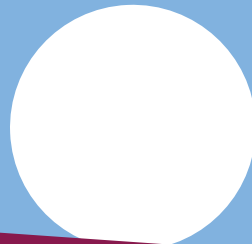




All DEMOCRACY IS LOCAL 2026



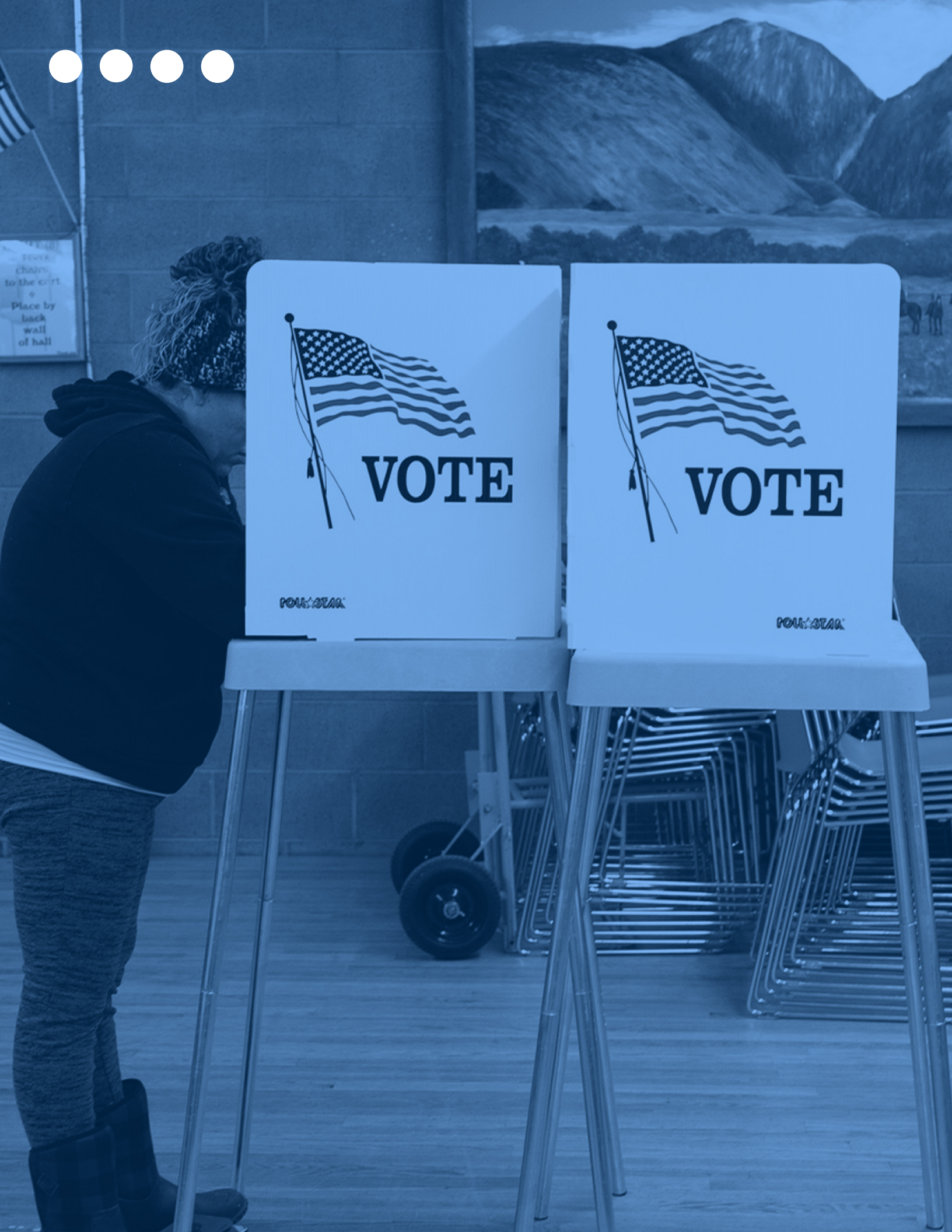
ACLU

Kansas



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VOTE

FOUR STAR



VOTE

FOUR STAR



INTRODUCTION

The 2024 General Election was one of our nation's most consequential at the local, state, and federal levels, with all 165 seats in the Kansas Legislature on the ballot in addition to the presidency. More Kansans voted in November of 2024 than in any election in modern history.¹ The stakes were clear in the Free State's largest county, Johnson, which touted 478,877 voters, all the way to its smallest county, Greeley, with just 890 voters.

The high level of electoral participation comes even as the constitutional right to vote is under attack at the federal level and in Kansas.

Over the last two years, the Kansas Legislature has created an array of new mechanisms making it increasingly harder for eligible citizens to vote in Kansas and revived failed policies of old, disenfranchising thousands of eligible voters while jeopardizing their sensitive information. In 2025, despite already having the shortest window to send, receive, and return mail ballots in the country, the Kansas Legislature revoked the three-day mail processing window, effectively disenfranchising thousands of eligible voters participating by mail and, who are disproportionately elderly, have disabilities, or live in rural areas. In the 2026 session, the legislature also overrode a gubernatorial veto of a bill that will change long-standing online voter registration efforts, create new mechanisms for purging eligible voters from the voter rolls, and compile lists of noncitizens to compare against these rolls and remove voters.

There has never been a better time for proactive efforts at the local level to defend the fundamental right to vote. As we prepare for another critical election cycle with legislative and congressional races on the ballot, as well as statewide elected offices, the

ACLU of Kansas renewed its analysis of voter access in Kansas that began in 2018. The affiliate's 2018 report, *All Democracy is Local: The Impact of County Election Officials on Citizen Participation in Kansas Elections*, a survey of all 105 counties across Kansas, drew clear connections between the practices of county election officials and voter turnout. The affiliate's 2023 report, *All Democracy is (Still) Local: The Continued Impact of County Election Officials on Kansas Voters' Access*, built on these findings and identified several ways election officials can proactively strengthen democracy. While this 2026 report builds on these findings, it is unique in that it is the first to cover not just a presidential election, but a record-breaking election in terms of voter turnout and participation in early voting methods. Some Kansas counties have made improvements in voting access, but most were unprepared to meet the needs of the unprecedented number of voters in 2024. As a result, the same barriers discovered in the previous iterations of this report not only resurfaced—such as limited early voting opportunities, overcrowded polls, long wait times, and accessibility issues—but were compounded. More than ever, local election officials have both the power and clear justification to ensure their continued improvements to election administration are proportional to the growing number of voters in Kansas.

KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, the ACLU of Kansas collected data on the 2024 General Election to highlight election administration practices responsible for positively or negatively impacting voter turnout. The following findings emerged from the data:

The number of voters per polling place significantly predicts voter turnout.

Our analysis finds that every additional 1,000 voters per poll was associated with a 1.3% decrease in voter turnout, even when accounting for community level factors like population, rural-urban classification, age distribution of the population, educational

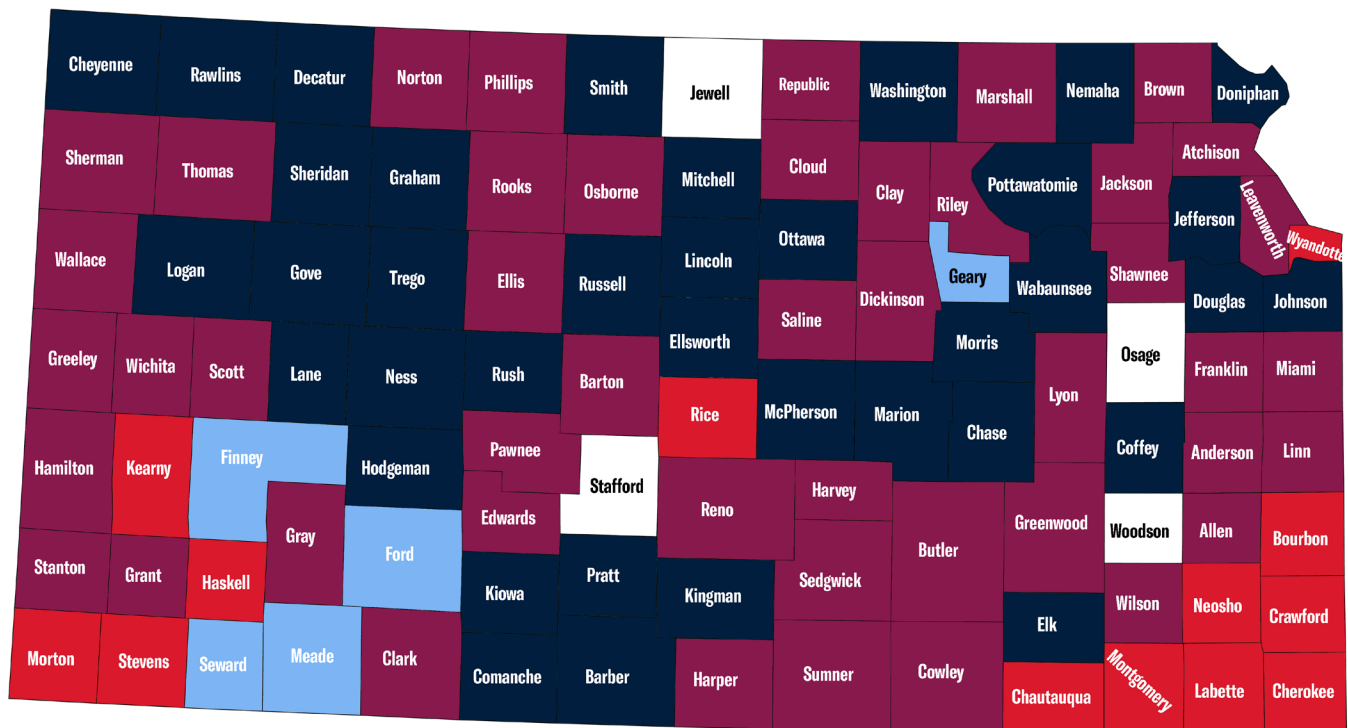
attainment, and the proportion of the population living below poverty. This highlights the important role election administration plays in making democratic participation accessible and convenient.

