

# How to Talk to Someone Who Doesn't Think Mail-in Voting Is Legitimate

The number of Americans voting by mail has [increased steadily](#) over the past few decades, with states such as Utah shifting to elections that are primarily done via mail-in ballots. This year is no different, especially with more people choosing to vote by mail due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trust and confidence in mail-in voting varies widely across political parties. 85% of Democrats believe mail-in voting to be a secure and valid system, while only 28% of Republicans do. Recently, both the USPS and mail-in voting process have featured significantly in the news, and many Americans have underlying concerns about all votes being counted accurately.

Below is a helpful framework to guide conversations on mail-in voting, particularly with people who don't view the process as legitimate or secure. But first, here are a few best practices to keep in mind when engaging in these discussions with others:

**Acknowledge specific concerns and address their questions.** 2020 has been a challenging year, and it's understandable that people have concerns about voting methods that seem new or different to them. Always assume their concerns are founded in reasons that are both important to them and relevant to their everyday life.

**Describe the process and highlight standardized security procedures.** Concerns about the legitimacy of mail-in voting can stem from uncertainty about the process and doubts about the security of sending a ballot through the mail. To help mitigate these concerns, walk the person through the existing security measures (identity verification, bar codes, ballot tracking, etc.) that prevent and catch fraud. Explain that eligible voters must comply with security measures in order to cast an absentee ballot.

**Highlight trusted individuals who are ensuring that the process works.** Emphasize the steps your local communities are taking to make the election safe, secure, and valid. For safety concerns, elevate the recommendations and guidance of local public health officials. When discussing security concerns, mention that election officials and poll volunteers are your neighbors — people who can be trusted to take the security and safety of this election seriously. You can find contact information for local election officials in the [U.S. Vote Foundation's Election Official Directory](#), created by state election administrators.

# FAQs

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## 1. What Is Going On With the United States Postal Service?

Recently, the USPS has undergone significant changes, including a new postmaster general and policies to address budget issues. These big and often rapid changes have caused confusion among postal workers and the American public. The USPS, which has historically been an apolitical institution, has also been dragged into political debates, even as postal workers on the ground continue to work and deliver Americans' mail largely on time.

We know that Americans continue to trust their postal workers: 64% say that postal workers deserve particular praise for their efforts during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Messages that focus on the individuals who deliver the mail (who are often members of the local community) resonate more strongly than discussions about the USPS on a national level.

### DISCUSSION TIPS

- **Ask questions and address specific concerns.** It is understandable that people feel worried about the security of mail-in voting. Ask about their specific concerns and understand the rationale behind their worries.
- **Remind them that the USPS has been consistent in their duty to deliver mail** safely to every address in the United States for over three centuries — since 1775, when it was headed by the first postmaster general and founding father, Benjamin Franklin. 91% of Americans, regardless of political ideology, have [favorable views](#) toward the post office — higher than any other federal agency.
- **Distinguish your local community from the national scene.** Remind people of the reliability of their local mail carrier. Even as views toward the USPS at the federal level may change, people still have high levels of confidence in their local postal workers. The majority of Americans (64%) appreciate postal workers, and consider them essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. Turning the conversation to the workers they know and trust can help alleviate worries about the larger system.

## FAQ

## 2. What Is the History of Mail-in Voting?

Mail-in voting was implemented during the Civil War so that soldiers on the battlefield could cast their ballots for the presidential election. More than 150 years later, this system has expanded so that Americans anywhere in the world can participate in the electoral process. The Americans who have benefitted most consistently from this feature of the U.S. electoral system are members of the military who serve overseas.

### DISCUSSION TIPS

- **Frame the conversation around the resiliency and strength of the mail-in voting system.** Often, people are wary about issues when there are many unknowns. Remind them that we have had this system in place since 1860, and have had 150 years to strengthen it. It is also true that its purpose — to make sure all Americans are heard at the ballot box — remains as legitimate and necessary today as when it was created.

## FAQ

### 3. Why Is Mail-in Voting a Necessary Part of Our Democracy?

Voting is a fundamental aspect of U.S. democracy — one that 74% of Americans, regardless of political ideology, recognize as an important American tradition. 8 in 10 feel a sense of pride in being American when they cast their ballot. Mail-in voting is one of many voting options available to us, and increases voter turnout across the board.

#### DISCUSSION TIPS

- **Broaden the conversation to the topic of voting generally.** When we talk about voting by mail, it's helpful to remember that this method was designed and implemented so that a larger number of Americans could participate in democracy by casting their vote.
- **Frame voting as both a right and a responsibility.** As a country, we have a responsibility to ensure all eligible voters can exercise their right to vote. As individuals, we each have a responsibility to take the necessary steps to comply with voting laws and cast our ballots safely and securely.
- **Make personal connections.** Vote-by-mail will be employed this year by our families, friends, and neighbors who may want to take extra health precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be helpful to frame mail-in voting as an option specifically for those we care about who feel uneasy about voting in person, but still want to fulfill their democratic duty.

## FAQ

#### 4. How Do I Know My Mail-In Ballot Will Be Counted?

We know from our research that people are more comfortable with voting methods that allow them to physically see their votes enter the ballot box. The unseen journey of a ballot from a person's house to the vote-counting machine invokes worry, and understandably so — people want absolute certainty that their vote is being counted.

**DISCUSSION TIPS**

- **Validate their desire for accurate results** by acknowledging that it's okay to be concerned and to ask questions about the security of the election.
- **Cite examples of specific places and situations in which the mail-in voting process has been successful.** People are more open to changing their minds when they see a process implemented successfully. Explaining that voting by mail is a norm for millions of Americans across political ideologies helps to boost confidence in the validity of the method.
  - Ex. "Residents of Utah, Colorado, and Oregon have been successfully voting by mail for many years, with process checks (e.g. signature verification) that have proven effective. These states have elected both Democrat and Republican officials..."
- **Talk through the [specific steps](#) your local community is taking** to ensure that the process of voting by mail is safe and secure.
- **Emphasize that as individuals, we can and should take specific actions to ensure we fill out a mail-in ballot correctly** so that it will not be rejected by election officials. You can use this [bipartisan resource](#) to learn state-by-state rules for mail-in voting.

## FAQ

## 5. Can I Trust the Outcome of the Election if a Majority of Votes Are Cast via Mail-in Ballots?

A vote cast through mail is as valid as a vote cast in person, or a vote dropped off at a polling station. In the 2016 presidential election, almost 1 in 4 Americans voted through absentee or mail-in ballots — that’s almost 35 million voters! Although this year is slightly different, with many more Americans projected to vote by mail because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our system is ready for an increase in mail-in ballots.

### DISCUSSION TIPS

- **Explain the step-by-step process of ballot validation.** People want to understand what happens when a ballot leaves a voter’s hand. Enumerating the multiple validation procedures in place, as explained in this [article](#) from the Bipartisan Policy Center, can clarify questions on how mail-in ballots are kept secure. It’s also important to mention the time it takes to count mail-in and absentee ballots, which may entail a longer wait than usual for final results (precisely because of the multiple validation processes).
- **Emphasize that our country has successfully held elections that heavily utilized mail-in ballots during difficult times,** from the Civil War to World Wars. See our sample op-ed, [Trying Times in History When America Has Held Fair and Safe Elections](#) for more information.
- **Speak to the democratic duty we have** to stay engaged with the process and take the necessary time to count valid votes, whether cast in person or via mail.