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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

JOINT PUBLIC HEARING: ELECTIONS IN A PANDEMIC A REVIEW OF THE 2020 PRIMARIES

TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES ON ELECTION LAW AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE AND NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY *August 11th, 2020 Held Remotely Via Zoom*

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Changes to New York state voting procedures leading up to the June 2020 primary election happened rapidly over the course of 8 weeks. The League worked to ensure voters were prepared to vote in the primary by creating educational materials and using remote distribution methods to share them with voters. The League created an absentee voting FAQ page detailing all information voters would need to know about voting absentee during the COVID-19 pandemic. The FAQ was made available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Bengali, and shared with organizations representing communities who speak these languages. We created a database of county boards of election information that included modified hours and email addresses and phone numbers voters could use to apply for an absentee ballot. The League also created short educational videos showing voters how to apply for an absentee ballot online and by mail.

Through our social media accounts, email and texting services, and partnerships with other organizations we were able to connect with hundreds of thousands of voters from around the state. In spite of our educational efforts, on the day of the primary, the League's office received dozens of phone calls from voters who were unable to vote because they never received their absentee ballot. It was extremely frustrating to have no options to give these voters other than to urge them to vote in person. Most voters who called stated that they felt uncomfortable voting in person or that they were unable to vote in person because they were not at their residence in New York City. These voters reluctantly chose not to vote because they were afraid of contracting the virus.

Survey of Voter's Experiences Using Absentee Voting for the June Primary

The League partnered with VoteEarly NY and the Let NY Vote coalition to conduct a survey of voters who chose to vote by absentee ballot for the June primary election. The survey asked voters about the methods they chose to apply for their ballot and return their ballot, their average wait time to receive their ballot, and their comfort with the experience. We also encouraged voters who applied to vote absentee but ultimately did not vote by absentee ballot to complete the survey. Our groups collected 1,575 survey responses representing voters from 53 of New York State's 62 counties. A full copy of the survey report is included as an attachment to this testimony.

Of voters surveyed, 85% felt the directions to complete and submit their absentee ballot were clear and 69% of voters said they were confident that their ballot would be counted. The majority of voters, 74%,

applied to vote absentee by mail. Only 22% applied online or by email, and less than 2% applied by calling their county board of elections. Most voters surveyed, 47%, reported waiting only 2 to 3 weeks to receive their ballot. Unfortunately, 8% of voters reported waiting 4 weeks or more for their ballot to arrive, and nearly 10% reported that their ballot never arrived at all. We would urge the members of the committee to review the full results of our survey which includes comments from voters related to our concerns and recommendations and a regional breakdown of our survey results.

Concerns and Recommendations

Although the majority of survey respondents reported having an easy time voting by absentee ballot, there were several common comments made by voters to improve the process.

1. Ballot Tracking

Many voters voiced a desire to have the ability to track their absentee ballot in the mail so that they can know when their ballot has been sent and received by their board of elections. Voters felt that there could have been a system in place to track their ballots and said they would have felt more comfortable voting absentee if they were able to know their ballot was counted. Ballot tracking services are used in jurisdictions throughout the country and allow voters to easily track their ballot online from when it is first printed to when it is counted. These services would be especially useful now that voters will have the opportunity to cure absentee ballot issues related to their signature and witness declaration.

2. Clarification of Absentee Ballot Directions and Grounds for Ballot Disqualification

Voters also wanted assurance that issues with their absentee ballot, such as the sealing of the inner envelope, the use of non-black or blue ink, and stray marks on their absentee ballot would not impact the counting of their vote. 20% of voters surveyed were unsure that their ballot would be counted in the primary election, and 11% felt certain that their ballot would not be counted.

Voters would also benefit from the inclusion of more expansive directions with their absentee ballot. Although 85% of voters surveyed felt the directions to apply for their ballot were clear, many were confused over whether they had correctly completed and returned their ballot. Voters commented that the ballot directions were unclear and added to their concerns over whether their ballot may be disqualified.

3. Absentee Ballot Request Options and Postage

Although voters had the opportunity to apply by mail, email or online, or by phone, not all county boards of election followed the Governor's mandates to promote these options to voters. In New York City, the option of requesting an absentee ballot online was highly publicized and promoted. As a result, 44% of New York City voters applied online or by email versus only 22% of voters around the whole state. The online application method made it easy for voters to apply but was only available in the form of an online portal in New York City, Erie County, and Livingston County. Of the 142 voters surveyed in Erie and Livingston counties, 40% applied for their absentee ballot online.

Unless all New York State counties implement an online portal system to allow voters to apply for an absentee ballot online, we would recommend that all eligible voters once again be sent an absentee request form with a pre-posted return envelope. This request form will ensure that all voters know about the option to vote by absentee ballot and that voters have the ability to request their absentee ballot in a timely manner.

We would also urge the legislature to ensure that all absentee ballots for the general election include a pre-paid postage return envelope by providing funds to county boards of election. County boards of election do not currently have the funding to provide postage for all absentee ballot request forms and ballots. The legislature may make these funds available so that no voter is prevented from voting because they are unable to purchase stamps for their ballot.

4. Alternative Voting Methods

Absentee voting was heavily relied upon for the June primary, but many voters are now saying they would much prefer to vote in-person in November. Counties should consider expanding the number of early voting poll sites so voters will have the ability to cast their ballot early and alleviate some of the stress on Election Day.

Early voting should be heavily promoted by county boards of election and more poll sites should be opened, especially in counties that are only required to open a single site. Greater access to early voting poll sites will ensure more voters take advantage of voting early to avoid long lines on election day. If more poll sites cannot be opened, counties should consider extending early voting poll site hours and promoting those extended hours.

5. Voter Registration

COVID-19 has impacted both the running of elections and the rate of new voter registrations. New York State's voter registration database has shown a major drop in new registrations from March through June of 2020. During this period, there was a 61% drop in new registrations from the same period four years ago. This decrease in registrations has been particularly alarming in New York City where many residents cannot use the DMV's online registration system because they do not have a DMV issued ID or license. Typically, the League and other voting rights organizations spend the spring, summer, and fall hosting voter registration drives and educating voters about upcoming elections, but because of the coronavirus, our voter registration and educational efforts have to be done remotely. The League believes that online voter registration will empower more New Yorkers to register to vote during the ongoing pandemic.

Although the legislature has passed a bill to allow for online voter registration, funding issues and the coronavirus have led to a major delay in the release of the program. The New York City Campaign Finance Board has already created an online voter registration portal that can be used by NYC voters. The portal is ready to go live but the legislature must pass a law to allow the NYC Board of Elections to accept these forms. Online voter registration leads to much faster processing, and fewer errors than the antiquated paper system. The window is closing on the opportunity for another positive change in this busy presidential election year. The deadline to register to vote is October 9th. We urge the legislature to pass S6463/A8473 so that voters in New York City do not miss out on the opportunity to vote in the 2020 election.

Conclusion

Before COVID-19 hit the United States, the New York State Board of Elections was predicting record turnout for the 2020 election. Early testimony from the state board estimated more than 8 million voters would turn out to vote in 2020. We are continuing to hold out hope that our elections will see record turnout but acutely aware that if we do not prepare for this surge of voters we are headed for an election disaster.

We would urge the legislature to pass legislation mandating counties use ballot tracking software and ensure that ballots are not thrown out because of stray marks and the improper sealing of an absentee ballot's inner envelope. We would further urge the legislature to provide funding to county boards of elections so that all voters can be sent an absentee voting request form, and that both the request form and absentee ballot return envelopes include pre-paid postage.

In addition to these absentee voting expansions, we would urge county boards of election to expand early voting poll sites and hours so that voters have ample opportunity to vote early and avoid long lines on election day. Registration has also been a continuing challenge, allowing New York City voters the

opportunity to register online will empower more voters to get registered before the October deadline. With these changes, New York State has a much better chance of avoiding Election Day disasters.



2020 ABSENTEE VOTING SURVEY REPORT

July 2020



Executive Summary

During the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, New York State extended its absentee voting procedures to allow all eligible voters to apply to vote absentee for the June primary. The New York State Board of Elections reported that over two million absentee ballot requests were received by county boards of elections offices for the June primary. At the publication of this report, we have not seen exact totals for how many ballots were accepted and how many ballots were received and counted but the number of requests far exceeds the annual average.

The League of Women Voters of New York State partnered with VoteEarly NY and the Let NY Vote coalition to create and distribute a survey on voter's experiences voting via absentee for the June primary. Voters who applied to vote absentee but never received their ballot were also encouraged to respond to the survey. **Our groups collected 1,575 survey responses representing 53 of New York State's 62 counties. The majority of survey respondents reported having an easy time voting via by absentee ballot.**

- 85% of voters surveyed felt the directions to complete and submit their absentee ballot were clear;
- 69% said they were confident that their ballot would be counted;
- 74% applied to vote absentee by mail, 22% applied online or by email, and 2% applied by phone;
- 47% reported waiting only 2 to 3 weeks to receive their ballot, 22% waited one week or less, and 14% waited 3 to 4 weeks;
- And 95% of voters returned their absentee ballot by mail with less than 2% opting to deliver their ballot in person.

Although the majority of survey respondents reported having a positive experience voting via absentee, we recognize that there were significant issues in many parts of the state that may not be reflected in this survey. The League office received phone calls from dozens of voters, primarily in New York City, who never received their absentee ballot. It was extremely frustrating to have no options to give these voters other than to urge them to vote in person. Most voters who called stated that they felt uncomfortable voting in person or that they were unable to vote in person because they were not at their residence in New York City. These voters reluctantly chose not to vote because they were afraid of contracting the virus.

- 8% of voters reported waiting 4 weeks or more for their ballot to arrive;
- And nearly 10% reported that their ballot never arrived at all.

In the weeks since the primary, our office has continued to receive calls from voters requesting information on how they can apply to vote absentee in November. We were pleased to see the legislature pass legislation to allow all voters to apply to vote absentee for the general election under the pretext of "temporary illness". The legislature has also been proactive in passing legislation that allows voters to receive notice if their absentee ballot is challenged because of an issue with the affirmation envelope or witness mark. Finally, we are pleased that voters will have the opportunity to apply to vote absentee more than 30 days ahead of the election and that their ballot will be counted even if it is missing a postmark date.

These new rules will ensure that voters have the opportunity to vote by absentee in the general election, but they are not enough to address all of the issues presented in the June primary. Voters would benefit from the ability to track their ballot in the mail so that they can know when their ballot has been sent and received by their board of elections. Voters also need assurance that other issues with their absentee

ballot, such as the sealing of the inner envelope, the use of non-black or blue ink, and stray marks on their absentee ballot will not impact the counting of their vote. We would also urge the legislature to ensure that absentee ballots for the general election include pre-paid postage, no voter should be prevented from voting because they are unable to purchase stamps for their ballot. Finally, we would urge boards of elections to once again send all eligible active and inactive voters a request form to apply for an absentee ballot. If these adjustments can be made ahead of the November election they will further protect voters' access to the ballot and ease concerns raised by many survey respondents.

