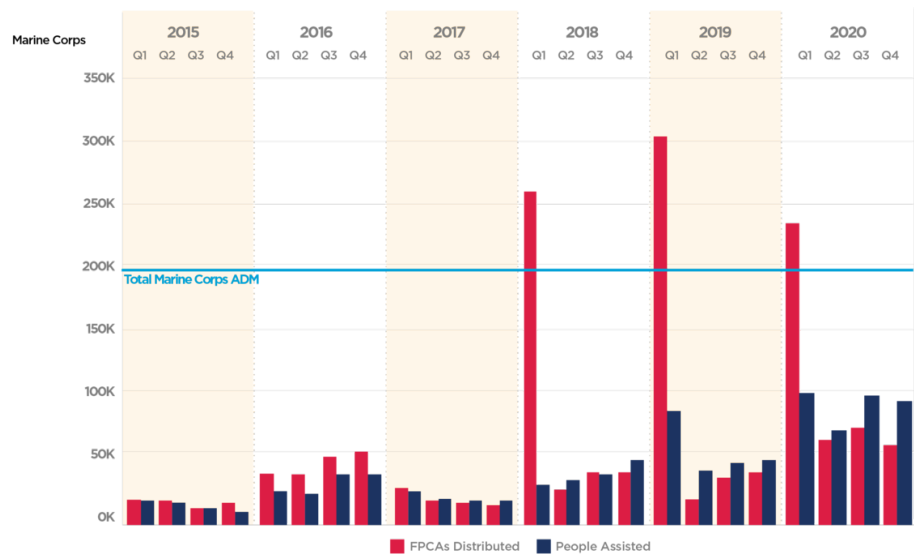


Figure 26. Marine Corps metrics for FPCAs distributed and people assisted since 2015

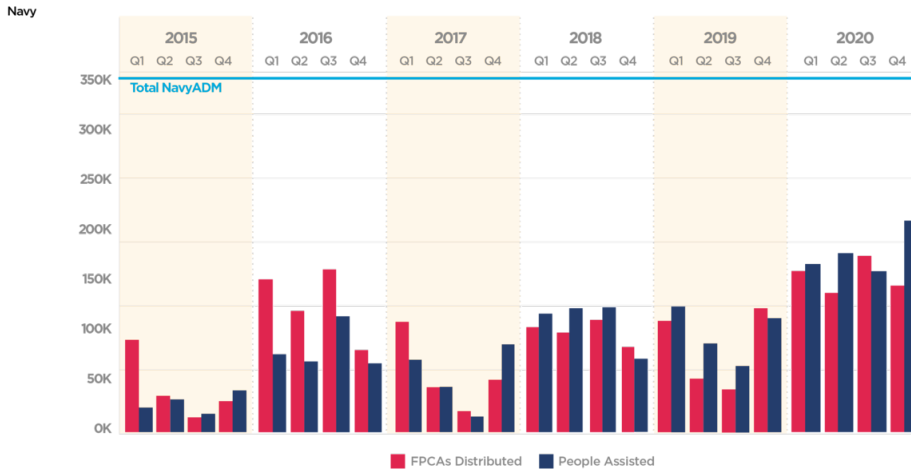


Figure 27. Navy metrics for FPCAs distributed and people assisted since 2015

Military Service and Department of State Assessment of Voting Assistance Programs

In addition to reporting metrics, each Military Service is required by DoDI 1000.04 to produce an After Action Report (AAR) in January of each year. Below are summaries of these reports, outlining the successes and challenges each Service faced while implementing the voting program requirements under DoDI 1000.04. While not held to the DoDI 1000.04 requirements, the U.S. Department of State's account of their voting program in 2020 also is included below.

Army

Army demonstrated their adherence to section 1566 of Title 10, U.S. Code, by appointing UVAOs who provided assistance to UOCAVA voters as well as by operating IVA offices. In 2019, the responsibility of the IVA offices was transferred to Senior Mission Commanders. Sixty of the IVA offices had new IVAOs appointed to the position in 2020. FVAP and the SVAO conducted trainings and conference calls to assist these new IVAOs with their new duties. There were over 3,000 UVAOs appointed and trained to assist eligible voters.

As in previous years, the Army Voting Assistance Program developed public service announcements for The Adjutant General (TAG) which aired on Armed Forces Networks overseas, YouTube, and MilTube. Voting emphasis emails were sent from Deputy Chief of Staff G-1 to Army Commanders to ensure their UVAOs were appointed, were trained, and provided voting



Army MSgt handed out FVAP wallet cards to soldiers in a Post Exchange at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.



Army LTG Ted Martin amplified FVAP's message for soldiers who wanted to vote. The video received almost 112,000 views on Twitter



Absentee ballot voting message delivered by Army Colonel orbiting earth aboard the International Space Station. Available for viewing here: <https://youtu.be/5mEzWWsj44>

assistance to eligible voters. The TAG sent “TAG sends” messages to the field and discussed voting while traveling throughout the world.

Additionally, the Army created a public service announcement with COL Andrew Morgan, NASA astronaut, aboard the International Space Station. The video emphasized the ability for Service members to vote from anywhere, including space. The Army Voting Assistance Program shared links to the video with the other Military Services’ voting programs.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, physical contact with voters was difficult during the two main outreach weeks. VAOs still reached out to voters, provided primary election dates, provided forms and answered questions. VAOs contacted voters through distribution emails, social media, and video calls. FPCAs were distributed in-hand or electronically twice during the election cycle. Installations used electronic signs and banners at gates, and hung posters in high traffic areas. Post newspapers and radio spots provided current state primary and voter registration information. Additionally, the SVAO began having a weekly conference call with the IVAOs to provide assistance, answer questions, share best business practices, and send information updates to the field. Despite the difficulties caused by COVID-19, the program still assisted over one million eligible voters.

Turnover remains an issue for the program. Keeping VAOs stable in their appointments will ensure there are no gaps in the program. 2020 highlighted the need for a greater emphasis from Commanders to appoint new UVAOs once the previous UVAO has PCS’d from a unit. A strong hand-off from one UVAO to another will create better continuity and will ensure that unit programs remain. The SVAO has also directed UVAOs to leave Continuity Binders with the unit. This will assist new UVAOs if they are appointed and do not have a hand-off.

Hard copy forms were difficult to obtain in 2020. The Army Voting Assistance program will look for funding resources for purchase of hard copies for training installations as printing can sometimes be an issue in a basic training or Advanced Individual Training environment.



Military members from Long Beach, Calif. display their absentee ballots to be cast from the guided-missile destroyer USS Sterett in the Gulf of Oman.

Funding remains an issue for the IVAO positions. IVAOs struggle with the level of voting responsibilities required as an additional duty during election years. Recommendations need to be made to allow Commanders to create a position strictly for IVAOs.³⁶

Navy

Navy Voting Assistance Program is administered through a broad network of UVAOs and IVAOs in accordance with 10 USC 1566. FPCAs were distributed in accordance with DoDI 1000.04 in January and July of the calendar year. Training was also conducted for staff and Sailors command wide for procedures on absentee voting via FVAP workshops, online training, and the training video.

Force-wide voting newsletters were sent to all VAOs by the Navy Voting Assistance Program on a monthly basis throughout 2020 while VAOs forwarded email notifications and reminders sent by the Navy SVAO. Leadership also encouraged Sailors to vote via All Hands, and the American Forces Network television and live radio was used to disseminate information on the voting process. Voting banners were displayed near HQ entrances.

Pandemic-related considerations reduced the ability to conduct special events and other in-person outreach during the focus weeks, but messages and voting information were broadcast as widely as possible including via email and social media. IVAOs, in particular, relied primarily on virtual voting assistance. Electronic means of communication helped make voting more accessible. Sailors were encouraged to use their personal computers to request absentee ballots.

In 2020, the Navy Voting Assistance Program found that their Service Instruction needed to be updated to align with new DOD 1000.04. Further, some IVAO positions, especially at larger installations and units ashore and afloat, should be a full-time billet rather than a collateral duty. Many IVAOs expressed concern that it is impossible to meet all requirements and provide adequate assistance to voters while continuing to be successful at their primary billet. Assigning this collateral duty to a primary duty tangential to the duties performed by IVAO, e.g. administrative officers, has had mixed results.³⁷



Navy UVAO provided absentee voting assistance aboard the mess decks of the cruiser USS Philippine Sea.

³⁶ U.S. Army, After Action Report

³⁷ U.S. Navy, After Action Report



The Absentee Voting Week video received over 1,800 views on Facebook.

Marine Corps

Marine Corps units are required to have a designated UVAO assigned in writing. Marine Corps policy is one UVAO assigned for every 200 personnel and units having over 200 personnel will have an Assistant UVAO. Currently, 18 UVAOs are appointed in writing at 18 Marine Corps installations, and over 956 VAOs are currently assigned to 334 Marine Corps units.

In early January 2020, 224,675 emails with a link to the electronic version of the FPCA were sent to all active duty and reserve personnel, and 46,889 hard copies were hand-delivered to Service members, recruits, and students in training. VAOs also provided the FPCA to eligible voters in mid-July 2020. The Marine Corps Voting Action Plan highlighted Armed Forces Voters Week and Absentee Voting Week events, and the UVAOs utilized the 2020 Voting Action Plan as a reference when planning unit absentee voting activities. Unit social media websites were a successful method of communication to advertise service-wide voting activities and to promote local installation voting events.

Marine Corps commands conducted a variety of voting assistance activities during 2020. During Absentee Voter Week and Armed Forces Overseas Voters week, units disseminated administrative messages highlighting absentee voter registration drives, special voter events such as the Women's Equality Day luncheon at Camp Pendleton, and notified eligible voters regarding the 2020 election deadlines to return their absentee ballots to their state election offices. UVAOs also disseminated posters and event emails, and set up voter registration tables at local exchanges and commissaries. A Facebook Live event in coordination with FVAP successfully highlighted the Marine Corps Voting Assistance Program featuring UVAOs from Camp Pendleton and interviews with Marine Security Guard Detachment serving at the Embassy in Bogota, Columbia voting for the first time. The event was seen by military and civilian personnel worldwide.

Commanding Generals and Unit Commanders were successful in highlighting the importance of voting and highly encouraged military and civilian personnel to vote during the 2020 elections. Many were guest speakers at unit voter awareness training and at FVAP VAO workshops. Additionally, they provided critical support and coordination for their unit's voting assistance activities, and to educate their personnel on the importance of voting, the Hatch Act, and the rules all personnel must follow when participating in political activities.

The SVAO utilized a dedicated network of various methods of communication tools to reach Commanders, IVA Offices, UVAOs, and Marine Corps personnel across the force. Official Marine Administrative Messages, email systems, Marine Corps Voting Assistance Program websites, local Public Affairs Offices, and unit social media websites were used to disseminate voting and election information. The 18 IVA Offices and the UVAOs utilized similar methods to further disseminate voting information to all installation personnel, including eligible family members and DoD civilians. The SVAO also worked closely with MF Strategic Communications staff to successfully disseminate articles on the importance of voting, and utilized social media platforms to notify voters on absentee registration activities and ballot return deadlines.

Due to COVID-19, many voting activities were scaled back to protect voters and the VAOs. Various news articles regarding voter registration and voting awareness activities appeared in the local base newspapers and on local unit websites at Marine Corps installations. Large gatherings were avoided and special emphasis was made on reaching voters through emails and social media platforms. Special unit voting events were limited and appropriate preventative measures were used when they occurred. Many VAOs teleworked and were able to successfully execute their responsibilities online.

The SVAO worked closely with the Marine Corps Inspector General to conduct inspections of voting assistance programs to ensure program compliance and effectiveness. The inspection process included interviews with VAOs, Commanding Officers, and personnel randomly selected within Marine units. The inspection team reviewed documents and procedures to ensure compliance with applicable FVAP and Marine Corps policies and directives. The team also inspected facilities to ensure voting assistance materials were displayed and readily available to all eligible voters.

The Marine Corps Voting Assistance Program order (MCO 1742.1B) is currently in the revision process to reflect the updated FVAP DoDI voting policies and guidance on managing its Voting Assistance Program.

The heavy use of social media platforms was effective, and education or assistance on the use of these platforms should be readily available to all VAOs. With the increased use of electronic voting forms during the 2020 election season, the technology to



In a video, USMC VAO discussed how to request an absentee ballot at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.



USMC shared helpful voting tips and best practices on its main social media pages.



IVAOs displayed FVAP's new "VAO in a Box" at a voter information event at Aviano Air Base during Armed Forces Voters Week.

successfully utilize electronic signatures for the FPCA and FWAB forms should be explored.³⁸

Air Force

In 2020, the Department of Air Force (DAF) published an updated guidance memo aligning the DAF Voting Assistance Program with requirements in revised DoDI 1000.04, November 2019. This publication required installation commanders to designate a primary and alternate IVAO from the Airman and Family Readiness Centers (A&FRC) resulting in 73 maintained and established IVA Offices. Unit commanders were required to appoint at least one UVAO per unit to ensure covered populations know how and where to go for information and support to exercise their right to vote. Unit commanders may appoint more UVAOs based on unit needs.

As mandated by DoDI 1000.04, FPCAs were delivered electronically or in-hand to installation members in January 2020 and in July 2020.

The DAF continued using a service-wide messaging system and installation distribution email lists to transmit recurring 30-60-90-day FVAP notifications of upcoming voting deadlines. DAF also distributed FVAP monthly "To Do List" messages, a 2020-2021 Voting Assistance Guide, and an updated AF Voting Action Plan 2020. Email messages to IVAOs regarding requirements, resources, tasks, and timelines were also distributed along with sharing quarterly metrics to major commands and command representatives for the purpose of monitoring success of their respective installations' Voting Assistance Programs. The SVAO posted message traffic on the Air Force Integrated Results and Statistical Tracking (AFFIRST) system announcement page to ensure access for all IVA Offices, posted bi-weekly voting-related articles on the "Airman and Family Division Facebook" page, and published a voting assistance vignette on the Air Force Personnel Center Public Affairs YouTube channel.

Due to COVID-19 and Health Protection Conditions (HPCON) implementation, most installation-wide voting events were conducted virtually with limited in-person activities. IVAOs still successfully led two mandated voter emphasis week events, Armed Forces Voters Week and Absentee Voting Week, resulting in 355,307 contacts, and engaged with installation leaders to encourage voting emphasis throughout 2020. The success

³⁸ U.S. Marine Corps, After Action Report

of the varied approaches for voter emphasis weeks led to an almost tripled number of contacts from 2018. IVAOs also noted a positive side effect on the increased number of contacts through more virtual mass marketing and advertising of information and assistance available for Service members interested in exercising their right to vote. A&FRCs and installation websites, as well as Key Spouses networks, were used to increase voter awareness, encourage voter participation, and advertise voting resources. IVAOs successfully used mass marketing efforts via social media platforms, yard signs, base newspapers, marquees, radio, and commander's action channels as well as developed tri-folds, smartboards, and bookmarks.

For those limited locations that were able to provide in person informational booths or tables, VAOs followed COVID-19 and local HPCON guidance. The limited information tables that were established provided voting forms, as well as brochures and information on primary election dates, ensuring personnel could register and receive absentee ballots. Memorable techniques involved distribution of FPCAs during "Rock the Vote with Zumba" virtual event, a First Sergeant Golf tournament, a scavenger hunt, a kids voting booth ("Future Voter") and a trivia game.