A lack of language access remains a barrier to voter engagement. While some counties have made improvements in providing additional translated materials, limited language access remains a significant predictor of low voter turnout. Counties with significantly larger proportions of voters who speak a primary language other than English and/or have Limited English Proficiency have the lowest turnouts in the state. Additionally, most counties (71) in Kansas do not offer translated materials of any kind. Only 6 counties are federally required to provide translated materials, which make up 6 out of the 7 counties in Kansas that offer translated materials including translated ballots.² Fifteen other counties provide some translated materials such as voter information and registration forms, but not ballots.

Accessible voting policies remain inconsistent across Kansas. Despite Kansas statute requiring accessible voting options, the way such policies are implemented and advertised varies from county to county. Elderly voters and voters with illnesses or disabilities require accessible voting options like curbside voting and permanent advance voting, but there is no widespread consensus on how to inform voters of these options or implement them smoothly.

Early in-person and advance mail-in voting remain important avenues for voters to make their voice heard. More than 52% of all ballots cast in the 2024 General Election were cast early in-person or by mail. On average, turnout was highest in counties that offered 15 or more days of early voting, more than 24 hours of early voting opportunities outside of standard business hours, and in places with 7 or more early voting locations—but a majority of counties did not utilize the full early voting period and had just one early voting location available.

2024 VOTER TURNOUT



- Counties with missing data
- Counties with 40% - 49.9% turnout
- Counties with 50% - 59.9% turnout
- Counties with 60% - 69.9% turnout
- Counties with >70% turnout

This data can also be used as a baseline before key legislative changes to election administration took effect, such as the elimination of the three-day mail processing window. County election officials continue to possess the authority to proactively strengthen democracy in their respective counties. The Kansas Legislature can and should return to these important issues and self-correct promptly. Additionally, the next Kansas Secretary of State has a unique opportunity to push back against federal interference in our elections and issue guidance at the local level. In light of recent changes to statewide election policy, this report finds several, locally driven opportunities to increase turnout and ensure that all eligible citizens can participate in our elections.

- **Opening more polling places on Election Day with increased focus on geographic diversity:** As has been the case in previous iterations of this report, there exists a clear correlation between voters per poll and voter turnout. When fewer voters are assigned to a polling place, lines are shorter and election administration is made simpler. As a result, counties that assigned fewer voters to a polling place saw higher turnout. When it comes to advance voting locations or Election Day polling places, counties who diversify their polling places increase access for thousands of eligible voters.
- **Expanding language access and translation services:** Our democracy is stronger when every eligible citizen can participate. But across Kansas, thousands of eligible voters speak a primary language other than English, compounding barriers to the polls. Evidence is clear that this need is significant among Spanish speakers. By translating election-related materials, from educational materials to ballots and sample ballots, election officials can open this door for thousands of Kansans who have worked hard to join our communities and make our elections more inclusive.
- **Establishing “vote from jail” programs:** Even among the minority of counties with an official vote from jail program, the burden remains on the individual being detained to make arrangements to vote, rather than there existing a proactive

effort on the part of the facility and county election office to ensure that anyone who is eligible is offered the opportunity, even those accused of a crime who have not been convicted.

- **Increasing voting rights education:** With more than half of all ballots cast before Election Day in 2024, whether early in-person or by mail, voter education efforts will be more important than ever. Voters who have relied on consistent mail-in voting practices for decades will suddenly be forced to return their ballots earlier than usual for their otherwise eligible vote to count. Additionally, changes in registration practices and new methods of purging voters from the voter rolls will impact eligible voters’ ability to cast their ballot in-person.
- **Reinstating the three-day mail processing window and implementing universal mail-in ballot policies.** over 137,000 ballots were cast by mail in 2024, and mail-in voting continues to be a popular option among voters. Rural counties rely on mail-in voting and, prior to repeal, depended on the three-day mail processing window to account for postal delays. Ensuring that all eligible voters can receive a mail-in ballot and that each mail-in ballot postmarked on Election Day gets counted makes for more fair and accurate election results.
- **Increasing the number of early voting locations:** Location matters, especially when considering the limited amount of time voters have to vote early and in-person outside of working hours. The vast majority of Kansas counties offer just one location for advanced voting, while those with at least 7 early locations saw the highest turnout.
- **Expanding early voting opportunities, including opportunities outside of standard business hours:** In 2024, as in previous years, counties that offered more days of early, in-person voting saw higher turnout than those who offered fewer. The same is true of those counties who offered additional hours of early, in-person voting opportunities outside of typical standard hours. Expanding these opportunities is a simple way to address low voter turnout across the state in counties small and large.

METHODOLOGY

In October of 2025, the ACLU of Kansas sent a digital survey to all 105 county election offices regarding their county's policies and practices for early voting, voter notification, and other aspects of election administration via email. The organization received partial or complete survey responses from 101 counties. Fifteen counties did not respond to the survey and received an official request under the Kansas Open Records Act (KORA). Seven counties—Chautauqua, Ellis, Gove, Linn, Montgomery, Pottawatomie, and Thomas—required payment for this information or to account for the time staff spent obtaining the information requested. Four counties did not complete the survey nor responded to the KORA request, leaving data from Jewell, Osage, Stafford, and Woodson Counties missing from this analysis.

Sample

Our sample counts 1,327,080 total ballots cast in the 2024 General Election out of the total 1,344,147 votes cast in Kansas.

Several factors were taken into consideration when grouping counties, such as length of early voting period, proportion of the citizen voting age population that spoke a primary language other than English, number of voters per poll, and county population. Turnout for each group was calculated by taking the average voter turnout rate of each grouping. Voter turnout numbers were collected from each county's election summary statistics found on their websites. For those counties that did not post this information on their website, turnout data was collected from the 2024 Presidential Election County-Level Results posted on the Kansas Secretary of State's official website. This number may underestimate the total ballots cast since this figure represents only ballots *counted* in the presidential election, not all ballots *cast*. The total number of registered voters in each county as of November 1, 2024, was provided by the Kansas Secretary of State.





EXPANDING EQUITABLE ACCESS ACROSS KANSAS

MORE POLLS FOR MORE VOTERS

The 2024 General Election was historic. For the first time, Kansas surpassed 2 million registered voters and saw roughly 66.2% turnout statewide.¹ While these numbers suggest civic engagement is on the rise, election administration and infrastructure have failed to keep pace in many areas, creating persistent accessibility challenges for voters and punishing them based on where they live.

COUNTY POPULATION & VOTER TURNOUT

COUNTY POPULATION SIZE	VOTER TURNOUT (%)	# OF COUNTIES
< 5,000	67.8%	37
5,000 - 9,999	68.9%	28
10,000 - 24,999	62.2%	15
25,000 - 49,999	60.8%	11
50,000 - 99,999	63.4%	5
100,000+	66.1%	5

