

## FAQs: 2021 VOTING FROM ABROAD

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## **I. VOTING AS A US CITIZEN OUTSIDE THE USA[VA]**

### **1. VA-1: I LIVE OUTSIDE THE US, CAN I VOTE IN US ELECTIONS?**

Yes, US citizens living (or working or traveling) outside the US have the right to vote in US elections as overseas voters! You must meet the same eligibility requirements as other US voters, such as being 18 years old by the General election, but it doesn't matter how long you have been outside the US or if you were registered to vote before you left.

All overseas voters are eligible to vote in Federal elections, that is, for President, US Senator and US House of Representatives. Federal elections take place every two (2) years. Overseas voters may vote in the Primary as well as the General election and in any Special federal elections that may be required outside of the regularly scheduled elections.

Some overseas voters are also eligible to vote in State and Local elections (such as governor, state legislature, mayor). Please see **FAQs # [ST-1](#), [ST-2](#) & [ST-3](#)** (below) for more information about voting in State and Local elections.

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### **2. VA-2: CAN I VOTE IN THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS AS AN OVERSEAS VOTER?**

Yes. US citizens living (or working or traveling) outside the US have the right to vote in US Federal elections. The Midterm elections are Federal elections that occur every two years and include all 435 seats in the US House of Representatives along with one-third of the US Senate seats.

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### **3. VA-3: CAN I VOTE IN THE PRIMARY ELECTIONS AS AN OVERSEAS VOTER?**

Yes, overseas voters may vote in the primaries! US citizens living (or working or traveling) outside the US can submit a one-page form, the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), to register to vote and request their ballot.

After your FPCA is accepted, your state will send you a ballot for every election you are eligible to vote in for the remainder of the **calendar year**, including any Primary, General, or Special elections. [Please see **FAQ # [REG-2](#)** (below) for more information about how to send in your FPCA form using [www.votefromabroad.org](http://www.votefromabroad.org).]

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**4. VA-4: SHOULD I BOTHER TO VOTE--WILL MY OVERSEAS BALLOT BE COUNTED?**

Yes, your overseas ballot will absolutely be counted! States must count every valid ballot received before the election result may be certified. When you see a race “called” for a candidate shortly after the close of polls, that’s a provisional assessment that the remaining outstanding ballots are not numerically sufficient to alter the outcome. But the actual outcome cannot be certified until all ballots have been tallied—including ballots from overseas voters!

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## **II. REGISTERING TO VOTE AND REQUESTING A BALLOT [REG]**

### **5. REG-1: WHAT IS THE PROCESS TO VOTE AS A US CITIZEN LIVING ABROAD?**

To vote in US elections while living (or working or traveling abroad), you need to:

1. Submit the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form to your Local Election Official to register to vote--and it will also request a ballot for that calendar year.

If you are already registered to vote, you still need to submit the FPCA to request your absentee ballot every calendar year.

Go to [www.votefromabroad.org](http://www.votefromabroad.org) and follow the prompts to fill out and submit your FPCA to your Local Election Official in your state.

2. Your Local Election Official sends you a blank Absentee Ballot, either by email, fax, website link, or postal mail.

3. You fill in the ballot, then submit the voted ballot to your Local Election Official by the deadline. Depending on the state, you may be able to submit the voted ballot by email, or fax, or by online upload, but postal mail is accepted in all states.

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### **6. REG-2: HOW DO I REGISTER TO VOTE OR REQUEST A BALLOT AS A US CITIZEN LIVING ABROAD?**

A US citizen living (or working or traveling) outside the US can submit a one-page form, the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), to register to vote and request their ballot. As an overseas voter, you will also need to send in the same form in subsequent years to request your ballot *for every calendar year* in which you wish to vote.

After your FPCA is accepted, your state will send you a ballot for every election you are eligible to vote in for the remainder of the **calendar year**, including any Primary, General, or Special elections.

It only takes 5-10 minutes to fill out and submit your FPCA:

**1. Go to [www.votefromabroad.org](http://www.votefromabroad.org), click on “Start” and follow the prompts to fill out the form.**

\*We highly recommend you check the box on the form to request your blank ballot be sent to you by Email/Online or Fax--you won't have to worry about your blank ballot being lost or delayed in the mail or if you move.

**2. Submit your completed and signed FPCA to your Local Election Official in the US.**

The instructions will provide the applicable contact information and will indicate whether your state accepts the form by email or fax as well as mail (most states do).

-- To submit your FPCA by mail or fax, you must print out and SIGN the completed form.

-- To submit your FPCA by email, you may either print and sign the completed form--or--follow the instructions to photograph your signature and submit the form directly to your state from the website.

**[THEN ADD OPTION 1 OR 2, depending if ballots are available yet:**

*OPTION 1: If ballots are not yet available:*

**3. After sending in the form, be sure to email or call your Local Election Official to verify they received it and will be sending you a ballot.**

The applicable contact information is in the printed instructions from VoteFromAbroad.org included with your completed FPCA. You can also look up the contact information at: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office").

This final step is very important! Only your election office can process your form and send out your ballot. They aren't required to contact you to confirm receipt; it's up to you to follow-up to ensure you'll get your ballot.

*OPTION 2: When ballots are available:*

**3. Ballots are now available!**

If you don't get your ballot emailed to you in a few days after sending in your form (check your spam folder!), please email or call your Local Election Official to verify they received it and will be sending a ballot to you. The applicable contact information is in the printed instructions from VoteFromAbroad.org included with your completed FPCA. You can also look up the contact information at: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office").

