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# District of Columbia 2020 Election Administration

**November 16, 2021**

A report by Fors Marsh Group LLC for the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor





November 16, 2021

The Hon. Muriel Bowser  
Mayor of the District of Columbia  
The John A. Wilson Building  
Washington, DC 20004

The Hon. Phil Mendelson  
Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia  
The John A. Wilson Building  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser and Chairman Mendelson:

I am pleased to share this report, DC Election Administration 2020, the second of three reports evaluating the 2020 elections in the District of Columbia. The report produced under contract by the Fors Marsh Group (FMG) is a comprehensive review of how elections were conducted throughout 2020 including the use of mail ballots, early voting, and the production of final results -- all taking place amid the extraordinary challenge of a pandemic.

A third report nearing completion by the ODCA staff is a statutorily required financial audit of the Fair Elections Program. The first report in the series, also by FMG, was a look at the impact that public campaign financing had in its first year of operation, Fair Elections Program Amplified "Voices of Everyday Voters."

The Office of the D.C. Auditor appreciates the cooperation and collaboration of the D.C. Board of Elections as well as the many candidates, campaign staff members, and other community stakeholders who shared their views on the conduct of elections during a pandemic. And we appreciate the expertise on election administration demonstrated by the FMG team. We hope the conclusions and recommendations in this series of reports will assist District policymakers as they seek to improve access to elections and the overall experience of voters.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathleen Patterson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathleen Patterson  
District of Columbia Auditor

cc: D.C. Councilmembers

REPORT

# District of Columbia 2020 Election Administration

November 2021

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2020 election in the District of Columbia was uniquely challenging for election officials and voters alike. Already facing substantial policy changes in many aspects of the election process, the DC Board of Elections (DCBOE) was forced to make significant changes as a result of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused confusion and problems for some voters during the June primary as did the failure of the District’s online voter registration app in late summer.

In the wake of the pandemic, DCBOE shifted its election process from primarily in person to a predominantly vote-by-mail experience supported by vote centers and voting drop boxes. These changes appear to have been embraced by District voters, who cast their ballots by mail at a high rate in the November 2020 general election (about two thirds of the ballots cast were by-mail ballots). Overall, data suggest that the District was in line or compared favorably with states nationwide on key indicators of effective administration of the 2020 general election.

These changes did not come without some difficulties locally, however:

- The June primary was marred by long lines and uncertainty about how to request, cast, and return an absentee ballot as COVID-19 spread;
- In the November general election, the high rates of undeliverable by-mail ballots as well as confusion about the process for requesting, returning, and tracking mail ballots left many voters frustrated—and sharing their complaints via social media;
- Stakeholders mentioned on social media and elsewhere an ongoing lack of communication by DCBOE and that rather than proactively addressing issues and informing voters of changes DCBOE reacted to events “too little too late”; and
- These challenges disproportionately impacted voters in certain wards, with Ward 8 residents, in particular, experiencing more difficulties with the by-mail voting process.

Despite these difficulties, however, DCBOE—which had to contend with its own COVID outbreak early in the year—managed to make the voting process work for over half a million District residents in the 2020 general election. Many constituents acknowledged on social media that voting on Election Day during the general election was easy and fast.

DCBOE should use the lessons learned – especially the need to 1) ensure that voters can register to vote or update their voting address, 2) create reliable systems for voters to request, return and track a ballot, and 3) communicate clearly with voters about the entire process – to build upon the successes it did have in 2020 while looking for further opportunities to implement best practices on registration and mail voting nationwide in 2022 and beyond.

# INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 was always shaping up to be an eventful election year for the District of Columbia. The Council of the District of Columbia had adopted numerous changes to its election policy, including expansion of voter registration opportunities,<sup>1</sup> which presented challenges for implementation in a presidential election year when turnout and interest are usually at their highest.

Then COVID-19 hit.

Faced with the task of implementing new policies in a rapidly changing environment where public health became a high priority, the DC Board of Elections (DCBOE) encountered unprecedented challenges administering the 2020 primary election. Approximately 8 weeks before Election Day, DCBOE was forced to shift course to create and execute a new plan for the June primary election that protected the health and safety of both voters and personnel. Shortly after announcing a shift to encourage a primarily vote-by-mail election, stay-at-home orders, as well as several staff members becoming sickened by COVID-19, further limited staff and resources.<sup>2</sup>

Coordinated outreach campaigns encouraged absentee voting as an alternative to casting a ballot in person,<sup>3</sup> and two absentee ballot request forms and pre-paid envelopes were included as part of the Primary Election Voter Guide.<sup>4</sup> As a result of these efforts, more than 92,000 absentee ballot requests were submitted to DCBOE for the primary election (over four times the number processed in previous primary elections). However, the IT systems and absentee ballot processes—which had been established a decade earlier when DC first implemented “no excuse” absentee voting—were unable to handle this dramatic increase in request volume, and the Vote4DC app failed to function as expected. In addition, because DCBOE did not yet have a contract in place with a mailing house, absentee ballot requests had to be processed by hand, further exacerbating staffing challenges.<sup>5</sup>

There were also widespread reports of residents not receiving their requested absentee ballots, with at least 1,100 residents claiming that they had not arrived.<sup>6</sup> In reaction to complaints about missing absentee ballots, DCBOE used alternative methods for delivery, including

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<sup>1</sup> D.C. Code § 1-1001.07.

<sup>2</sup> DC Board of Elections. June 16, 2020. DCBOE June 2020 Primary Election Recap.

<https://www.dcboe.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=64981f9e-9b7f-44ae-90e1-b8b5854c72d0>

<sup>3</sup> DCBOE. June 2, 2020, Primary Election After-Action Report. <https://dcboe.org/getattachment/Data-Resources-Forms/June-2-2020-Primary-Election-Issues-Oversight-Response.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US>

<sup>4</sup> DC Board of Elections. District of Columbia Voter Guide to the June 2, 2020 Primary Election.

<https://www.dcboe.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=70ac2ee8-edb0-4665-acf0-19e1b77216d6>

<sup>5</sup> DC Board of Elections. June 16, 2020. DCBOE June 2020 Primary Election Recap.

<https://www.dcboe.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=64981f9e-9b7f-44ae-90e1-b8b5854c72d0>

<sup>6</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections’ Performance in Conducting the June 2, 2020, Primary Election. June 19, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5493](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5493)

overnight postage, hand delivery, and offering some voters the option to cast a ballot via email, granting them access to the existing OmniBallot Online service that had previously been used only for certain voters with disabilities and overseas military members.<sup>7</sup> However, concerns about how DCBOE processed ballots remained, as did questions about availability and procedures for use of the email ballot system, which was not advertised by DCBOE as an option for those who had yet to receive their absentee ballot on the eve of the primary election.<sup>8</sup>

Although DCBOE efforts to encourage by-mail voting led to far fewer ballots cast in person compared to previous primary elections, options for in-person voting were cut dramatically. With nearly 1,700 poll workers opting out of service for the primary, DCBOE was unable to open and staff the previously planned 14 early vote centers and 144 Election Day precincts, and instead relied on only 20 vote centers that operated both during early voting and on Election Day. In addition, personnel were limited to 10 staff per location to conform with social distancing recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>9</sup> Many voters who either did not request an absentee ballot or did not receive their requested ballot for the June primary confronted long lines when attempting to vote in person on Election Day, with reports of wait times as long as 6 hours at some vote centers, and the DCBOE's web-based line tracker seemed to dramatically underestimate wait times.<sup>10</sup>

These issues were particularly problematic in Ward 8, where many residents complained of failure to receive a voter guide with instructions and forms to request an absentee ballot, or even their absentee ballot after requesting it. Indeed, Wards 7 and 8, which have predominantly Black and low-income populations, lagged other areas in absentee requests for the June primary.<sup>11</sup> These concerns prompted a lawsuit against DCBOE by two Ward 8 residents, which was later dismissed, alleging that the voting procedures adopted in response to the pandemic violated the Voting Rights Act by failing to take into account historical inequities and current conditions in the ward.<sup>12</sup>

The DC Voting Access Report on the June 2, 2020, Primary Election found conditions at voting centers that would have created challenges for voters with disabilities. Staff to support curbside voting, which enables voters to check in and cast a ballot outside of a polling place without getting out of their vehicle, was not available at 30% of vote centers during the

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<sup>7</sup> DCBOE June 2020 Primary Election Recap. June 16, 2020. <https://www.dcboe.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=64981f9e-9b7f-44ae-90e1-b8b5854c72d0>

<sup>8</sup> Elissa Silverman, At-Large DC Councilmember. Letter to the DCBOE on Missing 2020 Absentee Ballots. June 2, 2020. [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/silverman/pages/531/attachments/original/1591195380/2020-06-02\\_BOE\\_Letter\\_on\\_Absentee\\_Ballots.pdf?1591195380](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/silverman/pages/531/attachments/original/1591195380/2020-06-02_BOE_Letter_on_Absentee_Ballots.pdf?1591195380)

<sup>9</sup> DC Board of Elections. June 16, 2020. DCBOE June 2020 Primary Election Recap. <https://www.dcboe.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=64981f9e-9b7f-44ae-90e1-b8b5854c72d0>

<sup>10</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections' Performance in Conducting the June 2, 2020, Primary Election. June 19, 2020. [http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5493](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5493)

<sup>11</sup> DCBOE Press Release. May 28, 2020. <https://www.dcboe.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=5cbb6cae-1923-46db-9322-140e336fa591>

<sup>12</sup> Robinson v. Board of Elections, 1:20-cv-1364 (D.C. Superior Court) (2020) <https://electionlawblog.org/wp-content/uploads/DC-Robinson-20200521-complaint.pdf> (Dismissed with prejudice on June 30, 2020.)



primary.<sup>13</sup> Disability Rights DC found that 50% of voting locations were operationally inaccessible, including having insufficient signage, failure to direct people to accessible entrances, and having heavy unpropped doors, locked metal gates, or lack of privacy at the machines.<sup>14</sup>

Although election policies and procedures were rapidly adjusted in response to risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, these changes and the voting options available in the 2020 election were not always clearly communicated to District residents. DCBOE contracted with an advertising firm to execute an extensive Vote Safe DC outreach campaign, which they report included several hundred radio ads, 27 community meetings, over 3,000 television commercials, email blasts to nearly 200,000 registered voters with an email address on file, and other outreach activities. But some voters, including Councilmembers and other stakeholders testifying at a hearing on the primary election, expressed concern that they never encountered these advertisements or messages which Council Judiciary and Public Safety Committee Chairperson Charles Allen referred to as “underwhelming public outreach.”<sup>15</sup>

Among concerns about communications efforts expressed during roundtable hearings were that voter registration agencies (other than Department of Motor Vehicles [DMV] and correctional facilities) were not promoting registration, as required; the lack of a dedicated assistance phoneline or email address made it difficult to get basic information, especially support in the days leading up to the primary election; and that communication materials lacked clarity about key points such as when voting starts, what to expect, when ballots should arrive, what to do if a ballot doesn’t arrive, options in place for in-person voting, and locations of drop boxes and vote centers.

In response to issues with absentee balloting and long lines for in-person voting observed during the primary, and also to encourage as many people as possible to vote by mail during the pandemic, the DC Council passed the “General Election Preparations Temporary Amendment Act of 2020.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections’ Performance in Conducting the June 2, 2020, Primary Election. June 19, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5493](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5493)

<sup>14</sup> Disability Rights D.C. September 18, 2020. DC Voting Access Report on the June 2, 2020, Primary Election.

<http://www.uls-dc.org/media/1216/drdc-dc-voting-access-report-june-2-primary-9-18-2020-final.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections’ Performance in Conducting the June 2, 2020, Primary Election. June 19, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5493](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5493)

<sup>16</sup> General Election Preparations Temporary Amendment Act of 2020, L23-0167, <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/laws/23-167.html>. Effective from Dec 23, 2020, Expired on Aug 04, 2021. An emergency version of this legislation, the Open Polling Places Emergency Amendment Act of 2020, Act A23-0382, Expired on Nov 10, 2020.

This legislation required the DCBOE to:

- Operate 80 polling places for the general election;
- Among the 80 polling places, include a polling place for individuals incarcerated at the Central Detention Facility and Correctional Treatment Facility;
- Mail every registered voter an absentee ballot and postage-paid return envelope;
- Publish and mail a paper voter guide; and
- Email registered voters (for those whom the Board maintains an email address) at least once with an electronic voter guide and lay-friendly information about the general election.

In addition, this act required voter registration agencies to promote DCBOE's plans for the general election, and removed some requirements related to public postings during the pandemic.

All registered voters were mailed an absentee ballot for the November 3, 2020, general election, and in-person voting options were also expanded to avoid issues with lines experienced during the primary election. This included expanded early and Election Day voting sites and the establishment of "super vote centers" at large venues that could allow processing more voters in a shorter time span. For the general election, voters seeking to vote in person could vote early at any one of 32 early voting centers, including six super vote centers. On Election Day, voters could use any of the 95 vote centers operating on Election Day (which included the 32 vote centers open during early voting). In addition, DCBOE provided 55 secure drop boxes placed throughout the city that could be used to return by-mail ballots.<sup>17</sup>

To improve accessibility for disabled and elderly voters for the general election, DCBOE promoted use of OmniBallot, an electronic ballot marking system, reaching out to voters who indicated a disability on registration forms and working with partner groups focused on those with disabilities to make them aware of this option. DCBOE also arranged ballot pick-up and smaller drop boxes at senior homes, by request.<sup>18</sup> Due to limitations associated with the pandemic, DCBOE was unable to establish vote centers at correctional facilities. However, DCBOE continued to work closely with the Department of Corrections to distribute informational materials, provide voter registration forms to all residents, and enable mailings, including the Voter Guide and ballots, to reach registered voters.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> DCBOE November 3, 2020, General Election After-Action Report.

<https://dcboe.org/dcboe/media/PDFFiles/After-Action-Report-Board-Overview-03112021.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections' Preparations for the November 3, 2020, General Election. September 10, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5633](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5633)

<sup>19</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections' Preparations for the November 3, 2020, General Election. September 10, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5633](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5633)

DCBOE also developed plans to improve communications and outreach efforts, including a large-scale outreach campaign with more frequent, but simplified messages.<sup>20</sup> The “Vote Safe DC” campaign for the general election included radio, TV, print, and digital ads, public service announcements (PSA), multiple postcard mailings, email notifications, and other forms of continuous outreach to members of the public to ensure they understood options for voting, any changes to operations, and where they could find additional information. DCBOE communications made a strategic shift from “Election Day” to “Election Week” to encourage use of variety of options, including early voting and vote-by-mail, and to avoid issues with lines and crowds at vote centers on Election Day.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the PR firm tasked with preparing and implementing outreach campaign activities, DCBOE established a working group of community stakeholders to obtain more feedback and input on outreach materials and efforts. However, some working group members complained that they were not given materials with sufficient time to provide feedback. For example, they received the Table of Contents for the updated voter guide, but none of the content of the Guide itself. Additionally, in reviewing the DCBOE website, working group members found many errors and omissions, and when key information was provided, it was often not presented in a user-friendly way. For example, information about drop box and vote center locations was provided as a list, organized by ward. When DCBOE later created a searchable Google Map version of this list, modeled after those that ANC commissioners and members of the public had created, it was initially shared only on Twitter and added to the website after this oversight was pointed out by working group members.<sup>22</sup>

There was also confusion among voters about voter list maintenance and concern about undeliverable ballot rates. An August mailer sent to DC residents to confirm registration address was confusing and had poor instructions about sending information back to DCBOE, particularly to inform DCBOE of address changes.<sup>23</sup> The shutoff of the District’s online voter registration mobile app in late summer also caught many by surprise and led to confusion about whether or not online registration was still available.<sup>24</sup> Later, as by-mail ballots were returned by voters, the ballot tracking system provided status updates using language such as “ballot returned,” which was unclear to voters. Voters were also not given clear guidance about the

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<sup>20</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections’ Performance in Conducting the June 2, 2020, Primary Election. June 19, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5493](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5493)

<sup>21</sup> DCBOE November 3, 2020, General Election After-Action Report.

<https://dcboe.org/dcboe/media/PDFFiles/After-Action-Report-Board-Overview-03112021.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections’ Preparations for the November 3, 2020, General Election. September 10, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5633](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5633)

<sup>23</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections’ Preparations for the November 3, 2020, General Election. September 10, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5633](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5633)

<sup>24</sup> [After Mishaps With App, Online Voter Registration Is No Longer Available in D.C. \(dcist.com\); DC voter app no longer available because of technical problems \(Wtop.com\)](#)

cure process through which they could correct issues that might cause their by-mail ballot to be rejected.<sup>25</sup>

Like other election boards that had to find alternative strategies and locations for ballot counting to accommodate the high volume of absentee ballots and also maintain social distancing,<sup>26</sup> DCBOE had to adjust ballot counting procedures based on the large-scale changes in how District voters cast their ballots for the 2020 general election. In particular, the shift to paper ballots led to an increase in the number of physical ballots to be counted. In addition, the transition away from individual precincts to vote centers resulted in an increase in the quantity of digital storage devices to be processed. Like many jurisdictions nationwide, in response to COVID-19 concerns and social distancing requirements, as well as to accommodate the sharp increase in paper ballots and the use of additional equipment to process higher levels of by-mail ballots, DCBOE conducted ballot counting at its warehouse rather than at its headquarters. It is unclear whether this shift in procedure was communicated to the public or if any candidates or other organizations requested access to the alternate counting locations pursuant to District regulations (DCMR 3-706).

## Election Policy

This report assesses the overall performance of the 2020 DC election, including procedures used and the outcomes of administrative practices, focusing particularly on a few key elements of election policy in the District of Columbia.

### *Registration*

With the exception of North Dakota, all states require some form of voter registration as a prerequisite to voting, each with its own set of rules governing who may register to vote, and when and how they are permitted to do so. In DC, registration is open to any U.S. citizen who has maintained a residence in the District for at least 30 days preceding the next election and does not claim voting residence or right to vote in any state or territory, is at least 17 years of age and who will be 18 years of age on or before the next general election and has not been found by a court of law to be legally incompetent to vote.<sup>27</sup>

DC allows preregistration of eligible 16-year-old residents. Preregistered voters are automatically registered to vote upon turning 18.<sup>28</sup> Preregistration is an option in 48 other states and territories in the United States, but 30 of them require that the voter is at least 17 years old or older.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> [Despite Some Hiccups, Voting By Mail Seems Popular With D.C. Residents – WAMU; Let’s Talk Ballots – Drop Box Tracking and some folks still haven’t received theirs \(PoPville\)](#)

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Election Assistance Commission. August 17, 2020. 2020 EAVS and 2020 Elections Lessons Learned Roundtable & Livestream [https://youtu.be/fpls\\_G\\_1bCM](https://youtu.be/fpls_G_1bCM)

<sup>27</sup> D.C. Code § 1–1001.02.

<sup>28</sup> D.C. Code § 1–1001.07.

<sup>29</sup> Five states require that the pre-registrant is 17.5 years old, and the other 25 states require the pre registrant to be at least 17 years of age. See Policy Survey results in chapter 2 of the EAVS for more details: [https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_library/files/2020\\_EAVS\\_Report\\_Final\\_508c.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/2020_EAVS_Report_Final_508c.pdf)

In 2018, DC implemented an Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) program through the DMV. As part of this program, any DMV application automatically serves as an application to register to vote or update registration records, unless the applicant opts out of this registration option. Information is electronically transmitted from the DMV to the DCBOE so that registration records can be added or updated.<sup>30</sup>

Registration may occur by mail, online, or at one of several designated voter registration agencies (VRA).<sup>31</sup> Registration forms to submit by mail are also available at public libraries, Metropolitan Police Department offices and fire stations.<sup>32</sup>

Forty-two states and the District of Columbia offered online voter registration for the 2020 election cycle.<sup>33</sup> Online registration has been offered in the District since 2015. This type of registration allows residents to complete their voter registration—or update their existing registration—through a web-based system that does not require any paper form to be submitted to DCBOE. Only DC and seven other states allow voters to use online registration without the need to have a driver’s license or other state-issued ID.<sup>34</sup> The District had been using the web-based and mobile application, Vote4DC, to process online registrations; however, after increased use in 2020 for the primary elections exposed some limitations and compatibility issues, DCBOE shut down the registration app for security reasons in August 2020. The registration app was replaced about two weeks later with an online fillable form available at the DCBOE website.<sup>35</sup> This form allows DC residents to complete the registration application fully online and sign with a mouse or touchpad on their electronic devices. In addition to online registration, DC offers lookup tools on its website that allow voters to check their registration status; view voter-specific ballot information; check the status of mail and UOCAVA ballot delivery, return, and processing; and check the status of provisional ballot processing.<sup>36</sup>

Although the formal registration period ends 21 days before an election, DC also allows for same day registration (SDR) to allow residents to register to vote and cast a ballot on the same day. According to the Board of Elections, SDR was allowed during early voting beginning in 2010. This option was formally authorized for the 2020 cycle, so eligible DC residents could go to any early voting center or polling location on Election Day and both register to vote and cast their ballot.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.nass.org/sites/default/files/reports/nass-report-voter-reg-maintenance-final-dec17.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> In addition to the DMV and DCBOE, other VRAs in the District include the Office on Aging, Department of Human Services, Department of Health, Department of Corrections, Department of Youth Services, Department of Developmental and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Health Care Finance, Department of Park and Recreation, Department on Disability Services, District of Columbia Public Libraries, District of Columbia Public Schools, and the Health Benefit Exchange Authority.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.dcboe.org/FAQS/Voter-Registration>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/same-day-registration.aspx>

<sup>34</sup> Election Administration and Voting Survey 2020:

[https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_library/files/2020\\_EAVS\\_Report\\_Final\\_508c.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/2020_EAVS_Report_Final_508c.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> [https://forms.dc.gov/f/DC\\_Voter\\_Registration\\_Form](https://forms.dc.gov/f/DC_Voter_Registration_Form)

<sup>36</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>; see also <http://dcboe.org>



In addition to DC, another 28 states and territories allow for some form of SDR, 16 of which allow for SDR during early voting and Election Day, as DC does.<sup>37</sup>

In 2018, individuals who were convicted of a felony and who were subsequently incarcerated were removed from District voter rolls. However, in 2020, criminal convictions were no longer a reason to remove a resident from the registration rolls. Only another two states and two territories (Maine, Vermont, Guam, and Puerto Rico) had a policy in 2020 in which criminal convictions did not limit a person's right to vote.<sup>38</sup>

### *List Maintenance*

In election administration, "list maintenance" is the process by which an election office cleans and updates its voter rolls to ensure that only eligible voters are on the rolls and that their information is accurate. Federal law provides parameters for this process via the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993.<sup>39</sup>

DCBOE receives real-time, electronic updates from the DMV related to voter registration activity, including new registrations and updates to existing registrations (such as changes of address or name). DCBOE also receives death record updates, which are used to flag registered voters who may need to be removed from rolls, on a quarterly basis.<sup>40</sup> DCBOE also uses the U.S. Postal Service's (USPS) National Change of Address records to identify voters who may have moved from their current registration address. It also participates, along with 30 other states, with the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) to help identify ineligible voters as well as those who are eligible but not yet registered to vote.<sup>41</sup>

For registration records flagged as potentially needing updates or removal, DCBOE sends registration confirmation notices to voters requesting that they confirm their address. If this confirmation notice is returned by USPS with a new address for a voter within the District, existing registration records are updated to reflect this new address and DCBOE sends a notice alerting the voter to this change. If confirmation notices are returned to the board, either by USPS with notification that the voter has moved outside the District or is returned as undeliverable, the voter is moved to the inactive registration list. Inactive registrations are removed from the rolls if no response is received to a follow-up notification from DCBOE and the voter does not vote in an election during the next two election cycles.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

<sup>38</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

<sup>39</sup> 52 U.S.C. 20501. See also <https://www.justice.gov/crt/national-voter-registration-act-1993-nvra> (summary).

<sup>40</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

<sup>41</sup> <https://ericstates.org/>

<sup>42</sup> 52 U.S.C. 20501. See also <https://www.nass.org/sites/default/files/reports/nass-report-voter-reg-maintenance-final-dec17.pdf>

### *By-Mail Voting*

Since 2010, the District has allowed what is commonly referred to as no-excuse absentee voting, meaning any registered voter may request a by-mail (absentee) ballot without providing a specific reason for doing so. Twenty-nine states and DC have a no-excuse absentee voting policy, and an additional four states issued a temporary authorization of no-excuse absentee voting during the 2020 general election.<sup>43</sup>

For the 2020 general election, DC shifted to an all-vote-by-mail system, meaning a ballot was automatically mailed to all registered voters in the active list without them first having to submit a request for a by-mail ballot. Five states and DC temporarily shifted to all vote by mail to conduct the 2020 general election, and an additional five states—Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington—have implemented all vote by mail on a permanent basis.<sup>44</sup>

By-mail ballots could be returned using a pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope, or dropped off at one of the District’s 55 dedicated ballot drop boxes. By-mail ballots are required to be returned by Election Day but are accepted up to 10 days after an election as long as the returned ballot is postmarked by Election Day.<sup>45</sup> For the purposes of this report, the term “by-mail voting” refers to all ballots that were sent to a voter so that they could complete the voting process remotely, independently of whether they then returned their mail ballot via the USPS or other return options such as designated drop-box or other drop off location.

