

**Factors affecting the speed of ballot counting and delivery of unofficial election results, with a case study of California and Florida**

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# Introduction

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States count ballots and report election results at different speeds.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> In some states, unofficial election results are usually reported quickly, with nearly full results available on Election Day or shortly thereafter. In other states, it may take election officials weeks to deliver the same results.<sup>5</sup> This variance is the result of different election administration methods, policies, and priorities between states, which is a product of the decentralized nature of election administration in the United States.<sup>6,7</sup>

This article explains factors that affect the speed of ballot counting and delivery of unofficial election results, analyzes how these factors interact in two states — California and Florida — and provides arguments for and against quicker election results reporting.

## Policies that affect the speed of election results

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The variables and policies that affect the speed of counting ballots across all states are:

- The prevalence and timing of early and absentee/mail-in voting
- Rules related to processing and tabulating early and absentee/mail-in voting ballots
- Statutory reporting requirements
- Resources available to election officials.
- Deadlines to return absentee/mail-in ballots
- Provisional ballot procedures
- Rules for curing ballots
- And, the existence of jurisdictions that hand count ballots

Any one of these topics might play an important role in the speed of election results in a given state while not having a significant effect elsewhere. These variables interact with each other in complex ways that vary by state, to affect the speed of election results.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup>

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1 [AP News, “Florida has nearly all ballots counted on Election Day, while California can take weeks. This is why,” October 8, 2024](#)

2 [Bipartisan Policy Center, “Why We Might Not Know Election Results Right Away,” November 4, 2024](#)

3 [MIT News, “How many votes will be counted after election night?” October 15, 2020](#)

4 [The New York Times, “When to Expect Results in Each State on Election Night, and Beyond,” November 1, 2024](#)

5 [California Secretary of State, “California Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D., Issues Unprocessed Ballots Report,” November 7, 2024](#)

6 [50 Shades of Federalism, “Voting, Elections and US Federalism: The Federal Government Perspective,” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

7 [CATO Institute, “The Framers Wisely Left Election Practice Decentralized,” December 3, 2020](#)

8 [Bipartisan Policy Center, “Why We Might Not Know Election Results Right Away,” November 4, 2024](#)

9 [R Street Institute, “Combating Misinformation Through Electoral Reform,” October 24, 2023](#)

10 [The Joseph Rainey Center for Public Policy, “Five Principles for Faster Vote Counts,” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

11 [The Nevada Independent, “Was a large percentage of votes received after Election Day in Nevada in 2024?” January 31, 2025](#)

## Prevalence and timing of absentee/mail-in and early voting

More voters casting ballots before Election Day can either speed up or slow down ballot counting and the reporting of election results, depending on state policies. To understand the other factors included in this article's effect on the speed of election results, the number of absentee/mail-in ballots and early in-person ballots is a necessary starting point.<sup>12,13,14</sup>

The share of each type of ballot (absentee/mail-in vs. early in-person) may have a different effect depending on the state, and changes in voting behavior can also delay the timeline for reporting results as election officials and policies adapt. For example, in Arizona, some lawmakers said slower results in elections in 2020 and 2024 were the result of an increase in absentee/mail-in ballots returned on Election Day and more voters voting in-person during a three-day emergency voting period before Election Day, creating a strain on resources close to the election.<sup>15,16</sup>

In 2020, 12.9% of voters used an absentee/mail-in ballot, while no voters voted early in person.<sup>17</sup> The same year, 99.3% of voters in Oregon voted using an absentee/mail-in ballot.<sup>18</sup> [Click here](#) to learn more about absentee/mail-in voting policies in each state.

## Pre-processing policies

The pre-processing of early and absentee/mail-in ballots affects the speed of results reporting.<sup>19</sup> Pre-processing refers to the administrative steps required to prepare ballots for tabulation. These may include signature verification, removing ballots from secrecy sleeves or outer envelopes, and scanning ballots before tabulation.

According to Sam Oliker-Friedland, executive director of the Institute for Responsive Government, "The more mail ballots, the longer results are going to take."<sup>20</sup> If a large number of voters vote using absentee/mail-in ballots, or early ballots that also require processing, there is a greater demand on election administration resources.<sup>21</sup> There is simply more work to do.

