



July 5, 2022

North Carolina State Board of Elections
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Re: NCSBE's Consideration of Signature Verification for Absentee Voting

Chair Circosta and Members of the State Board of Elections:

We write on behalf of VoteShield, a project of Protect Democracy, a non-partisan non-profit organization that works to defend democratic norms and institutions. We use public data to identify improper changes in voter registration and absentee ballot databases that could affect the administration of an election, or the confidence in it. We are writing to oppose the State Board of Elections (NCSBE) taking any action authorizing county election boards to impose signature verification for absentee ballots in North Carolina.

To best support elections officials, VoteShield maintains a team of policy and data analysts with specific expertise in election administration and voting data. As part of our work, we recently completed a report analyzing the accuracy and disenfranchising impact of various absentee verification methods including signature matching and different levels of voter ID.¹

Based on this research, we strongly urge the NCSBE to refrain from imposing an additional requirement for signature verification on either absentee ballot applications or the ballots themselves. Allowing counties to impose signature matching for absentee ballots would likely result in the disenfranchisement of eligible voters without identifying significant additional voter fraud.

VoteShield's research found that signature matching results in large numbers of incorrectly rejected ballots and unjustified disparities in rejection rates across populations, all without meaningfully decreasing the incidence of fraud. Our analysis shows that even if we

¹ VoteShield, *An Assessment of Absentee Voter Verification Methods* (Apr. 5, 2022) (unpublished report) (enclosed).

assume relatively high levels of absentee voter fraud and the expertise of handwriting experts, signature matching likely leads to the rejection of many more legitimately signed ballots than illegitimately signed ones.²

Specifically, we estimate that, on average, for every 500 ballots rejected for mis-matched signatures, only three are actually fraudulently signed. In other words, even under the circumstances wherein the highest scholarly estimates of fraud are correct, 99.4% of rejected ballots would be incorrectly rejected. Moreover, since most elections workers who are evaluating signatures are not handwriting experts, it is very likely that our analysis underestimates the true proportion of valid ballots rejected.

While it is true that a process to correct inaccurately rejected ballots could mitigate this concern to a degree, it is unlikely that all affected voters will and could take advantage of such a process. Ballot curing procedures are not costless to voters or election administrators and often impose barriers that make curing difficult in practice. For example, the window of time between when the voter is notified of their rejection and the end of the ballot curing period can be very narrow, making it difficult for voters to avoid submitting late responses and putting more work and pressure on election administrators at an already busy point in the election cycle. Furthermore, if voters are notified of their rejection after election day, they may be less inclined to cure if the election results are already largely known.

Another major problem with verifying absentee ballots through signature matching is the lack of consistency in matching standards across times and jurisdictions. Further VoteShield analysis of the 2020 Georgia general election and 2021 Senate runoff demonstrates a lack of consistent and objective standards in the evaluation of voter signatures.³ We found a four-fold increase in ballots rejected for an invalid signature in the 2021 Georgia Senate runoff compared with the 2020 Georgia general election, even though there were about 350,000 fewer absentee votes than in the November 2020. We also found that the cure rate increased from 32.4% in the general election to 60.6% in the runoff, suggesting that the surge in rejections was due to higher levels of incorrectly rejected ballots.⁴ Further, there was a significant shift in the profiles of voters rejected between the two elections, in all suggesting that ballot rejection standards were subjective and could potentially be influenced by various external or internal pressures.

² Specifically, expanding on work by Dr. Alexander Street, we assume the highest scholarly estimate of underlying signature fraud and the highest scholarly estimates of successful signature matching among human experts and automated systems. See *Report of Alexander Street, Ph.D.* in the case of League of Women Voters of Ohio *et al.* v. LaRose, 489 F. Supp. 3d 719 (S.D. Ohio 2020), available at <https://lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Ohio.pdf>.

³ Clint S. Swift & Delaney Gomen, *Invalid Signature Rejections in Georgia Absentee Voting: Comparing the 2020 General to the 2021 Senate Runoff*, MIT Election Data & Science Lab (July 21, 2021), available at https://electionlab.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2021-07/swiftgomen_garejections.pdf (enclosed).

⁴ One factor that potentially complicates this picture is the significant ballot curing effort undertaken by parties and campaigns during what was an extremely close runoff election. See, e.g., Brad Schrade, *Push Intensifies to Cure Rejected Absentee Ballots*, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Jan. 1, 2021), <https://www.ajc.com/politics/election/push-intensifies-to-cure-rejected-absentee-ballots/E2QQ56QI2VBZZNC6GGRGW56UPCI/>.

Shifting standards also threaten voter confidence in the election process. When these standards are shifting, there is nothing voters can do, prior to sending their ballot back, to ensure that it is counted. What may be adequate in one election or jurisdiction may not suffice in another. Thus, while signature matching may give many who are never rejected a superficial comfort that an already largely secure system is in fact secure, those who do experience false rejections are likely to have heightened concerns about the reliability of the electoral process. Any benefit to public confidence that may come from signature matching, therefore, also comes with a price.

Signature verification is also a solution in search of a problem. Across the country, in states with strict mail ballot verification policies and those with more relaxed procedures, there is little evidence of mail ballot fraud. Scholarly estimates universally fall below .05%,⁵ and according to the Heritage Foundation, there have been only 118 documented cases of voter fraud in the past decade.⁶ If you further examine the Heritage data, you will find that there is no difference in per capita levels of documented fraud between states that match signatures (3.7 per 10,000,000 people) and those that do not (3.4 per 10,000,000 people).

In sum, introducing signature matching will (1) lead to rejecting a significantly higher number of valid ballots than actually identifying fraudulent ballots, (2) increase the workload of election administrators already at their limits as a result of having to cure so many valid ballots, and (3) introduce highly subjective standards that can leave the large number of incorrectly rejected voters with less confidence in our election system. All of this for a policy that shows no evidence of significantly impacting the already miniscule number of instances of ballot fraud. For all of these reasons, we respectfully urge the Board to refrain from taking any actions to authorize county election boards to impose signature verification on absentee ballots in North Carolina. If you have any questions, please reach out to Quinn Raymond at quinn.raymond@voteshield.us.

Sincerely,

Quinn Raymond
Co-founder, VoteShield

Clint Swift
Analyst, VoteShield

Enc. *“An Assessment of Absentee Voter Verification Methods”*; *“Invalid Signature Rejections in Georgia Absentee Voting”*

⁵ VoteShield, *An Assessment of Absentee Voter Verification Methods* (Apr. 5, 2022) (unpublished report) (enclosed).

⁶ *Voter Fraud Cases*, The Heritage Foundation, https://www.heritage.org/voterfraud/search?combine=&state=All&year=&case_type=All&fraud_type=24489.

An Assessment of Absentee Voter Verification Methods

Landscape analysis and mission-driven recommendations

April 5, 2022

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Executive Summary

What are absentee or vote by mail verification methods?

Voter verification methods, generally speaking, are procedures in place to ensure that the individual casting a ballot is the registered voter that they claim to be. Absentee and mail voting rely on two general means of verifying voter identity: signature matching and voter ID.

What do verification methods look like in practice?

- **Signature Matching:** Election workers evaluate signature similarities and differences by hand or with the assistance of signature matching software, accepting ballots where the signatures match and rejecting those deemed not to match.
 - 31 states employ some form of signature matching on absentee or mail ballots.
 - Only 5 states provide statutory guidance on how signatures should be matched.
 - The best estimates of success for expert signature matchers and automated systems suggest that less than 1% of ballots rejected for signature mismatch actually contain fraudulent signatures.
 - The ability to “cure” rejections may correct some of the falsely rejected ballots, but is unlikely to make a significant difference.
- **Voter ID:** Depending on the state, voters may have to provide a photocopy of their ID, write in their ID number, or have the ballot and/or application notarized or witnessed. Some states provide voters multiple ID options or require some combination of these methods.
 - 19 states and DC have some form of ID requirements on absentee or mail ballots.
 - 7 states require that you submit a copy of your ID or with your ballot or have your ballot notarized.
 - 10 states and DC only require your social security number on the application or ballot.
 - Survey evidence suggests that voters without a suitable ID are more likely to say they don’t vote because of ID than those with one, but it’s not generally their only or primary reason for not voting.
 - Fraud is too rare to draw conclusions about the deterrent effects of ID requirements, but no clear relationship in the scant data.

Mission Driven Recommendations

1. Verification methods should be evaluated by their potential to disenfranchise voters

- All methods of verification will disenfranchise legitimate voters in pursuit of dissuading or identifying fraud.

- Given low estimates of fraud, verification methods may not be justified but are likely politically inevitable in many parts of the county.
- Given the above, verification methods must be evaluated on their potential to disenfranchise voters, and policies must be pursued that minimize that possibility.

2. Both verification methods should not be implemented simultaneously

- Both methods will disenfranchise voters and there is significant potential that the populations of voters affected are distinct for each method.
- The populations of potential fraudsters targeted by each method, however, should be largely the same in that fraudsters should have about equal access to either valid voter IDs or signatures.
- Implementing both methods—no matter the specific form they take—would disenfranchise more voters than either method individually without any guaranteed decrease to levels of fraud.

3. If states require a verification method, they should favor ID requirements

- Signature matching is imprecise and standards are opaque and often subjective.
 - Subjective standards can more easily be weaponized by bad faith actors.
- A voter with perfect information and adequate resources can take steps to ensure their vote is counted if verification is done by voter ID, but that same voter could do little to ensure that their ballot isn't rejected for a signature mismatch.

4. Tailoring ID requirements to minimize disenfranchisement

- ID numbers only; no copy or notary requirements.
- Accept multiple forms of ID, including the last four digits of SSN, and free voting-specific ID.
- State voter records must include complete ID information before implementation.
- Requirements should be clear and effectively communicated.
- Active engagement with communities with lower access to ID.

5. Tailoring signature requirements to minimize disenfranchisement

- Mandatory guidance and training for officials who evaluate signatures.
- Oversight and redundancy procedures to ensure ballots can't be rejected unilaterally.
- Provide alternatives for voters incapable of signing their name.
- Robust and prompt rejection notification system.
- Lengthy curing period with multiple means of curing.
- State review of jurisdiction/precinct-level rejection rates.

Introduction

[More than 70 million Americans](#), nearly half of all voters, cast their ballots by mail in 2020, more than the number who voted early in person or on Election Day. With mail voting becoming increasingly common, it is crucial to understand whether and how mail ballot verification measures discourage, deter, and/or disenfranchise voters. This report explores the landscape of mail ballot verification methods and their impact on the security and accessibility of voting. The goal is to provide clear policy recommendations in line with our mission.

It's crucial to understand the impacts that different voter verification methods may have on the electoral process as voters transition away from in-person voting methods. The rate of absentee and mail voting had been [steadily increasing for decades](#), even before 2020, when the onset of COVID-19 pushed more voters than ever before to cast their ballots by mail. In several states, mail voting is no longer just an alternative for absent voters. Eight states (CA, CO, HI, NV, OR, UT, VT, WA) have adopted universal mail voting, a system under which every voter is sent a mail ballot unless they specifically request to vote in person.

Verification methods such as signature matching and voter ID are at once the primary safeguard of, and barrier to, an increasingly common method of voting. These procedures are meant to verify the identity of the voter casting the ballot to protect against fraud, although there are vanishingly few instances of mail ballot fraud. Because different verification procedures have distinct impacts on both the security and accessibility of mail voting, this report explores the landscape, benefits, and drawbacks of verification procedures across the country.

The mail-in voting landscape has changed significantly in the past two years due to both the COVID-19 Pandemic and a raft of new voting laws passed in 2021. With the onset of the pandemic in the early months of 2020, many states adopted legislation that loosened restrictions on who could vote by mail. Many states amended eligibility statutes so that elderly, immunocompromised, or other at-risk voters could stay home and cast a ballot. Some states introduced no excuse absentee voting, allowing any voter who preferred to cast a mail ballot to do so. The success of mail voting in 2020 also expedited the adoption of all mail voting in [California](#), [Nevada](#), and [Vermont](#).

Rules for mail-in voting also changed significantly in 2021, but more often in a restrictive direction. In addition to the sunset of many COVID provisions in states like New York and Missouri, [several new voting laws](#) have been enacted in states. Many of these bills have provisions impacting who may cast mail ballots, limiting request and return intervals, and increasing voter ID requirements.

Mail ballot verification, in particular, has also become a contentious political issue. In 2021, [Georgia transitioned](#) from signature match to requiring voter ID numbers while [Texas instituted](#) a requirement that voters must provide ID on their application in addition to the ballot itself. Additionally, Congress is considering [legislation](#) that would set new minimum standards for access to mail ballots and would preclude both signature matching and ID requirements.

There are, in fact, significant existing differences in how states verify mail ballots. Some states have no identity verification processes for either applications or ballot returns, while others require mail voters to have both their application and ballot notarized. Within this range, states have a diverse range of signature matching, voter ID, notary and witness requirements. In fact, the only nationwide commonality is that federal law requires first time voters in a jurisdiction who registered by mail and did not include ID with their registration must present an identifying document.¹

Across the country, from states with strict mail ballot verification policies to those with more relaxed procedures, there is little evidence of mail ballot fraud. Scholarly estimates universally fall below .05%, and there are [fewer than 100 documented cases](#) in the past decade. Even in states with relatively relaxed mail ballot security measures, rates of fraud are infinitesimal, belying the rationale behind stricter provisions. However, mail ballot verification methods do serve another purpose. In addition to deterring or identifying potential voter fraud, absentee ballot verification measures may bolster public confidence in the integrity of elections. With an ever-increasing number of voters casting mail ballots, it is important to institute provisions that assure the public that elections are being appropriately conducted. We must, however, keep in mind the potential costs of instituting any such measures.

The two general methods states use to verify mail ballots are signature matching and voter ID. Signature matching involves ensuring that a voter's signature on their absentee application or ballot matches the one in the voter registration file. Election workers evaluate signature similarities and differences by hand or with the assistance of signature matching software, accepting ballots where the signatures match and rejecting those deemed not to match. The other main method of verifying mail ballots is requiring voters to provide identification. Depending on the state, voters may have to provide a photocopy of their ID, write in their ID number, or have the ballot notarized or witnessed. Some states provide voters multiple ID options or require some combination of these methods.

Despite their prominence as the two most common methods of verifying mail ballots, it is difficult to directly compare their impact on electoral accessibility. Signature matching primarily impacts voters through ballot rejections, a back-end hurdle with any disenfranchisement of legitimate voters occurring after ballots are cast. In contrast, voter ID requirements impact voters' decision to cast a mail ballot in the first place. This makes estimating rates of improper disenfranchisement much more difficult for mail ID states, as it is more challenging to track voters dissuaded or thwarted by ID requirements than the reported number who have ballots rejected because their signatures do not match.

The next section on signature matching summarizes the current statutory landscape and then demonstrates how existing statutes likely lead to a significant number of inaccurate rejections.

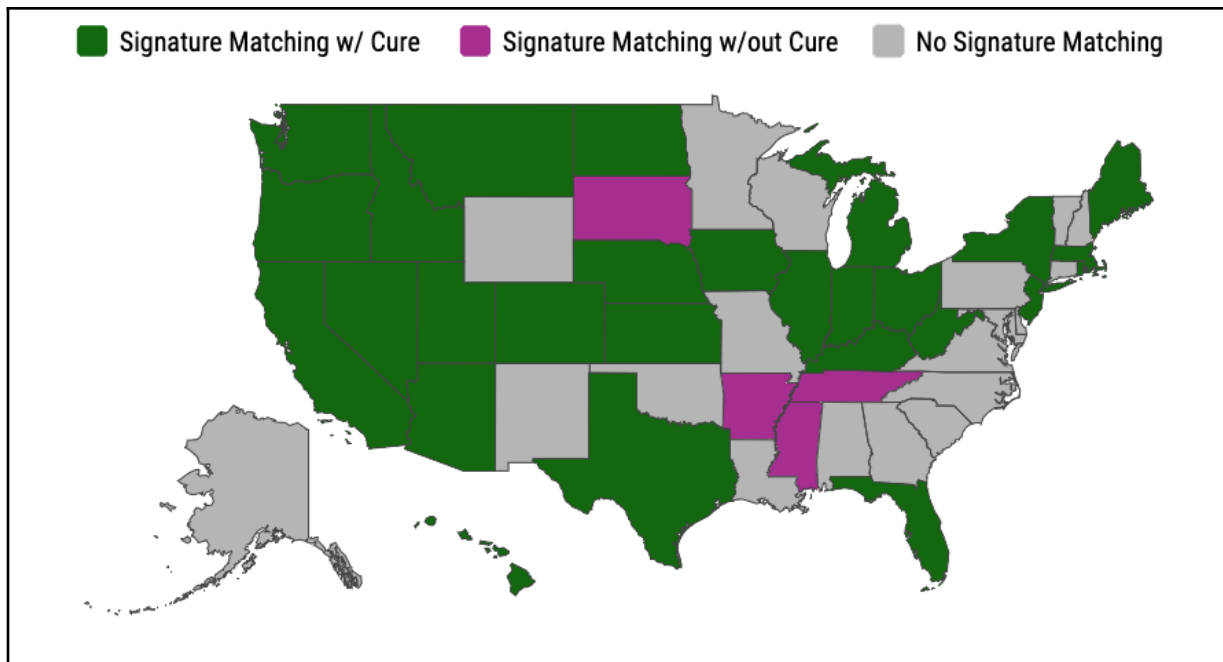
¹ This includes a current photo ID, current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document with the voter's name and address. This requirement was created by the 2002 Help America Vote Act.

We then consider the state of mail ballot voter ID laws across the country, exploring how these statutes may dissuade or preclude voters from electoral participation. After considering both major types of mail ballot verification measures, we engage in a comparative evaluation, considering their relative merits and drawbacks. Finally, we will offer a series of recommendations designed to protect the fraud prevention and public confidence benefits of existing verification while minimizing voter dissuasion and inaccurate rejections.

The Absentee and Mail Signature Matching Landscape

Signature matching in absentee or mail voting is a common practice across the states. In October of 2020, [The New York Times](#) identified 32 states that use signature matching to verify the identity of absentee and by-mail voters. In figure 1 we present a slightly corrected and updated² version of that list. Of the 31 states identified in figure 1, all but 4 of them allow for rejections due to non-matching signatures to be cured by the voter.

Figure 1. States that Use Signature Matching and Allow Cures for Non-matches



There are no clear political patterns associated with the presence of signature matching (table 1), but signature matching does seem more common among those states with unified government³. It does also appear that signature matching is more prominent in larger states, especially those with high rates of vote-by-mail.⁴

² The NYT had incorrectly assigned Louisiana to the group that performs matches and Iowa to the group that does not. Further, Georgia has since replaced signature matching with identification requirements.

³ Trifectas occur when one party controls the governorship, as well as the upper and lower chamber of the legislature.

⁴ Seven of the eight universal vote-by-mail states use signature matching.

Table 1. The Presence of Signature Matching Policy by Party Control

| | Democratic Trifecta | | Divided Govt. | | Republican Trifecta | | Average Biden Vote | Average Population | Average Vote-By-Mail |
|--------------------|------------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Signature Matching | 11 | 73% | 5 | 38% | 15 | 68% | 47.3% | 7.58 M | 50.88% |
| No Matching | 4 | 27% | 8 | 62% | 7 | 32% | 48.6% | 5.02 M | 30.40% |
| Total | 15 | 100% | 13 | 100% | 22 | 100% | 47.8% | 6.61 M | 43.10% |

Difference in Rejections across States

While many states implement some form of signature matching, the policy’s impact—as measured by the number of ballots rejected for non-matching signatures—varies drastically across states. To demonstrate this variation we turn to data from the Elections Assistance Commission’s [Elections Administration and Voting Survey \(EAVS\)](#). The data show that across all states a total of 157,477 ballots were reported as rejected for non-matching signatures in the 2020 election. That represents about 2.23 ballots rejected for every 1,000 returned and is slightly up from 2018 (2.09) and down from 2016 (2.63).

Additionally, the EAVS data indicate that five states (IA, MA, ME, MS, WV) with signature matching have reported rejecting less than 100 ballots total over the past three federal elections. To contrast, the 5 highest rejecting states are presented in table 2. What stands out about the list of states in table 2 is that the top four have implemented all-mail voting. We also see that some states demonstrate significant year-to-year variation—like Oregon—while others—like Washington—maintain a relatively constant rejection rate over time.

Table 2. Absentee and Mail Ballot Rejections for Non-matching Signatures: Top 5 States

| | 2016 | | 2018 | | 2020 | | Average Rank | |
|------------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|--------------|---|
| | # | ‰* | # | ‰* | # | ‰* | # | % |
| California | 25,965 | 3.05 | 16,116 | 1.94 | 47,817 | 3.11 | 1 | 9 |
| Washington | 17,592 | 5.28 | 17,228 | 5.54 | 23,387 | 5.73 | 2 | 3 |
| Colorado | 16,149 | 6.08 | 13,027 | 5.32 | 21,924 | 7.02 | 3 | 1 |
| Oregon | 9,637 | 4.7 | 62 | 0.03 | 12,743 | 5.32 | 4 | 6 |
| New Jersey | 1,161 | 3.27 | 1,913 | 4.71 | 16,299 | 3.85 | 5 | 4 |

Note: Data are from the 2016, 2018 and 2020 EAVS survey.
 *The number of signature match rejections per 1,000 returned mail ballots.