For the 2020 general election, DCBOE implemented intelligent barcode technology. A unique barcode, which could be linked to a voter, was printed on both the ballot delivery and return envelopes. This barcode could be scanned at USPS facilities and DCBOE, enabling ballots to be tracked throughout the delivery and return process.<sup>46</sup> This information about the status of a by-mail ballot could be accessed by voters using the ballot tracking system available on the DCBOE website.<sup>47</sup> Only six states and DC offered a centralized, statewide ballot tracking system in 2020.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> NCSL. May 1, 2020. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vopp-table-1-states-with-no-excuse-absentee-voting.aspx>

<sup>44</sup> NCSL. November 3, 2020. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-mail-voting-policies-in-effect-for-the-2020-election.aspx>

<sup>45</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

<sup>46</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections’ Preparations for the November 3, 2020 General Election. September 10, 2020. [http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5633](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5633)

<sup>47</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections’ Preparations for the November 3, 2020 General Election. September 10, 2020. [http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5633](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5633)

<sup>48</sup> The National Vote at Home Institute. What Happened in American Elections 2020? 2020 Wrap Document [https://4b67do18vbmiwnq4tb3tg4t0-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NVAHI\\_wrapdoc\\_07.pdf](https://4b67do18vbmiwnq4tb3tg4t0-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NVAHI_wrapdoc_07.pdf)

The District requires that returned by-mail ballots contain the voter's signature. Returned by-mail ballots are put through a mail ballot sorter that scans the voter's signature and voter ID barcode, which are then loaded into the voter registration system so that a voter is given credit for returning a ballot. Signature verification is conducted to confirm that the signature on the envelope matches the signature in the voter registration file. If a signature is missing from the envelope or does not match the signature on file, DCBOE sends a letter to the voter alerting them to the signature issue. The voter then has until 10 days after Election Day (November 13, 2020) to correct or "cure" the issue and have their ballot counted. The ballot tracking system, available on the DCBOE website, also provided information about ballot status as it was being processed in 2020.<sup>49</sup>

### *In-Person Voting*

The District currently offers voters the opportunity to vote in person during a 7- to 10-day early voting period. For the 2020 general election, New Jersey was the only state that did not offer some option for in-person voting during a pre-election, early voting period.<sup>50</sup>

Most District voters in the active registration list are not required to present identification to vote in person. Only those using SDR, as well as first-time voters who registered online or by mail and did not provide a proof of residence when registering, must provide proof of residence before voting.<sup>51</sup> In addition to DC, only 15 other states report that voters in the active registration list do not need to present any form of identity verification documents to vote in person if they already provided proof of residence when registering to vote.<sup>52</sup> Conversely, seven states have strict voter identification laws for in-person voting, meaning a government-issued, photo identification is required to vote. Other states require some identification to be presented, but do not limit this to government-issued photo IDs.<sup>53</sup>

The District used vote centers on Election Day in the primary and general election for the first time in 2020. This meant that voters in DC were able to cast a ballot at any vote center

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<sup>49</sup> Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. Public Oversight Roundtable: The Board of Elections' Preparations for the November 3, 2020 General Election. September 10, 2020.

[http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=44&clip\\_id=5633](http://dc.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=44&clip_id=5633)

<sup>50</sup> See Policy Survey results in chapter 2 of the EAVS for more details:

[https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_library/files/2020\\_EAVS\\_Report\\_Final\\_508c.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/2020_EAVS_Report_Final_508c.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Accepted forms of proof of residence include a copy of a current and valid, government-issued photo identification; current residential lease or rental agreement; a tuition or housing bill from a District of Columbia college or university issued for the current academic or housing term; or one of the following documents issued no earlier than 90 days before the election: A utility bill for water, gas, electricity, cable, internet, telephone, or cellular phone service; a savings, checking, credit, or money market account statement from a bank or credit union; a paycheck, stub, or earning statement that includes the employer's name, address, and telephone number; a government-issued document or check from a federal or District agency, other than the Board of Elections; an occupancy statement from a District homeless shelter. <https://www.dcboe.org/FAQS/Voter-Registration>

<sup>52</sup> First time voters who registered to vote by mail or online in DC and want to vote by mail need to include in their ballot return envelope a copy of a government issued photo ID or a copy of a bill, bank statement, government check or other government issued document that shows the registrant's name and address.

<https://dcboe.org/Voters/How-to-Vote/Mail-Ballot-Instructions>

<sup>53</sup> NCSL. 2021. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id.aspx>

independently of their ward and precinct of residence. When voters arrived at the vote center, a clerk checked the voter in with a poll pad and provided the voter with their appropriate ballot according to the voter's precinct residence.<sup>54</sup> The District was one of eight states that used vote centers statewide during the 2020 election cycle.<sup>55</sup>

### *Ballot Counting*

Post-election audits are strongly recommended as an elections best practice, as they help ensure that election equipment functioned correctly and help boost voters' confidence in election outcomes and election administration practices. Organizations such as the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS), and the Democracy Fund recommend conducting post-election tabulation audits. Forty-three states and the District of Columbia conduct some form of post-election audit, either as part of statutory requirement or standard administrative practice. However, the types and audit protocols vary substantially.<sup>56</sup>

Thirty-five states and the District conduct traditional tabulation audits of election results.<sup>57</sup> A traditional tabulation audit is a procedure for verifying election results in which records from a fixed percentage of randomly selected voting districts or voting machines are compared to the results produced by the voting system. DC statute requires a public, manual audit that includes at least 5% of the precincts with precinct-level vote-tabulation machines during the election; and at least 5% of the voter-verifiable records that are tabulated centrally, including absentee ballots and special ballots. Of those voter-verifiable records audited, DCBOE must examine at least three contests, of which at least one must be a District-wide contest and at least two must be a ward-wide race.<sup>58</sup>

Ten states, including four with all-vote-by-mail elections, reported conducting a risk-limiting tabulation audit (RLA) following the 2020 general election.<sup>59</sup> An RLA involves an audit protocol designed to limit the risk of certifying an incorrect election outcome by using statistical principles and methods to select the audit sample size.<sup>60</sup>

### **Report Overview**

This report assesses DCBOE's administration of the 2020 primary and general elections. First, the report analyzes DCBOE data to understand how voters completed each phase of the voting

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<sup>54</sup> DC Board of Elections. District of Columbia Voter Guide to the June 2, 2020 Primary Election.

<https://www.dcboe.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=70ac2ee8-edb0-4665-acf0-19e1b77216d6>

<sup>55</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

<sup>56</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

<sup>57</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

<sup>58</sup> D.C. Code § 1–1001.09a. <https://code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/sections/1-1001.09a.html>

<sup>59</sup> Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey dataset from the EAC. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

<sup>60</sup> [https://democracyfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019\\_DF\\_KnowingItsRight\\_Part1.pdf](https://democracyfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019_DF_KnowingItsRight_Part1.pdf)

process—from registration to casting a ballot and ultimately having that ballot counted. Next, EAC data are used to compare performance in the District to nationwide benchmarks as well as other states using similar vote-by-mail procedures for the 2020 election. Finally, this report uses a social listening strategy to better understand administration of the 2020 election from District voters' perspective, identifying key themes about the voting experience expressed in online conversations. The report concludes with a summary of findings and recommendations for how election administration in the District can be improved, both by building on the successes of 2020 and addressing challenges to improve the election process for voters across the District. This review also incorporated a review of press accounts of the election supplemented by conversations with stakeholders about DCBOE activities during the 2020 cycle.



# THE DISTRICT'S VOTING PROCESS IN THE 2020 ELECTIONS

Voting in the District, as elsewhere across the nation, is a multi-phase process. At a minimum, a voter needs to register to vote and then submit a ballot for processing, either by receiving and returning a by-mail ballot or by casting a ballot in person at a designated polling place on or, in many cases, before Election Day. However, additional interactions between the voter and the election office may take place, such as updates to a registered voter's address, party, or legal name. When voting by mail, a voter may be required to submit a ballot request application or provide updates to registration information. A ballot must be transmitted to voters by the election office, and they must receive, complete, then return that ballot, within the required timeframe. Ballots returned to the election office are then assessed to ensure that signature and other requirements are met so that only valid votes are counted and those that do not meet the requirements are rejected.

In the District, by-mail voting was greatly expanded during the 2020 election cycle. To ensure the election was as safe as possible for residents, primary voters were strongly encouraged to request by-mail ballots; and the District implemented universal vote by mail for the general election, meaning that every registered voter was sent a ballot automatically to the address indicated on their active registration record. Residents, however, were still given the opportunity to vote in person early or on Election Day for the primary and general elections.

This section assesses the voting process, from registration to when the ballot is cast—in particular, how District residents engaged with the election process for the primary and general elections in 2020, how the process and behavior of voters in 2020 compares to previous elections, and differences among wards within the District.

## Methodology

The following analyses use transactional data from the voter history file provided by the DC Board of Elections (DCBOE). These data are current as of June 15, 2021. In addition to the voter history file, DCBOE also provided general and primary election absentee records, as well as data about the polling locations and equipment from the primary and general election of 2020.

### Source of the Data

#### VOTE HISTORY FILE

The voter history file provides information on when a resident originally registered to vote, their method of registration, the ward they are registered to vote in, age range, and whether they participated in the last several elections. One caveat is that the data used here are current as of June 15, 2021. Because the database is updated constantly, it does include records of residents who registered to vote after the 2020 general election and may not include the records of former residents who voted in elections before 2020 but were since removed from

the rolls because they moved away or were removed for some other reason. This constraint somewhat limits analysis of older elections.<sup>61</sup>

### ABSENTEE RECORDS

The general and primary election absentee records report additional data about by-mail voting behavior.<sup>62</sup> This file provides the type of by-mail voter (e.g., civilian, military, overseas citizen), whether the voter was in the permanent by-mail list or requested to vote by mail, and the status of mail ballot. These records also provide the date when the mail ballot was requested by the voter, the date when the mail ballot was issued by the election office, and the date when the mail ballot was received. This file also provides information on whether returned ballots were valid or rejected but does not have data on whether a voter used in-person voting instead of returning the mail ballot. To find whether voters who did not return a mail ballot voted in person in the election, the content of this data set had to be compared with the voter history file, and information was not available for all voters on record.

### POLLING PLACES AND EQUIPMENT

Detailed information about the polling places and equipment deployed for the general and primary elections of 2020 was provided by DCBOE. This information includes the names of early voting and Election Day locations, as well as the number of workers serving in different roles at each location (e.g., number of registration clerks, coordinators, ballot clerks), and the technological resources available in each location (e.g., the number of registration tablets, ballot marking devices, and scanners to tally ballots). These records also reported the number of votes cast in each early voting location by day during the primary and general elections.

## Voter Registration

Data from the DC government (<https://opendata.dc.gov/>) estimates the population of the District as 692,683 persons, with 519,267 estimated being U.S. citizens aged 18 or older (Citizen Voting Age Population, or CVAP). Table 1 below provides a breakdown of population estimates by ward, along with data on voter registrations from DCBOE's voter history files. Ward 6 is the most populated ward in the District (and the one with the most registered voters), and Ward 2 is the least populated ward. With the exception of Ward 2, the number of active registrants is very similar to that of the CVAP.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Data from voters who registered to vote after the day of the 2020 general election were not included in the analysis, since they could not have participated in any of the elections covered in this report.

<sup>62</sup> The terms "absentee" and "by-mail" are generally used interchangeably in the field of elections. This section predominantly uses the term "by-mail" except when referring to the records provided by DCBOE.

<sup>63</sup> The CVAP is an estimate rather than a census of the number of citizens eligible to vote and usually underestimates the actual number of voting eligible residents. On the other hand, registration rolls usually contain (even in the active registration list) voters that are no longer eligible to vote (e.g., if a registrant moves out of DC and does not inform DCBOE, it may take some time to the DCBOE to move the registrant to an inactive list). As a result, it is not strange to find instances where the number of Active Registrants exceeds the CVAP, such as the case of Wards 4, 6 and 8 in Table 1.

**Table 1. DC Population, CVAP and Registrants by Ward<sup>64</sup>**

	Total Population	Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP)	Total Registrants	Active Registrants	Inactive Registrants
Ward 1	83,811	63,015	80,593	62,716	17,877
Ward 2	77,855	63,575	64,331	47,875	16,456
Ward 3	82,737	61,756	73,001	57,561	15,440
Ward 4	89,992	60,158	75,157	63,421	11,736
Ward 5	90,172	69,900	83,274	69,429	13,845
Ward 6	99,786	81,317	104,185	85,374	18,811
Ward 7	81,946	60,721	73,891	60,455	13,436
Ward 8	86,384	58,825	73,702	59,757	13,945
Total	692,683	519,267	628,134	506,588	121,546

There were 628,134 voters who had registered to vote by the close of polls on Election Day 2020.<sup>65</sup> Of these registrants, 80.6% were active voters, meaning that they did not need to provide additional documentation to cast a ballot, and 19.4% were inactive, meaning that some information confirming their eligibility to vote (e.g., proof of address) was required before casting a ballot.<sup>66,67</sup> The percentage of active and inactive voters varied slightly across wards, with Ward 4 having the highest percentage of active voters (84.4%) and Ward 2 having the lowest.

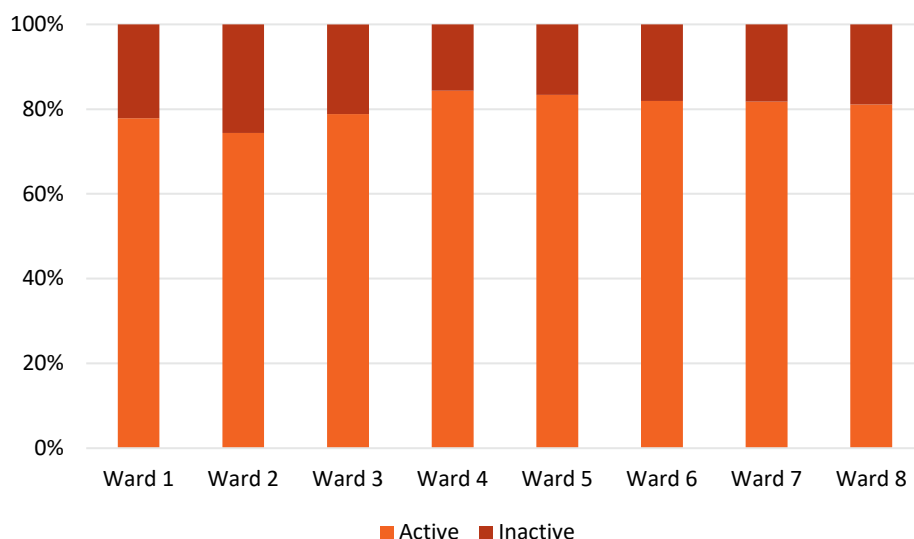
<sup>64</sup> Estimates for “Total Population” and “CVAP” were collected from <https://opendata.dc.gov/datasets/DCGIS::acs-demographic-characteristics-dc-ward/explore?location=38.893750%2C-77.014600%2C12.30> These data are current as of January 28, 2021.

<sup>65</sup> As of the voter registration records available June 15, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Active includes voters labeled as FPCA (Federal Post Card Application). Inactive includes voters labeled as Active ID Required.

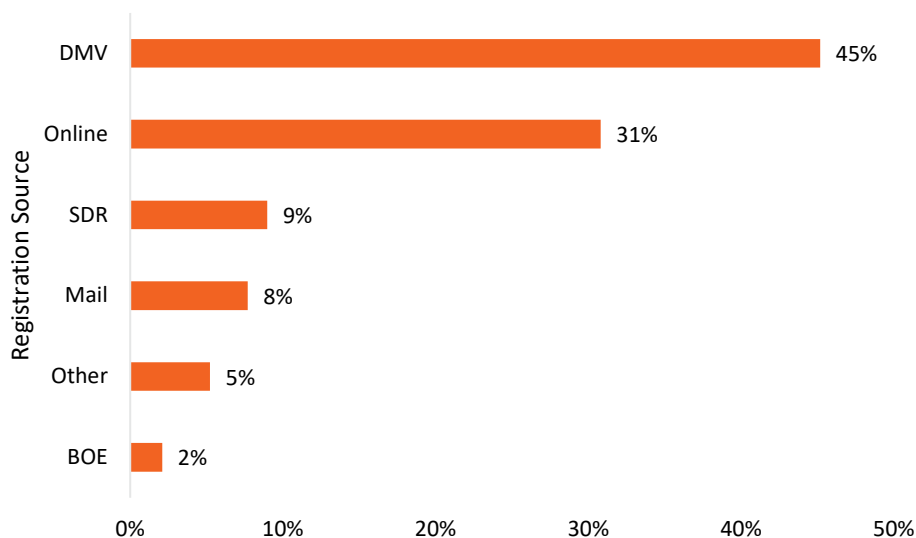
<sup>67</sup> A voter is considered inactive when there is a valid reason to believe that the voter no longer lives in the jurisdiction or does not meet the voting requirements. It is common that if the election office receives notice from an agency like the USPS, or the DMV that a resident has changed their address, the election office will send a confirmation notice to the voter to confirm if they continue living in the address on their files. If there is no response to the confirmation notice, then the voter is moved to the inactive list, so they will need to provide proof of residency to cast a ballot. The election office maintains an inactive voter in the registration rolls for at least two general elections before they can remove them from the registration rolls if the voter has not voted nor has confirmed eligibility during that period.

**Figure 1: Percentage of Active and Inactive Registrants for the 2020 General Election by Ward**



During the 2020 voter registration cycle, roughly three-quarters of registrations were filed either online or at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV; see Figure 2).<sup>68</sup> In addition to online and at the DMV, DC residents had the option to register at the polls when voting (i.e., same day registration, or SDR), register by mail, through the Board of Elections, or through another designated voter registration agency (VRA) such as public assistance program offices, which are classified here as “other” registration sources.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Registrations During the 2020 Election Cycle by Source**



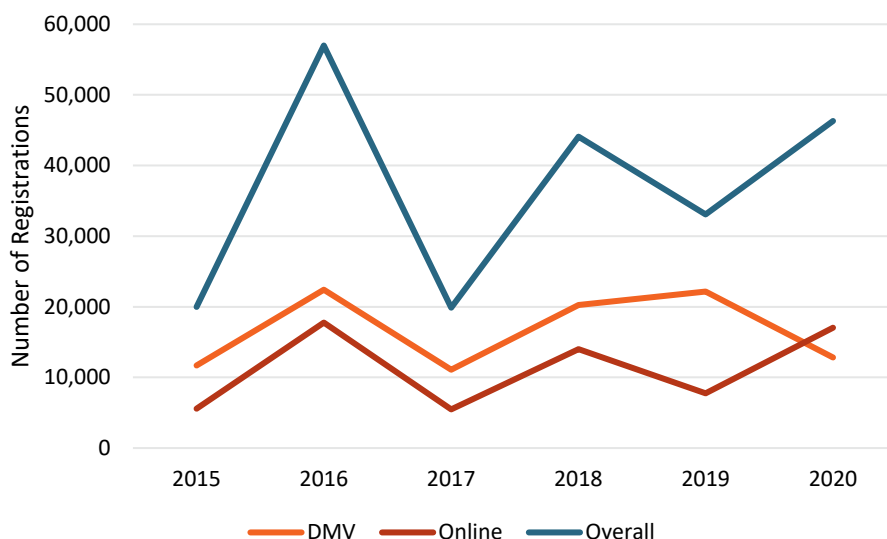
<sup>68</sup> The 2020 registration cycle began the day after the 2018 general election (November 7, 2018) and ended the day of the 2020 general election (November 3, 2020).

When looking at the registration source by ward, Wards 7 and 8 had the highest levels of DMV registrations during the 2020 election cycle (over 50%) and lowest levels of online registration (19.6% and 18.8%, respectively). In Wards 1 through 6, online registrations accounted for over 25% of the registrations during the 2020 election cycle (see Table A1 in Appendix A for detailed breakdown).

### *DMV and Online Registration*

Consistent with national trends, the most common source of registration among District residents is the DMV.<sup>69</sup> Figure 3 shows the number of online, DMV, and overall registrations each year since online registration was first implemented in DC in 2015. The DMV processed a higher number of voter registrations compared to online every year except for 2020, when the number of registrations processed at the DMV was more comparable to non-election years. Online registrations in 2020 were comparable to those processed in 2016, the first election year after the system was implemented.

**Figure 3: Number of DMV and Online Registrations, by Year<sup>70</sup>**



In August 2020 during the registration period for the 2020 general election, there were technological issues with the application that served District residents to register to vote online, which caused DCBOE to discontinue the use of the application. To be able to continue offering residents the possibility of registering to vote online, DCBOE provided an alternative method to complete the registration process online through an online fillable form accessible at DCBOE's

<sup>69</sup> The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993 (also known as the "motor voter law") requires states to offer voter registration opportunities at state motor vehicle agencies, through a mail-in application, and at certain state and local offices, including public assistance and disability offices (<https://www.justice.gov/crt/national-voter-registration-act-1993-nvra>).

<sup>70</sup> The number of registrations for 2020 covers registrations up to Election Day (included). The registrations in the graph correspond to registrants in the voter history as of June 15, 2021. The "Overall" category includes registrations received from all sources (including DMV and Online).



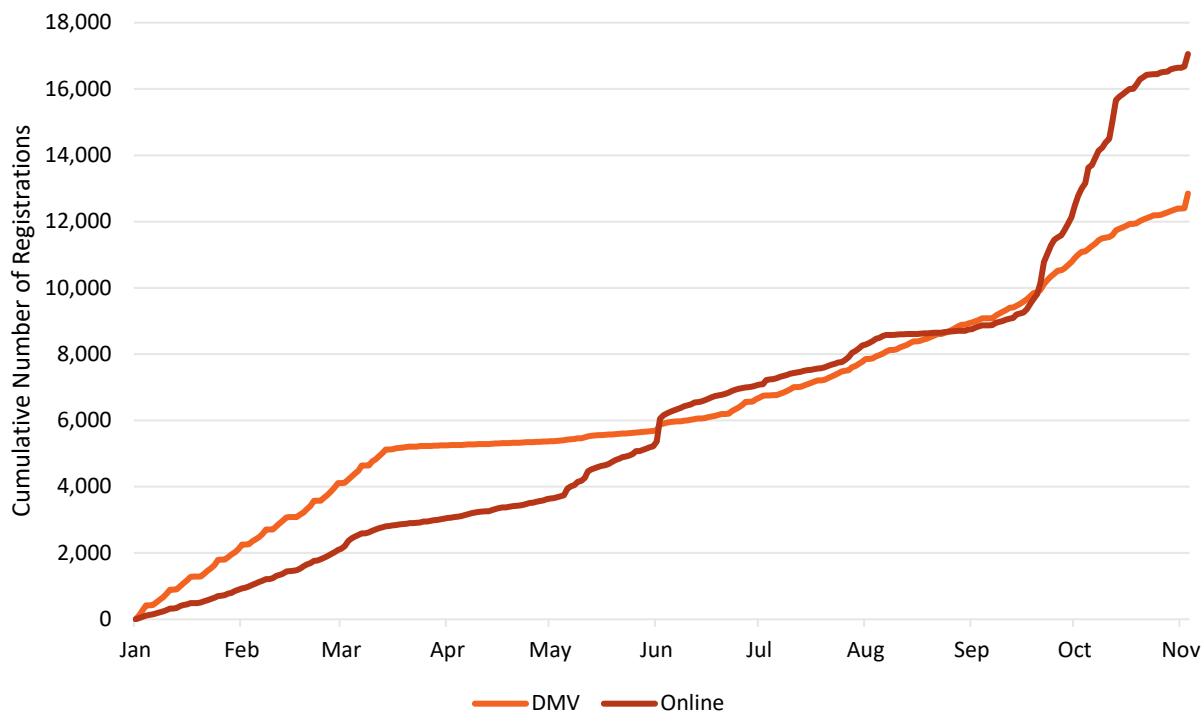
website.<sup>71</sup> Residents were—and currently are—allowed to complete this electronic form and sign it online using their computer mouse or touchscreen on a mobile device.

A closer look of the evolution of registrations received through the DMV and online show the unique characteristics of the 2020 election cycle. Figure 4 (below) shows the cumulative number of registrations received by each source from January 1, 2020, to Election Day.

The graph shows the effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on DMV registrations, when DMV offices were first closed and then reopened at a limited capacity, causing a virtual halt to the process of voter registrations (as seen in the graph between the months of March and June). In particular, from January 1 through March 14, 2020, the average number of DMV registrations per day was 69. From mid-March until early May, the average number of registrations processed at the DMV dropped to 5. After this period, DMV registrations started to rebound again all the way through Election Day.

Online registrations, on the other hand, started the year at a slower pace than DMV registrations, but as expected, were not affected by the beginning of the pandemic. This type of registration, however, was impacted by the technological issues experienced in the online app during the month of August, when the graph shows a marked slowdown in applications processed until early September, when applications received online increased significantly.

**Figure 4: Number of Cumulative DMV and Online Registrations by Day During the Year 2020**



<sup>71</sup> <https://www.dcboe.org/Voters/Register-To-Vote/Register-to-Vote>

### *Same Day Registration (SDR)*

SDR allows residents to register to vote the same day they cast a ballot for an election. This registration option is available in DC and in about half of the states in the United States.<sup>72</sup> Many residents took advantage of this policy and registered to vote at the polls. For the primary election, 628 residents registered to vote at the polls on June 2, 2020, the day of the primary. To put it in context, this accounts for nearly 30% of the total number of voters who registered to vote in May 2020. SDR on the day of the general election accounted for 13.3% of all the registrations processed in 2020. A total of 6,172 SDR's were processed on Election Day in the 2020 general election, accounting for 7.5% of all registrations received during the 2020 voter registration cycle, more than double the national average among states that allowed for SDR in 2020 (3.5%).<sup>73</sup>

## **Voting**

Among eligible registered voters in the District's voter history file, 343,408 voted in the general election and 282,016 eligible registrants did not cast a ballot—a turnout rate of 54.9% of eligible registered voters.<sup>74</sup> For comparison, the turnout rate among voters who remained on the rolls continuously between 2012 and 2020 is shown in Figure 5.<sup>75</sup> The results show that participation among this subset of registered voters in 2020 is comparable to the 2016 election but lower than in the 2012 election. This pattern holds across wards, with each showing similar turnout rates in 2020 and 2016 and higher turnout for the 2012 general election. The similarity in DC's turnout rates in 2016 and 2020 contrasts with the national trend, which showed a 6.7 percentage point turnout increase from 2016 to 2020 at the national level.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> A total of 26 states, two U.S. territories and DC allow for some form of SDR. In some cases, SDR is only allowed on Election Day, or during an overlap between the end of the registration period and the beginning of early voting. In DC, SDR is allowed on Election Day and during early voting.

<sup>73</sup> The 2020 voter registration cycle refers to the period between the day after the 2018 general election and the day of the election of 2020 (November 7, 2018 to November 3, 2020, both included).