However, in states where election officials are permitted to pre-process, or even tabulate ballots before Election Day, a greater number of early and absentee/mail-in voters may speed up the delivery of results. According to a report from the R Street Institute, — a think tank which described itself as "focused on solving complex public policy challenges through free markets and limited, effective government" — "When paired with streamlined ballot processing, [expanding early and absentee/mail-in voting] can be useful mechanisms for expediting vote tabulation, which can help minimize post-election misinformation."<sup>22,23</sup>

Pre-processing rules vary by state, including when election officials may begin processing mailed ballots, and what steps they may take before Election Day. Within some states, the rules may even

12 [FactCheck.org](#), "Counting Mail-In Ballots Delays Results, But Doesn't Denote Fraud," November 7, 2022

13 [NPR](#), "A need for speed: Several states are looking for ways to count votes faster," January 16, 2025

14 [MIT Election Data & Science Lab](#), "Voting by mail and absentee voting," accessed April 21, 2025

15 [Arizona Legislature](#), "House Bill 2703, First Regular Session, 2025," accessed April 21, 2025

16 [R Street Institute](#), "Arizona Lawmakers Advancing Bills that Help Would Produce Faster Election Results," January 30, 2025

17 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#), "2020 EAVS Data Brief: Alabama," accessed April 21, 2025

18 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#), "2020 EAVS Data Brief: Oregon," accessed April 21, 2025

19 [Bipartisan Policy Center](#), "Ballot Pre-processing Policies Explained," September 7, 2022

20 [NPR](#), "A need for speed: Several states are looking for ways to count votes faster," January 16, 2025

21 [California Public Radio](#), "As California looks to speed up vote counting, election experts hope it won't come at a cost," March 14, 2025

22 [R Street Institute](#), "About R Street," accessed April 21, 2025

23 [R Street Institute](#), "Combating Misinformation Through Electoral Reform," October 24, 2023

vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. States where a large number of voters cast their ballot before Election Day but election officials don't begin processing until shortly before, or on Election Day frequently report full results more slowly.

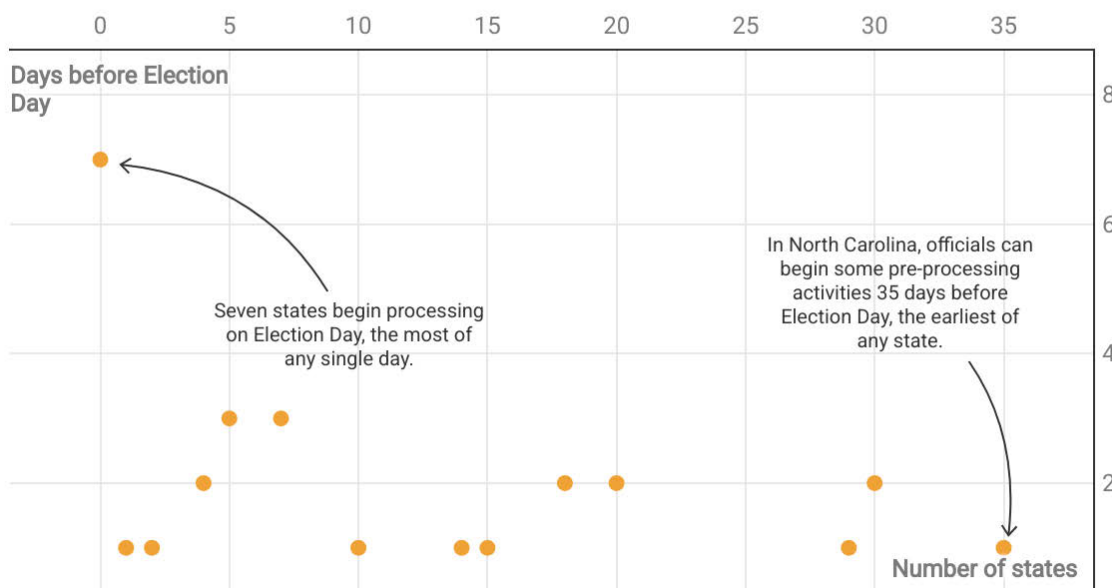
In some states, officials may fully process, and even scan a ballot before Election Day. In others, election officials may complete some of the required administrative steps in advance of Election Day, but must wait until Election Day to count the ballots. Twelve states permit election officials to fully process and scan early and absentee/mail-in ballots before Election Day, while in seven states and D.C., election officials do not begin processing any aspect of absentee/mail-in ballots until Election Day, as of April 2025.<sup>24,25</sup>

Even among states that permit pre-processing, the period during which election officials may do so varies. In several states, election officials begin pre-processing upon receipt of a ballot. On the other hand, South Carolina law provides the shortest pre-processing period which begins at 7 a.m. two days before the election.<sup>26</sup>

In seven states — Alabama, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin — election officials begin processing absentee/mail-in ballots after polls open on Election Day. In at least four states, pre-processing begins 30 days or more before the election, while in 16 states, at least some processing begins upon receipt of a voted ballot.

## When states begin pre-processing absentee/mail-in ballots

Showing the number of states that begin pre-processing absentee/mail-in ballots on a given day before or after Election Day where 0 is the day of the election. In seven states, the date varies by jurisdiction and other factors, while in 15, pre-processing begins upon receipt of a ballot or at a specific time after receipt. In every other state, state law sets a specific date when at least some pre-processing activities may start.