*If you have any questions, VoteFromAbroad.org has an online chat box (the orange square in the lower right corner of every screen).*

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**7. REG-3: WHY SHOULD I SEND IN AN FPCA FORM FOR OVERSEAS VOTERS INSTEAD OF THE ABSENTEE BALLOT REQUEST FORM FOR IN-STATE VOTERS?**

We strongly recommend that all overseas voters submit the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form to let your Local Election Official know you are now living abroad. The FPCA is only one page and takes only a few minutes to fill out and send in. It acts like an address update, which voters are required to provide, BUT it also provides significant advantages that are only available to overseas voters:

1. An FPCA form, sent in the calendar year of an election, protects your ballot at the federal level in case of a recount. (A ballot that doesn't have a corresponding FPCA form may be subject to challenge in a close election);
2. You will receive a ballot for every election in that **calendar** year, including primaries, special elections and runoff elections. (Many states require voters who wish to vote absentee to submit a form for every single election if using the regular state form);
3. You can request your ballot be sent to you via email, fax or online instead of postal mail;
4. Your state must send your ballot to you at least 45 days before the election;
5. If you don't receive your ballot in time to send it in by the deadline, you can use the Backup Ballot (the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot or FWAB) to vote;
6. Many states allow overseas voters additional time to submit their ballots and/or allow overseas voters to submit ballots via electronic means.

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**8. REG-4: WHY SHOULD I SEND IN THE FORM TO REQUEST MY BALLOT EVERY CALENDAR YEAR?**

As an overseas voter, you need to send in the form to **request your ballot every calendar year** in which you wish to vote.

Voting in the last federal election does not mean you will get a ballot for the next election! Under Federal law, states are only required to send you a ballot if you submit the form to request it that calendar year--even if you're a registered voter. At least 29 states require an annual request and most of the remaining states require that the ballot request be sent in every general election cycle, which is difficult to keep track of. Be safe and send in your form every year--you don't want to miss your chance to vote!

Overseas voters use the same form (the Federal Post Card Application or FPCA) to both register to vote initially *and* to request a ballot each year. The FPCA is only one page and takes only a few minutes to fill out and send in, but it provides significant benefits, including protecting

your ballot at the federal level in case of a recount. [For more information about the protections provided by the FPCA, please see **FAQ # REG-3** (above)].

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**9. REG-5: I'M ALREADY A REGISTERED VOTER (OR MY STATE ALWAYS SENDS MY BLANK BALLOT), WHY SHOULD I SEND IN THE FPCA FORM?**

Even if you vote in a state that typically sends out a ballot without an annual request, we still urge all overseas voters to send in the form to request a ballot every year to make sure you will be able to vote.

But, if you don't want to send in the form, it's still very important that **you email or call your Local Election official to verify that you will be getting a ballot this year**. Mistakes can happen and states can change their voting rules! Every election, we hear from voters who find out too late that they won't be able to vote because they missed the deadline to request their ballot.

And remember, an FPCA form, sent in the calendar year of an election, protects your ballot at the federal level in case of a recount.

You can look up the contact information for your Local Election Official here: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office").

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**10. REG-6 HOW DO I CHECK IF I AM REGISTERED TO VOTE AND/OR IF MY BALLOT REQUEST FORM WAS RECEIVED?**

Only your Local Election Official in the US can accept your voter registration and send out a ballot. You should **email or call** your Local Election Official to verify you are a registered voter and that they will be sending you a ballot. You can look up the contact information here: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office").

In addition, some states post this information online. If your state has a website, you can find the link at: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (Scroll down to "Am I Registered?" or "Where is My Ballot?") Please be aware that these websites are not always up-to-date, so if you don't see your information, it's still a good idea to contact your Local Election Official directly.

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### III. FILLING OUT THE FPCA (FEDERAL POST CARD APPLICATION):

#### 1. FP-1: WHY SHOULD I USE [WWW.VOTEFROMABROAD.ORG](http://WWW.VOTEFROMABROAD.ORG) RATHER THAN THE PAPER FORM?

We urge voters to use the [www.votefromabroad.org](http://www.votefromabroad.org) website to fill out their Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) because:

- The form covers all 50+ US voting jurisdictions, but many states have unique requirements that voters must also adhere to. When you use the website, the prompts automatically include your state's specific requirements.
- All information on your form will be printed out legibly. Illegibility is the major cause of form rejection.
- The website provides complete, step-by-step Instructions how to submit the completed form to your Local Election Official, with the full mailing address, email address, phone and fax information.
- The website also provides instructions on how to verify with your Local Election Official that your form was received.
- If your state allows email submission, you may opt to submit your completed form directly from the website without the need to print it out.

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#### 2. FP-2: SHOULD I CHOOSE "I INTEND TO RETURN" OR "MY INTENT TO RETURN IS UNCERTAIN"?

It is up to you to decide which category to choose.

*If you choose "I intend to return":* You don't have to have a set date of return and it doesn't have to be within a set time frame, but you do need to have an **intention** to return at some time in the future. If you choose "I intend to return," you will receive a ballot to vote in both Federal (US President, US Senate and US House of Representatives) and State elections (Governor, State Legislature, etc).