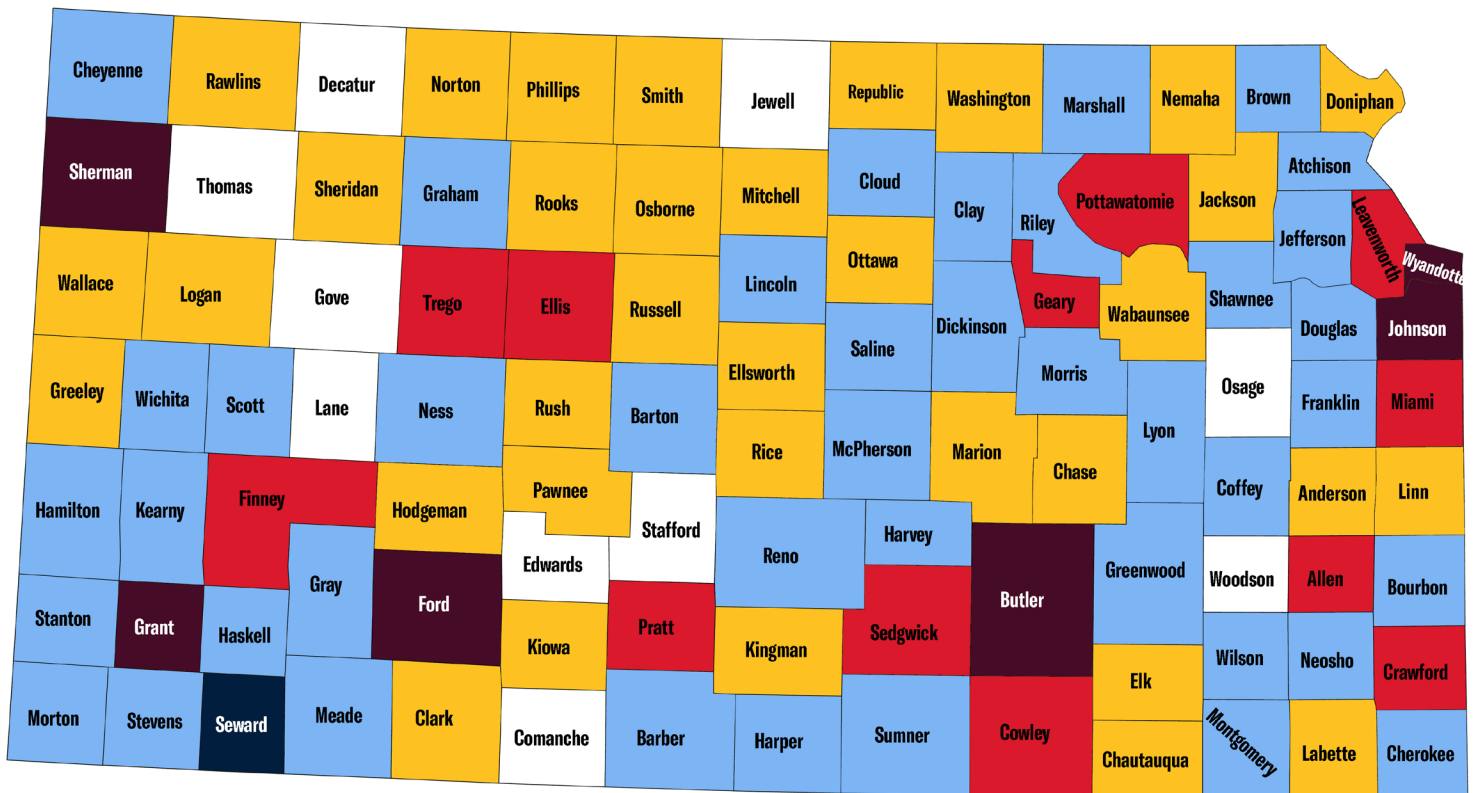
On average, Kansas saw an average of 1,408 voters per polling location in 2024. However, because no existing statute regulates the number of voters assigned to each poll, the distribution between counties varies dramatically, from just 280 voters per polling place in Comanche County to as many as 5,561 in Seward County. This disparity means some voters will face longer lines, waiting times, commutes, and other logistical barriers than others, and that experiences differ based on where someone lives.

The number of voters per polling place continues to be one of the strongest predictors of turnout. While smaller counties have fewer voters and polling locations, the size of a county alone does not explain differences in turnout. Rather, how thinly polling resources are spread appears to matter more. For instance, despite being one of the most populous counties in the state, Wyandotte County saw just 54.1% turnout in 2024, well below the statewide average of 66.2%. Not coincidentally, Wyandotte

VOTERS PER POLL & TURNOUT

VOTERS PER POLL	VOTER TURNOUT (%)	# OF COUNTIES
< 500	73.0%	4
500 - 999	69.9%	34
1,000 - 1,999	64.2%	42
2,000 - 2,999	64.0%	12
3,000 - 3,999	61.7%	6
4,000+	41.3%	1

VOTERS PER POLL



County had around 3,046 voters per poll compared to the statewide voter per poll average of 1,403 voters per poll. In 2024, Seward County—whose voter-per-poll ratio of 5,561 is the highest in the state—recorded one of the state’s lowest turnout rates at just 41.37%. Eight of the 11 counties with more than 3,000 voters per polling location experienced notably low turnout in 2024 even for a midterm election. In 2022, voter turnout in several counties, including Grant, Scott, and Sedgwick, fell between 40% and 50%, while Finney, Ford, Geary, and Wyandotte Counties dropped below 40%.

Overall, by 2024, the number of counties exceeding 3,000 voters per poll decreased to nine, and fewer of them reported turnout far below the state average—a meaningful improvement from 2022. Still, however, challenges clearly remain in the more extreme cases

mentioned above. Long lines, extended wait times, transportation challenges, limited hours, and staffing challenges can compound to make voting more difficult, particularly for working voters, caregivers, and those with limited flexibility. Addressing these gaps by increasing the number of polling locations and distributing voters across these sites would not only improve the voting experience but help ensure that access to the ballot is equitable from county-to-county, regardless of where someone chooses to live.

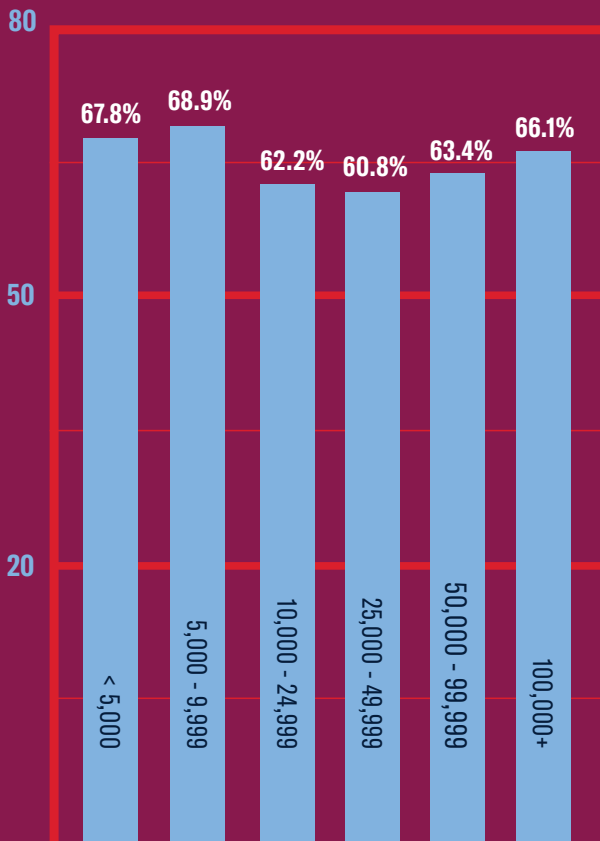
This continued pattern underscores the importance of adequately resourcing polling locations to ensure voters are not discouraged or prevented from participating due to avoidable barriers. This analysis shows that outside of the larger social, economic, cultural, and political climate, election officials can improve voter turnout through proactive local policy.

County Spotlight: *Sedgwick County*

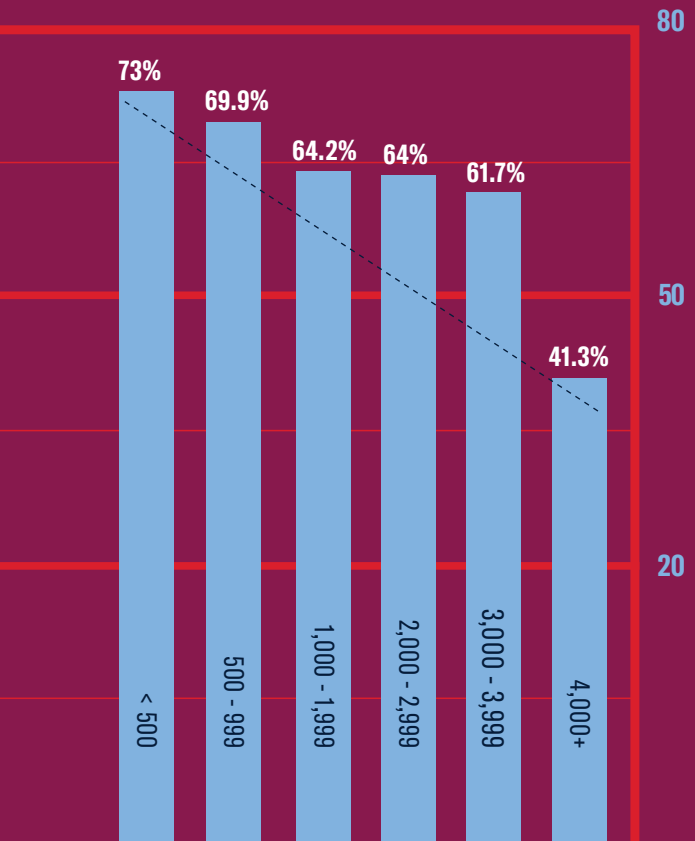
In the 2020 General Election, turnout in Sedgwick County reached 70%.³ While the county continues to see higher-than-average turnout, the number of voters per poll in Sedgwick County remains above average. With around 322,381 registered voters in November of 2020, 18 early voting locations, and 83 Election Day polling locations, Sedgwick County still averaged roughly 3,191 voters per poll.⁴ Because the ratio of voters to polling locations is often a barrier to voting, the ACLU of Kansas encouraged counties with overcrowded polls to update their election infrastructure to meet the increased number of registered voters in its 2023 iteration of *All Democracy is Local*.

