

# TEXAS VS OREGON

While Texas serves as a pioneer in early voting, Oregon followed a different path in encouraging voter turnout by allowing vote by mail. In the vote-by-mail system, the state of Oregon mails a ballot to every registered voter about two weeks before the election. At their leisure, voters mark the ballot and mail the ballot back in a special envelope. A voter may also deliver the ballot by hand to designated locations throughout the state.

Historically, states allowed voters to receive a ballot early and mail it back only for absentee voting. Absentee voting required that the voter provide a legitimate reason for not being in the community on Election Day in order to cast an early ballot. In 1981, Oregon allowed limited experiments with mail-in ballots for all voters in local elections. In December 1995, the state extended the process to party primaries. By 1998, all elections in Oregon utilized the vote-by-mail system. One review of the research on the impact of voting by mail suggests that voter turnout increases between 5 to 10 percent over traditional in-person voting.<sup>1</sup>

The table to the right presents some statistics comparing turnout in Texas to turnout in Oregon since voting by mail became a statewide process in 1998.

## Voter Turnout in Oregon and Texas

Election	Oregon Turnout	Texas Turnout
2000 Presidential election	65%	44%
2002 November general election	51%	29%
2004 Presidential election	71%	46%
2006 November general election	52%	26%
2008 Presidential election	66%	46%
2010 November general election	52%	27%
2012 Presidential election	59%	43%

## THINKING Critically

- ★ What is vote by mail?
- ★ How is the vote-by-mail system similar to early voting in Texas?
- ★ Do you think a vote-by-mail system would help boost voter turnout in Texas?
- ★ Have you ever voted with early voting in Texas?
- ★ Would you be more likely to vote if you could vote by mail?

i. Paul Gronke and Peter Miller, "Voting by Mail and Turnout: A Replication and Extension," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, August 20, 2007.

**Sources:** Texas Secretary of State, "Turnout and Voter Registration Figures (1970–Current)," 2012, [www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/historical/70-92.shtml](http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/historical/70-92.shtml); Oregon Secretary of State, "Statistical Summary 2010 General Election," 2010, [www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov22010/g2010stats.pdf](http://www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov22010/g2010stats.pdf); Oregon Secretary of State, "Statistical Summary 2008 General Election," 2008, [www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov42008/go8stats.pdf](http://www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov42008/go8stats.pdf); Oregon Secretary of State, "Statistic Summary 2006 General Election," 2006, [www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov72006/go6stats.pdf](http://www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov72006/go6stats.pdf); Oregon Secretary of State, "Statistical Summary 2004 General Election," 2004, [www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov22004/go4stats.pdf](http://www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov22004/go4stats.pdf); Oregon Secretary of State, "Statistical Summary 2002 General Election," 2002, [www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov52002/go2stats.pdf](http://www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov52002/go2stats.pdf); Oregon Secretary of State, "Statistical Summary 2000 General Election," 2000, [www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov72000/genstats.pdf](http://www.oregonvotes.gov/doc/history/nov72000/genstats.pdf) (all Web sites accessed on September 8, 2014); some calculations made by authors.