[The following does not apply to states with NO state income tax: Delete the portion in *italics* if you know they vote in **AK, FL, NV, SD, TX, WA and WY**:

*\*Note: Please be aware that if your voting state imposes a state income tax, selecting "I intend to return" rather than "my intent to return is uncertain" may contribute towards establishing yourself as a tax resident in your voting state. Because the legal requirements to establish "residence" or "domicile" for tax purposes are determined by state law and the specific facts of*

*your life, before you chose “I intend to return,” you may consider seeking advice on these matters from a tax professional.*

If you don't have a current intention to return to your state or otherwise don't wish to choose “I intend to return,” then you should opt for “my intent to return is uncertain.” You will receive a ballot for Federal elections--and nearly ⅔ of the states (32) will also provide a ballot for State elections. **[NOTE:** If you know their voting state, you can use this chart to see if they will get a ballot for state elections as well: [Voting in Downballot State Elections](#)]

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**3. FP-3: CAN I REGISTER TO VOTE IF I'VE NEVER RESIDED IN THE US?**

Yes. As a US citizen living abroad, you can submit the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to register to vote and request your ballot even though you have never resided in the US.

For your “voting address,” use the address of the last place your US citizen parent lived in the US. (If both of your parents are US citizens, you may use the last US address of either US parent.)

*[Provide information in **FAQ # [REG-2](#)** as well]*

***[Include only if question asks about the “never resided” category on the FPCA:]***

Currently, 12 states don't allow US citizens who have never resided in the US to register to vote in their jurisdiction and 2 (Oregon and Illinois) apply restrictions that effectively prevent most of these US citizens from registering to vote. This effectively disenfranchises US citizens who are otherwise entitled to vote and also incur all the responsibilities of being a US citizen, such as filing tax returns and registering for the military draft. The US government website to register to vote from abroad ([www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov)) doesn't list the “never lived” option for the 12 states that exclude these voters and [www.votefromabroad.org](http://www.votefromabroad.org) also excludes this option.

If you are a US citizen who has never lived in the US and are registering to vote in one of these 14 states, then as a non-military overseas voter, you should choose as your voter type that you either “intend to return” or that “my return is uncertain.” [Please see **FAQ # [FP-2](#)** (above) discussing these categories]

The 14 states that do not allow US citizens who have never resided in the US to register to vote in their jurisdiction (or have major restrictions) are:

|           |                          |              |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Alabama   | Arkansas                 | Florida      |
| Idaho     | Illinois (non-military)  | Indiana      |
| Louisiana | Maryland                 | Mississippi  |
| Missouri  | Oregon (very restricted) | Pennsylvania |
| Texas     | Utah                     |              |

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#### **4. FP-4: WHAT CAN I DO IF MY STATE REJECTED MY VOTER REGISTRATION BECAUSE I'VE NEVER RESIDED IN THE US?**

Most states allow a US citizen who has never resided in the US to register to vote using the address of the last place the US citizen parent lived in the US. However, 14 states either require that a voter must have actually resided in the state in the past to register to vote there or apply restrictions that effectively prevent these US citizens from registering to vote. This position effectively disenfranchises US citizens who otherwise are otherwise entitled to vote and also incur all the responsibilities of being a US citizen, such as filing tax returns and registering for the military draft.

The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) lists 5 categories for overseas voters to choose from, including "I have never lived in the US." However the FPCA is meant to be used in all 50 states (plus 6 non-state jurisdictions) and not all classification categories are applicable for every state. The US government website to register to vote from abroad ([www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov)) doesn't list the "never lived" option for the 13 states that exclude US citizens who have never resided in the US and [www.votefromabroad.org](http://www.votefromabroad.org) also excludes this option for those states.

If your voter registration was rejected because you indicated you've "never resided" in the state, you can try to re-apply under another category. As a non-military overseas voter, your choices would be: "intend to return" or "return is uncertain." [Please see **FAQ # FP-2** (above)]

Alternatively, you could seek to register to vote under your own ties to a state, not as a "never resided" voter. If you have a strong tie to a state, such as lengthy stays (30 days in-state is often a requirement to register to vote) or multiple visits to friends or relatives in-state, you may be able to use one of those addresses as your "US voting address."

Finally, you could go live in the US for a sufficient amount of time to establish voting residency at that address (as mentioned above 30 days is often a requirement to register to vote). Then you'd be using your own US voting address and not using your US parent's last US residence address.

Please keep in mind, this is general advice about registering to vote as an overseas voter. The Local Election Official (LEO) in the voting district makes the final determination whether the ties are sufficient to accept a voter registration form. (If the LEO rejects a voter registration form, they must provide an explanation.)

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**5. FP-5: WHAT IS MY “US VOTING ADDRESS”?**

As a US citizen living abroad, your “voting address” is the street address of the last place you lived in the US. This applies even if your family no longer owns the property, or you no longer have ties to the state, or you don’t intend to return to that address or that state, or even if it no longer exists as a residence. It also doesn’t matter if you were registered to vote at that address.

If you are a US citizen who has never lived in the US, your “voting address” is the street address of the last place your US citizen parent (or spouse) lived in the US. If both of your parents are US citizens, you may use the last US address of either one.