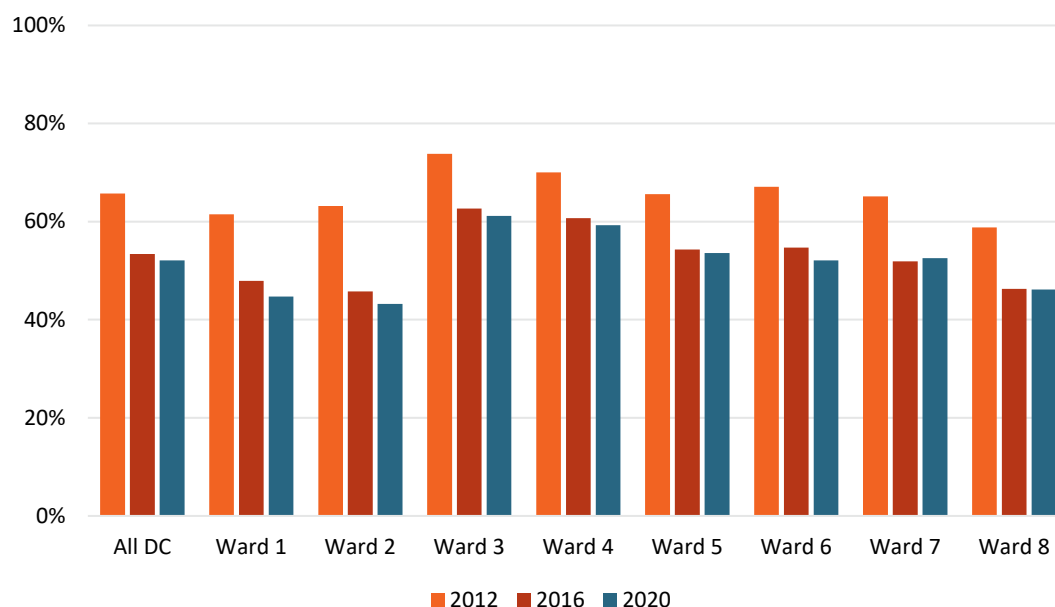
<sup>74</sup> Of the 628,134 registered voters in the active or inactive list, there were 762 who were flagged as "Not eligible to vote" and 1,948 with "No voting history" for the 2020 general election according to the DCBOE's records. These 2,710 registered voters were not included in the calculations for the turnout rate; only voters flagged as having cast a ballot or categorized as "Eligible did not vote" and with information on their ward of residence were included.

<sup>75</sup> The population for the comparison and the graph are DC residents who have been registered and were eligible to vote in all federal elections from 2012 to 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Election Administration and Voting Survey report 2020:

[https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_library/files/2020\\_EAVS\\_Report\\_Final\\_508c.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/2020_EAVS_Report_Final_508c.pdf)

**Figure 5: Turnout Among D.C. Residents Who Were Registered and Eligible to Vote Between 2012 and 2020, by Year and Ward.<sup>77</sup>**



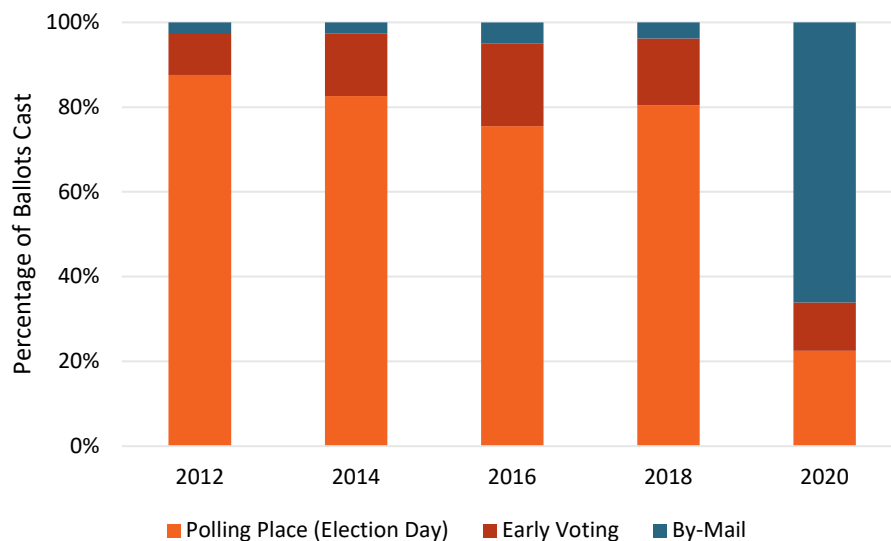
### *Voting Methods*

The three main methods to cast a ballot in an election are: by mail, in-person early, and in-person on the day of the election.<sup>78</sup> The 2020 primary and general elections differed substantially from previous elections in the methods of voting used by residents to cast their ballot. Figures 6 and 7 show the contrast in use of by-mail and in-person early and Election Day voting during the five most recent general and primary elections. Vote by mail was rarely used by DC residents from 2012 to 2018, with highest vote-by-mail rates in 2016 with 4.9% in the primary election and 6.1% in the general election. This trend, of course, shifted in 2020 when 66.1% of voters voted by mail in the primaries and 68% did so in the general election when the District sent mail ballots to all registered voters. Conversely, in-person voting on Election Day had been the preferred voting method for DC residents for primary and general elections until 2020. Interestingly, early voting—the other form of in-person voting—did not experience a sharp decrease compared with previous primary and general elections and had a slightly higher rate in the 2020 general election (21.9%) than in the 2018 general election (21.7%). Also, early voting accounted for a larger portion of in-person voting in the 2020 general election compared to in-person voting on Election Day.

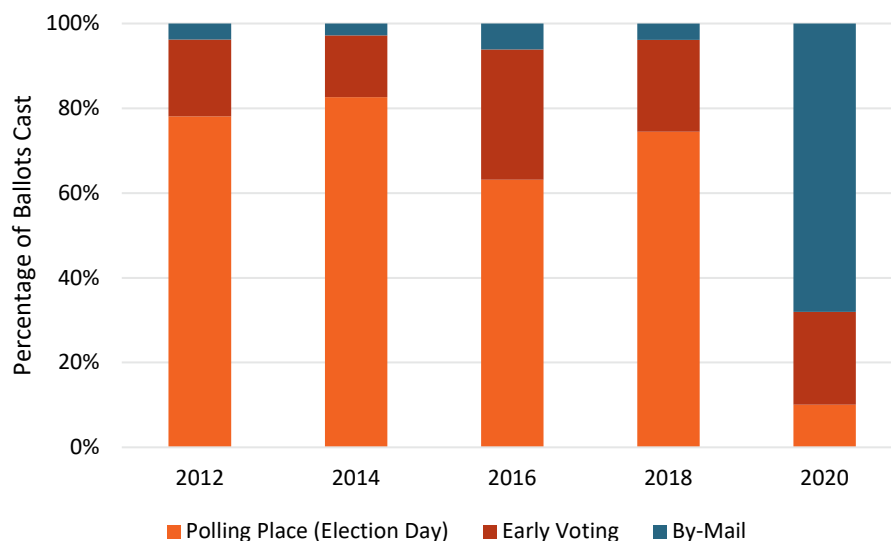
<sup>77</sup> See Table A2 in Appendix A for additional turnout results for the general elections of 2014 and 2016.

<sup>78</sup> As an exception, and due to issues with DC residents claiming they never received their mail ballots, DCBOE allowed some voters to cast their ballots by email in the 2020 primary election. These ballots are categorized as mail ballots in the analysis.

**Figure 6: Voting Method in Primary Election by Year**



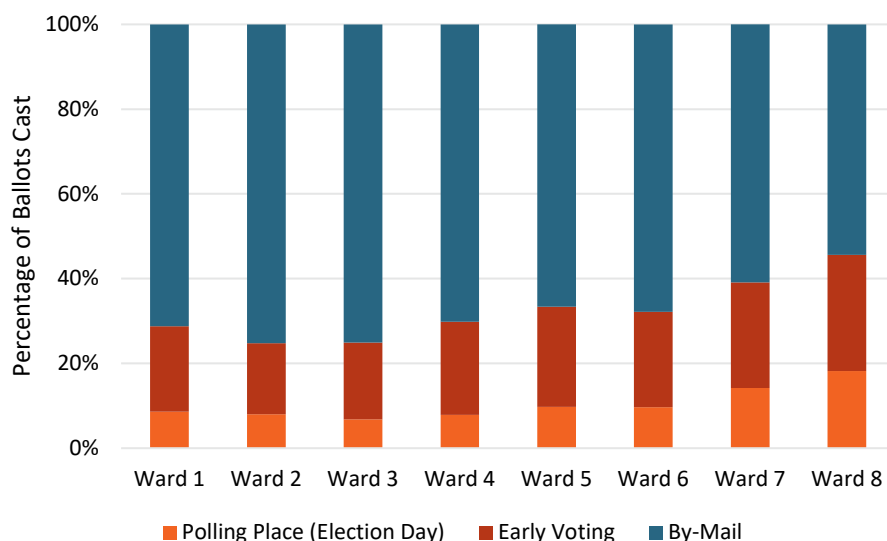
**Figure 7: Voting Method in General Election by Year**



There were differences in the types of District voters who chose to vote in person versus those who used by-mail options. When breaking down methods of voting by age, younger voters tended to vote in person at a higher rate than those in older age brackets. For example, 19.0% of voters ages 18–24 voted at the polls, compared to 3.4% of voters over 75 years of age.

Voting options utilized across wards is shown in Figure 8, below. Wards 7 and 8 had higher rates of in-person voting (both early and on Election Day) than did other wards in DC. This pattern is consistent with the 2016 and 2018 elections, during which Wards 7 and 8 also had a higher proportion of in-person voting compared to the rest of the wards.

**Figure 8: Voting Method in the 2020 General Election, by Ward**



Although Wards 7 and 8 have higher proportion of voters using either of the in-person options to cast their ballots, these wards also have lower turnout rates compared to the rest of the wards. This is particularly the case for Ward 8, which had the lowest turnout rate in the 2020 election, with just 44.8% of registered and eligible voters casting a ballot in the 2020 general election.

### IN-PERSON VOTING

There were two options in the District to cast an in-person ballot for the primary and general elections in 2020: on Election Day or during an early voting period. The early voting period took place between May 22, 2020, and June 1, 2020, for the primary election,<sup>79</sup> and between October 27, 2020, and November 2, 2020, for the general election. Trends in early voting differed between the primary and general election. For the primary, the days with the most participation were the last two days that early voting was available. For the general election, the first two days of early voting saw the highest number of ballots cast. According to historic voter participation records during presidential election years provided by DCBOE, early voting in 2020 accounted for a lower portion of the overall turnout compared to the 2016 presidential and primary elections, but slightly higher than in 2012 (see Table 2 below). These data also show that early voting was more popular during general elections compared to the primaries.

<sup>79</sup> On Monday May 25, 2020, early voting centers were closed in observance of Memorial Day.



**Table 2: Early Voting Turnout in D.C. Primaries and General Elections in 2012, 2016, and 2020.**

	Early Voters	Overall Turnout	Percent of Early Voting Overall Turnout
Primary Election 2012	6,247	64,361	9.7%
Primary Election 2016	19,153	100,423	19.1%
Primary Election 2020	12,689	114,890	11.0%
General Election 2012	57,053	294,814	19.4%
General Election 2016	101,077	312,575	32.3%
General Election 2020	80,959	346,491	23.4%

To cast a ballot in-person early, DC residents had the opportunity to go to any of the early voting centers open during the early voting period, independent of the voter's ward of residence. Early voting centers are places often located in schools or recreation centers that were open during the early voting period—all of which were also open on Election Day during the primary and general elections. For in-person voting on Election Day during the general election, there were additional vote centers, and for the first time, DC residents were allowed to use any vote center in the District on Election Day for the primary and general elections, independent of the ward and precinct of residence. In addition to vote centers open during early voting and/or Election Day, and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DC made available super vote centers to cast a ballot in-person early and on Election Day for the general election. Super vote centers are locations with increased voter capacity (e.g., baseball stadium) that can serve a high number of voters while maintaining social distancing requirements.

There were 20 early voting centers open to District residents in the 2020 primary election. For the general election, 32 early voting centers were open to the public, ranging between three to five vote centers per ward. Six of the 32 early voting centers open for the general election were super vote centers, which provided increased voter capacity for in-person voting (see Appendices B and C for detailed list of vote centers and location). The number of early voting centers open for the 2020 primary and general elections was notably higher than in 2018 and 2016, when nine early voting centers were open during the primary and general elections early voting period—one vote center per ward except for Ward 6, which had two early voting centers.

In 2020, each early voting center for the primary and general election was equipped with polling pads to check voters in, ballot marking devices for residents to cast their vote, and scanners that could be used to cast a vote and tally ballots cast on ballot marking devices.

Early voting centers were staffed by 10 to 13 people during the 2020 primary election, covering roles like voting assistant clerk, registration clerk, and site coordinator. For the general election, staffing levels were increased, with the number of staff working at each early voting center

varying from 16 to 48 workers, with the higher number of workers staffed at super vote centers (see Appendices B and C for details on staff deployed by vote center).<sup>80</sup>

For the 2020 primary election, the same 20 locations were used for both early and Election Day voting. This stands in contrast with previous primary elections when there was a polling place in nearly every precinct of the District in Election Day. For the primary elections of 2016 and 2018, there were 140 total polling locations on Election Day (one per precinct, except for three that covered two precincts) and DC residents had to vote in the polling place serving their home precinct. The number of people working on the polls also differed greatly. In 2020, a total of 224 people worked at the polls on Election Day for the primary election, whereas in 2018 and 2016, there were 1,471 and 1,659 workers, respectively.

For the 2020 general election, in addition to the locations used during early voting, another 63 vote centers were available, totaling 95 physical voting locations where residents could cast a ballot on Election Day. The number of vote centers ranged from seven in Ward 2 (one of which was the super vote center Capital One Arena) to 16 vote centers in Ward 7. Every vote center had the voting equipment described previously (polling pads, ballot marking devices, etc.). The number of devices per polling location varied, with larger super vote centers having more units than regular vote centers. In terms of staffing, 2,198 people worked in the vote centers on Election Day in roles such as registration clerk, voting clerk, site coordinator, and precinct technician, with an additional 185 workers on reserve. In terms of number of vote centers and staff working on Election Day, the 2020 general election was relatively similar to Election Day in the general elections of 2018 and 2016. The total number of people working at the vote centers on Election Day was actually higher in 2020 (2,198 workers) than in 2018 and 2016 (1,693 and 2,163 workers, respectively). And although the number of locations opened to cast a ballot on Election Day was lower in 2020 (95 vote centers) than in 2018 and 2016 (140 locations each), some of the centers allowed for increased capacity in 2020 and DC residents were allowed to vote at any of the 95 locations rather than being limited to their designated precinct polling place.

## BY-MAIL VOTING

The impact of the pandemic and subsequent implementation of an all-vote-by-mail election in DC for the general election brought about a substantial increase in the use of by-mail voting, with 66.1% of primary ballots and 68.0% of general election ballots being cast by-mail in 2020. By-mail ballots in the primary and general elections could be returned by regular mail or at any of the drop boxes that were available in DC. Overall, 56% of the mail ballots sent by DCBOE were returned by voters, however, the return rate for this type of ballot varied considerably across wards. Ward 3 had the higher return rate by far, with 71.2% of mail ballots returned, followed by Ward 4 with 62.0%, whereas Wards 7 and 8 had the lowest return rates, with only 48% and 37.2% of mailed ballots returned by voters.

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<sup>80</sup> Data for number of poll workers for the 2020, 2018 and 2016 primary and general elections were obtained from DCBOE's "After-Action Reports" for the corresponding election: <https://dcboe.org/FOIA-Info/After-Action-Reports>

The absentee records show that, generally speaking, DCBOE was able to efficiently process the unprecedented volume of by-mail ballot requests received during the primary election, with 81.7% of requests having a ballot transmitted within three calendar days of the initial by-mail ballot request. For the general election, DC moved to an all-by-mail election and DCBOE was required to send a mail ballot to every voter on the active registration list ahead of the election. According to the absentee records, DCBOE issued 93.5% of all by-mail ballots by September 25, 2020.

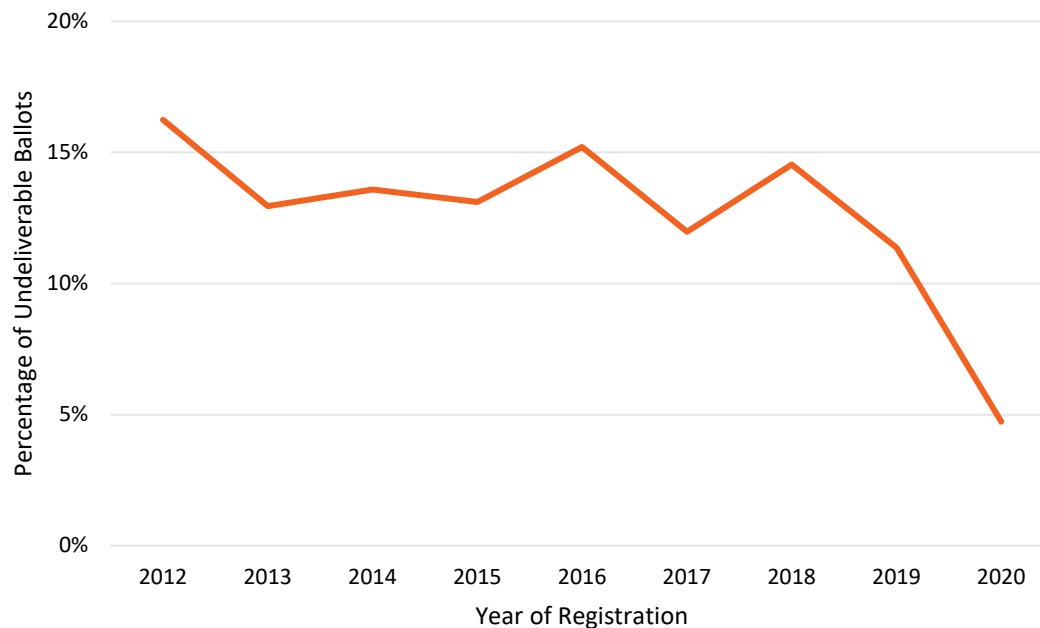
Despite prompt transmission of by-mail ballots, among the biggest challenges conducting an all-vote-by-mail election for the 2020 general election was the number of ballots returned undeliverable. According to DCBOE's absentee records, DC issued 421,791 by-mail ballots for the 2020 general election, and 48,018 of them (11.4%) were returned as undeliverable—an undeliverable rate more than eight times higher the national average of 1.4% undeliverable ballots.<sup>81</sup> The high percentage of undeliverable mail ballots in the general election stands in contrast with the low percentage of such ballots in the primary election—for which voters were required to proactively request a by-mail ballot and only 1.3% of by-mail ballots were returned undeliverable. This lower percentage of undeliverable ballots evidences the necessity of ensuring registration and address information is up to date to reduce the chances of a ballot being returned undeliverable. Moreover, of all the undeliverable ballots recorded in the 2020 general election, 95.6% correspond to domestic voters who would otherwise have been required to vote in person, with the rest of undeliverable ballots corresponding to Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) voters, voters in the permanent by-mail list, or voters who actively requested a by-mail ballot for the 2020 primary and general elections.

The high percentage of undeliverable by-mail ballots is a challenge that all by-mail states and jurisdictions often see, as many addresses in the registration records may not be up to date. This effect can be seen when breaking down the percentage of undeliverable by-mail ballots by registration year. As shown in Figure 9, the more recent a registration, the lower the percentage of undeliverable by-mail ballots, likely because recent registrations have more up-to-date information and thus lower chances of having an outdated address.

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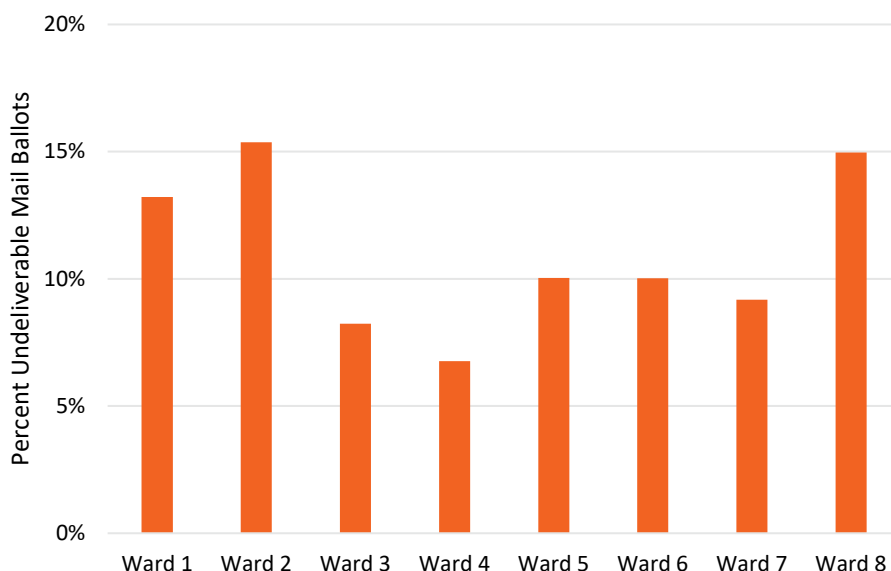
<sup>81</sup> The national rate for undeliverable ballots was obtained from EAC's EAVS. The undeliverable rate for DC reported in this section differs slightly from that reported in EAC's EAVS. The data in this section uses the voter history file provided by the DCBOE which was current as of June 15, 2021, which may not contain information for registrants who participated in the 2020 general election but were since removed from registration rolls. The EAVS, however, uses data that should be current as of the day of the November 3, 2020 General Election. See section "Approach and Performance of Election Administration" for more information on how DC compares with other states and the national average.

**Figure 9: Percentage of 2020 General Election By-Mail Ballots Returned Undeliverable, by Registration Year**



When looking at the percentage of by-mail ballots transmitted for the 2020 general election that were returned undeliverable, big differences are observed across wards. In particular, most wards had somewhere between 6% and 10% of their by-mail ballots returned undeliverable. Voters in Ward 8 had 15.0% of all their by-mail ballots returned as undeliverable and voters in Ward 2 had 15.4% ballots returned undeliverable (see Figure 10 below). The high percentage of undeliverable ballots in Wards 2 and 8, however, is not related to having a higher proportion of inactive registrants or voters with older registration dates compared to other wards. This discrepancy may be related to other causes that affect the accuracy of data in the registration rolls, such as relative frequency of voters in that ward changing their address. A more in-depth assessment of the source of these discrepancies would help to find strategies to mitigate these high undeliverable rates.

**Figure 10: Percentage of 2020 General Election By-Mail Ballots Returned Undeliverable, by Ward**

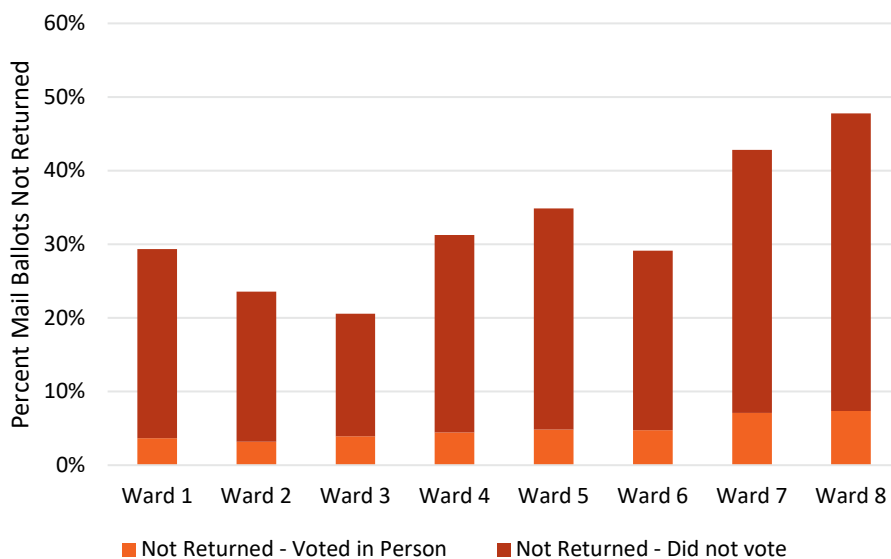


When a by-mail ballot is returned undeliverable to DCBOE, a confirmation notice is sent to the voter to confirm their address, pursuant to the guidelines provided in the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993.<sup>82</sup> Voters with undeliverable ballots, however, had the option in 2020 of casting their ballot in person at one of the District’s vote centers.

Nearly one-third of by-mail ballots transmitted (32.6%), were never returned by voters nor returned undeliverable. In some cases, a mail ballot was not returned because the voter opted to cast a ballot in person; however, in most cases, voters who were sent a mail ballot that was not returned did not vote in the 2020 election. Figure 11 breaks down unreturned mail ballots by those where the voter cast a ballot in person and those where no vote was cast in the election, either because the person chose not to vote or experienced some challenge that prevented them from doing so. The graph shows that Wards 7 and 8 had the largest percentages of mail ballots not returned (42.8% and 47.8%, respectively). Consistent with previous findings, Wards 7 and 8 show slightly higher reliance on in-person voting options even when receiving a mail ballot compared with other wards. Interestingly, although both Wards 2 and 8 had high rates of ballots returned as undeliverable, the outcome of delivered ballots differed dramatically in these wards. In Ward 8, 40.5% of ballots delivered to voters (i.e., not returned as undeliverable) were neither returned nor replaced by an in-person vote, nearly double the rate of ballots unaccounted for in Ward 2 (20.4%).

<sup>82</sup> The NVRA requires that when there is evidence that a voter may have moved out of the address on record, election officials must send a confirmation notice to the voter to confirm their address. If the voter fails to respond to the confirmation notice, does not update the registration information, and does not participate in the two following general elections, then the election officials can remove the voter from the registration rolls.

**Figure 11: Percentage of 2020 General Election By-Mail Ballots Not Returned, by Ward**



Residents had until Election Day in 2020 to return their completed ballots to the election office for processing. Ballots postmarked by Election Day were accepted if received within 10 days after Election Day. Returned ballots were processed by the election office at a regular pace from early October until early November, with a larger portion of the ballots being received and processed in early October and in late October/early November compared to the weeks in mid-October.

There were some differences in the pace and timeline of by-mail ballot return between wards. Residents of Ward 3, for example, returned their by-mail ballots the earliest whereas residents in Ward 8 returned them the latest of the wards. As an example of this discrepancy in the return timeline, 50% of all by-mail ballots received in the ward for the general election were received by October 19, 2020, in Ward 3 and by October 27, 2020, in Ward 8.

### *Ballot Counting*

The voter file provided by DCBOE shows that there were 487,378 voters registered and eligible to vote in the 2020 primary election, and 625,424 voters registered and eligible to vote in the 2020 general election.<sup>83,84</sup> Of those registered and eligible voters, 112,017 cast a ballot in the 2020 primary election and 343,408 in the general election. Voters must be registered as a

<sup>83</sup> “Registered and eligible” refers to voters who are allowed to participate in an election, independently of whether they are on the active or inactive list. In the primary election, for example, a voter needs to be affiliated with a party to be eligible to vote.