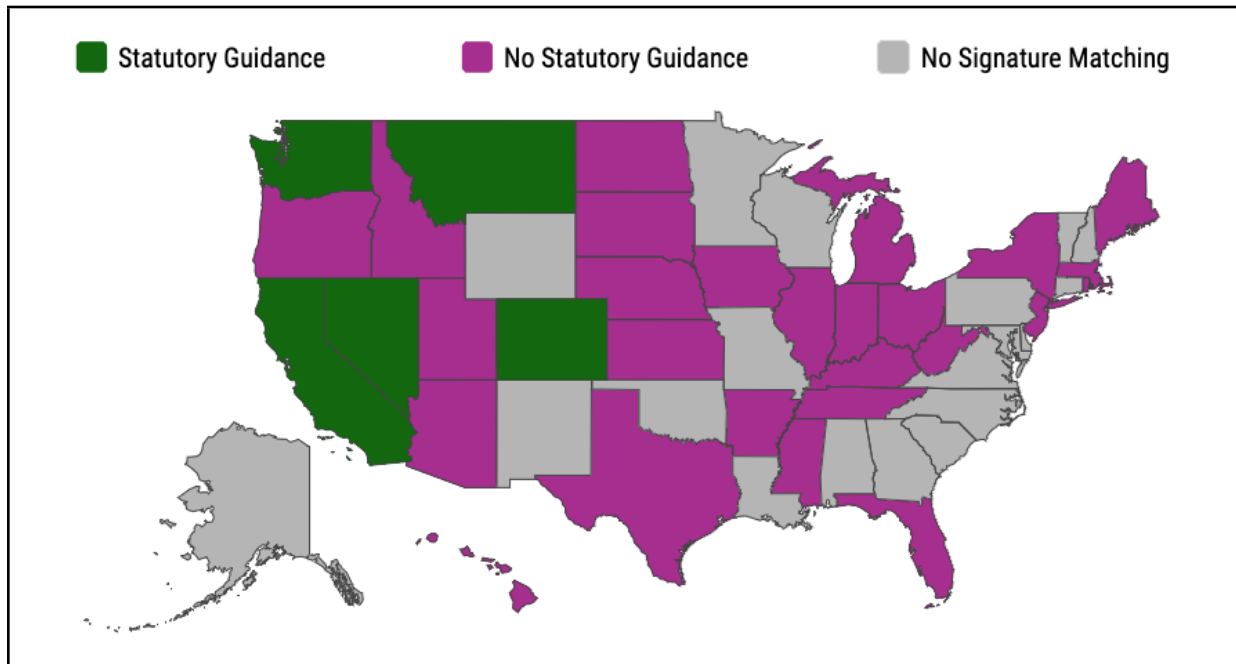
Methods of Matching Signatures

It is difficult to identify all the reasons for the drastic differences in outcomes related to signature rejections with any real certainty, but one crucial factor likely involves the exact means of implementation. Because there are no federal laws guiding the use of signature matching, states and sometimes counties are largely left to implement these requirements as they see fit. In most instances (purple states in figure 2), statutes are silent on how signature matching is to

be conducted or overseen for potential errors. In many others there is little evidence that states provide any additional specific guidance beyond the statute. Yet in some states, such as [Colorado](#) or [New Jersey](#), extensive resources, informational materials, and training are provided to the election workers on the ground to guide the process of signature matching.

Another way that states and jurisdictions differ in their implementation of signature matching is in the use of automated systems. In the lead up to the 2020 election, [Reuters reported that at least 29 counties across 8 states](#) employ some form of automated signature verification software. This list unsurprisingly included some very large counties like Los Angeles (CA), Denver (CO), and Broward (FL).⁵ These very large jurisdictions process huge numbers of absentee ballots and must certainly face significant obstacles to manage such a task by hand. In many instances, however, these systems do not completely remove the need for staff. 21 of the 29 counties employing them also indicated to Reuters that they had at least some staff oversight and 17 still used staff to evaluate a majority of their ballot signatures.

Figure 2. States with Statutory Guidance on Signature Matching Procedures



In all, while signature matching is a common process across the states, the stringency of matches and the procedures for verification vary drastically. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the decentralized nature of our elections. But what may be some of the consequences associated with such a system? In the next section, we address this question through an assessment of the likely shortcomings of relying on signature matching to verify the identity of absentee and mail voters.

⁵ Based on [data from MIT's Election Data and Science Lab](#), these 28 counties account for more than 10% of all ballots cast in the 2020 presidential election.

Issues with Using Signature Matching to Verify Absentee and Mail Voters

The primary problem with signature matching as a means of verifying a voter's identity is the possibility that election workers will misidentify and reject valid ballots. Further, were signature verification to result in more rejections of legitimate ballots than fraudulent ones, its value in securing electoral outcomes would be completely outweighed by its cost. In order to determine the likelihood of this scenario⁶, we need three additional pieces of information:

1. Success rate: How much of the actual fraud does signature matching identify.
2. False rejection rate: How frequently signature matching rejects valid signatures.
3. Rate of fraud: What proportion of all absentee/mail ballots are fraudulently signed.

Although we don't have good estimates of the signature match success rate and false rejection rate among election workers, there is some scholarship on the effectiveness of signature matching among handwriting experts and automated systems.⁷ Table 3 presents the estimates from the two studies of handwriting experts.

Table 3. Estimates for Signature Matching among Handwriting Experts

| | <u>Success Rate</u> | <u>False Rejection Rate</u> |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Kam et al. (2001) | .9951 | .0705 |
| Sita, Found. and Rogers (2002) | .9848 | .0531 |

In addition, [Hafenmann et al. \(2017\)](#) conduct a survey of the academic literature on automated signature verification and show that, across the examined algorithms and datasets, the highest success rate was 0.9647 which had a paired false rejection rate of 0.0394. These probabilities are for the "best case scenario"⁸ which we cannot expect in a real world voting context, and therefore represent very optimistic estimates of the capabilities of automated systems.

In terms of estimates of fraud in vote-by-mail, the existing literature is virtually unanimous that rates are very low. [Charles Stewart III recently estimated](#) this rate based on the number of vote-by-mail fraud convictions to be 0.00006% of all votes cast. Of course, not all instances of fraud lead to convictions, so other scholars have devised methods to develop a more robust estimate. One of the highest rates estimated in the literature comes from [Goel et al. \(2020\)](#) who find that as many as 0.025% of all ballots cast in the 2012 general election may have been fraudulent. Although this number applies to all ballots, not just those cast by mail, we will never-the-less use it as a reasonable ceiling in order that our analysis provides the most conservative estimates of disenfranchisement. In the following analysis (figure 3) we estimate

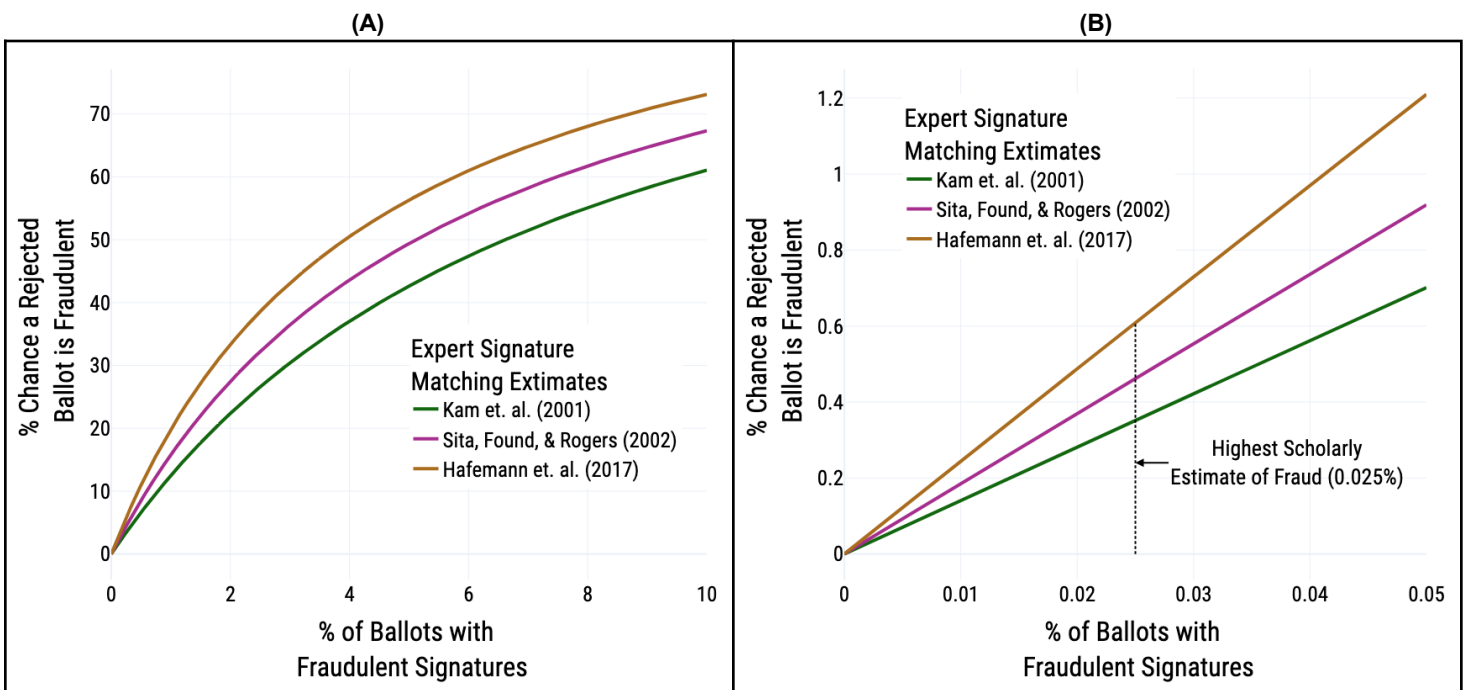
⁶ See Appendix I for details on how these estimates were produced.

⁷ A recent [VoteShield report](#) on signature matching in GA during the 2020 general and 2021 special elections found cure rates as high as 32-60%. This would imply a false rejection rate well above those used here.

⁸ Specifically, these estimates are derived from algorithms that use a dozen valid reference signatures and on datasets with near parity between fraudulent and valid signatures.

the likelihood that a rejected ballot is fraudulent across a range of hypothetical underlying levels of fraud.

Figure 3. Estimated Probability that Rejected Ballots are Fraudulent Given Varying Parameters



The lines in figure 3 each represent estimates of the chance a rejected ballot is actually fraudulent (y-axis) based on the three sets of scholarly estimates and the estimate of fraud on the x-axis. The green and purple lines are for the two estimates of human handwriting experts, while the orange line is the optimistic estimate of automated systems.

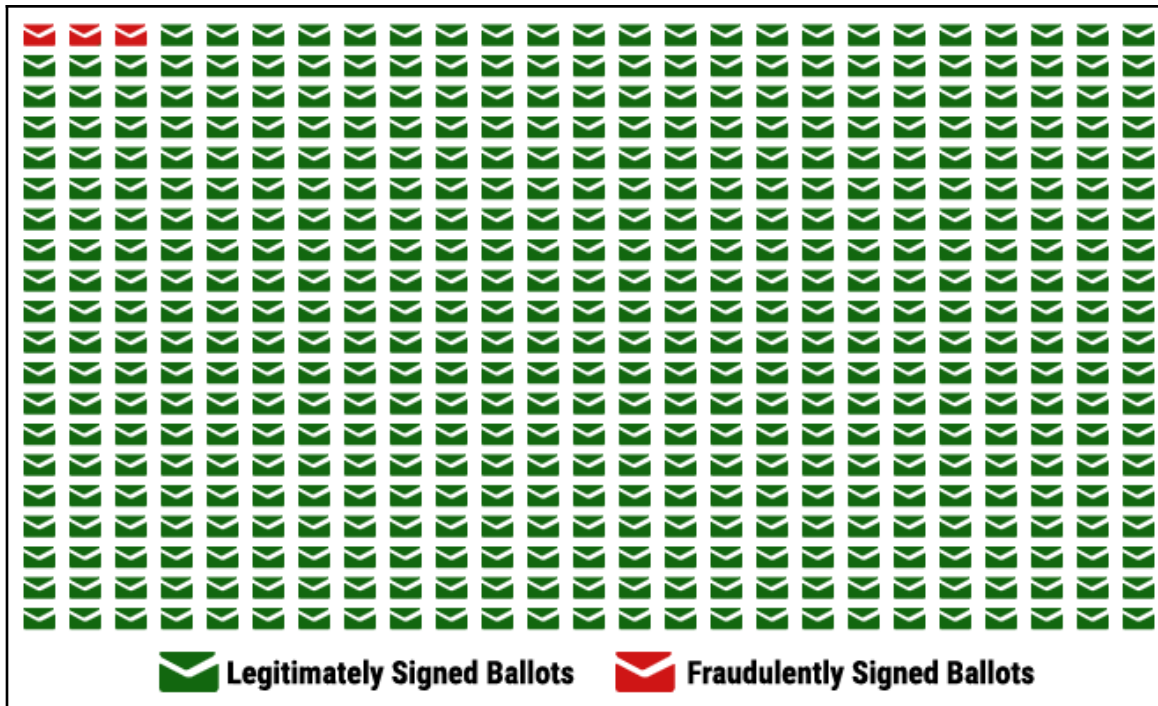
Figure 3(A) shows estimates for a range of fraud from none to 10 percent of ballots cast (x-axis). This shows that we can be more confident that rejected ballots are fraudulent as the degree of actual underlying fraud increases. In fact, the majority of rejections are expected to be legitimate ballots until fraud rates get as high as four to six percent.⁹ Figure 3(B) shows a more reasonable range of underlying fraud based on the estimates of experts and scholars. Even at the high range in this figure, where one in 2,000 ballots is fraudulently signed, we can only expect that, at most, 1.2 percent of rejections would actually be fraudulent. If we consider Goel et al.'s high-end estimate of one fraudulent ballot for every 4,000 legitimate ones, then at most 0.6% of rejections would actually be fraudulent.

To return to the question of whether it is likely that election workers will reject legitimate ballots in pursuit of fraudulent ones using signature matching, the above analysis strongly indicates that to be the case. Our analysis reveals a dynamic where the probability of a rejected ballot actually being fraudulent increases with the prevalence of real fraud (figure 3). We also show that signature matching—by expert humans or advanced software— isn't reliable enough, given

⁹ These levels of fraud would imply that between 1 in 17 and 1 in 25 ballots are fraudulently signed.

reasonable assumptions about the rate of actual fraud, for the benefits in caught fraudulent ballots to outweigh the costs in rejected legitimate ones. Specifically, if we assume the highest scholarly estimate of underlying signature fraud (0.025%), we would expect only 3 of 500 rejected ballots to actually be fraudulent (figure 5). Moreover, since most elections workers who are evaluating signatures are not handwriting experts, it is very likely that our analysis underestimates the true proportion of valid ballots rejected.

Figure 5. The Expected Distribution of Legitimate and Fraudulently Signed Ballots Among 500 Signature Match Rejections.



Note: The above is based on the most conservative of scholarly estimates: the estimates for automated matching algorithms (Hafenmann et al. 2017) and Goel et al.'s estimate of voting fraud.

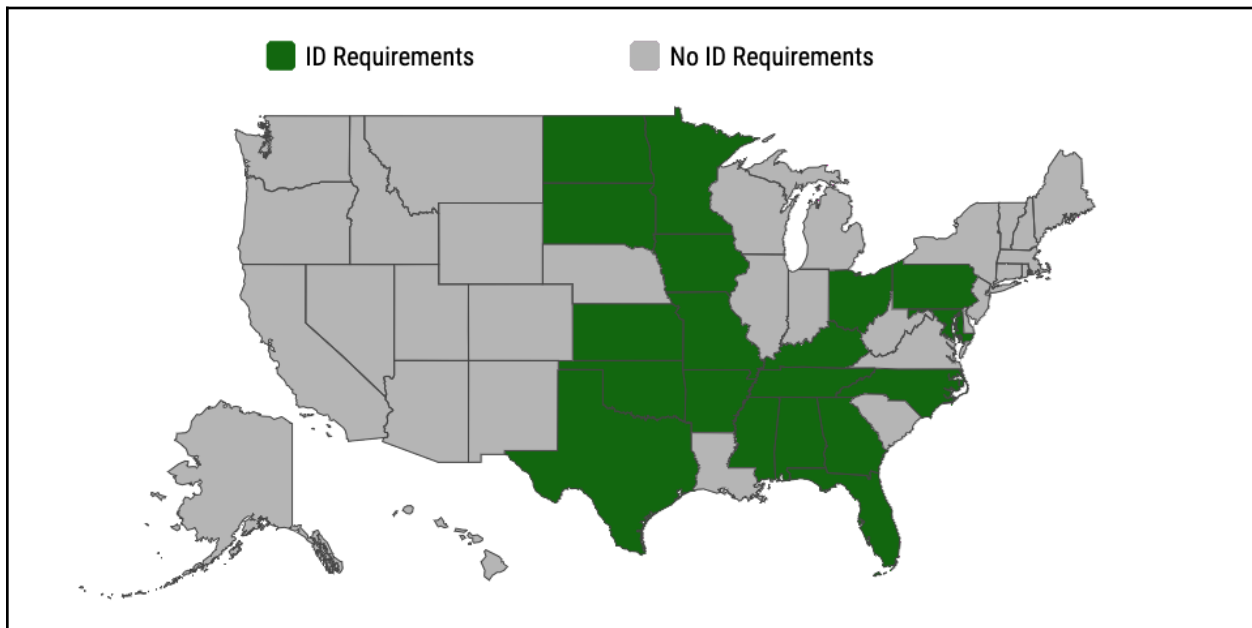
In addition to the problem of rejecting legitimate ballots, the difficulty with accurately identifying non-matching signatures also leads to shifting and subjective standards over time. A recent [VoteShield report](#) examining signature matching rejections in Georgia in both the 2020 general and 2021 senate run-off elections found evidence of just such a shifting standard. In the 2021 runoff, Georgia rejected more than twice the number of ballots as in the 2020 general election—only two months earlier—even though about 350,000 fewer voters voted by absentee. Shifting standards present legitimate voters with a significant problem because there is nothing they can do, prior to sending their ballot back, to ensure that it is counted. What may be adequate in one election may not suffice in another. Thus while signature matching may give many who are never rejected a bit of superficial comfort that an already largely secure system is in fact secure, those who do experience false rejections are likely to have heightened concerns about the reliability of the electoral process. Thus any benefit to public confidence that may come from signature matching also comes with a cost.

Finally, while it is true that most states allow for some kind of curing process to correct inaccurately rejected ballots, curing procedures, like signature matching procedures, [vary drastically across states](#) and often impose different barriers that make curing difficult in practice. In some states, timing may preclude an opportunity to cure if the ballot was returned close to the deadline. In Massachusetts and Minnesota, for example, curing cannot happen after election day, so any ballots received and rejected in the days leading up to the election have no opportunity to cure. In California, voters have more time to cure but must do so in person. This could be highly problematic for elderly or disabled voters and incredibly inconvenient for voters with little free time or easy access to transportation. Furthermore, if voters are notified of their rejection after election day, they may be less inclined to cure if the election results are already largely known. While curing may allow for the correction of some falsely rejected ballots, it is unlikely to have a significant impact in this regard.

The Absentee and Mail Voter ID Landscape

Voter ID requirements for in-person voting can be [found in the majority of states](#) and first time registrants in a state must, [according to federal law](#), provide identification. ID requirements for absentee and mail voting are less common than signature matching procedures, yet we still find them in a total of 19 states and the District of Columbia (figure 4). These states are mostly concentrated in the midwest and southern regions of the country and ID requirements are conspicuously absent from western and northeastern states.

Figure 4. States that Have Some Form of ID Requirement for Absentee or Mail Voting



Also unlike with signature matching, the presence of ID requirements does appear to be associated with patterns of party control of state government. In the left side of table 4, we show the number of states with ID requirements by which party controls the government and find that none of the 15 states wholly under Democratic control have ID requirements for absentee or mail voting, and furthermore, that a clear majority of Republican controlled states do have them. Given the politicization of voter ID requirements generally, this is perhaps not surprising. States without ID requirements also showed a significantly higher proportion of their votes in 2020 cast by mail (52.3% to 28.1%). This is primarily reflective of the fact that none of the universal vote-by-mail states require ID.

Table 4. The Presence of ID Requirement by Party Control and Other Important Indicators

| | Democratic Trifecta | | Divided Govt. | | Republican Trifecta | | Average Biden Vote | Average Population | Average Vote-By-Mail |
|------------|------------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| ID Reqs | 0 | 0% | 6 | 46% | 13 | 59% | 43.3% | 7.88 M | 28.1% |
| No ID Reqs | 15 | 100% | 7 | 54% | 9 | 41% | 50.6% | 5.83 M | 52.3% |
| Total | 15 | 100% | 13 | 100% | 22 | 100% | 47.8% | 6.61 M | 43.1% |

NOTE: The chi-squared statistic for the Party Control portion of the table is statistically significant ($p < 0.005$), strongly suggesting that party control and the presence of ID requirements are not independent.

Unlike with signature matching procedures, where there was a good degree of state uniformity in their lack of detail, mail and absentee voter identification laws diverge dramatically in their specific requirements. Among the states which require absentee voters to present identification, there are several major dimensions of difference. Specifically, we see significant variation in how voters are asked to furnish identification, whether they must have third party identity attestations, and the types of ID they may provide.

Methods of Providing ID

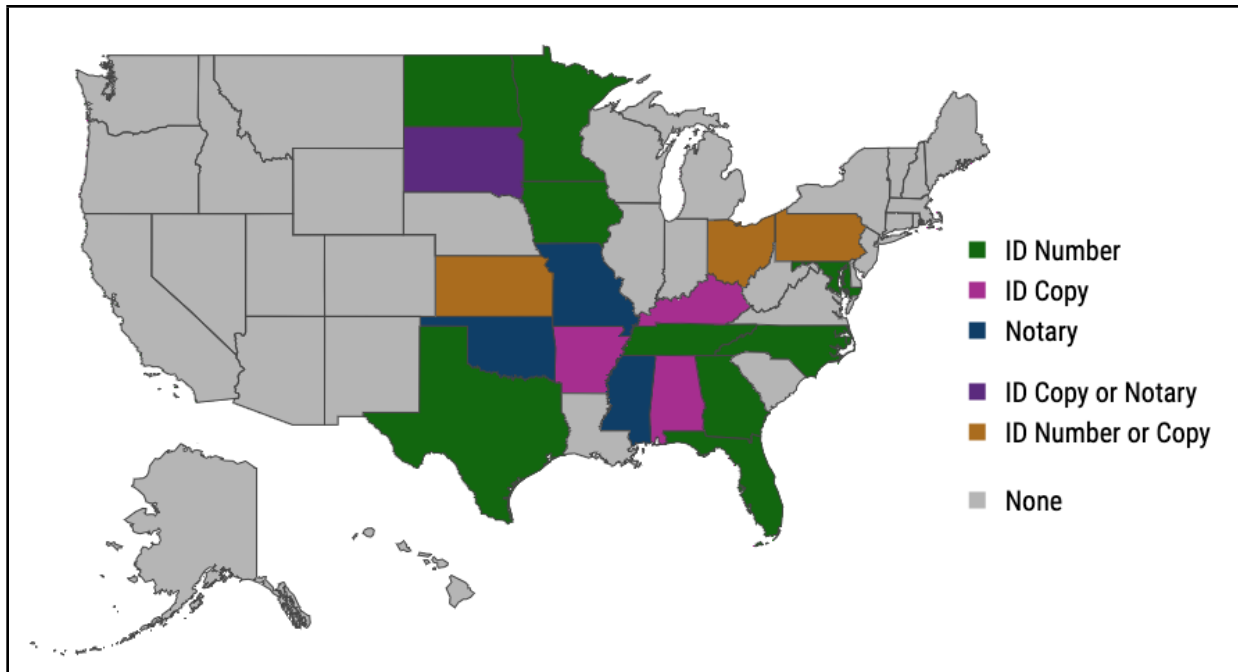
Among states which require ID, there are several distinct manners of provision. Some states require voters to include copies of acceptable ID with their ballot applications or submissions. Other states ask voters to provide the number associated with acceptable forms of identification, such as driver's license and social security numbers. A final set of states require voters to have either their application or ballot notarized, which requires presenting identification documents to a notary public.