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**6. FP-6: I CAN’T REMEMBER MY LAST US ADDRESS, HOW DO I FIND IT?**

If you don’t remember your US voting address (that is, your last residence address in the US), here are some ideas to try to find that information:

1. If you were previously registered to vote, check your state’s website to see if your voter registration information is still available. It may include your voting address.
2. Look for old documents that might have your US street address, such as tax returns, letters, address books or your birth certificate.
3. Ask relatives and friends if they remember your old address.
4. If you have a general location but no street address, use Google Earth “street view” to look for a street address.
5. If you know the county where it was located, call the Local Election Official for the area and describe the location. They may be able to help find the address. You can find contact information for Local Election Officials here: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to “Find Your Election Office”).

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**7. FP-7: CAN I REGISTER TO VOTE IN ANOTHER STATE?**

As a US citizen living abroad, your voting address is usually the address of the last place you lived in the US. This applies no matter how long you’ve been away or whether or not you ever intend to return to that state.

However, if you feel you have sufficient ties with another state, you may be eligible to register to vote in that location. The strength of your ties to the state will depend on the facts of your situation and typically involve questions like: Do you own property in the state? Do you pay state

taxes? Do you stay in the state for lengthy periods of time? How long have you been going to the state? Simply setting up a mailing address in a new state is typically not sufficient to establish ties for voting.

Please keep in mind, this is general advice about registering to vote as an overseas voter. The Local Election Official in the voting district makes the final determination whether to accept your voter registration in their jurisdiction. You may wish to contact them, explain your situation and ask what their decision will be. You can look up the contact information for Local Election Officials here: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to “Find Your Election Office”).

Or, you can try submitting the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and see if it is accepted. [Provide information in **FAQ # REG-2** as well]

If you do register to vote in a new jurisdiction, it’s always a good idea to contact the *previous* election office to let them know you’ve moved your voter registration. It helps them keep their records up to date and prevents confusion. You can look up the contact information at: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to “Find Your Election Office”).

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**8. FP-8: SHOULD I GET MY BALLOT SENT TO ME BY “EMAIL/ONLINE” OR “FAX” OR “MAIL”?**

We strongly recommend that overseas voters request their ballots be sent to them electronically, that is, either via email/online or fax.

Remember this is the blank ballot coming to you, so there are no privacy concerns. Selecting electronic delivery means you will get your ballot almost immediately after it is sent to you. You don’t have to worry about the ballot being delayed or lost while coming in the mail. Particularly in countries with poor, slow or non-existent mail service, receiving a blank ballot electronically can make the difference in getting your voted ballot back by the election deadline.

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**9. FP-9: CAN I VOTE IF I DON’T HAVE A SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER OR A STATE ID CARD?**

The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form asks voters to provide their Social Security number (usually just the last 4 digits) and/or a state identification card number. If you have either or both, you should provide the information.

However, if you don’t have either number, check the box that indicates: “I don’t have the above identification.”

For most states, this is sufficient. If your voting state requires more information, they will contact you after you send in your form. If that happens, please get in touch with us if you need help with documentation to support your right to vote.

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**10. FP-10: I FILLED OUT THE FORM ON [WWW.VOTEFROMABROAD.ORG](http://WWW.VOTEFROMABROAD.ORG), AM I DONE?**

No, you must sign and submit your form to your Local Election Official in the US! Only your Local Election Official has the authority to register you to vote and to send out a ballot. The website, [www.votefromabroad.org](http://www.votefromabroad.org), provides help to fill out the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and also provides complete, step-by-step Instructions how to submit the completed form and to verify it was received.

And after you send in your form, we strongly recommend that you **email or call** your Local Election Official to verify they received your form and will be sending you a ballot. The contact information is at [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to “Find Your Election Office”).

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## **IV. RECEIVING AND RETURNING BALLOTS [BAL]**

### **1. BAL-1: WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE SURE I'LL GET MY BALLOT?**

Never assume that you will receive a ballot. You should always verify with your Local Election Official (LEO) that you will be receiving a ballot. After you send in your Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), call or email your LEO to verify they received your form and will be sending a blank ballot to you. The contact information is in the Instructions with your completed FPCA as well as on the State Voting Guide at: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to “Find Your Election Office”).

In addition, some states post this information online. If your state has a website, you can find the link at: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (Scroll down to “Am I Registered?” or “Where is My Ballot?”) Please be aware that these websites are not always up-to-date, so if you don't see your information, it's still a good idea to contact your Local Election Official directly.

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### **2. BAL-2: WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE SURE MY VOTE IS COUNTED?**

Your ballot is your vote--when you get it, be sure to fill it out and return it right away. You don't want your ballot to be rejected because you missed the deadline. And if any problems occur, you also want to make sure you have time to correct them.

Each state has its own rules and procedures that you must follow to ensure your vote is deemed valid. Your ballot will contain the instructions and deadlines specific to your voting state. *Please be sure to read and follow the instructions completely!*

If you have any questions, contact your Local Election Official for clarification--email is usually best so you will have a written record. Don't make guesses; if your ballot is rejected, you may not get second chance! You can find contact information at: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to “Find Your Election Office.”)

And after you send in your voted ballot, be sure to verify that it was received and counted! You can contact your Local Election Official directly for confirmation. Also, many states have websites to track your ballot return, although the website information may not be as up-to-date as information from your Local Election Official. You can find contact information and, if available, links to state ballot tracking state websites at [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to “Where Is My Ballot?”)

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**3. BAL-3: SHOULD I USE THE OPTION TO RETURN MY BALLOT ELECTRONICALLY (THAT IS, BY EMAIL ATTACHMENT, ONLINE UPLOAD, OR FAX)?**

If electronic ballot return is available to you, we highly recommend you use it!