Additionally, some installations still had to maintain a physical presence during mission-specific actions that were ongoing, such as pre-deployment processing. One installation noted that "... having a continuous presence at pre-deployment briefings really made a difference." In this instance, the IVAO remained on-site and set up a voter registration and ballot request station so those deploying could complete the form immediately, rather than just briefing the members and waiting for them to contact the IVAO.

Further, FVAP-reported metrics indicated a significant growth in the two measured FVAP categories of personnel assisted and forms distributed, and in the subsets of the populations supported. In comparison to 2018, the last general election for Federal office year, the overall growth in personnel assisted and forms distributed was two to six times greater for both IVAOs and UVAOs (e.g., UVAOs assisted 230,000 military personnel in 2018 and 634,000 military personnel in 2020).³⁹



VAOs shared absentee voting tools at McGuire AFB during Armed Forces Voting Week.

³⁹ U.S. Air Force, After Action Report

Coast Guard

Coast Guard policy requires all unit commanders designate a UVAO. During the 2020 election cycle a Title 10 Reserve resource was established to conduct a Coast Guard-wide review to confirm or establish properly designated and trained UVAOs. FPCAs were distributed through FVAP-provided “VAO in a Box” kits mailed to the 16 regional mission support bases, and to Training Center Cape May, New Jersey, and the Coast Guard Academy New London, Connecticut.

Additionally, there were leadership bulletins, Unit All Hands, published online resources, and social media outreach. Guard-wide official message traffic was published in January and September 2020. These voting assistance messages were communicated across various platforms throughout the lead-up to the election including MyCG.uscg.mil (the USCG’s single repository for news and announcements), social media, and other leadership networks (e.g., senior enlisted and unit ombudsman bulletins).

Many activities in 2020 were curtailed due to the social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, including cancelling traditional in-person Coast Guard Day events. FVAP’s prepared social media and marketing materials were particularly useful in filling the gap caused by COVID-19 restrictions.

However, the COVID-19 restrictions did invite some creative alternatives including a video message from the UVAO at Training Center Yorktown, Virginia, to the approximately 2,000 students and staff there. Of particular note, boot camp trainees at Training Center Cape May, New Jersey, were subject to strict COVID-19 isolation measures that hindered normal voting assistance. Voting Assistance personnel at Cape May were able to circumvent this difficulty by training the staff already authorized to be within the isolation zone, ultimately providing voting assistance to over 900 recruit trainees. In lieu of the in-person events, the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard and the crew of USCG Cutter MUSKINGUM (WLR-75402) were featured in a short video with information on registering and requesting an absentee ballot. This video was timed to coincide with Absentee Voting Week and posted widely, including to the official USCG Facebook page and YouTube channel.

The Coast Guard would like to thank the overseas DoD facilities that supported voting assistance activities by tenant and visiting

U.S. Coast Guard
September 22 at 5:54 PM · 🌐

#GetOutandVote The National General Election is 6 weeks from today. You have until October 13th to register as an absentee voter through the Federal Voting Assistance Program Go to www.fvap.gov to register to vote today and request your ballot.



👍👍👍 595

22 Comments 64 Shares

USCG Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard reminded military members to register and request their ballot. This video received 2,600 views on Twitter.

USCG units. Noteworthy assistance was provided to Port Security Unit 308 at NAVSTA Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and to USCG Cutter WAESCHE (WMSL-751) at Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan.

The Coast Guard would like to thank the overseas DoD facilities that supported voting assistance activities by tenant and visiting USCG units. Noteworthy assistance was provided to Port Security Unit 308 at NAVSTA Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and to USCG Cutter WAESCHE at Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan.

The CGVAP, as supplemented by the Title 10 resource, will continue to assist unit commanders to designate UVAOs, obtain training, and refine our program details. FVAP's assistance, provided via prepared social media materials and marketing materials, was very helpful. "VAO in a Box" was exceptionally helpful given the COVID-19 constraints this year and USCG plans to significantly increase the order request in the future.⁴⁰

Department of State Voting Program

Similar to military VAOs, Department of State VAOs assist overseas U.S. citizens who wish to participate in U.S. Federal elections. The Department of State conducts voter outreach efforts and provides extensive guidance on the absentee voting process through a network of VAOs appointed at the 238 U.S. embassies and consulates around the world. As in previous years, VAOs informed U.S. citizens overseas that FPCAs and FWABs are both available to download on FVAP's website, and provided links to the forms in messages and online posts. Posts also provided paper FPCAs and FWABs as necessary, or provided applicants with the opportunity to download the forms at the embassy or consulate.

Due to the global pandemic, posts were unable to hold in-person events in 2020 which necessitated a pivot to virtual outreach. Posts were very creative with their voting action plans: Consular and Public Affairs sections collaborated on frequent social media outreach, messages to U.S. citizens, special messages publicizing voting during special days or weeks, new pages on the Embassy or Consulate website, and Facebook Live chats. Staff continued to work with community partners to physically place FVAP promotional materials at their locations, and advertise links and information on mission websites and social media platforms.



VAOs from U.S. Embassy Trinidad and Tobago organized a Facebook Live event about the absentee voting process which received 5,700 views.



The U.S. Embassy in Bahrain hosted a virtual voting information session for military members and overseas citizens. The video received 1,800 views on Facebook.

⁴⁰ U.S. Coast Guard, After Action Report



The U.S. Embassy in the Philippines interacted with overseas U.S. citizens through a series of virtual town halls about the absentee voting process.

Local media outlets were used to amplify State Department messaging while consular staff leveraged their networks to reach U.S. citizens. Combining pre-cleared voting messages with locally relevant graphics and videos doubled the number of views and engagements with voting messages over previous election years.

Ambassadors, Deputy Chiefs of Mission and Consular Chiefs instead held virtual town hall meetings, recorded video messages, and wrote Op Eds for local newspapers aimed at overseas voters. In fact, when posts capitalized on the power of principal officers, more attention was generated than with other voting programming.

Standard operating procedures were developed for receiving and scanning voting materials for shipment via diplomatic pouch. The U.S. Consular or mailroom staff emptied the ballot boxes daily and increased the frequency of pouch shipments in the weeks leading up to the election.

Given space constraints and COVID-related restrictions, consular sections had to balance admitting visitors for regular consular services and for ballot drop off. Despite these restrictions, posts processed nearly 50,000 ballots which was three times the amount processed in the 2016 General Election.

Additionally, voting teams regularly tweeted or sent messages about upcoming deadlines. This resulted in a sense of urgency from the voting public and prompted an increase in inquiries and ballot drop-offs, as nearly 10 percent of the total number of voting questions from U.S. citizens focused on how to submit a ballot during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In providing assistance to voters in 2020, State Department's voting program found that communicating voting procedures as early as possible helped to mitigate last minute voting questions and concerns. Outreach for the election began in July 2020 and maintained a consistent stream of messages across a variety of sources leading up to the election. Consular sections learned to anticipate and have answers to common questions ready in advance.⁴¹



The U.S. Embassy in Mongolia produced a creative video about absentee voting and upcoming election deadlines for overseas citizens. The video received 4,600 views on Facebook.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State, After Action Report

Collection and Delivery of Ballots for Overseas Uniformed Services Voters

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and the DoD Military Postal Service (MPS) facilitate the delivery of election materials between overseas military voters and election offices. Pursuant to section 20304 of Title 52, U.S.C., the USPS and the MPS provide expedited mail delivery service for overseas Uniformed Services voters' absentee ballots in general elections, which are processed before other classes of mail.

For the 2020 General Election, the average transit time of voted ballots from the absentee voter to election offices was 5.8 working days or 7.1 calendar days.

Procedures for Handling Overseas Military Ballots

Details regarding inbound ballots during the 2020 General Election are described below:

Inbound blank absentee ballots from election offices are initially sorted at a USPS International Service Center prior to dispatching them to overseas military postal activities. Military postal clerks process and deliver ballots through individual mail boxes or unit delivery. For ballots that cannot be delivered as addressed:

- A directory clerk attempts to locate addressees via change-of-address cards on file, local personnel management systems, or global address listings.
- If a new address is found, the absentee ballot is then dispatched (forwarded) and delivered to the current address on file, either overseas or domestic.
- If no new address information is found, the absentee ballot is returned to the election official marked "undeliverable as addressed" (UAA).

Ballots Collected and Delivered to Overseas Uniformed Services

Between September 1, 2019 and January 11, 2020, the MPS postmarked and dispatched 59,904 voted absentee ballots from military voters to election offices using Priority Mail Express Military Service. The average transit time of ballots to election offices was 5.8 days. Military Post Offices (MPOs) received 3,625 non-voted ballots (12.3 percent) that were UAA from election



Seaman assists a customer in the Fleet Industrial Supply Center Yokosuka Post Office at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka in 2010

offices. This percentage is an increase of 5.3 percent over the previous Presidential election cycle (7 percent). MPOs redirected 2,052 ballots to current addresses while 1,573 were returned to sender. The UAA ballots may be attributed to two key factors:

- Election offices did not validate current addresses of voters.
- Absentee voters did not update mailing addresses with election offices.

The top five states with the highest number of redirected ballots, were due to Permanent Change of Station of personnel or personnel returned to the U.S.: California (514), Washington (368), Florida (314), Texas (93), and New York and Nevada (74). The top five states with the highest number of ballots returned to sender were primarily due to Attempted Not Known: California (839), Washington (511), Florida (489), Nevada (216), and Virginia (144).

Expediting and Tracking Overseas Uniformed Services Ballots

Section 20304 of Title 52, U.S.C., requires expedited mail delivery service for marked absentee ballots of overseas military personnel (inclusive of eligible family members residing overseas), in Federal general elections. The voted ballots of overseas military members were processed using the Express Mail Service Label 11-DoD. Upon receipt from the military voter, Military Postal Clerks applied the label to each ballot, ensuring expedited delivery to the election office. The label provides voters and the MPS the ability to track ballots from acceptance through delivery. Ballots are first scanned in at the initial intake point. They are then scanned in upon arrival at the U.S. International Gateways of Chicago, New York, San Francisco, or Miami. Then finally, they are scanned in again by USPS demonstrating delivery at the election office address.

USPS and the MPS continue to build from efforts in 2014 to modernize military mail systems and now provide a proactive way to encourage military members to update their mailing address with election offices. In the past, the MPS may have had a separate listing of address changes that would result in delays as ballots were sent overseas before being redirected. Now, when standard-sized ballot envelopes are processed through USPS, the integration of the MPS and USPS address-change information will process a ballot for forwarding before transmitting it overseas.



USMC military post office at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in California.

State and local election officials often use USPS Address Information System Services and information from the National Change of Address (NCOA) database to conduct maintenance on lists of registered voters. In the past, these excluded overseas/APO and FPO address changes. The new system consolidated all address change information for MPO addresses into the overall NCOA list maintenance service – meaning that local election officials can now leverage one source of data for the most current address information registered with either USPS or the MPS. These services assist with ensuring the most recent address information is reflected on absentee balloting records and lowers the number of UAA ballots.

The 2020 General Election Cycle was the first election cycle to authorize the use of the Label 11-DoD for DoD personnel assigned to State Department missions. A total of 260 embassies and consulates were offered labels while 86 locations refused citing that they lacked DoD personnel or the DoD personnel had access to alternative services.

Election Official Engagement

FVAP works with states to raise awareness of their responsibilities under *UOCAVA*, providing election officials information about the challenges of voting while serving in the military or living overseas, and giving election officials additional information and tools to assist eligible voters. This section provides information regarding FVAP's state and local relations program, cooperative agreement with the Council of State Governments (CSG), and FVAP's combined efforts with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) in regards to the Election Administration Voting Survey (EAVS) Section B.

Use of FVAP Support and Products

In 2020, FVAP reinforced its commitment to serve as a critical information source for policymakers through its state and local relations program. FVAP fostered and strengthened relationships with state and local government officials to identify and assess areas for improvement to the *UOCAVA* absentee voting process.

To support its mission, FVAP tracks and researches policy and state legislative developments that may have implications for military and overseas voters. FVAP also provides policy-related products to the states. According to FVAP's customer service survey, the Post-Election Voting Survey for State Election Officials

(PEVS-SEO), state election officials (SEOs) indicated that they found FVAP’s policy-related products useful. FVAP is continuing its work with state and local stakeholders and plans to release additional policy research.

In addition to assessing the usefulness of FVAP’s policy-related products, the PEVS-SEO is also used to evaluate FVAP’s effectiveness in serving election officials, shaping future products and services, addressing state ballot and registration issues, and clarifying its understanding of state policies. Of the SEOs who reported using FVAP products or services, the vast majority indicated that they were satisfied with the resources. Satisfaction ratings of FVAP products and services ranged from 63 percent to 93 percent.⁴²

- FVAP.gov: 90 percent satisfied
- FVAP Staff Support: 93 percent satisfied
- Address Look-up Service: 63 percent satisfied
- Online Training: 71 percent satisfied

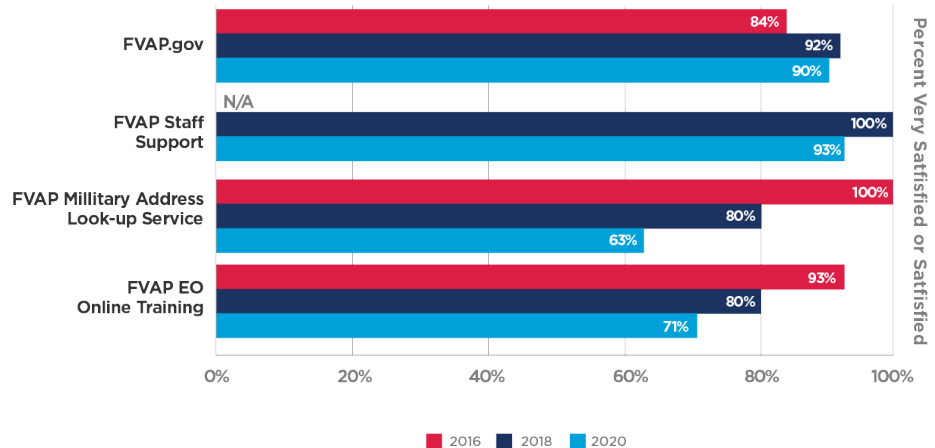


Figure 28. Percent of SEOs that were very satisfied or satisfied with FVAP products and services

Eighty-four percent of SEOs indicated that they referred FVAP.gov to local election officials (LEOs) in 2020, which was slightly more than the 82 percent who reported doing so in 2018.⁴³

⁴² 2020 PEVS-SEO, Q.2

⁴³ 2020 PEVS-SEO, Q.3

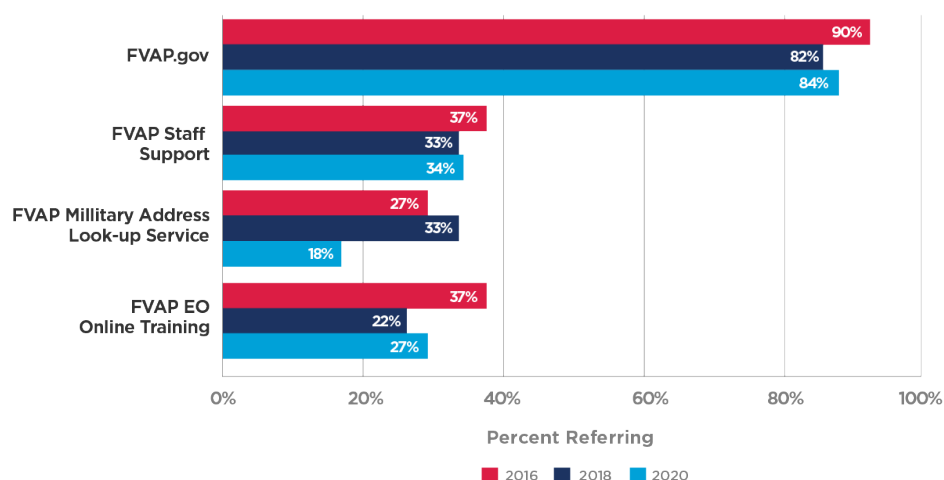


Figure 29. Percent of SEOs that referred local election officials (LEO) to the following FVAP products or services

FVAP will review findings from this feedback from election officials to refine its approach and expand more direct outreach to local election officials to highlight existing products and services available to them. This is especially important for assisting election officials who attempt to train new personnel on the complexities of conducting elections in the United States and their specific responsibilities. FVAP will continue to leverage its direct relationship with state election officials on matters of policy, but the increasing demand placed upon state election officials requires a different tactic from FVAP to support the greater election community.

