



MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS PROS / CONS & FACTS

Facts

- Three states listed below currently conduct all mail ballot elections and other states permit all mail ballot elections in certain circumstances.
 - Oregon (2000)
 - Washington (2011)
 - Colorado (2013)
- Wyoming currently allows all mail ballot elections when an election has been declared null and void, is court ordered or for some special district elections.
- According to the Independent Voter Project online, voter turnout nationwide in 2012 was 58.7%. The turnout for those who conducted all mail ballot elections was higher. Oregon 64.3%, Washington 65% and Colorado 71%.
- Fraud is possible everywhere—it's our responsibility to try to mitigate it and going mail ballot with security measures could alleviate some of this.

Pros

- Provides a fairly straightforward and fiscally responsible way to save without infringing on voters' rights. Savings could include but aren't limited to the following:
 - Voting equipment maintenance & replacement
 - Maintenance contracts could be reduced significantly with less machines
 - Election judges
 - Polling place rent
 - Cost of runners to deliver, setup and return voting equipment
 - Cost of updating rural polling places to be accessible for all voters
- Allows voters to complete their ballot in the privacy of their homes, especially when a ballot is long and contains complex issues. Ballots are mailed weeks in advance of an election day rather than only allowing a voter minutes at a polling place to thoughtfully complete the ballot.
- Voter participation could increase due to the convenience factor.
- Removes the need for a large number of polling places to be secured. Often clerks have difficulty ensuring these locations are ADA accessible in rural locations and schools are becoming increasingly difficult to hold elections in due to security concerns. Some locations are even charging rent to use a location for a public election.
- Voters with disabilities can request assistance in completing their ballots.

- Secure drop sites could exist for voters who do not wish to mail ballot.
- Counties are having greater difficulty obtaining a sufficient number of election judges to run elections. Mailing ballots would eliminate the need for most of these judges. With the contentious nature of politics these days we hear from judges worried about their fear of making an error or upsetting a voter.
- Streamlines the process not only for voters but for those administering an election. Because Wyoming is so spread out and areas often have a small population base it further complicates administering the election to be able to provide equipment, judges and support to each location.
- Reduces the possibility of a voter getting the wrong ballot where multiple split districts cause many ballot styles for a district. By reducing that error, new elections would not have to be done.
- Voters can still do an “early vote process”. Bring their ballot into the voting center 40 days prior to the election to process their vote in person.
- Wyoming could maintain its same-day voter registration status and allow voters to register and vote leading up to an election or even register and vote at the designated polling place on Election Day.
- Wyoming legislators could have the option to adopt law that would make all mail ballot elections optional on the local level elections so that each county could decide what works best for them or to make all mail ballot elections mandatory state-wide for all elections. If passed for statewide elections, this would not be optional by the county.
- There can still be one or more, in-person polling place for a set time for each election to allow voters the option to vote in person.
- Voters will be more likely to keep their registration up to date so they do not have to go to the County Clerk’s Office and get a new ballot in their correct precinct or party.

Potential Cons

- One could argue that opposing parties will know how many party ballots have been returned and will encourage their own party to act and return ballots in turn changing the face of the vote.
 - Response – With no-excuse absentee voting and early voting in Wyoming, voters already have the choice to return absentee ballots early or vote early.
- Coercion could occur or someone could potentially receive a ballot for another individual and complete it. To do this they would have to forge the voter’s signature on the return envelope.
 - Response – Wyoming could implement stiff penalties for anyone convicted of voting crimes. In addition, the same thing could occur with current absentee voting in Wyoming. Finally, signature verification software could be implemented that can compare a registered voter’s signature with the returned ballot.
- Loss of tradition. The civic experience with voting would no longer exist.
 - Response – As technology increases and individuals seem busier we all seem to prefer convenient and cost effective solutions to make their lives easier. The trend seems to be all mail ballot elections and likely electronic voting in the future.
- Some of the cost savings would be offset by the cost of printing paper ballots, postage and one-time fees like updates to WyoReg that may be needed and signature verification software. Further cost of equipment to read paper ballots can be expensive.
 - Response – All counties currently have electronic voting equipment to read paper ballots. This equipment would need maintained and updated over time but it would be minimal compared to a fleet

of machines to disperse throughout the state. The cost of printing ballots and postage for mailing would almost always be cheaper than staffing each precinct with at least 3 election judges and other polling place related costs.

- Loss of confidentiality. Some argue that those administering the election could see who was voted for and connect it to their name.
 - Response – There would be processes setup to ensure as much confidentiality as possible, the same as what currently occurs with absentee ballots in Wyoming.
- Relying on the United States Postal Service (USPS).
 - Response – Voter training to ensure voters know when ballots should arrive. In addition meeting with the USPS representatives to be sure election mail is properly identified, sized, etc... for fast and accurate delivery.

How would a mail ballot election work? This could be optional by county for local issues:

1. Voters register as always with no need to request an absentee ballot.
2. A set number of days prior to an election, clerks would automatically mail ballots to all registered voters.
3. Voters complete ballots in the privacy of their homes with ample time to consider candidates and ballot measures.
4. Voters return ballots to the clerk's by a set time (likely 7 p.m. on Election Day as is the case currently with absentee ballots).
5. As ballots are received, signatures on ballot envelopes are verified by comparing them to the voter's signature the clerk has on record in WyoReg and the ballots are "binked" (the bar code is scanned) and WyoReg marks that voter as having voted.
6. Meanwhile, clerks are processing ballots through machines. This involves a team of mixed political parties of at least 3 individuals. One individual opens the ballot envelope, a second individual removes the ballot from the envelope and separates the two, then a third individual unfolds the ballot and runs it through the machine. Again, this currently occurs with absentee ballots.
7. Ballots and machines are stored in secure locations and no results are provided or even known to clerks until Election Day when results are tallied onto a central count machine – same as what occurs today with traditional elections.
8. Those individuals that aren't registered at the time ballots are sent to voters could still register at town clerk's offices, county clerk's offices, or via mail. Basically the same methods as are currently allowed.
9. If the registration takes place after ballots are already mailed, voters are either given a ballot or one is mailed to them.
10. On Election Day there would be one or more polling locations in the county where voters could still register and vote in person. This may be the county clerk's office or another public location.
11. Changes of Address and parties would need to be done at the office of the County Clerk. This can be a pro or con. Pro: We do education to keep your registration current so you get the ballot you want in the area you actually live in. Con: Those who have moved but didn't update their address with our office may not receive a ballot on the first mailing but first class mail would be returned to us for reprocessing. For a limited time, our lines at the Clerk's Office to re-issue ballots will be high.