



# How Kentucky Elections Would Look Different if the Freedom to Vote Act Had Been Enacted

By Greta Bedekovics, Sydney Bryant, and Alice Lillydahl | October 9, 2024

The Freedom to Vote Act (FTVA) would expand access to the ballot box for millions of Americans and ensure that all citizens can easily exercise their right to vote, regardless of their ZIP code. At the same time, this transformational voting rights legislation would strengthen election security, improve election administration and campaign finance transparency, and ban partisan gerrymandering.

The FTVA would make voting easier and more secure for 3.2 million voting-age Kentucky citizens, including 2.3 million registered voters. A new report from the Center for American Progress provides analysis and statistical extrapolations to illustrate how the 2024 and subsequent election cycles would be transformed if the FTVA's key voting policies had been enacted in 2022, when the legislation was blocked through the use of the filibuster on the U.S. Senate floor.<sup>1</sup>

Analysis and projections for Kentucky, based on previous academic and expert research as well as original research, demonstrate the transformative impact the FTVA could have for voters in the state.

Unless otherwise cited, the author conducted original analysis and created projections primarily based on data published by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission for past federal election cycles. For a comprehensive look at the data analyzed for this fact sheet, see [here](#).

To put some of the below findings into perspective, the 2016 Kentucky U.S. Senate election was decided by 277,000 voters and the 2022 Kentucky U.S. Senate election was decided by 350,000 voters.<sup>2</sup>

**277,000**

voters decided the 2016  
Kentucky U.S. Senate  
election

**350,000**

voters decided the 2020  
Kentucky U.S. Senate  
election

**216,000**

additional Kentucky voters  
would likely vote in the  
2024 presidential election

**Read the full report:**  
[Pass the Freedom to Vote Act: How Elections Would Look Different This Year and in the Future](#)

## Automatic voter registration

The FTVA would ensure eligible Kentucky citizens can automatically register to vote through the department of motor vehicles.<sup>3</sup> Automatic voter registration (AVR) has been shown to be critical not only for registering voters and keeping voter rolls up to date but also for closing racial gaps in voter registration rates. Given the measured impacts that AVR has had in other states:

- Approximately **78,000 eligible Kentuckians** would have newly registered to vote through AVR, including more than 3,000 Black Kentuckians and nearly 4,000 Hispanic Kentuckians.
- Approximately **397,000 already registered Kentucky voters** would have updated their voter registration information using AVR.
- Approximately **38,000 additional Kentucky voters** would likely cast a ballot in the 2024 general election, including nearly 1,500 Black Kentuckians and 1,800 Hispanic Kentuckians.

## Same-day voter registration

The FTVA would ensure eligible Kentucky citizens can register to vote at the polls on Election Day and during an early voting period.<sup>4</sup> Same-day voter registration (SDR) greatly benefits communities that tend to move more frequently and therefore need to update their voter registration information more often; Hispanic Americans and young Americans are among the demographic populations that move around the most frequently.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, SDR helps mitigate issues with inaccurate voter roll purges that often disproportionately affect voters of color.<sup>6</sup> The SDR policy in the FTVA would ensure that voters inaccurately removed from the voter rolls are able not only to re-register at the polls but also to cast a nonprovisional ballot.

Across the past three federal election cycles, Hispanic voters in states with SDR had an average voter turnout rate that was 6.6 percentage points higher than that of Hispanic voters in states without SDR; during the last presidential election, it was 4.5 percentage points higher. Additionally, academic experts have found that SDR increases youth voter turnout by between 3.1 percentage points and 7.3 percentage points.<sup>7</sup> Given these findings:

- Approximately **7,000 additional Hispanic voters** would likely cast a ballot if voter turnout for Kentucky Hispanic voters was at the same rate as for Hispanic voters in states with SDR.
- As many as **19,000 more young Kentuckians**—those ages 18 to 24—would likely cast a ballot in the 2024 general election.

## Re-enfranchisement

The FTVA would restore the right to vote for returning citizens who have served time for felony sentences. Black Americans are incarcerated at five times the rate of white Americans, while Hispanic/Latino Americans are incarcerated at nearly two-and-a-half times the rate of white Americans.<sup>8</sup> With enactment of the FTVA:

- **132,000 Kentuckians** who have served their time for felony convictions would be eligible to cast a ballot in the 2024 general elections—4.5 percent of Kentucky’s citizen voting-age population.<sup>9</sup>

### Voting by mail

The FTVA would ensure that all Kentucky voters can request a mail-in ballot.<sup>10</sup> During the last general election, states that allowed all voters to request a mail-in ballot (no-excuse states) had a 19 percent average vote-by-mail rate, compared with 5.1 percent for states that required a preapproved excuse (excuse states). Additionally, no-excuse states had an average voter turnout rate that was 6.7 percentage points higher than that of excuse states. Given these findings:

- Nearly **325,000 additional Kentucky voters** who have participated in recent elections would likely cast their ballot by mail instead of in person for the 2024 general election.
- More than **216,000 additional voters** would likely cast a ballot in the 2024 general election if voter turnout in Kentucky increased by 6.7 percentage points.