In 2024, Sedgwick County increased the combined number of polling locations available during the early voting period and on Election Day from 101 total locations to 19 early voting locations and 107 Election Day locations for a total of 126. This improvement, however, still did not account for the increase in registered voters, which swelled to 344,640. While the number of voters per poll dipped slightly to 2,735, Sedgwick County's turnout of 62.9% for the 2024 General Election remained slightly below the state average. This demonstrates that there are likely several factors at play, and that improvements to election infrastructure cannot be as simple as increasing the number of polling locations without consideration for whether additional locations are in proportion to the needs of the growing population of voters.

Voter Turnout (%) BY COUNTY POPULATION SIZE



Voter Turnout (%) BY VOTERS PER POLL



Increasing the number of polling locations and reducing the number of voters per poll is perhaps the most effective way to decrease long lines and wait times and, ultimately, improve voter turnout.

KEY FINDING: Even when controlling for other factors, such as population size, rural-urban classification, age distribution of the population, educational attainment, and the percentage of the population living below poverty, the number of voters per poll remains statistically significant for voter turnout, which translates to about a 1.3% decrease in turnout for every additional 1,000 voters per poll.⁵

MAKING THE CASE FOR LANGUAGE TRANSLATION

Places with larger shares of voting-age residents who speak a language other than English, particularly those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), tend to have lower voter turnout than counties with fewer such residents. Participating fully in elections requires an understanding of both voting procedures and the content of the ballot, which, in turn, depends on access to materials in a language eligible voters with LEP can read and understand. Whether through translated ballots, sample ballots, information about polling places, or the right to receive language assistance at the polls, voters cannot fully participate in the democratic process unless all information is accessible. When those materials are not translated, language becomes a direct barrier to participation. Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires jurisdictions with significant populations of language minorities to provide election-related materials in those languages. Specifically, this provision applies to counties with more than 10,000 individuals or 5% of the voting age population who speak a primary language other than English.⁶ This provision was designed to address longstanding discrimination and exclusion that prevented language minorities from equal participation in elections. As calculated by this federal statute, six counties in Kansas meet the threshold required to provide translated materials: Finney, Ford, Grant, Haskell, Seward, and Stevens

LANGUAGE FLUENCY & TURNOUT

% OF POP. THAT SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH*	VOTER TURNOUT (%)	# OF COUNTIES
< 6%	68.2%	72
6% - 12%	67.8%	15
> 12%	54%	14

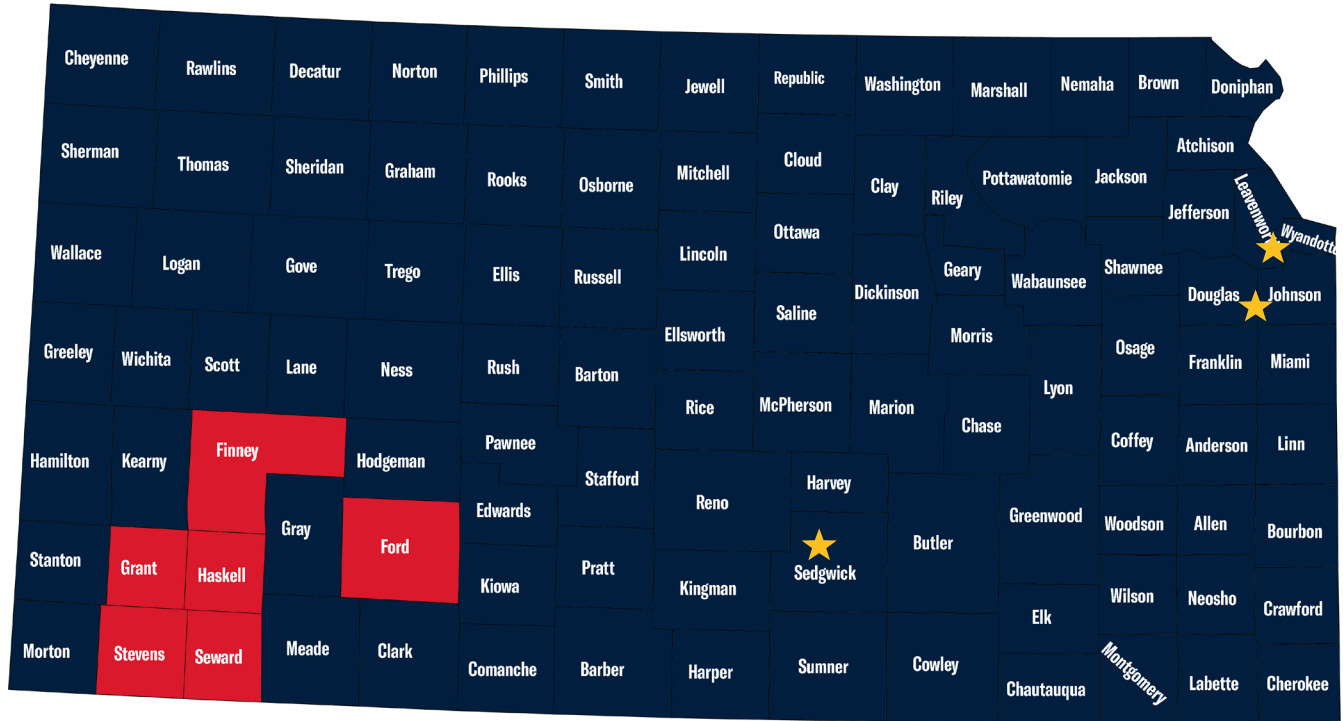
* SAMPLE MEAN: 6%

% OF POP. THAT SPEAKS ENGLISH "LESS THAN VERY WELL"	VOTER TURNOUT (%)	# OF COUNTIES
< 2%	68.2%	72
2% - 5%	67.8%	15
> 5%	54%	14

* SAMPLE MEAN: 1.9%



COUNTIES FEDERALLY MAdATED TO TRANSLATE VOTING MATERIALS



- Counties federally required to provide language accessible materials
- Counties not federally required to provide language accessible materials
- ★ Counties with the most amount of citizens who speak a language other than English

Counties. However, these federal requirements represent the floor, not the ceiling, for what is possible to help voters. Ensuring meaningful access means going beyond minimum standards set by law and proactively expanding language access where communities represent a clear need.

In Kansas, an estimated 168,000 residents speak a language other than English and may face obstacles to voting because of limited access to translated election materials.⁷ But despite this obvious need, 71 counties offer no translated materials. 15 counties included in this sample provided some translated materials but excluded critical documents like ballots and sample ballots. Most notably, at least 5% of the eligible population in 11 counties included in this sample exhibited Limited English Proficiency (LEP): Finney, Ford, Grant, Hamilton, Haskell, Kearny, Morton, Seward, Stevens, Wilson, and Wyandotte. While

these 11 counties reported offering some translated materials, just six made translated ballots available during the advance voting period or on Election Day, leaving gaps even in areas with clear language access needs.

Thousands of eligible voters who speak a primary language other than English reside in larger cities or counties that don't meet the federal, percentage-based threshold that requires translated materials. For example, Johnson County has over 38,000 residents that speak a language other than English, Sedgwick County has more than 40,000, and Wyandotte County has roughly 19,000. While these counties are not federally required to provide translated materials, these populations—which often outnumber those in smaller counties—would benefit from improved language access.



Across Kansas, cities and counties are making the push for expanded language access and translated materials, including but not limited to ballots and sample ballots, informational materials, online content, and information regarding the right to receive language assistance at the polls. By taking the lead and calling for proactive election administration, these counties, which include Johnson and Wyandotte, are taking steps to ensure that voters are able to exercise their constitutional right to vote. Broad voter participation is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy, and participation is strongest when all eligible citizens can engage fully and confidently in the process. Immigrants are often the proudest American citizens, walking the hard path to full citizenship, following the law, and having a voice in our democracy. Many may be working to learn English but have not mastered it enough yet to overcome ballot language that is confusing for even first language English speakers. Giving eligible citizens access to election materials in the language they are most comfortable ensures that they fully understand the process of voting and the decisions they are making for their communities. Providing translated materials is a practical way that election officials can support every eligible voter’s participation in the democratic process.

ACCESSIBLE VOTING: EXPECTATION VS. REALITY

National estimates found that 11% of voters with disabilities—around 1.9 million voters total—experienced some type of difficulty voting in 2020.⁸ The turnout gap between voters with disabilities and voters without has narrowed over time, especially after the passing of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), but there are still barriers to participation for voters with disabilities such as *“lack of poll worker training to simple physical accessibility of the polling*

*place.”*⁹ These barriers remained in 2024 and today, but election officials retain the ability to implement more accessible policies.

