

High Demand, Stifled Supply

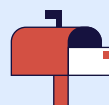
EARLY VOTING ACCESS IN OHIO

Ohio voters made it clear in 2020 that they want and need both in-person early vote (EV) and vote-by-mail (VBM) options. Early in-person voting and VBM in Ohio rose to record levels in 2020, and Election Day voting fell to record lows. Nearly 60% of voters across the state voted with these methods,¹ and this sharp uptick in early voting and VBM spanned across party lines, voters of different races, and rural and urban communities.

This popularity isn't surprising. A recent national survey conducted by Strategies 360 shows that the record number of voters who cast an absentee ballot during the COVID-19 pandemic were overwhelmingly satisfied with their experiences.² Americans emphatically endorse (70%) efforts over the past year to give voters more options for voting safely, like expanding early and absentee voting.³ While Ohio has long employed no-excuse absentee voting, the drastic increase in early and absentee voting across the state shows the value and popularity of voting methods that allow voters to cast a ballot before Election Day.

But Ohio lawmakers and officials have long refused to expand either form of voting. Multiple ballot drop boxes and early voting locations beyond one per county are restricted under law, and further restrictions have been proposed. For example, state Rep. William J. Seitz (R-30) and Rep. Sharon Ray (R-69) have introduced a legislative proposal to curtail ballot drop boxes, allowing them to be open only ten days before the election and located only at the county board of elections, among other restrictions.⁴ According to our analysis, this is a mistake.

Due to the broad use and popularity of both voting methods, elected officials who oppose EV and VBM do so at the risk of alienating their own supporters. Further, as voter familiarity with these methods has grown, so too has the expectation that these methods will continue to be offered.



Given the broad popularity of early voting and voting-by-mail, Ohio lawmakers need to look forward by making these equitable improvements:

- 01** **Expand access to drop boxes by authorizing counties to add more than one. Have these drop boxes be accessible 24 hours a day during the full early voting period;**
- 02** **Authorize counties to add more than one early in-person voting location.**

¹ All Voting is Local: Too many ballots of last resort: April 2021, <https://allvotingislocal.org/reports/too-many-ballots-of-last-resort-ohio/>.

² Strategies 360 conducted a survey - on behalf of the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights and Voting Rights Lab - of 1002 registered voters nationwide from January 25th to February 1st, 2021. Interviews were conducted online among respondents fully matched to state voter files; the sample was weighted to represent the national population of registered voters. The margin of error for a survey of 1002 interviews is $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level for each individual sample.

³ Strategies 360 survey

⁴ Since lawmakers recently passed Senate Bill 22, they can reject or modify any state health order as soon as it's given, and extend or end states of emergencies.



Voters Want More Options to Vote — Not Less

2020 TOPLINES ON EARLY VOTING AND VOTE-BY-MAIL IN OHIO

- **In the 2020 General Election, nearly 6 million Ohioans turned out to vote.** Ohioans hadn't turned out at that level since the 1992 General Election when turnout hit a high of 77%.⁵
- Early and absentee voting rose to record levels, and Election Day voting fell to record lows.⁶
- **Ohioans made greater use of EV in 2020 with 22.5% voting early as compared to 11.9% in 2016, a total increase of more than 680,000 voters.** VBM in 2020 also increased, accounting for 36.1% of the 5.97 million ballots cast.⁷
- Predictably, with the large increase in 2020 voters preferring EV and VBM options, Election Day voting fell drastically from 66.48% in 2016 to 41.36% in 2020. While 2.47 million Ohioans voted on Election Day, this move away from Election Day represents a seismic shift in preferred voting methods with more than 1.26 million voters changing how they voted from 2016 to 2020.⁸
- Early voting and VBM popularity extended across racial groups and geographic areas. White and Black Ohioans voted by mail or used early voting at nearly identical rates.⁹
- 21% of Black voters used early voting compared to 20% of White voters, and 33% of Black voters used absentee ballots, compared to 31% of White voters.¹⁰
- By adopting policies that increase the use of VBM, Ohio can decrease provisional ballot use. For context, in 2020, 24,369 provisional ballots went uncounted in Ohio. In 2016, 22,470 votes decided a hotly contested statewide race for an Ohio Supreme Court seat.¹¹
- Elected officials will alienate their own supporters statewide if they oppose early voting, put extreme limitations on drop boxes, hamper VBM options, and favor inaccessible identification requirements to vote early or by mail.

⁵ All Voting is Local: Too many ballots of last resort: April 2021, <https://allvotingislocal.org/reports/too-many-ballots-of-last-resort-ohio/>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ America Votes-Ohio.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Shaffer, Cory. "Black Cleveland Activists Vow to Thwart Judge John O'Donnell's Campaign for Ohio Supreme Court -- Again." Cleveland.Com, cleveland.com, 24 Aug. 2020, www.cleveland.com/court-justice/2020/08/black-cleveland-activists-vow-to-thwart-judge-john-odonnells-campaign-for-ohio-supreme-court-again.html.



VOTING STORIES

Why Voting Options Matter for Ohioans

We can all agree that when it comes to our elections, we want a transparent process we can trust, where Americans have equal freedom to vote, no matter who they are, where they live, or how they vote. Limiting early voting and vote-by-mail not only threatens to silence our voices, it increases the likelihood of problems on Election Day — both for voters and election workers. For example:

Kathleen Valdez, a poll worker at a polling site on Cleveland's near west side, said she was struck by how many Latino voters had encountered problems casting a ballot on Election Day. She recalls voters who brought identification that didn't match the electronic voter identification exactly. Many were asked to use provisional ballots, but there was a fix that poll workers overlooked. These voters went by two last names. Valdez, who is fluent in Spanish, was able to fix those poll book errors on the spot, enabling some voters to cast a regular ballot. But countless other voters were turned away.

Voting amid a pandemic presented difficult choices for **Alexis Thomas**, a young Black voter living in Cleveland. She requested a vote-by-mail ballot for her safety. But voting in person was by far her preference. As Election Day drew near, she considered voting early — she could cast a ballot in person, but beat the crowds. But with only one early voting location in her county, she learned she could have to wait up to four hours to cast a ballot.

Ultimately, she chose to vote in person on Election Day. Once she did, she was forced to cast a provisional ballot because she had already requested a mail ballot. Ohio officials can avoid this confusion and long wait times with a simple solution: expand early voting and vote-by-mail options so that every voter can cast a ballot that counts.

ALL VOTING
IS LOCAL

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