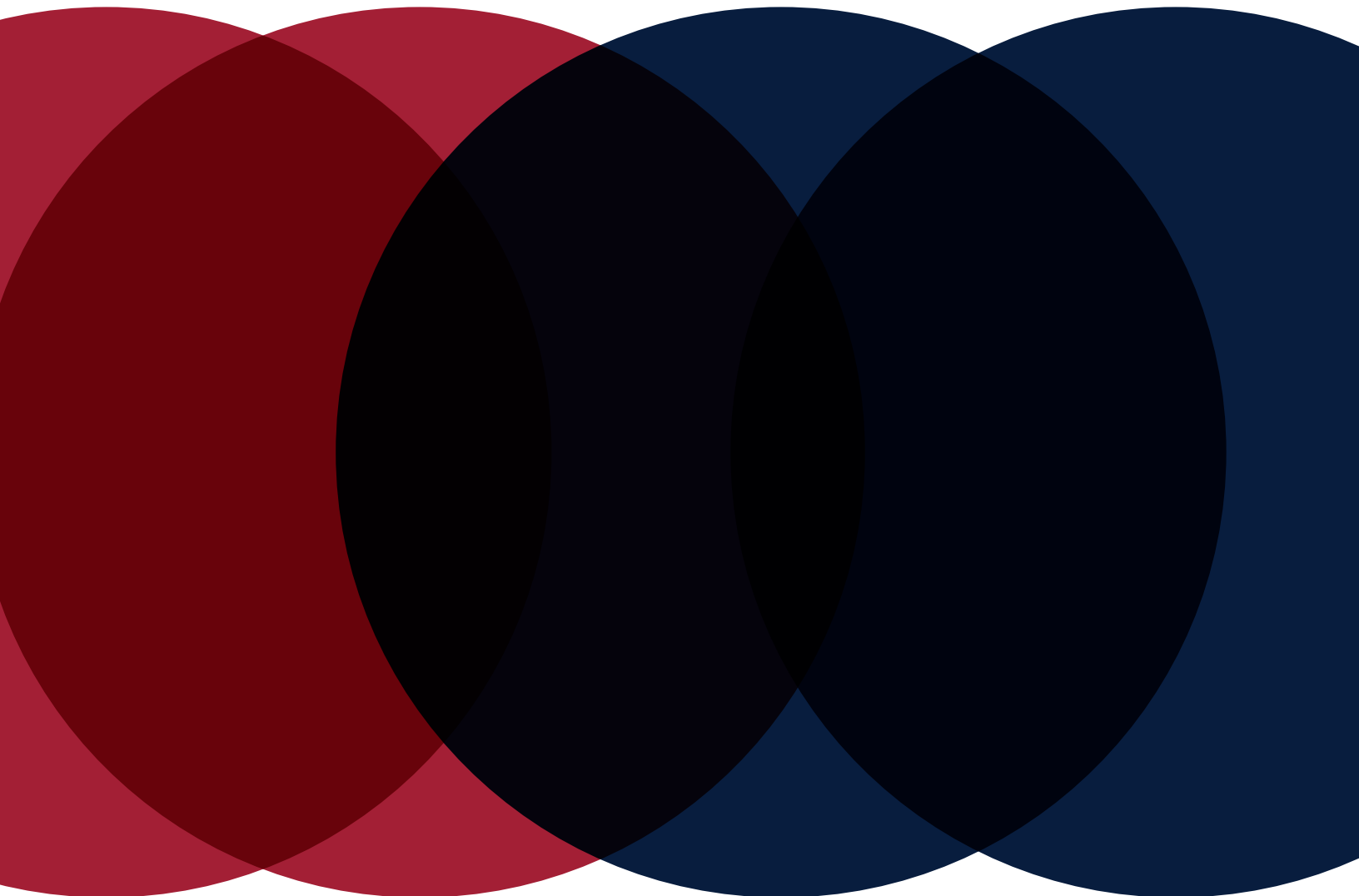




U.S. VOTE FOUNDATION
**2022 POST ELECTION
SURVEY REPORT**



EVERY CITIZEN IS A
VOTER

Voters Report Lower Satisfaction While Motivation to Vote Remains High

The results of U.S. Vote Foundation’s 2022 Midterm Election Voter Experience survey show a continued and significant interest in voting, and highlight how well voting processes have fared despite concerted efforts by a small minority to undermine the integrity of our elections. The turnout for the November 8, 2022 election also changed our concept of how midterm elections might affect the administration and party in power and demonstrated that American voters can sustain interest during non-presidential election years. That turnout highlighted a nation-wide understanding of the significance of these elections in ways that were once thought to be only reserved for quadrennial presidential elections.