As can be seen in figure 6, three states (AL, AR, KY) require voters to furnish a copy of their identification, with four additional states (KS, OH, PA, SD) offering it as an option but provide an alternative. To successfully include a copy with their ballots, voters must copy, scan, or photograph the ID and then be able to print this reproduction.

Copies are not the only way states ask absentee voters to supply identification. Figure 6 shows that nine states (FL, GA, IA, MD, MN, NC, ND, TN, TX) and the District of Columbia ask voters to provide the number associated with an acceptable form of identification, while three (KS, OH,

PA) others offer this as an option. Successfully completing this process requires voters to have access to this number and feel comfortable transmitting personal information, often a Social Security number, through the mail or online.

Figure 6. Types of ID Requirements for Mail or Absentee Voting in the States



Mississippi, Missouri, and Oklahoma require voters to visit a notary to cast an absentee ballot, while six (AL, AK, MS, NC, ND, RI) other states offer notaries as an alternative to either witness or ID requirements. Whereas a witness requirement does not necessitate the provision of ID, a notary requirement does, and thus is considered a voter ID requirement.

Notary vs. Witnesses

Not all of the states which require third party attestation restrict acceptable witnesses to notaries public. As seen in table 5, five states (AL, AK, MN, NC, RI) allow witnesses as an alternative to using a notary, while four more (LA, SC, VA, WI) set it forth as the sole option. These states vary in how many witnesses they require with Alaska, North Carolina, and Rhode Island calling for two and the remainder necessitating one.

None of these nine states have stringent requirements for who can serve as a witness. Five (AL, LA, RI, SC, VA) states have no statutory requirements for who can witness an absentee ballot. The other four (AK, MN, NC, WI) have minimal requirements such as that the witness must be a US Citizen or at least 18 years of age. Minnesota is the strictest of the nine, requiring the witness to be a fellow Minnesota registered voter. However, even this is a much more expansive and accessible category than notaries public.

Table 5. Notary and Witness Requirements for Mail or Absentee Voting in the States

| | | |
|----------------|---|-----|
| <i>Notary</i> | Missouri, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Dakota** | (4) |
| <i>Witness</i> | Louisiana, South Carolina, Virginia, Wisconsin | (4) |
| <i>Either</i> | Alaska, Alabama*, Minnesota, North Carolina*, Rhode Island* | (5) |

Note: States where only a witness is required to verify identity for a ballot are not considered as having an ID requirement in previous or subsequent analysis.

*2 witnesses are required as an alternative to a notary.

**In South Dakota, voters may provide a copy of their identification as an alternative to a notarized application.

Forms of Identification

In addition to the variation in acceptable methods of provision, states also differ in the types of identification that they accept for absentee and mail voting. Table 6 illustrates that each of the states which requires copies accepts a wide variety of forms of identification. In addition to common government-issued identification such as driver's licenses and passports they accept some combination of student, military, and tribal IDs. Other commonly accepted IDs include government employee IDs from all levels of government and non-driver's license state IDs. Although each of these states sets forth a different grouping of acceptable IDs, no state which requires a copy accepts fewer than five distinct types of identification.

Among states which require numerical identification, the most common forms are Social Security number, driver's license number, and other state-issued identification number. All but Tennessee give voters the option to choose among multiple different accepted ID numbers.

Several of the states which require voters to provide numbers have attestation alternatives for those who do not possess any of these forms of ID. For example, if a registered voter in Texas does not have a driver's license, election identification certificate, personal identification card issued by the Department of Public Safety or Social Security number, they may receive a ballot after signing a statement attesting to this fact.

Other Considerations

There are several additional relevant features of the absentee voter identification landscape that may not be as important for voter access, but are still worth mentioning. The first is that states require ID at different points in the voting process. Some states require voters to provide ID at the time a ballot request is made, while others instead require it at the time of ballot submission. Despite this dissimilarity, there is no obvious substantive difference between providing identification at one of these junctures as opposed to the other. Several states require ID at both

steps of this process, however, and this may be a logistical hassle which increases the potential of voter or administrator error but does not fundamentally impact questions of access.

Table 6. Types of Accepted ID for Mail and Absentee Voting in the States

| | DL | SSN | Passport | Student | Military | Tribal | Other State | Other Federal |
|-----------------|--------|-----|----------|---------|----------|--------|-------------|---------------|
| Alabama | C | | C | C | C | C | C | C |
| Arkansas | C | | C | C | C | C | C | C |
| Florida | N | N | | | | | N | |
| Georgia | N | | | | | | N | |
| Iowa | N | N | | | | | | |
| Kansas | C or N | | C | C | C | C | C or N | C |
| Kentucky | C | | C | C | C | | C | C |
| Maryland | N | N | | | | | N | |
| Minnesota | N | N | | | | | N | |
| North Carolina | N | N | | | | | N | |
| North Dakota | N | | | | | N | N | |
| Ohio | C or N | N | C | | C | | C | C |
| Pennsylvania | N | N | C | C | C | | C | C |
| South Dakota | C | | C | C | | C | | C |
| Tennessee | | N | | | | | | |
| Texas | N | N | | | | | N | |
| Washington D.C. | N | N | | | | | N | |

C = A copy of the ID must be provided.

N = The ID number (or part) must be provided.

*In Louisiana, only the online application requires an ID number.

Second, several states relax identification requirements for certain classes of voters. Mississippi exempts disabled voters from its notary requirement, Nebraska does not require elderly voters to provide identification, and Kansas allows voters 65 years of age and above to use expired identification.

A final consideration is that several states have distinct identification requirements for different request and voting methods. For example, Louisiana and New Mexico voters who request absentee ballots in person or by mail are not subject to ID requirements but those who request online must provide an ID number.

Issues with Using Voter ID to Verify Absentee and Mail Voters

[Arguments in favor of voter ID requirements](#) for in-person voting have focused on the fact that most voting eligible Americans already have identification as well as the relative ease of obtaining identification for those that do not yet have it. Although there is a good amount of debate about the specific number of voting-eligible Americans without identification, [a 2014 GAO review of surveys](#) suggested that anywhere between five and 16 percent of registered

voters did not have a driver's license or other state ID. [A more detailed survey](#) conducted by Charles Stewart found that about 3.4% of Americans did not have *any* voting-suitable form of identification.

Opponents of voter ID generally argue that the ease (or not) of obtaining ID is directly related to the resources (time, money, network, etc...) at one's disposal. Costs may also not be evenly distributed across society. For example, government offices providing ID, or informational campaigns explaining requirements, may be concentrated in certain communities and impose higher costs in places where they are absent.

Opponents frequently point to research indicating that [low income and minority voters are less likely to have ID](#) and how voter ID laws tend to disproportionately [suppress minority votes](#). Suppressing any votes unnecessarily would be highly problematic, but suppressing the votes of a particular community of interest could sway outcomes or leave certain interests underrepresented and would, thus, present a much greater threat to democratic governance.

To varying degrees, these same concerns exist with ID requirements for absentee and mail voting. The initial hurdle of access to appropriate identification remains but is, in some instances, either mitigated or compounded by specific procedural requirements. Because absentee and mail voters do not appear in person to request or receive their ballot, they cannot furnish identification manually as in-person voters do. States that require ID for verification, deal with this in various different ways, as illustrated above, are the procedures they choose can impose further burdens or alleviate existing ones.

Let's first consider the distinction between providing an identification number, a copy of the identification document, or requiring notarization. These are three very different requirements that can impose drastically different burdens on voters, especially those with limited resources.

The major obstacles with the provision of an identification number—as with in-person voter ID requirements—is primarily with access to the necessary ID documents. In some ways however, these requirements for ID numbers tend to mitigate this concern by accepting non-photo alternatives, including Social Security numbers (SSN).¹⁰ Because Social Security numbers are provided by the federal government in a much more uniform manner than many other forms of ID, it is entirely conceivable that providing your SSN is a lower burden than having a valid and current government photo ID.

Requirements to furnish a copy of your ID either with your application or ballot, in contrast, impose higher burdens on voters, especially those with limited resources. Although personal technology is certainly becoming more and more commonplace, there are still [significant divides in access](#). Furthermore, the provision of a copy would specifically require access to a printer or photocopier, which are becoming more and more uncommon as we shift to direct digital consumption. Not only do these requirements then disproportionately burden those with fewer

¹⁰ Of the 12 states that accept an ID number, only 3 do not accept SSNs: Georgia, Kansas, and North Dakota.

resources, but they would likely also affect younger people, who may see less of a need to own paper printers.

The greatest burdens are likely imposed by notary requirements. Having to get the application or ballot notarized requires not only access to a valid ID, but also the time, and sometimes money¹¹, needed to enlist the services of a notary public. Perhaps in recognition of this burden, some states have offered witnesses as an alternative. This is interesting because witnesses may offer a solution with the lowest burdens, especially if witness requirements remain relatively minimal. Finding a suitable witness would likely impose significantly lower costs on most voters than having to employ the services of a notary. A witness attestation alternative would also obviate the burdens associated with access to ID since, unlike notaries public, witness attestation would not require identification documents at all.

Based on the above discussion, we can assess the relative burdens imposed by each type of absentee and mail voter ID requirements and then classify the states accordingly. Table 7 provides this classification.

Table 7. ID Requirements and Associated States Classified by the Level of Burden they Place on the Voter

| Level of Burden | Requirement | States |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Highest | Notary Attestation only | MO, MS, OK |
| High | ID Copy only | AL, AR, KY |
| High | ID Copy or Notary Attestation | SD |
| Moderate | ID Number only (non-SSN)* | GA, ND |
| Moderate | ID Copy or Number (non-SSN) | KS |
| Low | SSN Number | FL, IA, MD, MN, NC, OH, PA, TN, TX, DC |
| Lowest | Witness Attestation** | AK, LA, SC, VA, WI |

*Approximately the same level of burden imposed by in-person photo ID requirements.

**Witness attestation does not require identification and is therefore not considered an ID requirement in the analysis above.

Three states (MO, MS, & OK) impose the highest burdens by requiring notary public attestation with no universal alternative. However, even these three states provide exceptions for the physically disabled or incapacitated.¹² For the vast majority of absentee and mail voters in these states however, voting will entail significantly more work and resources than in most others. In an additional four states (AL, AR, KY, SD) you would need to provide a copy of your ID in order to vote by absentee or mail. Among this group, only Arkansas and South Dakota provide for exceptions. Arkansas exempts uniform service members and their families as well as residents of licensed long-term care facilities if attested by an administrator. South Dakota, on the other

¹¹ In Oklahoma and Missouri notaries are explicitly forbidden from charging for services related to voting.

¹² Mississippi will still require one witness and Oklahoma will require two in instances of physical disability or incapacitation.

hand, will simply allow you to attest, under penalty of perjury, to your identity if you do not have adequate ID. While these carve-outs among the higher burden states might alleviate some concern over the potential for disenfranchisement, they are not available to all and frequently require additional knowledge or effort.

The majority of states have requirements that impose some of the lower burdens on voters. The most common requirement (10 states) is for the provision of a voter's Social Security number. While this is not a costless requirement, it is certainly less costly than engaging the services of a notary or gaining access to a photocopier or printer. Additionally, the least costly requirement of witness attestation can be found in five states and does not amount to an ID requirement yet satisfies the same purpose.

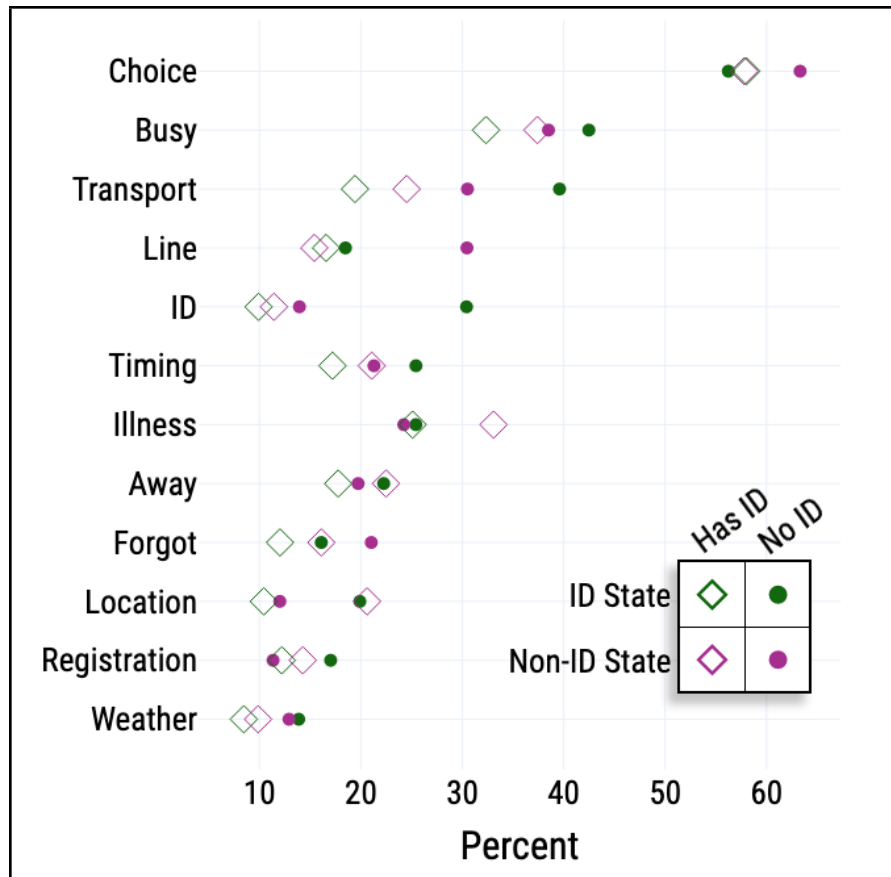
In addition to the burdens imposed by different types of absentee and mail requirements, we must also consider two additional factors when assessing the disenfranchising potential for voter ID requirements more generally. First, we must acknowledge that many of the same factors that are associated with not having an ID are also associated with abstaining from voting. Political science has long acknowledged [the connection between the availability of resources and the propensity to participate in politics](#). If those same individuals who do not have ID were unlikely to vote even if they did, then we cannot say that ID requirements impose actual burdens. Although this is a difficult dynamic to assess, the [2016 Survey of the Performance of American Elections](#) might provide the best opportunity because it asks both about reasons why people didn't vote and whether they have ID.

Figure 7 presents the percent of non-voting respondents who said the reason on the left was a factor in their decision not to vote. Respondents could identify any or all of the listed reasons as relevant to their decision. Each marker type represents a different set of non-voting respondents grouped by whether they have ID and whether their state has ID requirements (see figure 7 legend). The green circle represents those voters without ID but in states with ID requirements—exactly the people who should be most dissuaded to vote by voter ID laws.

About 30% of this group reported that ID requirements were either a minor or major factor in their decision not to vote. While this is more than any of the other groups, only one respondent in this group reported ID as the *only* major factor dissuading them from voting. Furthermore, ID is only the fourth most common reason that this group reports for not voting. More than 56% of these respondents said that they simply chose not to vote, 42% said they were too busy, and about 39% said that they did not have transportation to the polls. This all suggests that the group which is most likely to be disenfranchised by voter ID requirements does not, on average, see these requirements as the primary *impediment* to voting.

This doesn't mean that ID requirements don't have a disenfranchising effect. In fact, if we compare the responses from voters without ID in states with requirements to every other group of voters, we see that they are much more likely to report ID as a reason. While ID requirements may not be the only or primary reason they decided not to vote, it is certainly on their minds and likely contributing to their decision in some capacity.

Figure 7. Reasons for Not Voting Among Respondents by State ID Requirements and Respondent Access to ID.



Source: [2016 Survey of the Performance of American Elections](#). Respondents included in the calculation answered that the reason was “a minor” or “a major” factor in not voting.

While the overlap between likely non-voters and individuals without ID might alleviate some of our concerns regarding the disenfranchising potential of ID requirements, our final consideration actually suggests these requirements may be more problematic in this regard. There is some indication that voters *with ID* are dissuaded from voting by ID requirements.

In table 8 we show the non-voting respondents who identified ID requirements as one of the major factors or the only major fact in their decision not to vote. Only 71 of the 927 non-voting respondents (7.7%) identified ID requirements as a major factor in their decision to not vote, 15 of which identified it as the sole major factor. 46 of these 71 respondents also report having ID (all report having valid state driver’s licenses). Although we find these results suggestive, we must also be cautious when drawing inferences from a relatively small subset of the total survey sample.

The survey by itself doesn’t tell us why respondents with ID would constitute the majority of voters who were dissuaded from voting by ID requirements. It is possible that people are reluctant to provide ID to government officials or that they have [misunderstood the requirements](#)

in some way. What is more clear from the survey is that we may not be able to assume that voters without ID are the only voters affected by these requirements.

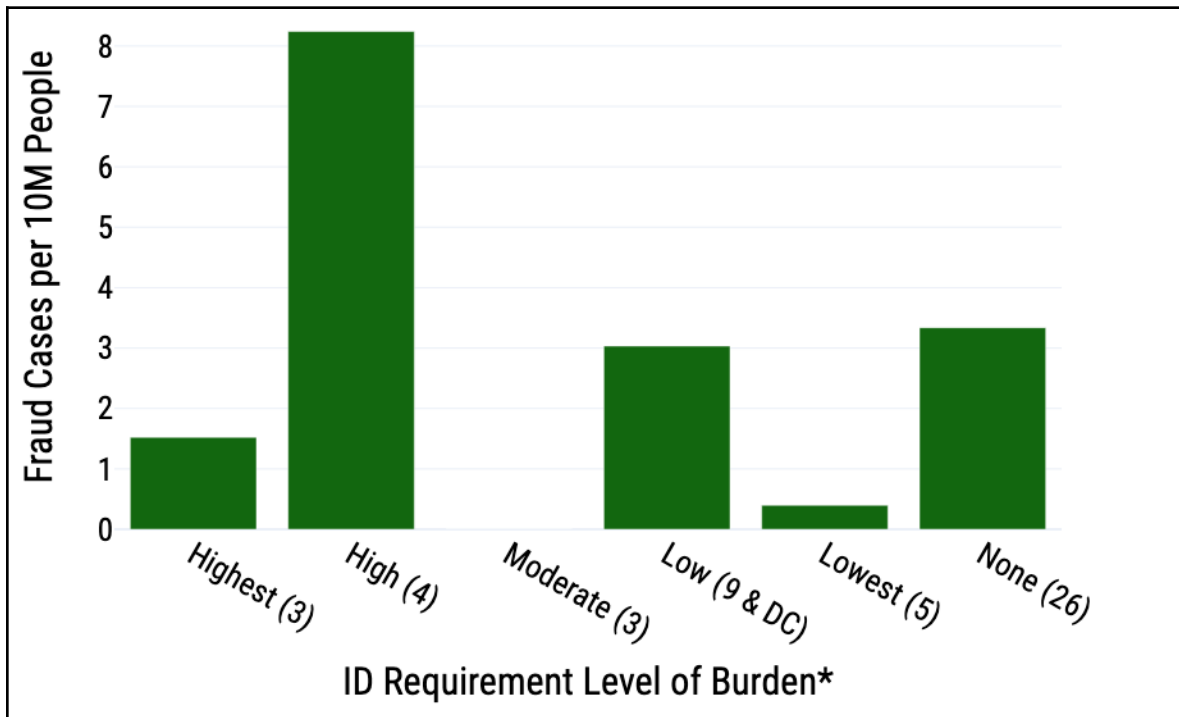
Table 8. Non-Voting Respondents Who Identify “ID Requirements” as a Major Factor for Not Voting

| | A Major Factor | | The Only Major Factor | |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| | <i>Has ID</i> | <i>No ID</i> | <i>Has ID</i> | <i>No ID</i> |
| <i>ID State</i> | 22 (39.3%) | 18 (32.1%) | 8 (53.3%) | 1 (6.7%) |
| <i>Non-ID State</i> | 9 (16.1%) | 7 (12.5%) | 5 (33.3%) | 1 (6.7%) |

Source: [2016 Survey of the Performance of American Elections](#).

While we have focused up to this point on the burdens to voters imposed by ID requirements, we have not considered the possible benefits in terms of dissuading vote fraud. It’s very difficult to estimate the degree to which any measure successfully prevents voting fraud simply because our sample of fraud is too small to draw reliable inferences. We do, however, show the clustering of fraud cases in figure 8 in order to demonstrate that there is no clear deterrent relationship between instances of fraud and the degree of burden placed on voters by ID requirements.

Figure 8. 10 Years of Absentee and Mail Voting Fraud Cases by ID Requirement Level of Burden (see table 7)



Fraud Case Source: [The Heritage Foundation: Election Fraud Cases Database](#)

*Number of states in each category in parentheses.

[The Heritage Foundation](#) reports a total of 99 instances of absentee or mail fraud over the last 10 years across all states and elections. Figure 8 shows the number of fraud cases per 10 million people for state groups according to the levels of burden outlined in table 7. The highest rate of fraud is found in states with “high” ID burdens, which clearly does not suggest a strong deterrent effect. Again, however, we must caution against inferring much more from such a small sample of fraud cases.

The fact that voter fraud is such a rare event draws our focus back to the burdens imposed by ID requirements. While it is true that most Americans have the required ID necessary to vote, not all do and when voting absentee other burdens may arise. The analysis above indicates that the means of implementing ID requirements may be as important as their presence. Some specific procedures may reduce burdens on voters (e.g., only requiring a Social Security number), while others may inflame them (e.g., requiring a notary). We must also be cognizant of the potential for voters *with ID* to be dissuaded from voting by ID requirements for various reasons not well understood. Although it’s likely that the number of voters dissuaded in this fashion is rather small, it is unclear how this dynamic could be mitigated while maintaining ID requirements.

Comparing Signature Matching to ID Requirements

In the analysis above we have described the two main methods of absentee and mail voter verification as distinct because of the different ways they impact voters and may address fraud. We do, however, find that some states implement both signature matching and ID requirements while others use neither.