Ensuring UOCAVA Protections

Voters covered by UOCAVA are entitled to certain protections that states do not have to extend to their other voters. For example, states must allow UOCAVA voters to use the FPCA to register to vote and request a ballot and use the FWAB as a backup ballot if their state ballot does not arrive in time provided the voter's initial application was timely. In addition, states must transmit ballots to UOCAVA voters at least 45 days before Federal elections and must offer electronic transmission of voting information and blank ballots. Based on the 2020 PEVS-SEO data, some states do not recognize UOCAVA protections for voters who do not use the FPCA. This finding underscores the importance of FVAP activities to distribute and promote the FPCA as the one universal national form for UOCAVA voters to use to ensure they receive the UOCAVA protections to which they are entitled.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ 2020 PEVS-SEO Q. 20

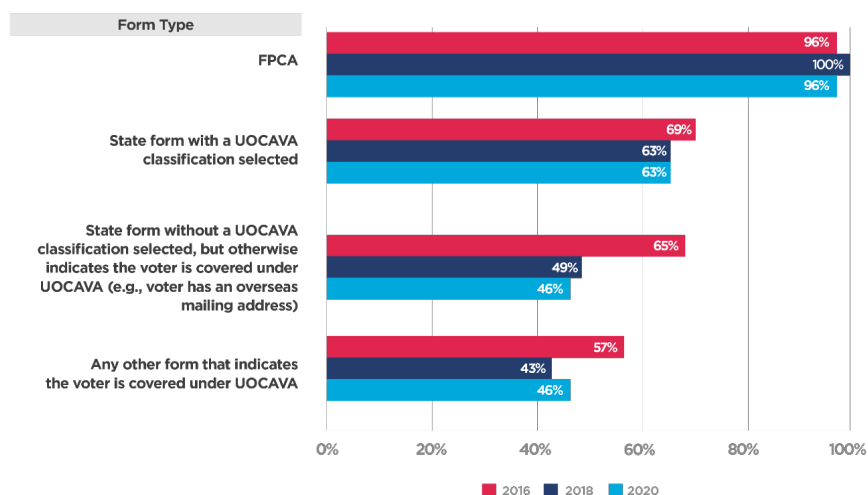


Figure 30, Percentage of states that grant UOCAVA protections to UOCAVA voters if they use one of these ballot request forms.

Election Administration Voting Survey Section B Analysis

In 2016, FVAP and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) combined data collection efforts at the Federal level to survey election officials to obtain the total number of *UOCAVA* ballots transmitted, received, and counted after each Federal general election.⁴⁵ The EAC's Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) collects data from approximately 6,500 local election jurisdictions on a wide variety of election administration topics, including *UOCAVA*.

According to the EAVS, election offices reported receiving 764,691 FPCAs ahead of the 2020 elections. In 2020, 30.3 percent came from Uniformed Service members,⁴⁶ and 66.9 percent were submitted by overseas citizens. Overall, only 2.7 percent of FPCAs requesting registration or an absentee ballot for the 2020 elections were rejected – 15.2 percent of these were rejected because the election office received the form after the state's absentee ballot request deadline.⁴⁷ The FPCA rejection rate among Uniformed Service members was slightly higher than among overseas citizens, with 3.3 percent of Uniformed Service members FPCAs rejected as compared to 2.3 percent of FPCAs submitted by overseas citizens.

⁴⁵ EAC, 2016 Election Administration Voting Survey https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/2016_EAVS_Comprehensive_Report.pdf

⁴⁶ Per the EAVS instructions, Uniformed Service members include both ADM and their eligible family members

⁴⁷ Percentages at the national level were calculated using case wise missing data deletion at the state level. Only states that had data for both the numerator and denominator for a calculation were included when reporting percentages at the national level. Responses of "does not apply," "data not available," and "valid skip" were considered as missing for purposes of creating these calculations. Case wise deletion has been used in the analysis for this report to avoid overinflating the denominator of the calculations.

General Election Year	2016 ⁴⁸	2018	2020
FPCAs Received	432,208⁴⁹	312,437	764,691
FPCAs Rejected	15,933	6,342	19,854
FPCAs Rejected (%)	3.70%	2.30%	2.70%

Table 8. FPCAs received and rejected for 2016, 2018, and 2020.

UOCAVA voters can use an FPCA to register and request their ballot or they can use an application authorized by their state. Therefore, the total number of FPCAs received during an election cycle will always be less than the total number of blank ballots that election officials transmit to UOCAVA voters.

For the 2020 November General Election there were 1,249,601 UOCAVA ballots transmitted to voters from election officials. Election officials received 913,734 voted ballots issued by states, and 33,027 FWABs. Out of these ballots, 913,734 were counted (889,837 ballots and 23,897 FWABs), and 19,060 ballots and 8,438 FWABs were rejected.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ In 2016, the EAC used imputed data, whereas in 2018 and 2020 it did not. Therefore, the 2016 data is not an exact comparison with the data from 2018 or 2020. FVAP 2016 Post-Election Report to Congress pg. 18. https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Reports/FVAP2016Report_20170731_final.pdf

⁴⁹ This imputed number for FPCAs received also includes an "other" category. This is why the total FPCAs received does not equal the total number of ADM and overseas citizens found in FVAP's 2016 Report to Congress.

⁵⁰ The rejection of ballots and FWABs are not combined as one of the main reasons for FWAB rejections is that the election official received the official ballot after they received the FWAB. In this situation, the election official would typically count the official ballot and reject the FWAB in order to ensure that only one ballot is counted in the election.

General Election Year	2016 ⁵¹	2018	2020
Regular absentee ballots transmitted	950,836	655,409	1,249,601
Regular absentee ballots Received (Returned)	623,577	344,392	911,614
Regular absentee ballots Counted	N/A ⁵²	388,271	889,837
Regular absentee ballots Rejected	15,692	19,328	19,060
Regular absentee ballots Rejected (%)	3% ⁵³	5.60%	2.10%
FWABs Received	18,117	7,284	33,027
FWABs Counted	24,313	5,016	23,897
FWABs Rejected	4,197	1,208	8,438
FWABs Rejected (%)	17%	16.60%	25.60%
Total Counted (Both Regular absentee ballots and FWABs)	671,243	393,287	913,734
Total Median Rejection Rate (Both regular absentee ballots and FWABs)	N/A ⁵⁴	2.80%	1.70%

Table 9. Ballots transmitted, ballots and FWABs received, counted, rejected for the November General Elections in 2016, 2018, and 2020.

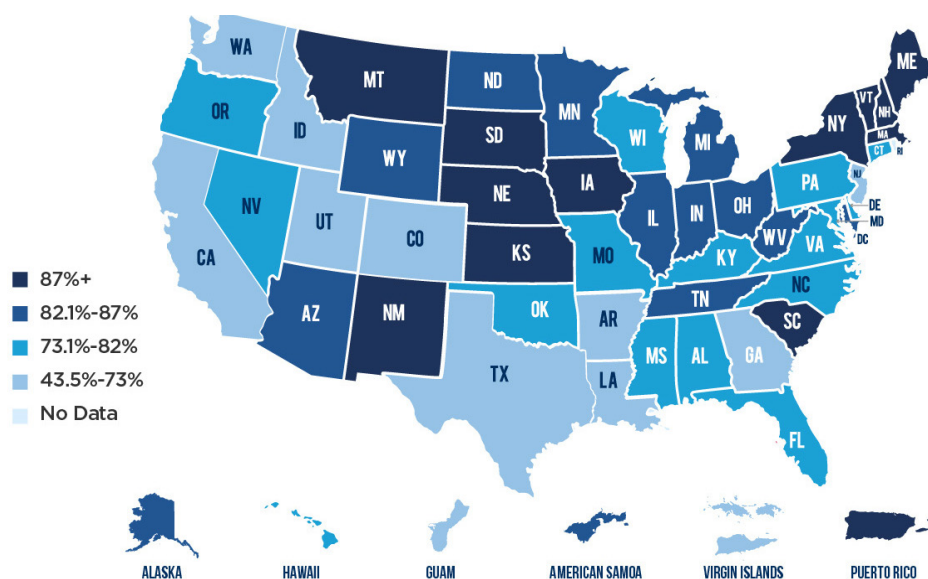
Data collected at the state level on *UOCAVA* ballots returned and rejected is shown in Figures 31 and 32. Figure 31 shows *UOCAVA* ballots returned as a percentage of total ballots transmitted. The map classifies states into four groups based on relative percentage of ballots returned.

⁵¹ 2020 Post-Election Report to Congress and LEO-Quant Tech Report https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/2020_EAVS_Report_Final_508c.pdf.

⁵² The imputed ballots counted number includes both regular absentee ballots and FWABs and is not available for regular absentee ballots, by themselves. Question B30 in the 2020 EAVS asked for regular absentee ballots counted to be divided by mode and transmission date. However, due to substantial missingness in this (since removed) grid question, the resulting total is an improbable 392,662 regular absentee ballots counted.

⁵³ FVAP's 2016 Report to Congress, page 19 https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Reports/FVAP2016Report_20170731_final.pdf

⁵⁴ In 2016, the imputed total rejection rate that was calculated excluded FWABs. Since imputed numbers were used in 2016, the total rejection rate cannot be calculated by simply dividing the total number rejected by the total number returned.



Ballot Return Rate = Ballots Returned (including FWABs)/Ballots Transmitted
Median Ballot Return Rate = 82.3%

Figure 31. UOCAVA ballots returned as a percentage of total ballots transmitted.⁵⁵

The overall median rejection rate for ballots received from UOCAVA voters was 1.7 percent. Missing the deadline was the most common reason for rejection among both at rates of 44.7 percent for Uniformed Service members and 41.3 percent for overseas civilians. Signature issues were the cause of 27.3 percent of ballot rejections for ballots returned by Uniformed Service members, which is almost twice the percentage of overseas civilian ballots rejected for this reason which is at 13.7 percent.⁵⁶ FVAP will continue to assess the rate of rejection based on signature issues to better understand the reasons and any efforts that can be undertaken to reduce the frequency. Figure 32 shows UOCAVA ballots rejected with states classified into four groups based on relative percentage of ballots rejected.

The overall rejection rates reported also include FWABs that were rejected due to the return of an official state ballot. FVAP stresses the importance of using the FWAB as a backup ballot in case the official state ballot does not arrive 30 days prior to the election. Inevitably, this may lead to an overstated rejection rate when voters return both ballots and the FWAB is rejected to ensure only one ballot is counted in the election. High rejection rates for the FWAB are expected given its backup

⁵⁵ Map not to scale.

⁵⁶ The percentage of ballots rejected for missing the deadline is calculated using question B19b/B18b in the 2020 EAVS for uniformed services voters and B19c/B18c for overseas civilians. The percentage of ballots rejected because of signature issues is calculated as B20b/B18b for uniformed services voters and B20c/B18c for overseas civilians. Case wise deletion was used at the state level in calculating these percentages.

role. However, this is likely another area where voter confusion is a contributing factor. For example, some states require a potential FWAB user to submit a ballot application 30 days prior to the election to gain eligibility to use the FWAB, mirroring the state-prescribed deadline for voter registration, which is the minimum requirement under Federal law. As detailed in the section titled “Assessment of FVAP Activities,” FVAP will continue to improve voter comprehension of the form’s proper usage and adherence to state requirements for acceptance.

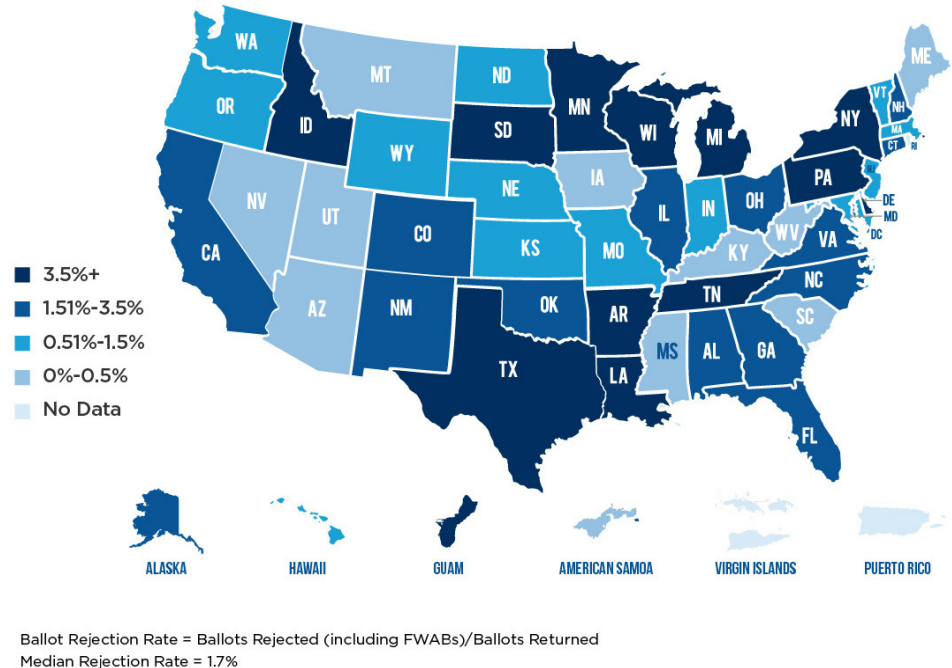


Figure 32. UOCAVA ballots rejected as a percentage of ballots returned.⁵⁷

ESB Data Standard Information Collection

Since 2015, 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 to not only provide a deeper level of analysis, but reduce the burden post-election data reporting for election officials when completing Section B of the Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS). This standardized format is called the EAVS Section B Data Standard or ESB Data Standard. The EAC's EAVS Section B provides aggregate information at the jurisdictional level, but does not effectively the impact of Congressional amendments to *UOCAVA* passed in 2009. Specifically, the ESB Data Standard attempts to assess the impact of the 45-day transmission of ballots and the impact

⁵⁷ Map not to scale.

of electronic blank ballot delivery options on the overall success for voters to cast ballots under provisions outlined in *UOCAVA*. Where utilized, the ESB Data Standard gathers data on how and when voting transactions (e.g., voter registration, ballot request, ballot transmission, and ballot receipt) occur and ultimately whether a ballot was returned and accepted for counting without collecting personal information on voters.

Unlike traditional survey-based or aggregate data sets like those produced within the EAVS, transactional data can better identify the potential challenges encountered in the absentee voting process. For the 2020 ESB Data Standard information collection, there were 18 participants, which included 11 states and seven local jurisdictions, up from 14 participants in 2018. Even though not all states and jurisdictions contributed to this data, the 2020 participants represent approximately 40 percent of the *UOCAVA* voting population. Therefore, this data can be regarded as useful for analyzing and assessing the *UOCAVA* absentee voting process, but the overall observations remain limited to the participating jurisdictions and should not be generalized to the overall total *UOCAVA* voting population. As implementation of the ESB Data Standard grows and continues to demonstrate its value, FVAP will be able to reduce the overall reporting burden for the states while still answering key research questions specifically tailored to assess drivers of success for *UOCAVA* voters.

