

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.¹ Oregon's success with vote by mail led Colorado and Washington State to adopt it as well.

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

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?

Voter Turnout in Oregon and Texas

Election	Oregon Turnout	Texas Turnout
2000 Presidential election	61%	44%
2002 November general election	56%	29%
2004 Presidential election	74%	46%
2006 November general election	57%	26%
2008 Presidential election	63%	46%
2010 November general election	53%	27%
2012 Presidential election	63%	43%
2014 November general election	52%	25%

Sources: Texas Secretary of State, "Turnout and Voter Registration Figures (1970–Current)," 2016, <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/historical/70-92.shtml>; U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration Tables" 2016, <http://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting/data/tables.html> (accessed August 9, 2016). Some calculations made by authors.

- ★ 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.