More than half of all states allow overseas voters to return their ballots electronically--that is, by Email, Online Upload, or Fax. This option is a huge boon to overseas voters who live in areas where the postal system is unreliable or non-existent, or who otherwise may not be able to meet the deadline for returning their ballots by postal mail.

Sending in your ballot electronically is simply a means to return your ballot. This is a ballot that you printed out (if you received it electronically) and marked, and are now returning as an email attachment, fax or online upload. And you retain a copy of your marked ballot, so there is a paper trail. There is no security concern that a ballot returned as an email attachment, fax or secure online upload will be changed from the voter's intention.

This is very different from the "electronic voting" about which there has been widely reported security concerns. With electronic voting, voters at in-person polling places submit their vote using a computer system that holds a large cache of votes and which may be vulnerable to inaccuracies as well as the more remote risk of outside manipulation. And if there's no paper receipt provided, the voter has no way to know that their vote was properly recorded and counted.

Finally, it may actually be safer to send in your ballot electronically than by postal mail as you don't have to worry that it may get lost or delayed in transit.

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**4. BAL-4: HOW DO I SEND IN MY BALLOT BY EMAIL?**

It's very easy to return your voted ballot as an email attachment--it's fast, free, and you don't have to worry that your ballot will be lost or arrive after the deadline to vote. You also keep the original ballot, so there's always a paper trail.

Your state's ballot materials should provide instructions, but the basic steps are:

1. If you received your ballot materials by email, print out your ballot and any required supporting documents that will need to be returned with your ballot (see your ballot instructions).
2. Fill out your ballot and the supporting documents, and sign as indicated in the instructions. (You will need to sign a waiver of your right to a secret ballot as your ballot will not be sealed when you send it in.)
3. Photograph or scan your marked ballot and the supporting materials. Save the file on your device.

4. Send an email to your Local Election Office and include the saved file as an email attachment.
5. Your Local Election Official will separate your identifying information from your vote as soon as possible. Your ballot won't be sealed, but no one should be able to see how you voted.

After you send in your voted ballot, be sure to verify that it was received and counted! You can contact your Local Election Official directly for confirmation. Also, many states have websites to track your ballot return, although the website information may not be as up-to-date as information from your Local Election Official. You can find contact information and, if available, links to state ballot tracking state websites at [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office" and "Where Is My Ballot?").

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**5. BAL-5: HOW DO I SEND IN MY BALLOT BY ONLINE UPLOAD?**

It's very easy to return your voted ballot by online upload--it's fast, free, and you don't have to worry that your ballot will be lost or arrive after the deadline to vote. You also keep the original ballot, so there's always a paper trail.

Your state's ballot materials should provide instructions, but the basic steps are:

1. If you received your ballot materials by email, print out your ballot and any required supporting documents that will need to be returned with your ballot (see your ballot instructions).
2. Fill out your ballot and the supporting documents, and sign as indicated in the instructions. (You will need to sign a waiver of your right to a secret ballot as your ballot will not be sealed when you send it in.)
3. Your state will provide you with a secure link to transmit materials between your computer and their system.
4. You will need to photograph or scan in your ballot and any required materials, then upload it to your computer.
5. Follow the instructions to transmit the materials over the link to your state.

After you send in your voted ballot, be sure to verify that it was received and counted! You can contact your Local Election Official directly for confirmation. Also, many states have websites to track your ballot return, although the website information may not be as up-to-date as information from your Local Election Official. You can find contact information and, if available, links to state ballot tracking state websites at [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office" and "Where Is My Ballot?").

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## 6. BAL-6: HOW DO I SEND IN MY BALLOT BY FAX?

Five states--Alaska, California, Florida, Louisiana, and Oklahoma--allow overseas voters to return their ballot by Fax. In addition, Texas allows active duty military or eligible family members who are in a hostile fire pay, imminent danger pay, or combat zone to return their ballots by Fax.

It's easy to return your voted ballot by Fax--it's fast, free, and you don't have to worry that your ballot will be lost or arrive after the deadline to vote. You also keep the original ballot, so there's always a paper trail.

Your state's ballot materials should provide instructions, but the basic steps are:

1. If you received your ballot materials by email, print out your ballot and any required supporting documents that will need to be returned with your ballot (see your ballot instructions.)
2. Fill out your ballot and the supporting documents, and sign as indicated in the instructions. (You will need to sign a waiver of your right to a secret ballot as your ballot will not be sealed when you send it in.)
3. Your state will usually provide a coversheet but if one isn't provided, be sure to include your own. You can download the Federal Voter Assistance Program's (FVAP) fax transmission coversheet at [www.fvap.gov/eo/overview/materials/forms](http://www.fvap.gov/eo/overview/materials/forms) (scroll to the bottom of that page)
4. Use a fax machine (many printers also work as fax machines) to submit your marked ballot and any required materials to your Local Election Office.
5. Your Local Election Official will separate your identifying information from your vote as soon as possible. Your ballot won't be sealed, but no one should be able to see how you voted.

