

A Step-by-Step Guide to Voting While Abroad

If you are a US citizen who will be abroad during the 2008 Presidential Election on **Tuesday, November 4**, you can and should still vote! Guidelines for voter registration and absentee balloting differ by state. The steps may seem complicated at first, but the effort is well worth it to make your vote count—even while you're studying abroad.

Before you leave:

1) Find out if you're registered.

Before you cast your ballot, you have to register to vote in your **home county or precinct**. If you recently moved, you can re-register in your new county of residence. You can find more information on how to do this below.

Even if you think you're already registered, it's a good idea to make sure county records are updated. Often, you can verify your registration online by providing your address and the last four numbers of your social security number or by contacting your county election officials.

- Check your registration status online at <http://www.canivote.org> or on the website for your local county's election office.
- If you are unsuccessful, check with your county's election office. For example, if you live in Lake County, Illinois, you would need to contact the supervising office for the Lake County elections. If you have trouble finding contact information for your election office, websites like <http://www.canivote.org> and <http://www.vote411.org> provide contact information for most election offices.

2) Not registered? Not a problem!

Many states require voters to be registered **at least 30 days prior to the November 4 election**. You are eligible to register in a new county or precinct if you have lived there for at least 30 days. **You will need to be registered to vote before you can request an absentee ballot.** Register early to avoid complications.

- You can either register in person with your local election official or by mail. To register by mail, download the Voter Registration Application and Guide or contact your local election office to acquire a voter registration form.
- The guide provides detailed information about how to register, depending on your state.
- **IMPORTANT:** Although you can download and complete the application online, **you must mail the form to your local election official** or bring it to their office.
- In the next 7-10 business days, check online or contact your local election official to see if you have been officially registered.

- Now that you are registered, you're ready to request your absentee ballot. Before you leave, check with your local election officials to familiarize yourself with requesting an absentee ballot.

When you're abroad:

3) Request an absentee ballot.

Again, check with your local election officials to find out how to request an absentee ballot. In most cases, you only need to state that you will not be present in your precinct on Election Day and request an absentee ballot. **Make sure that you submit your request for an absentee ballot before your state's deadline.** The deadline to request absentee ballots in Illinois is October 25.

- For more information and support while voting abroad, visit <https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/overseas/home.htm>.
- Depending on your state, you can receive and return your ballot by regular mail, fax, or electronic mail. However, most states prefer regular mail or fax.

4) Learn about the candidates.

To make your vote truly count, be educated about the issues and the candidates. Voting for the next President is important, but you'll find other important items on the ballot that need your attention too.

- Download a sample ballot from your local election official's website to find out about other representatives and ballot measures will be on your ballot.
- Keep up with the news from home by watching the news on television or reading about it online. Consult various newspapers and news sources that you trust to learn more about the candidates, the other races in your precinct, and ballot measures.
- Explore non-partisan sites like <http://www.vote411.org> that compare candidates' positions on the issues and compile voting records and other useful information. Visit each candidate's website to hear their opinions in their own words.

5) Vote!

Now that you have your ballot and you've done your research, you're ready to vote!

- Mail, fax, or electronically submit your ballot, depending on your local election officials' guidelines.
- In most cases, your ballot can arrive up to 14 days after the election and still be counted, as long as it has been **postmarked before Election Day**. However, it may be best to vote early to ensure your ballot gets back to the States on time.

- Don't forget to remind your friends and families to vote!

Useful Links

<http://www.vote411.org/>

A non-partisan “one-stop-shop” for all election-related information including national and state-specific information on: registration, voter identification requirements, polling place locations, early voting, absentee ballots, and where to find information about ballot measures and candidates.

<http://www.canivote.org>

A step-by-step guide on how to vote.

<http://www.voterinfonet.com>

Cook County Election Information

<http://www.voteforjudges.org/>

In Illinois, judges must be elected and electing qualified judges helps protect the courts. This site provides background information about candidates running to be judges in the state of Illinois.

<http://www.illinoisvotersguide.org>

An interactive website that provides voters with information about judicial candidates and elections.

http://www.civicyouth.org/quick/youth_voting.htm

Provides fact sheets, studies, and useful information about mobilizing youth voters.

<https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/overseas/home.htm>

Nonpartisan voter services for US citizens overseas and Uniformed Service Members.