Curbside Voting

Kansas statute requires that curbside voting, or voting from your vehicle, is an option for voters, yet 21 of the counties surveyed said they do not offer curbside voting. Curbside voting is intended to serve as a critical accessibility tool, particularly for voters with mobility limitations, chronic health conditions, or disabilities that make the movement of entering a polling place difficult or unsafe. When implemented properly, it allows voters to cast a ballot privately and independently without needing to navigate physical barriers such as stairs, heavy doors, long distances, or crowded indoor environments. The gap between what the law requires and what is being offered on the ground, however, suggests that this safeguard is not being consistently realized across the state. Even in counties where curbside voting is technically available, inconsistent implementation can create additional barriers. Voters may encounter unclear signage, difficulty alerting poll workers, or long wait times for assistance once they arrive. Without clear protocols and adequate staffing, the availability of curbside voting in statute does not always translate into a reliable or accessible option in practice.



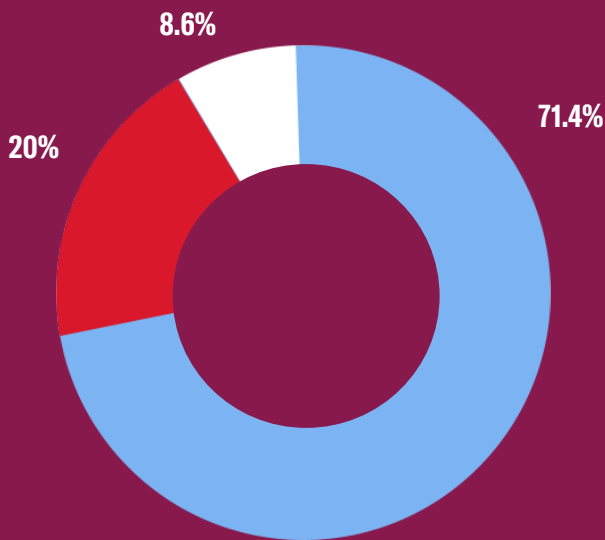
Permanent Advance Voting

Permanent advance voting is another form of early voting; however, it is often reserved for the elderly and disabled. Most counties included in this sample provide permanent advance voting upon request, but only 16 counties said they directly reach out to voters to notify them of their eligibility for permanent advance voting either via phone, email, or mail in addition to indirect advertising. Permanent advance voting is especially important as the number of eligible Kansans 65 and older continues to grow. With an aging population, the likelihood of disability increases, making this an important step in ensuring all Kansans, no matter their age or ability, can exercise their right to vote. In 2026, the Kansas Legislature passed legislation creating new methods for removing eligible voters from the voter rolls. Continued legislative attempts to increase the frequency of removing voters from the permanent advance voting list also means that a voter's advance voting status is far from guaranteed to be permanent.

Ensuring that alternative and accessible voting methods such as curbside voting and permanent advance voting are not only offered, but consistently and effectively implemented, is an important step toward closing the accessibility gap. As the population ages and the number of voters with disabilities continues to grow, strengthening these systems will be increasingly important in ensuring all eligible Kansans can fully participate in elections with dignity. The right to vote includes the practical ability to cast a ballot. Taken together, these discussions highlight the ongoing tension around practical accessibility. While curbside voting, permanent advance voting, and voting by mail are intended to provide basic accommodations, inconsistent availability across counties combined with burdensome policy proposals underscore the importance of ensuring that both in-person and advanced mail-in voting accommodations are not only required by law but consistently implemented and clearly supported. For many voters with disabilities, especially those who already face barriers to the ballot box, reliable voting access remains an essential safeguard to ensure meaningful participation in elections.

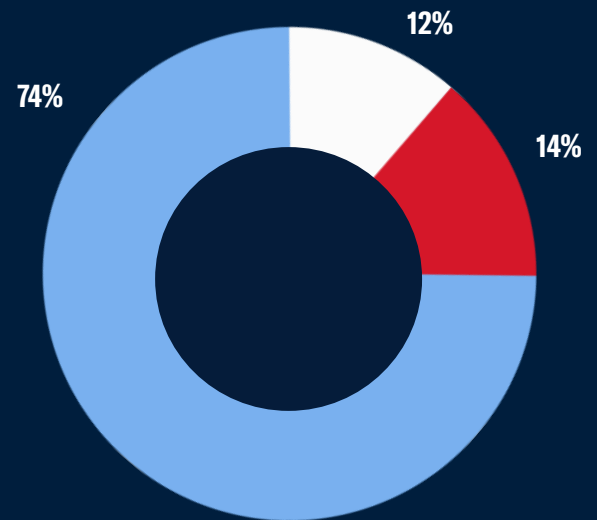


COUNTIES WITH CURBSIDE VOTING



- Counties with curbside voting
- Counties without curbside voting
- Missing data

COUNTIES WITH VOTE FROM JAIL LOCATIONS



- Counties without vote from jail policies
- Counties with vote from jail policies
- Missing data



VOTE FROM JAIL

Only 15 counties reported having a formal “vote from jail” program or an established working relationship with their local sheriff’s department to ensure that eligible individuals in custody can vote. In most jurisdictions, this means there is no consistent or standardized process for distributing voter registration information, providing ballots, or facilitating voting for eligible detainees. As a result, access often depends heavily on local discretion, informal coordination, or whether jail staff have the time and training to assist, rather than on a guaranteed statewide system. This patchwork approach matters because individuals who are pretrial detainees or otherwise legally eligible to vote face significant barriers due to their incarceration status. Without thoroughly outlined vote from jail programs, eligible voters may not receive timely information about their rights, may lack access to registration materials, or may not be able to request or submit a ballot to meet important deadlines. Even short periods of detention can disrupt voting participation in the absence of clear procedures.

FELONY CHECKS

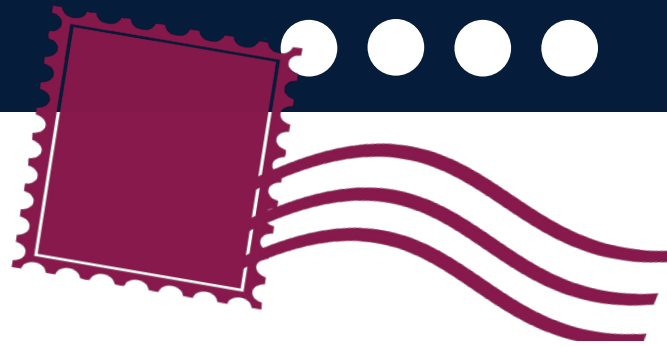
Of the 101 counties included in this sample, 67 remove individuals with felony convictions from the voter rolls as soon as they receive notification from the Secretary of State’s office. However, 27 counties take additional steps before removal, using additional verification methods to confirm that the individual is legally ineligible to vote before updating their

records. The latter, more cautious approach reflects an effort to reduce the risk of wrongful removal due to incomplete, outdated, or incorrectly matched data.

Under Kansas law, individuals with felony convictions are eligible to vote once they have completed their sentence, including any term of incarceration, parole, or probation. This means that the right to vote is automatically restored upon completion of the full sentence, without requiring a separate application for reinstatement. Despite this clear legal standard, the process of updating the voter rolls does not always reflect real-time changes in restored eligibility, especially when records are transferred between correctional systems and election offices.

This creates an important administrative responsibility for county election officials: ensuring that eligible returning citizens are not mistakenly removed from the rolls or discouraged from registering due to outdated information. When removal processes rely strictly on automated or early notifications without verification, individuals who have regained their right to vote may still encounter obstacles when attempting to register or exercise that right. Where there is promptness in removing an ineligible voter on one side of the equation, there is far less efficiency and consistency in the process on the other side to restore a newly eligible voter’s right to be on the rolls. Strengthening consistent verification practices and improving coordination between criminal legal and election systems can help ensure that eligibility restoration is fully recognized in practice, not just in statute.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAIL-IN VOTING



Mail-in voting, or advance voting by mail, allows registered voters to receive their ballot at home, complete it at their convenience, and return it by mail or at a designated drop-off location on or before 7:00 p.m. on Election Day. This method ensures accessibility by removing the need to appear in-person at a polling place, making it a valuable alternative for eligible voters with demanding work schedules, those with transportation barriers, rural voters, disabled voters, those with caregiving responsibilities, and voters with health concerns. By offering a flexible and secure alternative to in-person voting, mail-in voting plays a critical role in broadening participation and making elections more inclusive.

Tens of thousands of Kansas voters rely on mail-in voting every election cycle and its importance has become increasingly evident in the post-2020 pandemic era. In 2016, 125,544 mail-in ballots were returned to local election offices, compared to 137,644 in 2024. The Kansas Secretary of State reported that approximately 52% of all votes cast in the 2024 General Election were cast prior to Election Day, either through advance mail ballots or early in-person voting. This shift reflects a broader trend toward convenience-based voting options that allow individuals to participate on their own schedules, rather than within the constraints of a single day.