**BALLOT**PEDIA

<sup>24</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, "When Absentee/Mail Ballot Processing and Counting Can Begin," accessed April 21, 2025

<sup>25</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, "Ballot Pre-processing Policies Explained," September 7, 2022

<sup>26</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, "Ballot Pre-processing Policies Explained," September 7, 2022



## Tabulation policies and reporting requirements

While deadlines to canvass and certify election results determine how and when election results become official, the policies that have a more direct effect on the speed of ballot counting and unofficial results are those that govern the time and place of ballot tabulation and statutory requirements to report results at specific times.<sup>27,28</sup>

In some states, state law requires election officials to count certain ballots in specific places, potentially affecting the release of results.<sup>29,30</sup> And, the speed at which tabulation occurs depends on the extent of pre-processing. As discussed above, some states' laws permit election officials to scan ballots ahead of or on Election Day. In effect, ballots that are scanned before Election Day have been counted, although the results of these ballots are not compiled until Election Day or released before the close of polls in any state. In states where ballots are pre-scanned, tabulation of results may simply mean pressing a button to add up the previously scanned ballots once polls close, while elsewhere election officials must scan up to millions of ballots on Election Day, or even after.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, several states require election officials to deliver a portion of results at a specific time, or mandate that election officials finish the tabulation of portions of ballots by a specific deadline.<sup>32,33,34</sup>

## Vote counting resources

The resources available to election officials affect the speed with which ballots are processed and counted.

According to a report from the R Street Institute, "American elections are consistently poorly funded. With increased election funding, states would be able to better address issues that impede efficient vote tabulation."<sup>35</sup> On delivering quicker results, Sam Oliker-Friedland, executive director of the Institute for Responsive Government, said, "One of the best ways to actually intervene on something like this is not necessarily passing a new bill. ... It's giving more resources to the local election officials across the country that are in charge of counting ballots."<sup>36</sup>

However, more resources do not by themselves result in quicker election results. Specific resource factors that play a role in the speed of ballot counting may include the number of election officials and volunteers, the availability of and type of ballot counting equipment, and the overall number of polling locations or tabulation centers.<sup>37</sup> As noted by the MIT Election Lab, the challenge is also complex: "The multitude of approaches to election administration at the local level creates a problem for policymakers striving to set uniform standards for how election resources should be allocated."<sup>38</sup>

27 Laws in every state set a deadline for officials to certify election results, and laws in every state except Delaware and West Virginia either set a time to begin or deadline to complete a canvass of statewide election results. But these deadlines are typically weeks after an election and have little to do with the speed with which election officials report unofficial results.

28 [According](#) to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, the canvass is a process that "aggregates and confirms every valid ballot cast and counted, including mail, uniformed and overseas citizen, early voting, Election Day, and provisional ballots," and certification is, "the process of election officials attesting that the election results are a true and accurate accounting of all votes cast in a particular election."

29 [The Joseph Rainey Center for Public Policy, "Five Principles for Faster Vote Counts," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

30 [Michigan Secretary of State, "Absentee Vote Counting Board," October 7, 2020](#)

31 [AP News, "Florida has nearly all ballots counted on Election Day, while California can take weeks. This is why," October 8, 2024](#)

32 [California Secretary of State, "Official Canvass - Vote Counting Process," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

33 [Justia, "GA Code § 21-2-493 \(2024\)," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

34 [Wisconsin State Legislature, "Wis. Stat. § 7.60," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

35 [R Street Institute, "Combating Misinformation Through Electoral Reform," October 24, 2023](#)

36 [AP News, "Florida has nearly all ballots counted on Election Day, while California can take weeks. This is why," October 8, 2024](#)

37 [The Joseph Rainey Center for Public Policy, "Five Principles for Faster Vote Counts," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

38 [MIT Election Data & Science Lab, "How Data Can Inform the Elections Resource Allocation Problem," November 18, 2021](#)