Figure 9. Absentee and Mail Verification Methods in the States

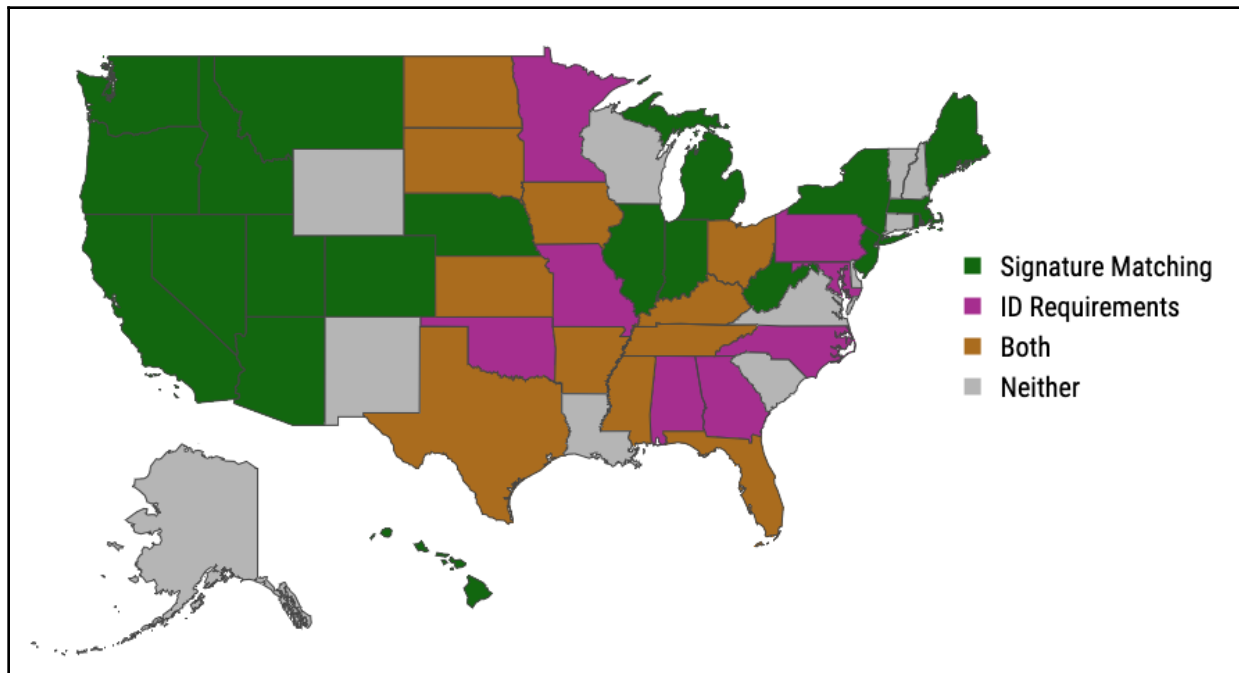


Figure 9 shows the combined distribution of these methods in the states. Eleven states implement some form of ID requirements and also match signatures (orange in figure 9), while another 11 implement neither (gray in figure 9). Interestingly, the majority of states that have ID requirements also match signatures (11 of 19).

While we previously found no evidence of a political predisposition among states to use signature matching (table 1), we did find one for the presence of ID requirements (table 4). Table 9 adds to that analysis by examining the overlap and absence of these two verification methods.

By examining both methods in combination we find that there is a slightly higher tendency for Democratically controlled states to rely solely on signature matching. Furthermore, we also find that Republican controlled states are more likely to have both ID requirements and signature matching than Democratically controlled ones. Specifically, nine of twenty-two Republican trifecta states employ both, while none of the 15 Democratic states do.¹³ Finally, we find no association between party control and the presence of neither verification method. Although the complete nature of the political dynamic surrounding these verification methods cannot be gleaned from this analysis, it is clear that ID requirements are a particularly strong driving force with none of the Democratic states and more than half of the Republican states choosing to employ them.

Table 9.

| | Democratic Trifecta | Divided Government | Republican Trifecta | Total |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| Signature Matching | 11 (22%) | 3 (6%) | 6 (12%) | 20 (40%) |
| ID Requirements | 0 (0%) | 4 (8%) | 4 (8%) | 8 (16%) |
| Both | 0 (0%) | 2 (4%) | 9 (18%) | 11 (22%) |
| Neither | 4 (8%) | 4 (8%) | 3 (6%) | 11 (22%) |
| Total | 15 (30%) | 13 (26%) | 22 (44%) | 50 (100%) |

Note: The chi-squared statistic for the table is statistically significant ($p < 0.005$), strongly suggesting that party control and the type of verification methods are not independent.

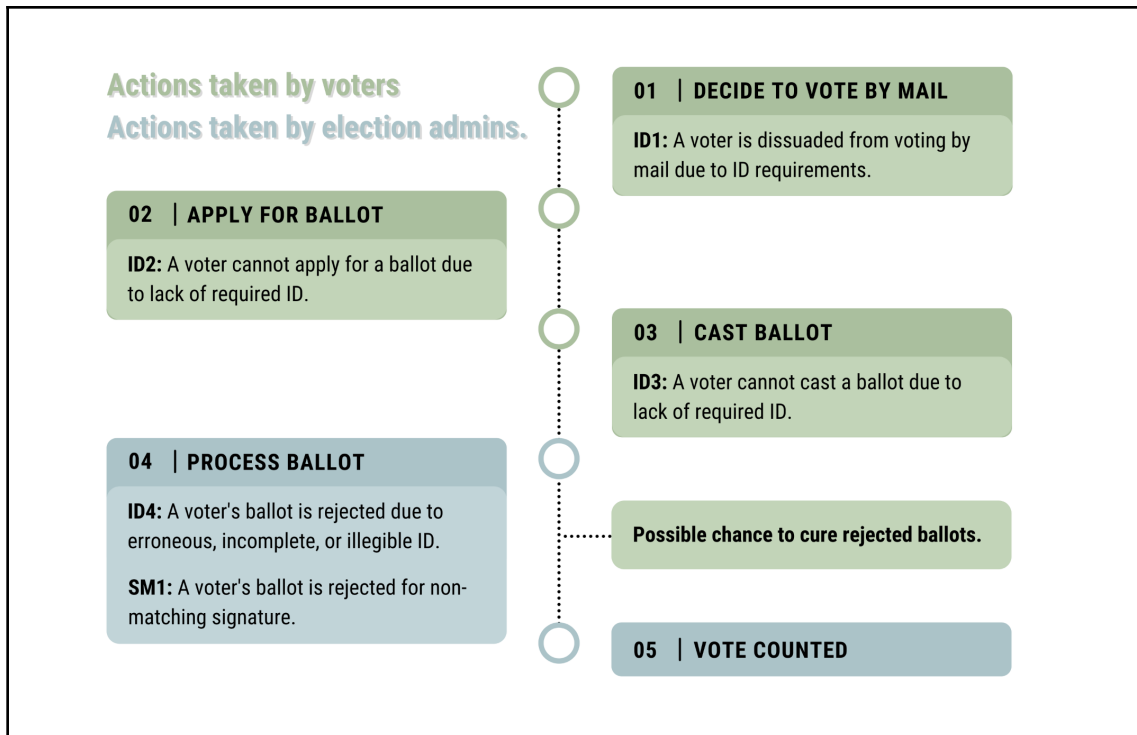
Beyond any potential political components, these verification methods differ in terms of where they come into play in the process of voting by mail. Figure 10 provides a model of the decision points and associated verification procedure barriers for voting by mail. At each step, either the voter (green boxes) or election administrators (blue boxes) must make decisions or take actions in order to proceed to the next step. The final step in the process is a successfully cast and counted ballot. At each stage we also identify the type of barrier a voter may face given the verification method employed in their state.

ID requirements can impose barriers at various points in the process (ID1 - ID4), but are concentrated mostly at those stages where the voter is making decisions and taking actions

¹³ As we have shown in table 4, no Democratic trifecta state has ID requirements for absentee or mail voting.

(stages 1-3). Signature matching related barriers, on the other hand, are imposed after the voter has decided to vote, applied for a ballot, and sent the ballot back to election administrators. This distinction between barriers applied earlier in the process and those later are embedded in the two different approaches to dealing with fraud—that of dissuasion and identification—and is important because they have different implications for potential disenfranchisement.

Figure 10. Timeline of Vote-by-Mail Decision Points and Verification Procedure Barriers



ID requirements impose a dissuasion barrier (ID1) that we don't see with signature matching. Voters may know or believe that certain ID requirements exist that they cannot or are not willing to satisfy and therefore decide not to vote at all. It's important to note that this dissuasion effect is based on the voter's perception of ID requirements, which might not always align with actual requirements. The chances of these skewed voter perceptions taking root are surely exacerbated by the rapidly changing statutory environment we have seen in recent years. Not knowing what the actual requirements are is one explanation for why the dissuasion barrier extends to voters who do have acceptable forms of ID (see figure 7 and table 8 above). Voters might also simply be unwilling to share their identifying information.

Signature matching requirements don't dissuade voters in the same manner because people generally can't anticipate a signature rejection in the way they could a rejection for no ID. Furthermore, because signatures don't need to be purchased or applied for and they can't be lost or stolen, most people¹⁴ have access to their signature in a way that they don't have access

¹⁴ Individuals with disabilities or who have difficulty signing their signature for any reason are clear exceptions.

to ID. This difference in access is what makes a requirement for signature on a ballot application (stage 2) less of a barrier than a requirement for a voter's driver's license number.

While voters' inability to anticipate rejection for non-matching signatures makes it so that matching requirements don't impose dissuasion barriers, it also makes it so voters can't effectively guard against these same rejections. Whereas with ID requirements, voters might be able to investigate specific qualifying documents and try to obtain them prior to casting a vote, there are few actions that could realistically mitigate chances of signature rejection. This problem is compounded by the evidence that these rejections are not applied universally or [in a consistent manner across jurisdictions](#) or from election to election. Although we note that ID requirements can also lead to rejections, these tend to be many fewer¹⁵ in number than signature matching rejections and are based on more objective criteria (I.e. missing/wrong/illegible number).¹⁶ Finally, because the opportunity to cure rejected ballots imposes additional costs of its own and is not universally available, it cannot be relied on to fully mitigate the disenfranchising effects of signature matching.

Unlike with ID requirements, there are few ways that the barriers created by signature matching could be mitigated. The fundamental problem with matching signatures is that it is not reliable enough to ensure that the legitimate ballots rejected don't vastly outnumber the fraudulent ones. Short of devising a better indicator of fraud from voter signatures, there is little that can avoid the tendency for false rejection in signature matching procedures. On the other hand, ID requirements, as discussed above, impose varying degrees of burdens on voters.

Whereas signature matching relies on a fraud prevention strategy meant to identify instances of fraud, ID requirements lean more on the dissuasion of potential fraud. The fundamental problem with ID requirements is that they dissuade more than just fraudsters, but also those eligible voters without access to the required document(s), photocopier/scanner, or notary public. The burdens imposed by ID requirements are, therefore, related to questions of access, which can be mitigated in a number of ways (e.g. by requiring numbers instead of copies or using witnesses instead of notaries).

Recommendations

1. Both verification methods should be evaluated by their potential to disenfranchise voters.

Both verification methods, and their many forms, disenfranchise voters through dissuasion, access burdens, or rejection mechanisms. The degree to which they dissuade or identify fraud is not entirely clear, but there is no evidence that states without verification methods have higher

¹⁵ According to the 2020 EAVS data, more than 12 times the number of ballots are rejected for non-matching signatures as for ID issues in states that require both.

¹⁶ Some [research](#) indicates that in-person voter ID requirements are applied in a racially biased fashion, demonstrating a lack of objectivity. Absentee and mail ID requirements, however, are unlikely to give administrators the same opportunity to discriminate.

levels of vote-by-mail fraud than those with them. This is mostly due to the fact that there is so little evidence of vote-by-mail fraud generally.

We might then ask: why do we need verification at all if fraud is so rare? Some may argue that one fraudulent vote is one too many, and given the central role of elections in our democratic system, that can be a compelling argument. If we truly care about the integrity of elections, however, we must care equally about the potential for eligible voters to be disenfranchised as the potential for voter fraud. In the crudest sense, this would mean that no measure meant to dissuade or identify fraud should disenfranchise more voters than it prevents fraudulent votes.¹⁷

We have demonstrated that for signature matching the majority of rejections are expected to be legitimate ballots until fraud rates get as high as four to six percent. That corresponds to a fraud rate of about 200 times the highest scholarly estimate. It is more difficult to assess the exact balance of fraud prevention and disenfranchisement for ID requirements because voter ID requirements can shape both fraudsters' and legitimate voters' decisions to cast an absentee ballot in the first place. What we can say is there is no evidence that ID requirements, especially those establishing high burdens, have resulted in lower levels of fraud (see figure 8), while the survey results we do have suggests that some eligible voters are actively dissuaded by the presence of ID requirements (see figure 7).

Therefore, if we accept that no verification method should disenfranchise more voters than it prevents fraudulent votes and given the reality of near-zero estimates of voter fraud, *we must conclude that neither verification method is justified.*

Unfortunately, there are two contemporary political phenomena that have pushed, and will likely continue to push, the adoption of verification methods in the states. First, [many Americans believe that voter fraud is significantly more prevalent than the evidence suggests](#), thus their evaluation of the need for such measures are skewed. Second, politicians are willing to fuel these beliefs and leverage them for political power and influence. Thus, in the inevitable face of likely adoption, we must recommend that *either verification method being considered should be judged by its potential to disenfranchise voters.*

2. States should not implement both verification methods simultaneously.

Both signature matching and ID requirements will disenfranchise voters and there is significant potential that the populations of voters affected are distinct for each method. The populations of potential fraudsters targeted by each method, however, should be the same in that fraudsters should have about equal access to either valid voter IDs or signatures. This means that implementing both methods—no matter the specific form they take—would disenfranchise more voters than either method individually without any guaranteed decrease to levels of fraud. Given

¹⁷ This is a crude model because it assumes that the harm of taking away one person's right to vote is equal to the harm of one fraudulent ballot being cast. Both do impose an equal collective harm in the way they could impact the election outcome, but disenfranchising a voter imposes an additional individual harm by excluding them from our political process.

this and the prescribed method of evaluating verification methods mentioned above, we must recommend that *states do not implement both verification methods simultaneously*.

3. If states require a verification method, they should favor ID requirements.

Signature matching and ID requirements disenfranchise voters at different points in the process of casting a mail ballot. Whereas ID requirements either dissuade or limit access for eligible voters at the front-end, signature matching disenfranchises via rejection after the ballot is cast. Because of this, ID requirements impose a direct burden on the voter (access to a notary or appropriate ID, for example) while, for most voters, signature matching does not. We could say that signature matching imposes a burden on the election administrators responsible for the match, but the consequences of this burdensome requirement still fall on the voters who are rejected as a result.

In both instances the voter faces the possibility of being disenfranchised but only with signature matching does the voter also forfeit control over mitigating that possibility. Signature matching, especially where curing is difficult or impossible, has voters hoping that they won't get caught in the largely arbitrary net cast by this imprecise procedure. Furthermore, the standards for matching can [shift from election to election and differ across jurisdictions](#) even within the same state. This uncertainty over the standard for the match makes it even more difficult for voters to understand how they might ensure their ballot is counted.

As a matter of principle, no voter or group should be saddled with unequal burdens to casting a ballot (see recommendation 1, above). If these burdens must be imposed, however, they should be as small as possible and voters should be the ones vested with the ability to overcome them. If a voter does not have that control or agency—if their ballot can be tossed out at near random—then they cannot be said to *have* a vote in any meaningful sense. A voter with perfect information and adequate resources can take steps to have their vote counted if verification is done by voter ID, but that same voter could do little to ensure that their ballot isn't rejected for a signature mis-match. ID requirements, therefore, vest more agency with the voter, especially when coupled with measures to equalize the availability of relevant resources and information (see below).

The imposition of open curing procedures and late deadlines might give some agency back to voters, but the associated burdens with curing tend to be as high or higher than many forms of ID requirements. For these reasons, *we recommend that if states require a verification method, they should favor ID requirements*.

4. Tailoring ID requirements to minimize disenfranchisement.

Below are certain specific recommendations to ensure that absentee and vote-by-mail ID requirements minimize the possibility of disenfranchising voters:

- *States should require provision of ID numbers only; no photocopy or notary requirements.* The required provision of copies of ID or notarized applications of ballots work to magnify the existing burdens associated with access to ID. The provision of ID numbers that the state can match to voter records on file should suffice and impose significantly less burden.
- *States should accept multiple forms of ID, including the last 4 digits of SSN and free voting specific ID.* Accepting many different forms of ID, especially those that are most commonly in voters' possession, and providing free access to ID significantly minimizes the access burdens associated with ID requirements.
- *States should ensure that their voter registration records have complete ID information for all forms of accepted ID wherever possible.* It is not enough that voters can use any of multiple forms of ID, state records must also support the matching of those various forms in order to avoid issues like those [seen in the lead up to the 2022 Texas primary](#).
- *States should craft their ID requirements so that they are clear to all voters and communicate them effectively.* Some voters may be dissuaded from voting even though they have the appropriate ID or easy access to such an ID. Requirements should be clear and easily available including information related to programs for free voter ID or alternative means of verification.
- *States should actively engage those communities with lower access to ID.* ID access is not equally or randomly distributed across society. Long-standing social inequalities have imposed heightened levels of burdens on certain communities and states must be cognizant of these disparities and work to remedy them when engaging in outreach, specifically by funding and supporting efforts at the local-level.

5. Tailoring signature requirements to minimize disenfranchisement.

Although we do not recommend implementing signature matching, those states that already have it in place and are not capable of removing it should consider the following recommendations for reform:

- *States should provide explicit guidance and training on the matching process.* Many states do not provide the local officials who conduct signature matching with guidance or training. Untrained individuals are more likely to incorrectly accept fraudulent ballots and incorrectly reject legal ones. Propagating uniform signature matching guidance and providing comprehensive training to all individuals who conduct matching would raise the quality of signature matching while diminishing the differences in how jurisdictions perform this function. This guidance should include a directive for administrators to presume a match when evaluating. This could both prevent incorrect rejections and reduce the existing disparities between jurisdictions.
- *States should create systems of oversight so that no single administrator or program can reject a ballot.* No individual should be able to unilaterally reject a ballot. States should institute verification procedures whereby multiple elections administrators or poll workers examine each signature. Only when multiple elections workers have examined a ballot and deemed the signature not a match should the ballot be rejected. This would reduce

the chance that a ballot is incorrectly rejected due to lack of matching knowledge, bias, or simply the exhaustion of one individual on a long shift.

- *States must provide alternatives for voters incapable of signing their name.* Not all voters are able to sign their names, whether because of disability status, literacy level, or another reason. States must provide these individuals alternative mechanisms to attest to their identity. For example, West Virginia provides non-signature options for voters with disabilities may receive assistance and provide an attestation of an individual who assisted with their ballot in lieu of a signature.
- *States must ensure a lengthy curing period with multiple means and opportunities of curing rejected ballots.* Individuals who have their ballots incorrectly rejected should have ample opportunity to prove their identity and have their ballot accepted. States should implement a lengthy curing period that extends until after Election Day, to allow voters who submit their ballots close to Election Day deadlines to fix potential errors. Individuals should have multiple options for how to cure their ballots, including in person or by submitting a cure form by mail. A robust curing process will allow the maximum number of incorrectly rejected voters to have their ballots counted.
- *States should implement prompt rejection notification systems that give the voter ample notice to cure.* Because effectively curing your ballot can be a very time sensitive affair, a timely notification system is of paramount importance. Voters should be notified of their rejection, not only by mail, but also by phone, text and/or email, where possible.
- *States should implement systems for post-election review of signature matching across jurisdictions, with a specific focus on transparency.* To minimize varying standards for signature matching across jurisdictions and elections, states should track and publicly report the number of rejected and cured ballots across all jurisdictions of interest and conduct post-election reviews of particularly high rejection rates or low cure rates.

Appendix I: Estimating the Probabilities in Figure 3

Figure 3 was produced following a procedure outlined by previous [work by Alexander Street](#). We use Bayes' Theorem (box A1, equation 1) to estimate the probability that a ballot rejected for a non-matching signature was actually fraudulently signed. In equation 2 we follow Street in applying Bayes' insights to the specific context of ballot signature matching.

Box A1. Bayes' Theorem Applied to Signature Rejections

$$(1)$$
$$P(A|B) = \frac{P(B|A) * P(A)}{P(B)} = \frac{P(B|A) * P(A)}{P(B|A) * P(A) + P(B|not A) * P(not A)}$$
$$(2)$$
$$P(fraud | rejection) = \frac{P(rejection | fraud) * P(fraud)}{P(rejection|fraud) * P(fraud) + P(rejection|not fraud) * P(not fraud)}$$

Equation 2 from box A1 tells us that to estimate the probability that a ballot rejected for a non-matching signature is actually fraudulent ($P(fraud | rejection)$) we need to know the following:

- $P(rejection | fraud)$: The probability that a ballot with a fraudulent signature will be rejected (a.k.a. the success rate).
- $P(rejection|not fraud)$: The probability that a ballot with a legitimate signature will be rejected for non-matching signature (a.k.a. the false rejection rate).
- $P(fraud)$: The probability that a ballot has a fraudulent signature (a.k.a. the rate of fraud). $P(not fraud)$ is the inverse of the fraud rate ($1 - P(fraud)$).

Given this equation we then plug in the estimates for the success rate and false rejections rate identified in the literature and compute the $P(fraud | rejection)$ across the range of possible values of $P(fraud)$.

Appendix II: Relevant State Statutes

Alabama

Ballot Request ID

[Code of Alabama 17-10-1\(b\)](#)

“(b) Voters who are voting by absentee ballot shall submit with the absentee ballot application a copy of one of the forms of identification listed in Section 17-9-30. An absentee ballot shall not be issued unless the required identification is submitted with the absentee ballot application except as provided in subsection (c).”

[Code of Alabama 17-9-30](#)

“(a) Each elector shall provide valid photo identification to an appropriate election official prior to voting. A voter required to show valid photo identification when voting in person shall present to the appropriate election official one of the following forms of valid photo identification: (1) A valid Alabama driver's license or nondriver identification card which was properly issued by the appropriate state or county department or agency. (2) A valid Alabama photo voter identification card issued under subsection (g) or other valid identification card issued by a branch, department, agency, or entity of the State of Alabama, any other state, or the United States authorized by law to issue personal identification, provided that such identification card contains a photograph of the elector. (3) A valid United States passport. (4) A valid employee identification card containing the photograph of the elector and issued by any branch, department, agency, or entity of the United States government, this state, or any county, municipality, board, authority, or other entity of this state. (5) A valid student or employee identification card issued by a public or private college, university, or postgraduate technical or professional school located within the state, provided that such identification card contains a photograph of the elector. (6) A valid United States military identification card, provided that such identification card contains a photograph of the elector. (7) A valid tribal identification card containing a photograph of the elector. (b) Voters requesting an absentee ballot shall submit with the absentee ballot application a copy of one of the forms of identification listed in subsection (a).”