I. Introduction

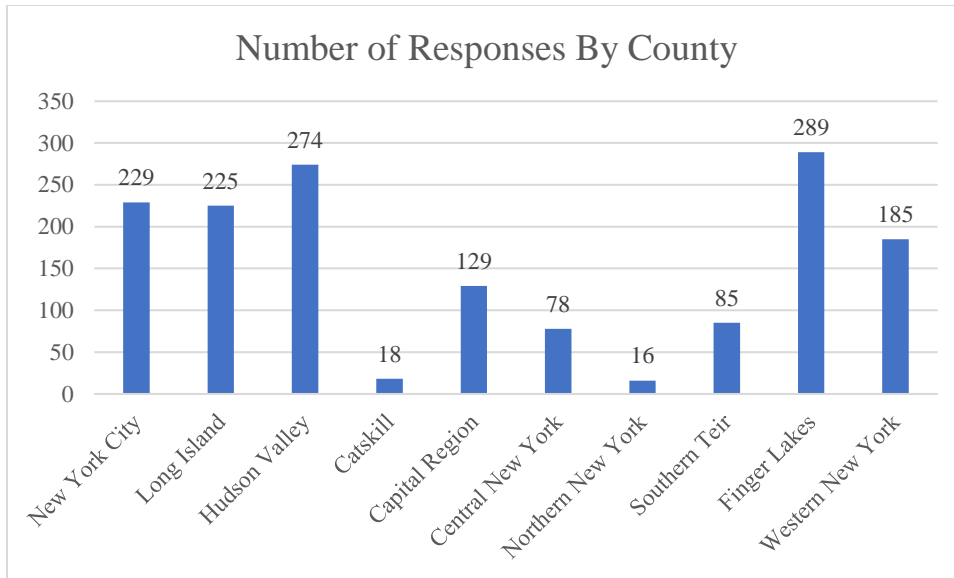
Following the declaration of a state of emergency because of COVID-19, boards of elections had only 2 months to prepare for the election law changes made through executive orders for spring primaries. County boards were mandated to send all eligible active and inactive voters a pre-paid absentee ballot request form and envelope. Boards were also required to accept email, online, and phone absentee ballot requests, and to send all ballots with a pre-posted return envelope. County boards of elections were to make available at their offices a ballot marking device for voters with disabilities and to have the option for voters to receive an email ballot that was compatible with screen reading software. Most boards of elections were quick to adjust to these new guidelines, but some offices had difficulty making these changes in a short period of time.

The League of Women Voters partnered with VoteEarly NY and Let NY Vote to conduct a survey of voter’s experiences voting by absentee during the pandemic. The survey asked voters about the method they utilized to apply for an absentee ballot, average wait time to receive their ballot, concerns over the directions to complete their ballot, and whether or not they were confident their ballot would be counted.

The League received responses from voters from the following 53 counties:

New York City	Long Island	Hudson Valley	Catskill	Capital Region
Bronx Kings New York Queens Richmond	Nassau Suffolk	Dutchess Putnam Rockland Westchester	Orange Ulster Sullivan Delaware Columbia	Albany Montgomery Rensselaer Saratoga Schenectady Washington
Central New York	Northern New York	Southern Tier	Finger Lakes	Western New York
Oneida Onondaga Oswego Jefferson	Clinton Essex Franklin St. Lawrence	Broome Chemung Cortland Madison Otsego Chenango Tioga	Livingston Monroe Ontario Schuyler Steuben Wayne Tompkins Yates	Allegany Cattaraugus Chautauqua Erie Genesee Niagara Orleans Wyoming

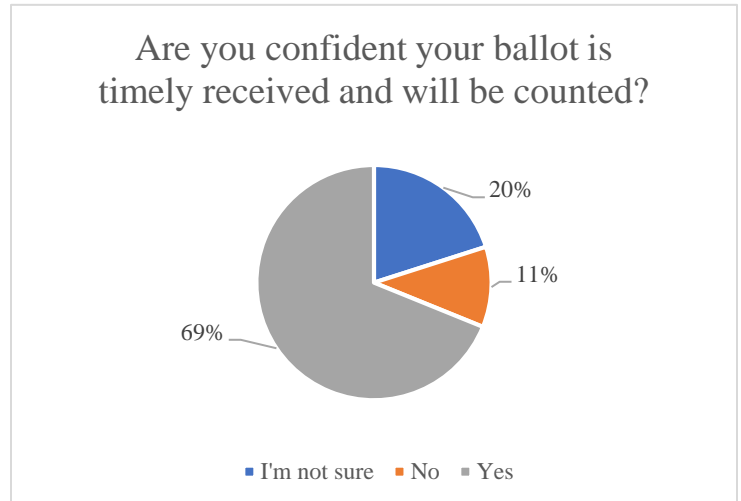
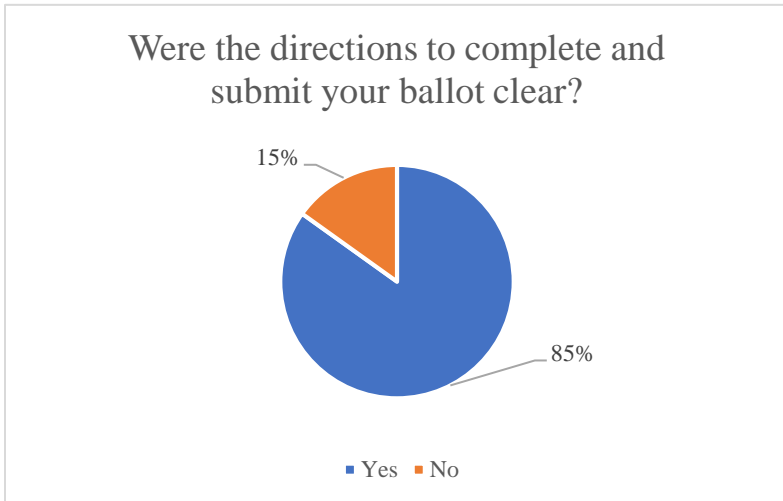
The Leagues did not receive responses from voters in Herkimer, Greene, Lewis, Fulton, Hamilton, Warren, Cayuga, Seneca, nor Schoharie counties.



II. Summary of Survey Results

1. Absentee Ballot Ease of Use

Voters responded positively to the expanded absentee voting process. Most voters felt that the process was easy and that the directions to complete the ballot were clear. Nearly 70% of voters said they felt confident that their ballot would be counted, but 11% did not feel assured that their ballot would be counted and 20% were unsure whether their ballot would count.

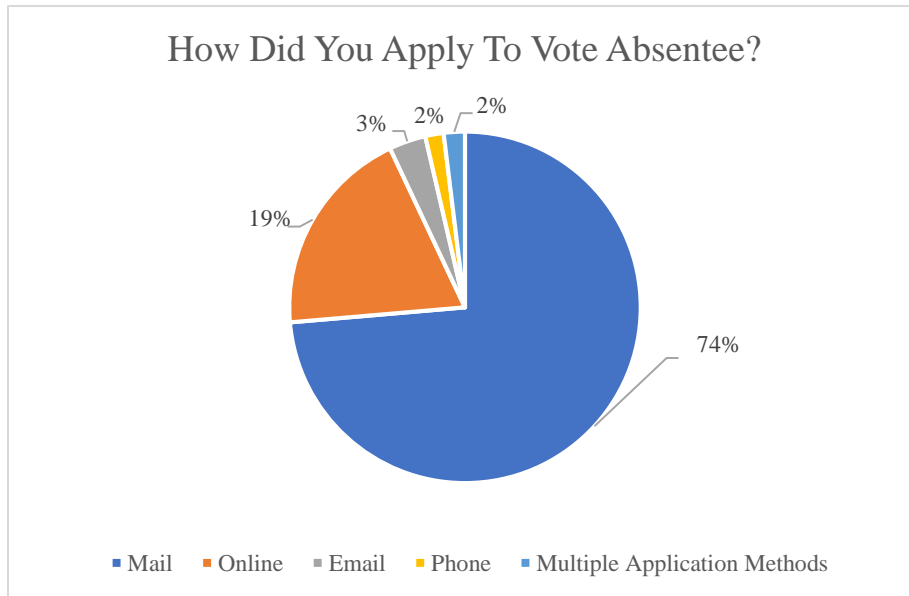


Even voters who reported that they felt the directions were clear made comments about the font size, font color, and language used to describe how to complete their absentee ballot. Voters were also confused as to why they received multiple absentee ballots instead of a single ballot. Because this was most voters first time voting absentee, they were unsure of the potential issues that could arise if they incorrectly completed their ballot.

The survey also asked voters about whether they needed accommodations for a disability or language barrier to apply for an absentee ballot. Only 24 survey respondents self-identified as needing accommodations and all those who self-identified said that those accommodations were met.

2. Application Methods

The majority of voters state-wide applied to vote absentee by mail. Voters also took advantage of the new rules allowing voters to apply to vote absentee online or by email, 21% of voters opted to use an electronic option to request their ballot. Only 2% of voters called to request their ballot, and 2% used multiple application methods such as sending in a mail form but also calling or emailing to ensure their application was received.



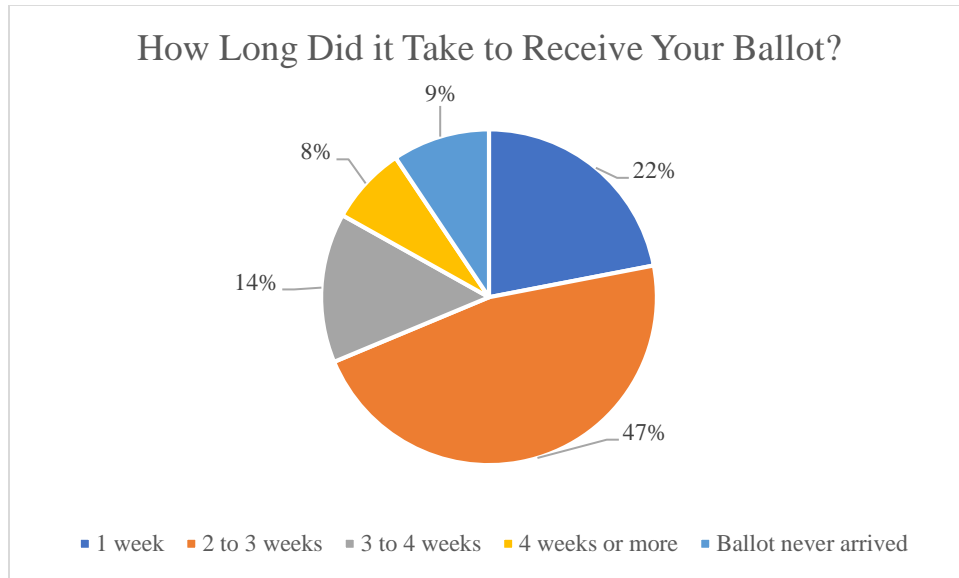
For the June primary election, all eligible active and inactive voters were sent an absentee ballot request form and pre-posted return envelope. The sending of the form contributed to both the awareness of the expanded absentee procedures and the need for voters to complete the request form in order to receive their absentee ballot. 505 of the voters surveyed stated that they learned about the expanded absentee voting procedures directly from their county board of elections. Without this mailing, many voters would likely have been unable to submit a form by mail and fewer voters would have been aware of the ability for them to apply for an absentee ballot through one of the alternative methods.

In addition to the mailing, some county boards of elections did not follow the Governor's mandates to list options for voters to submit their request by email or phone on their website. Although the counties may have been accepting absentee ballot requests through these alternative methods, it was not directly stated on their websites or social media. This may have been due to a lack of staffing or technical support but regardless of the reason, these counties were not in compliance with the Governor's mandate and voters may have felt mailing their request form was the only option.

