

VOTE OUTCOMES FOR FPCAs AND STATE APPLICATIONS

Ballots requested using an FPCA were counted at higher percentages than were ballots requested through state applications for active duty military and overseas citizens.

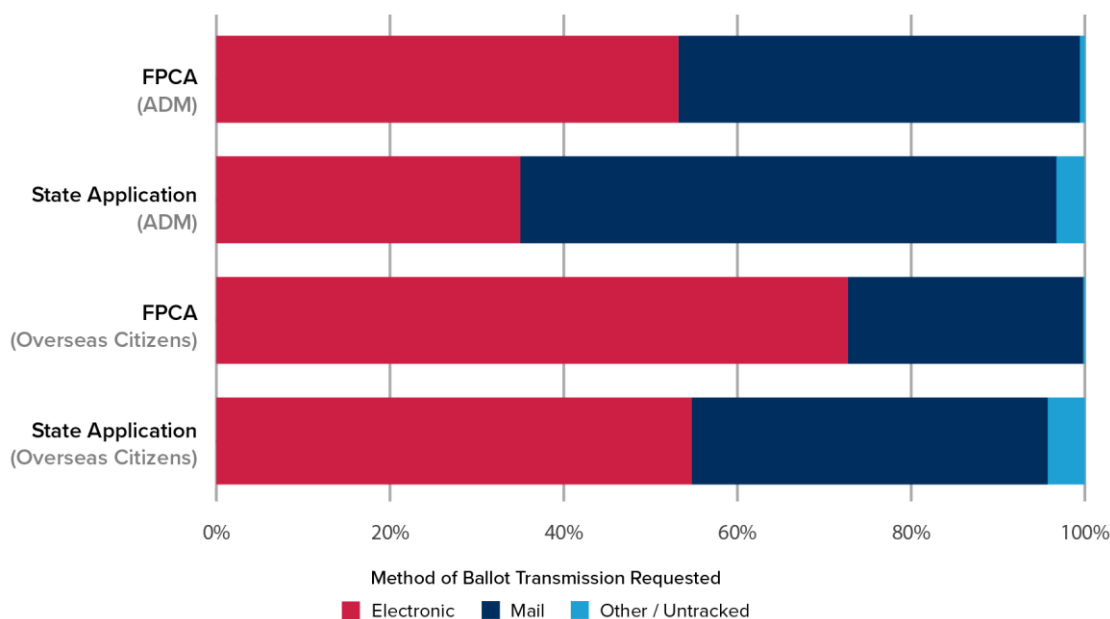
Voters covered under the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*—active duty military (ADM), their families, and U.S. citizens living abroad—can request their ballots using a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) or a state application. The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) recommends that these voters file a new FPCA each year to ensure they receive UOCAVA protections. To examine outcomes of ballots requested by each method, this issue brief uses data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey Section B (ESB) Data Standard.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.

Background and Results. UOCAVA voters have several options to request a ballot, with FPCAs and state applications being the most widely used methods. FPCAs are accepted as registration and ballot request applications for UOCAVA voters in all states and grant these voters specific protections (e.g., election offices must transmit ballots to voters at least 45 days before the election and offer an electronic method for ballot transmission). Each state’s unique application may or may not identify voters as covered by UOCAVA protections.

In 2020, ADM and overseas citizens differed in their use of FPCAs versus state applications.² ADM filed four times more state applications than FPCAs, and a majority of ADM submitted state applications electronically, whereas they used regular mail more often to submit FPCAs. Overseas citizens, in contrast, relied more on FPCAs than state applications, and they more frequently used electronic options to submit their FPCAs and regular mail to send state applications.

Interestingly, both ADM and overseas citizens used the electronic option to have their blank ballot delivered to them more often when they filed the ballot request through an FPCA compared to when they filed a state application (see Figure 1). Overall, ADM relied more on postal mail to receive their blank ballot than did overseas citizens.

Figure 1. Blank Ballot Transmission Methods Requested by ADM and Overseas Citizens



While ultimate ballot success cannot be uniquely attributed to the method that a UOCAVA voter uses to request their ballot, transactional data reveal some important trends. Table 1 shows that ballot outcomes were better (i.e., higher percentage of

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 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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ballots counted and lower percentage of undeliverable ballots) for ballots requested during the election year compared to ballot requests from previous years, with the difference being statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. Additionally, ballots that were originally requested through an FPCA had higher percentages of ballots counted than those requested through a state application for both ADM and overseas citizens. Moreover, the percentage of undeliverable ballots, while low for ballot requests filed during the election year, was at least four times lower for ballots requested using an FPCA compared to ballots requested using a state application. FPCAs filed during the election year had significantly better outcomes in terms of higher percentage of ballots counted and lower percentage of ballots returned undeliverable than did state applications for ADM and overseas citizens. Taken together, these results suggest that it is crucial for ballot requesters to have up-to-date voter information in order to successfully complete the voting process.

Table 1. Ballot Outcomes by Ballot Request Type and Year for ADM and Overseas Citizens

	Year of Ballot Request	FPCAs			State Applications		
		Percent Counted	Percent Rejected	Percent Undeliverable	Percent Counted	Percent Rejected	Percent Undeliverable
ADM	2020	99.1%**	0.9%**	0.05%**	97.8%	1.9%	0.32%
	2019	98.5%	0.9%	0.53%*	97.8%	1.1%	1.16%
	2018	97.6%	0.8%	1.60%	97.2%	1.8%	1.05%
	Pre-2018	98.0%	1.0%	0.96%	97.6%	1.2%	1.24%
Overseas Citizens	2020	99.5%**	0.5%**	0.03%**	98.1%	1.8%	0.12%
	2019	99.9%**	0.1%**	0.03%	99.2%	0.8%	0.05%
	2018	99.4%**	0.3%**	0.34%	98.7%	0.9%	0.39%
	Pre-2018	98.2%	1.0%	0.79%	98.0%	1.0%	1.00%

Key:

- Ballots requested in the election year were more likely to be counted than those requested in prior years
- Ballots requested using an FPCA were more likely to be counted than those requested using state applications
- Ballots requested using an FPCA had a lower percent undelivered than those requested using state applications
- * Differences between ballots requested using an FPCA and ballots requested using a state application are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level
- ** Differences between ballots requested using an FPCA and ballots requested using a state application are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level

Conclusions. FPCAs as a ballot request method, provide unique protections to ADM and overseas citizens per the UOCAVA and the *Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act*. These protections may be related to better outcomes of ballots originally requested through an FPCA compared to state applications. In particular, higher percentages of ballots counted and lower percentages of ballots returned undeliverable were found for ballots requested using an FPCA independently of the UOCAVA population or the year the ballot request was filed. Among UOCAVA voters, FPCAs were used more widely by overseas citizens than ADM.

Recommendations.

- Continue and expand efforts to encourage the ADM population to use FPCAs, as this population seems less inclined to use this option.
- Work to understand the barriers that are preventing UOCAVA voters, particularly ADM, from using the FPCA and from submitting it electronically when they do use it.
- Ensure that state forms offer the same opportunities and protections as the FPCA, particularly an electronic option for blank ballot transmission.
- Continue to encourage UOCAVA voters to submit a ballot request at least every election year, emphasizing the importance of up-to-date information to successfully complete the voting process.