

# HOW THE FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT IMPACTS BARRIERS TO VOTING



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November 15, 2021

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	
-	<a href="#">Topline Figures</a>
-	<a href="#">Overview</a>
-	<a href="#">Solutions</a>
-	<a href="#">Findings</a>
-	<a href="#">Freedom to Vote Act Policy Details</a>

## TOPLINE FIGURES

- Passing the *Freedom to Vote Act* could minimize the impact of barriers to voting that kept approximately 6.5 million registered Americans from participating in last year's election.
- The two most common barriers addressed by the *Freedom to Vote Act's* improvements -- **illness or disability** and **general busyness or a conflicting schedule** -- account for an estimated 3.3 million registered non-voters' failure to vote last year.
- Of the *Freedom to Vote Act's* proposals, **accessible voting locations**, **no-excuse mail-in ballots**, and **drop box availability** will reduce the widest array of barriers.

## OVERVIEW

The *Freedom to Vote Act* will directly address many of the barriers to voting that prevented around 6.5 million registered voters from casting their ballots last year -- a majority of the 12.8 million registered voters who chose not to vote in 2020, according to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau's [2020 Voting and Registration Supplemental to the Current Population Survey](#).

The study, which drew from interviews with approximately 54,000 households across the nation, finds varied and complex reasons behind registered non-voters' decisions to not cast ballots, ranging from accessibility issues to apathy towards the election itself.

The *Freedom to Vote Act* takes aim at two barriers to voting that each kept over a million people from casting ballots in 2020: **illness or disability** and **general busyness or a conflicting schedule**. Over a quarter of total respondents pointed to one of these reasons for not participating in the election -- representing the equivalent of approximately 3.3 million people, a population larger in size than the [eligible voting populations of 26 different states](#).

## SOLUTIONS

The *Freedom to Vote Act* is equipped to address the spectrum of barriers to participation, but certain proposals will reduce more of the obstacles than others. Our analysis shows that **accessible voting locations, no-excuse mail-in ballots, and flexible drop off locations will address the widest array of barriers.**

In summation, the millions of registered Americans who have chosen not to participate in elections demonstrate a clear need for robust federal election standards, and the *Freedom to Vote Act* could be an impactful avenue for improving national turnout. The chart below breaks out each relevant barrier to voting examined by the Current Population Study with the estimated number of Americans it constrained in 2020 and identifies specific, common-sense steps the *Freedom to Vote Act* would take to combat these barriers. The section below the chart defines and describes each of these policies in more detail.

## FINDINGS

<b>Barrier to Voting</b>	<b>Estimated Number of Americans Affected, 2020</b>	<b>How the <i>Freedom to Vote Act</i> Could Help</b>
Transportation Issues	307,400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Accessible Voting Locations</li> <li>● No-Excuse Absentee Ballots</li> </ul>
Out of Town/Away from Home	781,400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No-Excuse Absentee Ballots</li> <li>● Expansive Early Voting</li> </ul>
Coronavirus Pandemic Concerns	550,800	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No-Excuse Absentee Ballots</li> <li>● Drop Box Availability</li> <li>● Curbside Voting Protections</li> </ul>
Illness or Disability (Own or One's Family)	1,665,300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Voting Accessibility Improvements</li> <li>● Accessible Voting Studies and Programs</li> <li>● No-Excuse Absentee Ballots</li> <li>● Drop Box Availability</li> <li>● Curbside Voting Protections</li> </ul>
Too Busy/Conflicting Schedule	1,678,100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No-Excuse Absentee Ballots</li> <li>● Expansive Early Voting</li> <li>● Election Day Holiday</li> </ul>
Registration Problems	627,700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Same Day Registration</li> <li>● Standards for Valid</li> </ul>

(ex. Failed to Receive Ballot, Not Registered in Current Location)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registration Challenges</li> <li>• Automatic Voter Registration</li> <li>• Online Voter Registration</li> <li>• Expansive Early Voting</li> <li>• Eligible Votes Counted at Every Voting Location</li> </ul>
Inconvenient Polling Place (Ex. Long Wait Times, Inconvenient Hours)	333,100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible Voting Locations</li> <li>• No-Excuse Absentee Ballots</li> <li>• Wait Time Limits</li> <li>• Expansive Early Voting</li> </ul>
Forgot to Vote/Send Absentee Ballot	474,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansive Early Voting</li> <li>• Election Day Holiday</li> <li>• Drop Box Availability</li> </ul>
Bad Weather Conditions	128,100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drop Box Availability</li> <li>• Expansive Early Voting</li> <li>• No-Excuse Absentee Ballots</li> </ul>
<b>TOTAL -- 6,545,800</b>		

<b>FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT POLICY DETAILS</b>
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- **Accessible Voting Locations:** To the extent practicable, early voting locations must be accessible from public transportation, and they must be well distributed in rural communities.
- **No-Excuse Absentee Ballots:** All voters nationwide are eligible to receive an absentee ballot without needing an excuse, meaning that a voter need not even leave their home in order to vote. Voters may return the ballot via mail or dropbox if they wish.
- **Expansive Early Voting:** All early voting centers must have hours that extend beyond of the typical 9 to 5 schedule, must be open during at least two weekends, and must be open for a minimum of two weeks ahead of Election Day.
- **Drop Box Availability:** In addition to mailing completed absentee ballots back the old fashioned way, voters across the nation will be able to utilize numerous secure drop boxes to submit their ballots.
- **Curbside Voting Protections:** Local jurisdictions that wish to implement curbside voting must open it up to all voters, and the state government may not impede curbside voting implementation.

- **Voting Accessibility Improvements:** The *Freedom to Vote Act* requires and provides funding for baseline accessible election procedures and infrastructure (from informational websites to accessible polling stations).
- **Accessible Voting Studies and Programs:** The *Freedom to Vote Act* creates and funds different studies on the state of accessible voting and on potential future advancements, including remote voting systems and voting, verification, and ballot-casting devices.
- **Election Day Holiday:** Some employers will take their cues from the federal government's election day holiday and grant their employees the day off.
- **Same Day Registration:** States must adopt a certain level of same day voter registration by 2022, with more extensive requirements phased in over time. Same day registration allows unregistered but eligible Americans to register at the polls and vote immediately.
- **Standards for Valid Registration Challenges:** Clear standards are established for the removal of inactive or ineligible voters from rolls, which is key not only for ensuring election security but also for guaranteeing that eligible voters can cast their ballots.
- **Automatic Voter Registration:** All states must adopt an automatic voter registration process at the Department of Motor Vehicles (or equivalent agency). Anyone submitting a driver's license application or engaging in any other service or activity at the DMV would be automatically registered to vote, unless they indicate opposition to this.
- **Online Voter Registration:** All states must allow eligible citizens to register to vote online.
- **Wait Time Limits:** All states must put forward a reasonable effort to prevent wait times longer than 30 minutes at early voting locations.
- **Eligible Votes Counted at Every Voting Location:** As long as a voter is voting in their county, all eligible votes they cast must be counted, even if they are voting at a different polling location from the one assigned to them. For example, a voter voting outside their precinct may not have their votes for some state and local candidates be counted, but their votes for their U.S. Senator, the President, and the Governor would be.