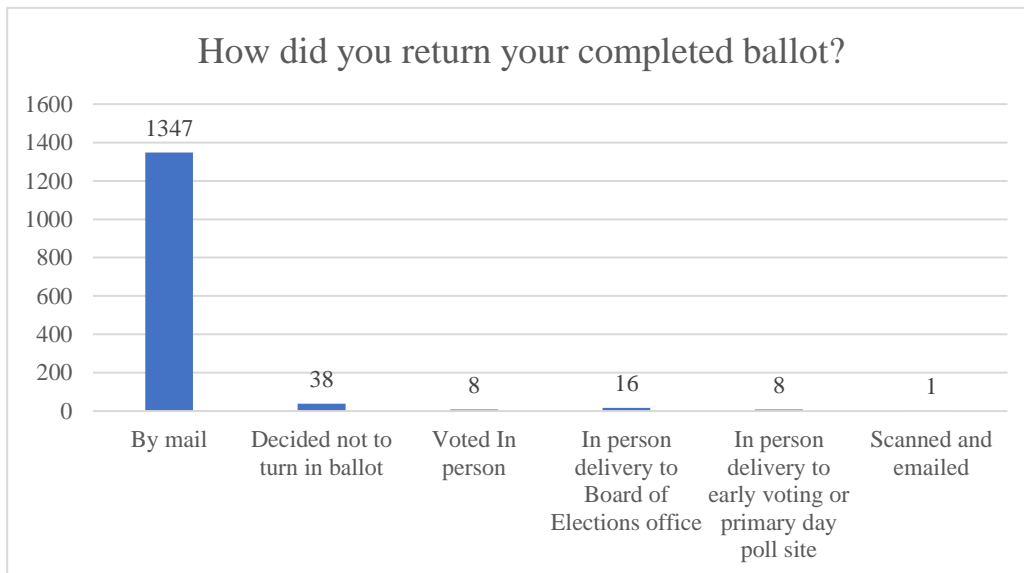
3. Receival and Submission of Absentee Ballots

After applying to vote by absentee ballot, the majority of voters waited between 2 to 3 weeks to receive their ballot. 22% waited only 1 week, 8% waited 4 weeks or more, and 9% of voters surveyed never received their ballot. Although our survey showed only 9% of voters not receiving their ballot, the

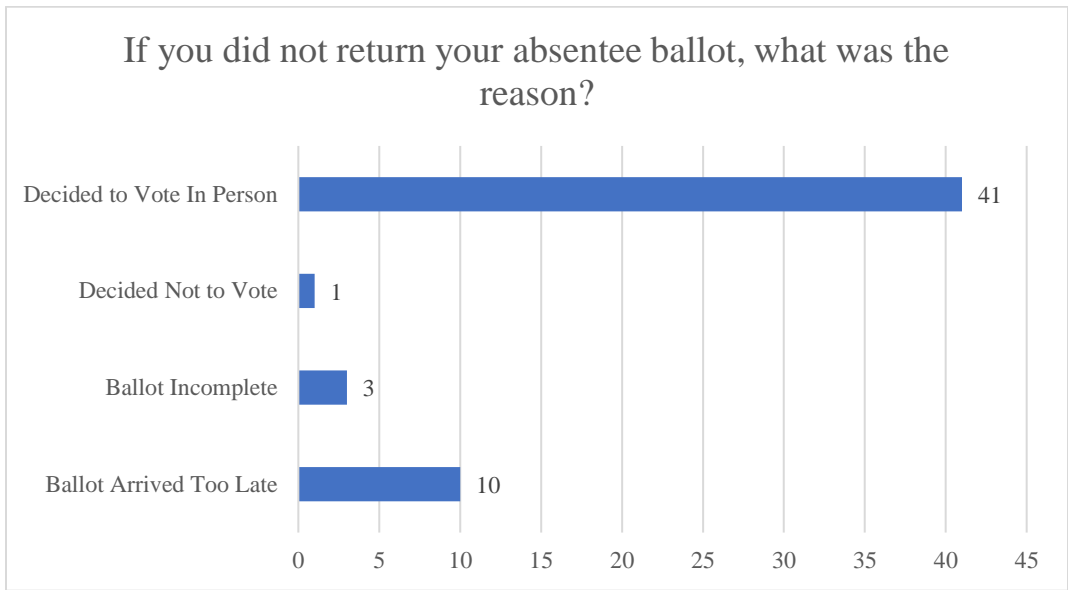
League heard reports from many more voters who did not respond to our survey that stated although they applied for a ballot, their ballot never arrived.



Most voters returned their absentee ballot by mail. Some voters decided instead to return their ballot in person to their board of elections office or at an early voting or election day poll site. Voters who turned in their ballot in person said that they had received their ballots late and were worried about the ballot being received by the board of elections in time to be counted. One voter also indicated that they had scanned and emailed their ballot back to the board of elections but did not give additional information.



There was a group of voters surveyed who did receive their ballot but did not return it by mail or in person. 41 voters decided to vote in person instead, 3 voters received a ballot that was incomplete or had inaccurate information, and 1 voter decided not to vote.



III. Concerns and Recommendations

1. Ballot Tracking

Although most voters felt the process was easy and safe, there were voters who voiced concerns over the whether their ballot would be received and counted. Voters felt that there could have been a system in place to track their ballots and said they would have felt more comfortable voting absentee if they were able to know their ballot was counted. Notable comments include:

“Would like a confirmation or a code from BOE so that I can track my ballot. I was really unsure if I would receive it.” (Bronx)

“There should be a tracking system with a bar code that you can enter into a specific website to view the status of your ballot just like you view the status of your fed ex or ups package.” (Suffolk)

“I have heard the rules for disallowing a completed ballot are not voter-friendly. And you can’t track your ballot once you’ve sent it in. And the Post Office is not foolproof. And I knew the BOE would be overwhelmed with the quantity so not sure if they can handle the counting process. All reasons why I decided to vote early.” (Westchester)

“Mail in application should have arrived earlier; there should be tracking on ballots; I don’t know what happened to mine and feel entitled to an extension given that my ballot never arrived. Would I have gotten my ballot if I lived in a different neighborhood?” (Manhattan)

“Tracking on ballots in and out. Too many people don’t know if theirs are lost or not.” (Monroe)

“There is no systematic way for voters to track their ballot; information should be available about when ballots will be mailed and when they have been received and (ultimately) opened.” (Suffolk)

An additional concern was the high number of voters in New York City who did not receive their absentee ballot. Of voters surveyed state-wide, 9% reported not receiving their ballot in time to vote in the

June primary. This ratio jumped to 21% in New York City where voters reported applying far in advance of the election but never getting their ballot.

Voters would benefit from the ability to track their ballot in the mail so that they can know when their ballot has been sent and received by their board of elections. Ballot tracking services are used in jurisdictions throughout the country and allow voters to easily track their ballot online from when it is first printed to when it is counted. These services would be especially useful now that voters will have the opportunity to cure absentee ballot issues.

2. Clarification of Absentee Ballot Directions and Grounds for Ballot Disqualification

Many Voters also raised concerns over whether their ballot would be counted once it was received. Voters were concerned that their signature may not match what was on file and whether or not they had correctly completed the ballot. Voters need assurance that issues with their absentee ballot such as the sealing of the inner envelope, the use of non-black or blue ink, and stray marks on their absentee ballot will not impact the counting of their vote. 20% of voters surveyed were unsure that their ballot would be counted in the primary election, and 11% felt certain that their ballot would not be counted.

Voters would also benefit from the inclusion of directions with their absentee ballot. Although 85% of voters surveyed felt the directions to apply for their ballot were clear, many were confused over whether they had correctly completed and returned their ballot. Voters' comments on ballot directions included:

"I didn't not know that there would be two separate ballots sent. I also found that directions somewhat confusing as I was filling out the school budget form at the same time and the directions were different. Consistency between all groups would be helpful." (Monroe)

"The directions on the ballot itself were not totally clear for the positions other than candidate for president. This can be improved to make sure there is no room for interpretation of the instructions." (Westchester)

"The return envelope that needed to be signed wasn't large enough for the ballot and the directions were not clear." (Kings)

"Directions should have been BOLDER" (Suffolk)

"Better, clearer, more explicit directions on the ballot." (Wyoming)

"Fewer words, larger font, lists for instructions & checklists are generally good - think of recipes for cooking." (Suffolk)

"Directions were very unclear. I had to read them several times. friends have reached out with questions about witness/no witness, etc. nothing to explain why I got two ballots - I thought I had gotten a second in error." (Wayne)

"It was complicated - applied online to get application to get ballot. Some info on forms was in small print or in light text on white background. Some directions were confusing." (Manhattan)

"The directions are super unclear. I almost did not sign the inner envelope. A candidate posted a how-to video on how to vote absentee and I'm glad I watched it. The instructions say nothing about signing and sealing the inner envelope." (Queens)

Voters should be provided with more thorough directions on how to complete and return their ballot. Boards of elections should be mindful of those who may have sight impairments or may not speak English as their primary language.

3. Absentee Ballot Request Options and Postage

As noted in our survey findings, not all county boards of elections followed the Governor's mandates to promote the options for voters to apply to vote absentee online or by phone. In New York City, the option of requesting an absentee form online was highly publicized and promoted. As a result, 44% of New York City voters applied online or by email versus only 22% of voters around the whole state. The online application method made it easy for voters to apply but was only available in the form of an online portal in New York City, Erie, and Livingston. Of the 142 voters surveyed in Erie and Livingston counties, 40% applied for their absentee ballot online.

Unless all New York State counties implement an online portal system to allow voters to apply for an absentee ballot online, we would recommend that all eligible voters once again be sent an absentee request form with a pre-posted return envelope. This request form will ensure that all voters know about the option to vote by absentee ballot and that voters have the ability to request their absentee ballot in a timely manner. One voter from Suffolk county commented:

“But if the mail-in form to request a ballot wasn't mass mailed out, I believe less would have the opportunity to vote in this election.” (Suffolk)

We would also urge the legislature to ensure that all absentee ballots for the general election include a pre-paid postage return envelope by providing funds to county boards of elections. County boards of elections do not currently have the funding to provide postage for all absentee ballot request forms and ballots. The legislature may make these funds available so that no voter is prevented from voting because they are unable to purchase stamps for their ballot.

4. Alternative Voting Methods

Absentee voting was heavily relied upon for the June primary, but many voters are now saying they would much prefer to vote in-person in November. This survey delves into the issues associated with absentee voting, but we must also highlight the need for greater in-person accessibility for the general election. Counties should consider expanding the number of early voting poll sites so voters will have the ability to cast their ballot early and alleviate some of the stress on Election Day.

Early voting should be heavily promoted by county boards of elections and more poll sites should be opened, especially in counties that are only required to open a single site. Greater access to early voting poll sites will ensure more voters take advantage of voting early to avoid long lines on election day. If more poll sites cannot be opened, counties should consider extending early voting poll site hours and promoting those extended hours.

IV. Conclusion

Before COVID-19 hit the United States, the New York State Board of Elections was predicting record turnout for the 2020 election. Early testimony from the state board estimated more than 8 million voters would turnout to vote in 2020. We are continuing to hold out hope that our elections will see the record turnout but acutely aware that if we do not prepare for this surge of voters we are headed for an election disaster. Unlike the June primary election, counties have more than 2 months to prepare and amend their operations. We urge the legislature to quickly pass bills to address our concerns raised around the tracking of ballots and uniformity of absentee ballot directions. We would further urge the legislature to make funds available so that all voters can be sent an absentee ballot request form and so that all request forms

and ballots include a pre-paid postage return envelope. In addition to these absentee voting expansions, we would urge county boards of elections to expand early voting poll sites and hours so that voters have ample opportunity to vote early and avoid long lines on election day. With these changes, New York State has a much better chance of avoiding Election Day disasters.

Appendix A: Survey Questions

New York State Absentee Voting Survey This survey is meant to assess the outcome of the expanded absentee voting procedures during the COVID-19 outbreak. The results of this survey will be used by voting rights organization to advocate for future reforms to New York State's absentee voting process.