The ESB Data Standard and supporting analysis is intended to illustrate the impact of the *UOCAVA* by answering the following research questions:

- What factors are associated with successfully completing the *UOCAVA* voting process (i.e., having a vote counted)?
- How does the timing and method of ballot requests influence the likelihood of absentee ballot return?
- What is the impact of electronic blank ballot delivery options on the military or overseas citizen voting experience?

Although there are options available at each phase, the *UOCAVA* absentee voting process can be broken down into three basic steps: voter registration/ballot request, blank ballot transmission, and voted ballot return (a voted ballot is processed by the election office, and is either counted or rejected based on procedural requirements).

However, the likelihood of successfully completing the process

and the obstacles faced may vary depending on the individual’s environment (e.g., infrastructure and conditions in host country).

Comparing the 2020 ESB Data Standard and EAVS data

The ESB Data Standard is intended to support the ability for states to eventually export a file to meet reporting requirements under Federal law. FVAP assessed the relative alignment between 2020 EAVS-reported data with data from ESB reporting jurisdictions to determine the relative strength of the ESB standard as a single administrative data source. As shown in Figure 33, the reporting for the ESB Data Standard is similar to that of the EAVS for most states and jurisdictions, however some discrepancies exist. The figure shows the reported UOCAVA ballot return rates for both the ESB Data Standard and the EAVS for those states and jurisdictions that participated in the 2020 ESB Data Standard. As the implementation of the ESB Data Standard continues to grow and the number of participants increases, we can anticipate the reporting of more complete data.

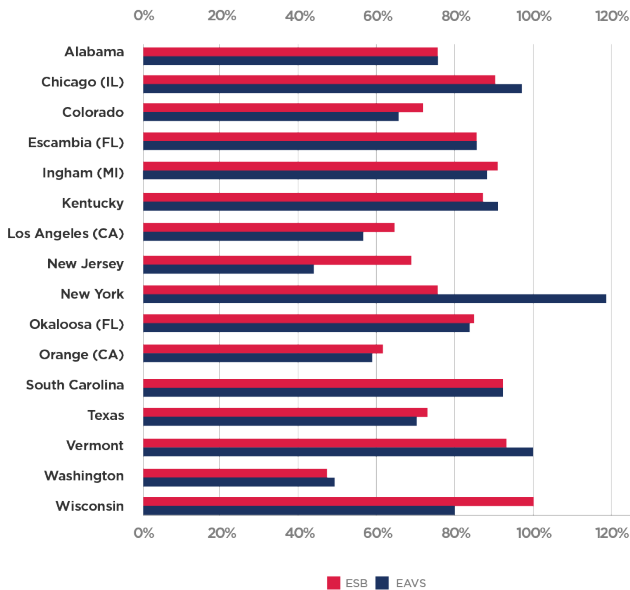


Figure 33. UOCAVA Ballot return rate comparison between the ESB Data Standard and the EAVS for participating states and jurisdictions. Please note that the state of New York reported in EAVS that their results may reflect UOCAVA voters returning FWABs.

⁵⁸ The return rate for EAVS is calculated as the total regular UOCAVA ballots returned (item B9a) divided by the total regular UOCAVA ballots transmitted (item B5a)—FWABs were not included in this calculation. The return rate for ESB is calculated as the total non-FWAB ballots returned (i.e., those ballots that had both a date and a mode linked to the ballot transmission and return information) divided by the total non-FWAB ballots transmitted (i.e., those ballots that had both a date and a mode linked to the ballot transmission information).

⁵⁹ The state of Pennsylvania and the jurisdiction of Richmond (GA) were excluded from the graph due to high levels of missingness in data related to ballot return (over 80% of all observations had missing data in the fields of ballot return date or ballot return mode). The high missingness made it impossible to calculate a reliable return rate for these two ESB participants.

⁶⁰ The state of New York shows an unlikely return rate as calculated with EAVS data. This state reported in EAVS that their results may reflect the fact that many UOCAVA voters returned more than one ballot (e.g., if a voter had electronic access to their ballot “they could potentially download and print the documents more than once and subsequently return them to the county boards.” Additionally, “some county boards mail a ballot to every UOCAVA voter regardless of their transmission preference” so they may return a ballot that was obtained

Since the ESB Standards remains in its early stages of implementation, FVAP will continue to work through the Overseas Voting Initiative to assist reporting jurisdictions with understanding how the ESB Standard can support as the single administrative data file to meet their overall reporting burden.

Ballot Requests: Impact of FPCA

Data reported by ESB Data Standard participating states and jurisdictions since 2016 shows that ballots requested using the FPCA are associated with higher return rates when compared to ballots requested using state absentee ballot applications, regardless of when the ballot was requested. This finding, shown in Figure 34, demonstrates the importance of FVAP activities to distribute and promote the FPCA as the universal form to ensure protections are in place for UOCAVA absentee voters. Election offices are also required to transmit requested absentee ballots by the 45th day before all federal elections within the same calendar year, and voters can request to receive their blank ballot electronically.

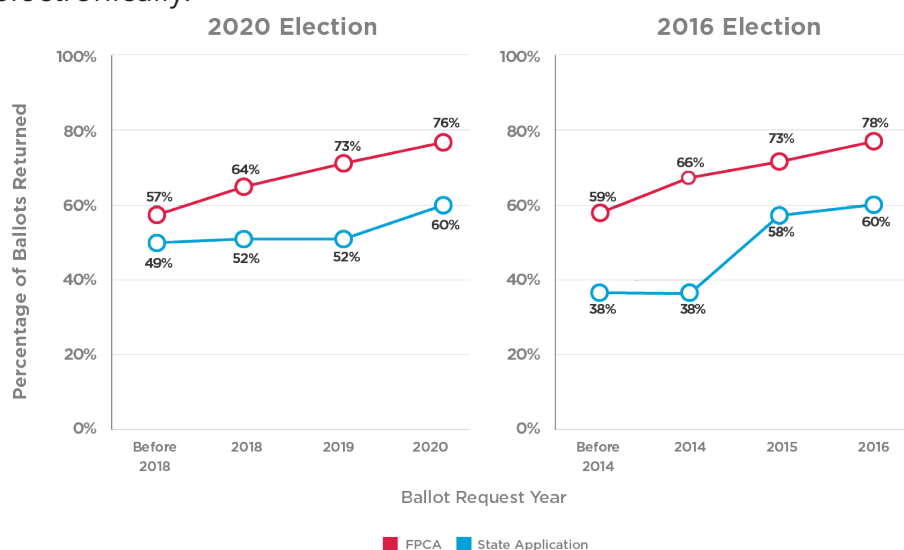


Figure 34. ESB Data Standard Reported Ballots requested using an FPCA were returned at higher rates than state applications regardless of the Request Year.⁶¹

electronically as well as the one that was mailed).

⁶¹ The state of Alabama, Escambia County (FL), Orange County (CA), and Richmond County (GA) are not included in calculations. They reported “untracked” ballot request type for all observations. This comparison graph uses only data from states and jurisdictions that completed ESB in 2016 and 2020. The states and jurisdictions included are: Colorado, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Washington, Wisconsin, Bexar County (TX), Los Angeles County (CA), Okaloosa County (FL), and Orange County (CA). New Jersey and Los Angeles County (CA) reported unlikely return rates higher 95 percent in 2016 and were excluded from the 2016 analysis. Orange County (CA) is not represented in the 2020 graphic because they reported ballot request type as “untracked” for all observations. The graphs exclude observations with ballot requests dated after Election Day, as well as observations that were rejected due to any of the following reasons: Undeliverable, Voided/ Spoiled, Voted in Person, and Voter Died.

As shown in Table 10, ADM were more likely to use a state application to request an absentee ballot; whereas, overseas citizens were more likely to use the FPCA. Table 11 shows the majority of the ballot requests that came in during 2020 were in the form of an FPCA. While the majority of ballot requests that were filed before 2020 were in the form of a state application. ADM submitted over four times more state applications as FPCAs, while most of the FPCAs reported by ESB participants came from overseas citizens.

	ADM	Overseas Citizens
FPCAs	23,219 (16.9%)	135,476 (60.6%)
State Applications	114,488 (83.1%)	88,133 (39.4%)
Total	137,707	223,609

Table 10. ESB Data Standard Reported Use of FPCAs and state applications by population for the 2020 General Election.⁶²

	2020	2019	2018	Pre-2018
FPCAs	203,827 (69.2%)	11,031 (39.3%)	9,250 (32.7%)	24,326 (24.3%)
State Applications	90,856 (30.8%)	17,021 (60.7%)	19,039 (67.3%)	75,846 (75.7%)
Total	294,683	28,052	28,289	100,174

Table 11. ESB Data Standard Reported Year of ballot request for FPCAs and state applications.⁶³

Ballots requested using a state application were more likely to be returned undeliverable than when requested using an FPCA. In 2020, only 0.07 percent of ballots requested by an FPCA resulted in an undeliverable ballot in ESB Data Standard jurisdictions, whereas the undeliverable ballot rate for those requested by state application was 0.27 percent. For both application types, undeliverable ballots were more common when the ballot request was received in years before the election. This data supports FVAP's recommendation that *UOCAVA* voters use the FPCA to register to vote and request an absentee ballot, submit an 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*.

⁶² The state of Alabama, Escambia County (FL), Orange County (CA), and Richmond County (GA) are not included in calculations. They reported "Untracked" ballot request type for all observations. The states of Texas and Kentucky and the city of Chicago (IL), are not included in analyses that report data only for ADM or overseas citizens, since they did not report the voter type in their data.

⁶³ The state of Alabama, Escambia County (FL), Orange County (CA), and Richmond County (GA) are not included in calculations. They reported "Untracked" ballot request type for all observations.

In 2020, electronic ballot requests in ESB Data Standard jurisdictions were more frequent than mail ballot requests for both ADM and overseas citizens. Figure 35 shows that around mid-August both methods had a notable increase in the number of ballot requests received. When comparing Figure 36 with Figure 35 it can be seen that in 2020 voters relied more on electronic ballot requests than in 2018. This may have been in part caused by the uncertainty around mail and mailing times during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, while in both elections half of the ballot requests had been received 45 days before each election, the increase in the pace of ballots received happened earlier in 2020 than in 2018, suggesting that voters took action earlier in 2020 compared to 2018.

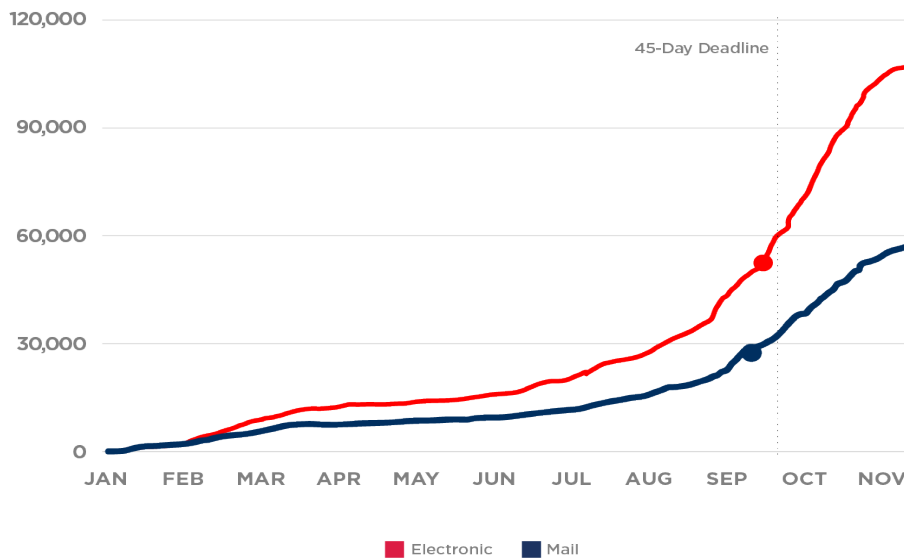


Figure 35. ESB Data Standard Jurisdictions Reported Higher Volume of Electronic Ballot Requests than Mail Ballot Requests in 2020⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The states of Alabama, New York, and Texas, and the jurisdictions of Ingham County (MI) and Orange County (CA), are excluded from analyses for reporting all requests made by mode “untracked.” This graph includes observations with ballot requests dated between January 1st 2020 and Election Day.

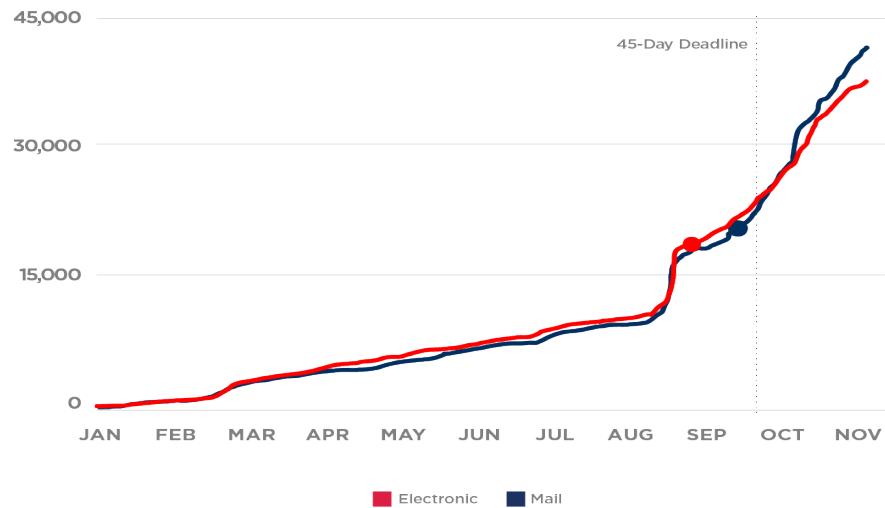


Figure 36. ESB Data Standard Jurisdictions Reported Timing Pattern Similar for Mail and Electronic Requests in 2018⁶⁵

In 2020, UOCAVA voters in ESB Data Standard jurisdictions requested their ballots earlier than they did in 2016. As shown in Figure 37, request timing is very similar for both election periods until March, which coincides with the start of COVID-19 restrictions in 2020. From March until late June, the percentage of ballot requests received was lower in 2020 compared to 2016. In each general election there is usually a point in time where the ballot requests increase significantly. This point is usually around late summer or early fall. However, in 2020 the inflection point occurs around mid-August, almost a month earlier than in 2016. This suggests that UOCAVA voters started the process earlier in 2020 compared to 2016, possibly due to FVAP messaging or expected processing delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁶⁵ The states of Alabama, and Texas are excluded from the graph for reporting all requests made by mode “untracked.” This graph includes observations with ballot requests dated between January 1st 2018 and Election Day.

