



DEMOCRATS
ABROAD

SOUTH AFRICA

VOTING GUIDANCE FOR AMERICANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

SEPTEMBER 2020 v4

Dear Americans in South Africa –

We all know the gravity of this election and the issues complicating it. It is essential that every one of us votes this year! Ensuring our ballots are submitted on time and counted is our number one priority. Please don't wait until the last minute to request and return your absentee ballot. Let's get this done!

This year our ballots are facing obstacles from all directions. We are concerned about the many potential unknowns between now and 3 November including tech issues, foreign interference, interference by the President, overwhelmed local officials, and time constraints related to both postal and courier services. So, we encourage you to take 30 min today to ensure you are ready to vote, make your voting plan and mark your calendar for **19-23 September**. Expect to receive your ballot via email by 19 September and plan to vote and return it by the 23rd. We implore you to vote as soon as your absentee ballot arrives.

Many states now allow electronic submission of ballots – but let's not chance overwhelmed staff or tech issues, let's get them in early. If your state requires postal delivery for submission of your ballot, we hope 6 weeks should be enough time for ballots to reach local election officials via the Consulate diplomatic pouch, PostNet's Global Mail (Royal Mail), or courier (safest bet) but you also have the option of submitting the Federal Write-In Ballot (FWAB) now as a back-up.

This document aims to provide you with some guidance and resources to ease the process.

IMPORTANT: Each state has different rules, timeframes and processes. PLEASE check your state-specific information now and plan ahead. Follow the timeframes and procedures “to the T” to ensure your 2020 vote counts!

More than half of the states now allow for electronic transmission of ballots from overseas voters. As there is pressure on Governors to adapt to email ballot submissions, this list continues to change. Several states have changed their rules in the past week. Please use the links below to confirm your state's rules (now, and again before you vote).

All the information you need (including town/city info) is available on these websites:
www.fvap.gov or www.votefromabroad.org

Instructional videos are available from FVAP:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2KoLhsVf2eMN1MsQXw6y0w>

Instructional videos are available from Vote from Abroad:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYRxJI1Hd1jz8Vb8_TYtXtA/videos

Democrats Abroad Help

Democrats Abroad is keeping updated voter information here:

https://www.democratsabroad.org/2020_ballot_faq#ballot

Democrats Abroad hosts Voter Assistance Sunday Sessions *Every Sunday* until the election – Zoom drop in for anyone to have your specific questions answered confidentially.

https://www.democratsabroad.org/154943/global_voter_assistance

Democrats Abroad has a team of experts available to help anyone who is experiencing difficulties voting. You can email them directly with your concerns or questions: voterprotection@democratsabroad.org

Also, for individual voting questions, support is available via helpdesk@votefromabroad.org and gotv@democratsabroad.org

Democrats Abroad South Africa (DASA) will be available to help you with further assistance but we are not experts and every state has different rules, so we strongly encourage you to use these resources to prepare yourself *in good time*. We will regularly share info and updates on our WhatsApp group and social media, please stay connected. You can contact DASA at southafrica@democratsabroad.org

VOTING FROM SOUTH AFRICA

VOTING OPTIONS FOR AMERICANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

- Electronic (email, portal upload, fax) for the States that allow
- Courier
- US Consulate Diplomatic Pouch (USPS when it reaches the US) (by 23 Sept latest)
- PostNet Global Mail (Royal Mail)
- *The Back-up Ballot (FWAB) (see below)*

VOTING DATES TO PLAN FOR: 19-23 September

22/23 Sept is 6 weeks from 3 Nov

19 Sept	Absentee ballots should be received (email) by all who requested
19-23 Sept	Vote! Complete your ballot and submit through your preferred option
21 -23 Sept	Drop off at Cape Town Consulate (see specific times)
22-23 Sept	Drop off at Joburg and Durban Consulates (see specific times)
1 Oct	Final deadline for anyone to submit from SA

REGISTER AND REQUEST YOUR BALLOT

REQUEST YOUR BALLOT

Register to Vote and Request Your Ballot - Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)