1. Which New York county are you registered to vote in?
2. How did you apply to vote absentee?
 - By mail
 - Online
 - By email
 - By phone
3. How did you hear about the COVID-19 related option to vote absentee?
 - From my County Board of Elections
 - From a candidate or elected official
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Instagram
 - Other social media source
 - Radio
 - Television
 - Print Media
 - Other
4. If you are disabled or a non-native English speaker, did the board of elections provide reasonable accommodations to meet your basic access needs?
5. Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I'm not sure
6. How long did it take to receive your ballot?
 - 1 week
 - 2 to 3 weeks
 - 3 to 4 weeks
 - 4 weeks or more
 - Ballot never arrived
7. Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear?
 - Yes
 - No
8. How did you return your completed ballot?
 - By mail
 - In person delivery to Board of Elections office
 - In person delivery to early voting or primary day poll site
 - Decided not to turn in ballot

9. If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason?

- I did return my ballot
- Decided to vote in person instead
- Decided not to vote at all
- Misplaced my ballot
- Ballot never arrived

10. Did your county board of elections follow up with you about your absentee ballot or application for any reason? (Error with ballot completion, signature missing, incomplete information, etc.)

11. Do you have concerns with the mail balloting process? If yes, please explain.

12. Are you confident your ballot is timely received and will be counted?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

13. Any suggestions to improve This process?

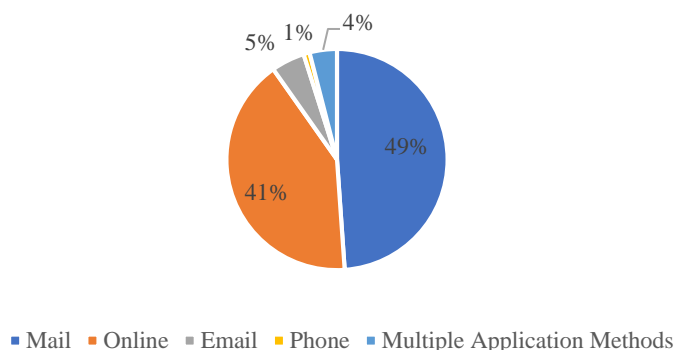
Appendix B: Regional Data Analysis

I. New York City

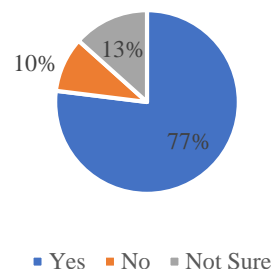
Total New York City Survey Responses: 229

Counties Included: Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, Richmond

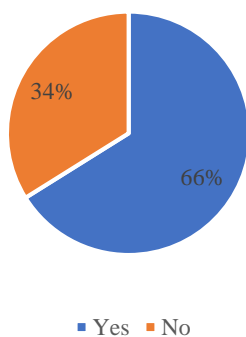
How did you apply to vote absentee?
(NYC)



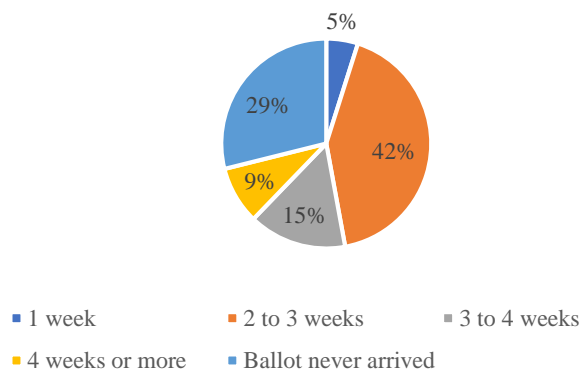
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid? (NYC)



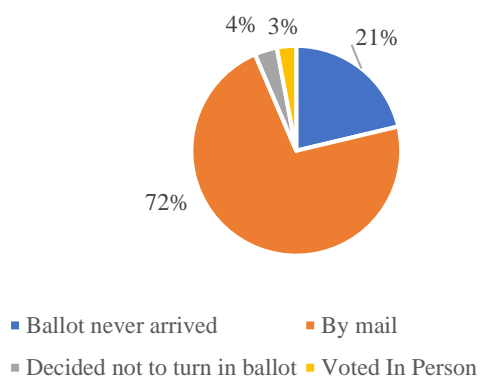
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear? (NYC)



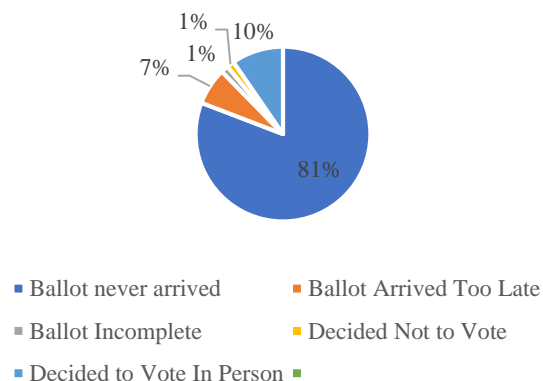
How long did it take to receive your ballot? (NYC)

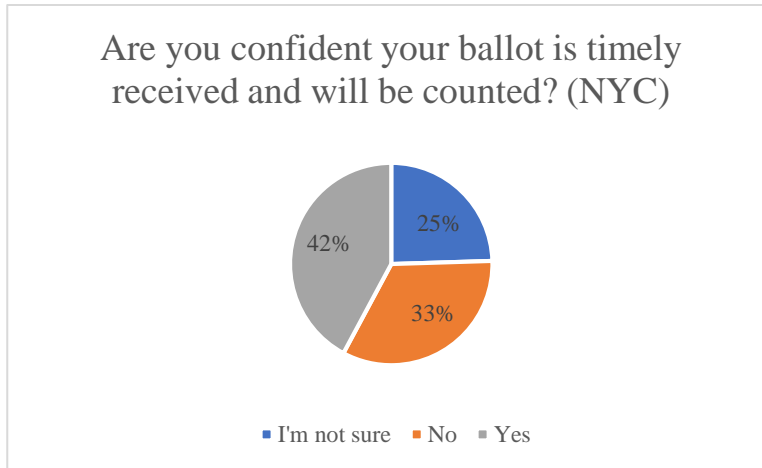


How did you return your completed ballot? (NYC)



If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason? (NYC)





Notable Comments From New York City Voters:

Directions

- Lots of confusion about how to use ballot, printing very small. Need a Largely printed postmark due date. This election is too important! (Brooklyn)
- Make instructions for all elements of the ballot clear. Boxes on the form and on the envelope had no indication of whether they were meant to be filled in by voter or election officials. (Manhattan)
- Make it easier to get a replacement ballot. I could have gone to pick one up for my husband as I'm not as concerned about covid and am more mobile. It was too late to wait for another ballot to arrive in the mail. (Brooklyn)

Ballot Delay

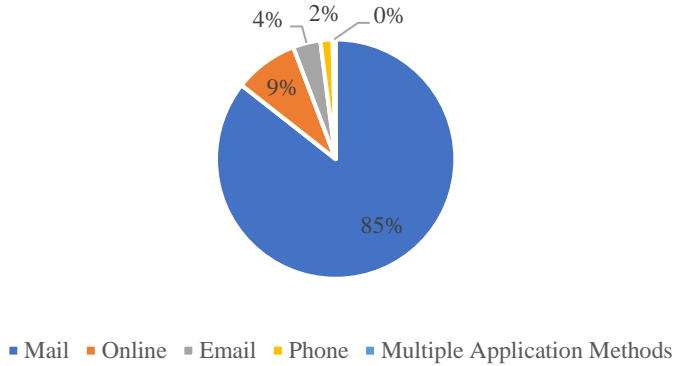
- I requested my ballot be sent out of state as I am absent from county due to COVID. I requested it the Friday before the Tuesday deadline to the CBOE email designated for such. 6/26 it still hasn't gotten here. I doubt anyone will ever even see my request. (Brooklyn)
- I wish that voting information was sent via email. As someone who has moved a lot and is often away from home, I frequently miss info sent to my home. (Brooklyn)
- Worked well for me, but friends are still waiting for their ballots. (Manhattan)
- I was nervous about not receiving the ballot in time. I mailed the application the same day I got it, which was later than people in Nassau got it, and I just received the ballot yesterday, June 19th, four days before the deadline. (Bronx)
- My ballot arrived 6/19. My husband's nearly ten days ago. Why the difference when we submitted our requests at the same time? Hence my fear that my ballot may be lost. Would like to vote digitally, or by phone. (Queens)

Concerns of Whether Ballot Will Count

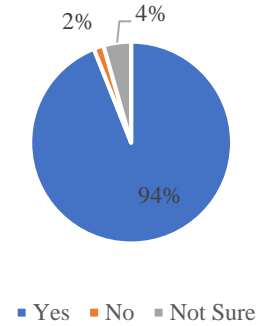
- Challenges to signature match can void the ballot and I would not be notified. (Brooklyn)
- Send voter a receipt of ballot and processing (Bronx)
- It would be good to know that my ballot was received and that it was deemed valid without any of the mistakes that could render it invalid. (Manhattan)
- Serial number on outside envelope that could be used to see if ballot arrived on online lookup app. (Manhattan)
- Status reporting/Traceability - to look up whether your ballot has been received. (Brooklyn)

II. Long Island
Total Long Island Responses: 225
Counties Included: Suffolk and Nassau

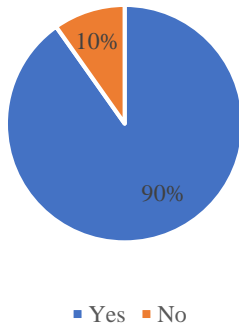
How did you apply to vote absentee?
 (Long Island)



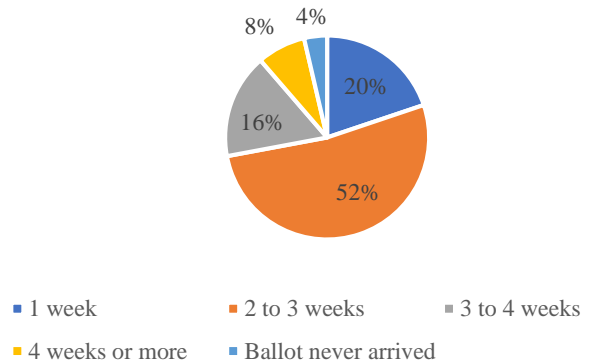
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid?
 (Long Island)



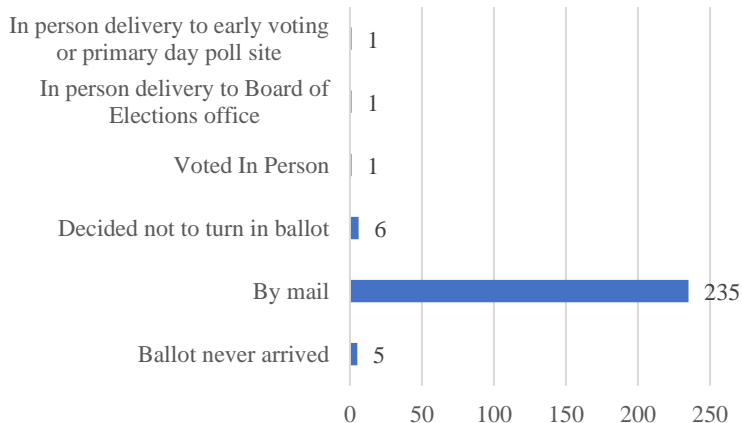
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear?
 (Long Island)



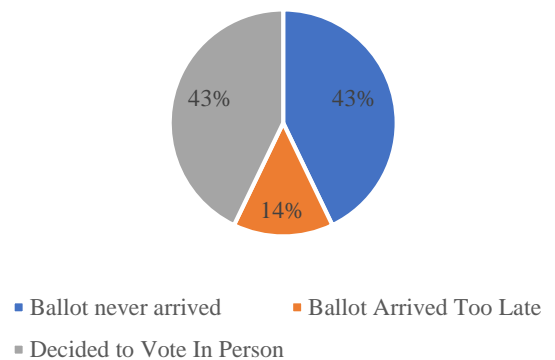
How long did it take to receive your ballot?
 (Long Island)



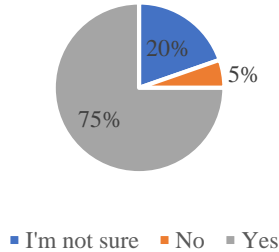
How did you return your completed ballot?
 (Long Island)



