



Public Perceptions of Voting by Mail

September 24, 2026

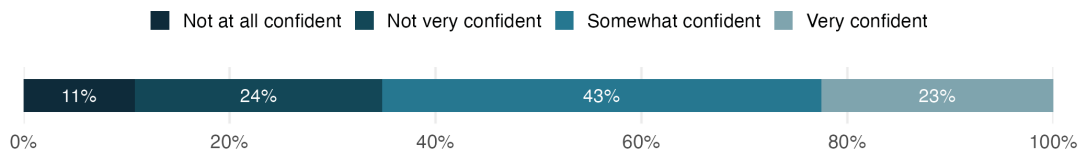
A national survey of 4,708 U.S. adults fielded September 12 to 18, 2026, reveals recent concerns, uncertainty, and planned behaviors around mail-in voting. Out of the 71% of respondents who reported voting in the 2024 presidential election, 24% say they voted by mail or by absentee ballot. Looking ahead to the 2026 midterms, among likely voters, 37% say they are very likely to vote by mail or have already done so.

While most respondents (65%) are somewhat or very confident USPS will deliver mail ballots reliably in time for 2026, a majority (63%) are somewhat or very concerned that mail ballots specifically will not be counted accurately.

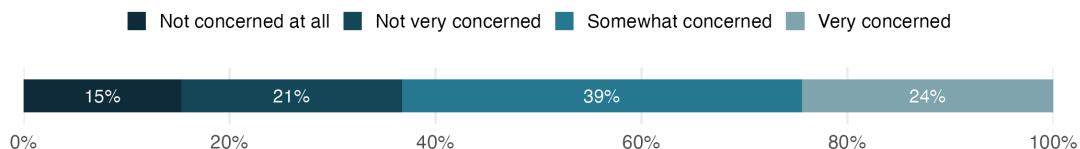
Concerns about ballot counting persist despite confidence in mail ballot delivery

% of respondents

How confident are you that the U.S. Postal Service will deliver mail ballots reliably and on time for the 2026 election?



Are you concerned that mail ballots will not be counted accurately in the 2026 election?



Source: CHIP50 survey of 4,708 U.S. adults, Sep 12 - 18, 2026.
Estimates are weighted to reflect the U.S. adult population.

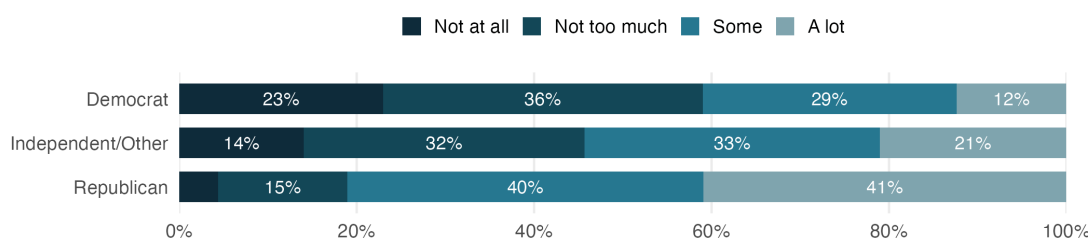
This is notably higher than the 18% who said they are not confident their own vote will be counted accurately, suggesting concerns are particularly high around mail voting. People who intend to vote by mail stand out as considerably more confident in the process than the public overall with 82% of likely mail voters saying they are confident their own ballot would be counted as intended.

A majority (58%) also believe illegal mail voting by people not eligible to vote is happening “Some” or “A lot” of the time.

This concern over illegal mail voting divides sharply along partisan lines, with 81% of Republicans saying illegal voting happens “Some” or “A lot” compared to 41% of Democrats.

How much illegal voting (by people not eligible to vote) do you think happens through voting by mail?

% of respondents by party affiliation



Source: CHIP50 survey of 4,708 U.S. adults, Sep 12 - 18, 2026.
Estimates are weighted to reflect the U.S. adult population.

In a similar pattern, when asked what share of each party's mail ballots nationally will come from ineligible voters, a third of Republicans (34%) expect at least half of Democratic ballots to be illegitimate, but only 20% say the same about Republican ballots. Democrats mirror it more mildly: 22% for Republican ballots, 17% for their own. Independents barely distinguish (22% for Democratic ballots and 23% for Republican ballots). Support for making mail voting easier also follows a partisan gradient with 79% of Democrats supporting it compared to 38% of Republicans.