[Code of Alabama 17-11-5\(a\)](#)

“Upon receipt of an application for an absentee ballot as provided in Section 17-11-3, if the applicant's name appears on the list of qualified voters produced from the state voter registration list in the election to be held, or if the applicant qualifies for a provisional absentee ballot, the absentee election manager shall furnish the absentee ballot...”

Ballot Submission ID

[Code of Alabama 17-11-9](#)

“After marking the ballot and subscribing the oath herein required, the voter shall seal his or her ballot in the plain envelope, place that plain envelope inside the affidavit envelope, complete the affidavit, have a notary public (or other officer authorized to acknowledge oaths) or two witnesses witness his or her signature to the affidavit, and forward it by United States mail to the absentee election manager or hand it to him or her in person.”

Alaska

Ballot Request ID

[Alaska Statutes 15-20-081](#)

“The application must include the address or, if the application requests delivery of an absentee ballot by electronic transmission, the telephone electronic transmission number, to which the

absentee ballot is to be returned, the applicant's full Alaska residence address, and the applicant's signature.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Alaska Statutes 15-20-081](#)

“(d) Upon receipt of an absentee ballot by mail, the voter, in the presence of a notary public, commissioned officer of the armed forces including the National Guard, district judge or magistrate, United States postal official, registration official, or other person qualified to administer oaths, may proceed to mark the ballot in secret, to place the ballot in the secrecy sleeve, to place the secrecy sleeve in the envelope provided, and to sign the voter's certificate on the envelope in the presence of an official listed in this subsection who shall sign as attesting official and shall date the signature. If none of the officials listed in this subsection is reasonably accessible, an absentee voter shall sign the voter's certificate in the presence of an individual who is 18 years of age or older, who shall sign as a witness and attest to the date on which the voter signed the certificate in the individual's presence, and, in addition, the voter shall certify, as prescribed in AS 09.63.020, under penalty of perjury, that the statements in the voter's certification are true.”

“(f) The director shall require a voter casting an absentee ballot by mail to provide proof of identification or other information to aid in the establishment of the voter's identity as prescribed by regulations adopted under AS 44.62 (Administrative Procedure Act). If the voter is a first-time voter who initially registered by mail or by facsimile or other electronic transmission approved by the director under AS 15.07.050 and has not met the identification requirements set out in AS 15.07.060, the voter must provide one of the following forms of proof of identification: (1) a copy of a driver's license, state identification card, current and valid photo identification, birth certificate, passport, or hunting or fishing license; or (2) a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, paycheck, government check, or other government document; an item provided under this paragraph must show the name and current address of the voter.”

Arizona

Ballot Request ID

[Arizona Revised Statutes 16-542\(A\)](#)

“In addition to name and address, the requesting elector shall provide the date of birth and state or country of birth or other information that if compared to the voter registration information on file would confirm the identity of the elector.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Arizona Revised Statutes 16-550\(A\)](#)

“On receipt of the envelope containing the early ballot and the ballot affidavit, the county recorder or other officer in charge of elections shall compare the signatures thereon with the signature of the elector on the elector's registration record. If the signature is inconsistent with the elector's signature on the elector's registration record, the county recorder or other officer in charge of elections shall make reasonable efforts to contact the voter, advise the voter of the inconsistent signature and allow the voter to correct or the county to confirm the inconsistent signature.”

Arkansas

Ballot Request ID

[Arkansas Code 7-5-404\(a\)\(1\)\(A\)](#)

“Applications for absentee ballots must be signed by the applicant and verified by the county clerk by checking the voter's name, address, date of birth, and signature from the voter registration application unless the application is sent by electronic means.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Arkansas Code 7-5-416\(F\)](#)

“(i) After the election official reads aloud from the statement, the election officials shall compare the name, address, date of birth, and signature of the voter's absentee application with the voter's statement and, for first-time voters who registered by mail, the first-time voter's identification document unless the voter previously provided identification at the time of mailing the voter registration application. (ii) If the county board of election commissioners determines that the application and the voter's statement do not compare as to name, address, date of birth, and signature, the absentee ballot shall not be counted.”

[Arkansas Constitution Amendment 51, Section 13](#)

“(b)(1)(A) In order to determine that all who cast a ballot in an election, a runoff election, or a school election in this state are legally qualified to vote in that election, each voter shall verify his or her registration by: (i) Presenting to the election official when appearing to vote in person either early or at the polls on election day in an election, a runoff election, or a school election verification of registration in the form of a document or identification card that: (a) Shows the name of the person to whom the document or identification card was issued; (b) Shows a photograph of the person to whom the document or identification card was issued; (c) Is issued by the United States, the State of Arkansas, or an accredited postsecondary educational institution in the State of Arkansas; and (d) If displaying an expiration date, is not expired or expired no more than four (4) years before the date of the election in which the voter seeks to vote; or (ii) Submitting with an absentee ballot in an election, a runoff election, or a school election a copy of a document or identification card that complies with the requirements of subdivision (b)(1)(A)(i) of this section.”

California

Ballot Request ID

N.A. because of universal mail voting

Ballot Submission ID

[California Election Code 3019\(a\)\(1\)](#)

“Upon receiving a vote by mail ballot, the elections official shall compare the signature on the identification envelope with either of the following to determine if the signatures compare: (A) The signature appearing on the voter's affidavit of registration or any previous affidavit of registration of the voter. (B) The signature appearing on a form issued by an elections official that contains the voter's signature and that is part of the voter's registration record.”

Colorado

Ballot Request ID

N.A. because of universal mail voting

Ballot Submission ID

[Colorado Revised Statutes 1-7.5-107.3\(1\)\(a\)](#)

“Except as provided in subsection (5) of this section, in every mail ballot election that is coordinated with or conducted by the county clerk and recorder, an election judge shall compare the signature on the self-affirmation on each return envelope with the signature of the eligible elector stored in the statewide voter registration system...”

Connecticut

Ballot Request ID

[General Statutes of Connecticut 9-140\(c\)](#)

“The municipal clerk shall check the name of each absentee ballot applicant against the last-completed registry list and any updated registry lists on file in the municipal clerk’s office.”

Ballot Submission ID

[General Statutes of Connecticut 9-140c\(c\)](#)

“If the name of the applicant returning the ballot is not on the official checklist for any polling place in such municipality, the registrars shall endorse on the face of such outer envelope the word “rejected”, followed by a statement of the reasons for rejection, and the outer envelope shall not be opened or the ballot counted.”

Delaware

Ballot Request ID

[Delaware Code 15-5504\(a\)](#)

“Upon receipt of a statement from an elector pursuant to § 5503 of this title, the Department shall process the same and confirm that the elector qualifies for an absentee ballot pursuant to § 5502 of this title.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Delaware Code 15-5509\(a\)](#)

“Upon receipt of a ballot envelope the Department, or a person authorized by the Department, shall: (1) Ascertain the names of each elector as they appear on the face of each ballot envelope; (2) Ascertain from the information on the ballot envelope the election district with whose votes the ballot within it shall be tallied; and (3) Place the ballot envelope in a secure location until such time as it is opened and the ballot within it is counted.”

District of Columbia

Ballot Request ID

[D.C. Municipal Regulations 3-720.7](#)

“A request for an absentee ballot shall include the following: (a) The voter's name; (b) Election(s) for which the absentee ballot is requested; (c) Address from which the voter is registered to vote; (d) Voter's current residence address, if different from the address listed on the Board's records; (e) Address to which the absentee ballot shall be delivered, if applicable; (f) Voter's DMV- issued identification number, the last four (4) digits of the voter's social security number, or the voter's unique voter identification number issued by the Board; (g) Voter's date of birth; and (h) Voter's signature, whether original or as a digitized image given directly by the applicant or received on behalf of the applicant through the Department of Motor Vehicles.”

Ballot Submission ID

[D.C. Municipal Regulations 3-720.11](#)

“Prior to returning the voted absentee ballot to the Board, a voter shall confirm the accuracy of his or her name, address, party affiliation, and ANC Single-Member District, where applicable, as it appears on the Board’s records by signing either the absentee ballot envelope. The voter’s signature shall be deemed an affirmation that the voter’s information is correct as shown on the Board’s records and that the voter is a qualified elector.”

Florida

Ballot Request ID

[Florida Statutes IX-101.62\(1\)\(b\)](#)

“The supervisor may accept a written, an in-person, or a telephonic request for a vote-by-mail ballot to be mailed to an elector’s address on file in the Florida Voter Registration System from the elector, or, if directly instructed by the elector, a member of the elector’s immediate family, or the elector’s legal guardian. If an in-person or a telephonic request is made, the elector must provide the elector’s Florida driver license number, the elector’s Florida identification card number, or the last four digits of the elector’s social security number, whichever may be verified in the supervisor’s records. If the ballot is requested to be mailed to an address other than the elector’s address on file in the Florida Voter Registration System, the request must be made in writing. A written request must be signed by the elector and include the elector’s Florida driver license number, the elector’s Florida identification card number, or the last four digits of the elector’s social security number.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Florida Revised Statutes IX-101.68](#)

“(1) The supervisor of the county where the absent elector resides shall receive the voted ballot, at which time the supervisor shall compare the signature of the elector on the voter’s certificate with the signature of the elector in the registration books or the precinct register to determine whether the elector is duly registered in the county and must record on the elector’s registration record that the elector has voted. During the signature comparison process, the supervisor may not use any knowledge of the political affiliation of the voter whose signature is subject to verification. [...] (2)(c)1. The canvassing board must, if the supervisor has not already done so, compare the signature of the elector on the voter’s certificate or on the vote-by-mail ballot cure affidavit as provided in subsection (4) with the signature of the elector in the registration books or the precinct register to see that the elector is duly registered in the county and to determine the legality of that vote-by-mail ballot. A vote-by-mail ballot may only be counted if: a. The signature on the voter’s certificate or the cure affidavit matches the elector’s signature in the registration books or precinct register; however, in the case of a cure affidavit, the supporting identification listed in subsection (4) must also confirm the identity of the elector; or b. The cure affidavit contains a signature that does not match the elector’s signature in the registration books or precinct register, but the elector has submitted a current and valid Tier 1 identification pursuant to subsection (4) which confirms the identity of the elector. For purposes of this subparagraph, any canvassing board finding that an elector’s signatures do not match must be by majority vote and beyond a reasonable doubt.”

Georgia

Ballot Request ID

[Georgia Code 21-2-381\(a\)\(1\)\(C\)\(i\)](#)

“Any person applying for an absentee-by-mail ballot shall make an application in writing on the form made available by the Secretary of State. In order to confirm the identity of the voter, such form shall require the elector to provide his or her name, date of birth, address as registered, address where the elector wishes the ballot to be mailed, and the number of his or her Georgia driver’s license or identification card issued pursuant to Article 5 of Chapter 5 of Title 40. If such elector does not have a Georgia driver’s license or identification card issued pursuant to Article 5 of Chapter 5 of Title 40, the elector shall affirm this fact in the manner prescribed in the application and the elector shall provide a copy of a form of identification listed in subsection (c) of Code Section 21-2-417.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Georgia Code 21-2-385\(a\)](#)

“In order to verify that the absentee ballot was voted by the elector who requested the ballot, the elector shall print the number of his or her Georgia driver's license number or identification card issued pursuant to Article 5 of Chapter 5 of Title 40 in the space provided on the outer oath envelope. The elector shall also print his or her date of birth in the space provided in the outer oath envelope. If the elector does not have a Georgia driver's license or state identification card issued pursuant to Article 5 of Chapter 5 of Title 40, the elector shall so affirm in the space provided on the outer oath envelope and print the last four digits of his or her social security number in the space provided on the outer oath envelope. If the elector does not have a Georgia driver's license, identification card issued pursuant to Article 5 of Chapter 5 of Title 40, or a social security number, the elector shall so affirm in the space provided on the outer oath envelope and place a copy of one of the forms of identification set forth in subsection (c) of Code Section 21-2-417 in the outer envelope.”

Hawaii

Ballot Request ID

N.A. because of universal mail voting

Ballot Submission ID

[Hawaii Revised Statutes 15-9](#)

“(c) Before opening the return and ballot envelopes and counting the ballots, the return envelopes shall be checked for the following: (1) Signature on the affirmation statement; (2) Whether the signature corresponds with the absentee request or register as prescribed in the rules adopted by the chief election officer; and (3) Whether the person is a registered voter and has complied with the requirements of sections 11-15 and 11-16.”

Idaho

Ballot Request ID

[Idaho Statutes 34-1003\(1\)](#)

“Upon receipt of an application for an absent elector’s ballot within the proper time, the county clerk receiving it shall examine the records of the county clerk’s office to ascertain whether or not such applicant is registered and lawfully entitled to vote as requested and, if found to be so, the county clerk shall arrange for the applicant to vote by absent elector’s ballot.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Idaho Statutes 34-1005\(2\)](#)

“Upon receipt of an absent elector’s ballot, the county clerk of the county wherein such elector resides shall verify the authenticity of the affidavit, including verifying that the signature matches the signature from such elector’s voter registration,”

Illinois

Ballot Request ID

[Illinois Compiled Statutes 10-5/19-4](#)

“it shall be the duty of such election authority to examine the records to ascertain whether or not such applicant is lawfully entitled to vote as requested, including a verification of the applicant's signature by comparison with the signature on the official registration record card.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Illinois Compiled Statutes 10-5/19-8\(g\)](#)

“...the election judge or official shall compare the voter's signature on the certification envelope of that vote by mail ballot with the signature of the voter on file in the office of the election authority. If the election judge or official determines that the 2 signatures match, and that the vote by mail voter is otherwise qualified to cast a vote by mail ballot, the election authority shall

cast and count the ballot on election day or the day the ballot is determined to be valid, whichever is later, adding the results to the precinct in which the voter is registered. If the election judge or official determines that the signatures do not match, or that the vote by mail voter is not qualified to cast a vote by mail ballot, then without opening the certification envelope, the judge or official shall mark across the face of the certification envelope the word "Rejected" and shall not cast or count the ballot."

Indiana

Ballot Request ID

[Indiana Code 3-11-4-17.5\(a\)](#)

"Upon receiving an application for an absentee ballot, the county election board (or the absentee voter board in the office of the circuit court clerk) shall determine if: (1) the applicant is a voter of the precinct in which the applicant resides, according to the records of the county voter registration office; (2) the information set forth on the application appears to be true; (3) the signature of the voter on the application substantially conforms with the signature of the voter on the voter registration record, or that any substantial difference between the signatures can be accounted for by age or disability of the voter or the execution of the affidavit by an individual acting under section 2(b) of this chapter; and (4) the application has been completed and filed in accordance with Indiana and federal law."

Ballot Submission ID

[Indiana Code 3-11.5-4-13\(a\)](#)

"If the absentee ballot counters find under section 11 of this chapter that any of the following applies, the ballots shall be rejected: [...] (2) The signatures do not correspond or there is no signature, and the signature mismatch or missing signature is not cured by the deadline established under section 13.5 or 13.6 of this chapter."

Iowa

Ballot Request ID

[Iowa Code 53.2\(4\)](#)

"(a) To request an absentee ballot, a registered voter must provide (1) The name and signature of the registered voter (2) the registered voter's date of birth (3) the address at which the voter is registered to vote (4) the registered voter's voter verification number (5) the name or date of the election for which the absentee ballot is requested (6) Such other information as may be necessary to determine the correct absentee ballot for the registered voter. [...] c. For purposes of this subsection, "voter verification number" means the registered voter's driver's license number or nonoperator's identification card number assigned to the voter by the department of transportation or the registered voter's identification number assigned to the voter by the state commissioner pursuant to section 47.7, subsection 2. (d) If an applicant does not have current access to the applicant's voter verification number, the commissioner shall verify the applicant's identity prior to supplying the voter verification number by asking the applicant to provide at least two of the following facts about the applicant: (1) Date of birth. (2) The last four digits of the applicant's social security number, if applicable. (3) Residential address. (4) Mailing address. (5) Middle name. (6) Voter verification number as defined in paragraph "c"

Ballot Submission ID

[Iowa Code 53.18\(3\)](#)

"For the purposes of this section, a return envelope marked with the affidavit shall be considered to contain a defect if it appears to the commissioner that the signature on the envelope has been signed by someone other than the registered voter, in comparing the signature on the envelope to the signature on record of the registered voter named on the envelope. A signature

or marking made in accordance with section 39.3, subsection 17, shall not be considered a defect for purposes of this section.”

Kansas

Ballot Request ID

[Kansas Statutes 25-1122](#)

“(a) Any registered voter may file with the county election officer where the person is a resident, or where the person is authorized by law to vote as a former precinct resident, an application for an advance voting ballot. The signed application shall be transmitted only to the county election officer by personal delivery, mail, facsimile or as otherwise provided by law. (b) If the registered voter is applying for an advance voting ballot to be transmitted in person, the voter shall provide identification pursuant to K.S.A. 25-2908, and amendments thereto. (c) If the registered voter is applying for an advance voting ballot to be transmitted by mail, the voter shall provide with the application for an advance voting ballot the voter's current and valid Kansas driver's license number, nondriver's identification card number or a photocopy of any other identification provided by K.S.A. 25-2908, and amendments thereto. [...] (e) No county election officer shall provide an advance voting ballot to a person who is requesting an advance voting ballot to be transmitted by mail unless: (1) The county election official verifies that the signature of the person matches that on file in the county voter registration records, except that verification of the voter's signature shall not be required if a voter has a disability preventing the voter from signing.”

[Kansas Statutes 25-2908\(h\)\(1\)](#)

“(h) (1) The following forms of identification shall be valid if the identification contains the name and photograph of the voter and has not expired. Expired documents shall be valid if the bearer of the document is 65 years of age or older: (A) A driver's license issued by Kansas or by another state or district of the United States; (B) a state identification card issued by Kansas or by another state or district of the United States; (C) a concealed carry of handgun license issued by Kansas or a concealed carry of handgun or weapon license issued by another state or district of the United States; (D) a United States passport; (E) an employee badge or identification document issued by a municipal, county, state, or federal government office or agency; (F) a military identification document issued by the United States; (G) a student identification card issued by an accredited postsecondary institution of education in the state of Kansas; (H) a public assistance identification card issued by a municipal, county, state, or federal government office or agency; or (I) an identification card issued by an Indian tribe.”

[Kansas Statutes 25-1122\(e\)](#)

“No county election officer shall provide an advance voting ballot to a person who is requesting an advance voting ballot to be transmitted by mail unless: (1) The county election official verifies that the signature of the person matches that on file in the county voter registration records, except that verification of the voter's signature shall not be required if a voter has a disability preventing the voter from signing. Signature verification may occur by electronic device or by human inspection. In the event that the signature of a person who is requesting an advance voting ballot does not match that on file, the county election officer shall attempt to contact the person and shall offer the person another opportunity to provide the person's signature for the purposes of verifying the person's identity.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Kansas Statutes 25-1124\(h\)](#)

“Subject to the provisions of subsection (b), no county election officer shall accept an advance voting ballot transmitted by mail unless the county election officer verifies that the signature of

the person on the advance voting ballot envelope matches the signature on file in the county voter registration records, except that verification of the voter's signature shall not be required if a voter has a disability preventing the voter from signing the ballot or preventing the voter from having a signature consistent with such voter's registration form. Signature verification may occur by electronic device or by human inspection. In the event that the signature of a person on the advance voting ballot envelope does not match the signature on file in the county voter registration records, the ballot shall not be counted.”

Kentucky

Ballot Request ID

[Kentucky Revised Statutes 117.085\(5\)](#)

“The mail-in absentee ballot application form shall be verified and signed by the voter, and the voter shall provide a copy of his or her proof of identification, as defined in KRS 117.001”

[Kentucky Revised Statutes 117.001\(13\)](#)

““Proof of identification" means a document that was issued by: (a) The United States or the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and the document contains: 1. The name of the individual to whom the document was issued; and 2. A photograph of the individual to whom the document was issued; (b) The United States Department of Defense, a branch of the uniformed services, the Merchant Marine, or the Kentucky National Guard, and the document contains: 1. The name of the individual to whom the document was issued; and 2. A photograph of the individual to whom the document was issued; (c) A public or private college, university, or postgraduate technical or professional school located within the United States, and the document contains: 1. The name of the individual to whom the document was issued; and 2. A photograph of the individual to whom the document was issued; or (d) Any city government, county government, urban-county government, charter county government, consolidated local government, or unified local government, which is located within this state, and the document contains: 1. The name of the individual to whom the document was issued; and 2. A photograph of the individual to whom the document was issued;”

Ballot Submission ID

[Kentucky Revised Statutes 17.087\(3\)\(c\)\(5\)](#)

“The members of the county board of elections, or the members of the central counting board, shall compare the signatures on the outer envelope and the detachable flap with the signature of the voter that appears on the voter's signature of record, which record shall include the signature on the voter's identity document as defined in KRS 186.010, the voter's mail-in absentee ballot application, or the voter's registration card.”

Louisiana

Ballot Request ID

[Louisiana Revised Statutes 18:1307\(A\)](#)

“A person qualified to vote absentee by mail under this Chapter may make application therefor to the registrar by letter; over his signature or mark if the voter is unable to sign his name, signed by two witnesses who witnessed the applicant's mark; setting forth: (1) The election or elections for which he requests an absentee ballot. (2) The reason for his request to vote absentee by mail and attaching any documents in support thereof that are required by law. Any person who is or expects to be temporarily outside the territorial limits of the state or absent from the parish in which he is qualified to vote during the early voting period and on election day and who requests an absentee ballot be mailed to an address within the parish shall indicate in his application the dates he will be outside the territorial limits of the state or absent from the parish. (3) The address to which the absentee ballot or ballots shall be sent. If the address is

within the parish or an adjacent parish, such address shall only be the address at which the applicant is registered to vote, his mailing address on file with the registrar of voters, or an address at which he regularly receives mail. [...] (5) The ward and precinct in which the person is qualified to vote, if known. (6) The date of birth of the voter. (7) The maiden name of the voter's mother or other identifying information provided in the voter's application for registration pursuant to R.S. 18:104. (8) The street address in the parish where the voter resides. A post office box is insufficient. (9) If the person requests that a ballot for a general election be sent in addition to a ballot for the primary, he shall declare in writing to the registrar that he will be eligible to vote absentee by mail in the general election.”

[Louisiana Revised Statutes 18:1307\(B\)\(1\)\(d\)](#)

“Notwithstanding the provisions of Subparagraph (a) of this Paragraph, with respect to applicants who have a valid Louisiana driver's license or Louisiana special identification card issued pursuant to R.S. 40:1321 who are registered to vote, an application to vote by mail may be made by completing and submitting an electronic application to vote by mail on the secretary of state's website.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Louisiana Revised Statutes 18:1306\(E\)\(2\)\(a\)](#)

“An absentee by mail ballot envelope flap shall also contain a line for the handwritten signature of one witness and a line for the printed name of the witness. The voter shall sign the certificate in the presence of one witness and his certificate shall be made under penalty of perjury for providing false or fraudulent information. Above the perforation and along the seal line, the words "DO NOT DETACH FLAP" shall be printed. No person except the immediate family member of the voter, as defined in this Code, shall witness more than one certificate of a voter.”