That heightened significance makes it important to compare the 2022 Midterm Election with the 2020 General Election, despite the fact that it would be more common to compare this most recent midterm election with the last midterm election in 2018. But the massive shifts in voter accessibility, methods, and motivation that took place during the 2020 General election – due to pandemic and a heightened sense of what was at stake in 2020 – makes the comparison between the 2020 General Election and the 2022 Midterm Election the more relevant one.

The three dominant themes that emerge from the survey reflect this sense of overall success, even if there were some problems:

- Voters were highly motivated to vote
- Voters’ satisfaction with their method of voting was lower than in the US Vote 2020 survey
- Nonetheless, the majority of respondents felt that the experience of voting was “easy”

Motivation to Vote Remains High

While motivation to vote came in at a record-setting high of 98% in the 2020 General Election Survey, the 96% positive satisfaction rate reported by respondents in the 2022 survey meant that this motivation remained in place. This is further evidence of a trend, also noted in the 2018 Midterm Election survey, of voters becoming more engaged during non-presidential year elections, which historically have been characterized by relatively low turnouts. The relatively high numbers in this most recent election augur well for a repeat in 2024 of the record voter turnout we saw in the 2020 General Election.

Satisfaction Down by 5% Across Voting Methods

The way voters chose to cast their ballots and their satisfaction with that choice produced some noticeable changes between the 2020 General Election survey results and the 2022 Midterm survey.

US Vote issued the Midterm Election Voter Experience Survey on Election Day November 8, 2022 and closed it one week later. Survey invitations were sent to the US Vote mailing list. A total of 3,886 voters participated in the survey. Of those, 3,235 reported that they voted, 651 did not. The majority of domestic voters did so in person at a polling place (688, or 21%.) Domestic absentee respondents totaled 558, or 18%, while overseas absentee voters – the largest single segment due to US Vote’s longstanding Overseas Voting Initiative – constituted 1,486, or 47% of the total. The remaining 14% of respondents used other methods.

Overall, voter satisfaction with the voting experience dropped an average of 5% relative to the 2020 election. Of the domestic respondents who voted by absentee ballot (or vote-by-mail), 90% reported a high level of satisfaction in 2022, down from 94% in 2020. Similarly, only 80% of overseas absentee voters reported a high level of satisfaction in this recent election, down from the 85% who reported being highly satisfied with their method of voting in 2022. Voters who cast their ballots in-person at a polling place also claimed to be less satisfied: only 87% indicated a high level of satisfaction in 2022 versus 93% in 2020.

The reasons for these differences are not apparent from the survey results. Since the 2020 election, a number of states have made changes to voter access – some restricted certain forms of voting and voter assistance, while others sought to measurably increase access. It is possible that displeasure with these changes was reflected in these results, and U.S. Vote Foundation (US Vote) intends to follow up with this issue in the 2024 general election survey.

Voting in 2022 was “Easy”

Regardless of whether voters were satisfied with their specific voting method, when asked for a one-word description of their voting experience, the word with the greatest number of responses was “easy”. The same word was the top choice in the 2020 survey as well. Other words that ranked highly were “good”, “great” and “excellent.” (See Voter Experience Word Cloud below.)

Despite some drop in overall satisfaction with voting methods, the fact that these were the words most used to characterize their voting experience, combined with the high rates of motivation reported by survey respondents, provides an extremely positive view of the electoral process and, by extension, the democratic experience voting sustains. This is quite remarkable in the face of the threats to democracy that emerged since the 2020 election, as well as the difficulties and dangers faced by election administrators.

Voter Experience Word Cloud

“In ONE word, how would you describe your voting experience in this election?”