If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason?
 (Long Island)



Are you confident your ballot is timely received and will be counted? (Long Island)



Notable Comments From Long Island Voters:

Directions

- Clarity of how to fill out and deadline (Suffolk)
- I thought the directions had too many words, needs editing to remove verbiage (Suffolk)
- Instructions were poorly written (although the "rules" were changing almost daily). When sent the absentee ballot application, people should be given the link to the NYS BOE voter lookup page so they could ensure that they are registered. (Suffolk)
- Yes, date for submission was incorrectly stated on two different places on ballot. (Suffolk)
- Perhaps more conscientious focus on the part of the Board of Elections; I received a single ballot in Spanish! I do not speak Spanish, but managed. (Suffolk)
- Confirm all details MUCH further ahead so publicity is consistent. Even candidates were sending out incorrect process information. Terminology was inconsistent. (Suffolk)
- Formatting of the ballot did not highlight adequately how many to vote for in each category and what the categories were. Double lines between different sections would have been helpful. (Nassau)
- Make voters aware of the need to sign the back of envelope. (Nassau)

Ballot Delay

- I was concerned that I would not receive my ballot in time. My NYC kids staying with us only got their ballots on 6/22. Cutting it close. I was also concerned that the PO might not postmark my ballot, since postage was prepaid. (Suffolk)
- I will have serious concerns if I do not receive it. I am extremely vigilant about the virus. (Suffolk)
- I mailed my application in the same envelope as two others (that were pre-filled, mine was not) and my ballot never arrived. I called the board of elections twice. I was assured the second time I called My ballot was in the mail. I needed to vote in person on Election Day because it never arrived. (Suffolk)

Concerns of Whether Ballot Will Count

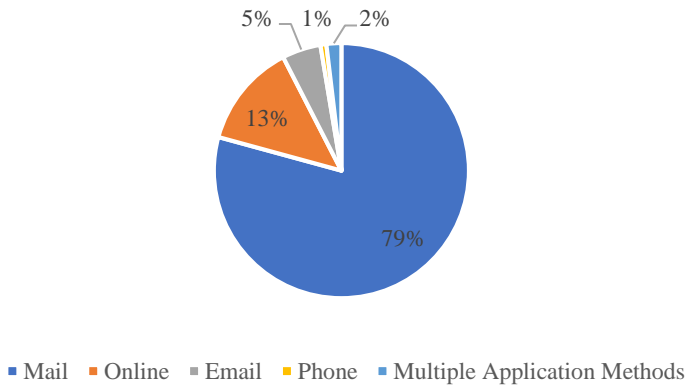
- I would like to know if I used my full first name for my signature or my usual, just the first letter of my first name. I want to be sure my ballot is counted but I would prefer to vote by mail. (Suffolk)
- It is impossible to know if your ballot has arrived, and ballots are not counted until long after Election Day. (Suffolk)
- It would be nice to receive a confirmation from the BOE that the ballot was received. (Suffolk)
- My only concern is that last minute ballots (June 23rd) get postmarked properly and not dismissed. I have read about some places where mail-in ballots were sitting unopened in a corner somewhere. (Suffolk)
- No guarantee my vote will a) make it to the BOE to be counted (lost in mail) and b) that it is cast successfully (Suffolk)
- There should be follow-up from the board of elections when they receive ballots (Nassau)

III. Hudson Valley

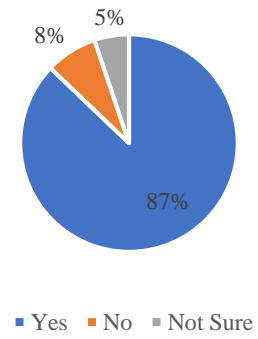
Total Hudson Valley Responses: 274

Counties Included: Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland, Westchester

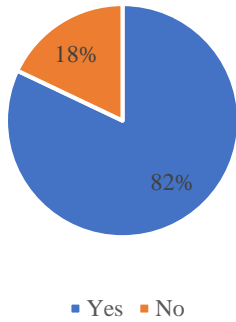
How did you apply to vote absentee?
(Hudson Valley)



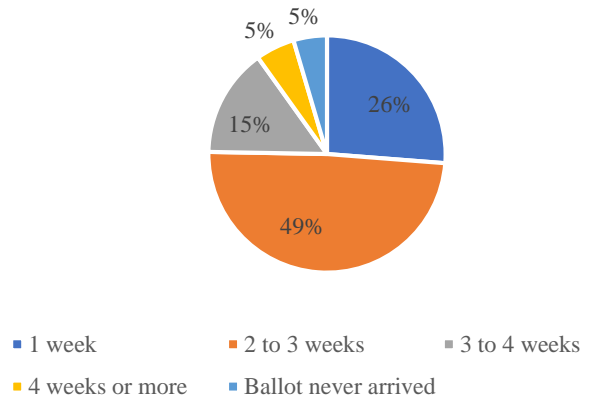
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid? (Hudson Valley)



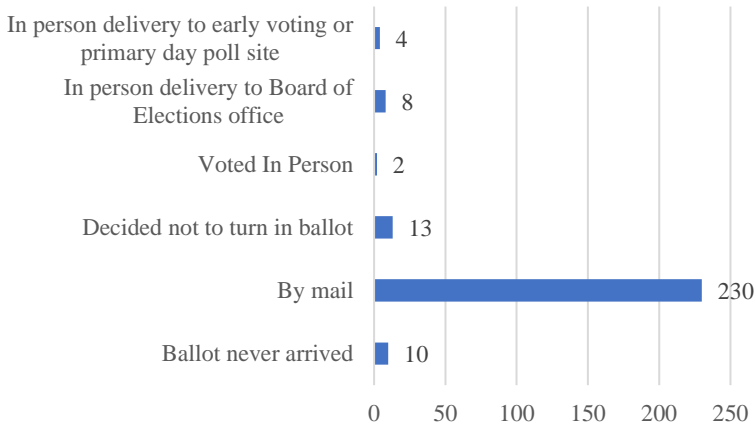
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear? (Hudson Valley)



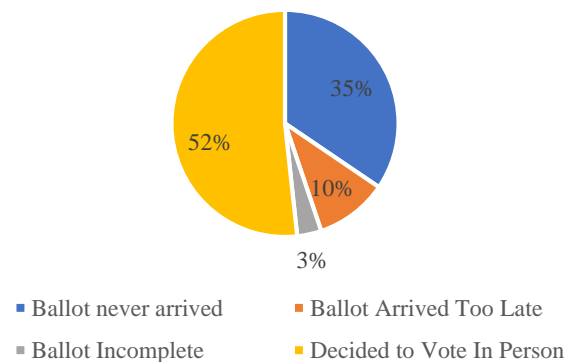
How long did it take to receive your ballot? (Hudson Valley)

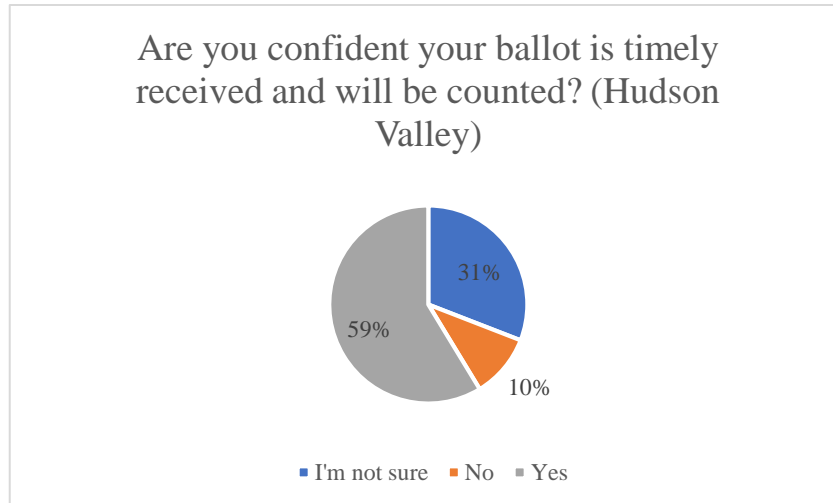


How did you return your completed ballot? (Hudson Valley)



If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason? (Hudson Valley)





Notable Comments From Hudson Valley Voters:

Directions

- Instructions are not prominent. I would think many people will not sign the oath on back of envelope. I think television, radio and print ads I newspapers should remind voters of the proper completion of mail in ballots so they do not get disqualified by BOE because of things like not filling in circle for candidate in ink, not putting return address including printing name on return envelope to help find voter in poll rosters, or not signing oath envelope or just skipping the oath envelope altogether. (Westchester)

Ballot Delay

- I called them (The Board of Elections) and they said it was mailed on 6/4, but when I hadn't received it by 6/13, I voted early in person. (Westchester)
- I received the composite ballot a long time ago because I had applied in February but then when it was time to vote I only received the Congressional ballot and had to call for the presidential. They sent it to me immediately (Westchester)
- I thought it took too long to send the ballot. (Westchester)
- The ballot had the voting place address rather than mine. I called and was told the BOE knew about the glitch so not to worry and not to write a correction. This does not give me confidence in the system. (Westchester)

Concerns of Whether Ballot Will Count

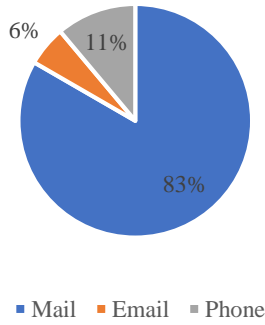
- Better tracking of applications and ballots so know when received. (Westchester)
- Concerns like with any election. Will my vote be counted? (Dutchess)
- How will I know it got counted? (Westchester)
- I am not sure I will end up counted. (Dutchess)
- I am uneasy with so many mail in ballots and reduced workers that the tallying process will be accurate and timely. (Westchester)
- I feel that my vote is not counted the same way. Races are already being viewed as a forgone conclusion even without any absentee ballots being counted. (Westchester)
- I would like a way to verify BEFORE in-person voting starts that my ballot was received. Or a secure drop box to put it in so that I could be sure that the ballot was received. (Westchester)

IV. Catskill

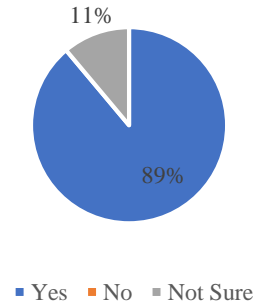
Total Catskill Responses: 18

Counties Included: Orange, Ulster, Sullivan, Delaware, and Columbia

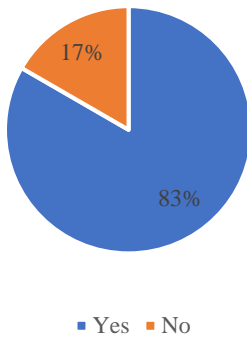
How did you apply to vote absentee?
(Catskill)



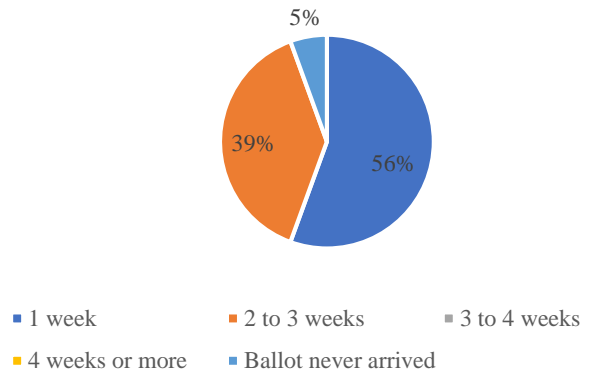
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid?
(Catskill)