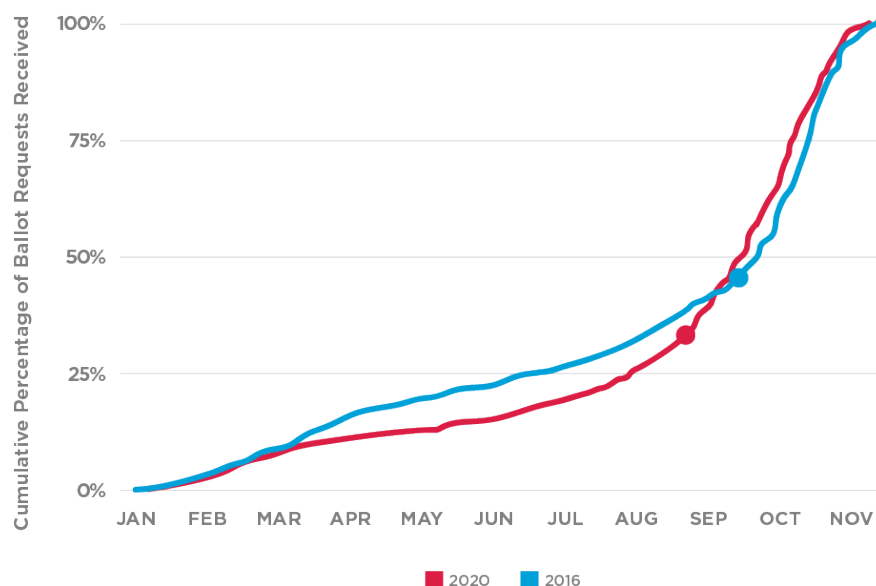


Figure 37. ESB Data Standard States and Jurisdictions Reported UOCAVA Voters Requested Ballots Earlier in 2020 Compared to the 2016 Election⁶⁶

Ballot Transmission Method and Ballot Return Rates

The UOCAVA requires that states provide an option for 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 the states and jurisdictions participating in the 2020 ESB Data Standard, overall, blank absentee ballots transmitted by mail were returned at slightly higher rates than those transmitted electronically. Figure 38 shows that this remained consistent regardless of when a UOCAVA voter requested their ballot.

⁶⁶ This graph uses data from states and jurisdictions that completed ESB in 2016 and 2020. The states and jurisdictions included are: Colorado, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Washington, Wisconsin, Bexar County (TX), Harris County (TX), Los Angeles County (CA), Okaloosa County (FL), and Orange County (CA).

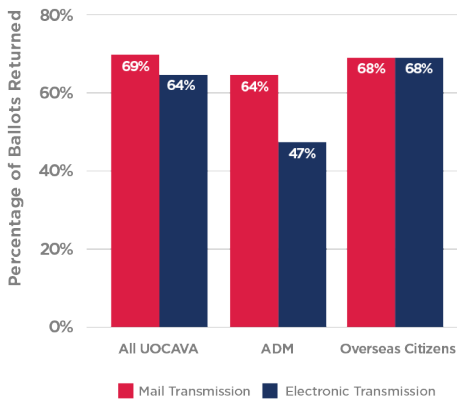


Figure 39. Breakdown between active duty military and overseas citizens for ESB Data Standard Jurisdictions in 2020 comparing the relationship between ballot transmission method and returning a ballot.

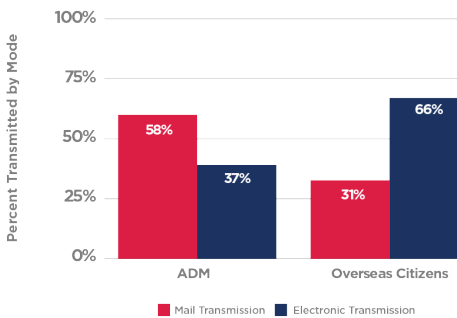


Figure 40. ESB Data Standard Jurisdictions Reported that active duty military members mostly relied on mail ballot transmission, while overseas citizens mostly relied on electronic ballot transmission.⁶⁶

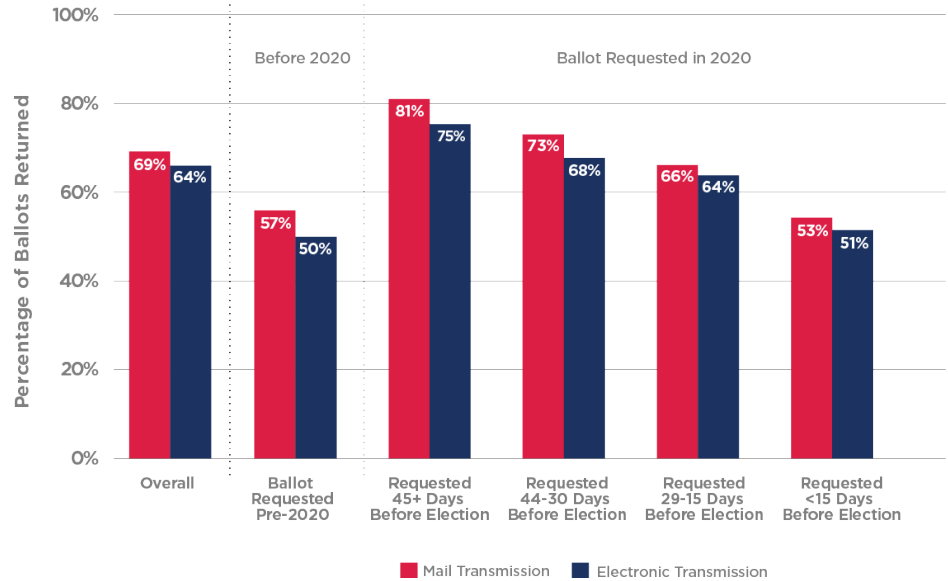


Figure 38. ESB Data Standard Jurisdictions Reported that overall, ballots transmitted in 2020 by mail had better return rates than those submitted electronically regardless of the request date.⁶⁷

Ballots transmitted to ADM by mail were returned at higher rates than those transmitted electronically. However, for overseas citizen voters there was no difference in the ballot return rate regardless of how their blank ballot was transmitted. Figure 39 demonstrates the breakdown between active duty military and overseas citizens when it comes to ballot return in relation to ballot transmission method.

Figure 40 illustrates overseas citizens mostly relied on electronic transmission to receive their blank absentee ballots, while active duty military members mostly relied on mail transmission. These results indicate that offering mail and electronic ballot return options are equally important when it comes to reducing the obstacles that UOCAVA voters might face when returning their ballot.

The importance of the FPCA as the one federal form universally establishing UOCAVA privileges across all states and territories cannot be overstated based on these initial observations from ESB reporting jurisdictions. It is also interesting to note the difference between the active duty population and overseas citizens in terms of their utilization of electronic blank ballot delivery options versus requesting blank ballots by mail.

⁶⁷ The state of Alabama is not included in calculations. They reported “unknown” ballot transmission method for all observations. This graph excludes observations with ballot requests dated after Election Day. It also excludes observations that were rejected due to any of the following reasons: Undeliverable, Voided/Spoiled, Voted in Person, and Voter Died. Electronic transmission includes email, fax and online.

⁶⁸ This graph excludes observations with ballot requests dated after Election Day. Electronic transmission includes email, fax and online.

Ballot Transmission Timing and Ballot Return Rates

The *UOCAVA* requires election officials to send out requested blank ballots to voters at least 45 days before Election Day to provide enough time for these voters to receive, complete, and return their ballots by the state deadline. For the 2020 General Election, 72 percent of ballot requests were filed before the 45-day deadline of September 19 (see Figure 41). Of all the ballots transmitted to *UOCAVA* voters in the ESB reporting jurisdictions, most of them were transmitted by the 45-day deadline. In Figure 41 it can be seen that the ballot return rates were higher for ballots requested during the election year, in particular, among those requested before the 45-day deadline. There was also a steady decline in ballots returned the closer the ballot request date was to Election Day. This data bolsters FVAP's effort to encourage *UOCAVA* voters to request their ballots early.

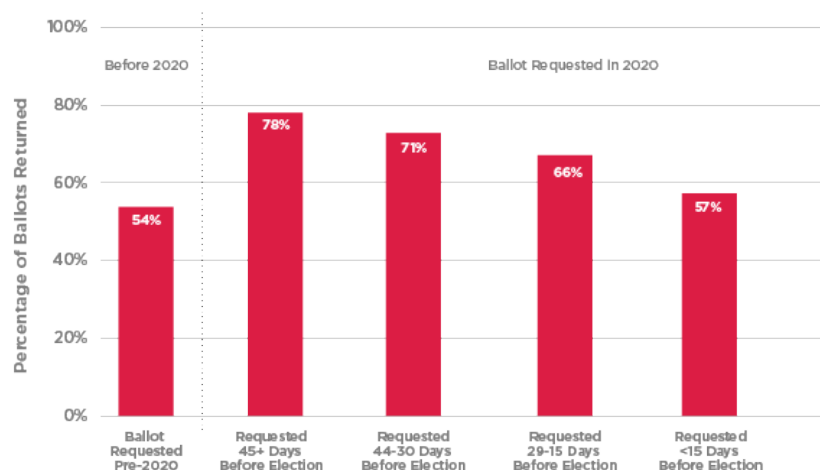


Figure 41. Ballots requested during the election year in ESB Data Standard States and Jurisdictions have higher return rates.⁶⁹

In the 2020 General Election ballots were returned earlier than they were in the 2016 and 2018 General Elections. Figure 42 shows the cumulative percentage of *UOCAVA* ballots received from 45 days before Election Day until 10 days after Election Day for the last three Federal elections. The earlier ballot return in 2020 may be linked to FVAP messaging and voters taking action earlier to ensure that their ballots were not affected by COVID-19-related delays to meet their state's ballot deadline.

⁶⁹ This graph excludes observations with ballot requests dated after Election Day. It also excludes observations that were rejected due to any of the following reasons: Undeliverable, Voided/Spoiled, Voted in Person, and Voter Died.

FAST FACT
*Voters acted earlier
in 2020 compared
to 2016 and 2018*

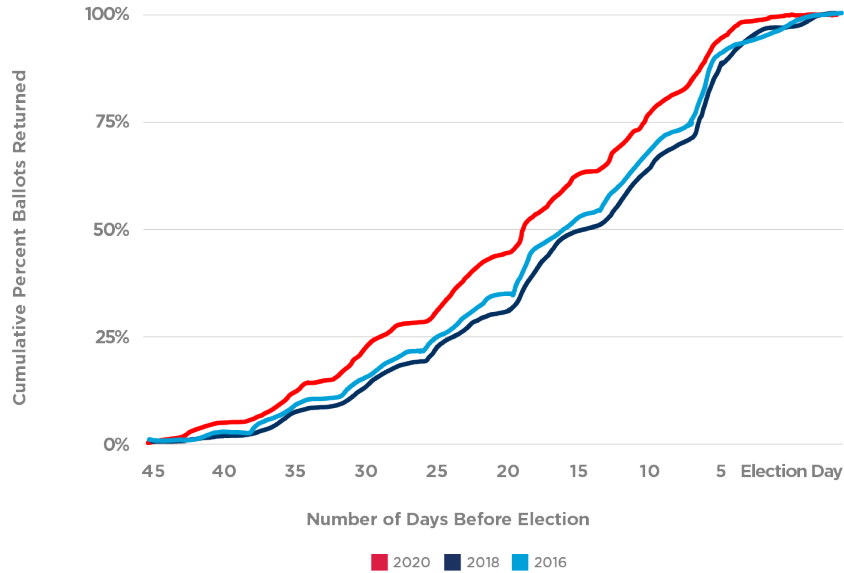


Figure 42. UOCAVA ballots in ESB Data Standard States and Jurisdictions were returned earlier in 2020 than in the 2016 and 2018 elections.⁷⁰

Ballot Return Method

In 2020, the use of electronic ballot return was used consistently more among states that allowed for it. Also, the use of electronic ballot return was not as concentrated in the days before Election Day as in 2018, but showed a constant pattern similar to that of mail ballot returns. Figures 43 and 44 show that in 2020, regardless of the return mode used, the ballot return flow remained steady with fewer spikes closer to election day compared to 2018.

⁷⁰ This graph uses data from states and jurisdictions that completed ESB in 2016, 2018, and 2020. The states and jurisdictions included are: Colorado, New Jersey, New York, South Carolina, Washington, Wisconsin, Bexar County (TX), Los Angeles County (CA), and Orange County (CA).

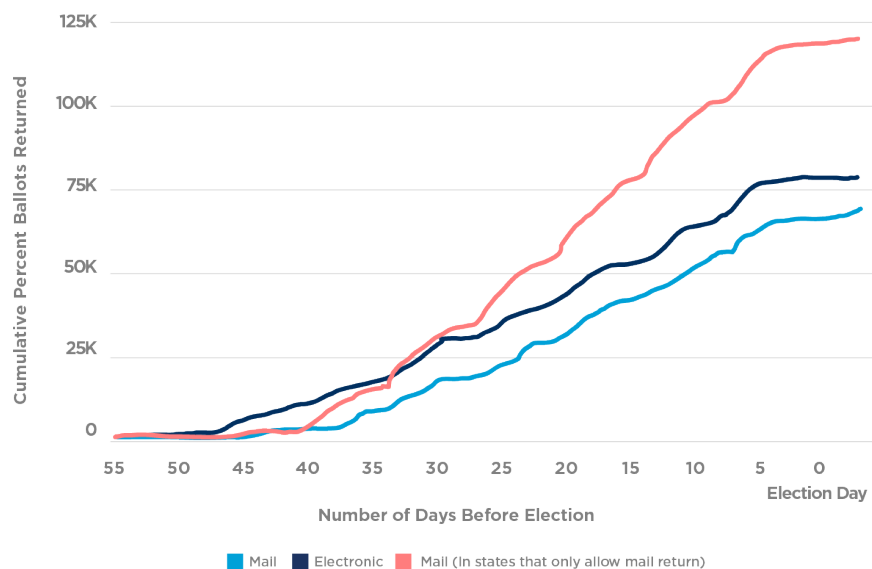


Figure 43. In 2020, electronic ballot return in ESB Data Standard States and Jurisdictions was used more than mail in states allowing electronic return.⁷¹

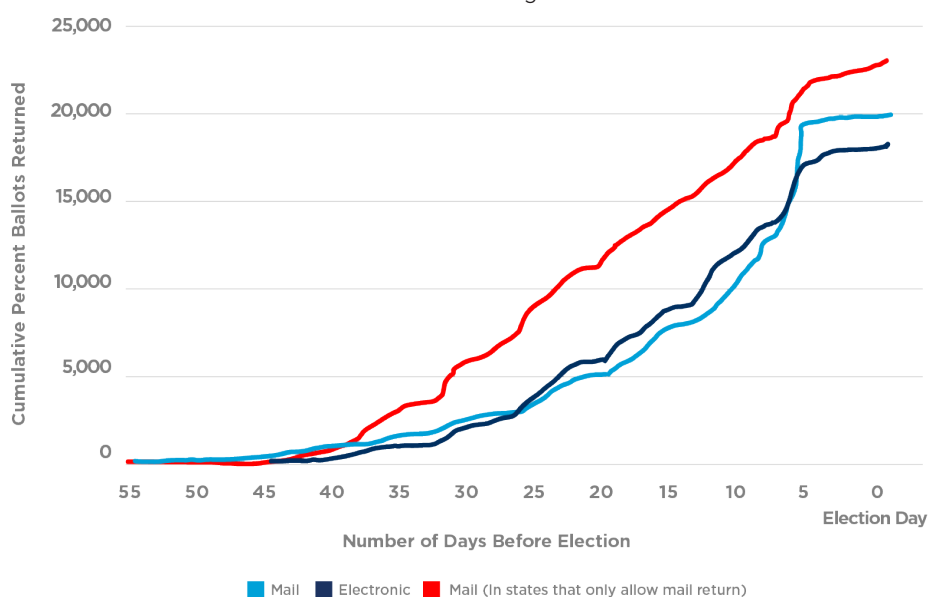


Figure 44. Electronic ballot return in ESB Data Standard States and Jurisdictions spiked close to election day in 2018.⁷²

⁷¹ This graph displays ballots received between September 9, 2020 and November 10, 2020. Policy on methods allowed for ballot return was obtained from FVAPs Voting Assistance Guide (<https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/States/eVAG.pdf>). The state of Kentucky, is not included because they reported the method of ballot return as "Untracked". The jurisdiction of Richmond County (GA) is not included because they did not report the method of ballot return.