If you have not already applied for an absentee ballot this year, please do so now. You can do this via www.fvap.gov or www.votefromabroad.org

IMPORTANT: FVAP form notes

- When you fill in your ballot request form, be aware that selecting “I intend to return” rather than “my intent to return is uncertain” may contribute towards establishing yourself as a tax resident in your voting state. Because the legal requirements to establish "residence" or "domicile" for tax purposes are determined by state law and the specific facts of your life, before you note that you intend to return on your form you may consider seeking advice on these matters from your tax professional. For some states this selection may also determine whether or not you can vote in state and local elections.
- Address in US where you are registering to vote: You can use your last residence in the US or your parents address
- For Americans who have never lived in the US, you can find info here on how to apply for your absentee ballot <https://www.fvap.gov/citizen-voter/reside>
- Where are you now? Ensure you provide a South African address
- Make sure to write in an email address and phone number
- Select to receive absentee ballot by “email or online” and ensure your email address is clear
- Make sure to fill in all sections carefully and don't forget to sign/date the FPCA (they will compare this signature with the one on your ballot)

IMPORTANT DATE: 19 September

Absentee Ballots will be sent out to us via email by 19 September. If you have not received it by the 21st, contact your local election officials.

COMPLETING AND SUBMITTING YOUR BALLOT

IMPORTANT DATES: 19-23 September

Completing and Returning Your Absentee Ballot

VOTE! Every absentee ballot is always counted (not just in close elections).

No one should consider using regular postal services from South Africa. People in some countries are using regular post, thus you'll see Democrats Abroad emphasising the urgent use of the FWAB now, for them. Please see below for more info on the FWAB.

IMPORTANT: Notes on completing & submitting your ballot

- Follow the instructions for your ballot carefully and completely!
- Ensure your handwriting is legible
- Make sure you sign and date your ballot oath
- Follow the envelope instructions carefully. If needed, you can print the postage-paid envelopes at <https://www.fvap.gov/eo/overview/materials/forms>
- If sending back more than one ballot by courier to the same local officials, close and seal each ballot separately. Then put all into the courier envelope.
- If sending back more than one ballot via the diplomatic bag, close and seal each ballot separately. Drop off individually sealed ballots with pre-paid postage envelopes at your local Consulate (by Sept 23)
- If returning by fax or email, return each ballot separately.
- Verify that your ballot has been received and counted by emailing your local official or using your state ballot tracker website, for the states that provide this service.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

If sending electronically by email / portal / fax:

Please follow your state's procedures carefully. These will be outlined with your ballot materials.

If sending via fax – where allowed by specific states:

If you don't have access to a fax machine, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) offers a free email-to-fax service. You will need to email your ballot and any required supporting materials (see your state's instructions) to fax@fvap.gov using the FVAP fax transmission coversheet at: www.fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/coversheet.pdf FVAP will then fax your election materials to your Local Election Officials.

More info at <https://www.votefromabroad.org/faqs/22/>

If sending by Courier:

We believe this is the safest, quickest option for the states requiring postal delivery.

- Send it 19-23 September (don't wait till its late!)
- Courier service is taking longer than usual because of COVID and the closer you wait until the election other unknowns could affect service and delivery.
- Democrats Abroad has confirmed that all states requiring postal delivery will accept couriered ballots. A postmark is not required as long as it arrives before election day. But, to be on the safe side they advise that voters in the "postal delivery only" states email their Local Election Official to confirm that this is acceptable. (See further note below)
- Couriers do not deliver to PO Boxes so please ensure that you have a street address for your local official (see www.fvap.gov or www.votefromabroad.org for contact details of local election officials)
- Track your package to ensure it's delivered on time

The following is a screenshot with updated info on this issue from https://www.democratsabroad.org/2020_ballot_faq#ballot It has been a concern for many so we share this info and urge you to confirm with your local election official that courier delivery will be accepted.

I understand postal mail will take an extra long time this year, so can I use a service, such as UPS or FedEx?

