Election Primer

There is likely to be record or near-record turnout for this year's election. The closeness of this election and the variety of voting and vote-counting procedures mean we may not know the outcome as quickly as we would like.

That's cause for preparation and patience—but not concern.

Here's what you need to know about what's ahead.

Fast Facts

With 31% of voters saying they intend to vote by mail or drop-box in 2024, there will be an estimated 50 million mail-in ballots to be counted.[1]

7 states (including swing states Pennsylvania and Wisconsin) must wait until Election Day to begin processing mail-in ballots, and 18 states may continue to receive ballots after Election Day, so long as they are postmarked on or before Election Day.[2]

Deadlines for the official local and state certification of election winners vary greatly by state. Some states are required to certify results within days of the election, while in other states the official deadline is more than a month after Election Day.[3]

Lawsuits related to election rules and processes are not unusual. In 2018, there were 226 state and federal lawsuits related to the election. In 2020, there were 543 lawsuits, and in 2022 there were 407.[4]

All states have established procedures to handle election complications, and disputes are regularly adjudicated by state and federal courts.

1   https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/econTabReport_pw9W1fW.pdf

2   https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-16-when-absentee-mail-ballot-processing-and-counting-can-begin and https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-11-receipt-and-postmark-deadlines-for-absentee-mail-ballots

3   https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/election-results-canvass-and-certification

4   https://statedemocracy.law.wisc.edu/featured/2023/election-litigation-data-2018-2020-2022/

Recent History

In 2022, it was **more than three weeks** after Election Day when the final races for Congress were called.

In 2020, major media outlets didn't call the results for the Presidential Election in Pennsylvania **until the Saturday** after Election Day.

In 2016, it took **34 days** to certify Trump's win in Wisconsin although he had already been declared the winner due to exceeding 270 electoral votes.

In 2000, it took **35 days** to finally resolve the presidential election.

Post-Election Timeline

November 5

General Election
Polls will close between 6:00 and 9:00 PM depending on the state.

December 11

State "Safe Harbor" Deadline
The soft deadline for states to resolve disputes and choose electors to be accepted by Congress.

December 17

Meeting of Electoral College
Disputes must be resolved and results certified before this meeting.

December 25

Receipt of Certificate of Electoral Votes Deadline
If Congress has not received a state's certificate of electoral votes by this date, it must be requested from the secretary of state.

January 6

Certification of Electoral Votes
A joint session of Congress counts and certifies the votes of the Electoral College.

January 20

End of Current Presidential Term (Inauguration Day)

Beware: Disinformation Online

Those wishing to undermine our nation and our electoral system, including foreign governments, often attempt to spread disinformation online. This can include reports of voter suppression, cyber breaches of voting systems, ballot fraud, and other problems. These disinformation campaigns are designed to undermine trust in our election system and the final election results.

Tips to Combat Disinformation

- Seek out information from trustworthy sources.

- Consider verifying information through multiple reliable sources before sharing it through social media.

- For information about election processes and final election results, rely on official state and local government election officials.

Resources

- National Association of State Election Directors' FAQ

- #TrustedInfo2024, a project of the National Association of Secretaries of State, which includes links to many state-level resources

What You Need to Know to Vote

Visit www.flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/election
Hours: Monday - Friday 8:00am - 5:00pm
290 B North Main Street, Kalispell, MT

For information on how, when, and where to vote, visit www.usa.˜ov/how-to-vote

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