⁷² This graph displays ballots received between September 12, 2018 and November 13, 2018. Policy on methods allowed for ballot return was obtained from FVAPs Voting Assistance Guide (<https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/States/eVAG.pdf>). The State of Texas, and the jurisdictions of Ingham County (MI) and Richmond County (GA) are not included because they reported the method of ballot return as "Untracked". The State of Washington is not included because they did not report the method of ballot return.

Ballot Rejection Rates

As seen in Figure 45, the percentage of returned ballots rejected was low no matter which mode had been used to transmit the ballot. However, ADM had higher levels of ballot rejection than overseas citizens for both ballot transmission methods, and particularly for returned ballots that had been transmitted to the voter electronically.

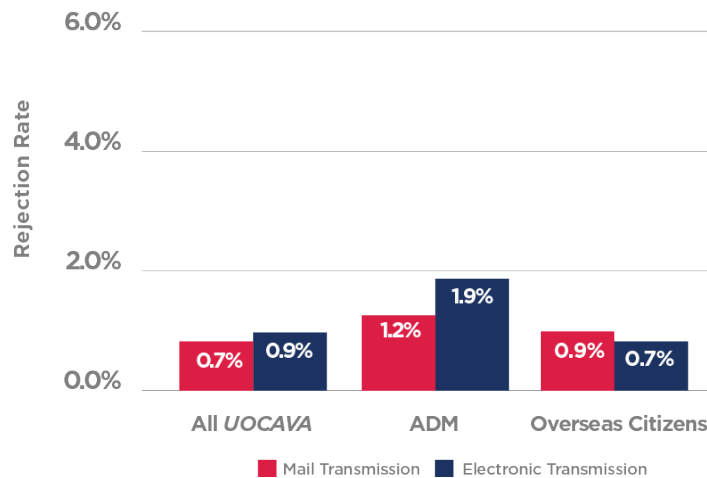


Figure 45. Among voted ballots returned by UOCAVA voters to ESB Data Standard Jurisdictions, those blank ballots transmitted to them electronically had slightly higher rejection rates for ADM compared to ballots transmitted by mail.⁷³

This ESB Data Standard data further demonstrates the importance of the UOCAVA—and states’ adherence to its requirements—in support of the absentee voting process for ADM and overseas citizens. 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 registration data is up-to-date and that they may take advantage of the special protections under UOCAVA. FVAP will continue to work with state and local election officials to expand the implementation of the ESB Data Standard and structure reporting processes from election jurisdictions before recommending changes to Section B of the EAVS.

Cooperative Agreement with the Council of State Governments

In 2018, FVAP entered into a second cooperative agreement with

⁷³ This graph excludes observations with ballot requests dated after Election Day. It also excludes observations that were rejected due to any of the following reasons: Undeliverable, Voided/Spoiled, Voted in Person, and Voter Died. Electronic transmission includes email, fax and online. The group “All UOCAVA” includes observations that do not specify if the voter was ADM or overseas citizen.

The Council of State Governments (CSG), which continues the work of the Overseas Voting Initiative (OVI). The collaboration aims to improve the voting process for *UOCAVA* voters by providing direct interaction with leading state and local election officials best positioned to share best practices and identify emerging trends. This initiative is critical for FVAP to further engage stakeholders in state and local government to explore innovative areas in which FVAP can aid election administrators and improve the connection between *UOCAVA* voters and their election office through the sharing of best practices.

The OVI Working Group consists of over 20 state and local election officials and is chaired by bipartisan Secretaries of State, Secretary Kim Wyman (R-WA) and Secretary James Condos (D-VT). The OVI Working Group continues to focus on the standardization of *UOCAVA* administrative data to reduce the post-election reporting burden for state and local election officials, and the sustainability of *UOCAVA* balloting solutions especially in the area of online ballot marking since this represents a niche product offering. Throughout 2020, the OVI Working Group addressed the need for contingency planning in response to international mail disruptions affecting overseas voters due to COVID-19 restrictions. Several key outputs emerged from these meetings:

- The Sustainability of *UOCAVA* Balloting Systems Report: An overview of many of the most pressing issues faced by election administrators servicing *UOCAVA* voters and an exploration of potential solutions.
- The Failsafe Task Force Recommendations: A list of options for election policymakers and administrators to overcome issues surrounding mail in voting for overseas citizens amid COVID-19 mail disruptions. The OVI task force members were invited by the EAC to speak about this report as part of a panel discussion on *UOCAVA* voting in the 2020 election.
- Montana Senate Bill 124: OVI provided assistance to Montana on the passage of a law allowing Service members to use common access card (CAC) digital signature capabilities to facilitate document signing in election correspondence. This work led OVI to provide assistance and information to several states considering similar legislation. This legislation was presented to a group of state legislators from many states at the 2019 CSG National Conference in Puerto Rico.

- A spotlight on the OVI's work on CAC legislation with Montana was published in the fifth issue of the CSG publication, Capitol Ideas, in 2019. The OVI convened jointly with the CSG national conference in 2019, which was widely attended by state legislators, governors, their staff, and other key state policy makers. This session highlighted the work in Montana with the bill's sponsor presenting on the significance of the bill and the support she and her team received from FVAP and the OVI.
- Ballot Duplication: OVI issued a series of online articles dispelling myths about ballot duplication that received over 30,000 online views and was featured on the "#PROTECT2020 RUMOR VS. REALITY" page of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (an operational component under the Department of Homeland Security).⁷⁴
- Data Standardization and Collection: OVI is working to develop a standard format for states to use to report anonymized transactions with *UOCAVA* voters. OVI collected transactional level data from the states and worked with member jurisdictions to refine the data standard to be more inclusive of all voting models and provide better data to assess the impact of Congressional reforms enacted in 2009.

Moving forward, FVAP will integrate the data standard into longer term reporting and analysis to better isolate the impact of reforms put into place as a result of the 2009 amendments to *UOCAVA*. Specifically, this data standard and subsequent analysis will isolate the impacts of voters engaging early in the absentee voting process, the federally mandated 45-day blank ballot transmission requirements, and electronic modes of delivering blank ballots to *UOCAVA* voters.

State Waiver Requests

No undue hardship waiver requests were submitted to the Department of Defense in 2020 by states indicating the inability to meet the 45-day required blank ballot transmission codified in *UOCAVA*.

⁷⁴ www.cisa.gov/rumorcontrol.

Assessment of FVAP Activities

In fulfilling DoD's responsibilities under the law, FVAP is committed to promoting awareness of the right to vote and working to eliminate real or perceived barriers for those who choose to exercise that right. In its 2018 Post-Election Report to Congress, FVAP recommended three areas for action to improve its effectiveness:

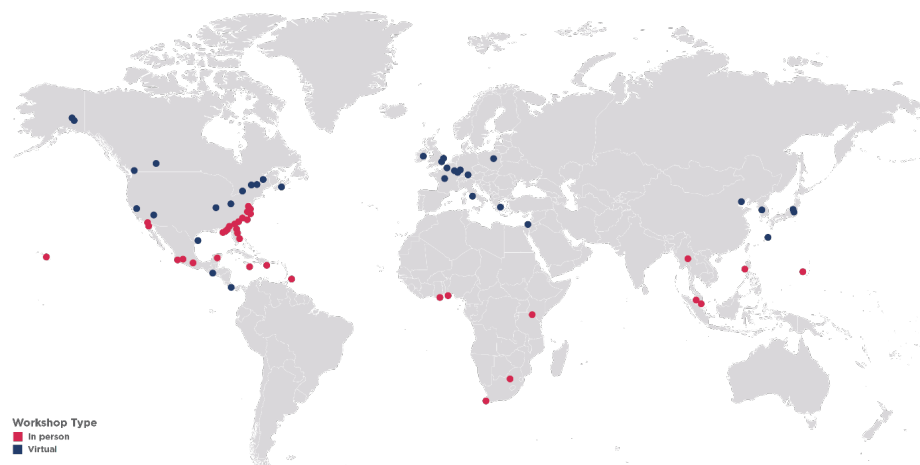
- Reduce barriers for *UOCAVA* voters to successfully vote absentee.
- Increase awareness about voting absentee.
- Enhance measures of effectiveness and participation.

Using lessons learned from the 2018 election cycle, FVAP further explored how to raise awareness of its resources and reduce obstacles by improving resources including its website, online outreach, and call center support.

Reduced Obstacles to *UOCAVA* Citizen Voting Success

Voting Assistance Officer Training

A key component to the absentee voting success of military members and their families is the Voting Assistance Officer (VAO). Each unit is required to have an assigned VAO and the Department of Defense clearly identifies these roles and responsibilities in DoD Instruction 1000.04. FVAP provides direct support for these VAOs to ensure VAOs understand the absentee voting process and their responsibilities in carrying out the law and the DoD regulations. Each VAO receives training on how to guide others through the process and use of the FVAP-provided state-specific tools and resources. In a typical election cycle, voting assistance training is offered online through FVAP's dedicated training website and in-person by FVAP employees.



Locations of in-person and virtual workshops conducted by FVAP in 2020.



FVAP Director presented a Voting Assistance Officer Workshop to VAOs at Marine Corps Base Quantico in January 2020.



After presenting a VAO workshop at U.S. Consulate Guadalajara, FVAP provided in-person absentee voting assistance to voters at a community event for overseas U.S. citizens in February 2020.

FVAP partnered with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and the Department of State to schedule 135 in-person VAO training workshops at military installations domestically and select installations and diplomatic posts around the globe where high populations of U.S. citizens resided in support of the 2020 election. In late February, the pandemic required an adjustment to this approach with travel restrictions occurring in various countries and eventually by the DoD itself.

FVAP quickly adapted to the situation by producing alternative training content in the form of a modified VAO training session with an option for live questions and answers by FVAP personnel. FVAP provided these training sessions through a variety of virtual meeting platforms available to, and set up by, the host VAOs. These workshops were able to train VAOs and provide pandemic-specific information regarding international mail status and state election date changes.

Before COVID-19 travel restrictions began, FVAP effectively conducted 40 in-person workshops. Following the pandemic's halt to in-person workshops, FVAP initiated 30 virtual workshops across several video communications platforms, allowing for a modified presentation and question-and-answer segment. On a 5-point scale, assessment survey responses from attendees showed the in-person workshops resulted in an average 2-point learning increase and the virtual sessions saw an average 1.5-point learning increase.

Through this combination of timely in-person and virtual workshops, FVAP trained 2,046 VAOs across the four Services and the Department of State. In 2020, FVAP's workshop satisfaction

score among attendees was 4.57 (on a scale from 1.00 to 5.00 with 5.00 being the highest rating), which is a slight decrease from FVAP's score in 2016 of 4.66 (4.60 in 2018). When workshop scores are separated into virtual and in-person locations, it suggests that this decline may be due to differing satisfaction scores. In-person locations in 2020 averaged a score 4.75 while virtual workshops averaged 4.4 points.

As an additional indicator of the effectiveness of voting assistance training, the 2020 PEVS data show that UVAOs who received online or in-person training served more individuals than UVAOs who received neither type of training. The combined impact of in-person and online training for UVAOs underscores the need for continued support for the Military Services' in-person training, as attendance at both modes of training results in a nine-percentage point increase in the number of individuals assisted.

Training Type	Average # of Individuals Served During 2020
Neither In-Person or Online	34.72
Only In-Person	44.76
Only Online	38.2
Both In-Person and Online	54.12

Table 12. Average number of UVAOs who attended FVAP training in 2020 by type of training

While post-workshop surveys of the trainings showed that FVAP successfully accomplished its objective, it is important to identify the impact of the pandemic and the balance struck in 2020 between providing the best support possible versus those opportunities that remain the most effective means of conducting training. FVAP reports to Congress on overall effectiveness, not just compliance. Based on the overall satisfaction scores and learning assessments, both historically and with limited data from 2020, in-person VAO workshops remain the most effective. This effectiveness is not only demonstrated by the learning mode itself, but the additional benefits of having FVAP staff provide direct guidance to VAOs, the ability for FVAP staff to witness installation programs to identify further areas for support, and assist state and local election officials in establishing a direct connection with installation commanders.



After presenting the FPCA to a fellow soldier as part of a voting information event at Fort Bragg, NC.

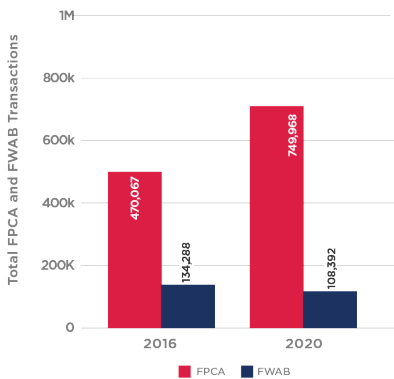


Figure 46. Total FPCA and FWAB transactions on FVAP.gov during 2016 and 2020

Moving forward, FVAP continues to leverage virtual VAO trainings throughout the calendar year, but use them to supplement in-person training efforts. The global disruptions experienced during the pandemic illustrated the value of having an expanded support presence closer to the general election. Historically, FVAP concludes all of its in-person workshop opportunities by July of each election year to focus on core customer service activities leading into the general election. The 2020 election cycle and pandemic demonstrated the capacity for the FVAP team to offer an additional training medium and offer more persistent support closer to the election.

FVAP.gov Website Metrics

FVAP.gov is an intuitively structured site with online assistants that guide users through completion and submission of the FPCA and the FWAB. The site offers educational materials directly to voters, and those who assist voters, to simplify the UOCAVA voting process. FVAP.gov directs users to state websites offering online voter registration and ballot request features, and provides election news, state-specific voting deadlines, requirements, and contact information. Web metrics for FVAP.gov in 2020 indicate site engagement was significantly higher than in 2016, with a 67 percent increase in site sessions and a 63 percent increase in users.

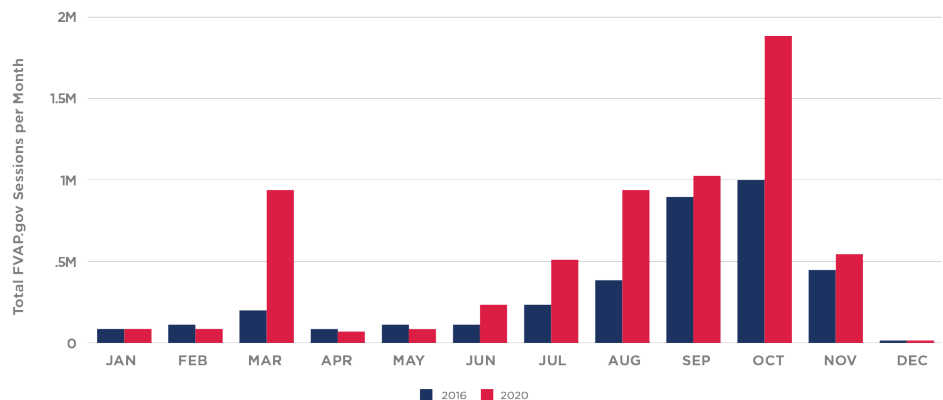


Figure 47. Total FVAP.gov sessions during 2016 and 2020.