Of the 101 counties included in this sample, the data accounts for roughly 120,509 mail-in ballots, or about 87.6% of the statewide total in 2024. This statewide total underscores the growing consensus that mail-in voting is a core component of Kansas election infrastructure. Beyond convenience, mail-in voting provides a critical safeguard for participation, ensuring that more voters can engage in the democratic process regardless of personal, geographic, or economic constraints.

MAIL-IN VOTING HOT SPOTS

Mail-in voting patterns across Kansas reveal that its use is not evenly distributed but concentrated in certain “hot spots” where voters rely on this option at much higher rates than the statewide average. Existing research consistently finds that mail-in voting is relied on most heavily by specific populations, including white voters, those 65 and older, and those who are overseas or military voters.¹⁰ The data in this report mirrors those trends while also showing how they manifest across different types of communities.

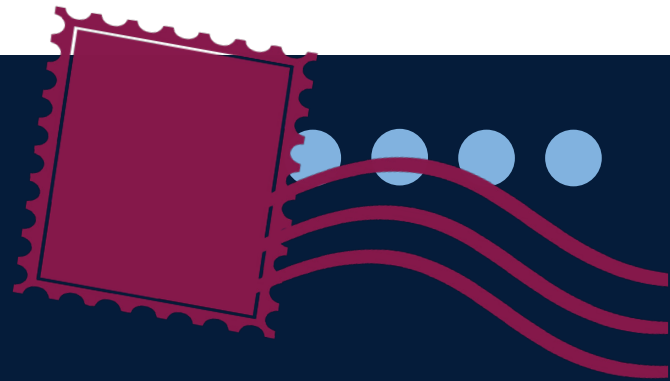
On average, mail-in ballots made up about 8% of total votes cast across counties included in this sample, but several counties significantly exceeded that baseline. Wilson County, for example, had the highest proportion, with 27.8% of all ballots cast by mail—more than three times the statewide average. In total, a small group of counties qualified as mail-in voting “hot spots,” defined here as counties where mail-in ballots accounted for more than 11% of total votes, or at least 3% above the sample mean. Demographically, these hot spots align closely with age-based trends. Five out of the eight counties identified as “hot spots” have well above the state average of 17.8% for residents aged 65 and older, reinforcing the idea that older voters are more likely to take advantage of voting by mail. At the same time, these counties are not confined to one type of geography. The group includes a mix of three urban counties, three rural counties, and one suburban county, illustrating that while the reasons for voting by mail may vary, its demand exists across diverse settings. Douglas County stands out as a compelling example of how mail-in voting can play a significant role in increasing turnout, even in places that do not fit the typical profile. With 22.9% of its ballots cast by mail, the second highest in the state, the county is neither predominantly rural nor characterized by an older-than-average population. At the same time,

Douglas County reported a turnout rate of 71%, which is roughly five percentage points above the state average, underscoring its overall strength in voter participation.

Turnout data further underscores the importance of mail-in voting in expanding access. Six out of the eight counties identified as “hot spots” reported turnout rates above the state average, suggesting that a greater reliance on mail-in voting may be associated with higher turnout. This is particularly relevant for populations that face structural barriers

to in-person voting, including older adults and rural residents where polling locations may be limited or far apart. A similar pattern emerged when examining proactive outreach. Only four counties—Douglas, Ellsworth, Hodgeman, and Wabaunsee—reported sending advance mail-in ballot applications directly to voters rather than requiring voters to request them. This reduces the burden on individuals to initiate the process themselves and may help normalize and increase the use of mail-in voting. Research shows that practices such as universal distribution of mail ballot applications are associated with higher turnout, but

MAIL-IN HOT SPOTS IN KANSAS



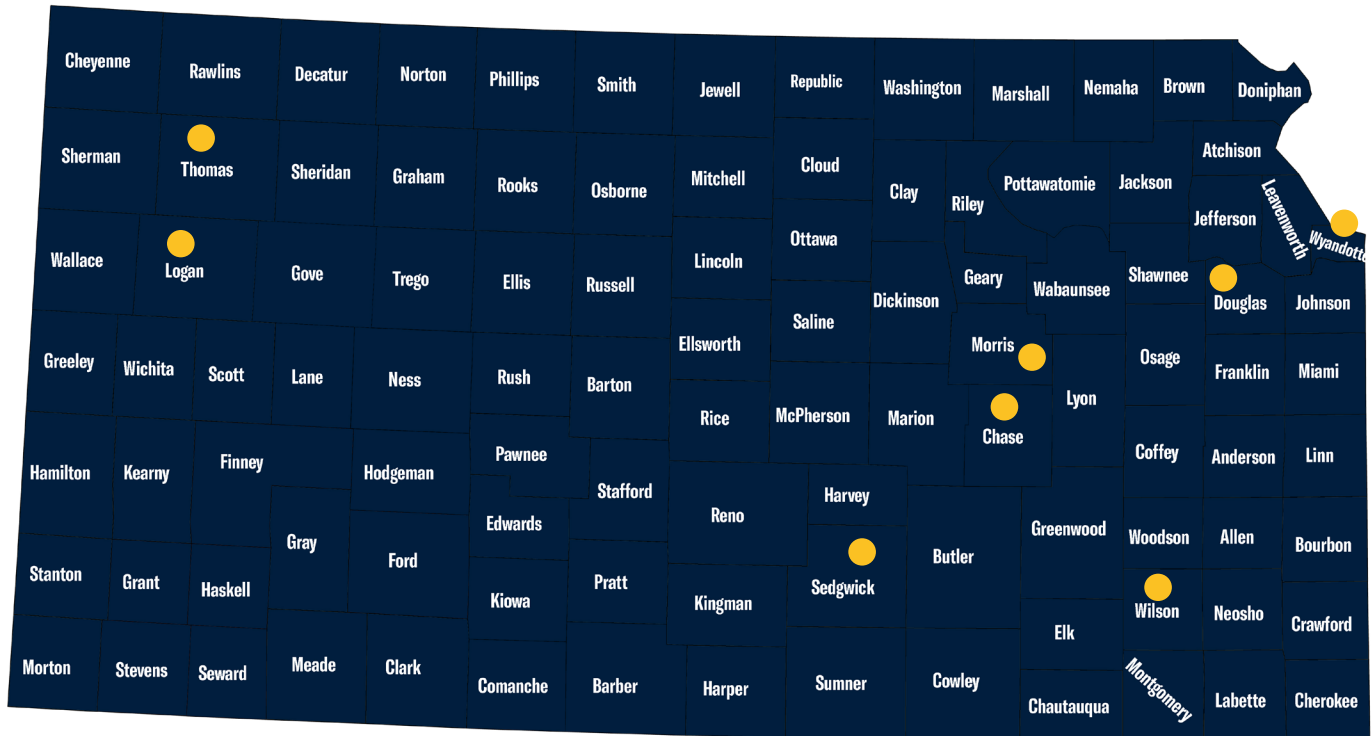
COUNTY	PROPORTION OF MAIL-IN BALLOTS (MAIL-INS TOTAL BALLOTS)	MAIL-INS ARRIVING WITHIN THE THREE-DAY PROCESSING WINDOW	TURNOUT (%)	% OF POPULATION 65 YEARS+	GEOGRAPHY
CHASE	13.1% (192 out of 1,475)	10	78.8%	26.6%	Rural
DOUGLAS	22.9% (13,530 out of 59,054)	21	71%	14.5%	Urban
LOGAN	17.9% (250 out of 1,997)	0	74.3%	23.1%	Rural
MORRIS	11.1% (314 out of 2,831)	0	70.6%	27.3%	Rural
SEDGWICK	14.8% (31,999 out of 216,621)	725	62.8%	16.9%	Urban
THOMAS	13.7% (504 out of 3,674)	10	68.7%	19.9%	Suburban
WILSON	27.8% (1,008 out of 3,624)	10	68.6%	24.5%	Rural
WYANDOTTE	14.9% (7,614 out of 51,104)	70	54.1%	14.4%	Urban

* Estimated percentage of adults 65 years and older in KS (2024): 17.8%, 2024 General Election Voter Turnout (2024): 66.2%

Red = below KS average

Yellow = above KS average

COUNTIES WITH THE HIGHEST PROPORTIONS OF MAIL-IN BALLOTS



do not significantly alter partisan outcomes.¹⁰ These four counties reported an average turnout of 72.6%, compared to 65.7% for the 91 counties that did not take this step—a gap of nearly seven percentage points. While several factors influence turnout, this difference highlights how reducing procedural barriers and increasing awareness meaningfully affects participation.

Together, these findings suggest that mail-in voting is not just a convenience, but a critical tool for broadening access. Where it is more widely used and more actively supported, turnout tends to be higher, indicating its potential to strengthen participation across Kansas.