The survey also provided some interesting details about the specific experiences of voters who used absentee ballots in the 2022 Midterm Election. This method of voting gained a new relevance in 2020 due to the pandemic, and the survey results showed that some of the mechanisms that were established or bolstered in 2020, such as the increasing sophistication of individual state voter assistance websites and the ability of the US Postal Service to successfully deliver ballots in a timely manner, continued their positive evolution in 2022.

Domestic Voting by Absentee Ballot in 2022

Of the 588 respondents who reported voting by domestic absentee ballot, 65% reported that convenience was an important reason that contributed to their decision to vote by absentee ballot or mail ballot. Other important reasons for choosing this voting method include reasons related to the voter's age (17%) and health (14%) as well as issues relating to traveling to the polls (13%) and disability-related reasons (10%). The survey also asked voters about intimidation concerns for the first time since US Vote's initial post-election survey was first fielded in 2004. Five percent of voters cited this concern as their contributing reason to vote by absentee ballot. It will be interesting to see in subsequent surveys how this issue trends over time.

State voter assistance websites continued to grow in importance. A significant majority of absentee ballot respondents (65%) reported using their state or local elections website to request their absentee ballot, up from 59% in 2020. The importance of local election offices was also reinforced in the survey, as 52% of

domestic absentee voters cited their local election office as the most highly rated source for resolving their problems. Ballot design and usability were also highlighted: a total of 96% of domestic voters found the instructions accompanying their ballot easy to follow.

The US Postal Service was used by 72% of absentee ballot voters to return their ballots in 2022, significantly up from 54% in 2020. In contrast, just 21% of absentee voters used drop boxes for ballot return in 2022, down from 32% in 2020. Only 45% reported that they checked on their ballot status using their state's online ballot tracking system in 2022, plummeting from 67% in 2020. Whether the lower use of on-line tracking was a sign of growing trust in the absentee ballot process or not, 92% of absentee voters in 2022 said they would choose this voting method in the future, significantly up from 65% in 2020.

Overseas Absentee Voting in 2022

Overseas voters, for whom an absentee ballot is the dominant method of voting, continued to make use of a number of different resources in order to request their ballot. State and local elections websites were the most commonly used resource, with 36% of respondents using these websites to request their overseas absentee ballots. As expected, overseas absentee voters also cited US Vote (22%) and our Overseas Vote initiative (21%) as important sources for ballot requests. Only 6% of overseas respondents indicated they used a US government website to request their ballots.

Voting was “easy” for these respondents as well, with 91% saying they had no problem with the absentee ballot process. Nonetheless, a small minority reported issues with accessing ballot request forms or instructions online (5%) and a smaller percent indicated problems printing their ballot request.

The number of respondents who received their ballot online came in at 75% in the midterm election, down slightly from the 80% who used this method in 2020. The number of respondents reporting receiving their ballot by mail, however, was up from 15% in 2020 to 24% in 2022.

More importantly, a record 96% of overseas absentee voters reported receiving their ballot in time to return it, as compared to 80% in 2020. This improvement may be due, in part, to the remediation of the disruptions in both domestic and international mail service that were experienced during the pandemic. Another factor may be the result of an increasing number of jurisdictions using ballot tracking services, which provide voters with a much higher degree of certainty regarding the receipt of their ballot than was previously available.

Nonetheless, 10% of respondents reported problems with ballot receipt, which indicates more attention to this issue is needed, something for which US Vote continues to advocate.

Did you have any of the following problems receiving your overseas absentee ballot?

No, I had no problem receiving my ballot	89.92%
Yes, I had trouble accessing my State's website to download my ballot	2.92%
Yes, I was not sure about the paper size for my ballot	2.70%
Yes, I had problems printing my online ballot	2.70%
Yes, my ballot had the wrong information	1.02%
Yes, my ballot was sent to the wrong address	0.22%
Yes, my ballot arrived damaged	0.51%

Several other issues of importance to overseas voters were highlighted in the survey, all of which favored different ways overseas voting can be simplified. The ability to maintain “permanent” overseas status instead of having to reapply for this status was seen as important by over 70% of respondents. Respondents also favored (44%) the extension of the use of the Federal Write-in Ballot to support simultaneous registration and ballot request services. Some 33% of respondents favored the inclusion of voting rights and voting process information in US Passports, and 22% indicated they favored internet and email voting despite the security risks. This latter “reform” is one that has been consistently opposed by US Vote and other experts precisely because of the lack of security and verifiability for an electronic vote. The percentage of respondents favoring this issue is down significantly from the 60% of respondents who cited this option in 2020, a positive trend in light of the overwhelmingly positive voting experiences using paper ballots.