## Absentee/mail-in ballot deadlines

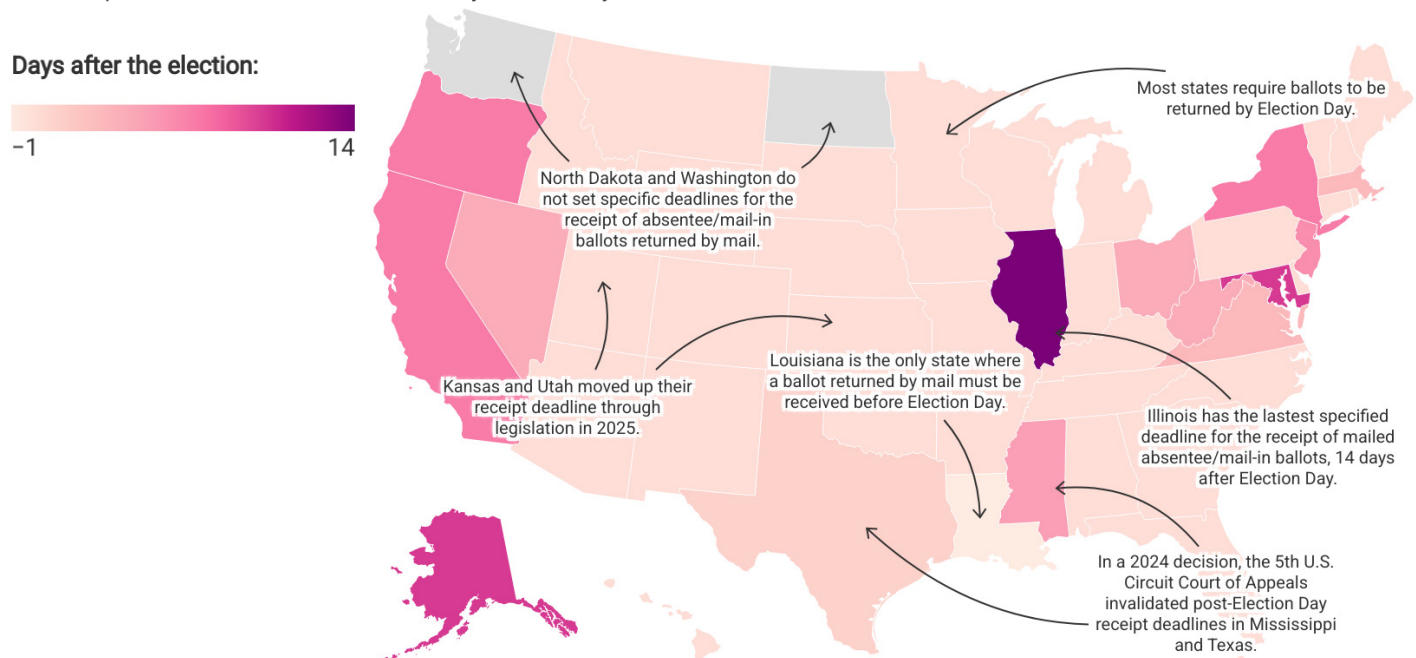
Every state requires voters to postmark absentee/mail-in ballots returned by mail by Election Day, at the latest. As of the November 2024 election, 18 states counted at least some ballots that arrived after Election Day. Because states report election data in different ways, it is difficult to get a full picture of the scale of late-arriving eligible absentee/mail-in ballots. In some states, such as Nevada — where of the 1.3 million ballots cast in Clark and Washoe counties, less than 1% arrived after Election Day — these ballots may not be a significant factor in delivering unofficial results. In others — such as Washington, where 8.9% of absentee/mail-in ballots counted in the 2024 election arrived after Election Day, and California, where the share of these ballots approached 40% of all ballots in 2024 — they are likely to be a factor in slower results.<sup>39,40,41,42</sup>

For most states, the most important dimension of absentee/mail-in ballot return with respect to the speed of results reporting is the number of absentee/mail-in ballots that are returned on Election Day, or that require processing on Election Day.<sup>43</sup> If a significant portion of absentee/mail-in ballots are returned on Election Day, and those ballots could have been processed sooner if they were returned before Election Day, there is a greater burden on election officials that makes it more difficult to report complete results on the day of an election.

Because of the requirement for processing these ballots, state laws that require voters to return their ballots before Election Day may result in quicker reporting of results. As of April 2025, just one state, Louisiana, required ballots returned by mail to be received before Election Day. Illinois had the latest deadline, whereby election officials counted valid ballots postmarked by Election Day if received by the 14th day after the election.

### Absentee/mail-in return deadlines by state

Showing the absentee/mail-in ballot return deadlines by state for ballots returned by mail. Every state requires voters to postmark absentee/mail-in ballots by Election Day to be counted.



39 [The Nevada Independent](#), “Was a large percentage of votes received after Election Day in Nevada in 2024?” January 31, 2025

40 [Washington Secretary of State](#), “2024 General Election, Ballot Return Statistics,” accessed April 21, 2024

41 [Political Data Intelligence](#), “California Early Vote Counts, 2024 General Election,” accessed April 21, 2024

42 [California Secretary of State](#), “Historical Vote-By-Mail (Absentee) Ballot Use in California,” accessed April 21, 2024

43 [R Street Institute](#), “Combating Misinformation Through Electoral Reform,” October 24, 2023

## Provisional ballot rules

Provisional ballots are ballots cast by a voter whose eligibility to vote cannot be proven at the polls on Election Day. Some states, such as California, also require voters that register on the day of the election to vote provisional ballots.