ATTACKS ON MAIL-IN VOTING

Despite its widespread use and demonstrated role in expanding access to the ballot, mail-in voting has become the subject of political and legal challenges at both the state and federal levels. These efforts often center on claims of voter fraud, despite a substantial

body of research showing that fraudulent mail-in voting is exceedingly rare.¹¹ The growing tension between the proven accessibility benefits of mail-in voting and the narratives used to restrict it has placed this method of voting at the center of broader debates about election integrity and voter access.

Repeal of the Three-Day Mail Processing Window

Despite Kansas having the shortest window to vote by mail in the country, in 2025, state legislators voted to overturn the three-day mail processing window, requiring all ballots to be returned by 7 p.m. on Election Day. This decision, which reversed a process voters had come to rely on, increases the risk of legally cast ballots being rejected due to factors outside a voter’s control. Eliminating the mail processing window and tossing out ballots from eligible citizens who did everything right ignores the fundamental fact of administering elections: election officials, election workers, and postal workers need time to do their jobs.

Within this report's 2024 sample of 120,509 mail-in ballots, at least 2,416 were received within the three-day mail processing window and reflect a large number of voters whose votes, under the new law, would have been completely rejected. Even with this window still in effect, 454 ballots were still rejected. Because this sample is not all-inclusive and not all counties provided complete responses, both figures are likely to be short of the actual totals.

This policy change will ultimately impact certain Kansas voters disproportionately, with rural communities at an increased risk of experiencing longer mail delivery times due to less centralized postal infrastructure. In this sample, six of the seven counties with the highest proportion of ballots arriving within the three-day mail processing window—Cheyenne, Hodgeman, Nemaha, Stanton, Trego, and Wallace—are rural, underscoring rural communities' dependence on mail-in voting and fair election policy.

However, the issue is not confined to rural areas. Larger, more populous counties also see significant numbers of ballots arriving after Election Day. During the 2024 General Election, Johnson County received 730 ballots within the three-day mail processing window.

As we prepare for critical elections in 2026, the elimination of this window will affect counties of all sizes, narrowing access to the ballot and increasing the risk of disenfranchisement.

Once again, local policy plays a critical role in ensuring participation remains accessible. To ensure voters are aware of these changes, county election officials should take steps to educate voters. Additionally, expanding and promoting the number of secure drop boxes would help ensure voters can still return their ballots safely and on time. By investing in community-centered election practices, these officials can increase turnout and promote broader civic engagement despite these challenges.



COUNTY SPOTLIGHT: *Johnson County Illustrates the Risks*

The consequences of eliminating the three-day mail processing window have already been felt. In a March 2026 special election in Johnson County, 1,008 mail-in ballots were rejected because they arrived after the Election Day deadline.¹³ These voters who completed and returned their ballots were likely disenfranchised due to logistical issues largely outside of their individual control. The stakes of these rejected ballots were not insignificant: in at least one race, the margin of victory was just nine votes, meaning the outcome could plausibly have been different had even a small portion of those ballots been counted.

This real-world example underscores the broader risks associated with removing the so-called grace period. What was once a safeguard to ensure legitimate ballots were counted despite routine mail delays has now become a hard cutoff with no room for error. The scale of rejected ballots in a single county, particularly one as large as Johnson, demonstrates how widespread the impact of repeal will be. It also reinforces earlier findings in this report: both high-volume urban counties and rural areas have depended on the flexibility that the three-day mail processing period once provided for the many election cycles it was in place. Without it, thousands of voters across Kansas are now abruptly at a heightened risk of disenfranchisement—likely without their knowledge.

THE CASE FOR EARLY VOTING

Long lines at the polls, long commutes, and taking time off work are just a few of the many deterrents to voting on Election Day. As a result, early voting has become a central feature of modern election administration, providing flexibility as to when and how eligible voters participate in the democratic process. According to the Kansas Secretary of State, more than 557,000 ballots were cast early in-person, and of the 1.3 million ballots cast in the presidential election, more than 137,000 were mail-in ballots.¹ By creating more opportunities for early voting, local election officials can reduce long lines, ease pressure on polling places on Election Day, and accommodate the varied schedules and obligations of working voters, caregivers, and those with limited transportation options. These opportunities are particularly significant in shaping who is able to vote, as differences in access, such as the number of early voting days, hours of operation, and availability of locations, influence turnout across communities. Understanding the structure and accessibility of early voting is essential to evaluating the inclusiveness and effectiveness of an election system.

Across the state, early voting opportunities fell short of the maximum potential window allowed by Kansas law, with no county offering the full 20 days of access in 2024, largely due to limited or nonexistent opportunities to vote during the weekend. Just 30 of the 101 counties represented in the sample provided some weekend availability, restricting access for those who are unable to participate on weekdays. At the same time, the data suggests a clear relationship between expanded early voting and higher turnout: counties that offered 15 or more days of early voting saw an average turnout of 68.5%, approximately 2.5 percentage points above

TURNOUT BY EARLY VOTE DAYS

TOTAL # OF EARLY VOTING DAYS	VOTER TURNOUT (%)	# OF COUNTIES
1 - 10 days	66%	15
11 - 14 days	65.8%	69
15 - 18 days	67.8%	17

the state average. Notably, six of these counties were among those with the highest number of early voting hours (exceeding 24 hours), underscoring the significant impact early voting opportunities have on turnout.

VOTING REMAINS A 9-5 JOB

While the length of the early voting period is important to consider, the timing of those early voting opportunities matters even more. Most counties offered very few hours outside of standard business hours. In 2024, counties that offered more than 24 hours of early voting outside of standard business hours consistently reported higher average turnout than counties with more limited opportunities. Douglas County distinguished itself with a total of 39 hours of early voting opportunities outside of standard business hours, one of just a handful of counties offering more than 35 such hours. Additionally, voters in Douglas County had access to 16 days of early voting and a wide network of polling locations, including 49 on Election Day. However, most counties fell into the latter category: 61 counties provided between just 1-14 hours of early voting outside of traditional business hours. In 2024, this often meant county clerks extended access by just 1-2 hours on select weekdays, (for example, operating from 8 AM to 5 PM or 9 AM to 6 PM) leaving voters with a narrow window before or after work to vote early, including time to commute to the voting location. Even

TURNOUT BY EARLY HOURS

# OF EARLY VOTE HRS OUTSIDE BUSINESS HRS (9-5)	VOTER TURNOUT (%)	# OF COUNTIES
0 hours	66.7%	7
1 - 14 hours	66.7%	62
15 - 24 hours	63.9%	21
24+ hours	67.6%	11

LOCATION MATTERS

Limited geographic access further compounds the constraints already created by restricted early voting hours. In addition to the lack of weekend availability, most counties provide very few locations where voters can cast an advanced ballot. Of the 101 counties included in this sample, 85 reported just one early voting site, most often located in the County Clerk’s office. This concentration can create practical barriers, particularly for voters who live far from county seats or lack reliable transportation. Only 16 counties reported offering more than one location, with the number ranging from just two sites in counties like Butler, Cowley, and Lyon to as many as 20 in Sedgwick County. Where additional locations were available in 2024, they were often placed in more accessible community spaces such as public buildings, senior centers, courthouses, and churches, helping to distribute access more evenly across the population.

These disparities are especially evident in more populous counties. Wyandotte County, for example, continues to experience relatively limited early voting infrastructure despite having one of the largest and most diverse electorates in the state. While the county expanded from three early voting locations in 2020 to five in 2024, turnout reached just 54.1% among more than 94,000 registered voters.¹⁴ This suggests that the scale of available voting sites has not kept pace with the size of the voting population. An insufficient number of polling locations may contribute to overcrowding, longer wait times, and ultimately lower turnout on Election Day.

in counties that offered more opportunities to vote early in terms of days, limiting hours of operation to the standard workday fails to address the needs of voters who cannot easily take time off or face barriers related to transportation, childcare, or inflexible schedules.

The combination of restricted scheduling and a limited number of early voting locations may also contribute to lower turnout. A small group of counties—Hodgeman, Lincoln, Mitchell, Morton, Ness, Rawlins, and Stevens—offered no early voting hours outside of traditional business hours. These rural counties are among the smallest in the sample, each with fewer than 4,500 registered voters, a factor that often corresponds with higher turnout rates. While their combined turnout averages roughly align with the rest of the state, individual outcomes vary significantly. Most notably, Morton and Stevens Counties reported comparatively low turnout rates of 50.7% and 55%, respectively. Additionally, these same counties provided just one early voting location. This suggests that limited early voting opportunities, in terms of time and location, compounds barriers to participation in a way that parallels the aforementioned relationship between voters per poll and overall voter turnout. This is especially true in rural areas, where travel can be cumbersome.



TURNOUT BY EARLY VOTE LOCATIONS

# OF EARLY VOTING LOCATIONS	VOTER TURNOUT (%)	# OF COUNTIES
1	66.4%	85
2 - 6	63.4%	12
7+	70.4%	4

By contrast, counties that invested heavily in increasing the number of early voting locations saw notably higher turnout. In 2024, Douglas, Johnson, Lane, and Sedgwick Counties had at least seven early voting sites and reported an average turnout of 70.4%, nearly five percentage points above the state average. This pattern reinforces the broader finding that accessibility, in terms of both time and location, plays a critical role in increasing turnout.