If you don't have access to a fax machine, you can search online for a public fax machine near you, or use a fax-to-email service available online or by using an app, or use the fax service available through FVAP. For more information, please see **FAQ # [BAL-7](#)**, or go to: [www.votefromabroad.org/how-to-return-your-ballot](http://www.votefromabroad.org/how-to-return-your-ballot)

After you send in your voted ballot, be sure to verify that it was received and counted! You can contact your Local Election Official directly for confirmation. Also, many states have websites to track your ballot return, although the website information may not be as up-to-date as information from your Local Election Official. You can find contact information and, if available, links to state ballot tracking state websites at [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office" and "Where Is My Ballot?").

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## 7. BAL-7: HOW DO I SEND IN MY BALLOT BY FAX IF I DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO A FAX MACHINE?

Not many people still have a Fax machine, but there are options even if you don't have access to one:

### 1. Look for a public fax machine:

You can search for "fax machine near me" for businesses that will send a fax for a fee. Or, you may be able to find a fax machine at a business supply or copy shop, a notary or realtor, or even a friend's office.

### 2. Use an email-to-fax service:

These services allow you to use your cell phone camera or a scanner to upload your ballot and supporting documents as email attachments, which are then converted to fax documents and forwarded to your election official.

There are several commercial services available, with free or inexpensive paid options. You can search online for Internet based services, some of which are HelloFax, FaxZero, eFax, or FaxPlus.

Or you can use a cellphone fax app. Search for "fax app for Android/iPhone" on application platforms like Apple's App Store, Google Play Store, Galaxie Store, etc. CocoFax, RingCentral, and GeniusFax are among the better known, but there are lots to choose from.

### 3. Use the Fax service through the Federal Voting Assistance Program [FVAP.gov](https://www.fvap.gov):

As a federal agency, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP.gov) is authorized to handle ballot materials. You can email your ballot materials to FVAP and they will fax the materials to your Local Election Office on your behalf. The basic steps are:

- a. Photograph or scan in your ballot and any required materials as an email attachment. You must include the FVAP fax transmission coversheet at [www.fvap.gov/eo/overview/materials/forms](https://www.fvap.gov/eo/overview/materials/forms) (scroll to the bottom of that page).
- b. Send the email attachment of your ballot materials, WITH coversheet, to [fax@fvap.gov](mailto:fax@fvap.gov).
- c. FVAP will print out the email attachment and use a fax machine to fax your ballot and other election materials to your Local Election Official.

But don't wait until the last minute when using the FVAP fax service! The service can get overloaded. And FVAP does not guarantee that your voted ballot will be faxed to your Local Election Official by the deadline even if you submit your ballot to FVAP in time.

After you send in your voted ballot, be sure to verify that it was received and counted! You can contact your Local Election Official directly for confirmation. Also, many states have websites to

track your ballot return, although the website information may not be as up-to-date as information from your Local Election Official. You can find contact information and, if available, links to state ballot tracking state websites at [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to “Find Your Election Office” and “Where Is My Ballot?”).

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**8. BAL-8: I NEED TO RETURN MY BALLOT BY MAIL; HOW CAN I GET IT BACK BY THE DEADLINE?**

If you choose to mail in your ballot--or if your state requires you to do so, here are some suggestions to help you insure your ballot is received by the deadline:

- Request your state send your blank ballot to you by Email/Online or Fax so you'll get it as soon as it's ready. (Overseas ballots must go out by 45 days before the election). Remember, this is your blank ballot, so there are no privacy concerns.
- Fill out and send back your ballot as soon as you can.
- Alternatively, use the Backup Ballot (the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot or FWAB). The Backup Ballot is only for overseas voters and protects your right to vote. [See **FAQ # BB-1** for more information about using a Backup Ballot]
- US citizens voting from abroad may access the diplomatic pouch at the US Embassy or Consulate to return their ballots. If the postal service in your area is unreliable, non-existent, or unduly expensive, we recommend you contact the US Embassy to find out their procedures for dropping off your ballot.

Any US citizen may use this service, you don't need to have a connection to the Embassy. And the mailing is free if you use the US postage-paid mailing template at: [www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fwab\\_envelope.pdf](http://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fwab_envelope.pdf) (size 10) or [www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fwab\\_envelopeC4.pdf](http://www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fwab_envelopeC4.pdf) (size C4)

But be aware that this method is very slow! It may take several weeks to a month for your ballot to get back to the US. Be sure to contact the Embassy/Consulate well in advance as many have extremely limited periods when they'll accept ballots. And many will not accept ballots less than a month before an election.

- Any plans to travel in the weeks before the election?
  - If you have travel plans to another country outside the US, and that country's postal system is quicker or more reliable, take your ballot with you and mail it from there.
  - If you'll be in the US but outside your voting area, contact your Local Election Official, explain your situation and ask permission to mail your overseas ballot from inside the US. Most will allow you to do so if they know it's coming, but if

they receive an overseas ballot with a US postmark without explanation, they may disallow the ballot. You can also look up the contact information for your Local Election Official here: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states)

- If you'll be in your voting jurisdiction, most states prefer that you vote in person. Again, contact your Local Election Official and explain your situation. They will tell you the proper procedure.
- Finally, it is expensive, but if regular mail or the diplomatic pouch is not available, you may want to look into using an express mail service. It is an expense you'll only need to incur every two years and it will insure your vote gets back in time to be counted!

And if other voters are sending ballots to the same election office, a single express mail envelope may contain multiple ballots but the ballots must be in separate SEALED envelopes. (Think of the express mail envelope as a mailbox).