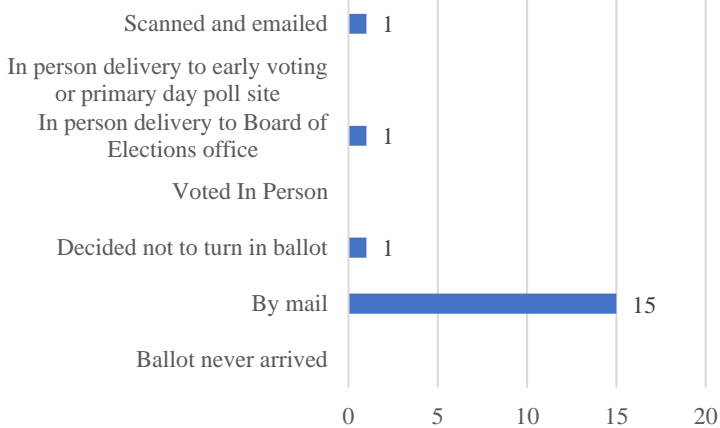
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear?
(Catskill)



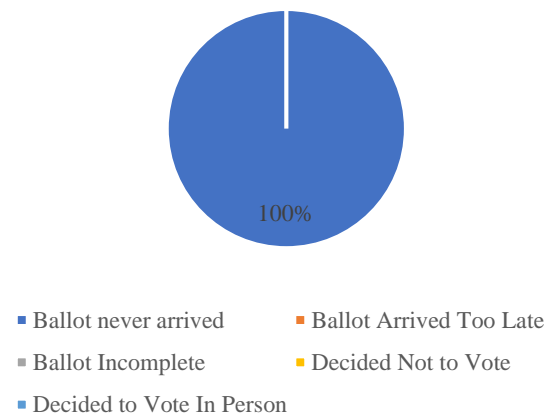
How long did it take to receive your ballot?
(Catskill)



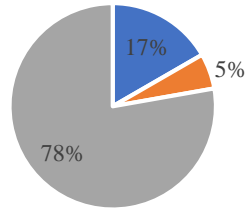
How did you return your completed ballot?
(Catskill)



If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason?
(Catskill)



Are you confident your ballot is timely received and will be counted? (Catskill)



■ I'm not sure ■ No ■ Yes

Notable Comments From Catskill Voters:

Directions

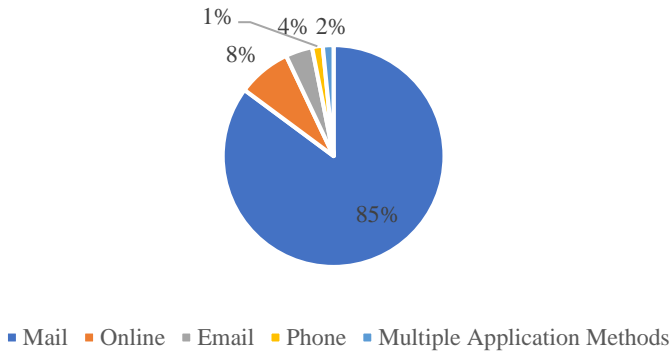
- The mail-in date should be the SAME as the date of voting at the polls, instead of the day before. Many people might not realize that the ballot must be postmarked the day before the election. There is no reason why it can't be the same as voting day. States that have only mail-in ballot voting systems allow ballots to be mailed in the same day. (Ulster)
- The process was simple and efficient. (Ulster)

V. Capital Region

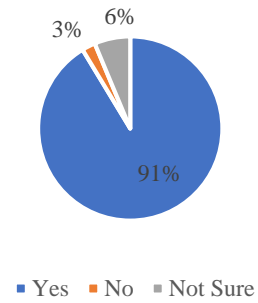
Total Capital Region Responses: 129

Counties Included: Albany, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Washington

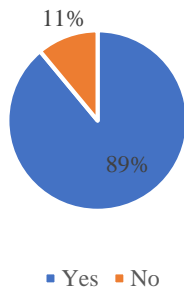
How did you apply to vote absentee?
(Capital Region)



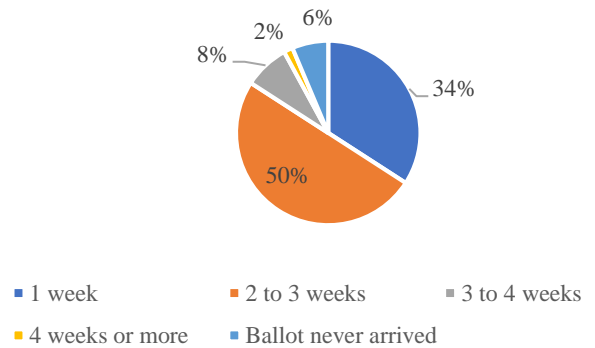
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid? (Capital Region)



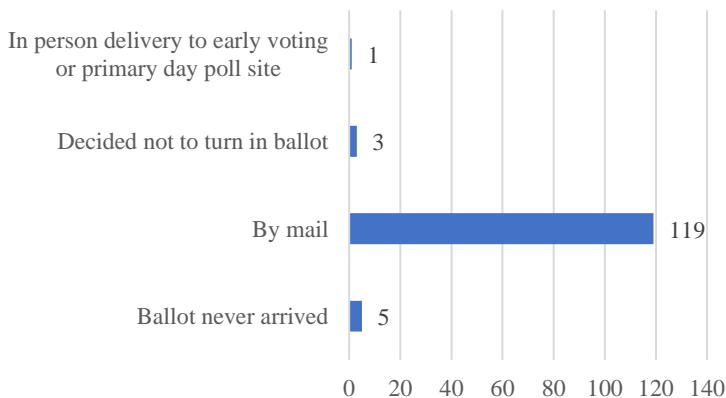
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear? (Capital Region)



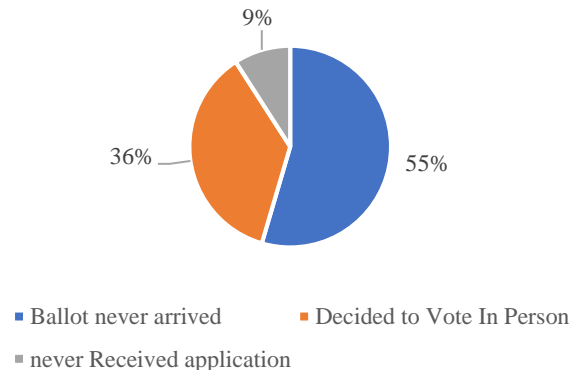
How long did it take to receive your ballot? (Capital Region)



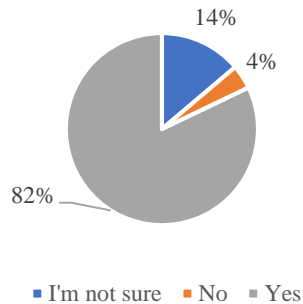
How did you return your completed ballot? (Capital Region)



If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason? (Capital Region)



Are you confident your ballot is timely received and will be counted? (Capital Region)



Notable Comments From Capital Region voters:

Directions

- Having two signature lines was confusing and the print was small explaining that the second line was for if you were unable to sign yourself and needed a witness. It almost looked like a witness was needed unless you read the fine print. (Saratoga)
- I was a bit mixed up about signing my name, I had to reread the message on that envelope because I was afraid that I'd miss doing it or not do it correctly. So I dated it and then signed my name. (Albany)
- It's confusing--hard to understand that you have to apply to get the ballot--takes time (Montgomery)
- Only that people might respond better if the instructions were super-simple on a separate colored-paper note. Sounds silly, but sometimes things get set aside if it isn't immediately obvious what to do with it. (Albany)
- On back of envelope, your signature should appear on top line, not underneath the line where a designated person signs if you can only sign with an X. Also a simple 1-page of instructions should be included providing additional info--such as how to correct a mistake, if you have a disability, etc. (Albany)

Ballot Delay

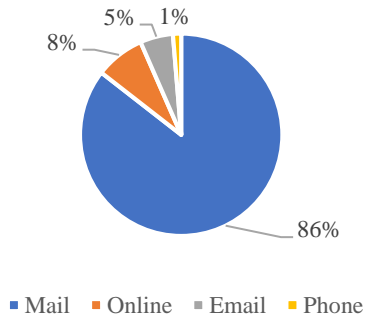
- I called when my ballot didn't arrive. They mailed me ANOTHER ballot application rather than a ballot. By then it was too late to submit the application so I voted in person instead. (Schenectady)

Concerns of Whether Ballot Will Count

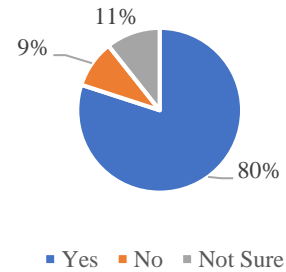
- Yes, there needs to be a way of determining that ballot was received. (Rensselaer)
- Confirmation that completed ballot was received would be nice. (Albany)
- Would be useful to know that my ballot arrived and was counted. Could there be an online reporting process that people could check to be sure their vote was processed. (Saratoga)

VI. Central New York
Total Central New York Responses: 78
Counties Included: Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, Jefferson

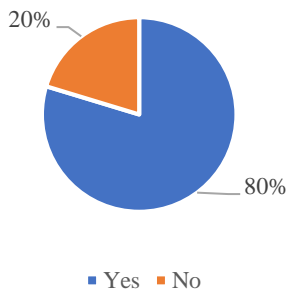
How did you apply to vote absentee (Central NY)



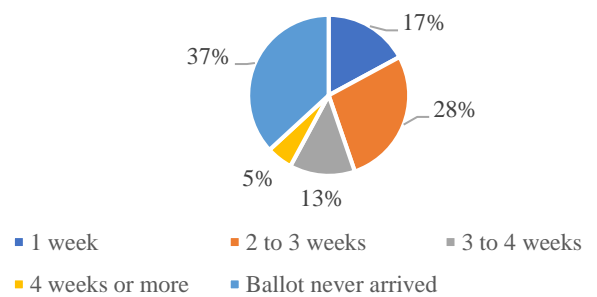
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid? (Central NY)



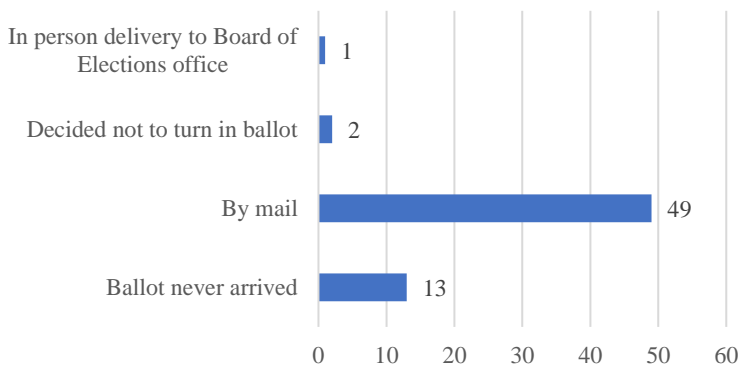
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear? (Central NY)



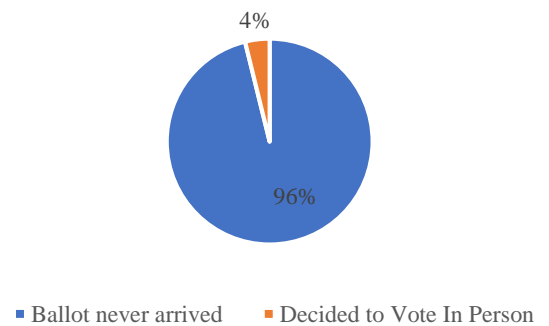
How long did it take to receive your ballot? (Central NY)



