



Analysis: Provisional Ballots Cast in November 2024 Election

Why Massachusetts Needs Same-Day Voter Registration
3/26/2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Data from the November 2024 statewide election released to the Massachusetts Election Modernization Coalition by the Secretary of the Commonwealth* reveals that two-thirds of provisional ballots cast on 11/5/2024 were rejected and not counted. Analysis reveals that the overwhelming majority of these votes could likely have been counted if same-day voter registration was an option in Massachusetts. Those voters could have resolved what often boils down to clerical mistakes, and then cast a ballot that was counted.

WHAT IS A PROVISIONAL BALLOT?

Provisional ballots are offered to voters if their personal information is incorrect or missing from the voter list when they check in to vote. According to the Secretary of Commonwealth's [website](#), *"provisional ballots are counted only if the local elections office is able to confirm that the voter is, in fact, registered to vote in the city or town. If a voter's registration status cannot be confirmed, then their provisional ballot is destroyed and not counted."*

VOTER DISENFRANCHISEMENT

Provisional ballots are only counted if the voter was registered at least 10 days in advance of the election, without any administrative errors, not if the voter was otherwise qualified to vote in the jurisdiction. Consequently, voters whose provisional ballots are rejected are frequently disenfranchised for purely administrative reasons.

Same-day voter registration would eliminate the need for the large majority of provisional ballots.

THE PROBLEM

Of the 5,106 provisional ballots cast in the November 2024 statewide election, 65% of them — a total of 3,309 ballots — were rejected and not counted. This means that upwards of 3,300 people who showed up on election day believing that they were registered to vote ended up casting ballots that were never counted.

Of the 3,309 rejected ballots, only 27, or less than 1% were rejected because the voter failed to show an appropriate form of identification. Over 99% of provisional

ballots were rejected for administrative reasons that might have been resolved through same-day voter registration.

Some of those reasons include:

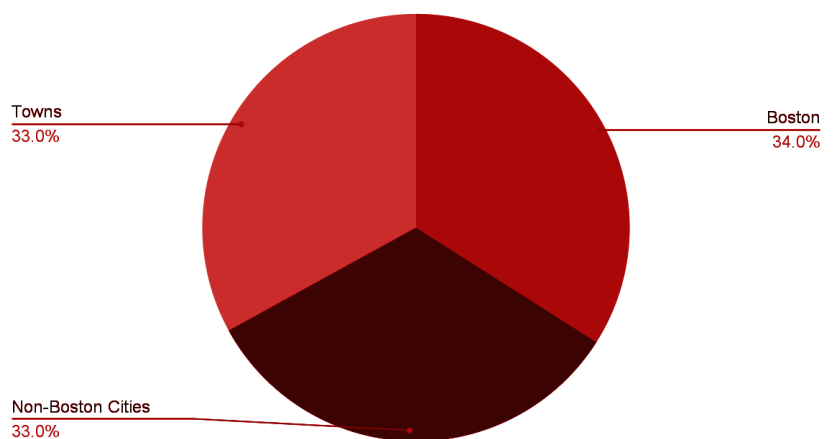
- The voter moved within the municipality and was registered at a different precinct
- The voter moved into the municipality
- Clerical errors like spelling mistakes

Cities produce a disproportionate number of rejected provisional ballots compared to towns. Of the 3,309 rejected ballots, **67.4%** were cast in cities, despite the population of cities making up only **55%** of the state's population.

Boston alone accounts for **34%** of all rejected ballots, despite having only **9%** of the state's population. Boston rejected 467 of the 606 provisional ballots cast in 2024 — a **64%** rejection rate. In order of the number of rejected ballots, the next four municipalities were:

- Worcester rejected 167 of 208 provisional ballots cast
- Lowell, rejected 95 of 149 provisional ballots cast;
- Cambridge, rejected 83 of 110 provisional ballots cast;
- Lawrence, rejected 69 of 96 ballots cast.

Rejected Provisional Ballots on 11/5/24 by Municipality Type



The majority of the 292 towns in Massachusetts issued fewer than ten provisional ballots each during the election. 140 towns issued no provisional ballots at all.

THE SOLUTION

A policy solution to this problem has already been filed in the legislature this session: *An Act establishing same day voter registration* filed by Senator Cindy Creem as [S.505](#) and by Representative Carmine Gentile as [H.834](#) would eliminate barriers to the ballot box and eliminate the need for almost all provisional ballots.

More information on the Voting Access Campaign is available
www.votingrightsma.org.

*The data obtained from the Secretary of the Commonwealth and analyzed by the Election Modernization Coalition is available in the [attached appendix](#).