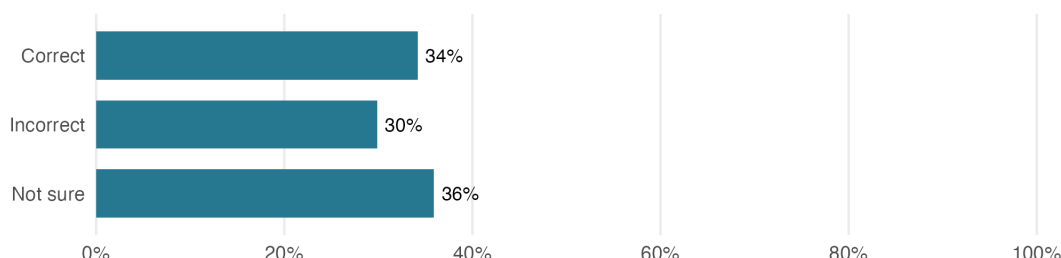
Beyond concern, there is uncertainty about how mail voting works. Mail and absentee voting policies vary by state: eight states and D.C. mail a ballot to every registered voter automatically, 13 states require voters to give a valid excuse to get one, and the remaining 29 let any voter request a mail ballot without a reason¹. Asked directly about how someone can vote by mail in their state, 36% say they are not sure, 30% select an option that does not match their state's rules, and 34% select an option that correctly matches their state's rules. Among respondents in states where any voter can request a mail ballot, 12% wrongly believe they need an excuse, and 14% believe a ballot will be mailed automatically. Among respondents in states that do require an excuse, 18% believe they do not need an excuse, and 7% believe a ballot will be mailed automatically.

¹ Movement Advancement Project. “Availability of No-Excuse Absentee Voting.” <https://mapresearch.org/democracy-map/absentee-and-mail-voting-policies/>



Many adults are uncertain or incorrect about their state's mail voting rules

% of respondents by whether they correctly identify their state's rules for requesting or receiving a mail ballot

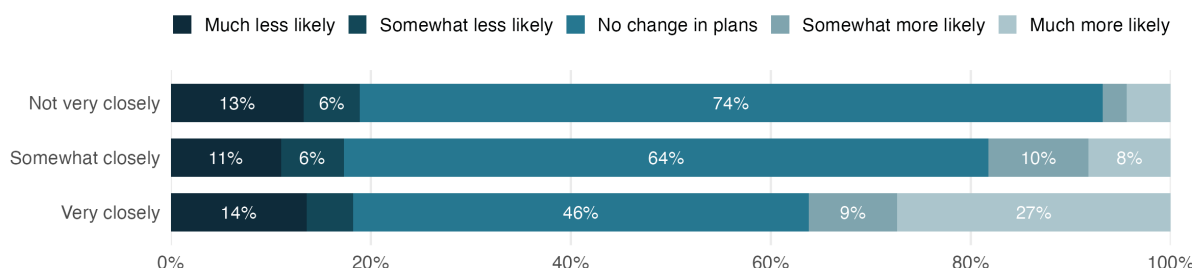


Source: CHIP50 survey of 4,708 U.S. adults, Sep 12 - 18, 2026.
Estimates are weighted to reflect the U.S. adult population.

On the impact of recent news about mail-in voting, only 39% of adults say they're following news about mail-voting rules and changes at all closely (11% very closely, 28% somewhat closely); 61% say they're following it not very closely or not closely at all. Overall, two-thirds (66%) of likely voters who have been following the news about mail-in voting at least a little (excluding people saying they did not follow recent news about mail-in voting) say it has not changed their voting plans. People following the news more closely say they are more likely to vote by mail as a result of recent news.

Has recent news about voting by mail changed how you plan to vote?

% of likely voters by how closely they follow news about mail voting, excluding those responding "Not closely at all"



Source: CHIP50 survey of 4,708 U.S. adults, Sep 12 - 18, 2026.
Estimates are weighted to reflect the U.S. adult population.



HARVARD Kennedy School

SHORENSTEIN CENTER

on Media, Politics and Public Policy

2026 Voting Information Trends Reports

Methodology

From September 12 to 18, 2026 we collected responses from 4,708 U.S. adults (18+) across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The surveys were conducted by PureSpectrum through an online, nonprobability sample. We reweighted our data using demographic characteristics to match the U.S. population with respect to 2024 vote choice and turnout, race and ethnicity, age, gender, education, and living in urban, suburban, or rural areas. More information on methodology is available at chip50.org/survey-methodology.

The Shorenstein Center 2026 Voting Information Trends Reports are produced by the Shorenstein Center in collaboration with the National Internet Observatory at Northeastern University, the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard Kennedy School, and The Civic Health and Institutions Project.

ShorensteinCenter.org/2026Trends