Maine

Ballot Request ID

[Maine Revised Statutes 21-A-753B\(3\)](#)

“A voter may complete an application or make a written request for the voter's own ballot by mail, in person or by facsimile. The voter may designate an immediate family member or a 3rd person to deliver the ballot on the voter's behalf. An immediate family member of a voter may also make an application or written request for an absentee ballot for the voter. A. An application or a written request for an absentee ballot must be accepted by the clerk if it contains the following information: (1) The voter's name; (2) The voter's residence address or other address sufficient to identify the voter; (3) The signature of the voter or the voter's immediate family member who is making the application or written request. If an immediate family member is either making the application or written request or is designated in the application or written request to deliver or return the ballot to the voter, then the family relationship to the voter must also be provided; and (4) If applicable, a different address to which the applicant requests the ballot be sent or delivered.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Maine Revised Statutes 21-A-756\(2\)](#)

“Clerk to examine signatures and affidavit. The clerk shall compare the signature of the voter on the application, where required, with that on the corresponding return envelope. The clerk shall examine the affidavit on the return envelope. If the signatures appear to have been made by the same person and if the affidavit is properly completed, the clerk shall write "OK" and the clerk's initials on the return envelope. Otherwise, the clerk shall note any discrepancy on the return envelope.”

Maryland

Ballot Request ID

[Maryland Code Election Law 9-305](#)

“(a) A voter may request an absentee ballot by completing and submitting: (1) the State Board approved absentee ballot application; (2) a form provided under federal law; (3) subject to subsection (b) of this section, a written request that includes: (i) the voter’s name, residence address, and signature; and (ii) the address to which the ballot is to be mailed, if different from the residence address; or (4) the accessible online absentee ballot application provided by the State Board. (b) A voter who uses the online absentee ballot application to request that an absentee ballot be sent by any method or who uses any method to request to receive a blank absentee ballot through the Internet shall provide the following information: (1) a Maryland driver's license number or Maryland identification card number, the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security number, and other information identified by the State Board that is not generally available to the public but is readily available to the applicant; or (2) if the applicant is an absent uniformed services voter or overseas voter as defined in the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act or a voter with a disability and does not have a Maryland driver's license or Maryland identification card, the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security number.”

Ballot Submission ID

None

Massachusetts

Ballot Request ID

[Massachusetts General Laws 54-91](#)

“When an application for an official absent voting ballot is received by the clerk of a city or town, it shall be transmitted by him to the registrars, who shall examine it and, if they believe the signature thereon to be genuine and the person executing the signature to be a duly registered voter or a family member of a duly registered voter, shall execute the certificate thereon and return the application to said clerk.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Massachusetts General Laws 54-94](#)

“The city or town clerk or a person designated by him shall open each envelope purporting to contain an official absent voting ballot as soon as possible after receiving it, in the view of any persons who may be present. He shall remove therefrom the inner envelope provided for in clause (c) of the first paragraph of section eighty-seven and, without opening such inner envelope, compare the signature thereon with the signature on the application therefor, except if a family member signed the application or if the voter received assistance in signing the application or the envelope, and examine the affidavit on each such envelope.”

Michigan

Ballot Request ID

[Michigan Compiled Laws 168-28-761](#)

“(1) If the clerk of a city or township receives an application for an absent voter ballot from a person registered to vote in that city or township and if the signature on the application agrees with the signature for the person contained in the qualified voter file or on the registration card as required in subsection (2), the clerk immediately upon receipt of the application or, if the application is received before the printing of the absent voter ballots, as soon as the ballots are received by the clerk, shall forward by mail, postage prepaid, or shall deliver personally 1 of the ballots or set of ballots if there is more than 1 kind of ballot to be voted to the applicant. If the

clerk of a city or township receives an application for an absent voter ballot from an applicant who is a program participant, as that term is defined in the address confidentiality program act, then the city or township clerk shall mail an absent voter ballot to that program participant at the designated address provided to that program participant by the department of the attorney general under the address confidentiality program act. Subject to the identification requirement in subsection (6), absent voter ballots may be delivered to an applicant in person at the office of the clerk. (2) The qualified voter file must be used to determine the genuineness of a signature on an application for an absent voter ballot. Signature comparisons must be made with the digitized signature in the qualified voter file. If the qualified voter file does not contain a digitized signature of an elector, or is not accessible to the clerk, the city or township clerk shall compare the signature appearing on the application for an absent voter ballot to the signature contained on the master card.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Michigan Compiled Laws 168-28-766](#)

“(1) Upon receipt from the city or township clerk of any envelope containing the marked ballot or ballots of an absent voter, the board of inspectors of election shall verify the legality of the vote by doing both of the following: (a) Examining the digitized signature for the absent voter included in the qualified voter file under section 509q or the registration record as provided in subsection (2) to see that the person has not voted in person, that he or she is a registered voter, and that the signature on the statement agrees with the signature on the registration record. (b) Examining the statement of the voter to see that it is properly executed. (2) The qualified voter file must be used to determine the genuineness of a signature on an envelope containing an absent voter ballot. Signature comparisons must be made with the digitized signature in the qualified voter file. If the qualified voter file does not contain a digitized signature of an elector, or is not accessible to the clerk, the city or township clerk shall compare the signature appearing on an envelope containing an absent voter ballot to the signature contained on the master card.”

Minnesota

Ballot Request ID

[Minnesota Statutes 203B.04\(1\)\(b\)](#)

“An application shall be approved if it is timely received, signed and dated by the applicant, contains the applicant's name and residence and mailing addresses, date of birth, and at least one of the following: (1) the applicant's Minnesota driver's license number; (2) Minnesota state identification card number; (3) the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security number; or (4) a statement that the applicant does not have any of these numbers.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Minnesota Statutes 203B.07\(3\)](#)

“A certificate of eligibility to vote by absentee ballot shall be printed on the back of the return envelope. The certificate shall contain space for the voter's Minnesota driver's license number, state identification number, or the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number, or to indicate that the voter does not have one of these numbers. The space must be designed to ensure that the voter provides the same type of identification as provided on the voter's absentee ballot application for purposes of comparison. The certificate must also contain a statement to be signed and sworn by the voter indicating that the voter meets all of the requirements established by law for voting by absentee ballot and space for a statement signed by a person who is registered to vote in Minnesota or by a notary public.”

[Minnesota Statutes 203B.121\(2\)\(b\)](#)

“The members of the ballot board shall mark the signature envelope "Accepted" and initial or sign the signature envelope below the word "Accepted" if a majority of the members of the ballot board examining the envelope are satisfied that: (1) the voter's name and address on the signature envelope are the same as the information provided on the absentee ballot application; (2) the voter signed the certification on the envelope; (3) the voter's Minnesota driver's license, state identification number, or the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number are the same as a number on the voter's absentee ballot application or voter record. If the number does not match, the election judges must compare the signature provided by the applicant to determine whether the ballots were returned by the same person to whom they were transmitted; (4) the voter is registered and eligible to vote in the precinct or has included a properly completed voter registration application in the signature envelope; (5) the certificate has been completed as prescribed in the directions for casting an absentee ballot; and (6) the voter has not already voted at that election, either in person or, if it is after the close of business on the seventh day before the election, by absentee ballot. The signature envelope from accepted ballots must be preserved and returned to the county auditor.”

Mississippi

Ballot Request ID

[Mississippi Code 23-15-627](#)

“If you are temporarily or permanently disabled, you are not required to have this application notarized or signed by an official authorized to administer oaths for absentee balloting. You are required to sign this application in the proper place and have a person eighteen (18) years of age or older witness your signature and sign this application in the proper place.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Mississippi Code 23-15-631\(c\)](#)

“Any notary public, United States postmaster, assistant United States postmaster, United States postal supervisor, clerk in charge of a contract postal station, or other officer having authority to administer an oath or take an acknowledgment may be an attesting witness; provided, however, that in the case of an absent elector who is temporarily or permanently physically disabled, the attesting witness may be any person eighteen (18) years of age or older and such person is not required to have the authority to administer an oath.”

[Mississippi Code 23-15-639\(1\)\(b\)](#)

“The signature on the application shall then be compared with the signature on the back of the envelope. If it corresponds and the affidavit, if one is required, is sufficient and the resolution board find that the applicant is a registered and qualified voter or otherwise qualified to vote, the envelope shall then be opened and the ballot removed from the envelope, without its being unfolded, or permitted to be unfolded or examined.”

Missouri

Ballot Request ID

[Missouri Revised Statutes 115.279\(2\)](#)

“Each application shall be in writing and shall state the applicant's name, address at which he or she is or would be registered, his or her reason for voting an absentee ballot, the address to which the ballot is to be mailed, if mailing is requested, and for absent uniformed services and overseas applicants, the applicant's email address if electronic transmission is requested.”

[Missouri Revised Statutes 115.302\(2\)](#)

“Each application for a mail-in ballot shall be made to the election authority of the jurisdiction in which the person is registered. Each application shall be in writing and shall state the

applicant's name, address at which he or she is registered, the address to which the ballot is to be mailed.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Missouri Revised Statutes 115.291](#)

“The affidavit of each person voting an absentee ballot shall be subscribed and sworn to before the election official receiving the ballot, a notary public or other officer authorized by law to administer oaths, unless the voter is voting absentee due to incapacity or confinement due to the provisions of section 115.284, illness or physical disability,”

[Missouri Revised Statutes 115.302\(11\)](#)

“Upon receiving a mail-in ballot by mail, the voter shall mark the ballot in secret, place the ballot in the ballot envelope, seal the envelope and fill out the statement on the ballot envelope. The statement required under subsection 7 of this section shall be subscribed and sworn to before a notary public or other officer authorized by law to administer oaths.”

Montana

Ballot Request ID

[Montana Code Annotated 13-13-212\(1\)\(a\)](#)

“Except as provided in subsection (1)(b), an elector may apply for an absentee ballot by using a standard application form provided by rule by the secretary of state pursuant to 13-1-210 or by making a written request, which must include the applicant's birth date and must be signed by the applicant. “

[Montana Code Annotated 13-13-213\(3\)\(a\)](#)

“The election administrator shall compare the signature on the application with the applicant's signature on the registration form or the agent's signature on the agent designation form. If convinced that the individual making the application is the same as the one whose name appears on the registration form or the agent designation form, the election administrator shall deliver the ballot to the elector in person or as otherwise provided in 13-13-214, subject to 13-13-205.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Montana Code Annotated 13-13-241](#)

“(1)(a) Upon receipt of each absentee ballot signature envelope, an election administrator shall compare the signature of the elector or elector's agent on the absentee ballot request or on the elector's voter registration form with the signature on the signature envelope. [...] (5) If the signature on the absentee ballot signature envelope does not match the signature on the absentee ballot request form or on the elector's voter registration form or if there is no signature on the absentee ballot signature envelope, the election administrator shall notify the elector as provided in 13-13-245. (6) If at any point there is a question concerning the validity of a particular ballot, the question must be resolved as provided in 13-13-245.”

Nebraska

Ballot Request ID

[Nebraska Revised Statutes Annotated 32-941](#)

“A registered voter shall request a ballot in writing to the election commissioner or county clerk in the county where the registered voter has established his or her home and shall indicate his or her residence address, the address to which the ballot is to be mailed if different, and his or her telephone number if available. The registered voter may use the form published by the

election commissioner or county clerk pursuant to section 32-808. The registered voter shall sign the request.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Nebraska Revised Statutes Annotated 32-1027\(3\)](#)

“(3) In its review, the counting board shall determine if: (a) The voter has provided his or her name, residence address, and signature on the voter identification envelope; (b) The ballot has been received from the voter who requested it and the residence address is the same address provided on the voter's request for a ballot for early voting, by comparing the information provided on the identification envelope with information recorded in the record of early voters or the voter's request; (c) A completed and signed registration application has been received from the voter by the deadline in section 32-302, 32-321, or 32-325 or by the close of the polls pursuant to section 32-945; (d) An identification document has been received from the voter not later than the close of the polls on election day if required pursuant to section 32-318.01; and (e) A completed and signed registration application and oath has been received from the voter by the close of the polls on election day if required pursuant to section 32-946.”

Nevada

Ballot Request ID

N.A. because of universal mail voting

Ballot Submission ID

[Nevada Bill 2021 AB 321 Section 11\(1\)](#)

“1. Except as otherwise provided in NRS 293D.200, when a mail ballot is returned by or on behalf of a voter to the county clerk, and a record of its return is made in the mail ballot record for the election, the clerk or an employee in the office of the clerk shall check the signature used for the mail ballot by electronic means pursuant to subsection 2 or manually pursuant to subsection 3.”

Note: As of the writing of this report, this statutory language had been passed and become effective but had not been added to the Nevada Revised Statutes. Citing the bill section rather than the NRS reflects the fact that this update is still pending.

New Hampshire

Ballot Request ID

[New Hampshire Revised Statutes 657:6](#)

“An application form for an absentee ballot shall be mailed or delivered to any person who applies therefor to the secretary of state or to any town or city clerk. It shall be filled out by the applicant and sent to the clerk of the town or city in which he or she desires to vote.”

Ballot Submission ID

[New Hampshire Revised Statutes 659:50\(I\)](#)

“The moderator shall begin processing absentee ballots by clearly announcing that he or she is about to open the envelopes which were delivered to him or her. The moderator shall then remove the envelope containing the ballots of each absentee voter and, for those absentee ballots where the absentee voter has not been verified by the clerk as provided in RSA 657:17-a, shall compare the signature on the affidavit with the signature on the application for the ballot. If: (a) The name of the voter is on the checklist; and (b) The affidavit appears to be properly executed; and (c) If the affidavit or application shows that the voter received assistance, the absentee voter shall be processed as verified. Otherwise, the signatures on the affidavit shall be examined to determine if it appears to be executed by the same person who signed the application.”

New Jersey

Ballot Request ID

[New Jersey Revised Statutes 19-63-8](#)

“8. Upon receipt of a request for a mail-in ballot, the county clerk shall, with the cooperation of the commissioner of registration, cause the signature of the applicant to be compared with the signature of the person appearing on the permanent registration form, or the digitalized image of the voter's signature stored in the Statewide voter registration system, to determine from such examination, and any other available information, if the applicant is a voter qualified to cast a ballot in the election in which the voter wants to vote, and determine in case of a primary election the political party primary in which the voter is entitled to vote. The commissioner of registration, or the superintendent of elections in counties having a superintendent of elections may, at the request of the county clerk, investigate any application or request for a mail-in ballot. If, after such examination, the county clerk is satisfied that the applicant is entitled to a ballot, the clerk shall mark on the application "Approved." If, after such examination the county clerk determines that the applicant is not entitled to a ballot, the clerk shall mark on the application "Disapproved" and shall so notify the applicant, stating the reason therefor, as required by section 5 of P.L.2004, c.88 (C.19:61-5).”

Ballot Submission ID

[New Jersey Revised Statutes 19-63-17\(a\)](#)

“The county board of elections shall, promptly after receiving each mail-in ballot, remove the inner envelope containing the ballot from the outer envelope and shall compare the signature and the information contained on the flap of the inner envelope with the signature and information contained in the respective requests for mail-in ballots and the signature and information contained in the Statewide voter registration system.”

New Mexico

Ballot Request ID

[New Mexico Statutes Annotated 1-6-4](#)

“B. Each application on a paper form for a mailed ballot shall be signed by the applicant and shall require the applicant's printed name, registration address and year of birth to be supplied by the applicant, which shall constitute the required form of identification. When submitted by the voter, the county clerk shall accept an application for a mailed ballot pursuant to this subsection regardless of whether the application for a mailed ballot is delivered to the county clerk on paper or by electronic means. When submitted by a third party, the county clerk shall not accept an application for a mailed ballot pursuant to this subsection if the application for a mailed ballot is delivered by electronic means. C. The secretary of state shall allow a voter to submit an online application for a mailed ballot through a website authorized by the secretary of state; provided that the voter shall have a current or expired New Mexico driver's license or state identification card issued by the motor vehicle division of the taxation and revenue department. An online request for a mailed ballot shall contain all of the information that is required for a paper form. The voter shall also provide the person's full New Mexico driver's license number or state identification card number.”

Ballot Submission ID

[New Mexico Statutes Annotated 1-6-9A](#)

“When voting a mailed ballot, the voter shall secretly mark the mailed ballot in the manner provided in the Election Code for marking paper ballots, place it in the official inner envelope and securely seal the envelope. The voter shall then place the official inner envelope inside the official mailing envelope and securely seal the envelope. The voter shall then complete the form

on the reverse of the official mailing envelope, which shall include a statement by the voter under penalty of perjury that the facts stated in the form are true and the voter's name, registration address and year of birth.”

New York

Ballot Request ID

[New York Consolidated Statutes 17-8-400\(3\)](#)

“The application for an absentee ballot when filed must contain in each instance the following information: (a) Applicant's full name, date of birth, and residence address, including the street and number, if any, rural delivery route, if any, mailing address if different from the residence address and his or her town or city and an address to which the ballot shall be mailed.”

Ballot Submission ID

[New York Consolidated Statutes 17-2-209\(2\)\(a\)\(i\)\(C\)](#)

“If such person is found to be registered and has not voted in person, an inspector shall compare the signature, if any, on each envelope with the signature, if any, on the registration poll record, the computer generated list of registered voters or the list of special presidential voters, of the person of the same name who registered from the same address. If the signatures are found to correspond, such inspector shall certify thereto by placing his or her initials in the space provided in the computer generated list of registered voters.”

North Carolina

Ballot Request ID

[North Carolina General Statutes 163-230.2\(a\)](#)

“The request form created by the State Board shall require at least the following information: (1) The name and address of the residence of the voter. (2) The name and address of the voter's near relative or verifiable legal guardian if that individual is making the request. (3) The address of the voter to which the application and absentee ballots are to be mailed if different from the residence address of the voter. (4) One of the following: a. The number of the applicant's North Carolina drivers license issued under Article 2 of Chapter 20 of the General Statutes, including a learner's permit or a provisional license. b. The number of the applicant's special identification card for nonoperators issued under G.S. 20-37.7. c. The last four digits of the applicant's social security number. (5) The voter's date of birth. (6) The signature of the voter or of the voter's near relative or verifiable legal guardian if that individual is making the request. (7) A clear indicator of the date the election generating the request is to be held, except for annual calendar year requests in accordance with G.S. 163-226(b). [...] (d) Upon receiving a completed request form for absentee ballots, the county board shall confirm that voter's registration. If that voter is confirmed as a registered voter of the county, the absentee ballots and certification form shall be mailed to the voter,”

Ballot Submission ID

[North Carolina General Statutes 163-231\(a\)](#)

“Procedure for Voting Absentee Ballots. – In the presence of two persons who are at least 18 years of age, and who are not disqualified by G.S. 163-226.3(a)(4) or G.S. 163-237(c), the voter shall do all of the following: (1) Mark the voter's ballots, or cause them to be marked by that person in the voter's presence according to the voter's instruction. [...] a. Have the application notarized. The notary public may be the person in whose presence the voter marked that voter's ballot. b. Have the two persons in whose presence the voter marked that voter's ballots to certify that the voter is the registered voter submitting the marked ballots. Alternatively to the prior paragraph of this subsection, any requirement for two witnesses shall be satisfied if witnessed by one notary public, who shall comply with all the other requirements of that paragraph. The

notary shall affix a valid notarial seal to the envelope, and include the word "Notary Public" below his or her signature."

North Dakota

Ballot Request ID

[North Dakota Century Code 16.1-07-06\(1\)](#)

"Application for an absent voter's or mail ballot must be made on a form, prescribed by the secretary of state, to be furnished by the proper officer of the county, city, or school district in which the applicant is an elector, or any form, approved by the secretary of state, containing the following: a. The applicant's name. b. The applicant's current or most recent North Dakota residential address. c. The applicant's mailing address. d. The applicant's current contact telephone number, if available. e. The election for which the ballot is being requested. f. The date of the request. g. An affirmation that the applicant has resided, or will reside, in the precinct for at least thirty days next preceding the election and will be a qualified elector of the precinct. h. The applicant's signature, a notification the signature on this affidavit will be compared to the signature on the affidavit on the envelope in which the absentee ballot must be placed. i. The designation of the individual's status as a citizen of this country and resident of this state living outside the United States, a uniformed service member living away from the individual's North Dakota residence, or an immediate family member of the uniformed service member living away from the individual's North Dakota residence. j. The applicant's date of birth. k. The identification number from one of the applicant's valid forms of identification, a copy of the applicant's long-term care certificate, and, if necessary, a copy of the applicant's supplemental identification under section 16.1-01-04.1."

[North Dakota Century Code 16.1-01-04.1](#)

"1. A qualified elector shall provide a valid form of identification to the proper election official before receiving a ballot for voting. 2. The identification must provide the following information regarding the elector: a. Legal name; b. Current residential street address in North Dakota; and c. Date of birth. 3. a. A valid form of identification is: (1) A driver's license or nondriver's identification card issued by the North Dakota department of transportation; or (2) An official form of identification issued by a tribal government to a tribal member residing in this state. b. If an individual's valid form of identification does not include all the information required under subsection 2 or the information on the identification is not current, the identification must be supplemented by presenting any of the following issued to the individual which provides the missing or outdated information: (1) A current utility bill; (2) A current bank statement; (3) A check issued by a federal, state, or local government; (4) A paycheck; (5) A document issued by a federal, state, or local government; or (6) A printed document containing all of the information required by subsection 2 issued by an institution of higher education for an enrolled student residing in the state and containing the institution's letterhead or seal, along with a student photo identification card issued by the institution and containing the student's photograph and legal name."

Ballot Submission ID

[North Dakota Century Code 16.1-07-10](#)

"Upon receipt of an envelope containing the absent voter's ballot, the proper officer immediately shall attach the application of the absent voter and file the ballot with other absentee ballots from the same precinct. If the election official has reason to suspect the signature on the application was made by a different individual than the individual who signed the affidavit on the return ballot envelope, the election official shall attempt to contact the absent voter as soon as practicable to provide an opportunity to validate the signatures. Contact shall first be attempted by phone if the absent voter provided a phone number on the submitted application. If the

election official is unable to speak with the absent voter, the election official shall mail a notice informing the absent voter the absentee ballot has been identified as having a signature mismatch and will be rejected if not verified.”

[North Dakota Century Code 16.1-07-12](#)

“At any time beginning three business days before election day and ending when the polls close on election day, the election clerks and board members of the relevant polling place first shall compare the signature on the application for an absent voter's ballot with the signature on the voter's affidavit provided for in section 16.1-07-08 to ensure the signatures correspond.”

