

## Absentee Voting in the 2020 Election

### Expanded Absentee Voting Authorization

Connecticut is among the states that require electors to provide a valid reason to vote by absentee ballot. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the General Assembly authorized any eligible elector to vote by absentee ballot in the November 3, 2020, election ([PA 20-3](#), July Special Session, as amended by [PA 20-4](#), Sept. Special Session). This legislation required that absentee ballots be updated by inserting “the sickness of COVID-19” on the inner envelope’s statement as a reason for which electors could vote absentee. As with other types of absentee voters, those who voted by absentee ballot due to COVID-19 had to sign the ballot under penalties of false statement ([CGS § 9-359a](#)).

#### Permissible Reasons to Vote by Absentee Ballot

1. absence from municipality during all hours of voting;
2. illness or physical disability;
3. religious tenets forbid secular activity on the day of the primary, election, or referendum;
4. active service in the U.S. Armed Forces;
5. duties as a primary, election, or referendum official outside of voting district during all hours of voting.

*State Constitution Article VI, § 7 and CGS § 9-135*

According to official results, more than one-third of voters voted by absentee ballot (35.4%) in the 2020 presidential election, compared with less than 8% of voters voting absentee in the 2016 presidential election. This brief highlights the most significant changes to absentee voting procedures for the 2020 state election.

#### Drop Boxes

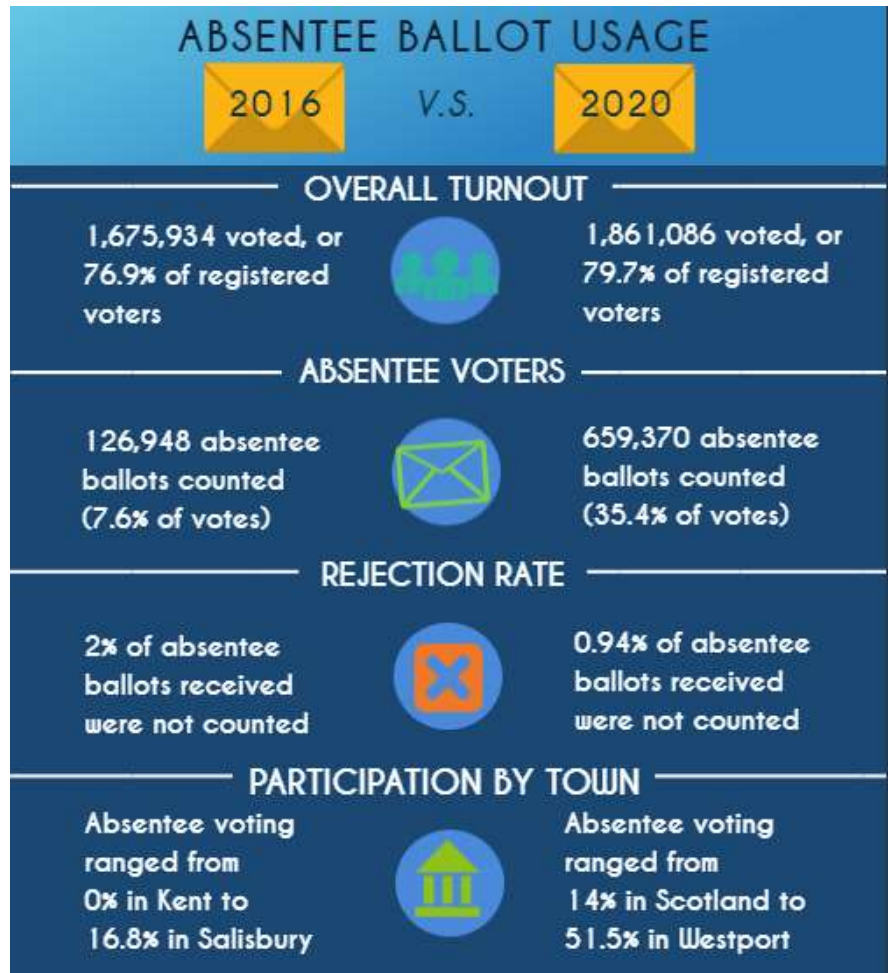
Typically, voters return completed absentee ballots via mail or in-person at their town clerk’s office. For the 2020 state election, voters could also deposit them in secure drop boxes designated by their town clerk for that purpose. The legislation required town clerks to (1) designate the drop boxes following instructions from the secretary of the state (SOTS) and (2) retrieve absentee ballots from the secure drop boxes beginning 29 days before the election (i.e., October 5, 2020), and each weekday thereafter until the polls closed.

## Pre-Counting Procedures & Post-Election Deadlines

For the 2020 state election, the legislature moved up by one week the time at which town clerks could begin sorting returned absentee ballots by district and checking names on the registry list. It thus allowed them to do so beginning two weeks before election day, rather than one week.

The legislature also authorized municipalities to conduct certain absentee ballot pre-counting procedures beginning at 5:00 p.m. on the fourth day before the election (i.e., Friday, October 30, 2020). Generally, these procedures included opening the ballot's outer envelope and verifying that the elector signed the inner envelope, which contains the marked ballot. However, municipalities could not open the inner envelope or count the ballots until election day. Municipalities using these pre-counting procedures had to comply with certain requirements, such as notifying SOTS in advance and obtaining her approval.

For the 2020 state election, the legislature also extended numerous post-election deadlines by 48 hours. Generally, these deadlines related to canvassing and reporting election returns (e.g., submitting a duplicate list of returns to SOTS). It did not change, however, the requirement that moderators electronically submit the preliminary list of election results to SOTS by midnight on election day ([CGS § 9-314](#)).



### Towns with the Greatest Share of Absentee Votes

1. Westport	51.5%	6. Bloomfield	46.3%
2. West Hartford	49.5%	7. Chester	46.3%
3. Old Lyme	48.2%	8. Weston	45.4%
4. Salisbury	47.2%	9. Woodbridge	45.4%
5. Madison	46.7%	10. Ridgefield	45.1%

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