### Early in-person voting

The FTVA would ensure all Americans have access to at least two weeks of early in-person voting (EIPV), including on weekends. Kentucky is among 10 states that will not offer a minimum of two weeks of EIPV for the 2024 general election.

During the previous two general elections, states with at least two weeks of EIPV had a voter turnout rate that was, on average, 3 percentage points higher than states without a minimum two weeks of EIPV.

Additionally, for the 2022 general election, on average, early in-person ballots accounted for 22.4 percent of total ballots cast in states with a minimum of two weeks of EIPV. In contrast, 16 percent of Kentucky voters cast their ballots early in person during the state’s three-day early voting period. Given these findings:

- Approximately **142,000 additional Kentucky voters** who have participated in recent elections would likely choose to vote early in person, mirroring higher EIPV rates in states with at least two weeks of EIPV.
- Approximately **102,000 more Kentucky voters** would likely turn out to cast a ballot in the 2024 general election if the state’s voter turnout increased by 3 percentage points, mirroring higher voter turnout rates in states with at least two weeks of EIPV.

## Endnotes

- 1 Greta Bedekovics, "Pass the Freedom to Vote Act: How Elections Would Look Different This Year and in the Future" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2024), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/pass-the-freedom-to-vote-act-how-elections-would-look-different-this-year-and-in-the-future/>; Freedom to Vote Act, S. 2747, 117th Cong., 1st sess. (September 14, 2021), available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2747>.
- 2 Ballotpedia, "United States Senate election in Kentucky, 2016," available at [https://ballotpedia.org/United\\_States\\_Senate\\_election\\_in\\_Kentucky\\_2016](https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_election_in_Kentucky_2016) (last accessed October 2024); Ballotpedia, "United States Senate election in Kentucky, 2022," available at [https://ballotpedia.org/United\\_States\\_Senate\\_election\\_in\\_Kentucky\\_2022](https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_election_in_Kentucky_2022) (last accessed October 2024).
- 3 National Conference of State Legislatures, "Automatic Voter Registration," available at <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration> (last accessed September 2024); Movement Advancement Project, "Automatic Voter Registration," available at [https://www.lgbtmap.org/democracy-maps/automatic\\_voter\\_registration](https://www.lgbtmap.org/democracy-maps/automatic_voter_registration) (last accessed September 2024).
- 4 Ballotpedia, "Same-day voter registration," available at [https://ballotpedia.org/Same-day\\_voter\\_registration](https://ballotpedia.org/Same-day_voter_registration) (last accessed September 2024).
- 5 Jacob M. Grumbach and Charlotte Hill, "Rock the Registration: Same Day Registration Increases Turnout of Young Voters," *The Journal of Politics* 84 (1) (2022): 405–417, available at <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/714776?journalCode=jop>; Paul Taylor and others, "American Mobility: Who Moves? Who Stays Put? Where's Home?" (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2008), available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2010/10/Movers-and-Stayers.pdf>; Hire A Helper, "32+ Key Moving Statistics You Should Know in 2023," available at <https://www.hireahelper.com/moving-statistics/> (last accessed September 2024); U.S. Census Bureau, "Current Population Survey Data Tables, 2022," available at [https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/data/tables.2022.List\\_1020932829.html#list-tab-List\\_1020932829](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/data/tables.2022.List_1020932829.html#list-tab-List_1020932829) (last accessed September 2024).
- 6 Michael Waldman, "Mass Purges are the New Voter Suppression," Brennan Center for Justice, March 12, 2024, available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/mass-purges-are-new-voter-suppression>; Megan Henry, "Ohio's voter purge 'disproportionately targets voters of color', civil rights organizations say," *Ohio Capital Journal*, July 25, 2024, available at <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/07/25/ohios-voter-purge-disproportionately-targets-voters-of-color-civil-rights-organizations-say/>.
- 7 Grumbach and Hill, "Rock the Registration: Same Day Registration Increases Turnout of Young Voters."
- 8 NAACP, "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet," available at <https://naacp.org/resources/criminal-justice-fact-sheet> (last accessed September 2024); Lauren-Brooke Eisen and Hernandez D. Stroud, "The Federal Government Must Incentivize States to Incarcerate Fewer People," Brennan Center for Justice, March 14, 2023, available at <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/federal-government-must-incentivize-states-incarcerate-fewer-people#:~:text=Black%20Americans%20are%20incarcerated%20in,incarceration%20rate%20of%20white%20people>.
- 9 Emma Stamen, Whitney Threadcraft, and Kristen M. Budd, "Kentucky Bars Over 152,000 Citizens from Voting," *The Sentencing Project*, available at <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2023/01/Kentucky-Voting-Rights-for-People-with-Felony-Convictions.pdf> (last accessed October 2024).
- 10 Vote.org, "Absentee Ballot Rules," available at <https://www.vote.org/absentee-voting-rules/> (last accessed September 2024); National Conference of State Legislatures, "Table 1: States with No-Excuse Absentee Voting," available at <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-1-states-with-no-excuse-absentee-voting> (last accessed September 2024).