<sup>84</sup> Of the 628,134 registered voters in the active or inactive list, there were 762 that were flagged as “Not eligible to vote” and 1,948 with “No voting history” for the 2020 general election, according to DCBOE’s records. These 2,710 registered voters were not included in the calculations for the turnout rate, only voters flagged as having cast a ballot or categorized as “Eligible did not vote” and with information on their ward of residence were included.



member of the Democratic, Republican, Libertarian, or DC Statehood Green Party to vote in that party's primary election. Unlike ballots cast in person, for which the eligibility and identity of the voter are confirmed at check-in, ballots cast by mail must be assessed once they arrive at the election office to confirm all the requirements are met.<sup>85</sup> Of the 236,462 by-mail ballots returned by voters in the general election, 0.3% were rejected or put under review—a mail ballot rejection rate less than half the national average.<sup>86</sup> As shown in Table 3, the most common reasons for by-mail ballots to be rejected were issues with the voter's signature and missing the deadline.

**Table 3. 2020 General Election By-Mail Ballots Rejected**

Rejection Reason	Total	Percent of Total Rejected
No Signature	294	37.5%
Missed Deadline	287	36.6%
Under Review	143	18.2%
Voided Ballot	55	7.0%
Spoiled Ballot	6	0.8%

At the ward level, the percentage of by-mail general election ballots received that were rejected varied from 0.2% in Wards 2 and 3 to 0.6% in Ward 8 (see Table 4 below). Interestingly, the reasons for ballot rejection varied considerably from ward to ward. For example, signature issues accounted for approximately half of the rejected by-mail ballots in Wards 4, 5, 7 and 8, compared to around 25% of the rejections in the other four wards. Also, the percentage of ballots marked as “under review” was particularly low in Wards 7 and 8 compared to the rest of the wards in the District.

**Table 4. 2020 General Election By-Mail Ballots Rejected, by Ward**

Rejection Reason	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
No Signature	26.5%	25.0%	26.3%	54.0%	40.7%	26.2%	52.3%	44.6%
Missed Deadline	42.2%	32.1%	46.1%	26.4%	30.6%	38.5%	31.8%	49.1%
Under Review	22.9%	33.9%	22.4%	16.1%	22.2%	31.1%	4.7%	3.6%
Voided Ballot	6.0%	8.9%	5.3%	2.3%	6.5%	3.3%	10.3%	2.7%
Spoiled Ballot	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.8%	0.9%	0.0%
Overall Rejection	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%	0.6%

<sup>85</sup> Information on rejected ballots for early voting and Election Day voting is not provided in the voter history file. Rejected ballots are included in the category “Eligible-Did not vote,” so they cannot be separated from instances where a voter did not cast a ballot. Only in the absentee records was there information about rejected ballots and reasons for rejection, which are discussed here.

<sup>86</sup> See section “Approach and Performance of Election Administration” for more information on how DC compares with other states and the national average.

## APPROACH AND PERFORMANCE OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION (EAC'S EAVS)

In addition to District-specific data, other sources of data can provide insight into the District's performance in the 2020 general election. This is particularly true as 2020 represented a significant change in the District's usual election administration practices, including mailing ballots to all registered voters, using a vote center model, and a disruption in the online registration system for a period of time. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) provides a way to compare the election performance of the District to other states and territories in the United States. The EAC collects EAVS data following each federal general election.<sup>87</sup> This section builds on findings from data provided by the DC Board of Elections (DCBOE), using the EAVS to contextualize findings against outcomes nationwide as well as in other states that implemented vote-by-mail for the 2020 election.

### EAVS Methodology

The data reported in this section were obtained from the 2020 EAVS. The survey collects election administration data at the jurisdiction level (typically the county) from all states, U.S. territories and DC. These data cover the topics of voter registration, voters from the uniformed services and overseas citizens (who are covered by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act and commonly known as UOCAVA voters<sup>88</sup>), domestic civilian by-mail voting, in-person voting and polling operations, provisional ballots, and voter participation and voting technologies. The EAC makes these data public and can be found online on its website (<https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>). Calculations of national percentages in EAVS exclude states which did not provide data on relevant questions.<sup>89</sup> All national averages include DC, even in those metrics that are used to compare DC to the national average. Data in this section may not fully match data collected from other sources that are provided in this report, such as data provided by DCBOE in the section "*The District's Voting Process in the 2020 Elections*".<sup>90</sup> Finally, the term "by-mail voting" used in the report refers to all ballots that were sent to a voter so that they could complete the voting

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<sup>87</sup> For more detail on how these data are collected, see the Survey Methodology and Procedures chapter of the 2020 EAVS Comprehensive Report at

[https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_library/files/2020\\_EAVS\\_Report\\_Final\\_508c.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/2020_EAVS_Report_Final_508c.pdf).

<sup>88</sup> 52 U.S.C. 20301.

<sup>89</sup> EAVS uses case-wise deletion at the state level, so the national level percentages only use data from states that provide information for the numerator and denominator of a calculation. For example, to calculate the percentage of mail ballots returned, the number of returned ballots is divided by the number of mail ballots transmitted; if a state does not provide information for number of ballots returned, its information on number of ballots transmitted is not used either for calculating the national average to avoid inflating one of the two items involved in the calculation.

<sup>90</sup> The reason for non-matching data with that provided by DCBOE is that DCBOE's data provided for the report are current as of June 15, 2021, and may miss some registrants and voters who participated in the 2020 general election but who were removed from the voter history file between the date of the election and the date of the data pull for various reasons (e.g., moved out of DC, requested to be removed from registration rolls).

process remotely, independently of whether they then returned their mail ballot via the USPS or other return options such as designated drop-box or other drop off location.

## Comparing DC to National Trends, 2016–2020

### Voter Registration Rates and Sources of Registration Applications

In the 2020 EAVS, the District reported a total of 625,683 registered voters for the 2020 general election. Of this total, 517,890 were active registered voters and 107,793 were inactive registered voters who required address verification under the provisions of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) before they could vote. This means that 96.5% of the District’s citizen voting age population (CVAP) were active registered voters for this election and, of the total number of registered voters, 82.8% were active and 17.2% were inactive. In the previous presidential general election in 2016, only 493,287 people were registered (CVAP active registration rate of 97.8%).<sup>91</sup> For the 2018 general election, 617,046 people were registered to vote in the District (CVAP active registration rate of 100.2%). Although the 2020 general election represents a 26.8% increase in the total number of people who were registered to vote, most of the increase in registered voters happened between the 2016 and 2018 general elections, with a more modest registration increase occurring between 2018 and 2020. Furthermore, there was a decrease of 1.3 percentage points in the active registration rate between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. In comparison, the active registration rate across all U.S. states and territories for 2020 was 88.2%, an increase of 3.5 percentage points over the 2016 general election—but 8.3 percentage points fewer than DC.<sup>92</sup>

Table 5 below displays the reported sources of voter registration applications. For 2016, this covers the period between the close of registration for the 2014 general election and the close of registration for the 2016 general election. For 2020, this covers the period between the close of registration for the 2018 general election and the close of registration for the 2020 general election. In 2016, the District’s sources of voter registrations differed from national trends in several ways: the District had fewer registrations submitted by mail and through other sources and significantly more applications submitted through the DMV. In 2020, however, the District was more in line with national trends, particularly in terms of the percentage of registration applications that were submitted by mail, online, at the DMV, and through other sources. The only significant difference was that the District had fewer registrations submitted in person than the national average.

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<sup>91</sup> The District did not report the number of inactive registered voters for the 2016 general election; for that election, all registered voters were marked as active.

<sup>92</sup> In calculating nation-wide percentages using EAVS data, case-wise deletion has been used at the state level. The national-level calculations only use data from those states that provided data for the numerator and denominator of the calculation.

**Table 5: Sources of Voter Registration Applications, 2016 and 2020**

Source of Voter Registration Application	District of Columbia		United States	
	2016	2020	2016	2020
Mail	2.8%	7.1%	17.6%	12.9%
In-person	13.3%	1.9%	13.5%	8.3%
Online	23.5%	29.6%	21.5%	28.2%
Motor Vehicle Department	59.9%	43.6%	33.7%	39.3%
Other	0.5%	17.9%	15.5%	12.8%

Note: The Other category includes public assistance offices, agencies serving people with disabilities, armed forces recruitment offices, registration drives, and other sources not already listed.

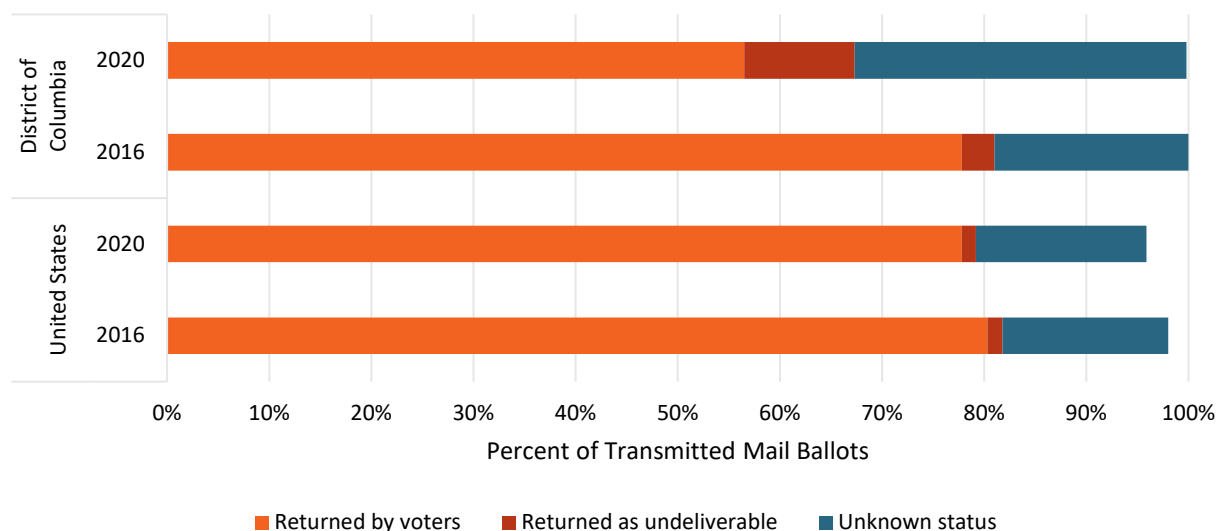
### Mail Ballot Transmission, Return, Count, and Rejection Rates

Like many other states, the District experienced a significant increase in mail balloting for the 2020 general election as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to ensure a safe, socially distanced election. The District’s decision to conduct an all-vote-by-mail election, in which all registered voters are automatically sent a mail ballot, resulted in a large increase in the number of mail ballots transmitted to voters, from 21,362 in the 2016 general election (the last presidential election) to 416,660 in the 2020 general election. As a result of this increase, the number of mail ballots transmitted per 100 active registered voters increased from 4.3 in 2016 to 80.5 in 2020.

Figure 12 below shows the outcome of the mail ballots that were reported as being transmitted in the EAVS. The District differs from national trends in terms of the percentage of transmitted ballots that were returned by voters, the percentage of transmitted ballots that were returned as undeliverable, and the percentage of transmitted mail ballots that were neither returned by the voter nor returned as undeliverable. On a national level, these percentages changed only slightly between the 2016 and 2020 general elections; for both elections, approximately four out of five transmitted mail ballots were returned by voters, slightly less than one out of five transmitted mail ballots had an unknown status, and slightly more than 1% of mail ballots were undeliverable. For the 2016 election, the District hewed fairly close to these national trends. However, the District’s percentages changed markedly for the 2020 election with the implementation of all-mail voting. The percentage of mail ballots voters returned declined, from 77.8% in 2016 to 56.5% in 2020, and the percentage of undeliverable and unknown status mail ballots both increased, from 3.2% to 10.8% and from 19.0% to 32.5%, respectively.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> “Unknown status” refers to mail ballots that were neither returned by the voter nor returned as undeliverable so that the status of the mail ballot cannot be established.

**Figure 12: Outcome of Transmitted Mail Ballots, 2016 and 2020**



Note: “Unknown Status” includes mail ballots that were neither returned as undeliverable nor returned by the voter. Some outcomes for mail ballots were not included in the graph because they accounted for a very small portion of the ballots in DC, in particular: mail ballots that were surrendered, spoiled, or replaced; that were replaced with a provisional ballot so the voter could cast a ballot in person; and mail ballots that were reported as having another status. These categories combined accounted for less than 0.5% in DC in 2016 and 2020 and for less than 5% at the national level in 2016 and 2020. Additionally, national percentages use case-wise deletion and may not add up to 100%.

The District did not differ significantly from the United States average in terms of the percentage of mail ballots that were counted and rejected; for both 2016 and 2020, nearly 99% of returned mail ballots in the United States were counted and around 1% of mail ballots were rejected. In the District, more than 99.7% of returned mail ballots were counted and 0.3% or less of returned mail ballots were rejected for both election years.

### Voter Turnout

EAVS data show that 346,491 voters cast a ballot that was counted for the 2020 general election in the District, an increase of 11.1% over the number of voters reported in 2016. As a percentage of CVAP, 64.6% of District voters cast a ballot that was counted, an increase of 2.7 percentage points over 2016 turnout levels. For both election years, CVAP turnout levels in the District were on par with national turnout levels (61.0% in 2016 and 67.7% in 2020), although the District saw a lower turnout increase in 2020 than the national average.

Table 6 shows that, like many other states, the District saw significant changes in how voters cast their ballots in the 2020 general election. The District was aligned with national trends in seeing a decrease in in-person turnout on Election Day and an increase in mail turnout; however, the District’s rates of change for both these modes of turnout were far larger than the national average. The national mail voting percentage increased by slightly fewer than 20 percentage points but increased by more than 60 percentage points in the District; for in-person Election Day voting, the decrease was 24 percentage points nationwide but 51 percentage points in the District. One area where the District diverged from national trends was

in the percentage of voters who voted in person before Election Day. Although this percentage increased by about 5 percentage points nationwide, it decreased by 9 percentage points in the District.

**Table 6: Voter Turnout by Mode, 2016 and 2020**

Mode of Turnout	District of Columbia		United States	
	2016	2020	2016	2020
In-person on Election Day	59.8%	8.4%	54.5%	30.5%
Mail ballot	5.3%	66.2%	24.5%	43.1%
In-person before Election Day	32.4%	23.4%	25.3%	30.6%
Provisional ballot	1.1%	0.5%	1.4%	0.8%
UOCAVA absentee ballot	1.4%	1.5%	0.5%	0.6%
Other mode	--	--	1.3%	2.5%

Note: The most common “other” modes of voting included mail ballots that could not be distinguished as being from UOCAVA or non-UOCAVA voters, conditional voter registration (CVR) voters in California, curbside absentee voters in North Carolina, and “other,” “unknown,” or “not categorized” ballots.

For both the District and the United States, the percentage of voters who were classified as UOCAVA did not change from 2016 to 2020. The percentage of voters who cast provisional ballots in the District was halved in 2020 compared to 2016, in line with national trends.

### Polling Places and Poll Workers

The District of Columbia reported having 144 precincts for the 2020 general election and using 95 polling places on Election Day, 32 of which were also used during early voting. All Election Day and early voting polling sites were located at sites other than election offices. This contrasts with the nationwide average of 9.6% of Election Day polling sites being located at election offices and 93.8% being located at sites other than election offices, and 42.8% of early voting polling sites being located at election offices and 57.3% being located at other sites.

The District reported engaging the services of 2,407 poll workers to assist with Election Day voting and 2,549 to assist with early voting.<sup>94</sup> This is an increase from the 2,163 poll workers who were reported as assisting with the 2016 general election,<sup>95</sup> despite much of the District’s voting taking place by mail in 2020. The EAVS also collected data on the ages of poll workers, which is shown in Table 7. The District’s poll workers in the 2016 general election skewed younger than the national average, and this was more pronounced for the 2020 general election. Slightly less than half of the District’s poll workers for 2020 were between the ages of 26 and 40, with the next most common age category being 41 to 60. Although poll workers across the country tended to be slightly younger in 2020 than in 2016, this shift was larger for the District.

<sup>94</sup> The total number of poll workers reported does not match the sum of the number of early and Election Day poll workers because the total number of poll workers counts poll workers only once even if they assisted with both early and Election Day voting.

<sup>95</sup> The 2016 EAVS did not ask the District to report the number of early voting and Election Day poll workers separately.



**Table 7: Ages of Poll Workers, 2016 and 2020**

Poll Worker Age Category	District of Columbia		United States	
	2016	2020	2016	2020
Under 18 years old	4.2%	1.8%	5.4%	3.2%
18 to 25	7.4%	8.8%	4.6%	6.2%
26 to 40	21.2%	49.6%	8.0%	15.0%
41 to 60	33.8%	24.6%	26.4%	28.4%
61 to 70	24.2%	11.4%	32.0%	27.3%
71 years and older	9.2%	3.7%	24.0%	20.1%

In the 2020 EAVS, the District reported that it was “neither difficult nor easy” to recruit a sufficient number of poll workers to assist with the election while most common response among other jurisdictions that responded was that it was “somewhat difficult” to recruit a sufficient number of poll workers. For the 2016 election, however, the District reported that poll worker recruitment was “very easy.”

## Comparing the District to Other Mail Voting States

The 2020 Policy Survey shows that there were 10 states that conducted all-mail elections statewide for the 2020 general election: California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, New Jersey, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, and Washington.<sup>96</sup> These states can be further categorized as follows:

- States that have conducted all-mail elections for multiple election cycles: Colorado, Oregon, and Washington;
- States that, prior to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, had planned to conduct the 2020 general election by mail: Hawaii and Utah; and
- States that conducted the 2020 general election by mail as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic: California, the District of Columbia, Nevada, New Jersey, and Vermont.

This section of the report compares data across states in these three categories in order to assess how the District compares to other states that were conducting their election by mail for the first time as well as states that have been conducting all-mail elections long term.

Table 8 reports voter turnout statistics for the all-mail states for the 2020 general election. Although the District’s total voter turnout for 2020 was the lowest among the states that conducted an all-mail election because of COVID, it was not significantly lower. All newly all-mail states had lower turnout levels than the three longtime all-mail states. The District’s mail turnout rate was on the lower end of the newly all-mail states because a significant portion of its electorate cast in-person ballots, either on Election Day or during early voting. New Jersey had the highest level of mail turnout among the states that went all-mail because of COVID, as

<sup>96</sup> Four states—Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, and Nebraska—reported conducting all-mail elections in select jurisdictions only. These states have been excluded from the analysis in this section. Information provided in the 2020 Policy Survey from the Election Assistance Commission (EAC). <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/datasets-codebooks-and-surveys>

that state reported that early voting was not offered for the 2020 general election and that fewer than 1,000 voters voted in person on Election Day.

**Table 8: Voter Turnout Statistics for All-Mail States, 2020**

State	Total Voter Turnout	Mail Turnout	Election Day Turnout	Early Voting Turnout
<b>All vote by mail because of COVID</b>				
District of Columbia	64.6%	66.2%	8.4%	23.4%
California	68.1%	81.9%	6.3%	5.5%
Nevada	66.7%	47.2%	9.1%	38.4%
New Jersey	72.8%	93.0%	0.0%	--
Vermont	73.8%	74.0%	24.7%	0.6%
<b>New all vote by mail in 2020</b>				
Hawaii	57.2%	94.6%	0.8%	4.2%
Utah	72.3%	89.9%	5.3%	2.3%
<b>Longtime all vote by mail states</b>				
Colorado	78.2%	93.1%	2.7%	3.3%
Oregon	75.8%	99.3%	--	--
Washington	76.1%	98.4%	--	0.0%

Note: UOCAVA voters, provisional voters, and other types of voters are not shown in this table.

Table 9 reports voter registration statistics for the all-mail states for the 2020 general election. The District had the highest voter registration rate among any of the all-mail states, both in terms of the total CVAP registration rate and the active CVAP registration rate. However, data on registered and eligible voters as reported in the EAVS should be used with caution, as these totals can include registrants who are no longer eligible to vote but who have not been removed from the voter registration rolls because the removal process outlined by the NVRA can take up to two election cycles to be completed. The District's rejection rate for registration applications was lower than the median for all-mail states.

**Table 9: Voter Registration Statistics for All-Mail States, 2020**

State	Total CVAP Registration Rate	Active CVAP Registration Rate	Percentage of Registration Applications Rejected
<b>All vote by mail because of COVID</b>			
District of Columbia	116.6%	96.5%	1.8%
California	100.5%	83.7%	4.9%
Nevada	96.6%	86.9%	2.6%
New Jersey	102.3%	95.6%	1.0%
Vermont	98.1%	88.4%	2.1%
<b>New all vote by mail in 2020</b>			
Hawaii	82.1%	74.9%	4.0%
Utah	87.2%	80.3%	13.3%
<b>Longtime all vote by mail states</b>			
Colorado	99.2%	89.6%	0.5%
Oregon	93.1%	93.1%	--
Washington	97.2%	90.5%	0.0%

Table 10 shows statistics on mail ballot transmission and return for regular, non-UOCAVA mail ballots for the 2020 general election. The District had one of the lowest rates of mail ballots transmitted per 100 registered voters; only Vermont transmitted fewer ballots per 100 registered voters. The other eight all-mail states transmitted close to, or more than, one mail ballot per registered voter.<sup>97</sup> The District also had the second-lowest percentage of transmitted mail ballots that were returned by voters and the second highest percentage of mail ballots with an unknown status. It is likely that these two statistics are connected to the District's relatively high percentage of in-person voting as compared to other all-mail states. If a person receives a mail ballot and chooses to vote in person instead, then that ballot will likely be categorized in the EAVS as being neither returned by the voter nor returned as being undeliverable. Notably, the District had the highest percentage of mail ballots that were undeliverable. The fact that nearly 11% of transmitted mail ballots were sent to an address where the registered voter no longer resided points to an avenue for improvement if the District chooses to conduct future elections by mail.

**Table 10: Mail Ballot Transmission and Return Statistics for All-Mail States, 2020**

State	Mail Ballots Transmitted per 100 Reg. Voters	Mail Ballots Returned by Voters	Mail Ballots Returned as Undeliverable	Mail Ballots with Unknown Status	Mail Ballot Count Rate	Mail Ballot Rejection Rate
<b>All vote by mail because of COVID</b>						
District of Columbia	80.5	56.5%	10.8%	32.5%	99.7%	0.3%
California	106.6	66.3%	1.4%	24.5%	99.4%	0.6%
Nevada	99.9	36.5%	6.7%	44.9%	99.2%	0.8%
New Jersey	102.7	69.9%	--	30.1%	98.8%	1.2%
Vermont	71.0	87.4%	0.5%	9.0%	99.5%	0.5%
<b>New all vote by mail in 2020</b>						
Hawaii	98.5	73.6%	2.2%	18.4%	99.5%	0.5%
Utah	102.3	79.7%	1.1%	15.4%	99.3%	0.7%
<b>Longtime all vote by mail states</b>						
Colorado	102.6	80.0%	3.0%	10.8%	99.1%	0.9%
Oregon	99.3	82.0%	1.4%	14.4%	99.3%	0.7%
Washington	103.1	81.0%	0.9%	13.8%	99.2%	0.8%

The District's statistics for counted and rejected mail ballots are in line with the other nine all-mail states; with the exception of New Jersey, all-mail states counted more than 99% of the mail ballots that were returned by voters and rejected fewer than 1%. Table 11 below shows the reasons why mail ballots were rejected. The most common rejection reasons in the District, each accounting for approximately 40% of mail rejections, was that the voter did not sign the ballot materials and the ballot was received after the deadline. The District also rejected a high

<sup>97</sup> A state may report transmitting more than one mail ballot per registered voter when replacement ballots are accounted for.

number of ballots for these reasons compared to other all-mail states. The high percentage of ballots rejected for these reasons points to the need for more voter education if the District conducts all-mail elections in the future. Compared to other all-mail states, the District rejected a relatively low percentage of ballots because the signature on the ballot materials did not match the signature on the voter's registration records. Other all-mail states rejected between one-third and three-fourths of their rejected mail ballots for this reason, but it accounted for only one-fifth of the District's mail ballot rejections.

**Table 11: Mail Ballot Rejection Reasons for All-Mail States, 2020**

State	No Voter Signature	Received Late	Non-Matching Signature	Ballot Returned in Unofficial Envelope	Ballot Missing from Envelope	Voter Already Voted in Person	First-Time Voter without Proper ID	Other Reasons
<b>All vote by mail because of COVID</b>								
District of Columbia	40.4%	39.7%	19.9%	--	--	--	--	--
California	15.8%	12.8%	51.5%	0.0%	0.8%	2.6%	1.9%	14.0%
Nevada	6.8%	6.3%	44.2%	1.5%	0.2%	4.4%	13.6%	21.3%
New Jersey	17.4%	4.0%	32.7%	23.5%	3.1%	--	--	19.3%
Vermont	21.0%	9.1%	--	--	65.4%	--	--	--
<b>New all vote by mail in 2020</b>								
Hawaii	17.8%	16.8%	48.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	17.0%
Utah	18.4%	7.9%	66.4%	--	0.1%	0.0%	6.6%	0.3%
<b>Longtime all vote by mail states</b>								
Colorado	5.4%	7.3%	74.2%	0.4%	1.1%	0.4%	10.2%	0.7%
Oregon	21.1%	5.5%	72.6%	0.0%	0.1%	--	--	0.7%
Washington	15.0%	7.9%	74.4%	0.0%	0.4%	--	0.7%	1.3%

Note: Rejections for the ballot not having a witness signature, for not having an election official signature, for the envelope not being sealed, for not having a resident address on the envelope, for the voter being deceased, for the envelope containing multiple ballots, and for there being no ballot application on file are not shown here because they comprised less than 2% of mail ballot rejections for each of the all-mail states.

# SOCIAL LISTENING DURING THE 2020 ELECTION CYCLE

This section describes the use of Fors Marsh Group's (FMG) Social Listening Lab, an innovative unit led by technical subject matter experts who used social listening tactics to analyze posts, trends, and conversations specific to election events occurring in Washington, DC, in 2020.

