



How do Americans vote?



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- A UNITED STATES FLAG SERVES AS A BACKDROP AS PEOPLE VOTE AT LINDELL SCHOOL IN LONG BEACH, NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 6, 2012.

Since local authorities rather than a single national authority conduct elections, different localities—even in the same state—can have different types of ballots and voting technology.

Today, very few U.S. voters mark paper ballots by putting an “X” next to a candidate’s name. That’s because many localities use optical systems that mechanically scan paper ballots on which voters fill in circles or connect lines. Still others employ a wide variety of mechanized voting devices.

In recent years, several states have adopted procedures that make ballots available to voters before the election. This trend started with provisions for absentee ballots, issued to voters who anticipate being away from their home (and their voting place) on Election Day. Some states and local jurisdictions gradually liberalized this provision, allowing citizens to register as “permanent absentee voters” and routinely have a ballot mailed to their home. Two states—Oregon and Washington—conduct their elections entirely by mail. Absentee voters generally return their completed ballots by mail.

Some states now allow citizens to vote up to three weeks before Election Day using voting machines in shopping malls and other public places. Citizens stop by at their convenience to cast their votes.