GETTING THE WORD OUT EARLY

Ninety-seven out of the 101 counties included in the sample reported engaging in some form of advertising for early voting, with most using a mix of communication channels rather than a single method. Common approaches included traditional media such as newspaper and radio advertisements alongside public signage, which were used by 39 counties. Forty-two

counties relied on a blended strategy that combined traditional outreach with digital tools such as social media posts, and just three counties reported using social media exclusively. Three counties indicated they do not conduct any kind of formal early voting outreach, relying primarily on word of mouth to inform voters instead. Twelve counties expanded beyond general advertising by directly contacting voters through mail, email, and/or phone reminders, reflecting a more targeted effort to increase awareness and participation.

While general advertising of early voting is widespread, far fewer counties take the additional step of proactively distributing early voting applications. In most jurisdictions, voters must request these applications themselves, placing the burden of initiation on the individual. Just three counties, Douglas, Ellsworth, and Hodgeman, automatically send out advance mail ballot applications to eligible voters. In 2024, these counties exhibited above-average turnout rates of 71%, 71.2%, and 74.6%, respectively. This suggests a potential relationship between proactive voter outreach and higher turnout, particularly when administrative processes are made more accessible and less reliant on individual initiation.

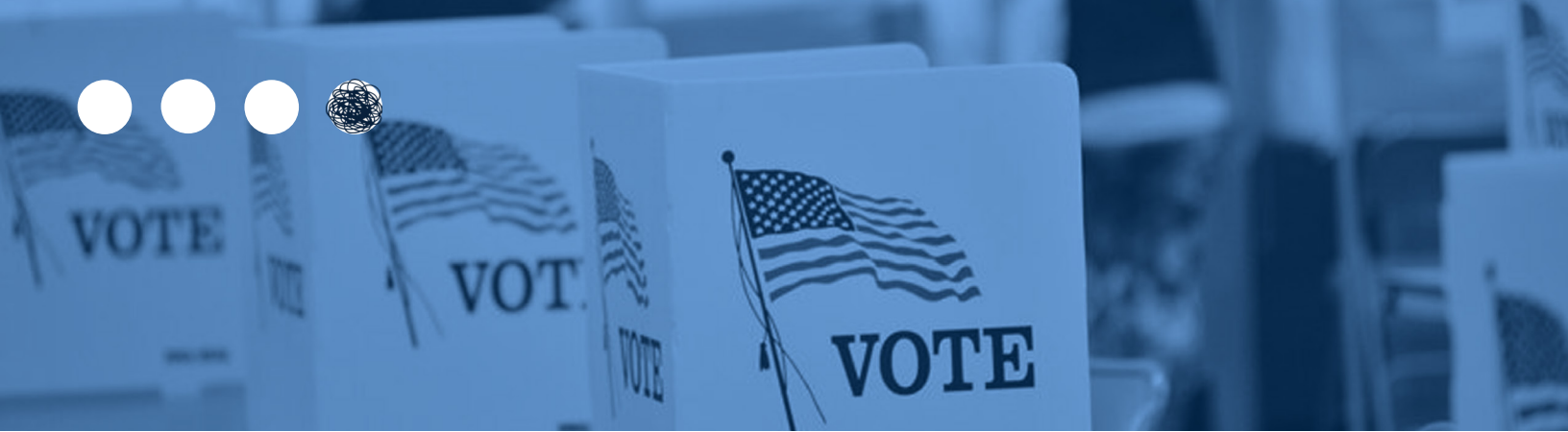
ADVANCED VOTING LOCATION CHANGES: *Johnson County*

The most populous county, Johnson County, also has the largest number of registered voters in the state, which means many voters rely heavily on early voting options. This is not just a matter of convenience for some, but for voters working multiple jobs, who rely on public transportation, or who have care-giving responsibilities, early voting may be the only way they can cast a ballot at all. But even as the number of registered voters continues to increase, in a county that relies on advance voting, the Johnson County Election Office made a last-minute decision to remove several advance voting locations. Despite requesting additional funds for an “expansion in early voting locations” in their 2026 budget proposal for the Primary and General Elections, the Johnson County Election office reduced the number of early voting locations from 18 in 2024 to just 12 in 2026.¹⁵ Eight locations were completely removed without being replaced by viable alternatives, many of which were located in predominantly low-income areas and in areas densely populated by people of color. The 8 advanced voting locations that will be closed accounted for 39,653 out of the total 209,305 early votes, or 19% of all early votes cast in Johnson County, in the 2024 General Election.¹⁶



JOHNSON COUNTY
LIBRARY

Johnson County Closed Early Vote Location photo via the Johnson County Library website



CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite relentless attacks on voting rights at the state and federal level, upholding democracy in Kansas remains a local fight. County election officials have the power to combat these attacks by implementing policies that make voting more accessible for every eligible voter. The ability to cast a ballot and exercise the right to vote should not be contingent on factors such as zip code, age, race, ethnicity, schedule, or disability status. But far too often in Kansas, access to the ballot *does* depend on these factors. From limited early voting opportunities to long lines and crowded polling locations, the ability to eliminate these barriers remains completely within the control of local election officials.

The counties with the lowest turnout in 2024—Bourbon, Finney, Ford, Geary, Meade, Morton, Seward, and Wyandotte Counties—demonstrated lower turnout in years prior, as well. These counties had several areas of election administration that could be improved by implementing different election practices. In 2024, Finney, Ford, and Geary Counties offered just 11 hours or less outside of standard business hours to vote early and just one early voting location. Because of this, in 2024, the number of voters per polling location on Election Day ranged from 1,013 voters (Morton) to 5,561 voters (Seward). Some of these same counties have the highest proportion of voters who speak a

primary language other than English, compounding barriers to the ballot box. For example, in Ford and Finney Counties, more than 30% of the eligible population speaks a primary language other than English, most often Spanish. Translating all election-related materials is one simple step election officials could take to increase turnout.

Election officials can and should implement more secure, modern, and inclusive voting policies. They can expand early voting opportunities in their respective counties by:

1. **INCREASING THE NUMBER OF EARLY VOTING LOCATIONS IN GEOGRAPHICALLY DIVERSE AREAS TO REACH MORE VOTERS**
2. **EXPANDING EARLY VOTING OPPORTUNITIES, INCLUDING OPTIONS OUTSIDE OF STANDARD BUSINESS HOURS**

Election officials can combat attacks on mail-in voting and make mail-in voting more accessible by:

1. **IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSAL MAIL-IN BALLOT POLICIES, WHICH ENSURE EVERY ELIGIBLE VOTER RECEIVES A MAIL-IN BALLOT AUTOMATICALLY**
2. **URGING LEGISLATORS TO REINSTATE THE THREE-DAY MAIL PROCESSING WINDOW**
3. **INFORMING VOTERS OF CHANGES TO IMPORTANT ELECTION DEADLINES SUCH AS WHEN MAIL-IN BALLOTS MUST BE RECEIVED AND WHERE SECURE DROP-BOXES ARE LOCATED**

Election officials can improve accessibility in their counties by:

1. **INCREASING THE GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY OF POLLING LOCATIONS**
2. **OPENING MORE POLLING LOCATIONS ON ELECTION DAY**
3. **EXPANDING LANGUAGE ACCESS AND TRANSLATION SERVICES BY OFFERING ALL ELECTION-RELATED MATERIALS IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH**
4. **COORDINATING WITH LOCAL SHERIFFS TO IMPLEMENT "VOTE FROM JAIL" PROGRAMS FOR ALL ELIGIBLE VOTERS**
5. **IMPLEMENTING CONSISTENT CURBSIDE VOTING OPPORTUNITIES, INCLUDING ADEQUATE TRAINING FOR POLL WORKERS AND ENSURING VOTERS ARE INFORMED OF THIS OPTION**

While the fight to protect the constitutional right to vote, including safe and secure options like voting by mail, is often waged in the halls of Congress or the Kansas Legislature, the most effective way to bring about change is to vote for those who commit to

protecting these policies locally. But as demonstrated here, voters face a cyclical dilemma: their access to vote for certain offices with the power to improve their access is often directly undermined by those very decisionmakers.

While county election officials cannot account for every factor that influences turnout, the number of tools discussed in this report have meaningful potential in removing physical and procedural barriers, improving access, and thus encouraging voter participation. Instituting more equitable policies is not just a matter of putting text on paper—it allows election officials to better realize their official obligation to empower every voter in their respective counties and, ultimately, to uphold the right to vote that is the heart and lifeblood of our democracy. In 2026 and beyond, free and fair elections continue to uphold our system of governance and provide the mechanism for voters to take part in the decision-making process in their communities. The ballot box remains the space we decide our collective values and hold one another accountable to those values—and it all starts at the local level.



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