Conversations were analyzed for the following events:

- Primary election: June 2, 2020
- District of Columbia Ward 2—Special election: June 16, 2020
- Republican and Democratic National Conventions—August 24–27, 2020 (RNC) and August 17–20, 2020 (DNC)
- General election: November 3, 2020

Social listening is the process of monitoring real-time conversations, discussions, and trending content on social networking platforms and digital media to identify insights, opportunities, and emerging issues. It is also used to discern consumer behavior as well as brand, target organization, issue, and other topics of discussion. In the context of this study, social listening allows us to explore public opinions around voting in DC elections and to understand voters' perspectives on their voting experience. According to the Pew Research Center, seven in 10 (about 240 million) individuals use social media in the United States and one in five adults (22%) say they use Twitter.<sup>98,99</sup> For this analysis, 48,000 unique users posted on social media about the DC elections. Analysis of social media content offers a window into what is being discussed naturally by voters as they walk through their voting experience, and the content posted by voters helps to determine if online conversations on social media mirror the views of the larger population. From a methodological standpoint, this can be a useful approach to understanding public opinion compared to more traditional methods of fielding surveys or conducting interviews.

The following sections evaluate content posted on social media by DC residents during the 2020 election cycle, with the goal of identifying challenges, barriers, and other residual impacts (such as a global pandemic) that may have affected voters during that time period. The goal of this effort is to provide the DC Board of Elections (DCBOE) with suggestions to improve DC residents' voting experience for future election cycles. Aims of this study are two-fold:

- **Aim 1.** To understand voters' experiences based on the four election events that occurred in 2020 as reported by individuals on social and online media.
- **Aim 2.** To identify obstacles constituents faced during their voting experiences as reported by individuals on social and online media.

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<sup>98</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/02/10-facts-about-americans-and-twitter/>

## Methodology

A Structured Query Language (SQL) query consisting of keywords, handles, and hashtags was constructed to identify relevant mentions. The capabilities of the tool helped us answer quantitative questions, such as volume over time, trending sites, number of authors, and circulated URLs as well as a qualitative approach to identify questions around prevalent themes and how these themes changed over time. Collectively, this query can piece together a larger picture of online conversations around a topic and examine nuances in conversations found on social and digital media.

To understand District voters' experiences in the 2020 election cycle, FMG's social listening lab used a suite of social listening tools to collect mentions from social media platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, and Facebook.<sup>100</sup> This analysis examined conversations surrounding the 2020 election cycle, with a focus on four key events that occurred in 2020.

Using the social listening tool Brandwatch, FMG developed a comprehensive list of keywords, hashtags, and social media handles to extract conversations about election events specific to Washington, DC. These keywords were then translated into a SQL query, which was formulated into two key data sets for each election event of interest: one data set that included all mentions posted on the days of the elections and other events, and a random sample of no more than 2,000 mentions between a range of time before and after the event.<sup>101</sup> This approach formed the basis of the data that was used to perform this social listening analysis. Social media mentions that were retweets or irrelevant were excluded from analysis. Content analysis of remaining mentions involved identifying common themes related to voters' experiences and concerns. Thematic codes were not mutually exclusive, such that one mention could have multiple thematic codes applied. Only the top three themes are reported in this analysis.<sup>102</sup>

The following should serve as a glossary of the terms used throughout the analysis:

- *@Account*: A user's Twitter handle that identifies their Twitter account (e.g., Vote4DC).
- *Impressions*: The potential number of viewers; the sum of followers of the Tweet author and followers of any retweet.
- *Mentions*: The sum of several individual posts on social media and the internet on any given topic.
- *Quote Tweets*: A tweet that a user retweets but adds a comment or quote before posting the retweet.
- *Retweet*: A tweet reposted by another user on Twitter that does not include a comment.

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<sup>100</sup> Although data were collected from multiple social media platforms, Twitter made up 97% of the total mention volume in this analysis. This was partially a function of the data collection methodology; DC voters were able to communicate about voting obstacles directly with DCBOE through their Twitter handle and dedicated hashtags, thereby making mentions of DCBOE and associated hashtags useful data collection keywords.

<sup>101</sup> For this study, this excludes mentions posted on the day of the event.

<sup>102</sup> See Appendix D for a detailed description of the processes and procedures used and a detailed methodology.



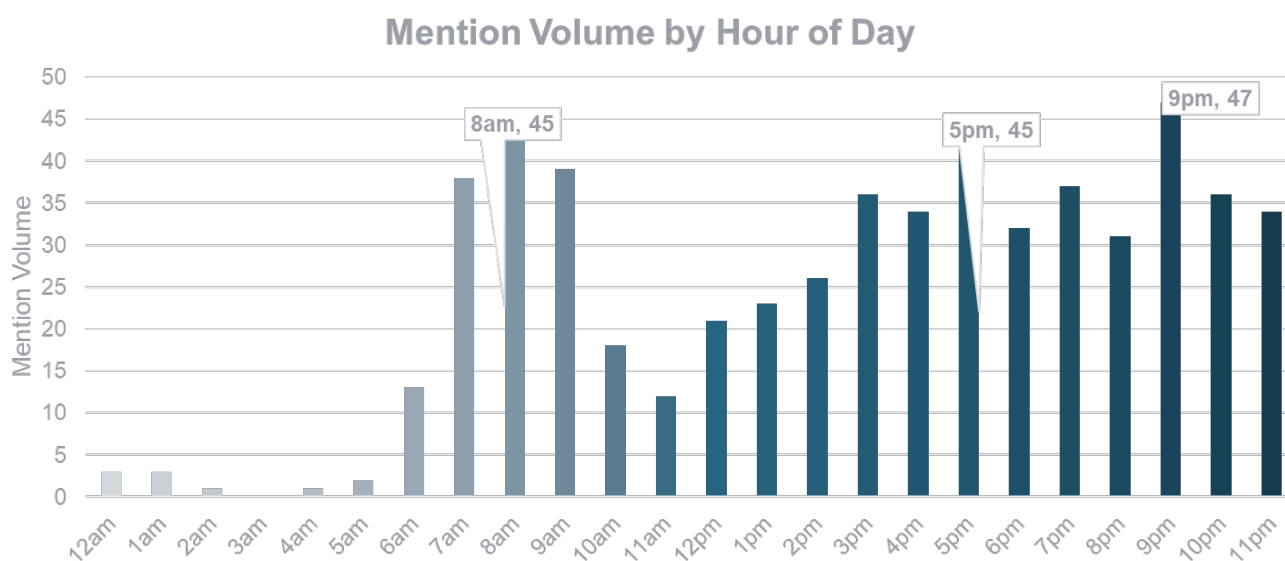
## Results

Using a thematic analysis approach through the built-in machine learning algorithms in Brandwatch, FMG identified emerging themes related to concerns and questions related to voters' experiences for each election event. Given the unique circumstances of the 2020 election cycle due to the COVID-19 pandemic, common challenges around voters' experiences across election events involved obstacles with both mail-in and in-person voting, such as ballot tracking, long lines, wait times, and ballot processing issues.

### Primary Election: June 2, 2020

DCBOE's Twitter handle (@Vote4DC) received the most "at mentions" in tweets posted on the day of the primary election. In total, the DCBOE Twitter handle received 269 total mentions reaching 2.3 million users on Twitter. As shown in Figure 13, mention volumes on social media were highest at 8 a.m. (45 mentions), 5 p.m. (45 mentions), and 9 p.m. (47 mentions).

**Figure 13. Mention Volume by Hour of Day**



The top three concerns DC residents expressed while voting on the day of the primary election were issues related to their absentee ballot, accounting for 52% of the mention volume of the three main themes, long lines (43%), and ballot tracking (5%).

Within the three main themes identified through social listening on the day of the primary election of 2020, there were several subthemes that emerged from each of them as well as questions from voters related to these topics. Tables 12 and 13 below provide an overall view before they are examined independently.

**Table 12: Subthemes of Top Three Themes on Primary Election Day**

Ballot/Absentee Ballot	Long Lines	Ballot Tracking
Several residents never received their absentee ballots	Voters experienced long lines to vote in Ward 1 and Ward 6	Voters mailed their ballots weeks in advance and the ballot tracker says “Not Available”
Ballot not processed	A voter noted that there were ~300 people in line in Emery Heights in Ward 4	Voters who mailed their ballot but could not receive a status update were unsure whether they should vote in person
Voters were unable to verify the status of their mail-in ballot	A voter reported that the line to vote in Ward 2 was 3 blocks long	Voters mailed their ballots but did not receive confirmation that their ballot was accepted or received by DCBOE
Voters were expecting an email/PDF option to vote if they did not receive a mail-in ballot	Voters who arrived at 8 p.m. to vote were still in line waiting to vote beyond 11 p.m. at multiple locations	Voters contacted DCBOE via Twitter, email, and phone, but many were unsuccessful

**Table 13: Top Questions on Primary Election Day**

Ballot/Absentee Ballot	Long Lines/Voting	Ballot Tracking/Voting Results
Can I turn in my completed absentee ballot to any vote center instead of being turned in by mail?	Why does the website say the line at the polling location is 30 minutes but greater than 3+ hours when I arrived?	When will DCBOE begin posting results now that the polls are closed?
Can I still vote in person if I requested an absentee ballot that never arrived?	Why is my local polling location closed if the website indicated that it’s open to vote?	Could someone help me understand the status listed for the absentee ballot I submitted?
Can I have my absentee ballot sent as a PDF instead since I never received it?	How will Mayor Bowser ensure voters’ safety during long lines and a curfew?	I have requested a ballot and it still says “Issued”; what does this mean? Will I still receive my ballot in time to vote?
	Why are there so few polling places for the primary election?	My ballot says pending; what does this mean?

### *Ballot/Absentee Ballot*

Concerns about ballots or absentee ballots were the most frequent challenge expressed by voters during the primary election (52% of the three main themes). These mentions often expressed never receiving their absentee ballots, slow processing of ballots, being unable to verify the status of their ballots, and expecting an email/PDF option to vote if they did not receive a mail in ballot (see Table 12). Examples of tweets are below:

*"This is an utter travesty, @Vote4DC. I tweeted at you last week that I never received my absentee ballot despite having applied for it in early May. You asked me to DM you, and you said my absentee ballot was "still being processed." —@khelanB*

*"Sounds like the best way to request a vbm ballot in DC was to use their wonky-ish mobile app. Everyone I helped using the app received a ballot... those that emailed in didn't receive [sic] one. I never thought I'd say @Vote4DC should look at Florida for best practices. #DCision2020." —@grapkoski*

*"Many #DC resident are posting about how they sent in their #ballot requests in time but still didn't receive. We've already seen in ward 8 that USPS has been negligent in their servicing of our area. Now people are forced to choose between health and civic duty." —@bgc4dc*

Top questions related to ballots or absentee ballots addressed the legitimacy and availability of emailed absentee ballots and voting by email, where to drop off completed absentee ballots, and what to do if absentee ballots were never received (see Table 13).<sup>103</sup>

### Long Lines

Experiencing long lines was the second most frequent issue discussed among mentions related to voters' experiences of the primary election (43% of the three main themes). Voters described long lines, wait times, and few voting machines during the primary election. Some mentions also identified which wards were particularly experiencing long lines. Others also demanded explanations or expressed frustration around the long lines. Examples of tweets are below:

*"Two different friends waited in line for 4 and 5 hours respectively to vote in the Ward 4 primary and just quit after being told they still had 2 hours left in line. Why the hell were polling spots closed and why are the lines so bad? Who is accountable for this?!" —@MeghanClearyJD*

*"I waited 4.5 hours to vote in DC's primary tonight. The line when I left @ 9:30pm was even longer than when I arrived. The delay seemed due to only 2 people checking in voters standing in line. ~10 voting machines but only 2 ppl able to use them at any given time. cc: @Vote4DC <https://t.co/nLdBtFCcl4>" —@Jenwillmore*

*"I just got back from the polling station for my ward in DC (Ward 6). There were long lines—8 blocks at their peak. I arrived at 4 PM and voted at 8:30. People seemed solemn and determined. DC curfew began at 7:00 PM. Voters excused. <https://t.co/b3r0WBWek0>." —@kjsturr*

Top questions related to long lines addressed inconsistencies regarding long wait times and available polling locations on the website, measures to ensure safety for voters waiting in long lines, meeting curfew given local protests and demonstrations, and the limited polling locations for the primary election (see Table 13).

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<sup>103</sup> In reaction to voters not receiving their requested absentee ballots in the primary election, DCBOE offered some voters the option to cast a ballot via email, using the OmniBallot Online service that had previously been used only for certain voters with disabilities and overseas military members.

### Ballot Tracking/Voting Results

Although issues regarding absentee ballots and long lines contributed to the majority of concerns expressed around the primary election, ballot tracking/voting results was also discussed among mentions related to voters' experiences in the primary election (5% of the three main themes). These mentions address technological issues with the ballot tracker, not knowing the status of their ballots or receiving any confirmation that their ballots were received, slow ballot processing, and being unable to reach DCBOE. Examples of tweets are below:

*"You can track your ballot here: <https://www.dcboe.org/Voters/Absentee-Voting/Track-Absentee-Ballot>. Mind you, put my ballot in the mail on May 26 and it still does not reflect as having been received. I imagine there is quite a backlog." — [r/washingtondc](#)*

*"Welp @Vote4DC I'm off to cast a special ballot at a vote center and I'm PISSED. I shouldn't be burdening the poll workers (or maybe getting the Rona), but since your ballot tracking system sucks and I want to make sure my vote gets counted, off I go." — [@mindymoretti](#)*

*"During a budget oversight hearing yesterday, @Vote4DC stated there are many mail-in ballots received but waiting to be scanned. They don't have the technology and staff to do it quickly and provide an updated status for ballots when they come in." — [@LorenzoWard7DC \[candidate\]](#)*

Common questions related to ballot tracking and voting results included clarifying the wording of status updates on ballots and when the voting results would be posted (see Table 13).

### Trending Retweets

The top trending retweet was a post by Martin Austermuhle (@maustermuhle), a reporter and editor at Washington DC's NPR station with 30,000 followers on Twitter. Martin quoted and retweeted [@MeganEMalloy's](#) tweet posted on June 2, 2020, at 11:46 p.m. a picture of the line she waited in for 5 hours to vote:

Trending Tweets	# of Retweets	Quote Tweets	Likes	Impressions
<i>"5 hours. That's how long a woman at the front of the line at the Turkey Thicket vote center had been waiting to cast a ballot when I just chatted with her as she was about to go in. 5 hours. The @Vote4DC line tracker never had wait times over 90 minutes. 5 hours." — <a href="#">@RobustTweets</a></i>	319	50	679	229,872

The retweet posted by WAMU's reporter Martin Austermuhle calls out @Vote4DC directly about the wait times at voting centers across DC. The tweet highlights that wait times listed on DCBOE's website were misleading, emphasizing the discrepancies between what was listed on the website and voters' experiences at the polls.

## Ward 2 Special Election: June 16, 2020

Out of the 1,011 social media mentions that met the search query criteria for the Ward 2 Special Election held on June 16, 2020, only <1% ( $n = 7$ ) of mentions addressed an issue pertinent to the analysis. The low volume of mention is most likely due to ward residents not experiencing serious issues, and because the election was confined to a small geographic area (i.e., Ward 2). Trending mentions on the day of the special election encouraged residents to go to the polls to vote and reiterated the deadline to postmark mail-in ballots:

*“Every registered voter in Ward 2 should have received a Mail-in Ballot for today's Special Election from DCBOE. Make sure your Mail-in Ballot is either postmarked by today or dropped off at one of two Ward 2 voting centers: [1 Hardy Middle School](#) [2 One Judiciary Square](#) <https://t.co/ESOcDdBZJT>”*  
—[@brookeforward2](#) [[candidate](#)]

*“Report from Hardy Middle School: I was the only person casting a ballot there at 3:45pm. Even then, I was simply hand delivering my mail-in ballot, so minimal contact required. My guess is this #Ward2 #SpecialElection will have horrendously low turnout, even counting mail-ins.”* —[@randomduck](#)

*“It's Election Day again in DC. So far, today's special election has avoided the long lines of the primary two weeks ago. Just 87 people have voted in person and about 5000 by mail.”*  
<https://t.co/hDWxCliu9k>.” —[@JulieZaumer](#) [[Washington Post](#)]

## Republican and Democratic National Conventions

The top issues DC residents discussed before the general election during the Republican and Democratic National Conventions were associated with DCBOE discontinuing the option for residents to register to vote online, accounting for 65% of the mention volume of the three main themes, concerns about ballot drop box locations (26%), and address confirmation (9%).

Interestingly, the three main themes identified through social listening during the Democratic and Republican conventions were not related to these conventions but with topics related to the upcoming general election. Table 14 shows subthemes for each of the three main themes before they are examined independently.

**Table 14: Subthemes of Top Three Themes Discussed During the RNC/DNC National Conventions**

Online Voter Registration	Ballot Drop Box Locations	Address Confirmation
DC residents recognized that DCBOE removed the option to register to vote online from its website	Residents reviewed the list of drop box locations on DCBOE's website	Residents discussed receiving the address confirmation form from DCBOE, many were surprised to know they were receiving a mail-in ballot
Residents suggest that the removal of the option to register online to vote is a form of "voter suppression"	Residents asked why there weren't more drop box locations available in their neighborhoods	Residents were confused about how to detach and mail in their new address information
DC residents describe their experiences and uses of the online voter registration app	Residents do not trust the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to deliver their mail-in ballot and are asking for more drop box locations	Martin Austermuhle tweeted about the design flaw that gave voters relief that they were reviewing the instructions correctly
The ACLU of the District of Columbia cited that it's unacceptable to remove the ability to register online when voters need greater access and flexibility to vote during the pandemic	Residents say that the list of vote centers and drop box locations are categorized incorrectly and will cause confusion	Residents did not ask to receive a mail-in ballot and some preferred to vote in person due to theories that the USPS would be compromised, or their vote not counted

### Online Voter Registration

Online voter registration was identified as a concern in 65% of mentions among the three main concerns before the general election. DC residents recognized that DCBOE removed the option to register to vote online from its website, with some claiming the removal of this option as a form of voter suppression. The ACLU of DC also cited that it was unacceptable to remove the ability to register online when voters need greater access and flexibility to vote during the pandemic. Other mentions expressed frustration over the online voter registration app. Examples of tweets are below:

*"This is insane!!! The @Vote4DC app was the only way to guarantee your ballot arrived on time. Everyone I know that used it and everyone on our block that we willed [sic] our ballot request forms for. Got them ASAP. Those that did it online never got theirs." —@listenlocaldc*

*"I literally registered to vote using that app a couple months ago. Now it's been removed from the App Store. Why would they discontinue support for their voter registration app in the midst of COVID, in an election year? I can't find anything about this in my googling." —bugaoxing*

*"@Vote4DC why is DCRegistrations@vote4DC.com no longer active?? I need to register to vote and do not have 1. DC identification or 2. A printer at home." —@natchevs*

### Ballot Drop Box Locations

Concerns related to ballot drop box locations were present in 26% of mentions among the three main concerns before the general election. These mentions described reviewing the list of drop box locations on the DCBOE website, requesting more drop box locations, expressing



mistrust of the USPS, and confusion over the organization of the online list of vote centers and drop box locations on the website.

*“@Vote4DC @MayorBowser @Janeese4DC : Ward 4 resident having a hard time figuring out where I would hand-deliver my mail-in ballot. The BOE website mentions but doesn’t link to a drop box list; does that exist somewhere?” —@wjsandel*

*“I can see these @Vote4DC lists causing more confusion. The list of Election Day voting centers isn't sorted by Ward but by an arbitrary "vote center" number. And the Reeves Center is listed as Ward 1 in the ballot drop sites list but as Ward 2 in the voting center list.” —@heisers*

*“Looks like there will be five ballot drop boxes per ward — but wards 5, 7 and 8 will each be getting eight. That's a reflection of spottier mail service in some of those neighborhoods.  
<https://twitter.com/Vote4DC/status/1295419242624561153>.” —@maustermuhle [WAMU]*

### Address Confirmation

Address confirmation was mentioned in 9% of mentions among the three main concerns before the general election. DC residents described receiving the address confirmation form from DCBOE and expressed confusion about the instructions and why they were receiving a mail-in ballot. Several people cited a series of tweets from Martin Austermuhle, which provided instructions to voters on how to properly confirm their address in response to the unclear instructions, claiming it to be a “design flaw.” Last, other tweets expressed voters’ preference to vote in person due to speculation that the USPS would be compromised. Furthermore, the USPS experienced a funding crisis, staffing overhauls, and incurred severe cost reductions that resulted in delays and interruptions in services across the country, including the District, which impacted residents’ confidence to consider mail as a reliable option. Examples of these tweets are below:

*“Months before the DC Board of Elections sent mail to voters with a “design flaw” that prevented them from knowing which voter wanted to change their address, they sent the wrong primary date to 25,000 voters. Where are the quality checks?” —@FenitN [Washington Post]*

*“@Vote4DC says this is a “design flaw” and [it] now wants people to fold the mailer in half and tape it shut instead of tearing it. Unclear how this will be communicated to all voters. @maustermuhle does a great job breaking down the issue here: <https://t.co/9iCs7nYrUt> 3/.” —@TheArtist MBS [Washington Post]*

*“@maustermuhle @Vote4DC IDK what's going on there. They shouldn't have sent addr confs bcs their records should show addr is good since subsequent mailings & ballots were clearly received. But this is DC. Watch them tell me the forms were returned by USPS or they never rec'd my reply.” —@CapitalJeff*

*“this may be a dumb question, but I dont ever remember getting mailed notices concerning address checking or mail in ballots until now....somehow this all seems like a prelude to a really paranoid election.” —@jackiefishman*

### Trending Retweets

The top trending tweets relevant to the upcoming general election in DC were a series of 11 tweets posted on August 12, 2020, at 11:39 a.m., by WAMU reporter Martin Austermuhle. These tweets criticized the process for DC residents to confirm their address to receive a mail-in

ballot for the November election for being “too complicated.” He specifically identified that “the instructions on the mailer to detach half of it are wrong” and that to solve it, the voter should “fill out any new info, fold the mailer again (but in reverse, so the return address is on the outside), and send the whole thing back in” ([@maustermuhle](#)) and described the reasons why the instructions were wrong and each step to complete and return the form correctly.

Trending Tweets	# of Retweets	Quote Tweets	Likes	Impressions
<i>“Ready for a way-too-complicated D.C. elections thread? Buckle up. So this week many D.C. voters started getting a mailer from @Vote4DC to confirm their address (or let them change it) ahead of November’s election, when ballots will be sent to every voter.” —@maustermuhle</i>	59	51	112	81,594

## General Election: November 3, 2020

There were few conversations that occurred on social media and the internet on the day of the 2020 general election, with few mentions posted on Election Day that expressed frustrations or reported any issues. The top discussions on social media posted by DC residents on the day of the 2020 general election were largely positive, mentioning the convenience of polling locations and no wait times/lines, which accounted for 46% and 37% of the mention volume of the three main themes, respectively. However, some voters did express some concerns over tracking mail-in ballots (17%).

Within the three main themes identified through social listening on the day of the general election of 2020, there were several subthemes that emerged from each of them as well as questions from voters related to these topics. Tables 16 and 17 below provide an overall view before they are examined independently.

**Table 15: Subthemes of Top 3 Themes on General Election Day**

Polling Locations	Wait Time/Lines	Mail-in Ballot
Voters were pleased with the location of voting centers	DC residents who voted in person reported no wait time or lines at their designated polling location	Voters shared the link to track the status of their mail-in ballot
Voters reiterated the closing times for poll/vote centers	There were no reports of long wait times or lines at any of the voting/polling locations in DC	Voters who mailed their ballots did not understand the status options and questioned the meaning of each ballot status
The top links shared on Election Day were the locations of all polling/voting centers	DC residents encouraged voters to head to the polls and register to vote the same day if needed on the Election Day	The link to track their ballot was the third-most shared link on social media among mentions about the general election in DC

**Table 16: Common Questions on General Election Day**

Ballot Tracking
What is the link to track your ballot?
My ballot says that it's under review; what does that mean? Should I still come in person to vote?
What happens if my online signature does not match with the signature in person? Will my ballot still count?
I emailed my proof of residency, but the ballot status has not been updated; should I provide proof of residency to vote in person?
What is the meaning of ballot returned? My status said received/process the day before; do I need to go in-person to vote?

### Polling Locations

Although polling locations were mentioned in 46% of mentions on general Election Day, these mentions were mostly positive, expressing satisfaction with their voting experience and the location of the polling centers. Voters did not report experiencing any obstacles at voting centers. Several mentions related to polling locations were informational, providing links to resources to check wait times or to register to vote. Examples of tweets are below:

*"There are 95 vote centers and residents may vote at \*any location\*. It's always a good idea to check the wait time at your preferred polling center before you go: <https://t.co/p19H8hAwUB>." —@marych eh [DC Council member]*

*"So cool @washingtondc has same-day voter registration and the ability to vote at any polling location in the District. Rest of the US, take note!." —@ArynM1*

*"DC voters, did you know that you can register to vote in-person on #ElectionDay at any of the District's voting centers? <https://t.co/yrqVoR163P>." —@wamu885*

*"Polls in DC are open until 8:00pm tonight. There are no lines. District residents can vote at any of the 95 Vote Centers across the city. There is one near you! <https://t.co/3jVDMUxHwA> VOTE! <https://t.co/OLmJuNFtOx>." —@mayorvincegray [DC Council member/candidate]*

### Wait Time/Lines

Wait time/lines were addressed in 37% of mentions on general Election Day. These mentions were similarly positive, sharing positive experiences at the polls and lack of lines and wait time. Some mentioned that there was a notable difference compared to the primary election. Other mentions also encouraged others to vote since same-day registration (SDR) was available. Examples of tweets are below:

*"Thank you @Vote4DC Voting in person today at Precinct 109 @RandleHighlands was flawless, no lines, no wait. Go Vote!! <https://t.co/KqMv3fPI2c>." —@CMYMA*

*"Absolutely no line at Columbia Heights Rec which was one of the busier early vote centers. @Vote4DC." —@mindymoretti*

*"I have to say, after badly messing up the primary, so far it seems like DCBOE has been running the general election pretty well. No widespread reports of long lines. Mailing ballots + lots of drop boxes + in person early voting really seems to have worked well." —@kwcollins*

*"PSA first-time voters in DC: there are no lines & you can register on the spot. In and out as a voter in 15 minutes! #powerthepolls @vote4dc #VoteDC #VoteSafeDC #VOTE." —@amandamedlock*

### *Mail-in Ballot*

Mail-in ballots were addressed in 17% of mentions on general Election Day. Several mentions shared the link allowing voters to track their mail-in ballots. This link was the third-most shared link on social media among mentions about the general election in DC. However, some confusion was expressed around wording of the status updates (i.e., ballot returned). Examples of tweets are below:

*"All Washington, DC voters had the option to receive ballots by mail. Ballots returned by post, deposited in drop boxes or in ballot boxes in polling centers. Watch me as I vote mine later today. #USEP2020 @IFES1987 @Vote4DC <https://t.co/dJeXWdAVu2>." —@mdsvetlik*

*"@kojoshow DC's Board of Elections needs to fix its bureaucratic use of "Ballot returned" to mean a voter sent it back. I saw confusion on listserves about this, including people declaring that they'd seen this notice, so they'd need to vote in person (an accidental crime).. " —@Geofutures*

*"Hot take: That @Vote4DC has succeeded in sending mail-in ballots to every registered voter WITH "i voted" stickers on them is a huge turnaround for an agency that 6 years ago printed our flag upside down." —@rkaufman*

*"Kudos to @Vote4DC for setting it up so voters can track the current status of their absentee ballots. \*Less\* kudos for (I think, and fervently hope) using the phrase "ballot returned" as their indicator that they've received it. Scared the hell out of me. <https://t.co/IF9qTM9QEs>." —@gardmaf*

### *Trending Retweets*

The most retweeted tweet highlighted the ability to register to vote even past the registration deadline. Other popular tweets encouraged others to vote and similarly emphasized that it was not too late to vote.