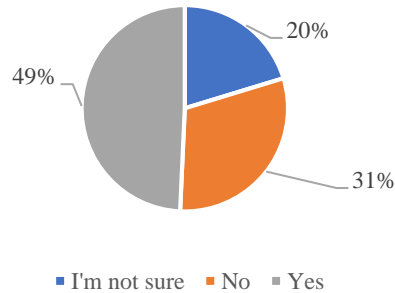
How did you return your completed ballot? (Central NY)



If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason? (Central NY)



Are you confident your ballot is timely received and will be counted? (Central NY)



Notable Comments From Central New York voters:

Directions

- Need to explain more thoroughly the difference with application versus the ballot. (Onondaga)
- More instructions on how to fill out the ballot. (Oswego)
- There were no clear directions on how to mark the ballot- pen or pencil? Fill in the circle or mark an X, what to do if you want to change a mark (Oswego)
- It was not clear to me that there would be two separate Democratic Primary ballots mailed, one for the Presidential candidate and another one for Congress. So initially I thought I had missed something, because the congressional ballot arrived several days after the presidential ballot. (Oswego)

Ballot Delay

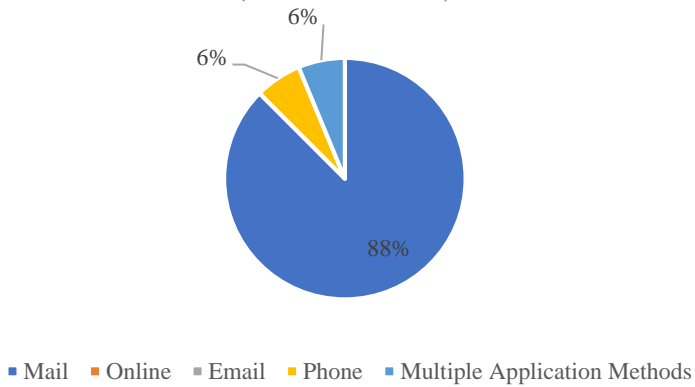
- Obviously not enough time was allowed for mailings to arrive and be returned!!! (Oneida)
- Process needs to get ballots out quickly. Many of my friends didn't receive theirs. Also need to let people know about the availability and how to apply for absentee ballots. (Oneida)
- Be sure everyone who is eligible to receive a ballot actually gets one. I know at least 11 people who did not get a ballot. I also, had to call to get the application for the ballot. (Oneida)
- They need to arrive sooner. Mine arrived the Saturday before the election and my husbands arrived the day before. (Oneida)
- My husband and my applications were sent the same day. His arrived last night when our mail was delivered at 5:10pm. Mine never arrived, and did not arrive today. It did not show to be delivered on our USPS app, so I know it did not go to my neighbor. (Oneida)

Concerns of Whether Ballot Will Count

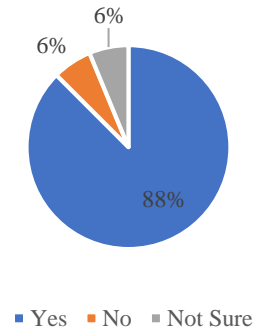
- Maybe there could be a way to verify that my ballot has been received and counted? Online or postcard. (Jefferson)
- A notification that my Vote was received & counted, by mail or email. (Oneida)
- A way to confirm that your completed ballot has arrived to the BOE. (Onondaga)

VII. Northern New York
Total Northern New York Responses: 16
Counties Included: Clinton, Essex, Franklin, St. Lawrence

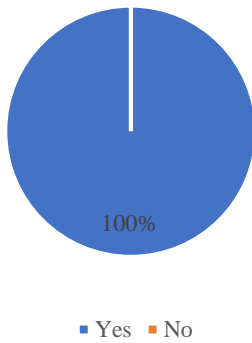
How did you apply to vote absentee?
 (Northern NY)



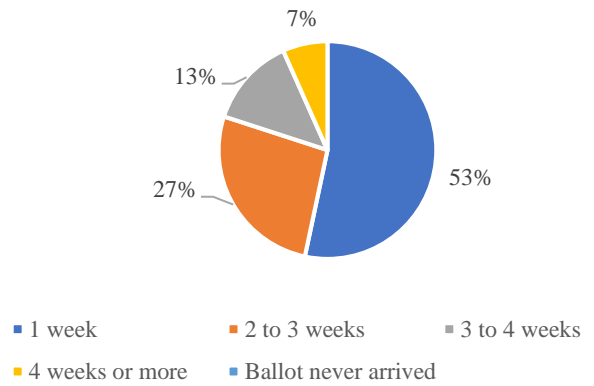
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid?
 (Northern NY)



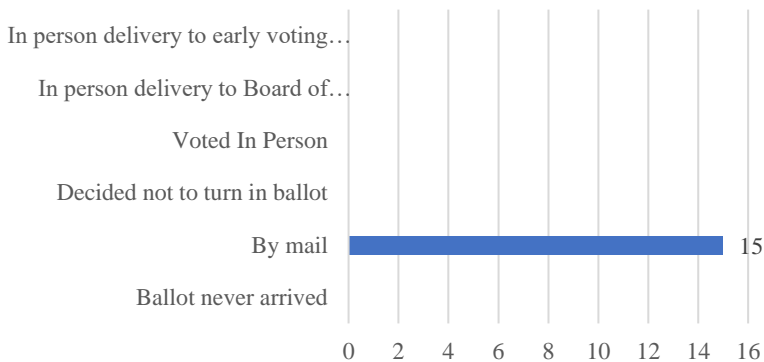
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear?
 (Northern NY)



How long did it take to receive your ballot?
 (Northern NY)



How did you return your completed ballot?
 (Northern NY)



Are you confident your ballot is timely received and will be counted?
 (Northern NY)



Notable Comments From Northern New York voters:

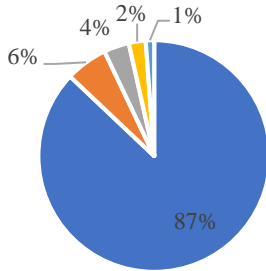
- Want receipt that your vote has been processed. (Clinton)
- Would be nice to receive some type of confirmation ballot was received by election officials and counted. (St. Lawrence)

VIII. Southern Tier

Total Southern Tier Responses: 85

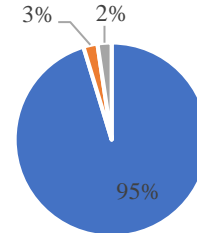
Counties Included: Broome, Chemung, Cortland, Madison, Otsego, Chenango, Tioga

How did you apply to vote absentee?
(Southern Tier)



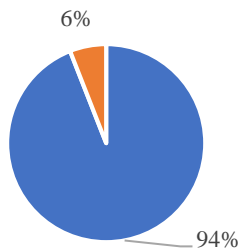
■ Mail ■ Online ■ Email ■ Phone ■ Multiple Application Methods

Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid? (Southern Tier)



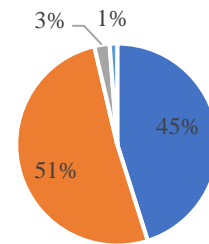
■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure

Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear? (Southern Tier)



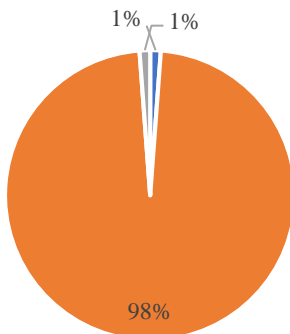
■ Yes ■ No

How long did it take to receive your ballot? (Southern Tier)



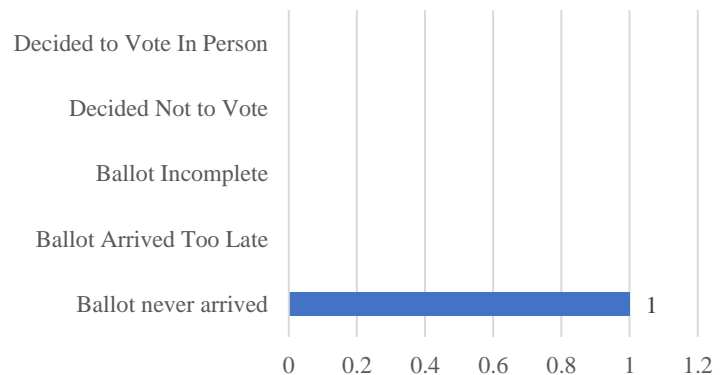
■ 1 week ■ 2 to 3 weeks ■ 3 to 4 weeks
■ 4 weeks or more ■ Ballot never arrived

How did you return your completed ballot? (Southern Tier)

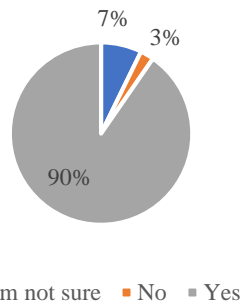


■ Ballot never arrived ■ By mail ■ Decided not to turn in ballot

If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason? (Southern Tier)



Are you confident your ballot is timely received and will be counted? (Southern Tier)



Notable Comments From Southern Tier voters:

Directions

- Make directions much larger and easier to read. (Madison)
- Have absentee ballots reviewed by someone other than elections board workers before sending them out to be sure they are easily understandable with complete instructions. (Madison)
- It seems (via social media) that some people had problems with the two envelopes -- sealing the ballot into one, then placing that into the envelope to be mailed. So instructions may need to be clearer. (Madison)

Ballot Delay

- I completed a request for a mail in ballot and mailed it to the BOE in April. As of 6/15 I had received nothing. I called the BOE that day and asked where my ballot might be. I was told there was no record of my request. I was also told they have my information on record and would register me for an absentee ballot. I did receive the ballot on Friday 6/19. (Chenango)
- Concerned my ballot came 2 weeks after my husband's. Requests Mailed at the same time. (Madison)

Concerns of Whether Ballot Will Count

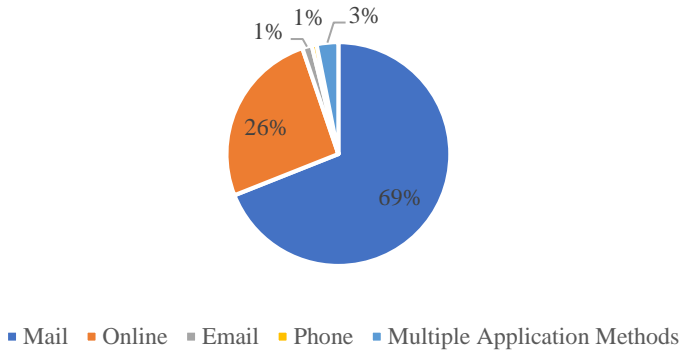
- Have an online process to track your ballot. (Tioga)
- Better publicity and monitoring of the counting process. (Madison)
- When a person applies for an absentee ballot there should be an acknowledgement of same from the BOE. (Chenango)

IX. Finger Lakes

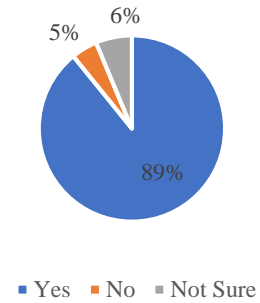
Total Finger Lakes Responses: 289

Counties Included: Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Schuyler, Steuben, Wayne, Tompkins, Yates

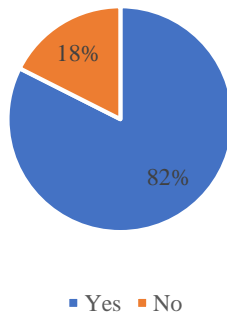
How did you apply to vote absentee?
(Finger Lakes)