[North Dakota Century Code 16.1-07-13.1\(1\)](#)

“If an election official, absentee ballot precinct election board, or the canvassing board has reason to suspect the absent voter's signatures on the application and the affidavit on the returned ballot envelope do not match, the election official shall notify the absent voter the signatures do not appear to match”

Ohio

Ballot Request ID

[Ohio Revised Code 3509.03\(B\)](#)

“Except as otherwise provided in division (C) of this section, the application need not be in any particular form but shall contain all of the following: (1) The elector's name; (2) The elector's signature; (3) The address at which the elector is registered to vote; (4) The elector's date of birth; (5) One of the following: (a) The elector's driver's license number; (b) The last four digits of the elector's social security number; (c) A copy of the elector's current and valid photo identification, a copy of a military identification, or a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document, other than a notice of voter registration mailed by a board of elections under section 3503.19 of the Revised Code, that shows the name and address of the elector.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Ohio Revised Code 3509.06\(D\)\(1\)](#)

“The election officials shall compare the signature of the elector on the outside of the identification envelope with the signature of that elector on the elector's registration form and verify that the absent voter's ballot is eligible to be counted under section 3509.07 of the Revised Code.”

[Ohio Revised Code 3509.06\(C\)\(3\)\(a\)](#)

“An identification envelope statement of voter shall be considered incomplete if it does not include all of the following: (i) The voter's name; (ii) The voter's residence address or, if the voter has a confidential voter registration record, as described in section 111.44 of the Revised Code, the voter's program participant identification number; (iii) The voter's date of birth. [...] (iv) The voter's signature; and (v) One of the following forms of identification: (I) The voter's driver's license number; (II) The last four digits of the voter's social security number; or (III) A copy of a current and valid photo identification, a military identification, or a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document, other than a notice of voter registration mailed by a board of elections, that shows the voter's name and address.”

Oklahoma

Ballot Request ID

[Oklahoma Statutes 26-14-106](#)

“When such application is received by the secretary of a county election board, it shall be his duty to verify the registration of said voter and to transmit, by United States mail, ballots which said voter has requested and is entitled to receive.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Oklahoma Statutes 26-14-108](#)

“A. The voter shall be required to mark the ballot in ink or other manner as prescribed by the Secretary of the State Election Board; seal the ballots in the plain opaque envelope; fill out completely and sign the affidavit, such signature to be notarized at no charge by a notary public...”

Oregon

Ballot Request ID

N.A. because of universal mail voting

Ballot Submission ID

[Oregon Revised Statutes 254.470\(9\)](#)

“The county clerk shall verify the signature of each elector on the return identification envelope with the signature on the elector’s registration record, according to the procedure provided by rules adopted by the Secretary of State. If the county clerk determines that an elector to whom a replacement ballot has been issued has voted more than once, the county clerk shall count only one ballot cast by that elector.”

Pennsylvania

Ballot Request ID

[Pennsylvania Statutes 25-3146.2\(b\)](#)

“An application for a qualified elector under subsection (a) shall contain the following information: Home residence at the time of entrance into actual military service or Federal employment, length of time a citizen, length of residence in Pennsylvania, date of birth, length of time a resident of voting district, voting district if known, party choice in case of primary, name and, for a military elector, his Stateside military address, FPO or APO number and serial number. Any elector other than a military elector shall in addition specify the nature of his employment, the address to which ballot is to be sent, relationship where necessary, and such other information as may be determined and prescribed by the Secretary of the Commonwealth.”

[Pennsylvania Statutes 25-3146.2b\(c\)](#)

“The county board of elections, upon receipt of any application of a qualified elector required to be registered under the provisions of preceding section 1301, shall determine the qualifications of such applicant by verifying the proof of identification and comparing the information set forth on such application with the information contained on the applicant's permanent registration card.”

[Pennsylvania Statutes 25-2602.z.5\(3\)](#)

“For a qualified absentee elector under section 1301 or a qualified mail-in elector under section 1301-d (i) in the case of an elector who has been issued a current and valid driver's license, the elector's driver's license number; (ii) in the case of an elector who has not been issued a current and valid driver's license, the last four digits of the elector's Social Security number; (iii) in the case of an elector who has a religious objection to being photographed, a copy of a document that satisfies paragraph (1); or (iv) in the case of an elector who has not been issued a current

and valid driver's license or Social Security number, a copy of a document that satisfies paragraph (2).”

[Pennsylvania Statutes 25-2606.z.5\(2\)](#)

“(2) For an elector who appears to vote under section 1210.4 a document that: (i) shows the name of the individual to whom the document was issued and the name substantially conforms to the name of the individual as it appears in the district register; (ii) shows a photograph of the individual to whom the document was issued; (iii) includes an expiration date and is not expired, except: (A) for a document issued by the Department of Transportation which is not more than twelve (12) months past the expiration date; or (B) in the case of a document from an agency of the Armed forces of the United States or their reserve components, including the Pennsylvania National Guard, establishing that the elector is a current member of or a veteran of the United States Armed Forces or National Guard which does not designate a specific date on which the document expires, but includes a designation that the expiration date is indefinite; and (iv) was issued by one of the following: (A) The United States Government. (B) The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. (C) A municipality of this Commonwealth to an employee of that municipality. (D) An accredited Pennsylvania public or private institution of higher learning. (E) A Pennsylvania care facility.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes 25-3146.6\(a\)](#)

“The elector shall then fill out, date and sign the declaration printed on such envelope.”

Rhode Island

Ballot Request ID

[Rhode Island General Laws 17-20-10\(a\)](#)

“Upon receipt of the application, the local board shall immediately examine it and determine whether it complies with each of the requirements set forth by this chapter and compare the signature on the ballot application with the signature contained on the original registration card”

Ballot Submission ID

[Rhode Island General Laws 17-20-26\(c\)](#)

“At these sessions, and before certifying any ballot, the state board shall: [...] (2) Compare the name, residence, and signature of the voter with the name, residence, and signature on the ballot application for mail ballots and satisfy itself that both signatures are identical.”

[Rhode Island General Laws 17-20-23\(c\)](#)

“Voters receiving a mail ballot pursuant to § 17-20-2(1), (2), and (4) shall mark the ballot in the presence of two (2) witnesses or some officer authorized by the law of the place where marked to administer oaths”

South Carolina

Ballot Request ID

[South Carolina Code of Laws 7-15-340](#)

“The application required in Section 7-15-330 to be submitted to these election officials must be in a form prescribed and distributed by the State Election Commission; except that persons listed in Section 7-15-320(2), (3), (6), and (10) may use Standard Form 76, or any subsequent form replacing it, provided by the federal government as a simultaneous request for registration and an absentee ballot or a request for an absentee ballot if already registered.

The application must contain the following information: name, registration certificate number, address, absentee address, election of ballot request, election date, runoff preference, party preference, reason for request, oath of voter, and voter's signature.”

Ballot Submission ID

[South Carolina Code of Laws 7-15-380\(A\)](#)

“The oath, which is required by Section 7-15-370 to be imprinted on the return-addressed envelope, furnished each absentee ballot applicant, must be signed by the absentee ballot applicant and witnessed. The address of the witness shall appear on the oath. In the event the voter cannot write because of a physical handicap or illiteracy, the voter must make his mark and have the mark witnessed by someone designated by the voter.”

South Dakota

Ballot Request ID

[South Dakota Codified Law 12-19-2](#)

“The application or request shall be made in writing, signed by the applicant, and shall contain the applicant's voter registration address. The application or request shall contain an oath verifying the validity of the information in the application or request. The oath shall be administered by a notary public or other officer authorized by this state to administer an oath or administered by an out-of-state notary public. If the application or request does not contain an oath, the application or request shall be accompanied by a copy of the voter's identification card as required by § 12-18-6.1”

[South Dakota Codified Law 12-18-6.1](#)

“When the voter is requesting a ballot, the voter shall present a valid form of personal identification. The personal identification that may be presented shall be either: (1) A South Dakota driver's license or nondriver identification card; (2) A passport or an identification card, including a picture, issued by an agency of the United States government; (3) A tribal identification card, including a picture; or (4) A current student identification card, including a picture, issued by a high school or an accredited institution of higher education, including a university, college, or technical school, located within the State of South Dakota.”

Ballot Submission ID

[South Dakota Codified Laws 12-19-10](#)

“If the election board is not otherwise engaged in official duties, or if there are absentee ballots not processed when the polls close, immediately thereafter, the board shall carefully compare the statement on the reverse side of the official return envelope with the written application received from the officer in charge of the election without opening or breaking the seal of the return envelope. If the ballot is contained in a combined absentee ballot application/return envelope, the comparison of the statement and the application shall be omitted. The board shall enter the voter's name on the election pollbook and mark the registration list if: (1) The ballots received were voted by the voter whose name appears on the statement; (2) The voter is registered in such precinct and has not previously voted in that precinct at the election; and (3) The written application and statement were both signed by the voter.”

[South Dakota Codified Laws 12-19-10.1](#)

“If a county uses an absentee ballot precinct at the building where the county auditor is located to process absentee ballots on election day for a federal, state, or county election, the county has the option to validate the absentee ballot signatures in the county auditor's office. The county auditor shall follow the provisions of § 12-19-10 except for the following: (1) The county auditor, at anytime during the absentee voting timeframe, shall carefully compare the statement

on the reverse side of the official return envelope with the written application without opening or breaking the seal of the return envelope; and (2) If the county auditor determines that both signatures match: (a) The application for absentee ballot does not need to be sent to the absentee precinct board; and (b) The county auditor shall initial the envelope after the determination that signatures do match.”

Tennessee

Ballot Request ID

[Tennessee Code 2-6-202](#)

“(a)(3) A voter may also request from the county election commission office an application to vote absentee. A voter may make the request or submit an application to vote by mail, facsimile transmission or e-mail with an attached document that includes a scanned signature. For a voter to use a facsimile transmission, an election commission shall have a facsimile machine physically located in the election commission office. The request shall be in writing over the voter's signature. The request serves as an application for a ballot if the request contains the following information: (A) The name of the registered voter; (B) The address of the voter's residence; (C) The voter's date of birth; (D) The voter's social security number; (E) The address to mail the ballot outside the county, if applicable; (F) The election the voter wishes to participate in; and (G) The reason the voter wishes to vote absentee. (4) This subsection (a) does not and may not be construed to require a county election commission to purchase or obtain a facsimile machine. (b) Upon receipt of a written request, the administrator of elections shall compare the signature of the voter with the signature on the voter's registration record in whatever form. If the signatures are the same and if the required information is provided, the administrator shall mail the voter a ballot in accordance with subsection (d). If the signatures are not the same, the administrator shall reject the application or request. If the required information is not provided, the administrator shall send the voter by mail or facsimile an application for a ballot.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Tennessee Code 2-6-202\(g\)](#)

“Upon receipt by mail of the absentee ballot, the administrator shall open only the outer envelope and compare the voter's signature on the application with the voter's signature on the appropriate registration record.”

Texas

Ballot Request ID

[Texas Election Code 84.002.](#)

“(a) An early voting ballot application must include: (1) the applicant's name and the address at which the applicant is registered to vote; (1-a) the following information: (A) the number of the applicant's driver's license, election identification certificate, or personal identification card issued by the Department of Public Safety; (B) if the applicant has not been issued a number described by Paragraph (A), the last four digits of the applicant's social security number; or (C) a statement by the applicant that the applicant has not been issued a number described by Paragraph (A) or (B);”

Ballot Submission ID

[Texas Election Code 87.027\(i\)](#)

“The signature verification committee shall compare the signature on each carrier envelope certificate, except those signed for a voter by a witness, with the signature on the voter's ballot application to determine whether the signatures are those of the voter. The committee may also compare the signatures with any known signature two or more signatures of the voter made within the preceding six years and on file with the county clerk or voter registrar to determine

whether the signatures are those of the voter. Except as provided by Subsection (l), a determination under this subsection that the signatures are not those of the voter must be made by a majority vote of the committee's membership. The committee shall place the jacket envelopes, carrier envelopes, and applications of voters whose signatures are not those of the voter in separate containers from those of voters whose signatures are those of the voter. The committee chair shall deliver the sorted materials to the early voting ballot board at the time specified by the board's presiding judge.”

[Texas Election Code 86.002](#)

“(g) The carrier envelope must include a space that is hidden from view when the envelope is sealed for the voter to enter the following information: (1) the number of the voter’s driver’s license or personal identification card issued by the Department of Public Safety; (2) if the voter has not been issued a number described by Subdivision (1), the last four digits of the voter’s social security number; or (3) a statement by the applicant that the applicant has not been issued a number described by Subdivision (1) or (2). (h) A person may use the number of a driver’s license or personal identification card that has expired for purposes of Subsection (g) if the license or identification is otherwise valid. (i) No record associating an individual voter with a ballot may be created.”

Utah

Ballot Request ID

N.A. because of universal mail voting

Ballot Submission ID

[Utah Code 20A-4a-401](#)

“(2)(a) Poll workers shall open return envelopes containing manual ballots that are in the custody of the poll workers in accordance with Subsection (2)(b). (b) The poll workers shall, first, compare the signature of the voter on the affidavit of the return envelope to the signature of the voter in the voter registration records. (3) After complying with Subsection (2), the poll workers shall determine whether: (a) the signatures correspond;”

Vermont

Ballot Request ID

N.A. because of universal mail voting

Ballot Submission ID

None

Virginia

Ballot Request ID

[Virginia Code 24.2-701\(C\)](#)

“Applications for absentee ballots shall contain the following information: 1. The applicant's printed name and the last four digits of the applicant's social security number. However, an applicant completing the application in person shall not be required to provide the last four digits of his social security number; 2. A statement that he is registered in the county or city in which he offers to vote and his residence address in such county or city. Any person temporarily residing outside the United States shall provide the last date of residency at his Virginia residence address, if that residence is no longer available to him. Any covered voter, as defined in § 24.2-452, who is not a registered voter may file the applications to register and for a ballot simultaneously; and 3. The complete address to which the ballot is to be sent directly to the applicant, unless the application is made in person at a time when the printed ballots for the

election are available and the applicant chooses to vote in person at the time of completing his application. The address given shall be (i) the address of the applicant on file in the registration records; (ii) the address at which he will be located while absent from his county or city; or (iii) the address at which he will be located while temporarily confined due to a disability or illness. No ballot shall be sent to, or in care of, any other person.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Virginia Code 24.2-707\(A\)](#)

“After the voter has marked his absentee ballot, he shall (a) enclose the ballot in the envelope provided for that purpose, (b) seal the envelope, (c) fill in and sign the statement printed on the back of the envelope in the presence of a witness, who shall sign the same envelope, (d) enclose the ballot envelope and any required assistance form within the envelope directed to the general registrar, and (e) seal that envelope.”

Washington

Ballot Request ID

N.A. because of universal mail voting

Ballot Submission ID

[Revised Code of Washington 29A-40-110\(3\)](#)

“The canvassing board, or its designated representatives, shall examine the postmark on the return envelope and signature on the declaration before processing the ballot. [...] Personnel shall verify that the voter's signature on the ballot declaration is the same as the signature of that voter in the registration files of the county. Verification may be conducted by an automated verification system approved by the secretary of state.”

West Virginia

Ballot Request ID

[West Virginia Code 3-3-5\(c\)](#)

“Upon acceptance of a completed application, the official designated to supervise and conduct absentee voting shall determine whether the following requirements have been met: (1) The application has been completed as required by law; (2) The applicant is duly registered to vote in the precinct of his or her residence and, in a primary election, is qualified to vote the ballot of the political party requested; (3) The applicant is authorized for the reasons given in the application to vote an absentee ballot by mail or electronically; (4) The address to which a ballot is to be mailed is an address outside the county if the voter is applying to vote by mail under the provisions of §3-3-1(b)(2)(A), §3-3-1(b)(2)(B), §3-3-1(b)(3), or §3-3-1(b)(4) of this code; (5) The applicant is not making his or her first vote after having registered by postcard registration or, if the applicant is making his or her first vote after having registered by postcard registration, the applicant is subject to one of the exceptions provided in §3-2-10 of this code; and (6) No regular and repeated pattern of applications for an absentee ballot by mail for the reason of being out of the county during the entire period of voting in person exists to suggest that the applicant is no longer a resident of the county.”

Ballot Submission ID

[West Virginia Code 3-3-10](#)

“Any one or more of the election commissioners or poll clerks in a precinct may challenge an absent voter's ballot on any of the following grounds: [...] (4) That the signatures of the person voting an absent voter's ballot as they appear on his or her registration record, his or her application for an absent voter's ballot and the absent voter's ballot envelope are not in the same handwriting;”

Wisconsin

Ballot Request ID

[Wisconsin Statutes 6.87\(4\)\(b\)3](#)

“If the absentee elector has received an absentee ballot from the municipal clerk by mail for a previous election, has provided proof of identification with that ballot, and has not changed his or her name or address since providing that proof of identification, the elector is not required to provide proof of identification.”

[Wisconsin Statutes 5.02\(6m\)](#)

““Identification” means any of the following documents issued to an individual: (a) One of the following documents that is unexpired or if expired has expired after the date of the most recent general election: 1. An operator's license issued under ch. 343. 2. An identification card issued under s. 343.50. 3. An identification card issued by a U.S. uniformed service. 4. A U.S. passport. (b) A certificate of U.S. naturalization that was issued not earlier than 2 years before the date of an election at which it is presented. (c) An unexpired driving receipt under s. 343.11. (d) An unexpired identification card receipt issued under s. 343.50. (e) An identification card issued by a federally recognized Indian tribe in this state. (f) An unexpired identification card issued by a university or college in this state that is accredited, as defined in s. 39.30 (1) (d), or by a technical college in this state that is a member of and governed by the technical college system under ch. 38, that contains the date of issuance and signature of the individual to whom it is issued and that contains an expiration date indicating that the card expires no later than 2 years after the date of issuance if the individual establishes that he or she is enrolled as a student at the university or college on the date that the card is presented. (g) An unexpired veterans identification card issued by the veterans health administration of the federal department of veterans affairs.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Wisconsin Statutes 6.87\(4\)\(a\)1](#)

“Except as otherwise provided in s. 6.875, an elector voting absentee, other than a military elector or an overseas elector, shall make and subscribe to the certification before one witness who is an adult U.S. citizen.”

Wyoming

Ballot Request ID

[Wyoming Statutes 22-9-104\(a\)](#)

“(a) A qualified elector may apply for an absentee ballot either in person, in writing, or by telephone, by furnishing the following information: (i) Name in full, social security number (optional), date of birth, and current Wyoming residence address by street, city, county, and zip code or last Wyoming residence address and month and year of leaving Wyoming to live temporarily in another state or nation, if applicable; (ii) The election for which the absentee ballot is requested; (iii) If a primary election, the political party ballot if desired; [...] (v) If not obtained in person by the elector, the address to which the absentee ballot is to be mailed or the name of the individual the elector designates in writing to deliver the ballot to the elector.”

Ballot Submission ID

[Wyoming Statutes 22-9-121\(a\)](#)

“After the judges of election are sworn in and as activity permits, the judges shall examine the affidavit on the absentee ballot envelope to determine if it is legally sufficient.”

Invalid Signature Rejections in Georgia Absentee Voting: Comparing the 2020 General to the 2021 Senate Runoff

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Abstract: In the wake of the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump and his allies made several claims about the purportedly low number of absentee ballots rejected in Georgia for failing to match voter signatures. The implication was clearly that local election officials were not sufficiently scrutinizing absentee ballots, opening the door to potential fraud. These claims drew national attention to the relatively obscure process of absentee ballot verification. Given that Georgia held its highly publicized U.S. Senate run-off election only a few months following the general, we took this opportunity to see if there were any differences in the rejection behavior of local administrators after the introduction of Trump's related rhetoric. We find a drastic increase in the number of ballots rejected for invalid signatures in the run-off compared to the general. This increase is particularly concentrated among ballots that would eventually be cured. Furthermore, there is a significant shift in the profiles of voters rejected between the two elections. The rejected voters in the run-off were more likely to belong to Republican leaning groups (older, whiter, and less urban) than in the general. Although we cannot attribute these changes directly to Trump's rhetoric with scientific certainty, we find evidence contrary to other plausible explanations. These findings pose serious questions about the methods of signature matching as a form of verification and demonstrate the importance of identifying cured ballots when assessing ballot rejections more generally.

Introduction

The vast majority of Americans have traditionally cast their ballots in person (Hartig et al 2020). Of course, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased concerns over public health, we experienced a drastic expansion of vote-by-mail and absentee in the 2020 general election. In fact, Pew reports that 46% of voters said they cast their ballot by mail in 2020, which is up from 20.9% in 2016 (Hartig et al 2020; Pew 2020). Given its increased use across the country, public scrutiny has recently focused on the mechanics of absentee voting. Here, we examine one aspect of these mechanics: invalid signature rejections or those absentee ballots that are marked as invalid because the signature on the ballot does not appear to match that of the registered voter on file.

While this fairly obscure aspect of our electoral process has not received much attention in the past, this changed when, in the wake of the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump and his allies made several claims about the purportedly low number of absentee ballots rejected in Georgia for invalid signatures (for an example, see Reuters 2020). When Trump tweeted: “In years past, close to 4% [rejections for invalid signature]. Not possible. Must have signature check on envelopes now (Trump Twitter Archive 2020),” the implication was clearly that local election officials were not sufficiently scrutinizing absentee ballots, opening the door to potential fraud. Even though Georgia’s Secretary of State demonstrated that 2020 rejection rates were low or on par with recent elections (Raffensburger 2020) and the state’s own post-election signature audit found no evidence of fraud (Niese 2020), this rhetoric nevertheless permeated the media landscape.

Given that there was another highly publicized election in Georgia only a few months following the general, we took this opportunity to see if there were any differences in the rejection behavior of local administrators after the introduction of Trump’s related rhetoric. Did these unfounded arguments lead to changes in the way that elections were administered on the ground? Although we cannot directly attribute any observed changes to Trump with scientific certainty, we do observe a drastic shift between November of 2020 and January of 2021 in terms of both the number of rejections and the types of voters being rejected.

What do we know about absentee ballot rejections?

Unlike ballots cast in person, absentee ballots may be rejected for various reasons. The three most common reasons in Georgia include a) the ballot was received late, b) the ballot was received without a signature, c) the ballot signature does not match the voter signature on file. Further, the Georgia absentee ballot tracking file identifies an additional two reasons for rejections as “ineligible elector” and “ID not provided.” Figure 1 below shows the number of final rejections by rejection category in Georgia for the 2020 general and the 2021 runoff.

«FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE»

A total of 4,583 ballots were rejected in the general election, and that number went up to 6,742 in the runoff. Across both elections the majority of rejections were for ballots received late (2,553 in the general and 3,551 in the runoff). In the general election, rejections for missing signatures were more numerous than those for invalid signatures (1,261 vs. 712), but invalid signature rejections (1,781) overtook missing signature rejections (1,318) in the runoff.

In addition to the variety of reasons for absentee ballot rejections, we would also like to know if specific groups of voters are more likely than others to have their ballots rejected. Unfortunately, because in-person voting has been the overwhelming method of casting a ballot until recently, there is comparatively little research on the niche topic of absentee vote *rejections*. What is available points us towards the effects of youth, inexperience, and minority race/ethnicity as primary correlates of absentee ballot rejection (Alvarez, Hall and Sinclair 2008; Bartinger, Herron, and Smith 2020). This scant research, however, focuses exclusively on ballots that are received late or ballots that do not have any signature at all (Shino, Suttman-Lea, and Smith 2021), and explicitly omits the type of rejections that Trump singled out, which result from invalid signatures.

Cumulative Rejections vs. Final Rejections

While absentee ballots may be rejected for invalid signatures, due to the generally subjective nature of these determinations, these rejections have the opportunity to be corrected by the voter. In Georgia specifically, voters are notified that their ballot was rejected for invalid

signature and given up to three days after the polls close to submit an affidavit to the Board of Registrars or absentee ballot clerk confirming that the ballot was submitted by the registered elector (O.C.G.A. §21-2-386).

These ballot cures then represent confirmed erroneous rejections. If you were to simply examine the number of ballots rejected at the final tally, as is common, you would miss all of the previously rejected ballots that were subsequently accepted after a successful cure. Therefore, we can differentiate between cumulative rejections, or all ballots that were rejected at some point, and final rejections, those ballots that were rejected, remained so, and are not counted.

To measure both final and cumulative rejections we rely on data from VoteShield, a non-profit that provides data analysis and machine learning tools to state and local election administrators to help them actively monitor the voter rolls and absentee voter files for security and accuracy. Because VoteShield receives regularly updated versions of the Georgia absentee voter file, they are capable of tracking changes over time to individual records, allowing us to see those ballot cures that would otherwise be invisible when looking at any single snapshot. When a ballot is received and processed, we can see whether it was initially rejected for an invalid signature in the ballot status field. Identifying cures is simply a matter of regularly reviewing these rejected ballots for changes in their statuses to “accepted” in subsequent snapshots. The calculations based on this procedure for the 2020 general and 2021 runoff are presented in figure 2.

«FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE»

Figure 2 shows a drastic increase in the number of invalid signature rejections in the runoff compared to the general election, even while there were about 350,000 fewer absentee voters in the runoff. Specifically, there were more than four times as many absentee ballots rejected for invalid signatures after Trump made his controversial claims (4,520) than before (1,056). This amounts to a nearly five-fold increase in a voter’s likelihood of being rejected in the runoff compared to the general. There was also a drastic increase in the rate at which invalid signature rejections were cured in the runoff. We saw this rate increase from 32.4% in the general election to 60.6% in the runoff (figure 3), further suggesting that the surge in rejections was substantially due to higher levels of erroneously rejected ballots. Finally, while the increase is noticeable for

final rejections alone (an increase of more than 100%), only when we consider the cures do we see the true magnitude of the change in rejection behavior (an increase of more than 300%).

«FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE»

A shift in voter profiles for invalid signature rejections

Not only did we find an increase in invalid signature rejections, but we also see that the profiles of voters rejected changed substantially from the general to the runoff. The scant academic research on absentee ballot rejections suggests that younger, less experienced, and/or minority voters are more likely to be rejected. This result, however, relates exclusively to types of rejections not under examination here and, therefore, is not directly relevant.

Rejections specifically for invalid signatures may, for instance, occur more commonly among older voters than other types of rejections due to the potential for signatures to change over time. For this reason, we make no claims about the expected composition of the rejected voters in the 2020 general election. Rather, we focus on the changes in rejection behavior between the 2020 general election and the 2021 Senate runoff.

As we have already demonstrated, there was a significant increase in both final and cumulative invalid signature rejections in the 2021 runoff when compared to the general. In addition, the social and demographic profiles of the rejected voters were also different in the runoff than in the general. Figure 4 compares the age distributions for invalid signature rejections across both elections.

«FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE»

We can see that, at least in Georgia, it is older voters who are more likely to be rejected for invalid signatures than younger ones. More interestingly, however, is that there was a significant increase in the proportion of invalid signature rejections among voters 65 and older in the runoff, as well as a smaller, yet still significant, decrease among the youngest age cohort (18-24). This indicates that the increase in invalid signature rejections in the runoff disproportionately affected older voters.

We also find differences in the racial profiles of the rejected voters across these two elections. Figure 5 shows that while a plurality of invalid signature rejections in the general were found among self-identified Black non-Hispanic voters, in the runoff it is White non-Hispanic voters who make up a plurality. Furthermore, all other non-White groups took up a smaller share of the rejections in the runoff than in the general.

«FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE»

We can also compare across elections in terms of where the rejections are occurring. Specifically, we separate Georgia counties into three groups: rural, urban, and suburban¹ and present the results for both elections in figure 6. In the general election, the rejection rates for invalid signatures across the types of counties were generally very similar and remained under one rejection per 1,000 ballots returned.

«FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE»

The runoff reveals a different pattern, however. While the average number of rejections across these county types shows increases in the runoff compared to the general, there are also clear differences across county types. Suburban counties average over 4.5 invalid signature rejections per 1,000 ballots returned, more than double what we see in urban counties.

In addition to its size and the altered voter profiles, the group of invalid signature rejections in the runoff may also stand out on another front. Specifically, these rejected voters show very high rates of successfully voting in Georgia just two months prior. Figure 7 shows that the vast majority of voters rejected for invalid signatures in the runoff cast a vote in the 2020 general, with a significant majority across all age groups successfully casting an absentee ballot by mail. In total, 74% of the invalid signature rejections in the runoff had an absentee mail ballot accepted in the 2020 general. Furthermore, this rate jumps to above 80% for voters 65 years of age or older.

¹County classification is based on 2010 Census data. Counties where the percent of the population in “rural areas” is greater than that in “urban areas” are classified as “rural” (n=108). Counties that have a greater urban population than rural and have an urban population density greater than 1,800 per square mile of urban area (Top 3% in terms of urban density) are categorized as “urban” (N=6). Remaining counties were categorized as “suburban” (N=45).

«FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE»

Conclusions

Between November 2nd, 2020 and January 6th, 2021 we observed a drastic increase in the number of absentee ballots rejected for invalid signatures. If we consider only the final rejections—those ballots that were never cured or counted—we see a doubling over this period. When we look at cumulative rejections in the runoff—or all ballots rejected for invalid signatures—we actually see more than five times the number of rejections we would expect. Based on the rejection rate in the general election, we would expect to see only 863 invalid signature rejections in the runoff. However, there were 4,520 invalid signature rejections in the runoff, 3,657 more than expected.

The types of voters rejected in the runoff were also different from those in the general. The runoff rejected voters were, on average, older, whiter, and less urban than in the general election. Although we do not have party affiliation in the Georgia voter file, it should be noted that the voters rejected in the runoff more closely resembled a traditional Republican voter profile than in the general, where rejected voters were younger, less white, and more urban.

Although we cannot attribute the increase in invalid signature rejections to Trump’s threats (Trump Twitter Archive 2020) with scientific certainty, we can say that the increase in rejections was not likely caused by a corresponding increase in invalid signatures. Unlike in the general where only 32.5% of invalid signature rejections were cured, in the runoff more than 60% were cured. This massive increase, which accounts for more than 69% of the total increase, indicates that administrators in the runoff were much more likely to reject a valid ballot than in the general. Furthermore, almost three-quarters of the rejections in the runoff successfully voted by mail in the general election just over two months prior. It seems unlikely that signatures would change so drastically as to be unrecognizable in such a short period for so many voters.

Since it is doubtful that all rejected voters took the opportunity to cure their ballots, the change to a stricter signature matching standard in the runoff likely led to the cancellation of some legitimate ballots that otherwise would have been counted. Yet, because the number of rejected ballots account for only a small portion of the vote margins for state-wide races in Georgia, these rejections were not decisive to the outcome of the runoffs. Further, Governor

Kemp has since signed SB 202 into law, which removed signature matching in Georgia in favor of requiring mail voters to submit their state issued identification number with their ballot.

Signature matching, never-the-less, remains a common means of verifying voter identities on mail and absentee ballots across the states. According to the *New York Times*, as of October 7, 2020, 32 states and the District of Columbia had some form of signature matching requirement (Buchanan Parlapano 2020). Although many jurisdictions impose standards meant to remove the subjective elements of this procedure,² many other impose no such requirements. Furthermore, in the wake of "The Big Lie", states without signature matching are moving to implement it. In Florida, for example, the recently signed SB 90 strengthens signature matching requirements, without addressing the issues of subjectivity identified above. This is particularly concerning because invalid signature rejections more commonly occur among older voters than other types of rejections, thus, disproportionately disenfranchising senior populations. Although, as noted above, the number of rejections would not generally be decisive in state-wide races, they could matter in local races, especially where there are larger concentrations of senior voters.

²In Denver, for example, they use software to compare signatures, thus minimizing the human element.

Figures

Figure 1: Final Rejections by Rejection Category

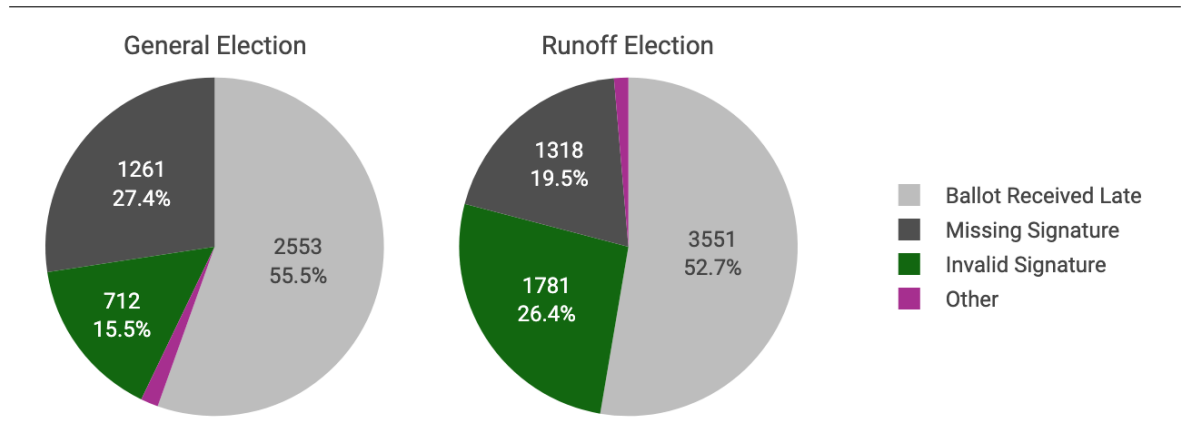


Figure 2: Cumulative Rejections For Invalid Signatures

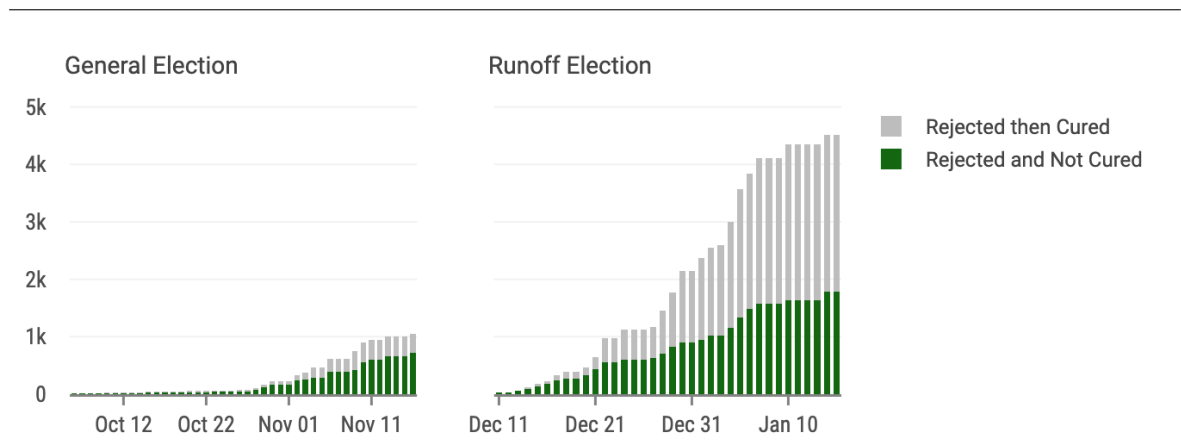


Figure 3: Percent of Invalid Signature Rejections Cured

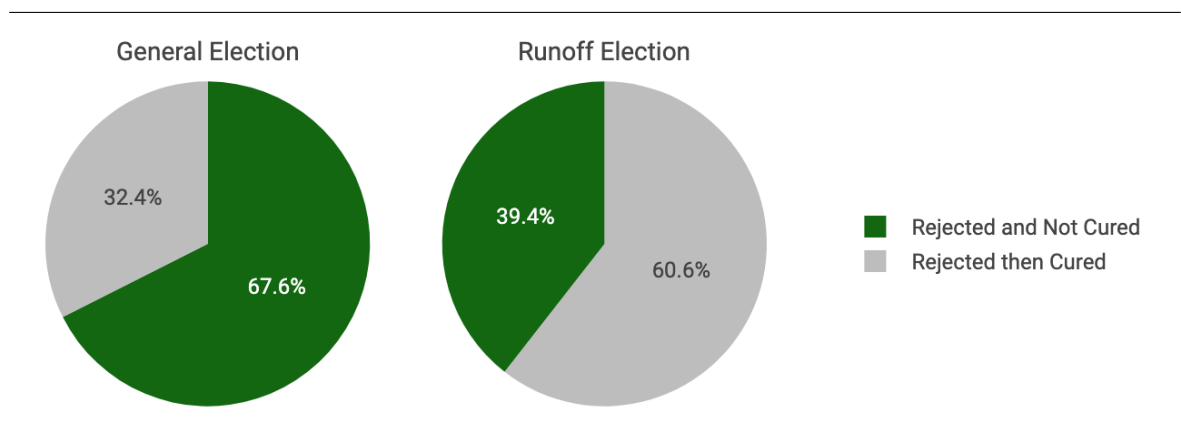


Figure 4: Invalid Signature Rejections by Age

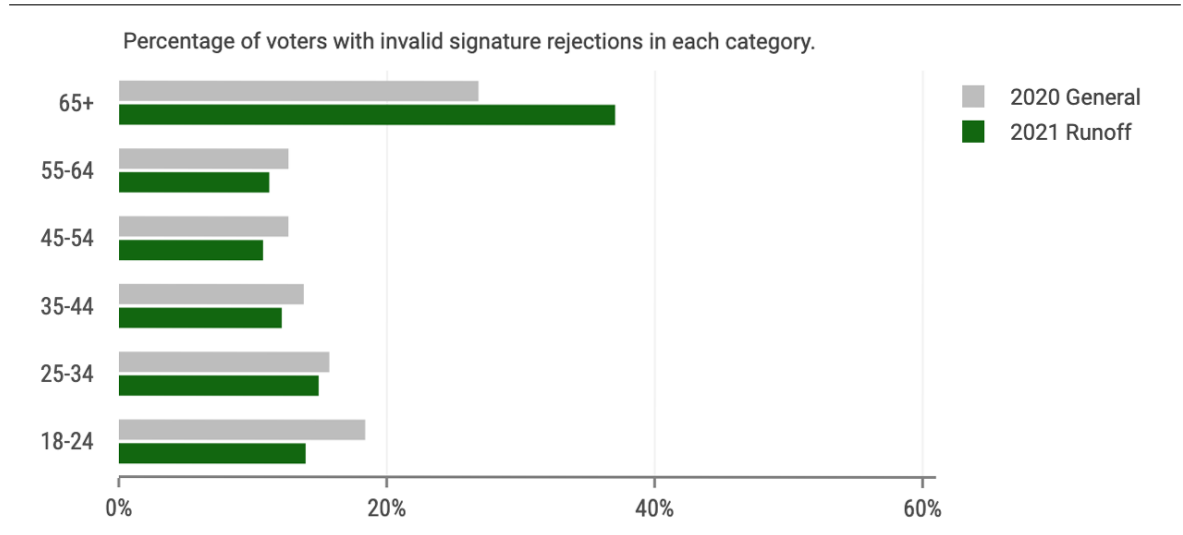


Figure 5: Invalid Signature Rejections by Self-Identified Race

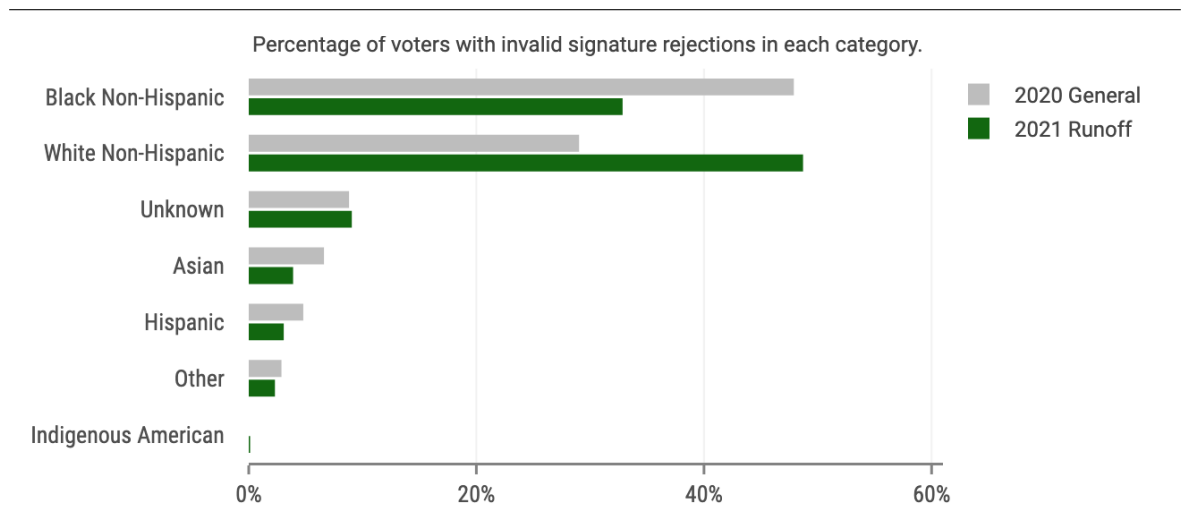
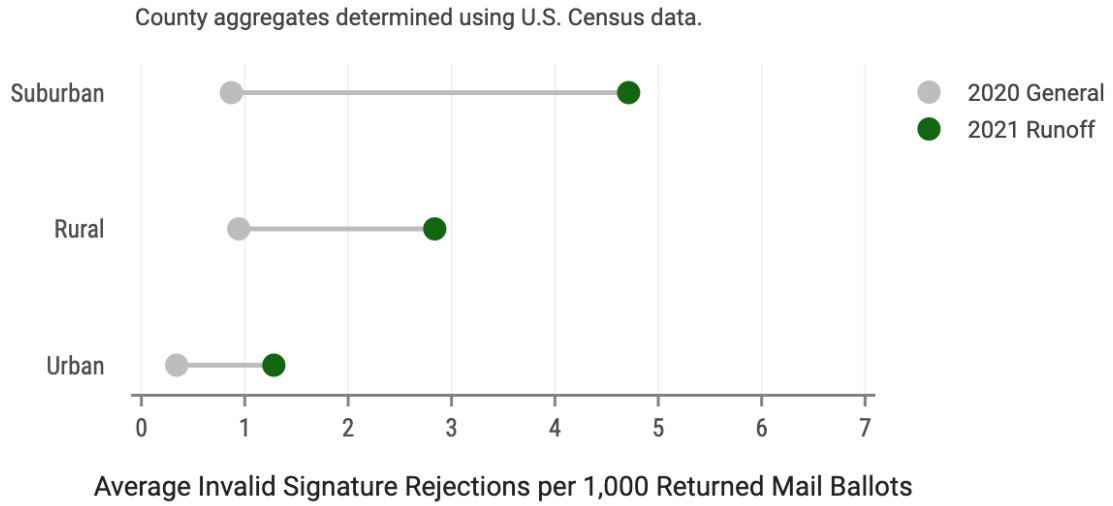
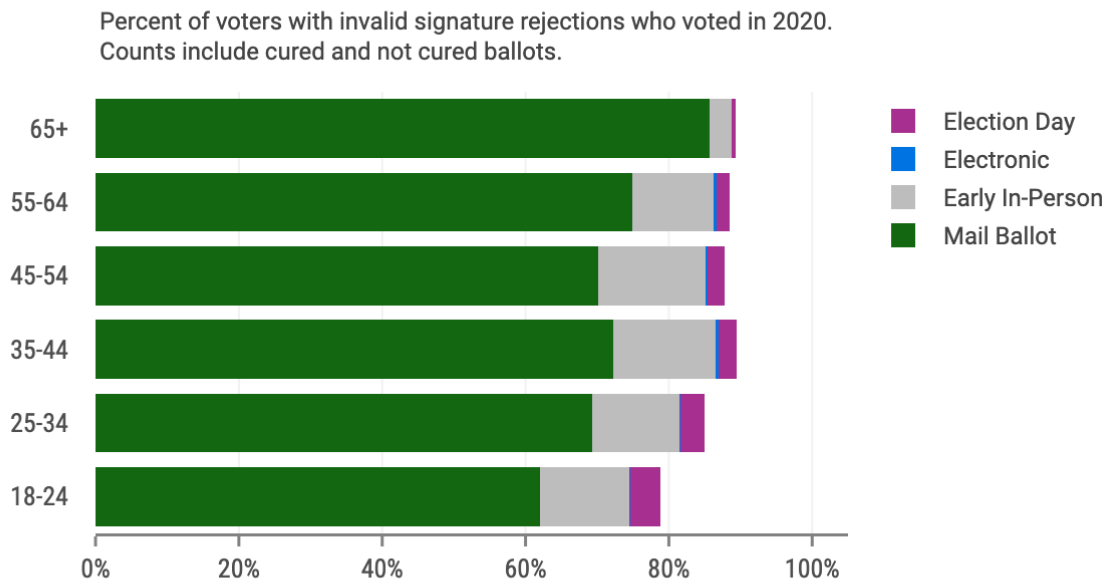


Figure 6: Invalid Signature Rejections by County Category



Note: Suburban and rural means are statistically different at 95% confidence.

Figure 7: 2020 Vote Method for 2021 Invalid Signature Rejections



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