To assess the effectiveness of its website, FVAP tracked four desired actions, or “conversions,” that website users might take during a session on FVAP.gov:

- Using the FVAP.gov online assistant for the FPCA
- Using the FVAP.gov online assistant for the FWAB
- Opening a PDF of the FPCA
- Opening a PDF of the FWAB

These conversions indicate a first step toward offline target behaviors – registering to vote and requesting a ballot – and returning a voted ballot.

The results of FVAP’s push-to-web efforts were an overall conversion rate of 30.51 percent which falls within the top 10 percent of conversion rate benchmarks for websites that are deemed “high traffic.” This conversion rate is also higher than in 2016 (27.9 percent).

From January 2020 through November 2020, 749,968 FPCAs were downloaded with 108,392 FWABs being downloaded in the same period. This is a 42 percent increase in Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and Federal Write In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) transactions on FVAP.gov in 2020 as compared to 2016.⁷⁵

On average a user needed 8.6 minutes to complete the FPCA and 10 minutes to complete the FWAB (target time for completion is 15 minutes or less) through their respective online assistance tools. These times are improvements from 2016, when voters required 9.05 minutes to complete FPCA and 10.73 minutes to complete the FWAB. FVAP will continue to assess usability enhancements to its form completion process. The online assistants are an important resource as they prevent visitors from omitting information that could result in their application or ballot being rejected by election officials.

While FVAP.gov is the official federally supported program website required by Federal law to support the implementation of UOCAVA, the Department recognizes and appreciates other organizations that provide assistance to FVAP voters worldwide. FVAP conducted an assessment of the relative metrics for referred links and traffic on the websites of two advocacy groups for military and overseas citizen voters.

Domain	Authority Score*	Monthly Visits	Keywords	Backlinks**	Referring Domains***
FVAP.gov	65/100	419,000	96,400	4,000,000	6,900
overseasvotefoundation.org	52/100	41,700	14,100	318,000	1,900
votefromabroad.org	47/100	27,000	6,600	99,000	1,500

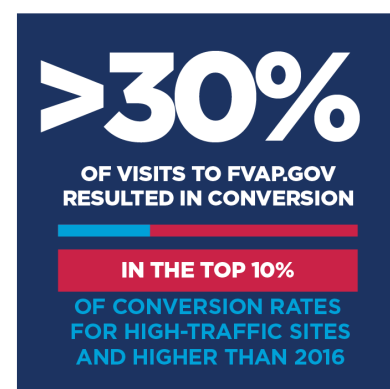
*Authority Score measures overall quality of the domain and influence on SEO based on monthly visits, the number and quality of backlinks, referring domains, organic search traffic and keywords, and other data.

**Backlinks refers to the total number of links back to the FVAP.gov domain.

***Referring Domains refers to the quantity of unique root domains containing at least one page linking to the FVAP.gov domain.

Domain analysis showing FVAP.gov metrics compared to nongovernmental organizations

⁷⁵ A transaction is an FPCA or a FWAB PDF form downloaded from FVAP.gov or the online assistant.



FVAP.gov maintains an Authority Score over 20 percent higher than the nearest non-governmental organization and has 10 times the volume of traffic. These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of FVAP's sustained information awareness campaigns since 2014 and its continued momentum.

Voting Assistance Center

FVAP's Voting Assistance Center provides phone, email, and fax support to *UOCAVA* voters and those who assist them including VAOs, election officials, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and stateside family members. The Voting Assistance Center provided continuous business-hours customer service throughout the 2020 election cycle, with expanded coverage on Election Day. Phone calls were handled by FVAP staff members and designated customer service staff from the Defense Personnel and Family Support Center's (DPFSC) Call Center. Outside of business hours, FVAP's three Voting Ambassadors, positioned in Europe and Asia, provided real time assistance in their respective and nearby time zones. Staff members worked additional time outside of business hours processing transactions.

Beginning in March 2020, FVAP staff members worked virtually due to the pandemic. However, the Voting Assistance Center continued to provide up-to-date and accurate information to voters navigating the absentee voting process even as the pandemic caused unforeseen hurdles to voting (e.g. international mail disruptions, changing state primary election dates, in-country COVID-19 lockdowns and prohibitions). Key observations on the performance of the Call Center in 2020 include:

- FVAP responded to 44,096 inquiries, representing an increase of 183 percent in phone calls and emails compared to the 2016 presidential election.
- The Call Center achieved a customer satisfaction rate of 4.3 out of 5 with a survey response rate of 9 percent.
- FVAP was able to provide the required customer service seamlessly without degrading quality or customer satisfaction through the election despite being in full-time telework status, demonstrating its effective continuity of operations planning efforts.

Also in 2020, FVAP's email-to-fax transmission service use increased by over 148 percent from the 2016 election, supporting a total of 24,299 transactions. *UOCAVA* customers

use this service when they need to fax their FPCA, official state ballot, or FWAB to their election office and do not have access to a fax machine. FVAP forwards emailed voting documents as a fax, but only to jurisdictions in states that allow electronic receipt of materials via fax, but not email, as voters can email the locality directly. *UOCAVA* voters emailing documents that do not meet this criterion are provided instructions and contact information to transmit their voting documents directly to their election office based on their state's guidelines.

FVAP continues to explore alternatives to the email-to-fax transmission service with the ultimate goal of eliminating the need for FVAP's intermediate role in the transmission of election materials between voters and election offices.

Expanded *UOCAVA* Voter Awareness and Outreach Initiatives

Efforts to Increase Awareness

In 2020, FVAP continued to build upon research-based strategies which proved successful in 2016 and 2018 to increase brand recognition and raise awareness of FVAP resources, including positioning FVAP.gov as the leading official source of absentee voting information for the military, their families, and overseas citizens. These strategies included:

- Using strategies based on behavior, acknowledging citizens who want to vote, but require assistance due to real or perceived challenges;
- Focusing on the process steps that specific *UOCAVA* audiences found most problematic;
- Encouraging voters to act earlier to avoid missing deadlines;
- Increasing the number of *UOCAVA* voters reached through advanced data science techniques; and
- Reaching voters directly in their homes and through trusted community organizations.

Specific tactics used in 2020 based on lessons learned and stakeholder recommendations included:

- Emphasis on 18-24 year-olds and those who had previously wanted to or tried to vote, but were unsuccessful;
- Messaging specific to residency and use of the official forms to ensure protections and ballot availability; and



FVAP launched a popular “spin” video on Instagram that featured overseas U.S. citizens in different parts of the world.

- Intensifying efforts to leverage partnerships (military voting assistance officers, State Department post staff, non-governmental organizations, other Federal agencies, employers, and family and friends) to spread awareness of FVAP tools and resources.

Throughout 2020, FVAP communicated the key message of the ability of ADM, their eligible family members, and overseas citizens to vote in Federal elections from anywhere. FVAP adjusted its messaging to coincide with the overall election calendar itself and address each step of the voting process for UOCAVA voters. Messaging in 2020 put greater emphasis on using the FPCA (to identify oneself as a UOCAVA voter to state and local election offices), highlighting trusted and accurate sources of election information, clarifying state voting residency conditions, and using the FWAB as a backup ballot.

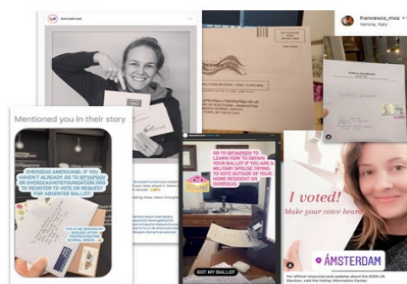
FVAP’s integrated marketing communications campaign achieved its goals of engaging UOCAVA voters through a combination of advertising, news media, social media, and direct outreach. The campaign intended to drive voters to FVAP.gov and encourage them to use the online assistants or downloadable forms to complete the FPCA and FWAB for submission to their election office.

Organic (Unpaid) Social Media

FVAP implemented a strategic social media plan across popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram. The timing and content of posts were designed to ensure these platforms were fully integrated into the overall outreach campaign and to maximize engagement with voters (both prospective and active) and other organizations with large audiences of U.S. citizens covered by UOCAVA.

Each of FVAP’s organic social channels reached a specific audience or mix of audiences. Facebook and Instagram typically reached UOCAVA voters directly; Twitter reached voters and stakeholders who could inform voters, including partners such as U.S. embassies and consulates; and LinkedIn reached influencers like state and local election offices. FVAP began use of Instagram as a social channel in 2020.

The popularity of the virtual “I Voted” sticker remained a key feature of FVAP’s social media engagement. The sticker’s landing



Overseas voters participated in our #ThisIsVoting challenge on Instagram and mentioned FVAP.



Examples of the “I Voted” sticker available on FVAP.gov.

page garnered 12,778 total page views and 209 clicks to view the selected country or territory-specific sticker. Unique to newer Instagram audiences, FVAP launched nine interactive GIPHY stickers to attract the attention of the viewer while scrolling through stories on Instagram. These included general voting phrases/actions, the FVAP logo, and an absentee voting checklist. These decorative digital stickers garnered 180,000 views on Instagram Stories, making them a creative and significant addition to FVAP's media strategy that focused on younger and first-time voters.

Paid Media

To raise awareness of FVAP's absentee voting materials and services for active duty personnel, their families, and overseas citizens, FVAP placed paid advertising in several proven avenues. FVAP's advertising focused primarily on digital platforms to include social media, search engine marketing, programmatic and video displays which adroitly direct messaging to FVAP voters, and sponsored content. FVAP combined these placements with similar ones that appeared on a weekly basis in *Stars & Stripes* overseas editions and print placements in niche publications, such as *The American*, published in the United Kingdom, and *The Local*, published in several cities worldwide.

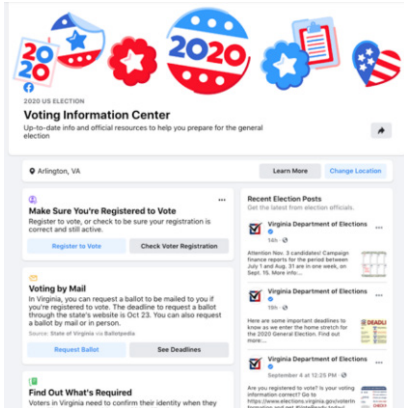
FVAP leveraged digital platforms in 2020 to adjust the planned advertising strategy to accommodate realities faced by U.S. citizens due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Snapchat was also used for the first time by FVAP to target younger ADM audiences.

The paid campaign's impressions (number of times the ads are displayed) increased from 85 million in 2016 to 126.7 million in 2020, demonstrating the effectiveness of FVAP applying lessons learned from previous Federal election cycles and focusing on the use of high performing digital channels such as Facebook. The campaign in 2020 also brought in 1.1 million more sessions at FVAP.gov and 225,000 more visitors using the form completion tools to register to vote, request an absentee ballot, or complete a back-up ballot than in 2016. Sessions generated by paid media made up 21 percent of all visits to FVAP.gov in 2020 compared to under six percent in 2016. Additionally, traffic to FVAP.gov from paid sources spiked during key periods in the absentee voting process – just before the recommended August 1 deadline to submit an FPCA, as well as the recommended October 13 and October 19 ballot return deadlines for overseas citizens and military, respectively.

Use our Instagram Sticker
or download your own
"I Voted From Sticker" at
[FVAP.gov/IVotedSticker](https://www.fvap.gov/IVotedSticker)



Examples of the nine GIPHY stickers launched on Instagram in June 2020.



Facebook's Voting Information Center directed users to the Voting Assistance Guide on FVAP.gov.

As in 2016, Facebook advertising was the most cost-effective social media platform in 2020. Accounting for less than a quarter of the paid media budget, Facebook generated nearly half of all resultant advertising impressions (more than 61 million impressions), reaching some individuals several times with information about FVAP's voting resources.



f **FACEBOOK ADS REACHED NEARLY 18.7 MILLION PEOPLE 3.2X EACH**
WITH MORE THAN 17M OF THEM OVERSEAS



CPM refers to cost per thousand impressions. It is a standard measure of cost efficiency for advertising

In 2020, social media channels, particularly Facebook and Instagram, introduced political advertising restrictions to combat misinformation and attempts to influence elections. Unfortunately, FVAP fell within this classification due to its inclusion of keywords like "voting" and "ballot" in its advertising even though all FVAP messaging is nonpartisan. FVAP will continue to engage Facebook on adjustments to this policy to better distinguish between political advertising and general voter awareness messaging, so that the ability of election administrators at Federal, state, and local levels to engage voters globally is not impacted.

Facebook did increase FVAP's visibility on the Facebook and Instagram platforms through the mid-August introduction of the Voting Information Center (VIC). The Facebook VIC directed users to FVAP and FVAP's Voting Assistance Guide as a resource for overseas voters. For a period in October, Facebook posted a top-of-feed notification to U.S. citizen users overseas to ensure their awareness of the FVAP voting assistance tools. More direct coordination with Facebook in the future will hopefully resolve FVAP's inclusion as political advertising and lead to Facebook's VIC better aligning with overall FVAP messaging.

Shared Media and Organizational Outreach

FVAP's integrated strategic communication approach leveraged its broad network of key stakeholders to reach UOCAVA voters through interaction with organizations and individuals who support military and overseas citizens with the absentee voting process. These organizations reached multiple segments of UOCAVA voters which included the Services, voting advocacy groups, embassies and consulates, Federal and private-sector employers overseas, state and local election offices, and online channels focused on military or overseas citizens.

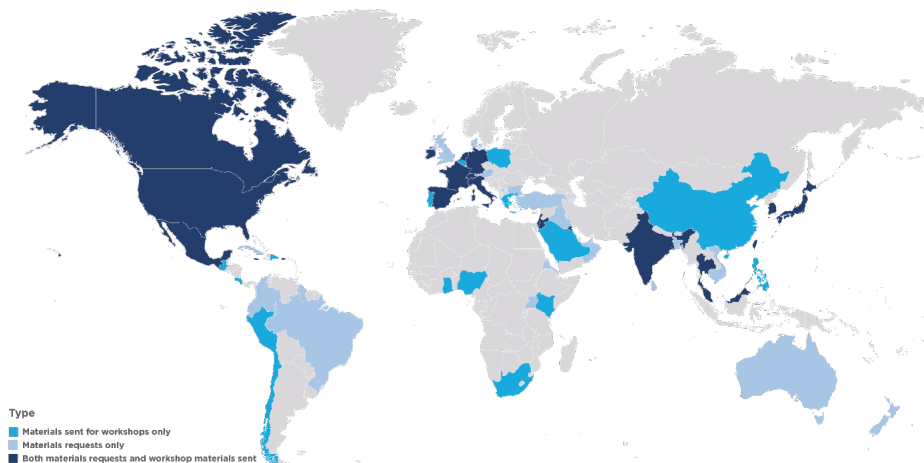
Collateral Materials

Prior to the start of the campaign, FVAP updated its brochures, wallet cards, and factsheets by redesigning the graphics and content. This included producing Service-specific posters, as well as a separate poster for overseas citizens, all of which became very popular throughout the election cycle. FVAP also developed fact sheets through efforts with the Department of State and FVAP's DoD partner organization, the Defense Language and National Security Education Office, that contained detailed instructions for filling out the FPCA and FWAB forms. These instructions are available in English, Spanish, French, and Arabic.