However you send in your ballot, remember that some states require that you (the voter) must be the one who places it in the mail or gives it to an authorized agent for the US Embassy/Consulate. In some states, it is unlawful for any other person to handle your voted ballot, even if it is sealed. Democrats Abroad cannot collect, process, handle or deliver absentee ballots, even if it is in a sealed envelope. For more information on your state's rules for ballot handling, please see: [NCSL: Who Can Collect and Return an Absentee Ballot Other Than the Voter](#)

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## V. USING THE BACKUP BALLOT (THE FWAB) [BB]

### 1. BB-1: I HAVEN'T RECEIVED MY BLANK BALLOT YET, SHOULD I USE A BACKUP BALLOT (THE FWAB)?:

#### ***[IF more than 45 days before the election:]***

States are required to send out ballots to overseas voters 45 days before a scheduled election. For the [date] Election, ballots should be sent out by [date].

You should **email or call** your Local Election Official to verify they will be sending you a ballot. You can look up the contact information here: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office").

#### ***[IF fewer than 45 days before the election:]***

Blank ballots were sent out to overseas voters starting on [date], so you should have received it by now [if you requested it by email or fax--or by [date] if you requested it by mail.]

\*If you requested your blank ballot be sent by email, be sure to check your "spam" folder and any secondary inboxes. You'd be surprised how many ballots are found hiding in there.

If your ballot isn't in your email folders, contact your Local Election Official right away to find out what happened to it. It's possible it was lost or that they don't have you on their voter rolls as an overseas voter. You can look up the contact information here: [www.votefromabroad.org/states](http://www.votefromabroad.org/states) (scroll down to "Find Your Election Office").

#### ***[FOR all situations:]***

Finally, if you're concerned you may not receive your blank ballot in time to return your vote by the deadline, you don't have to wait! You can vote NOW using the Backup Ballot (the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot or FWAB). The Backup Ballot is only for overseas voters and protects your right to vote.

The Backup Ballot is subject to the same **requirements and deadlines** as your regular ballot. Please be sure to follow the instructions carefully, especially if your state requires a witness signature. The deadline information will be in the Instructions that print out with your completed Backup Ballot. Please be sure to allow enough time for your Backup Ballot to get back to the US!

For detailed information about how to fill out and send in a Backup Ballot, please go to: [www.votefromabroad.org/fwab](http://www.votefromabroad.org/fwab)

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## **VI. FEDERAL TAX [TX]**

### **1. TX-1: IF I REGISTER TO VOTE IN US ELECTIONS, WILL THAT MAKE THE IRS COME CALLING?**

We aren't able to provide tax advice, but every US citizen has certain income tax filing obligations, whether they are living in the US or outside the country. Registering to vote does not change your tax status or filing requirements.

If you are not currently up to date with your US tax obligations, you may wish to consult a tax professional about the "streamline filing" program currently run by the IRS. Here are links to some IRS websites that may be helpful:

[www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/u-s-taxpayers-residing-outside-the-united-states](http://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/u-s-taxpayers-residing-outside-the-united-states)

[www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/streamlined-filing-compliance-procedures](http://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/streamlined-filing-compliance-procedures)

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## VII. STATE AND LOCAL ELECTIONS [ST]

### 1. ST-1: CAN I VOTE IN STATE AND LOCAL ELECTIONS IF I LIVE OUTSIDE THE US?

As an overseas voter, you need to send in the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to request a ballot (and register to vote if necessary). You choose your voter category on the form. If you are a civilian overseas voter, the choice is typically "intend to return" or "my intent to return is uncertain". (See **FAQ # FP-2** for more information about these categories.)

After your state receives and accepts your FPCA, your state will send a ballot listing all the races you are eligible to vote in. All US overseas voters have the right to vote for Federal offices (that is, for President, US Senate and US House of Representatives). However, each state decides if some or all of its overseas voters may vote in State and Local elections (such as, Governor, state legislature and local offices).

- If you indicate on your FPCA that you "intend to return": Every state will send a ballot that includes state and local elections.
- If you indicate on your FPCA that your "intent to return is uncertain": More than half of the states (32) will send a ballot that includes state and local races. The remaining 18 states will send "return uncertain" voters a ballot with only Federal offices. The 18 states are:

Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida (some counties), Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

*\*Note: Please be aware that if your voting state imposes a state income tax, selecting "I intend to return" rather than "my intent to return is uncertain" may contribute towards establishing yourself as a tax resident in your voting state. Because the legal requirements to establish "residence" or "domicile" for tax purposes are determined by state law and the specific facts of your life, before you chose "I intend to return," you may consider seeking advice on these matters from a tax professional.*

[NOTE: You can also use this chart to check for a specific state: [Voting in Downballot State Elections](#)]

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### 2. ST-2: WHAT ARE THE STATE INCOME TAX CONSEQUENCES IF I INDICATE ON MY FEDERAL POST CARD APPLICATION (FPCA) FORM THAT I "INTEND TO RETURN"?

We aren't able to provide tax advice, but please be aware that when you fill in your Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), selecting "I intend to return" rather than "my return is uncertain" may contribute towards establishing yourself as a tax resident in your voting state.

Because the legal requirements to establish "residence" or "domicile" for tax purposes are determined by state law and the specific facts of your life, before you note that you intend to return on your form you may consider seeking advice on these matters from a tax professional.