States where more voters use provisional ballots may have later results because state laws typically require verification of the voter's eligibility, either through an action by the voter or by election officials. According to the Council on State Governments, "Given that a provisional ballot is reviewed in order to validate the voter's eligibility, they often take more time to count. This can lead to votes still being tallied after Election Day."<sup>44</sup>

However, provisional ballots typically make up a small share of ballots and are not a significant factor in the speed with which election officials report most election results. According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, between 2006-2016, "In presidential cycles provisional ballots account for approximately 1.8 percent of all ballots cast, compared with about 1.1 percent of all ballots cast in midterm elections."<sup>45</sup>

## Cure processes

Ballot curing is a process that gives voters an opportunity to correct an absentee/mail-in ballot with a missing or mismatched signature, or other discrepancy.

Several aspects of cure processes can affect the speed of results reporting, including the overall number of curable ballots, requirements for election officials related to these ballots, and rules dictating the method and date by which a voter can fix their ballot or cast a replacement.

While national figures are not available, those from several states indicate that, similar to provisional ballots, ballots requiring cure processes are a small portion of all ballots. In Florida, for example, of the just over 11 million ballots cast in the state for the 2020 presidential election, about 0.4% required a cure.<sup>46</sup> In the same election in North Carolina, of the more than 5.5 million ballots cast, 0.36%, or just over 20,000 ballots counted in the election were cured ballots.<sup>47</sup> In New York that year, the share of cured ballots as a percentage of all ballots cast in the election was even smaller.<sup>48</sup> In 2024, cured ballots in Pennsylvania made up less than 0.1% of all ballots counted in the presidential election cycle.<sup>49</sup>

As of April 2025, 16 states did not have a statewide cure process. In Oregon, voters had up until the 21st day after Election Day to cure a ballot, while in Louisiana, voters had to cure a ballot deficiency by 4:30 p.m. on the day before the election. [Click here](#) to read more about each state's policy.

<sup>44</sup> [The Council on State Governments, "Provisional Ballots MythBusters," accessed April 21, 2024](#)

<sup>45</sup> [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "EAVS Deep Dive: Provisional Ballots," accessed April 21, 2024](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Reason Magazine, "How Florida Fixed Its Vote-Counting Problem After the 2000 Election," January 2024](#)

<sup>47</sup> [Southern Coalition for Social Justice, "North Carolina's Absentee Ballot Cure Process: Impact Analysis," July 2021](#)

<sup>48</sup> [Gotham Gazette, "First New York Election with Absentee Ballot 'Curing' Shows Progress and Mysteries," March 30, 2021](#)

<sup>49</sup> [ACLU of Pennsylvania, "Mail Ballots, Notice-and-Cure, and the 2024 Election," accessed April 21, 2025](#)



## Hand count jurisdictions

Across the United States, only a small share of jurisdictions count ballots by hand, and most of these have less than 1,000 voters.<sup>50</sup> Data about the speed of hand counting ballots is not widely available, but the resources required to hand count ballots at the same speed as machines, which can count hundreds of ballots per minute, are significant.<sup>51</sup> According to a report from the [Brennan Center](#), Shasta County, California, — which planned to begin hand count ballots in 2023 before state lawmakers blocked the policy — with 111,000 registered voters, “estimated that a hand count would cost over \$1.6 million and require hiring 1,200 additional staff members — and the process would take 18 days.”<sup>52,53</sup> Rules that require election officials to hand count ballots interact with other factors to affect the speed of election results, particularly the complexity of a ballot, or the number of offices and questions that a voter votes on in a given election.<sup>54</sup>

In many states, there are no jurisdictions that hand count ballots. New Hampshire is an example of a state on the other end of the spectrum. For the 2024 election, 122 towns in the state hand counted ballots.<sup>55</sup>

## Evaluating policies at play

Understanding the policies that determine the speed of election results in a given state requires taking a holistic view. Therefore, the questions whose answers will give a general sense for the speed of results reporting in a given state may be formulated as:

- How many ballots are cast before Election Day? And, how quickly are these ballots processed and tabulated?
  - How many people vote using an absentee/mail-in ballot? How many people vote early?
  - What are the rules for election officials with respect to processing these ballots? What actions can they take and when?
  - When does tabulation mean in this state and when does it happen?
- How many ballots are cast on Election Day? Are there any requirements to report results by a specific time?
  - When do election officials process these ballots? When do they tabulate them? How do they tabulate them? Does state law mandate a time for reporting initial results or intervals for updating results?
- What are the resources used to count ballots?
  - How does a jurisdiction count ballots? How many ballots does a typical jurisdiction count? What is the overall number of tabulating machines per jurisdiction? What is their capacity? How many election workers are involved in the processing and counting of ballots? How many ballots do election officials count by hand?

