Debunking the absentee / vote by mail fraud and abuse argument

One of the most puzzling, frustrating things we run into at the **National Vote at Home Coalition** is the accusation that making absentee ballots far more accessible, much less allowing "Vote at Home" elections in which every voter receives a mailed-out ballot will result in material fraud or abuse. So, let's set the record straight, with data rather than fear.

In the 2016 presidential election, more than 33 million voters, roughly 1 in 4, cast their votes via mailed-out ballots. This was one of the most contentious elections in recent American history, and even alleged instances of mailed-out ballot fraud, much less proven examples, were virtually nil.

Three states, Colorado, Washington, and Oregon, now hold their elections _entirel_y by mailed-out ballots. So do 27 of the 29 counties in Utah; 31 of the 53 counties in North Dakota; five counties (and growing) in California; and the City of Anchorage where about 40% of Alaska's voters reside.

Add all this together, and since 2000 more than 250 million votes have been cast via mailed-out ballots, in all 50 states, without a whiff of serious election fraud. That's one heck of a sample size to overlook in the "I'm worried about fraud and abuse" argument. Also note those states above are red, purple and blue. This is not a partisan issue.

Understanding how absentee or "vote by mail" ballots work demonstrates why this is such a secure way to manage the voting process.

When the ballot packets are sent out, they contain both a "blank" ballot as well as return envelopes that are individualized by voter name and address. After a voted ballot is returned in its individualized envelope, county voting administrators are required to match the signature on the return envelope with the signature on that voter's registration card. Only then can a ballot be counted. This process assures authenticity.

Even attempting to forge a signature, coerce a voter, or commit any other type of election fraud with mailed-out ballots is a felony in Vote at Home states, subject to 5 years prison time. And to succeed at changing a single vote, any would-be ballot thief either has to:

   a. Intercept the ballot before the voter gets it, and then successfully forge the voter's signature, which is nearly impossible; or
   b. Intercept an already sealed return ballot envelope, steam it open, change the votes on the ballot; and then reseal it.

It's a fool's errand, for the benefit of one vote changed, for the risk of a 5-year jail sentence. Possible? Of course. Likely? Not at all. Oregon has mailed-out more than 100 million ballots since 2000, with about a dozen cases of proven fraud.

In universal Vote at Home states or counties, widely available drop boxes and voting centers also help voters avoid even the tiniest risk of "post-voting, pre-mailing" tampering. Voters who might not want to return their ballots by mail, for any reason, can simply take them in person to those secure ballot drop sites, or go to a Voting Center to be issued their ballot. Indeed, it turns out most voters in Vote at Home states prefer this "Vote at Home and drop off" model over literal "vote by mail." Hence, the name of our organization.

The "spousal/partner coercion" argument is similarly misguided, if not an outright "electoral myth." While the scourge of abuse certainly exists in our society, there's zero evidence of it actually affecting voting even in 100% Vote at Home or high absentee states, much less at greater rates than in more polling place dependent states. And with absentee ballots already available in all 50 states, after an election wouldn't we already be seeing or hearing about such spousal "political abusers" already?

Finally, having dispensed with the lack of any real issue with fraud and abuse, let's talk about the benefits. For voters it means no standing in long lines, no fighting traffic or bad weather, no worries about child care or work pressures getting in the way, no confusion about early voting times or places, and no confusion about proper ID since the signature matching solves that.

The result of this convenience is voter turnout that runs 10% points higher in Presidential years, 20% points or more in mid-terms. In party primary elections, the differential is even larger. And because voters can take their time and study their voter pamphlets while they vote, there is more down ballot engagement, too.

For taxpayers, full Vote at Home elections have another huge advantage: they save money, about $2-$5 per voter per election. Government entities do not have to staff and run parallel in-person and absentee processes. No balky voting machines and no running out of ballots. By definition, Vote at Home provides a verifiable paper trail of ballots that can be carefully scrutinized if a recount is required. And since the vote counting machines are centralized in county facilities, and off-line from the Internet, they are much harder to hack.

Secure elections, higher turnout, lower costs. That's what Vote at Home, or even just improved absentee access offers. It's time for all states to move forward with this. www.voteathome.org

For more definitive data on this subject see research done by the Heritage Foundation: https://www.heritage.org/voterfraud/search?name=&state=All&year=&case_type=All&fraud_type=237 61

It shows 180 cases of "absentee ballot model" fraud over 20 years across the entire USA, or about 9-10 per year. And that number has not risen as the use of mailed-out ballots has increased dramatically. Surprisingly, the largest numbers tend to come from states without a "no-excuse" absentee policy. And the 100% VAH states are near the bottom of the list.