Trending Tweets	# of Retweets	Quote Tweets	Likes	Impressions
<i>"Didn't get a chance to register to vote before Election Day? You can register and vote TODAY in these 19 states + Washington, DC <a href="https://t.co/r0mW1QEYuc">https://t.co/r0mW1QEYuc</a> <a href="https://t.co/NRtzbWGGCB">https://t.co/NRtzbWGGCB</a>." —@EmilysList</i>	41	4	51	638,612

## Summary of Findings

Individuals expressed challenges with both mail-in and in-person voting during the 2020 election cycle. Concerns related to receiving or mailing ballots and ballot tracking were prevalent across all election events. Facility-related issues, such as long lines and wait times, inconvenient locations, and facility conditions were also common during the primary election. Logistical issues, including address confirmation and limited polling centers, and technical difficulties with accessing the app, website, and customer service, as well as lagging online updates for wait times, were reported. Last, results indicated a notable difference in tweets across election events, such that voters reported a notable improvement in their experiences in the general election compared to the primary election.

### Primary Election: June 2, 2020

DC residents expressed the most discontent with the DCBOE during the execution of the primary election. From long lines to not receiving a ballot in time to vote by mail to inaccurate wait times posted on DCBOE's website, these issues led to frustration as several residents took to social media to voice their concerns.

Once the primary elections had ended, DC residents were most concerned with their health and safety and were displeased with their inability to avoid voting in person during the pandemic when so many residents were choosing to stay home. Many questioned DCBOE's readiness for the general election based on the performance and outcomes of the primary election.

### Ward 2 Special Election: June 16, 2020

There were very few mentions about the Ward 2 special election. Content posted on social media during this period focused on encouraging residents in Ward 2 to go to the polls to cast their vote. Although mentions of this special election were minimal, DC residents still asked questions about tracking the submission of their ballots.

### Republican and Democratic National Conventions

DC residents expressed discontent with DCBOE removing the option for residents to register to vote online without explanation or notification for residents to plan accordingly. DC residents expressed confusion over the instructions to complete the address confirmation cards they received by mail and expressed confusion with how vote center and drop box location information was posted on DCBOE's website. These issues made it difficult for residents to locate a place to submit their ballots.

### General Election: November 3, 2020

There were very few mentions about the general election posted on social media. Most of the activity on social media during this period focused on encouraging residents to go to the polls to cast their vote. After the election, residents continued to ask questions about tracking the submission of their ballots and understanding the status of their ballot on the online portal.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Election officials faced unprecedented challenges administering the 2020 election. By and large, the DC Board of Elections (DCBOE) was able to rectify many of the issues of the primary election and successfully conduct a largely by-mail general election in November 2020. However, significant challenges and areas for improvement remain. Among the key findings from this analysis are:

### Undeliverable by-mail ballots

- Mail ballots were returned as undeliverable at a rate that far exceeded other by-mail states and jurisdictions, including those also implementing all vote by mail for the first time in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Undeliverable rates were particularly high in Wards 2 and 8 compared other wards.
- Undeliverable rates were notably higher for older registrations than those that had been added or updated more recently, suggesting information in registration records was not up-to-date for many long-time District voters.

### Turnout and voting challenges

- The District saw less growth in turnout compared to other states and the national average. Although turnout hit record highs in the 2020 general election nationwide and in most states, overall turnout in DC was similar to that of the 2016 general election.
- Although by-mail accounted for more than half of the ballots cast District-wide, Wards 7 and 8 relied more on in-person voting options (early voting and Election Day voting) than did voters in other wards across DC.
- The vast majority of returned by-mail ballots were counted, and the percentage rejected was low compared to other all-vote-by-mail states; however, Wards 7 and 8 had the highest by-mail rejection rates of all wards in DC. By-mail ballots from Ward 7 and 8 voters were primarily rejected because they were either returned late or lacked a signature, and were far less likely to be categorized as “under review” due to a signature mismatch that could not be resolved through the ballot cure process than were rejected ballots from voters in other wards.
- Voters expressed confusion about the voting options available and could not readily understand the status of their by-mail ballots based on the information made available in the ballot tracking system.
- Long lines and wait times reported during the primary election were fixed for the general election, when more in-person voting locations were available.

### Registration

- Online registration surpassed registration through the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) in 2020, likely due to DMV offices being closed or operating at limited capacity due to COVID and a concerted effort by DCBOE and other stakeholders to encourage residents to check and update their registration information using the online system.



- Wards 7 and 8 relied more on in-person registration methods (e.g., DMV) and less on online registration compared to the rest of the wards.
- Same day registration (SDR), and the extension of this option to cover both Election Day and the early voting period, provided an important fail-safe option for unregistered District residents seeking to vote in the 2020 election, with same-day options (both during early voting and on Election Day) used at far higher rates than in other states and jurisdictions allowing this type of registration.

## Recommendations

Based on the study findings as well as conversations with local stakeholders, the following recommendations should be considered to improve and enhance the election process in the District:

### *Resources*

DCBOE has access to federal funding from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), which pursuant to the Help America Vote Act (HAVA),<sup>104</sup> distributes congressionally-appropriated funds like those most recently approved for improved cybersecurity in the 2018 omnibus appropriations bill<sup>105</sup> and for COVID-19 response in the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.<sup>106</sup> Although these funds, which are distributed to states using a formula based on voting-age population, cover targeted priority issues and not basic operating expenses, DCBOE should be coordinating with the DC Council to ensure that its overall funding, from both District and federal resources, covers its full mission.

### *Improved Communications*

Although DCBOE executed an extensive outreach campaign throughout the election cycle, these efforts can and should be improved to better and more clearly communicate with voters and stakeholders about the elections process:

- Voters look to the DCBOE website for information about the election process, so it is important to keep the site up to date with easy-to-find information on frequently asked questions. Voters complained that information about polling places and wait times was not kept current and was not provided in a user-friendly format. Many also struggled to find information on voting procedures and how to use various in-person and by-mail voting options. The DCBOE should consider a rigorous audit of the content and usability of the website to ensure it meets voters' needs.
- Include descriptions of each ballot status used in the ballot tracker system. This information should be readily available within the tracker, on the website, and included in the confirmation email sent when voters register to receive status updates. Additionally, voters should be clearly informed what actions they need to take to "cure" their ballot if there is an issue that might prevent it from being counted.
- The locations at which voters could cast ballots in person changed dramatically in 2020. Vote center locations were new and unfamiliar to voters, and the shift to vote centers disrupted the habits of many voters accustomed to voting at their traditional precinct-based polling location. As DCBOE formalizes plans for in-person voting in future election cycles—whether that be with continued use of vote centers, shifting back to precinct-based locations, or some combination—it will be critically important to inform all voters

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<sup>104</sup> 52 U.S.C. 20901.

<sup>105</sup> Public Law 115-141 (2018).

<sup>106</sup> Public Law 116-136 (2020).

of plans and any changes from previous election cycles, including the location of all in-person voting locations, when each will be open, and which options will be available to them. This information should not only be part of communications such as the Voter Guide, postcards, and other advertisements or outreach materials, but also available on the DCBOE website as a searchable map that makes it easy for voters to identify which locations are closest or most convenient for them. This mapping feature should be kept up to date and, if possible, should provide accurate wait times at each facility during early voting and on Election Day. If and when locations change, post signage at inactive voting locations to notify residents of the closest alternative location to cast their ballot.

- Make rigorous efforts to correct misinformation, including proactively providing updates when policy changes create confusion among voters. For example, when the voter registration online application was taken down in mid-August, a frequent theme within social media posts was the inaccurate claim that online registration was no longer available in the District. In addition to general statements providing accurate information (in this case the availability of the fillable PDF option for online registration), DCBOE should have a dedicated staff member to actively monitor and respond to inaccurate posts to provide correct information. This will help slow the spread of misinformation and lesson confusion caused by conflicting messages circulating through official vs. unofficial sources.
- Communicate early and often; in the words of one stakeholder, “I feel like DCBOE is often ‘too little, too late’ in communicating about the problems it is facing.” These same stakeholders suggested that DCBOE take better advantage of the working group of local organizations set up during the 2020 cycle and consult proactively about challenges rather than present specific approaches as final. These coordination efforts occurred too late in the election cycle for many recommended changes to be implemented in 2020. Moving forward, DCBOE should coordinate with working group members, community leaders, and other stakeholders well ahead of the next election, soliciting their feedback and including their voices in the planning phase of communication and outreach.

### *Registration and List Maintenance*

Maintaining accurate voter registration lists is among the biggest challenges to administration of all-vote-by-mail elections, and one with which the District struggled in 2020 as they transitioned to an all-vote-by-mail model.

- Enhance online registration systems to be easier to use and more accessible, no matter what type of device they are accessed on. The massive increase in traffic to the Vote4DC app revealed substantial problems with both usability and functionality, leading to the discontinuation of this tool mid-cycle. As part of broader investments in IT infrastructure, DCBOE should ensure sufficient time and resources are dedicated to not just developing but also testing new applications. This is particularly the case for any voter-facing tools such as the mobile app but is also important for back-end applications used by DCBOE to process voting materials, where shifting demand volume, process

changes, and a lack of redundancy led to delays and errors that potentially disenfranchised voters and decreased trust in the DC election system.

- Encourage registered voters to check and update their registration information regularly, with clear instructions on how to do this. Many states have had success with campaigns urging residents to be “vote ready.” For example:
  - Virginia publishes a pocket voter guide that explains the process;<sup>107</sup>
  - Washington state partners with the League of Women Voters to encourage people to “Be A Voter”;<sup>108</sup> and
  - Maryland publishes a one-page guide entitled “How Maryland Votes” that walks voters through the ballot casting process.<sup>109</sup>

There are many other similar examples nationwide and DCBOE can and should look to these for inspiration and guidance in improving voting information for District residents. The Center for Civic Design has a series of user guides that could be very useful in designing and distributing voting information resources to voters.<sup>110</sup>

- Send periodic address confirmation mailings to all voters, not only those flagged as potentially having moved within or outside the District based on Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), DMV, or National Change of Address (NCOA) reports. Do this earlier than the 90 days ahead of each federal election required by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) so that there is adequate time for response and follow-up.<sup>111</sup>
- Work with voter registration agencies (VRA), including but not limited to the DMV, to ensure they are effectively fulfilling their obligations to inform voters about registration opportunities. Communicate to VRAs the important role that they plan in ensuring District residents are able to participate in the election process and encourage a proactive approach to executing registration responsibilities.
- If possible, rather than simply providing agencies with paper registration forms, look for ways to integrate agency systems into the District’s registration system, similar to DMV integration, so that address and other information changes are automatically received and the address update/confirmation process can start immediately.

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<sup>107</sup> <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/voter-pocket-guide/>

<sup>108</sup>

<https://lwvwa.org/resources/Pictures/Be%20a%20Voter%20Toolkit/Be%20a%20Voter%20Flyer%201%202021%20Primary,%20dark%20bg.pdf>

<sup>109</sup> <https://elections.maryland.gov/voting/documents/HowMDVotes.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> <https://civicdesign.org/fieldguides/>

<sup>111</sup> The National Association of Secretaries of State has surveyed its membership on list maintenance practices-  
<https://www.nass.org/sites/default/files/reports/nass-report-voter-reg-maintenance-final-dec17.pdf>

### *Equity Across Wards*

The data suggest that residents of Ward 8 experienced more challenges in voting than residents of other District wards, and especially with by-mail voting. Although undeliverable mail ballots were a problem across the District, this issue disproportionately affected Ward 8 residents. Fewer Ward 8 residents used by-mail options, and those who did tended to return their mail ballots later than did voters from other wards. Subsequently, ballots were rejected at higher rates, especially for arriving after the ballot return deadline but also because voters had less opportunity to cure their ballots to correct other disqualifying issues (e.g., a missing or mismatching signature). Many of the recommendations listed above will help improve access and alleviate the challenges that disproportionately impacted certain wards. In particular:

- Expand opportunities to register to vote and update voter registration, particularly at agencies and community organizations that residents regularly interact with. This will help voters ensure their registration information is up to date—specifically, address information—so that by-mail ballots are received and can be returned in a timely manner.
- Work closely with community leaders to develop and implement concerted efforts to inform and update voters on the voting process and strategies to better serve these communities. Look for ways to create new partnerships or better leverage existing ones (like the working group of local organizations) as a way to discuss and test solution to challenges regarding registration and voting in Ward 8 compared to the rest of the District. These efforts should occur sufficiently ahead of the election so that feedback can be meaningfully incorporated into plans for both how the next election will be administered (e.g., where in-person voting locations and drop boxes are located) as well what information is needed and how that information can best be communicated to residents.
- In areas with low voting rates, and particularly with low rates of by-mail voting, gather information about the barriers that prevent residents from using vote-by-mail options. Other states have found that all-vote-by mail systems increase turnout, especially among lower propensity voting groups.<sup>112</sup> For DC to actualize this potential benefit of expanded by-mail voting, residents must trust this method of voting, understand how to use the system, and have sufficient access to resources and the opportunity to use this option. Whether through a formal survey, qualitative approaches such as focus groups or in-depth interviews, or community engagement and listening efforts, DCBOE should seek to understand perceptions of by-mail voting, the specific challenges residents experienced that precluded them from returning a mail ballot, and how the system might be improved to become more trusted by and better meet the needs of residents.

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<sup>112</sup> Bonica, A., Grumbach, J. M., Hill, C., & Jefferson, H. (2021). All-mail voting in Colorado increases turnout and reduces turnout inequality. *Electoral Studies*, 72, 102363.

## APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL REGISTRATION AND VOTING TABLES BY WARD

**Table A1: Registrations During the 2020 Election Cycle by Ward and Registration Source**

Ward	Total 2020 Cycle Registrations	DMV		Online Registrations		Mail		Same Day Registrations		Other		Board of Elections	
		Total	Pct.	Total	Pct.	Total	Pct.	Total	Pct.	Total	Pct.	Total	Pct.
Ward 1	12,033	5,113	42.5%	4,335	36.0%	967	8.0%	913	7.6%	461	3.8%	244	2.0%
Ward 2	11,387	4,545	39.9%	4,235	37.2%	959	8.4%	901	7.9%	467	4.1%	280	2.5%
Ward 3	9,386	4,140	44.1%	3,059	32.6%	856	9.1%	634	6.8%	558	5.9%	139	1.5%
Ward 4	7,329	3,135	42.8%	2,227	30.4%	599	8.2%	749	10.2%	484	6.6%	135	1.8%
Ward 5	9,814	4,606	46.9%	2,815	28.7%	689	7.0%	932	9.5%	554	5.6%	218	2.2%
Ward 6	17,964	8,201	45.7%	5,969	33.2%	1,442	8.0%	1,375	7.7%	545	3.0%	432	2.4%
Ward 7	7,059	3,617	51.2%	1,385	19.6%	419	5.9%	848	12.0%	645	9.1%	145	2.1%
Ward 8	7,721	3,998	51.8%	1,448	18.8%	430	5.6%	1,062	13.8%	648	8.4%	135	1.7%

Note: The “Other” category includes registrations from additional voter registration agencies such as libraries and health and human services offices.

**Table A2: Turnout Among DC Residents that were Registered and Eligible to Vote Between 2012 and 2020, by Year and Ward.**

Year	All DC	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
2012	65.8%	61.5%	63.2%	73.8%	70.0%	65.6%	67.1%	65.2%	58.8%
2014	36.6%	34.1%	32.7%	47.0%	45.5%	37.3%	39.4%	31.6%	24.5%
2016	53.4%	47.9%	45.8%	62.6%	60.7%	54.3%	54.7%	51.9%	46.3%
2018	38.7%	34.7%	31.8%	48.1%	46.4%	39.4%	40.7%	36.0%	29.9%
2020	52.1%	44.7%	43.2%	61.2%	59.3%	53.6%	52.1%	52.6%	46.2%



## APPENDIX B: PRIMARY ELECTION VOTING RESOURCES

The following data on voting technology were provided by the DCBOE. The equipment described in the table refers to:

- poll pads used to check voters in,
- ballot on demand devices used to provide each voter with a ballot with the appropriate contests on it according to their precinct of residence,
- ballot marking devices used by voters to mark their ballots, and
- scanners that can scan and tabulate ballots marked by hand or by ballot marking devices.

**Table B.1: Primary Election: Election Day and Early Voting Technology Resources**

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Technology Resources			
			Poll Pads	Ballot on Demand	Ballot Marking Devices	Scanner (DS200)
Ward 1	1A	Columbia Heights	3	2	10	2
	1B	Prince Hall Masonic Temple	3	2	10	2
Ward 2	2A	One Judiciary Sq	3	2	10	2
	2B	Hardy Middle School	3	2	10	2
Ward 3	3A	Murch Elementary School	3	2	10	2
	3B	Oyster Adams Bilingual School	3	2	10	2
Ward 4	4A	Ida B. Wells Middle School	3	2	10	2
	4B	Emery Heights Comm Ctr	3	2	10	2
	4C	Raymond Recreation Center	3	2	10	2
Ward 5	5A	Turkey Thicket Recreation Center	3	2	10	2
	5B	McKinley Tech. High School	3	2	10	2
Ward 6	6A	King Greenleaf	3	2	10	2
	6B	Sherwood Recreation Center	3	2	10	2
	6C	Kennedy Recreation Center	3	2	10	2
Ward 7	7A	Deanwood Community Ctr	3	2	10	2
	7B	Benning Stoddert Comm Ctr	3	2	10	2
	7C	Hillcrest Recreation Center	3	2	10	2
Ward 8	8A	Malcolm X Opportunity Center	3	2	10	2
	8B	Barry Farms Rec Ctr	3	2	10	2
	8C	Anacostia High School	3	2	10	2
		Mail-in Ballot Return Center	N/A	N/A	N/A	30
		<b>TOTALS</b>	60	40	200	70

**Table B.2: Primary Election: Election Day and Early Voting Poll Workers<sup>113</sup>**

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Poll Workers				
			Number of Registration Clerks	Number of Ballot Clerks	Number of Ballot Marking Clerks	Number of Voting Assistance Clerks	Number of Site Coordinators
Ward 1	1A	Columbia Heights	3	2	2	2	2
	1B	Prince Hall Masonic Temple	3	2	1	2	2
Ward 2	2A	One Judiciary Sq	3	2	3	2	2
	2B	Hardy Middle School	3	2	2	2	2
Ward 3	3A	Murch Elementary School	3	2	2	2	2
	3B	Oyster Adams Bilingual School	3	2	2	2	2
Ward 4	4A	Ida B. Wells Middle School	3	2	3	2	2
	4B	Emery Heights Comm Ctr	3	2	1	3	2
	4C	Raymond Recreation Center	2	2	1	3	2
Ward 5	5A	Turkey Thicket Recreation Center	3	2	2	3	2
	5B	McKinley Tech. High School	3	1	2	2	2
Ward 6	6A	King Greenleaf	3	2	2	2	2
	6B	Sherwood Recreation Center	3	3	2	2	2
	6C	Kennedy Recreation Center	3	2	3	3	2
Ward 7	7A	Deanwood Community Ctr	2	2	2	2	2
	7B	Benning Stoddert Comm Ctr	3	2	2	2	2
	7C	Hillcrest Recreation Center	3	1	3	2	2
Ward 8	8A	Malcolm X Opportunity Center	3	2	2	4	2
	8B	Barry Farms Rec Ctr	3	2	2	3	2
	8C	Anacostia High School	3	1	2	2	2
TOTAL			58	38	41	47	40

<sup>113</sup> Data for number of poll workers were obtained from DCBOE's After-Action Report for the 2020 primary election. <https://dcboe.org/dcboe/media/PDFFiles/2020-Primary-Election-Poll-Worker-Staffing-by-Vote-Center.pdf>

## APPENDIX C: GENERAL ELECTION VOTING RESOURCES

The following data on voting technology were provided by the DCBOE. The equipment described in tables C1 and C3 refer to:

- poll pads used to check voters in by registration clerks, site coordinators, and curbside poll workers.
- ADA tablets are accessible tablets that comply with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines and are used to translate languages and provide assistance to voters with disabilities,
- ballot on demand devices used to provide each voter with a ballot with the appropriate contests on it according to their precinct of residence,
- ballot marking devices used by voters to mark their ballots, and
- scanners that can scan and tabulate ballots marked by hand or by ballot marking devices.

Additionally, tables C1 and C2 cover the equipment and personnel deployed at voting locations that were open during early voting and on Election Day, and tables C3 and C4 cover the equipment and personnel deployed at voting locations that were open only on Election Day.

**Table C.1: General Election Technology Resources: Early Voting and Election Day Voting**

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Technology Resources						
			Reg Clerk Poll Pads	Site Coordinator Poll Pads	Curbside Poll Pads	ADA Tablet	Ballot on Demand	Ballot Marking Devices	Scanner (DS200)
Ward 1	1A	Columbia Heights Community Center	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	1B	Prince Hall Center (Masonic Temple)	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	1C	Marie Reed Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
Ward 2	2A	Hardy Middle School	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	2B	Capital One Sports Arena*	20	1	0	1	4	20	5
	2C	School w/o Walls at Francis Stephen	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
Ward 3	3A	Omni Shoreham Hotel*	15	1	0	1	4	20	5
	3B	University of the District of Columbia*	20	1	0	1	3	15	5
	3C	Murch Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
	3D	Horace Mann Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
Ward 4	4A	Ida B. Wells Middle School	6	1	3	1	2	10	2

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Technology Resources						
			Reg Clerk Poll Pads	Site Coordinator Poll Pads	Curbside Poll Pads	ADA Tablet	Ballot on Demand	Ballot Marking Devices	Scanner (DS200)
	4B	Emery Heights Community Center	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	4C	Lafayette Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
	4D	Raymond Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
	4E	Shepherd Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
Ward 5	5A	Turkey Thicket Recreation Center	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	5B	Dock 5 @ Union Market*	15	1	0	1	3	15	5
	5C	McKinley Technology High School	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
	5D	Trinidad Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
Ward 6	6A	Washington Nationals Park*	20	1	0	1	4	20	5
	6B	Sherwood Recreation Center	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	6C	Kennedy Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
	6D	Walker-Jones Education Campus	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
Ward 7	7A	Deanwood Recreation Center	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	7B	Benning Stoddert Recreation Center	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	7C	Hillcrest Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
	7D	Ridge Road Community Center	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
Ward 8	8A	Malcolm X Opportunity Center	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	8B	Ferebee – Hope Recreation Center	6	1	3	1	2	10	2
	8C	Anacostia Senior High School	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
	8D	Ballou Senior High School	5	1	3	1	1	6	1
	8E	Entertainment and Sports Arena*	20	2	0	1	3	20	5
TOTAL			251	33	78	32	58	310	67

\*Indicates super vote center site

**Table C.2: General Election Poll Workers: Early Voting and Election Day Voting<sup>114</sup>**

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Poll Workers				
			Number of Site Coordinators	Number of Registration Clerks	Number of Ballot Clerks	Number of Precinct Technician	Number of Voting Assistance Clerks
Ward 1	1A	Columbia Heights Community Center	1	11	6	1	5
	1B	Prince Hall Center (Masonic Temple)	2	14	5	1	7
	1C	Marie Reed Elementary School	2	10	6	1	6
Ward 2	2A	Hardy Middle School	2	10	5	0	5
	2B	Capital One Sports Arena*	2	21	14	1	10
	2C	School w/o Walls at Francis Stephen	2	6	5	2	6
Ward 3	3A	Omni Shoreham Hotel*	2	16	12	0	9
	3B	University of the District of Columbia*	2	20	9	0	7
	3C	Murch Elementary School	3	7	9	0	7
	3D	Horace Mann Elementary School	2	10	6	1	9
Ward 4	4A	Ida B. Wells Middle School	2	13	8	1	8
	4B	Emery Heights Community Center	2	11	7	1	8
	4C	Lafayette Elementary School	1	9	6	1	4
	4D	Raymond Recreation Center	1	10	7	1	6
	4E	Shepherd Elementary School	2	4	5	1	6
Ward 5	5A	Turkey Thicket Recreation Center	2	8	5	1	8
	5B	Dock 5 @ Union Market*	1	19	14	1	11

<sup>114</sup> Data for number of poll workers were obtained from DCBOE's After-Action Report for the 2020 general election. [https://dcboe.org/dcboe/media/PDFFiles/PW-Staffing-by-Precinct\\_1A.pdf](https://dcboe.org/dcboe/media/PDFFiles/PW-Staffing-by-Precinct_1A.pdf)

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Poll Workers				
			Number of Site Coordinators	Number of Registration Clerks	Number of Ballot Clerks	Number of Precinct Technician	Number of Voting Assistance Clerks
	5C	McKinley Technology High School	1	10	7	1	6
	5D	Trinidad Recreation Center	2	9	3	1	6
Ward 6	6A	Washington Nationals Park*	2	20	8	0	6
	6B	Sherwood Recreation Center	1	10	3	0	7
	6C	Kennedy Recreation Center	1	10	4	1	8
	6D	Walker-Jones Education Campus	1	9	5	1	8
Ward 7	7A	Deanwood Recreation Center	1	13	4	1	7
	7B	Benning Stoddert Recreation Center	1	11	5	1	8
	7C	Hillcrest Recreation Center	1	10	6	1	7
	7D	Ridge Road Community Center	1	6	5	0	7
Ward 8	8A	Malcolm X Opportunity Center	1	7	4	1	3
	8B	Ferebee – Hope Recreation Center	2	8	5	1	7
	8C	Anacostia Senior High School	1	9	5	1	8
	8D	Ballou Senior High School	1	7	4	1	7
	8E	Entertainment and Sports Arena*	1	14	12	1	7
	TOTAL		49	352	209	26	224