50 [Verified Voting](#), “Hand Counted Paper Ballots,” accessed April 21, 2025

51 [Election Systems and Software](#), “DS850,” accessed April 21, 2025

52 [Brennan Center for Justice](#), “Hand Counting Ballots,” July 29, 2024

53 [AP News](#), “Florida has nearly all ballots counted on Election Day, while California can take weeks. This is why,” October 8, 2024

54 [Verified Voting](#), “Hand Counted Paper Ballots,” accessed April 21, 2025

55 [New Hampshire Secretary of State](#), “Towns which HAND COUNT ballots - 2024,” July 1, 2024

- How many ballots require action from election officials after Election Day? What are the cutoff dates for these actions?
  - How many ballots postmarked by Election Day are received after election day and counted?
  - How many curable ballots are there? What do election officials or voters need to do to cure a ballot? And by when?
  - How many provisional ballots are there? What do election officials or voters need to do to verify a provisional ballot? And by when?

## California and Florida

*“Florida is famous among election nerds for having the fastest reporting of vote totals in the country, with near-instant results on election night.”<sup>56</sup>*

*“California takes longer to count election ballots than just about any other state.”<sup>57</sup>*

These two states are frequently given as examples of a state that delivers unofficial results quickly (Florida), and one that often takes much more time to deliver the same share of results (California).<sup>58</sup> So, what are their policies and do they match up with what we would anticipate?

In both states, a large share of ballots are cast by mail or at early in-person voting locations and election officials can begin pre-processing and scanning ballots more than 20 days before Election Day. The share of provisional ballots and cured ballots make up a small percentage of all ballots cast in both states, however is slightly higher in California than Florida.

As far as differences, in California, significantly more ballots arrive after Election Day. In Florida, statutory reporting requirements require election officials to count and deliver results quickly after the close of polls. While in California, there are statutory reporting requirements, but they do not set deadlines to finish counting ballots outside of the certification deadline. The lack of ballots arriving after Election Day, and reporting requirements shortly after the close of polls in Florida are the most likely factor in quicker unofficial results in that state.

With respect to the effect of resources on the delivery of results in each state, more information is needed. Questions that would help shed light on the effect of resources are: How many and what kind of machines are used to count ballots? How many election officials and workers participate in pre-processing of absentee/mail-in envelopes? What is the typical tabulation burden for one election official or worker, i.e. how many ballots is one official responsible for “counting”?

<sup>56</sup> Reason Magazine, “How Florida Fixed Its Vote-Counting Problem After the 2000 Election,” January 2024

<sup>57</sup> California Public Radio, “As California looks to speed up vote counting, election experts hope it won’t come at a cost,” March 14, 2025

<sup>58</sup> AP News, “Florida has nearly all ballots counted on Election Day, while California can take weeks. This is why,” October 8, 2024

POLICY/TOPIC	CALIFORNIA	FLORIDA
<b>Absentee/ mail-in and early voting availability</b>	<p>In 2024, 80.8% of voters voted using an absentee/mail-in ballot. This does not include voters who voted early using an in-person ballot. All registered voters automatically receive an absentee/mail-in ballot for each election.<sup>59</sup></p> <p>In 2020, 86.7% of voters voted using an absentee/mail-in ballot. The same year, 5.4% of voters voted early in person.<sup>60</sup></p>	<p>In 2024, 77.2% of voters voted using an absentee/mail-in or early in-person ballot. All voters are eligible to vote early or by mail in Florida. A voter must submit an application by 5:00 p.m. on the 12th day before the election to receive an absentee/mail-in ballot.<sup>61,62</sup></p> <p>In 2020, 79.8% of voters voted using an absentee/mail-in or early ballot or early in-person ballot.<sup>63</sup></p>
<b>Pre-processing rules</b>	<p>“County elections officials may begin opening and processing vote-by-mail ballot envelopes up to 29 days before Election Day, but those results cannot be accessed or shared with the public until all polls close on Election Day.”<sup>64</sup></p>	<p>Election officials can begin processing absentee/mail-in ballots when they are received, but can not canvass these ballots until the completion of logic and accuracy testing, which must occur by the 25th day before Election Day.<sup>65,66</sup></p>

59 [California Secretary of State, “Historical Vote-By-Mail \(Absentee\) Ballot Use in California,” accessed April 21, 2024](#)

60 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, “2020 EAVS Data Brief: California,” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

61 [Florida Department of State, “November 5, 2024 General Election,” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

62 [Florida Division of Elections, “Vote-by-Mail,” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