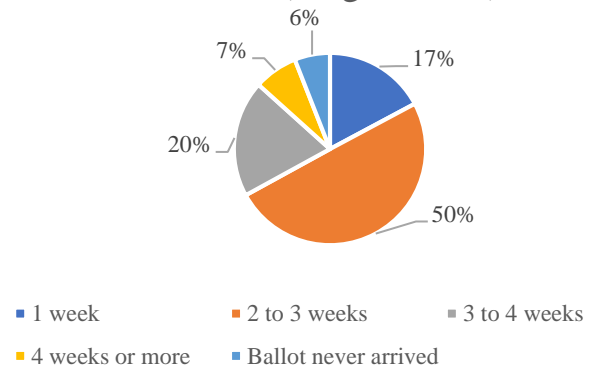
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid? (Finger Lakes)



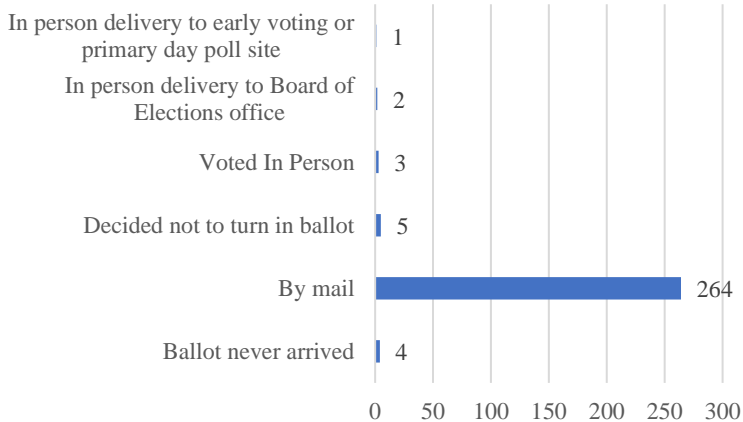
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear? (Finger Lakes)



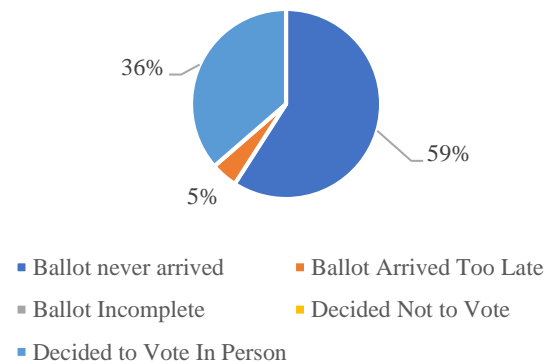
How long did it take to receive your ballot? (Finger Lakes)

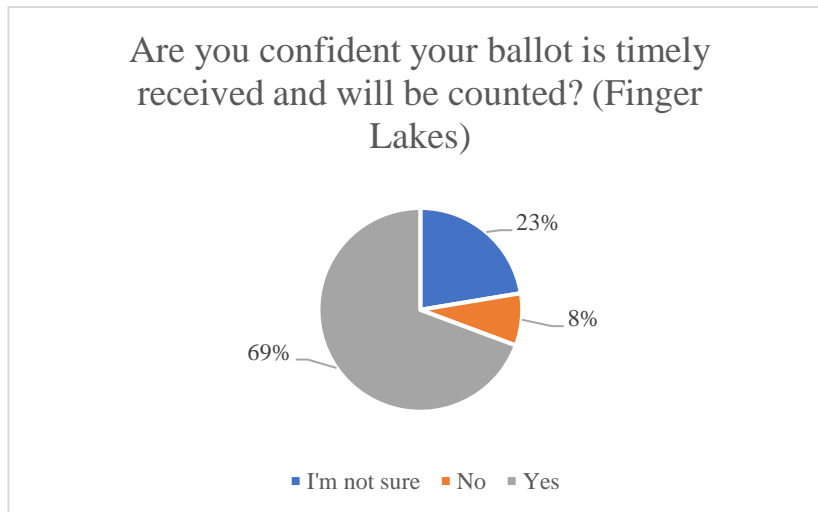


How did you return your completed ballot? (Finger Lakes)



If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason? (Finger Lakes)





Notable Comments From Southern Tier voters:

Directions

- I didn't see instructions about signing the outside of the envelope provided. It should have been more clear. Being a longtime voter and voter inspector helped. If I had never voted before, it could have been confusing. Instructions need to be extremely clear. Use numbered bullet points, very simple language, maybe even a few images to be clear for those new to the process. (Livingston)
- I didn't not know that there would be two separate ballots sent. I also found that directions somewhat confusing as I was filling out the school budget form at the same time and the directions were different. Consistency between all groups would be helpful. (Monroe)
- If many absentee ballots will be used in the future, you might have to add more help and streamline the process. I'm sure it was stressful for you. (Monroe)
- It was confusing with 2 ballots, if possible would prefer all on one. (Monroe)
- One ballot. Emphasis on importance of signature and how anonymity is preserved. Prominently displayed number and website to call with questions - website should include graphics clearly displaying the absentee voting process. Also info that you can still choose to vote in person even though you've received an absentee ballot. I fear that lots of absentee ballots will end up being disqualified. (Monroe)

Ballot Delay

- Speed up the timeline! I was making plans to go to an early voting polling place, which I really didn't want to do, because the Board of Election's press release said not to count on receiving my mail-in ballot. (Monroe)
- My wife and I first applied for absentee ballots by mail with the paper applications we received in the mail, but after a month we hadn't received our ballots, so I then applied online a few days before the June 16th deadline. Luckily we finally received our ballots on Friday June 19th and put them in the mail on Sunday. (Monroe)
- Ballots should arrive sooner so they can be mailed sooner. (Ontario)

Concerns of Whether Ballot Will Count

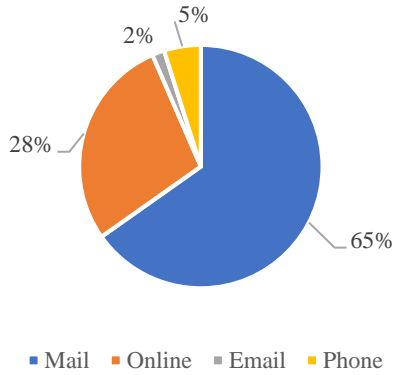
- Some type of verification (e.g. a postcard stating ballot(s) were received and posted) (Monroe)
- Send receipts that ballots were received, but this would create a ton of work for the BOE so maybe this isn't a good idea. (Monroe)

X. Western New York

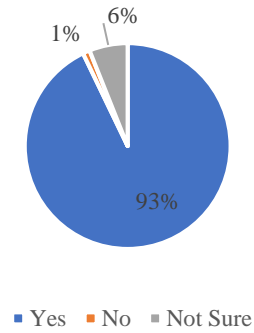
Total Western New York Responses: 185

Counties Included: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, Wyoming

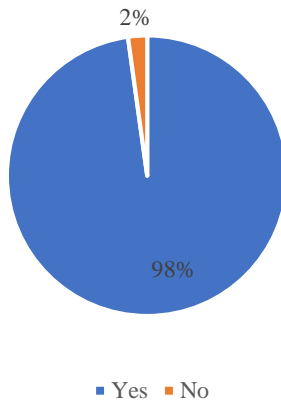
How did you apply to vote absentee?
(Western NY)



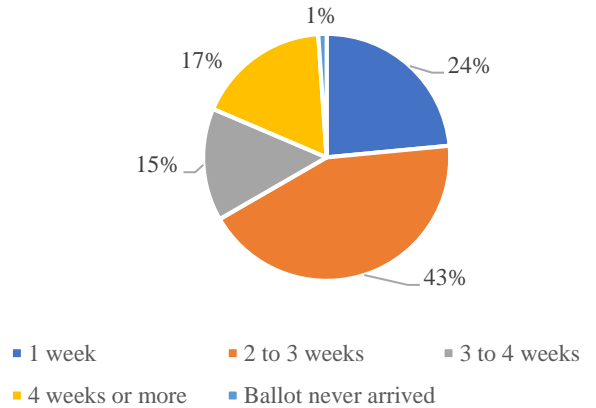
Did your absentee ballot request form and ballot return envelopes come with postage pre-paid? (Western NY)



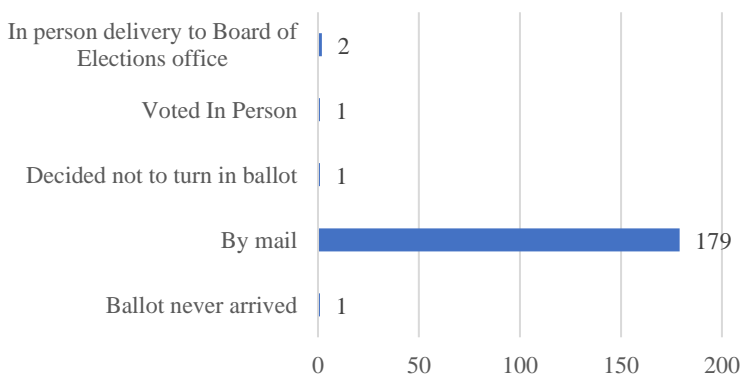
Were the directions to complete and submit your ballot clear? (Western NY)



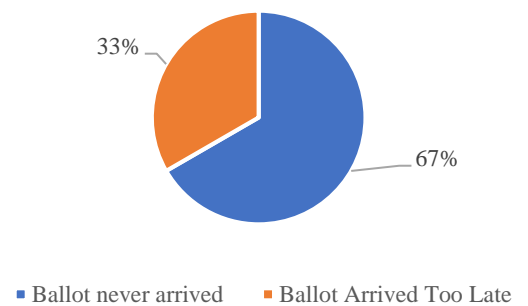
How long did it take to receive your ballot? (Western NY)

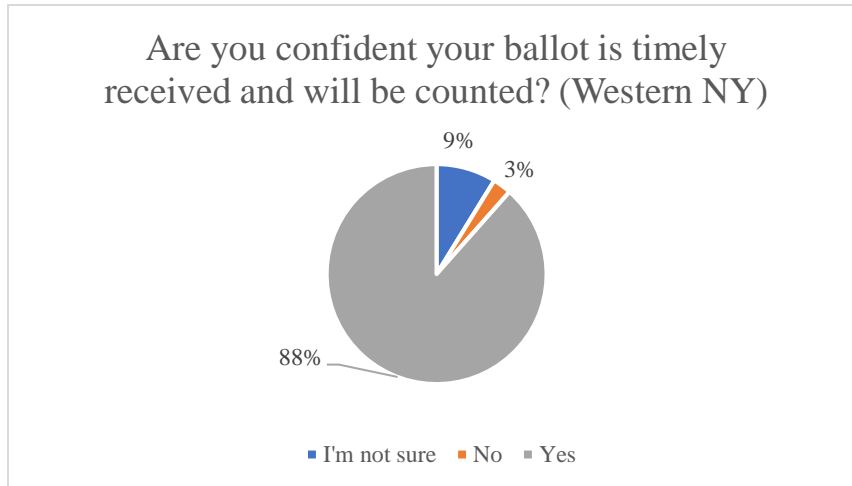


How did you return your completed ballot? (Western NY)



If you did not return your absentee ballot, what was the reason? (Western NY)





Notable Comments From Western New York voters:

Directions

- I had concerns that the ballots were to be placed into specific envelopes and there was too much room for people to mix them up. I contacted the Board of Elections and I believe they will handle this situation appropriately. (Erie)
- Need it translated in many languages and fuller marketing (I know it is costly). (Erie)
- It would be great if there was an easy way to go online and verify my vote was counted. (Erie)

Ballot Delay

- My return envelope had postage paid, my husband's did not. (Genessee)
- Yes! Some people got multiple ballots, I got none. Seems like it will not be a fair vote if my absentee ballot (Erie)

Concerns of Whether Ballot Will Count

- I am wondering if we will confirmation that they were received. (Erie)
- Glue on inside envelope was not strong. Did not want to seal and instructions said it wouldn't count if not sealed. (Erie)
- Is there a way to receive notification that my vote is counted? Like what I would see on the screen after inputting my ballot to the voting machine? (Erie)