\*Indicates voting supercenter site



**Table C.3: General Election Technology Resources Election Day Only**

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Technology Resources						
			Reg. Clerk Poll Pads	Site Coordinator Poll Pads	Curbside Poll Pads	ADA Tablet	Ballot on Demand	Ballot Marking Devices	Scanner (DS200)
Ward 1	PCT 5	Washington Metro High School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 6	Capitol Hill Montessori @ Meyer School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 7	Rita Bright Community Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 11	H.D. Cooke Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 12	Columbia Heights Education Campus	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 13	Bancroft Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 45	Garrison Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
Ward 2	PCT 1	School Without Walls High School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 2	Duke Ellington High School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 46	Reeves Municipal Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 56	Foundry United Church	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
Ward 3	PCT 3	Palisades Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 4	Guy Mason Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 8	Oyster Bilingual School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 9	Cleveland Park Library	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 10	Janney Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 16	Chevy Chase Community Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 48	Capitol Hill Memorial Church	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
Ward 4	PCT 14	M.P.D. R.O.C. North	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 15	Powell Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 17	Barnard Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 18	Takoma Education Campus	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 19	Lamond Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 20	LaSalle-Backus Education Campus	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 52	St. John's College High School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 58	Fort Stevens Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 59	Brightwood Education Campus	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
Ward 5	PCT 21	UDC Community College @ Backus	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 22	Burroughs Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 23	Noyes Education Campus	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 24	Joseph H. Cole Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 49	Mt. Horeb Baptist Church	5	1	3	1	1	4	1

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Technology Resources						
			Reg. Clerk Poll Pads	Site Coordinator Poll Pads	Curbside Poll Pads	ADA Tablet	Ballot on Demand	Ballot Marking Devices	Scanner (DS200)
	PCT 53	Ukrainian National Shrine	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 60	Dunbar Senior High School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
Ward 6	PCT 25	Miner Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 27	J.O. Wilson Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 28	Stuart-Hobson Middle School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 29	Eastern Market	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 30	Payne Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 31	Watkins Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 43	Arthur Capper Community Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 47	Jefferson Middle School Academy	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 57	King Greenleaf Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
Ward 7	PCT 32	Nationals Youth Basketball Academy	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 33	Burrville Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 34	Kelly Miller Middle School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 35	Thomas Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 36	River Terrace Education Campus	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 37	Plummer Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 38	Nalle Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 39	Sousa Middle School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 40	Randle-Highlands Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 51	St. Timothy's Episcopal Church	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 61	Drew Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 62	Therapeutic Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
Ward 8	PCT 26	Bald Eagle Recreation Center	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 41	Moten Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 42	Hendley Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 44	Boone Elementary School (Formerly Orr)	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 50	Allen A.M.E. Church	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 54	Covenant Baptist Church	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 55	Union Temple Baptist Church	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	PCT 63	Turner Elementary School	5	1	3	1	1	4	1
	TOTAL		315	63	189	63	63	252	63

**Table C.4: General Election Poll Workers: Election Day Voting Only<sup>115</sup>**

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Poll Workers				
			Number of Site Coordinators	Number of Registration Clerks	Number of Ballot Clerks	Number of Precinct Technician	Number of Voting Assistance Clerks
Ward 1	PCT 5	Washington Metro High School	1	10	3		5
	PCT 6	Capitol Hill Montessori @ Meyer School	1	11	4	1	6
	PCT 7	Rita Bright Community Center	1	10	5	1	5
	PCT 11	H.D. Cooke Elementary School	1	10	8		7
	PCT 12	Columbia Heights Education Campus	2	8	5	1	7
	PCT 13	Bancroft Elementary School	1	9	5	1	7
	PCT 45	Garrison Elementary School	1	9	6		7
Ward 2	PCT 1	School Without Walls High School	1	9	5		6
	PCT 2	Duke Ellington High School	1	9	6	1	7
	PCT 46	Reeves Municipal Center	1	14	6		6
	PCT 56	Foundry United Church	1	10	6		7
Ward 3	PCT 3	Palisades Recreation Center	1	7	5		7
	PCT 4	Guy Mason Recreation Center	1	8	6	1	7
	PCT 8	Oyster Bilingual School	1	10	5		6
	PCT 9	Cleveland Park Library	1	7	8		8
	PCT 10	Janney Elementary School	1	10	6		7
	PCT 16	Chevy Chase Community Center	1	7	4		6
	PCT 48	Capitol Hill Memorial Church	1	7	6		7
Ward 4	PCT 14	M.P.D. R.O.C. North	1	9	5		6
	PCT 15	Powell Elementary School	1	10	7	1	6
	PCT 17	Barnard Elementary School	1	8	5		7

<sup>115</sup> Data for number of poll workers were obtained from DCBOE's After-Action Report for the 2020 general election. [https://dcboe.org/dcboe/media/PDFFiles/PW-Staffing-by-Precinct\\_1A.pdf](https://dcboe.org/dcboe/media/PDFFiles/PW-Staffing-by-Precinct_1A.pdf)

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Poll Workers				
			Number of Site Coordinators	Number of Registration Clerks	Number of Ballot Clerks	Number of Precinct Technician	Number of Voting Assistance Clerks
	PCT 18	Takoma Education Campus	1	8	4		5
	PCT 19	Lamond Recreation Center	1	6	5	1	7
	PCT 20	LaSalle-Backus Education Campus	1	10	4		5
	PCT 52	St. John's College High School	1	8	5	1	3
	PCT 58	Fort Stevens Recreation Center	1	10	6		5
	PCT 59	Brightwood Education Campus	1	9	6	1	5
Ward 5	PCT 21	UDC Community College @ Backus	1	8	7		7
	PCT 22	Burroughs Elementary School	1	8	3	1	5
	PCT 23	Noyes Education Campus	1	9	7		6
	PCT 24	Joseph H. Cole Recreation Center	1	9	5	1	6
	PCT 49	Mt. Horeb Baptist Church	1	7	3	1	8
	PCT 53	Ukrainian National Shrine	1	8	4		5
	PCT 60	Dunbar Senior High School	1	8	7	1	6
Ward 6	PCT 25	Miner Elementary School	1	8	6	1	8
	PCT 27	J.O. Wilson Elementary School	1	11	6	1	8
	PCT 28	Stuart-Hobson Middle School	1	11	5		6
	PCT 29	Eastern Market	1	13	6		7
	PCT 30	Payne Elementary School	1	8	5		6
	PCT 31	Watkins Elementary School	1	9	7		6
	PCT 43	Arthur Capper Community Center	1	10	6		3
	PCT 47	Jefferson Middle School Academy	1	9	7		5
	PCT 57	King Greenleaf Recreation Center	1	9	5		7
Ward 7	PCT 32	Nationals Youth Basketball Academy	1	8	5		7

Ward	Vote Center Code	Location	Poll Workers				
			Number of Site Coordinators	Number of Registration Clerks	Number of Ballot Clerks	Number of Precinct Technician	Number of Voting Assistance Clerks
	PCT 33	Burrville Elementary School	1	9	5	1	7
	PCT 34	Kelly Miller Middle School	1	7	5		6
	PCT 35	Thomas Elementary School	1	8	8		4
	PCT 36	River Terrace Education Campus	1	8	4		6
	PCT 37	Plummer Elementary School	1	8	6	1	6
	PCT 38	Nalle Elementary School	1	6	5	1	4
	PCT 39	Sousa Middle School	1	8	2	1	4
	PCT 40	Randle-Highlands Elementary School	1	8	4		6
	PCT 51	St. Timothy's Episcopal Church	1	8	7	1	7
	PCT 61	Drew Elementary School	1	7	4	1	5
	PCT 62	Therapeutic Recreation Center	1	8	6		6
Ward 8	PCT 26	Bald Eagle Recreation Center	2	7	4	1	5
	PCT 41	Moten Elementary School	1	8	6		7
	PCT 42	Hendley Elementary School	1	7	3		5
	PCT 44	Boone Elementary School (Formerly Orr)	1	8	4		3
	PCT 50	Allen A.M.E. Church	1	9	6	1	8
	PCT 54	Covenant Baptist Church	1	7	3	2	6
	PCT 55	Union Temple Baptist Church	1	7	2	1	6
	PCT 63	Turner Elementary School	1	5	4		5
TOTAL			65	539	328	27	379

## APPENDIX D: SOCIAL LISTENING—DETAILED METHODOLOGY

To understand DC voters’ experiences in the 2020 election cycle, FMG’s social listening lab utilized our suite of social listening tools to collect mentions from social media channels such as Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, and Facebook. This retrospective analysis examined conversations and discussions surrounding the 2020 election cycle, with a focus on four key events that occurred in 2020: (1) primary election, June 2, 2020, (2) District of Columbia Ward 2, Special election, June 16, 2020, (3) Republican and Democratic National Conventions, August 24-27, 2020 (RNC) and August 17-20, 2020 (DNC) and (4) general election, November 3, 2020.

### Data Collection

FMG utilized Brandwatch, a social listening tool, to collect media data from publicly available accounts, forums, and websites on social media and the Internet. A key advantage of using platforms like Brandwatch is that it provides access to the Twitter firehose, giving us full access to tweets. For each election event, we developed a comprehensive list of keywords, hashtags, and social media handles to extract conversations about election events specific to DC (see Figure D1).

The keywords were then translated into a SQL query, to collect data that meet the criteria outlined in the query (see Figure D2). Finalizing the query also involved an iterative process of adding exclusion terms to the query to remove irrelevant mentions and focus on content posted by the everyday user on social media.

**Figure D1: Keywords for SQL Query**<sup>116</sup>

DC Quadrants		DC Neighborhoods		Nickname		Wards		Ward 1		Ward 2		Ward 3		Ward 4		Ward 5		Ward 6	
NW	North West	Adams Morgan	AdMo	Ward 1	Adams Morgan	Burleith	American University Park	Barnaby Woods	Arboretum	Barney Circle									
NE	North East	Anacostia		Ward 2	Columbia Heights	Downtown	Berkley	Brightwood	Bloomingdale	Capitol Hill									
SW	South West	Brookland		Ward 3	Le Droit Park	Dupont Circle	Cathedral Heights	Brightwood Park	Brentwood	Chinatown									
SE	South East	Capitol Hill		Ward 4	Mount Pleasant	Foggy Bottom	Chevy Chase	Colonial Village	Brookland	Judiciary Square									
		Capitol Riverfront	Waterfront	Ward 5	Park View	Georgetown	Cleveland Park	Crestwood	Carver Langston	Kingman Park									
		Chinatown		Ward 6	Pleasant Plains	Sheridan Kalorama	Colony Hill	Fort Totten	Eckington	Navy Yard/Near Southeast									
		Columbia Heights		Ward 7	Shaw	Logan Circle	Forest Hills	Hawthorne	Edgewood	Near Northeast									
		Congress Heights		Ward 8	Woodley Park	Mount Vernon Square	Foxhall	Manor Park	Fort Lincoln	Penn Quarter									
		Dupont Circle	Dupont			Shaw	Friendship Heights	Petworth	Fort Totten (Also in Ward 4)	NoMa									
		Foggy Bottom				West End	Glover Park	Riggs Park	Gateway	Southwest Federal Center									
		Georgetown	G-Town				Kent	Lamond-Riggs	Ivy City	Southwest Waterfront									
		H Street Corridor					Massachusetts Heights	Shepherd Park	Riggs Park (Also in Ward 4)	Sursum Corda									
		Ivy City					McLean Gardens	Sixteenth Street Heights	Langdon	Swampoodle									
		Logan Circle					North Cleveland Park	Takoma	Michigan Park	Union Station									
		Mount Vernon Square					Observatory Circle		North Michigan Park										
		National Mall	The Mall				The Palisades		Pleasant Hill										
		NoMa					Potomac Heights		Stronghold/Metropolis View										
		Penn Quarter					Spring Valley		Trinidad										
		Petworth					Tenlytown		Truxton Circle										
		Shaw					Wakefield		Woodridge										
		The Wharf					Wesley Heights												
		U Street Corridor					Woodland-Normanstone Terrace												
		Woodley Park					Woodley Park												

<sup>116</sup> Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) 7E, 7F, 8A, 8B, 8C, 8D, and 8E were also covered in the query.



Ward 7	Ward 8	Advisory Neighborhood Commissions	In-Person Voting	Vote by Mail	DCBOE	Counting/air Elections/Campaign Finance	Race-Specific
Benning Heights	Anacostia	ANC 1A	Ballot	Absentee Ballot	DCBOE	Canvass	At-large
Benning Ridge	Barry Farm	ANC 1B	Candidate	Accepted	BOE	Count	Board of Ed
Benning	Bellevue	ANC 1C	Early	Address	Board of Elections Results	Fair Election(s)	Board of Education
Burrville	Buena Vista	ANC 1D	Election	Ballot Drop Box	Michael Bennett	Winner	Matching funds
Capitol View	Congress Heights	ANC 2A	Long Line	Counted	Mike Gill	Tally	PAC
Civic Betterment	Douglass	ANC 2B	Poll worker	Cure	Karyn Greenfield	Public finance	Spend(ing)
Deanwood	Fairlawn	ANC 2C	Pollworker	Drop Box	Alice [P.] Miller		
Dupont Park	Garfield Heights	ANC 2D	Precinct	Early Voting	Terri [D.] Stroud		
Eastland Gardens	Knox Hill	ANC 2E	Provisional	Mail-In Ballot	Karen [F.] Brooks		
Fairfax Village	Shipley Terrace	ANC 2F	Register(ed)	Postmark			
Fairlawn	Washington Highland	ANC 3A	Vote	Postmarked			
Fort Davis	Woodland	ANC 3B	Vote Center	Rejected			
Fort Dupont		ANC 3C	Voted	Request			
Good Hope		ANC 3D	Voting	Returned			
Grant Park		ANC 3E	Wait	Signature			
Greenway		ANC 3F	Wait time	Status			
Hillbrook		ANC 3G	Waited	Track(ing)			
Hillcrest		ANC 4A	Waiting	Under review			
Kenilworth		ANC 4B		US Postal Service			
Kingman Park		ANC 4C		USPS			
Lincoln Heights		ANC 4D		VBM			
Mahoning Heights		ANC 5A					
Marshall Heights		ANC 5B					
Mayfair		ANC 5C					
Naylor Gardens		ANC 5D					
Penn Branch		ANC 5E					
Randle Highlands		ANC 6A					
River Terrace		ANC 6B					
Skyland		ANC 6C					
Summit Park		ANC 6D					
Twining		ANC 6E					
		ANC 7A					
		ANC 7B					
		ANC 7C					
		ANC 7D					

**Figure D2: SQL Query**

```

((((DCBOE) OR "DC Board of Elections" OR "D.C. Board of Elections" OR "the district" OR "Washington D.C." OR "DC Fair Election Program" OR "Office of Campaign Finance" OR (OCF) OR Northwest OR (NW) OR Northeast OR (NE) OR Southwest OR (SW) OR Southeast OR (SE) OR (WARD NEAR/1f (1 OR 2 OR 3 OR 4 OR 5 OR 6 OR 7 OR 8 OR "Advisory Neighborhood Commissions" OR (ANC) OR "Adams Morgan" OR Anacostia OR Brookland OR "Capitol Hill" OR "Capitol Riverfront" OR Chinatown OR "Columbia Heights" OR "Congress Heights" OR "Dupont Circle" OR "Foggy Bottom" OR Georgetown OR "H Street" OR "H St." OR "Ivy City" OR "Logan Circle" OR "Mount Vernon Square" OR (NOMA) OR "Penn Quarter" OR Petworth OR Shaw OR "The Wharf" OR "U Street" OR "U St." OR "Woodley Park"))))
NEAR/15
(("Absentee Ballot" OR "Ballot Drop Box" OR "vote center" OR poll OR polling OR polls OR Candidate OR Counted OR candidate OR Cure OR "Early Voting" OR vote OR voted OR "Mail in Ballot" OR election OR Postmark OR Postmark* OR Reject* OR Request OR Returned OR Status OR Track* OR Sent OR "Under Review" OR (USPS) OR "US Postal Service" OR "Post Office" OR "Primary Election" OR "Special Election" OR "General Election" OR (VBM) OR ((Mail) NEAR/3 (Ballot))))
OR (@vote4dc AND ("Absentee Ballot" OR "Ballot Drop Box" OR "vote center" OR poll OR polling OR polls OR Candidate OR Counted OR candidate OR Cure OR "Early Voting" OR vote OR voted OR "Mail in Ballot" OR election OR Postmark OR Postmark* OR Reject* OR Request OR Returned OR Status OR Track* OR Sent OR "Under Review" OR (USPS) OR "US Postal Service" OR "Post Office" OR "Primary Election" OR "Special Election" OR "General Election" OR (VBM) OR ((Mail) NEAR/3 (Ballot))))
OR (engagingWith:voted4dc AND ("Absentee Ballot" OR "Ballot Drop Box" OR "vote center" OR poll OR polling OR polls OR Candidate OR Counted OR candidate OR Cure OR "Early Voting" OR vote OR voted OR "Mail in Ballot" OR election OR Postmark OR Postmark* OR Reject* OR Request OR Returned OR Status OR Track* OR Sent OR "Under Review" OR (USPS) OR "US Postal Service" OR "Post Office" OR "Primary Election" OR "Special Election" OR "General Election" OR (VBM) OR ((Mail) NEAR/3 (Ballot))))
OR (author:voted4dc AND ("Absentee Ballot" OR "Ballot Drop Box" OR "vote center" OR poll OR polling OR polls OR Candidate OR Counted OR candidate OR Cure OR "Early Voting" OR vote OR voted OR "Mail in Ballot" OR election OR Postmark OR Postmark* OR Reject* OR Request OR Returned OR Status OR Track* OR Sent OR "Under Review" OR (USPS) OR "US Postal Service" OR "Post Office" OR "Primary Election" OR "Special Election" OR "General Election" OR (VBM) OR ((Mail) NEAR/3 (Ballot))))
OR links:dcboe.org OR url:dcboe.org
OR (author:GOP OR DNC)
OR #ward1 OR #ward2 OR #ward3 OR #ward4 OR #ward5 OR #ward6 OR #ward7 OR #ward8 OR #DCBOE OR #votesafedc)
AND (city:"USA.DC.Washington, DC" OR url:reddit.com/r/washingtondc)

NOT("Southeast Asia" OR "SE Asian" OR "SW Baltimore" OR "northwest track" OR "Southeast Louisiana" OR "Northeast Kansas" OR "Statehood" OR "DC Statehood" OR #statehood OR "51st state" OR Malaysia OR "Homebound because of COVID19" OR author:capitalweather OR author:metroheroalerts OR author:metroherobot_sv OR author:metroherobot_ OR author:realhumanrights OR author:DCPoliceDept)

```

The search query allowed us to collect two datasets for each election event: (1) all mentions posted on the day of the election event and (2) a random sample of no more than 2000 mentions between a range of time before and after the event.<sup>117</sup> These date ranges varied based on the event (See Table D1). For example, for the primary election, the date range April 17, 2020, to June 30, 2020, was selected to capture 45 days before the primary Election Day when residents were able to request an absentee ballot and four weeks after the Election Day. For the Ward 2 special election, the date range of June 10, 2020, to June 26, 2020, was selected

<sup>117</sup> For this study, this excludes mentions posted on the day of the event.

to capture 10-days before and after the Election Day. The same reasoning applied for the selection of the date ranges for the Republican and Democratic National Conventions (August 12, 2020, to September 1, 2020). The Republican and Democratic National Conventions were selected as a period for data collection to capture DC voters' concerns prior to the general election. Data was not collected for this period of time to capture conversations about topics related to the conventions themselves; rather, the timeframe of the conventions represented a period of expected rise in conversations about local elections that may have been top of mind for voters at the time. Due to the significance of the general election and the number of mentions anticipated on the day of the election, we adjusted the sampling strategy. We collected all mentions from November 2, 2020, to November 4, 2020, and the random sample was collected from September 19, 2020, to November 13, 2020, to capture 45 days before and 10 days after the election. Date ranges and custom queries were created to Tag specific conversations for each event listed below (Table D1).

**Table D1: Date Ranges and SQL Tags were Developed for Each Election Event**

Event	Date of Event	Date Range	SQL Tags
Primary Election	June 2, 2020	April 17 - June 30, 2020	(Request* OR "Absentee Ballot" OR Ballot OR Vot* OR election* OR primary OR primaries OR poll* OR "mail in ballot") - (author: DNC OR GOP OR {DNC} OR {RNC})
Ward 2 Special Election	June 16, 2020	June 10 - June 26, 2020	(Registration OR Request* OR "Absentee Ballot" OR Ballot* OR Vot* OR "vote center" OR "voting centers" OR "drop box" OR election* OR "special election" OR poll* OR "mail in ballot" OR #votesafedc OR #dcision20 OR #dcboe) - (author: DNC OR GOP OR {DNC} OR {RNC})
Republican and Democratic National Conventions	August 24-27, 2020 (RNC); August 17-20, 2020 (DNC)	August 12 - September 1, 2020	(Registration OR Register OR Request* OR "Absentee Ballot" OR Ballot* OR Vot* OR "vote center" OR "voting centers" OR "drop box" OR election* OR "general election" OR "presidential election" OR poll* OR "mail in ballot" OR #votesafedc OR #dcision20 OR #dcboe) - (author: DNC OR GOP OR {DNC} OR {RNC})
General Election	November 3, 2020	September 19 - November 13, 2020	(Registration OR Request* OR "Absentee Ballot" OR Ballot* OR Vot* OR "vote center" OR "voting centers" OR "drop box" OR election* OR "general election" OR "presidential election" OR poll* OR "mail in ballot" OR #votesafedc OR #dcision20 OR #dcboe) - (author: DNC OR GOP OR {DNC} OR {RNC})

These queries led to the collection of tweets for each election event. All mentions from the day of the election event were collected, and a random sample from the respective date range that excluded the day of the event was collected. If fewer than 2,000 mentions met the query criteria, then all mentions were analyzed. For the primary election, a total of 4,290 mentions

were collected: (1) 2,290 on primary Election Day and (2) 2,000 from a random sample from the respective date range. For the Ward 2 special election, a total of 1,139 mentions were analyzed: (1) 80 on special Election Day and (2) 1,059 from a random sample from the respective date range. The Republican and Democratic National Conventions were analyzed together as one dataset. A maximum of 2,000 mentions were randomly sampled from the respective date range. For the general election, a total of 4,330 mentions were analyzed: (1) 2,330 on November 2 to 4, 2020, and (2) a random sample of 2,000 from the respective date range. A total of 11,759 mentions were analyzed across the four events. This is summarized in Table D2.

**Table D2: Number of Tweets for Each Election Event**

Event	Date of Event	Date Range	# Of Tweets Analyzed
Primary Election	June 2, 2020	April 17 - June 30, 2020	Day of event: 2,290 Random sample: 2,000 Total: 4,290
Ward 2 Special Election	June 16, 2020	June 10 - June 26, 2020	Day of event: 80 Random sample: 1,059 Total: 1,139
Republican and Democratic National Conventions	August 24-27, 2020 (RNC); August 17-20, 2020 (DNC)	August 12 - September 1, 2020	Total: 2000
General Election	November 2 – 4 , 2020	September 19 - November 13, 2020	Day of event: 2,330 Random sample: 2,000 Total: 4,330
Total			11,759

## Data Analysis

Mentions from the day of the event and the random sample were analyzed together to explore emerging themes. Two coders reviewed mentions to identify relevant mentions. Retweets were excluded from the thematic analysis but were considered when identifying which tweets were retweeted the most. Brandwatch utilizes built-in artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities for qualitative analysis of online mentions to identify thematic codes. A dashboard was developed within Brandwatch to organize content by election event and segment other themes of discussion related to voters' experiences. A series of techniques within the dashboard, such as word clouds and topic wheels, were used to identify and define thematic codes. Thematic codes were also derived by analyzing trends in the overall mention volume. Descriptive statistics were also carried out for each of the thematic codes. Only the top three most frequently occurring themes are reported in this analysis.

# Agency Comments

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On September 30, 2021, we sent a draft copy of this report to the D.C. Board of Elections (DCBOE) for review and written comment. DCBOE responded with comments on October 28, 2021. Agency comments are included here in their entirety, followed by ODCA's Response to Agency Comments.



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
**BOARD OF ELECTIONS**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20003-4733



October 28, 2021

Kathleen Patterson  
District of Columbia Auditor  
Office of the District of Columbia Auditor  
717 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW – Suite 900  
Washington, DC 20005

Re: Response to the Draft Audit Report, "District of Columbia 2020 Election  
Administration Report"

Dear Ms. Patterson:

Please find the District of Columbia Board of Elections' response to the above-referenced draft audit report issued on September 30, 2021. Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the findings and observations. As I am sure you are aware, we take the mission of the agency very seriously. We always seek and embrace opportunities to improve our operations.

We will gladly respond to any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Monica H. Evans".

Monica H. Evans  
Executive Director

cc: Board Members

## **DCBOE RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT AUDIT REPORT**

The District of Columbia Board of Elections (DCBOE) has reviewed the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor's (ODCA) report entitled "The District of Columbia 2020 Election Administration Report" dated September 30, 2021.

In reviewing the ODCA's observations and recommendations, DCBOE has identified several topics that necessitate a response. Before addressing the recommendations contained in the draft audit report, we provide the following DCBOE observations.

### **DCBOE Efforts to Implement Restore the Vote Legislation**

Since the enactment of the Restore the Vote legislation, DCBOE has endeavored to ensure its requirements are met and exceeded. Even though the legislation, with respect to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), was not required to be implemented until 2021, DCBOE began implementation before the November 2020 General Election.

