

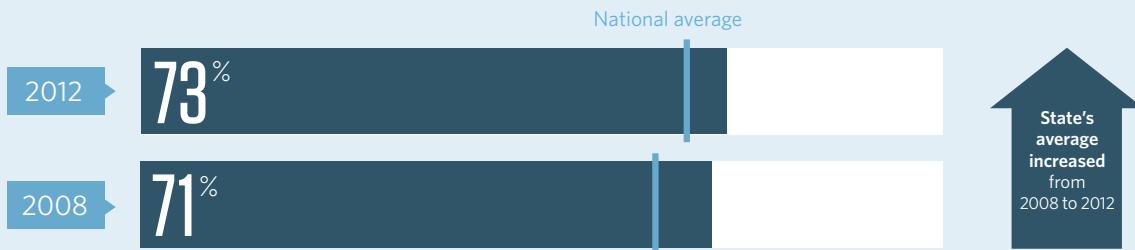


Washington

Elections Performance Index

This profile reports important trends for Washington that emerged from the 2012 update to The Pew Charitable Trusts' Elections Performance Index, or EPI. The EPI analyzes 17 key indicators of election administration and scores each state's performance by indicator and overall. For more information and to view the full interactive index, visit www.pewstates.org/epi.

Overall EPI Average*



Key indicators	2008	2012
Data completeness	89%	100%
Disability- or illness-related voting problems	6.4%	3.5%
Provisional ballots cast out of all ballots	1.8%	0.2%
Registration or absentee ballot problems	10.6%	11.4%
Residual vote rate	1.1%	1.5%

*The overall EPI average is a simple average of all 17 indicators.

Beyond the numbers

As in 2008 and 2010, Washington remained among the 12 highest performers in EPI average in 2012. Although the state didn't increase its performance significantly, it remains well above average overall.

Washington is one of two states—the other is Oregon—that conduct their elections entirely by mail. In 2012, the state had sizable decreases in the number of provisional ballots issued, driven in part by King and Pierce counties, which became all-vote-by-mail for the first time, and by a change in how people who need replacements for their mail ballots are dealt with.

In 2008, King and Pierce counties still had in-person Election Day voting and combined for nearly 44,000 provisional ballots, more than 80 percent of the 54,000 cast in the state. After these counties went to all-vote-by-mail, their provisional ballot totals dropped to approximately 2,500 in 2012, about 35 percent of the 6,800 issued statewide.

In 2012, there was also the expansion to all counties of the electronic, or eballot, system that the state had in place to allow military and overseas voters to access their ballots online. This made it possible for all state voters to access their correct regular ballots from any county election office, reducing the need for provisional ballots statewide.

In addition, Washington's rate of disability- or illness-related nonvoting—already the nation's lowest in 2008—fell below 4 percent in 2012. Recent research shows that more permissive mail ballot regimes are associated with higher turnout among the disabled.¹

Washington is also one of only two states—Arizona is the other—to have online voter registration since 2008.

Room for improvement

Despite its status as a high performer, Washington could do even better. The state had the nation's second-highest rate of nonvoting due to registration or absentee ballot problems in 2008 and 2012, behind Oregon. That all-vote-by-mail states would experience unusually high levels of mail ballot issues is not surprising, but whether all-mail voting is correlated with high rates of registration problems is a subject in need of further study.

Washington also had the highest rate of mail ballots rejected; Oregon had the second-highest rate. Again, this is not entirely surprising, but more research needs to be done in states that conduct all or most of their elections by mail to better understand the mail ballot process and its impact on rejection rates.

The state also saw its residual vote rate—the discrepancy between the number of ballots cast and the number of votes counted for an office—rise from 2008 to 2012. Preliminary research suggests a correlation between greater use of mail voting and higher residual vote rates, in part because mail voters do not have the opportunity to correct errors on their ballots.²

Endnotes

1 Lisa Schur and Douglas Kruse, "Disability and Election Policies and Practices," in *The Measure of American Elections*, eds. Barry C. Burden and Charles Stewart III (forthcoming).

2 R. Michael Alvarez, Charles Stewart III, and Dustin Beckett, "Voting Technology, Vote-by-Mail, and Residual Votes in California, 1990–2010," Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project, Working Paper No. 105 (May 5, 2011), http://www.vote.caltech.edu/sites/default/files/wp_105.pdf 4dc97a0220.pdf.

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