63 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, “2020 EAVS Data Brief: Florida,” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

64 [California Secretary of State, “Official Canvass - Vote Counting Process,” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

65 [The Florida Legislature, “The 2024 Florida Statutes, § 101.68” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

66 [The Florida Legislature, “The 2024 Florida Statutes, § 101.5612” accessed April 21, 2025](#)

POLICY/TOPIC	CALIFORNIA	FLORIDA
<b>Tabulation and Election Day reporting requirements</b>	<p>State law allows election officials to scan ballots up to 29 days before Election Day, but they may not release a tally of results until the close of polls, at earliest.<sup>67</sup></p> <p>Beginning at 8 p.m. on Election Day, county elections officials must conduct the semi-official canvas of votes and report every 2 hours to the sos until completion.</p> <p>Beginning on the Thursday after Election Day, election officials must post updated unofficial results at least weekly until the final certification of results. Additionally, state law requires a report on the number of outstanding unprocessed ballots on the second day after the election, and report on these ballots on any day the elections officials publicly release updated elections results beginning on the sixth day after the election.<sup>68</sup></p> <p>In 2022, the state reported that 100% of precincts used ballot scanners.<sup>69</sup></p>	<p>Election officials may scan ballots before Election Day but may not release a tally of votes until the close of polls, at earliest.<sup>70,71</sup></p> <p>Election officials must upload initial returns to their county's election management system from early and absentee/mail-in voting ballots by 7 p.m. the day before the election.<sup>72</sup></p> <p>Election officials must report complete results from these ballots by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, and must report updated unofficial results every 45 minutes thereafter until results are complete.<sup>73</sup></p>
<b>Resources</b>	<p>In 2022, there were 35,053 poll workers across 3,876 polling locations, or 9 poll workers per location.<sup>74</sup></p>	<p>In 2022, there were 37,099 poll workers across 4,134 polling locations, or 8.9 poll workers per location.<sup>75</sup></p>
<b>Absentee/mail-in voting deadlines</b>	<p>Voters must postmark their ballot by Election Day. Election officials may count ballots that arrive postmarked on or before Election Day "no later than 7 days after Election Day."<sup>76</sup></p>	<p>A ballot must be received by election officials in the county in which the voter is registered by 7 p.m. on Election Day.<sup>77</sup></p>

67 [California Legislative Information, "California Election Code, Division 15, Chapter 2, § 1501" accessed April 21, 2025](#)

68 [California Legislative Information, "California Election Code, Division 15, Chapter 4, § 15305" accessed April 21, 2025](#)

69 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "2022 EAVS Data Brief: California," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

70 [The Florida Legislature, "The 2024 Florida Statutes, § 101.68" accessed April 21, 2025](#)

71 [Bipartisan Policy Center, "Ballot Pre-processing Policies Explained," September 7, 2022](#)

72 [The Florida Legislature, "The 2024 Florida Statutes, § 102.141" accessed April 21, 2025](#)

73 [The Florida Legislature, "The 2024 Florida Statutes, § 102.141" accessed April 21, 2025](#)

74 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "2022 EAVS Data Brief: California," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

75 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "2022 EAVS Data Brief: Florida," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

76 [California Secretary of State, "Where and How to Vote," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

77 [Florida Division of Elections, "Vote-by-Mail," accessed April 21, 2025](#)

POLICY/TOPIC	CALIFORNIA	FLORIDA
<b>Provisional ballots</b>	State law requires the election officials to verify the eligibility of provisional ballots during the official canvass. This official canvass must begin by the Thursday after Election Day. <sup>78</sup> In 2022, 0.25% of ballots cast in the statewide general election were provisional. <sup>79</sup> The rate of provisional ballots in California has historically been higher than elsewhere because state law requires more classes of voters to use these ballots, although some of these laws have recently changed, resulting in a lower total of provisional ballots. <sup>80,81</sup>	According to NCSL, “The provisional ballot count must be completed by noon on the third day after a primary election, and noon on the fourth day after a general election.” <sup>82</sup> In 2020, 0.19% of ballots cast in the statewide general election were provisional. <sup>83</sup>
<b>Cure policies</b>	“If a signature is missing or does not compare to the signature on file, state law requires county elections officials to reach out to voters to verify their signature to ensure that their ballot can be counted. By law, voters are allowed to verify their signature up to two days before the county certifies their results,” which happens “within 30 days of the election.” <sup>84,85</sup> In 2022, voters cured 48,597 ballots, roughly 0.43% of all ballots. <sup>86</sup>	Election officials contact voters who submitted ballots with curable deficiencies. According to the Florida Division of Elections, “The deadline to submit the form and the ID is no later than 5 p.m. (local time) on the 2nd day after an election.” <sup>87</sup> In 2022, voters cured 13,556 ballots, roughly 0.17% of all ballots. <sup>88</sup>
<b>Hand count jurisdictions</b>	Per <a href="#">AB 969</a> , which became law in 2023, election officials were barred from hand counting ballots in most instances. <a href="#">Click here</a> to read more. In 2022, the state reported that 100% of precincts used ballots scanners. <sup>89</sup>	In 2022, the state reported that 98% of precincts used ballot scanners. <sup>90</sup> It was unclear whether any jurisdictions in the state hand counted ballots.