Answer: It should be okay, but check with your Local Election Official to be sure because your ballot envelope will not have a postmark. If you are concerned about having your ballot arrive in a timely fashion, the extra price may be worth it.

Your ballot must be enclosed in a ballot envelope. The instructions that come with your ballot will explain how to prepare your ballot envelope. **Complete your ballot, put it in the ballot envelope, seal it, make sure to sign the ballot oath, and then put it in the courier service envelope.**

Update (Aug. 30): Democrats Abroad has contacted all of these states and they have confirmed that they will accept voted ballot return by a courier service. No date stamp is necessary as long as the voted ballot arrives by close of polls on Election Day.

If sending via the US Consulate Diplomatic Pouch:

This option is free, but timeframes can't be guaranteed. The Diplomatic Pouch has been a great way to send our votes in past years and the US Consulates in South Africa are providing this service in 2020 but it takes time and when the ballots reach the US they then travel by USPS. We know the concerns with the reliability of the postal service now given how politicized voting by mail has become. Absentee ballots are given a local Consulate timestamp when you drop them off. They advise that it could take up to 5 weeks for ballots to reach their final destination. Remember this is 2020, anything can happen.

So, if you are going to use the Consulate's service, please get your ballot in as early as possible, you can even submit the FWAB now to be on the safe side and submit your absentee ballot when it arrives. You don't need to worry if you submit both - your ballot will only be counted once. The FWAB is considered a back-up ballot.

Consulates in Joburg, Cape Town and Durban each have specific hours/days for ballot drop off. Please check these carefully. Wear your mask and drop off your ballots in the postage-paid envelopes as noted above.

U.S. Consulate General Johannesburg

9:00-15:00 Tuesday-Thursday

Email questions to: VoteJohannesburg@state.gov

U.S. Consulate General Cape Town

9:00-15:00 Monday-Thursday

Email questions to: VoteCapeTown@state.gov

U.S. Consulate General Durban

10:00-15:00 Tuesday-Thursday

Email questions to: ConsularDurban@state.gov

If sending by PostNet Global Mail (Royal Mail):

- Your ballot would be sent by courier to the UK where it enters the international postal system.
- PostNet says it takes approx. 15 business days from South Africa to the US, but this is a postal product and there are no tracking facilities and no guaranteed timeframes.
- Complete the ballot as noted above and send from PostNet.
- We've been given rates of R40-R70 from PostNet.
- This could be an option for sending your FWAB now if you'd like to do so.

Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB)

The FWAB is a backup ballot. If your state requires postal delivery for your ballot and you are planning to use the Consulate Diplomatic Pouch or PostNet's Global Mail, rather than courier, you should probably also submit the FWAB as a backup. You may want to send the FWAB now via one of these options and then submit your state ballot as soon as it arrives. If both are received by local election officials by the deadline, only the state ballot will be counted, so you don't need to worry about double counting.

If you applied for your absentee ballot but don't receive it well enough in advance, you can also submit the FWAB as a backup at that point.

You can complete the FWAB online <https://www.fvap.gov/fwab-privacy-notice> but you will need to print it and submit according to your state's rules.

IMPORTANT:

- Make sure to fill in the form carefully and completely.
- Sign the form with the same signature you used on your absentee ballot application
- Write in the names of the candidates of your choice. If you have not received your list of candidates, you can write in "Democrat" for all. This list should be available in Sept after primaries are concluded. It will be sent out with absentee ballots or you can request from local officials.
- If returning by mail, please note that 2 envelopes are required: an inner one to hold the ballot pages, and an outer mailing envelope to contain the first envelope as well as your supporting materials with identifying information.
- The FWAB must be sent from outside the United States

LOOKING TOWARD 2021

Again, you can contact your local election officials by email to confirm receipt of your ballot and following that to confirm that it has been counted!

Let's do our part to ensure we see Joe Biden and Kamala Harris sworn in on 20 January 2021 so our country can move forward!

We will need volunteers to help Americans vote from SA. There is training available. Please contact southafrica@democratsabroad.org for more info.

Thank you - Democrats Abroad South Africa