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**3. ST-3: MY STATE SENDS ME A FULL BALLOT WITH BOTH STATE AND FEDERAL ELECTIONS. CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM STATE INCOME TAX LIABILITY IF I ONLY VOTE FOR THE FEDERAL OFFICES?**

Some overseas voters who receive a full ballot (that is, containing both Federal and State races) have said they only vote in the Federal races as a way to avoid state income tax liability. We aren't able to give tax advice, but voting only for Federal offices when you've received a full ballot should not make a difference in your state income tax liability. Ballots are secret; no one knows which offices on the ballot you have voted for and which ones you've skipped over.

*\*Because the legal requirements to establish "residence" or "domicile" for tax purposes are determined by state law and the specific facts of your life, you may consider seeking advice on these matters from a tax professional.*

Voting in State and local elections is hugely important! In addition to making and enforcing laws at the state and local levels, these races decide how your state will apply Federal laws on vital issues like education, health care and the environment.

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## VIII. STUDY ABROAD [SA]

### 1. SA-1: I'M STUDYING ABROAD AND I DIDN'T REGISTER TO VOTE BEFORE LEAVING THE US, CAN I VOTE?

Yes, US citizens living (or working or traveling) outside the US have the right to vote in US elections as overseas voters! You must meet the same eligibility requirements as other US voters, such as being 18 years old by the General election, but it doesn't matter how long you have been outside the US or if you were registered to vote before you left.

It's easy to register to vote from overseas, you just need to send in the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA). Please see **FAQ # REG-2** (above) for more information about how to fill out and send in your FPCA form.

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### 2. SA-2: I'M STUDYING ABROAD FOR ONLY ONE SEMESTER, SHOULD I SEND IN THE FEDERAL POST CARD APPLICATION (FPCA) TO REGISTER TO VOTE NOW, OR WAIT UNTIL I GET BACK TO THE US?

Don't wait to register to vote--do it now! As a US citizen living outside the US, you need to make sure you get a ballot for every election in which you are entitled to vote. Sending in the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) will cover you for all elections in the calendar year: Primary, General and Special Elections that you may otherwise not be aware of. Many states have early deadlines to register to vote--if you wait until you're back in the US, you run the risk of missing the deadline and losing your chance to vote.

The FPCA is only one-page and it provides special protections for overseas voters--such as the option to receive your blank ballot electronically, your blank ballot must be sent to you at least 45 days before the election, you can use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot if necessary and many states allow additional time to return your voted ballot and/or the ability to return your voted ballot electronically. (See **FAQ # REG-3**)

When you get back to the US, just let your Local Election Official know that you're back. You'll still be a registered voter, but you'll receive your ballot as an in-state voter.

And plans can change! You may find yourself living outside the US longer than you originally planned--traveling, enrolling in a new program, or just hanging out in your new city. When you use the FPCA, you can request your blank ballot be sent to you by Email/Online or Fax and

you'll receive your ballot wherever you are in the world.

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**3. SA-3: I'M ALREADY REGISTERED TO VOTE, DO I NEED TO SEND IN THE FEDERAL POST CARD APPLICATION (FPCA) TO REQUEST MY BALLOT WHILE I'M STUDYING ABROAD?**

Yes, you should send in an FPCA. It's only one page and acts like an address update. But it also provides significant advantages that are only available to overseas voters:

1. An FPCA form, sent in the **calendar** year of an election, protects your ballot at the federal level in case of a recount. (A ballot that doesn't have a corresponding FPCA form may be subject to challenge in a close election);
2. You will receive a ballot for every election in that calendar year, including primaries, special elections and runoff elections. (Many states require voters who wish to vote absentee to submit a form for every single election if using the regular state form);
3. You can use the form to request your ballot be sent to you via email, fax or online instead of postal mail;
4. Your state must send out your ballot at least 45 days before the election;
5. If you don't receive your ballot in time to send it in by the deadline, you can use the Backup Ballot (the Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot or FWAB) to vote;
6. Many states allow overseas voters additional time to submit their ballots and/or allow overseas voters to submit ballots via electronic means.

(See also **FAQ # [REG-3](#)**)

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**4. SA-4: WHAT SHOULD I USE AS MY "US VOTING ADDRESS" WHEN I'M STUDYING ABROAD?**

As a US citizen living abroad, your "voting address" is the street address of the last place you lived in the US. This applies even if your family no longer owns the property, or you no longer have ties to the state, or you don't intend to return to that address or that state, or even if it no longer exists as a residence. It also doesn't matter if you were registered to vote at that address.

(See also **FAQ # [FP-5](#)**)

University students may choose to use either your home address or your last address on campus.

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**5. SA-5: IF I SEND IN THE FEDERAL POST CARD APPLICATION (FPCA), WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I RETURN TO THE US?**

Once you're back living in the US, you'll need to update your address with your Local Election Official--just like you do whenever you move.

If you return to your current voting state, you'll already be a registered voter and will just need to update your information. But if you've moved to a new state, you'll need to register to vote in that state..

To find the form you'll need to submit and the contact information, search for "[State] register to vote" or "[State] update voter registration." Many states will allow voters to register and update their voter registration online.

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**6. SA-6: WHAT HAPPENS IF I FORGET TO UPDATE MY ADDRESS AFTER I MOVE BACK TO THE US AND I GET AN OVERSEAS BALLOT?**

Just contact your Local Election Official to let them know you are now living in the US. They will let you know the procedure to vote in person or (if your state allows) to use an in-state absentee ballot.

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