Would you be in favor of any of the following reforms for Overseas Absentee Voting? (Select all that apply)

Standardized deadlines across all states for voters abroad	38.37%
The ability to use the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot as a single, simultaneous registration + ballot request + ballot as of 45 days prior to an election	44.09%
Inclusion of information with each passport summarizing voting rights and procedures when abroad	33.36%
The option for civilian voters and indefinitely abroad, to opt into “permanent” overseas absentee voter status	70.48%
We should have internet or email voting and ignore the security risks	22.63%
We should only have paper ballots with a verifiable paper trail	14.25%

A few other details from overseas respondents:

- A 70% majority of overseas ballot return continued to be on paper, 60% by postal mail, 8% by express/ courier and 2% in the diplomatic pouch. This remains unchanged from previous elections. The remainder were emailed or uploaded to a server. In 2022, only 44% of this voter cohort checked their absentee ballot status online with their state’s tracking service, down from 55% in 2020.
- Election officials were cited as the number one source of assistance to Overseas Absentee Voters. There is certainly room for improvement on the instructions coming with the ballot, as 10% of voters reported.
- Lastly, 99% indicated that they would continue to vote by Overseas Absentee Ballot if they lived abroad during future elections.

Voting at the Polling Place on Election Day in 2022

In-person voting was a significantly more positive experience in 2022 than in 2020, most likely due to the combination of improved in-person voting processes, as well as the increased use of mail-in ballots, which led to fewer in-person voters this year. Fewer than 6% of respondents reported waiting more than 30 minutes in 2022, a significant improvement over the 21% who waited more than 30 minutes in 2020. The vast majority (98%) found the ballot instructions easy to follow, but only 82% said they planned to vote in person for the next election.

How long did you have to wait at the polling place to vote?

I did not wait	50.73%
Less than 10 minutes	29.47%
Between 10-30 minutes	14.08%
Between 30-60 minutes	4.69%
Between 1-2 hours	1.03%
Between 2-3 hours	0.00%
Between 3-4 hours	0.00%
The wait was so long, I left and came back later	0.00

Voters Who Didn’t Vote

Some 20% of the respondents indicated they hadn’t voted, of which 8% of these would have been first time voters had they been able to vote. The percentage of respondents who indicated that their inability to vote was due to a late-arriving ballot was similar (41%) to the percentage who had this problem in 2020 (46%). Of these non-voters, 12% acknowledged that they had missed the deadline to register, and 23% indicated they had missed the deadline to request a ballot, a significant increase from the 6% who missed the ballot request deadline in 2020.

Considering the increase in online voter resources in 2022 – from our own augmented services to the growth in state websites and those of other organizations – the fact that 13% of respondents indicated they couldn’t find information or advice on how to vote suggests a problem worth trying to solve, and is a call to action for more voter education and resources.

Unfortunately, the percentage of respondents who felt that their vote didn’t matter (11%) was more than double the 2020 figure (5%). Another 9% claimed they lost the motivation to vote and a tragic 5% indicated that they did not vote due to voter suppression issues. The fact that 20% of respondents took the trouble to tell us why they didn’t vote, with the majority having had deadline-related problems, showcases the need for US Vote and other organizations to continue to educate voters on the dates and deadlines that govern the voting process.

Conclusion

The net results of the US Vote Foundation’s 2022 Midterm Election Voter Experience survey reaffirm the overall strength and resiliency of our democracy and its voting processes. In doing so, these results also reaffirm the incredible contribution of local election officials and the many other individuals who labor, mostly in obscurity, to keep the wheels of democracy turning.

Despite years of inflammatory-and at times violent-rhetoric and action against the integrity of our democracy, the 2022 Midterm Election was a watershed event precisely because, as our survey highlighted, voting has gotten easier and more accessible to more voters. US Vote’s mission statement, “Every Citizen is a Voter,” has never been more relevant.

For more U.S. Vote Foundation post election survey results see: usvotefoundation.org/research

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