

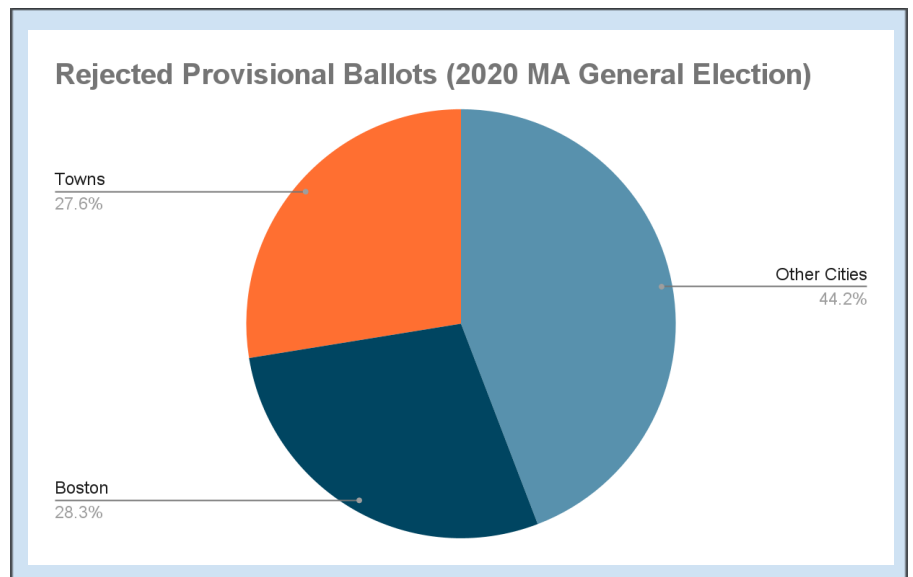
Memo: Provisional Ballots in 2020 MA General Election

Provisional Ballots in 2020 MA General Election

The 2020 Massachusetts General Election saw the highest voter [turnout](#) in decades. However, even with the expansions made to accommodate voters during the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of people encountered a problem at the polls and had to cast provisional ballots. This data illustrates why Election Day Registration is still needed in Massachusetts.

Key takeaways from the 2020 MA General Election Provisional Ballot Data:

- 4,323 provisional ballots were issued statewide, 1,724 (40%) were accepted and 2,587 (60%) were rejected.
- In other words, 2,587 people went to vote at their assumed polling location and, due to a voter registration error, their vote was not counted.
- 72% of all issued and rejected provisional ballots were in cities, and only 28% in towns. This is particularly notable because the state's population is nearly evenly split between cities and towns.
- Boston accounts for one-third of all provisional ballots issued and rejected. 731 voters were not counted in Boston because they weren't on the voter rolls.
- The cities with the highest number of provisional ballots rejected are: Boston (731), Worcester (182), Lowell (149), Taunton (84), Lawrence (56), Haverhill (49), and Newton (42).
- More than 75% of the 292 towns in Massachusetts issued fewer than 5 provisional ballots.



What are provisional ballots?

Provisional ballots are issued in Massachusetts for a few reasons. The most common is that a voter's name does not appear on the voter rolls at the polling location. State law requires that local election officials resolve all provisional ballots within three days of a state or presidential primary and within twelve days of a state or local election. All provisional ballots are investigated and those found to be cast by registered eligible voters are counted.

Why are provisional ballots rejected?

Under state law, provisional ballots are rejected after a clerk or election administrator determines the person to be ineligible because they are not on the voter rolls in that municipality or because they fail to provide proof of address with their provisional ballot. A provisional ballot cast by a person whose name is not on the voting list for the city or town in which they are claiming the right to vote, but whom the city or town clerk determines to be eligible to vote in another precinct of the same city or town, shall be counted in the precinct in which the person cast the provisional ballot for all offices for which the person is eligible to vote.

Key Takeaways

Thousands of provisional ballots rejected means thousands of people who are qualified to vote, but who were denied the right to cast their ballots because of an administrative obstacle. Election Day Registration would enable all qualified voters, such as those whose provisional ballots were rejected in 2020, to register and then vote at the polls. The administrative impact of EDR would likely **reduce** workload for Clerks and poll workers as it would replace the need to issue provisional ballots, issue affidavits, investigate in the days after an election, and reject provisional ballots.