78 [California Legislative Information, “California Election Code, Division 14, Chapter 3, Article 5, § 14310”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

79 [California Secretary of State, “2022 General Election,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

80 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, “EAVS Deep Dive, Provisional Ballots,”](#) accessed April 21, 2024

81 [Cal Matters, “California dramatically cut provisional ballots. Here’s how,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

82 [National Conference of State Legislatures, “Provisional Ballots,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

83 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, “Studies and Reports,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

84 [California Secretary of State, “Official Canvass - Vote Counting Process,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

85 [California Legislative Information, “California Election Code, Division 15, Chapter 4, Article 6, § 15372,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

86 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, “Studies and Reports,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

87 [Florida Division of Elections, “Vote-by-Mail,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

88 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, “Studies and Reports,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

89 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, “2022 EAVS Data Brief: California,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025

90 [U.S. Election Assistance Commission, “2022 EAVS Data Brief: Florida,”](#) accessed April 21, 2025



# Arguments for and against quicker reporting of election results

Critics of slow election result reporting argue that it is frustrating for voters, provides opportunities for the spread of mis- or disinformation, and is ultimately unnecessary.<sup>91,92,93,94</sup> Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the [Cato Institute](#), wrote, “If you don’t want certain losing candidates to run around endlessly claiming your state’s election was stolen from them, one of the best things you can do is to make sure your state’s vote totals get reported in substantially complete form by the time residents go to sleep election night.”<sup>95</sup> Before the 2024 presidential election, the [Brookings Institution](#) wrote, “Vote counts that take several days look suspicious even when there are logical reasons for the time delays. It will be easy for either side to promote false narratives if the ballots take several days to process.”<sup>96</sup>

Supporters of allowing slower election results argue that election administration policies should not prioritize quicker results at the risk of disenfranchising eligible voters legally casting a ballot or at the expense of accurate election results. Pamela Smith — president and CEO of Verified Voting, an organization that described its mission as “[strengthening] democracy for all voters by promoting the responsible use of technology in elections” — said, “I think what’s important to think about is the balance between how fast we get results reported out and how well voters are supported for their participation.”<sup>97,98</sup> California legislator [Marc Berman](#) (D) said of the state’s policy of accepting ballots postmarked by Election Day but received afterwards, that “we don’t want delays in the Postal Service to disenfranchise voters.”<sup>99</sup> The Center for Election Innovation and Research — an organization that described itself as “a nonprofit whose core mission is to work with election officials and build confidence in elections that voters should trust and do trust” — said that, “given the size and complexity of our national election system, and thanks to the great gains made in the speed, accuracy, and efficiency of vote counting in recent years, we are approaching reasonable limits in how quickly our national elections can be accurately counted and confirmed.”<sup>100,101</sup> The [American Civil Liberties Union](#) (ACLU) wrote that the administrative steps that typically cause slower results “are part of the system of checks and verifications that keep our elections fair and free.”<sup>102</sup>

91 [R Street Institute](#), “Combating Misinformation Through Electoral Reform,” October 24, 2023

92 [R Street Institute](#), “Arizona Lawmakers Advancing Bills that Help Would Produce Faster Election Results,” January 30, 2025

93 [Reason Magazine](#), “How Florida Fixed Its Vote-Counting Problem After the 2000 Election,” January 2024

94 [FGA Research](#), “Accurate and Fast Ballot Counting: How States Can Improve the Tabulation of Election Results,” accessed April 21, 2025

95 [Cato Institute](#), “Florida Counts Votes Quickly. Other States Should Too,” December 27, 2023

96 [Brookings Institution](#), “Election night disinformation risks,” October 28, 2024

97 [Verified Voting](#), “About,” accessed April 21, 2025

98 [NPR](#), “A need for speed: Several states are looking for ways to count votes faster,” January 16, 2025

99 [NPR](#), “A need for speed: Several states are looking for ways to count votes faster,” January 16, 2025

100 [The Center for Election Innovation and Research](#), “About CEIR,” accessed April 21, 2025

101 [The Center for Election Innovation and Research](#), “Can and should we count ballots faster?” February 2024

102 [American Civil Liberties Union](#), “Why Counting the Vote Can, and Should, Take Time,” November 5, 2024