

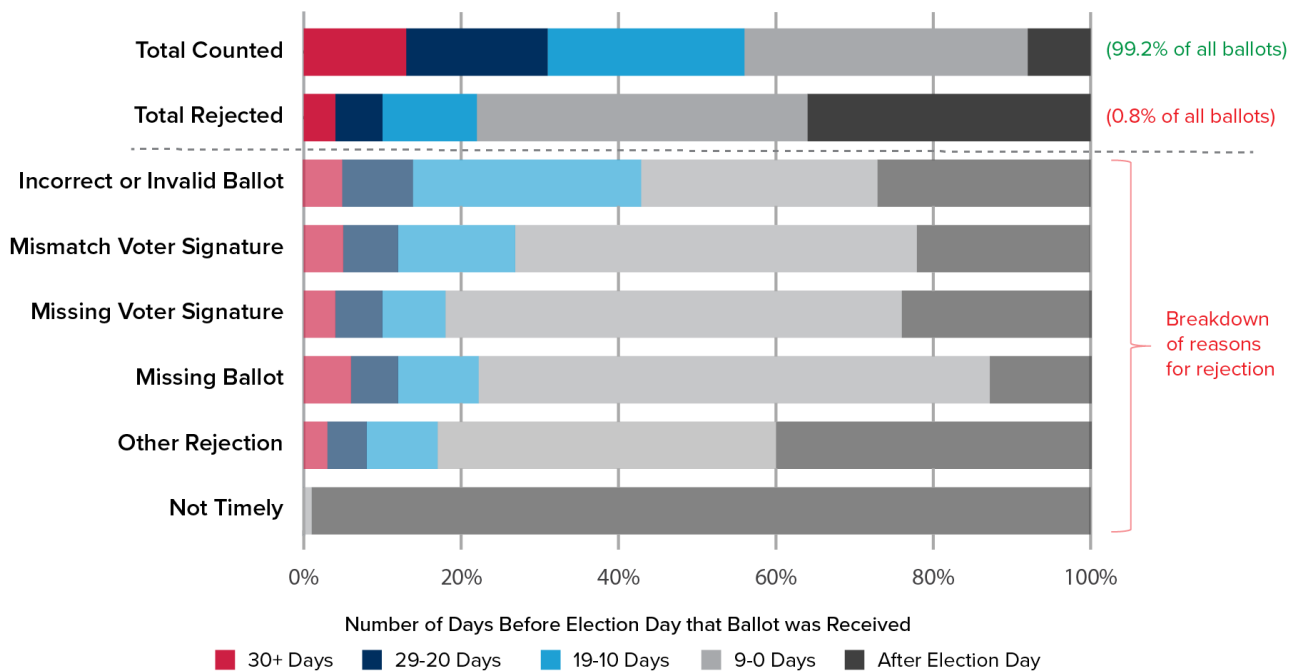
BALLOT OUTCOMES BY BALLOT RECEIPT DATE

Ballots received closer to Election Day were more likely to be rejected compared to ballots received earlier from active duty military and overseas citizens.

While the ballots of most voters covered under the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*—active duty military (ADM), their families, and U.S. citizens living abroad—are counted in each election, a small proportion are rejected because they arrive late or contain errors. To identify whether ballots that arrived at the election office near Election Day were more likely to be rejected (suggesting insufficient time for election officials to notify voters to correct problems, a process known as “curing a ballot”), this issue brief uses data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey Section B (ESB) Data Standard to examine outcomes of UOCAVA ballots by the date election offices received them.¹ In 2020, 12 states and seven jurisdictions, together accounting for about 40 percent of the total UOCAVA population, contributed their data to the ESB Data Standard.

Results. For the 2020 General Election, 99.2 percent of UOCAVA ballots received by participating election offices were counted,² whereas the remaining 0.8 percent of the UOCAVA ballots were rejected for varying reasons.³ For ADM, Figure 1 shows that just over half of the ballots that were counted were received at least 10 days before Election Day. That stands in contrast with rejected ballots, which, independently of the reason for rejection, were generally received closer to the day of the election. When looking at whether returning ballots by regular mail or by electronic means (in states that allow for it) had an impact in the results for ADM, data showed that both methods had similar results to those displayed in Figure 1, with rejected ballots returned electronically slightly more clustered in the days closer to Election Day.

Figure 1. Breakdown of Ballot Outcome by the Date the Ballot Was Received in the Election Office — Active Duty Military



¹ The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) and The Council of State Governments Overseas Voting Initiative are developing the ESB Data Standard to provide a common format for states to report UOCAVA voting transactions, including the date each ballot arrived and its final disposition.