Prior to being required to do so, DCBOE put measures in place to implement the legislation by establishing new contacts with the BOP, and we continued to cultivate the existing relationship with the Department of Corrections (DOC). The enactment of the Restore the Vote legislation added increased responsibilities and created unforeseen challenges, specifically, the need to garner positive working relationships with the BOP to obtain needed information with respect to DC residents who were incarcerated in the federal prisons so that they could register and vote. Additionally, the Board:

- Worked with the DOC to conduct education and registration drives. Voter education/registration material was developed by DCBOE and placed on tablets by the DOC for use by citizens incarcerated in the DC Jail. The enactment of the 'Restore the Vote' legislation required DOC and DCBOE to include citizens convicted of felony offenses in the population of citizens allowed to register and vote.
- Continued to work with the Office of Human Rights (OHR) to ensure the rights of Returning Citizens. Joint education/registration sessions at the DC Jail were held in conjunction with OHR to educate incarcerated citizens about their voting rights upon release.
- Created posters that articulated the rights of incarcerated and Returning Citizens that were posted in the DC jail in strategic high-traffic areas. This information was also electronically sent within the BOP.
- Gave a presentation at the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) Community Resource Video Conference to DC residents incarcerated in federal prisons who are scheduled for release.

- Continued to work with the Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs (MORCA). MORCA attended and assisted with some DCBOE outreach events. Plans were made for joint MORCA/DCBOE jail visits, but none occurred because the DC Jail was closed to outsiders due to the health emergency.
- Attended CSOSA's BOP 2-day trip to visit DC residents incarcerated at federal prisons who were scheduled for release.

In-person registration activities were held at the DOC until the jail was closed due to the health emergency. After this, DCBOE worked with the DOC to ensure voter registration materials, Voter Guides, and absentee ballots were provided to incarcerated citizens. Tablets were used for the first time to disseminate information to the DC Jail population. DOC and BOP worked together to get ballots to and returned from voters within the DOC.

DCBOE worked with the BOP to determine the number of DC residents housed throughout the BOP. The BOP provided information indicating DC residents were housed throughout 103 federal facilities. Based on this, DCBOE sent registration materials to the wardens of those facilities for dissemination. When registration applications were received, DCBOE either registered the individual or attempted to perfect incomplete applications. Ballots were sent to and received from the BOP via the USPS. In some unique and last-minute cases, FedEx had to be used to get ballots to and from voters. The BOP Re-Entry Affairs Coordinators were instrumental in the resolution of Voter Registration Application problems and getting last-minute ballots distributed and returned.

With respect to Returning Citizens, DCBOE met with the new Director of the Ready Center, a facility that assists Returning Citizens with their reentry into society. DCBOE provided updated Voter Registration Applications to the Ready Center and ensured staff were educated on how to complete the Voter Registration Application. DCBOE left posters and brochures at the Ready Center and disseminated a PowerPoint presentation for their use. A monthly schedule for DCBOE to meet with Ready Center constituents (Returning Citizens) was created. However, this plan was not implemented due to the health emergency. An electronic Voter Guide was also provided for posting on the Ready Center's website after the facility was closed.

During the health emergency and in preparation for the General Election, teleconference voter registration sessions between DCBOE and the Returning Citizen community were conducted. These sessions focused on voter education, voter registration, and election worker recruitment.

As a result of the Board's efforts, 562 DC residents incarcerated across the BOP facilities successfully registered to vote. Of these, 264 voted in the General Election.



## **Robinson v. Board of Elections**

The audit report contains the statement from the auditors that, “concerns prompted a lawsuit against DCBOE by two Ward 8 residents alleging that the voting procedures adopted in response to the pandemic violated the Voting Rights Act by failing to consider historical inequities and current conditions in the ward.” The plaintiffs alleged that DCBOE’s selection of Vote Centers for Ward 8 served to diminish Black voters’ access to the voting process. The draft audit report fails to acknowledge that DCBOE successfully defended the lawsuit and the original Vote Centers selected by the Board were deemed appropriate. The lawsuit was dismissed for lack of merit.

## **Voters with Disabilities**

The draft audit report contains the statement that “[v]oters with disabilities ... experienced difficulties voting in the primary election.” This statement appears to be based primarily upon the DC Voting Access Report on the June 2, 2020 Primary Election authored by Disability Rights DC at University Legal Services (DRDC). However, the draft audit report does not offer any testimony from voters with disabilities that supports the claim that they, in fact, experienced difficulties voting. Accordingly, the conclusory statement about voters’ actual experiences is problematic. It would be more accurate to simply state that DRDC filed a report claiming that their observers found instances of structural and/or operational inaccessibility at voting locations used in the Primary Election.

Moreover, there were some flaws in DRDC audit report. For example, the DRDC report states that “BOE’s failure to effectively manage the absentee ballot process ... resulted in overcrowded voting centers[,]” which put the vulnerable disability community at further risk. The Vote Centers were not overcrowded. As mentioned in the draft audit report, DCBOE adhered to social distancing recommendations and limited the number of people in Vote Centers per guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the DC Department of Health.

DCBOE takes its responsibility to voters with disabilities very seriously. We take deliberate steps to make polling places accessible to all. Our efforts have received national recognition from the Election Assistance Commission (EAC). In 2019, DCBOE was honored with a Clearie Award for Improving Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities. Specifically, the EAC recognized DCBOE for its overall commitment to assisting voters with disabilities throughout the voting process.

## **Communications and Outreach**

There are several different issues that need to be addressed in the audit regarding DCBOE communications. The audit closely examines DCBOE's social media effort and makes only passing reference to the massive communications and outreach campaign DCBOE executed leading up to the General Election. Moreover, the focus on social media fails to mention efforts to address the digital divide and reach District voters in other ways.

DCBOE produced two 30-second TV ads. The first utilized graphics to inform DC voters of the different ways to register and cast a ballot in DC. The second took a more active and engaging approach, using prominent public figures such as Virginia Ali, owner of Ben's Chili Bowl, and Jason Wright, player for the Washington Football Team, to deliver the same message and encourage voting by mail. The ads ran on all local TV affiliates – WRC-4, FOX-5 DC, WJLA-7, and WUSA-9 - as well as some national cable networks during high viewership events such as the Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates. Combined, the ads aired over 5,000 times, so that individual viewers saw the ads multiple times to re-enforce the message.

DCBOE also utilized radio advertising to further amplify the TV ad message. The ads played multiple times a day for a total of 1,800 airings. Specifically, the ads played on Weather & Traffic radio, I Heart Radio, WAMU, Radio One, WKYS, WHUR, WPGC, WBIG, WASH, WAMU, WTOP, and others.

Then-DCBOE Chair Michael Bennett and staff assisted with and provided interviews for over 300 TV, radio, and newspaper stories. These stories focused on providing voters with information about voter registration, and then after the registration deadline, shifted to providing information about mail ballots, drop boxes, Super Vote Centers, etc. DCBOE worked with a number of outlets, including all local TV stations, CNN, NBC, CBS, The Washington Post, City Paper, DCist, The Afro-American, El Tiempo, the Washington Blade, WAMU, WHUR, WTOP, PRAISE, WKYS, and WPGC.

We also diversified our advertising approach. We advertised in Metro stations, using Metro's "Live Boards," and placed an emphasis on stations in Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8. We also initiated a targeted online advertising buy utilizing the TV ads mentioned above. These ads appeared in ad breaks during streamed programming and reached approximately 300,000 District residents. DCBOE also developed and placed print advertising echoing the same core message of having a voting plan – how to return a mailed ballot or utilize Vote Centers during Early Voting or on Election Day – in the Washington Business Journal, City Paper, the Washington Informer and Afro-American, the Georgetown, El Pregonero, El Tiempo, the Washington Blade, Hill Rag,

East of the River, and Mid-City DC. These ads appeared in print as well as in key placements on their respective websites.

When Early Voting started, DCBOE increased messaging to voters. We produced and distributed robocalls that reached 400,000 registered voters. We also sent targeted text messages that promoted the same early voting message to 200,000 District voters. Finally, DCBOE distributed door hangers to individual residents and placed yard signs on major thoroughfares across the city.

The audit indicates that in conducting its media review, discussions were held with stakeholders and press accounts were reviewed. However, no specifics were provided regarding which press accounts were reviewed and which stakeholders were contacted.

While DCBOE sees some benefit to referencing social media generally, it strongly objects to the inclusion of specific social media posts in the audit report. It is impossible to fact-check every anecdotal social media post, and false information spreads faster than truthful information. It is difficult to measure the intrinsic value of social media posts to performance, positive or negative. There is also no way to objectively know whether selected social media posts are representative of a problem or solution. Additionally, the selection of social media platforms chosen to review is somewhat curious. While DCBOE is active on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, it has no presence on Reddit, a social media platform used in this report. A better analysis of DCBOE's social media activities can and should be drawn solely from the platforms on which it is active and has a presence.

There is also critical context missing in the social media examples used in the audit. While comments from voters are presented, a discussion of DCBOE's responses to and/or resolution of issues that arose is notably absent. Showing how DCBOE responded to issues and criticisms coming directly from the public would offer a much more accurate and revealing picture of our social media operation than just displaying individual comments.

During the General Election, DCBOE responded to comments and issues by asking voters to "[p]lease DM so we can address." This was a way to deliver service to individual voters to address their unique issues directly and to protect their privacy. In many instances, we needed to have a voter's full name, address, and birthdate to look up their voting record, find their ballot, etc. To that end, we decided not to share a voter's personal and private information on a public forum such as Twitter, and therefore moved to the more direct and private Direct Message approach. It should also be added that issues were successfully resolved in these direct exchanges by providing relevant information and/or directing the voter to the relevant DCBOE staff person to help them.

### *Entertainment and Sports Arena Event*

DCBOE has continuously conducted targeted outreach events in Wards 7 and 8. A major voter registration event was held on October 13, 2020 that leveraged many community partners. The event was held at the Entertainment and Sports Arena parking lot in Ward 8. We had representation from the Washington Football Team, the Washington Nationals, the Washington Wizards, and the Washington Mystics. The Racing Presidents and the Wizards cheerleaders were also on hand. Dunkin Donuts and Power Up provided snacks and coupons to those who attended the event. Martha's Table had a grocery giveaway. The event was covered by the Washington Post, local radio and television stations, and national media outlets. In addition to offering voter registration, the sports teams had giveaways and took pictures with fans. Monumental Sports assisted with advertising and logistics for the event.

Despite the efforts of DCBOE and its partners, the event was not well attended. A lot of time and creativity went into making this event successful. We even went into the neighborhood to garner support, but few people responded or even seemed interested. Unfortunately, our efforts to register people in Wards 7 and 8 are not always fruitful.

### **Working Group**

The draft audit report references the working group that was established during the 2020 Election Cycle. While DCBOE appreciates the benefits of working with local partners and getting input, the working group proved to be problematic. First, the working group was not selected by DCBOE, nor did we have input into its composition. The working group's diversity was not representative of District voters. Additionally, the role and parameters of the working group were never clearly defined.

Several members of the working group were excessively critical of the work of DCBOE staff. They apparently viewed themselves as providing oversight over the Board instead of partnering with the Board. Comments and criticism were often not accompanied by suggestions or solutions. Feedback from the working group was not balanced and was oftentimes exaggerated or baseless. For instance, one of the working group members said a document sent to them for review was, "riddled with grammatical and spelling errors." The document in question had already been shared with Council staff members and we were in agreement about its content. Also, no grammatical or spelling errors were identified, because none existed.

Feedback from the working group sometimes came with racial undertones. For instance, errors or oversights were articulated with complete disdain. Some working group members often

referred to DCBOE as “incompetent” and did not acknowledge the pandemic pressures nor the relatively short time in which we were working.

With agreement from Council staff, the working group was disbanded. While sometimes helpful, their approach was overreaching, intrusive, and counterproductive.

### **DCBOE 2020 Election Cycle**

DCBOE takes the mission of the agency very seriously. Everyone works hard and is fully dedicated to the agency’s work. The 2020 Election Cycle was unlike any other. Due to the pandemic, staff members faced many challenges. We must recognize that staff continuously worked onsite in extremely compromising and challenging conditions. This occurred daily for over ten months.

No one was personally or professionally prepared to tackle the many obstacles we faced. The agency had to pivot and change course abruptly. Plans that had been in place for 18 months were abandoned and reworked to administer the June Primary Election in just three months’ time. We then modified preparations for the November General Election.

All of this was done while staff faced health challenges that included hospitalizations, and the deaths of children, parents, and other family members. Nonetheless, staff stood tall, supported each other, and worked hard to execute the elections on behalf of District voters. Admittedly, the June Primary was far from perfect, but we are proud of the work of the staff and commend them for their efforts.

### **Other Concerns**

There are a few other substantive and procedural issues we noted during our review of the draft audit report. Distinctions between Primary Election events and General Election events were not always clearly distinguished. The draft audit report also erroneously stated that the 2020 Election Cycle was the first time we offered Same-Day Registration during Early Voting; Same-Day Registration has been offered during Early Voting for over ten years.

Regarding process, the auditors never contacted the Executive Director or Board Chair to discuss the findings and recommendations contained in the draft audit report. It is baffling that a draft audit report would be issued without a single conversation with the Executive Director. Instead, the draft audit cites many third party sources without including any responses from DCBOE.

We were also disappointed that the draft audit report was sent to the Executive Office of the Mayor and to the Office of Campaign Finance. We thought we would have the opportunity to address the findings and recommendations before they were shared with others. We hope future draft reports will be kept confidential until they are issued as final.

Thank you for the time that was put into your review of the 2020 Election Cycle. We hope the comments presented herein are helpful. We are happy to respond to any questions you may have.

We now turn our attention to the recommendations contained in the draft audit report and DCBOE's responses.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Resources*

**Recommendation:** DCBOE has access to federal funding from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), which pursuant to the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), distributes congressionally-appropriated funds like those most recently approved for improved cybersecurity in the 2018 omnibus appropriations bill and for COVID-19 response in the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Although these funds, which are distributed to states using a formula based on voting-age population, cover targeted priority issues and not basic operating expenses, DCBOE should be coordinating with the DC Council to ensure that its overall funding, from both District and federal resources, covers its full mission.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE has and will continue to request adequate funding to meet our needs. We are currently in the 2023 budget request cycle. As always, we will use this opportunity to advocate for adequate resources. Unfortunately, full funding has never been provided due to other government priorities.

### *Improved Communications*

**Recommendation:** Voters look to the DCBOE website for information about the election process, so it is important to keep the site up to date with easy-to-find information on frequently asked questions. Voters complained that information about polling places and wait times was not kept current and was not provided in a user-friendly format. Many also struggled to find information on voting procedures and how to use various in-person and by-mail voting options. The DCBOE should consider a rigorous audit of the content and usability of the website to ensure it meets voters' needs.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE recognizes challenges with finding content and navigating our website. Our Public Information Officer has begun a comprehensive review of the current website and plans to launch a more user-friendly version in early 2022.

During Early Voting, wait times are updated by site coordinators. Many coordinators did not update wait times on the poll pads as instructed. In some instances, DCBOE staff updated wait times when they observed it had not been done. DCBOE will emphasize the importance of frequently updating wait times during election worker training.

**Recommendation:** Include descriptions of each ballot status used in the ballot tracker system. This information should be readily available within the tracker, on the website, and included in



the confirmation email sent when voters register to receive status updates. Additionally, voters should be clearly informed what actions they need to take to “cure” their ballot if there is an issue that might prevent it from being counted.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE recognizes the confusion with understanding the terminology regarding ballot status. We will ensure clear definitions accompany the ballot tracker in the future. While DCBOE does inform voters about “cure” measures, we will make additional efforts to amplify this message. DCBOE will ensure this information is on the website with information about tracking ballots. DCBOE will also include this information in future mail ballot instructions.

**Recommendation:** The locations at which voters could cast ballots in person changed dramatically in 2020. Vote center locations were new and unfamiliar to voters, and the shift to vote centers disrupted the habits of many voters accustomed to voting at their traditional precinct-based polling location. As DCBOE formalizes plans for in-person voting in future election cycles—whether that be with continued use of vote centers, shifting back to precinct-based locations, or some combination—it will be critically important to inform all voters of plans and any changes from previous election cycles, including the location of all in-person voting locations, when each will be open, and which options will be available to them. This information should not only be part of communications such as the Voter Guide, postcards, and other advertisements or outreach materials, but also available on the DCBOE website as a searchable map that makes it easy for voters to identify which locations are closest or most convenient for them. This mapping feature should be kept up to date and, if possible, should provide accurate wait times at each facility during early voting and on Election Day. If and when locations change, post signage at inactive voting locations to notify residents of the closest alternative location to cast their ballot.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE agrees that voters and residents should be notified of changes to vote locations and available voting options for each election cycle. DCBOE posted signage at every voting location that was not being used for this election. DCBOE will continue this practice with the 2022 Election Cycle. Changes to voting practices will be articulated on the DCBOE website, in the Voter Guide, and via other communications to voters such as mailing postcards and voter education materials. During the 2020 Election Cycle, DCBOE distributed a Voter Guide to all households that included a list of Vote Centers. Vote Center locations and changes were also included on our website.

Due to changes with voting locations, we recognized the importance of launching a searchable map. A searchable map was available to voters during the General Election. We do not provide wait times on Election Day. Wait times are only provided during Early Voting.

**Recommendation:** Make rigorous efforts to correct misinformation, including proactively providing updates when policy changes create confusion among voters. For example, when the voter registration online application was taken down in mid-August, a frequent theme within social media posts was the inaccurate claim that online registration was no longer available in the District. In addition to general statements providing accurate information (in this case the availability of the fillable PDF option for online registration), DCBOE should have a dedicated staff member to actively monitor and respond to inaccurate posts to provide correct information. This will help slow the spread of misinformation and lessen confusion caused by conflicting messages circulating through official vs. unofficial sources.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE agrees that rigorous efforts should be made to correct misinformation. Policy changes and procedural updates should be proactively provided to voters. While DCBOE will make every effort to correct misinformation in the 2022 Election Cycle, we have not been staffed to provide a dedicated staff member to actively monitor and respond to inaccurate posts to provide correct information. We will, however, use our current resources to make this a top priority.

**Recommendation:** Communicate early and often; in the words of one stakeholder, “I feel like DCBOE is often ‘too little, too late’ in communicating about the problems it is facing.” These same stakeholders suggested that DCBOE take better advantage of the working group of local organizations set up during the 2020 cycle and consult proactively about challenges rather than present specific approaches as final. These coordination efforts occurred too late in the election cycle for many recommended changes to be implemented in 2020. Moving forward, DCBOE should coordinate with working group members, community leaders, and other stakeholders well ahead of the next election, soliciting their feedback and including their voices in the planning phase of communication and outreach.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE agrees that it should communicate early and often. We strive to be transparent about our challenges and processes. However, we do not believe the working group established in 2020 is the best vehicle to accomplish this. During the 2022 Election Cycle and going forward, we will coordinate with community leaders and other stakeholders to solicit feedback regarding communication and outreach.

### *Registration and List Maintenance*

**Recommendation:** Enhance online registration systems to be easier to use and more accessible, no matter what type of device they are accessed on. The massive increase in traffic to the Vote4DC app revealed substantial problems with both usability and functionality, leading

to the discontinuation of this tool mid-cycle. As part of broader investments in IT infrastructure, DCBOE should ensure sufficient time and resources are dedicated to not just developing but also testing new applications. This is particularly the case for any voter-facing tools such as the mobile app but is also important for back-end applications used by DCBOE to process voting materials, where shifting demand volume, process changes, and a lack of redundancy led to delays and errors that potentially disenfranchised voters and decreased trust in the DC election system.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE agrees that online registration should be enhanced and easier to use. An effective online registration system is under development and will be available during the 2022 Election Cycle.

**Recommendation:** Encourage registered voters to check and update their registration information regularly, with clear instructions on how to do this. Many states have had success with campaigns urging residents to be “vote ready.” For example:

- Virginia publishes a pocket voter guide that explains the process;
- Washington state partners with the League of Women Voters to encourage people to “Be A Voter”; and
- Maryland publishes a one-page guide entitled “How Maryland Votes” that walks voters through the ballot casting process.

There are many other similar examples nationwide and DCBOE can and should look to these for inspiration and guidance in improving voting information for District residents. The Center for Civic Design has a series of user guides that could be very useful in designing and distributing voting information resources to voters.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE agrees that registered voters should be encouraged to check and update their registration. We will review some of the methods used by other jurisdictions and begin additional messaging in early 2022. During the 2020 Election Cycle, a flash page was displayed on the BOE website that discussed how to register or update a registration, as well as the three methods of voting: Voting by mail, Early Voting, and Election Day Voting. Again, a Voter Guide was mailed to all residential households that contained this information.

**Recommendation:** Send periodic address confirmation mailings to all voters, not only those flagged as potentially having moved within or outside the District based on Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), DMV, or National Change of Address (NCOA) reports. Do this earlier than the 90 days ahead of each federal election required by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) so that there is adequate time for response and follow-up.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE generally agrees with the recommendation. In fact, DCBOE mailed out address confirmation cards to all registered voters during the 2020 Election Cycle. However, DCBOE is not properly staffed and resourced to provide additional mailers on a periodic basis.

**Recommendation:** Work with voter registration agencies (VRA), including but not limited to the DMV, to ensure they are effectively fulfilling their obligations to inform voters about registration opportunities. Communicate to VRAs the important role that they play in ensuring District residents are able to participate in the election process and encourage a proactive approach to executing registration responsibilities.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE agrees with this recommendation. We will continue to work with VRAs and provide training. We have sent letters outlining VRA responsibilities to each agency. We are also working on an informational video that will assist in our training efforts.

**Recommendation:** If possible, rather than simply providing agencies with paper registration forms, look for ways to integrate agency systems into the District's registration system, similar to DMV integration, so that address and other information changes are automatically received, and the address update/confirmation process can start immediately.

**DCBOE Response:** Given the complexities of this recommendation, integrating systems is not possible at this time. This recommendation would require the full cooperation of other agencies, some of which have informed us that voter registration is not their responsibility. Additionally, this action would require those agencies to adopt online systems that would allow for the integration and electronic transfer of data.

### *Equity Across Wards*

**Recommendation:** Expand opportunities to register to vote and update voter registration, particularly at agencies and community organizations that residents regularly interact with. This will help voters ensure their registration information is up to date—specifically, address information—so that by-mail ballots are received and can be returned in a timely manner.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE has a very robust Voter Education and Outreach unit that conducts voter registration drives. We will continue to look for ways to work with new agencies and community organizations that interact with residents. Our efforts will also remind registered voters to check and update registration information, as needed. During the 2020 Election Cycle, we conducted many voter registration drives and virtual informational sessions in the midst of a global pandemic. We held over 50 in-person voter registration events and

participated in over 60 virtual meetings. All of this information was posted on our website under the Events tab.

**Recommendation:** Work closely with community leaders to develop and implement concerted efforts to inform and update voters on the voting process and strategies to better serve these communities. Look for ways to create new partnerships or better leverage existing ones (like the working group of local organizations) as a way to discuss and test solution to challenges regarding registration and turnout in Ward 8 compared to the rest of the District. These efforts should occur sufficiently ahead of the election so that feedback can be meaningfully incorporated into plans for both how the next election will be administered (e.g., where in-person voting locations and drop boxes are located) as well what information is needed and how that information can best be communicated to residents.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE will continue voter education and outreach efforts. We will look for ways to create new partnerships and better leverage existing relationships with local organizations and Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners. During the 2020 Election Cycle, we solicited input from community leaders and the DC Council regarding the placement of Vote Centers and Mail Ballot Drop Boxes. However, voter turnout is not part of DCBOE's mission. DCBOE is not charged with increasing voter turnout and does not engage in this practice. Arguably, increasing voter turnout in particular areas of any jurisdiction can be viewed as partisan or biased. DCBOE will continue efforts to target special populations.

**Recommendation:** In areas with low voting rates, and particularly with low rates of by-mail voting, gather information about the barriers that prevent residents from using vote-by-mail options. Other states have found that all-vote-by mail systems increase turnout, especially among lower propensity voting groups. For DC to actualize this potential benefit of expanded by-mail voting, residents must trust this method of voting, understand how to use the system, and have sufficient access to resources and the opportunity to use this option. Whether through a formal survey, qualitative approaches such as focus groups or in-depth interviews, or community engagement and listening efforts, DCBOE should seek to understand perceptions of by-mail voting, the specific challenges residents experienced that precluded them from returning a mail ballot, and how the system might be improved to become more trusted by and better meet the needs of residents.

**DCBOE Response:** DCBOE will continue education and outreach efforts around vote-by-mail practices. However, DCBOE will not focus efforts solely on areas with low voting rates. As previously stated, voter turnout is not part of the agency's mission. DCBOE will use a variety of effective communication tools, taking into account the demographic makeup of the District.

# ODCA Response to Agency Comments

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ODCA appreciates the comprehensive response to the draft report provided by the D.C. Board of Elections (DCBOE) and would like to thank the Board and staff once again for their collaboration and timely response to all inquiries and requests from ODCA staff and staff of Fors Marsh Group throughout the audit.

We are pleased that DCBOE concurs with the recommendations and has indicated their commitment to address virtually all suggestions to improve the administration of elections in the nation's capital.

One advantage to ODCA reports in publishing verbatim written comments from agencies under audit is that the agency comments section provides an opportunity to tell a more complete story which can cover useful related information that may not have been a focus for the audit. We greatly appreciate the thorough description provided of the DCBOE outreach to incarcerated persons and to District residents who have returned following incarceration. We commend the board for the outreach and successful registration.

Similarly, we appreciate the comprehensive description of the DCBOE's communications efforts throughout the primary and general election including details about press outreach and frequency of advertisements. Both sections of DCBOE comments provide the interested reader with a more comprehensive picture of the work of the Board throughout a most unusual and challenging election cycle.

With regard to specific concerns with language in the draft report, we concur with the DCBOE view that in mentioning the litigation filed during the election cycle it was important to also note that the lawsuit was dismissed and we have added that to the report text. To the Board's point about the source of criticism on services to persons with disabilities we have edited the text to note the complaint was made in a report issued by Disability Rights DC at University Legal Services. And we apologize for inadvertently sending the draft report to the Executive Office of the Mayor. It is a standard step to include the EOM for reports on mayoral agencies but a report on an independent agency such as the Board of Elections should have gone solely to the DCBOE.

Finally, regarding the implementation date for same day voter registration (SDR) the Board indicated to our audit team that they allowed SDR during early voting beginning in 2010. Same day registration during early voting was formally authorized in D.C. Municipal Regulations in 2018 (See 3 DCMR § 504.6).

# About ODCA

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The mission of the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) is to support the Council of the District of Columbia by making sound recommendations that improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of the District government.

To fulfill our mission, we conduct performance audits, non-audit reviews, and revenue certifications. The residents of the District of Columbia are one of our primary customers and we strive to keep the residents of the District of Columbia informed on how their government is operating and how their tax money is being spent.

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