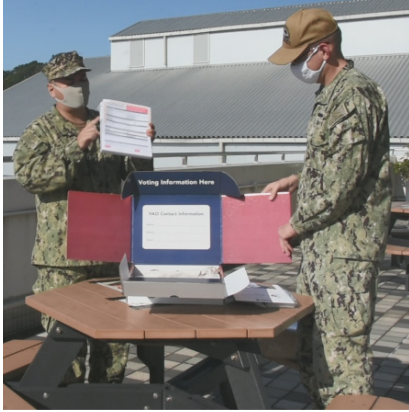
In 2020, FVAP distributed 28,909 hardcopy FPCAs and FWABs as well as 169,436 pieces of other educational and outreach materials to voters in 66 countries and 105 military installations worldwide, despite the pandemic causing international postal disruptions and mandated teleworking. This demonstrated the value of providing hard copy materials despite the increased use of digital platforms and the onset of the global pandemic.



FVAP's assortment of FPCA and FWAB fact sheets available in English, Spanish, French, and Arabic on FVAP.gov.



Countries where FVAP shipped collateral materials for in 2020.



VAOs open up FVAP's new VAO in a Box as part of an introductory video at Fleet Activities Yokosuka in 2020

Development of "VAO in a Box"

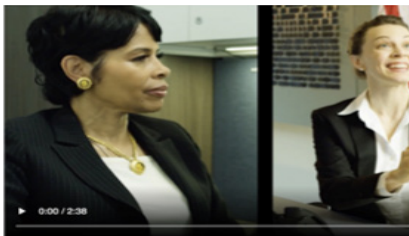
After specific needs were identified at a 2019 meeting with Military Service representatives from all military branches and the Department of State, FVAP created the "VAO in a Box" kit to support remote installations and to assist VAOs to better engage their unit members by providing VAOs a minimum footprint of voting resources. The box was compact and storable, and contained the most important items for starting or maintaining an installation's voting program including: an instruction sheet, a pack of FPCAs, a pack of FWABs, the Guide, one resource booklet, a poster, a pack of wallet cards, and a pack of brochures. Over the course of 2020, a total of 249 boxes were shipped out to VAOs.

The boxes were well received by VAOs across the Military Services and Department of State, with Army and Coast Guard specifically calling out their usefulness in their respective AARs. The Army Voting Program recommends to continue the use of these boxes if possible and gearing them toward forward deployed and overseas UVAOs, who seem to have the most issues with internet connectivity and accessing printers. For the Coast Guard Voting Program, "VAO in a Box" was exceptionally helpful given the COVID-19 constraints this year, and USCG plans to significantly increase the order request in the future.

Videos

For the 2020 cycle, FVAP developed a new two-and-a-half-minute video that walks overseas citizens through the absentee voting process, with a particular emphasis on the FPCA and FWAB resources available at FVAP.gov. As in the past, FVAP segmented the video into 15-second short clips to more easily share across its social media platforms. As of November 2, 2020, this video had 66,106 total video plays on FVAP.gov and a combined view of 16,311 on YouTube.

Prior to the onset of the global pandemic, FVAP coordinated a series of video interviews with the Secretaries of State of Vermont, Iowa, and Pennsylvania in support of the National Association of Secretaries of State's #TrustedInfo2020 social media campaign.



The Overseas Citizens Tutorial Video outlined the absentee voting process for each phase of the election cycle.

FVAP's DoD partner organization, Military OneSource, supported the film production between FVAP leadership and three Secretaries of State to educate voters on the potential for election misinformation and disinformation and to inform viewers that election officials, along with FVAP, are the trusted sources for accurate, non-partisan voting information.

Digital Media Content Toolkits

FVAP updated its digital toolkits designed for use by embassies and consulates, the military services (one for military members and a separate one for spouses and family members), human resource professionals who work with overseas citizens, and election offices for 2020. The kits contained customizable shared sample content for publication on digital channels like websites, blogs, social media, email, and other channels. The toolkits remain available on FVAP.gov.

Calendar Alerts

FVAP developed downloadable Google calendars with information about upcoming Federal elections for each state and territory. Each of the 55 calendars for the 2020 election cycle contained state-specific, Primary and General Election dates and recommended deadlines, as well as information regarding ballot request and ballot return methods for a given state or territory. Voters could easily download their state or territory's calendar for synchronization with their mobile or desktop device. Once downloaded, users received calendar alerts and email notifications, as well as automatic updates to their calendars when primary election dates changed due to the pandemic. The calendars provided users with real-time awareness of these changes. FVAP also created a Google calendar that contained the events of the voting action plan to assist VAOs with providing regular voting reminders to their unit members. FVAP routinely promoted these new online resources through social media and email blasts, resulting in over 3,900 calendar downloads in 2020.

Social Media Engagement

FVAP designed its regularly scheduled social media content to be clear, concise, and accurate, making it accessible and convenient for UOCAVA voters and partner organizations to amplify and share across their channels. Leading up to November, the official social media accounts of the Department of Defense and the military branches increased awareness of FVAP.gov by sharing



FVAP and NASS collaborated on a video interview for the #TrustedInfo2020 social media campaign.



FVAP's downloadable calendars allowed voters to sync their state's election dates and deadlines with their desktop and mobile devices.



VAOs from U.S. Consulate Calgary and U.S. Embassy Mexico City participated in FVAP's first Instagram Live event for overseas voters.



Navy military spouse and FVAP Ambassador, Deana, along with her active duty husband participated in a Facebook Live event about absentee voting from Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan.

prominent posts and content about the absentee voting process with their military and family member audiences. Furthermore, several U.S. embassies and consulates at the Department of State promoted FVAP's resources through graphics, videos, and widespread Facebook Live events, with FVAP moderating the comments from voters for fifteen of these events in real-time.

FVAP collaborated with Military OneSource to coordinate three Facebook Live events for ADM and military spouses. The first event took place in the spring and focused on how voters could register and vote in the many scheduled and changing Federal and state primary elections. The second event in September featured a VAO from Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in California and a member of the U.S. Marine Security Detachment at U.S. Embassy Bogota, Colombia, and consisted of a call-to-action for military members to register and request their ballot for the November general election. The third event in October featured a Navy military spouse alongside her active duty husband, who reminded voters to send in their absentee ballots as soon as possible. The two events conducted closest to the November election received 1,800 views each.

Direct Marketing

Section 20305(a)(2) of Title 52, U.S.C., requires that FVAP send email notifications to all military members in the months leading up to each election for Federal offices. Based on this requirement, FVAP sent out monthly email notifications to all ADM from December 2019 to October 2020. Post-election data shows that, of 86 percent of military VAOs who used FVAP's alerts, 88 percent found them useful in performing their duties. State Department embassy and consulate VAOs also received these monthly email notifications and disseminated the information to in-country U.S. citizens through their Message Alert System for Citizens Overseas Tool.



FVAP effectively disseminated single-subject email blasts to several audiences throughout the 2020 election cycle.

FVAP emailed election officials a quarterly newsletter that detailed research data findings, UOCAVA election tips, general FVAP updates, and enhancements to voter resources. To ensure voters were able to communicate directly with their local election officials, FVAP also contacted election offices requesting any updates to their posted contact information in the directory on FVAP.gov.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent changes to election dates and deadlines in 2020, FVAP increased the use

of single-subject mass emails to reach overseas citizens, active duty military members, VAOs, and election officials. These blasts included specific information regarding international and military mail, helpful absentee voting process tips, reminders, and specific tools that FVAP updated due to changes caused by COVID-19 like the downloadable calendars and digital media outreach toolkits.

Pilot Program: Voting Assistance Ambassadors

The Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) previous post-election surveys of ADM and overseas citizens show real and perceived obstacles to absentee voting for those living overseas. Additionally, FVAP staff typically focus primarily on direct customer service in the last 90 days prior to each general election. To offset this lack of direct outreach in proximity to the election, FVAP ran a pilot program in 2020 to provide service especially in those areas with high concentrations of overseas citizens and military personnel.

The structure for the pilot program consisted of three term employees, with one in London, Rome, and Tokyo, as determined by FVAP survey and military installation data.

As COVID-19 began impacting the above populations, FVAP recognized the need to explore a more virtual approach for the Ambassadors outreach efforts.

All in-person outreach completed by the Voting Assistance Ambassadors during the last months was done in strict adherence to the local country's COVID-19 safety guidelines. Further, the Ambassadors had the option of not joining or conducting a particular event if they felt it would be in any way unsafe. The Ambassadors safely conducted outreach events for active duty military, their family members, and other U.S. citizens residing overseas.

COVID-19 restrictions necessitated the creation of extended outreach through social media platforms, though basic social media strategies were part of the original project plan. The resulting social media work was more in-depth and crucial given the physical restrictions many voters overseas found themselves in. The FVAP team bolstered the Ambassador's ability to run successful online platforms and worked with the Ambassadors to develop robust region-specific social media plans for



FVAP Ambassador in Rome collaborated with the U.S. Embassy in Rome to host an in-person voter outreach event.



FVAP Ambassador outreach at RAF Mildenhall in coordination with the IVAO.



FVAP Ambassadors in Rome, London, and Tokyo provided virtual, one-on-one voting assistance to overseas citizens in the last two weeks before the General Election.



FVAP Ambassador in Tokyo hosted an informative Facebook Live event about absentee voting for overseas citizens in Japan.

Facebook and Twitter. FVAP created original content as well as promotional graphics to support various outreach initiatives to include in-person informational sessions, Facebook Live events, and virtual voting assistance. The active social media presence of these Ambassadors allowed military and overseas voters in similar time zones to access helpful absentee voting information directly during their regular waking hours. More so, when FVAP collaborated with the Ambassadors to host six virtual office hours during the last two weeks of October, over 100 overseas U.S. citizens received direct, one-on-one assistance with their remaining absentee voting questions.

The Ambassadors grew their reach throughout the year by joining online U.S. citizen groups, assisting voters, growing followers, and making new connections.

The Ambassadors assisted 4,075 UOCAVA voters (3,345 overseas citizens) between in person events and virtual assistance (e.g. emails or online events). A total of 1,757 FPCAs and 499 FWABs were distributed either in hardcopy or PDF format. An additional 2,196 voters were directed to FVAP.gov.

FVAP found the pilot program to be successful in supporting personnel and family members at overseas military installations as well as U.S. citizens not directly affiliated with an installation. FVAP was able to learn specific country-level obstacles faced by UOCAVA voters as well as provide effective localized support and create collaborative opportunities with FVAP stakeholders including the Military Services and the Department of State. The Ambassadors' ability to assist voters in real time was a benefit that was multiplied due to COVID-19 pandemic travel and movement restrictions that kept FVAP staff in Washington DC. Based on the 2020 experience, FVAP will explore potentially expanding the Voting Ambassador program in 2022.

Conclusion

The 2020 election year represented a unique challenge, but also provided new opportunities. FVAP demonstrated key progress in the following areas from its 2018 recommendations:

- Realized a 42 percent increase in FPCA and FWAB transactions on FVAP.gov in 2020 as compared to 2016.
- FVAP physically distributed 28,909 FPCAs and FWABs as well as 169,436 pieces of other educational and outreach materials to 66 countries and 105 installations which does not incorporate the number of FVAP-branded materials that were distributed directly by the Military Services or the Department of State.
- FVAP.gov achieved a 63 percent increase in total visitors and a 67 percent increase in visits in 2020 when compared to 2016.
- Twenty-one percent of all FVAP.gov sessions originated from paid media advertising, as compared to just six percent in 2016.
- VAO training workshops were conducted at 76 locations virtually or in-person before COVID-19-related travel restrictions: 37 U.S. military installations and 38 U.S. embassies and consulates over a span of 27 countries. FVAP received a workshop customer satisfaction score of 4.57, with 5.00 being the highest score achievable. This score decreased from FVAP's score in 2016 which was 4.66.
- FVAP continued to enhance its Effective Voting Assistance Model to track changes to VAO responsibilities across the Services for effectiveness and identification of best practices.
- FVAP leveraged the Council of State Governments' ongoing work with implementation of a reporting data standard for states to assess and report the impacts of Congressional reforms passed in the 2009 MOVE Act, with data collected from approximately 40 percent of the UOCAVA participating voter population.

FVAP's activities fulfilled DoD's responsibilities under UOCAVA. FVAP's activities remain geared towards promoting the awareness of the right to vote among UOCAVA citizens and eliminating barriers for those who choose to exercise that right. As featured in its Strategic Plan, FVAP remains committed to these key strategic goals and will align all of its 2022 activities to the FVAP Strategic Plan.

Recommendations for the 2022 Election Cycle

The activities that FVAP performed in 2020 aligned with the advancement of its strategic goals and will remain the areas of focus in upcoming election cycles along with these specific initiatives within each area for the 2022 election cycle:

Goal 1: Be a highly valued customer service program to military members, their eligible family members, voting assistance officers, overseas voters, and election officials.

- Implement an aggressive engagement strategy for state and local election officials to raise awareness on core responsibilities under Federal law.
- Educate states on how to enhance the usability of the absentee voting process for ADM by authorizing acceptance of electronic signatures from the DoD Common Access Card (CAC) in the election process, based on the Council of State Governments' Overseas Voting Initiative recommendations.
- Support the development and implementation of ballot tracking to support overseas military and overseas citizens in response to Executive Order 14019.
- Leverage the Council of State Governments' ongoing work to expand the implementation a national data standard to more effectively report the impacts of Congressional reforms passed in 2009 (*the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act*) while reducing the post-election reporting burden on the states in partnership with the United States Election Assistance Commission.

Goal 2: Reduce obstacles to military and overseas absentee voting success.

- Increase availability of election materials in alternative languages pursuant to Executive Order 14019.
- Continue to review and update as necessary the FPCA and the FWAB to focus on core federal election eligibility requirements to avoid confusion and maximize benefits codified under UOCAVA.
- Maintain continued alignment across the DoD enterprise to support Military Service-level voting assistance programs.
- Expand use of virtual training opportunities to support VAOs, voters, and stakeholders throughout the calendar year and within closer proximity to the general election.
- Refine and improve upon FVAP's Effective Voting Assistance

Model to track changes to Voting Assistance Officer responsibilities across the Services for effectiveness and identification of best practices.

Goal 3: Increase Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voter awareness of available tools and resources.

- Continue to use paid media and social media outlets to focus on population segments who lack awareness of available resources through FVAP, especially first-time absentee voters.
- Examine the potential for expanding the Voting Assistance Ambassador program.
- Create and effectively distribute innovative content that resonates with the military, their families, and overseas citizens.

Glossary

A

ADM active duty military

C

CAC common access card
CSG Council of State Governments
CVAP citizen voting age population

D

DoD Department of Defense
DoDI Department of Defense Instruction

E

EAC Election Assistance Commission
EAVS Election Administration and Voting Survey
EVAM Effective Voting Assistance Model
ESB EAVS Section B

F

FPCA Federal Post Card Application
FVAP Federal Voting Assistance Program
FWAB Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot

G

Guide *Voting Assistance Guide*

I

IVA Office Installation Voter Assistance Office
IVAO Installation Voting Assistance Officer

L

LEO local election official

M

MOU Memorandum of Understanding
MOVE Act *Military and Overseas
Voter Empowerment Act*
MPO Military Post Office
MPS Military Postal Service

N

NCOA National Change of Address
NVRA National Voter Registration Act
NVRF National Voter Registration Form

O

OCPA Overseas Citizen Population Analysis

P

PEVS Post-Election Voting Survey

S

SEO state election official
SVAO service voting action officer

U

UAA undeliverable as addressed
UOCAVA *Uniformed and Overseas
Citizens Absentee Voting Act*
U.S.C. United States Code
USPS U.S. Postal Service
UVAO unit voting assistance officer

V

VAO voting assistance officer



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