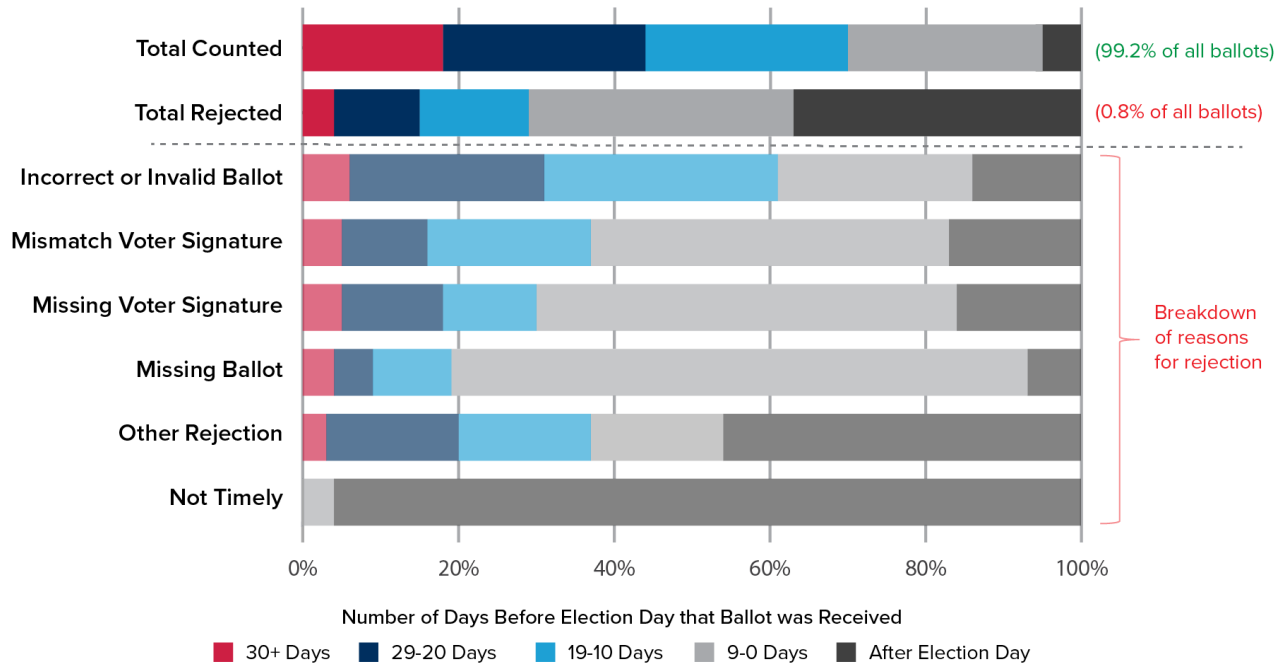
² In some states, state laws allow for ballots to be valid even if received after Election Day if they are postmarked by the day of the election. The number of days after the election that each state allows for a ballot to be considered valid varies and ranges from zero (ballot must be received by Election Day) to 20 days after the election in the states and jurisdictions covered in this issue brief.

³ Data in this issue brief refers only to the states and jurisdictions that participated in the 2020 ESB. For more information see: https://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Reports/2020-ESB-Research-Note_Final.pdf

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Figure 2 illustrates that overseas citizens returned ballots earlier than ADM in the 2020 General Election—almost 70 percent of counted ballots were received in election offices 10 or more days before Election Day. For rejected ballots, however, the trends for overseas citizens were very similar to the trends for ADM, with rejected ballots generally being received closer to the day of the election.

Figure 2. Breakdown of Ballot Outcome by the Date the Ballot Was Received in the Election Office — Overseas Citizens



Among both ADM and overseas citizens, over 60 percent of ballots rejected for all reasons except an incorrect or invalid ballot were received less than 10 days before the election. While ballots received after the state's deadline must be rejected, some ballots, such as those with a missing or mismatched voter signature, can be cured and ultimately counted if there is sufficient time for election officials to notify voters of a problem and for voters to fix the problem before the deadline.

Conclusions. Rejected UOCAVA ballots in the 2020 General Election accounted for only 0.8 percent of all the ballots received. Rejected ballots, independently of the reason for rejection, were generally returned very close to Election Day. This timeline might have had an impact on the rejection, as in some cases, election officials can work with voters to solve errors in their returned ballots (e.g., a missing voter signature) and to cure ballots. When a ballot is received too close to Election Day, there may not be sufficient time to resolve errors, and a ballot that might have otherwise been counted if the issue had been fixed is ultimately rejected.

Recommendations.

- Continue and expand marketing efforts to encourage the UOCAVA population to return their voted ballots early to allow not only for timely receipt by the election office, but also adequate time to cure the ballots in the event an issue is found by election officials upon receipt.
- Ensure voters understand the requirements for ballot return, including signature or other requirements, to reduce the likelihood of rejection when ballots are returned close to Election Day, when there is little time left to resolve issues.
- Inform voters about ballot curing opportunities and how it works depending on the state they vote in. Emphasize the importance of voters returning their ballots early to allow enough time to complete the curing process in case it is needed.