

2012 ELECTION CYCLE – BEGINS NOW

Be an active voter. Start thinking about your participation in the U.S. 2012 elections today!

The Consular Section staff at U.S. Embassy Bamako is ready to assist with completing your Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) -- the form you need to complete **this year** to participate in the 2012 elections as an overseas absentee voter. Our purpose is to inform and educate you about your voting rights, to ensure you are able to exercise your right to participate in elections for federal offices (President, Vice President, Senator, and Representative), and to assist you with voting in state or local elections, if allowed by your state.

New absentee voting laws are in effect for the 2012 elections. You will no longer automatically receive ballots based on a previous absentee ballot request. All U.S. citizens outside the United States who want to vote by absentee ballot in the 2012 primary and general elections must complete a new Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) every year if they wish to vote from abroad. States are now required to send out ballots 45 days before an election. No matter what state you vote in, you can now ask your local election officials to provide your blank ballots to you electronically (by email, internet download, or fax, depending on your state). You can now also confirm your registration and ballot delivery online. Be sure to include your email address on the form to take advantage of the electronic ballot delivery option. This is the fastest and most reliable way to receive your ballot on time, and we strongly recommend every overseas voter take advantage of it. Learn more at the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) website www.FVAP.gov.

Beginning in January 2012, presidential primaries will be held in the states of New Hampshire (January 10), South Carolina (January 21), Florida (January 31), Missouri (February 7), Wisconsin (February 21), Arizona (February 28), and Michigan (February 28). Other states will follow throughout the spring and summer. Voter registration deadlines for primaries are as early as January 3, 2012. Note: Participation in party presidential caucuses by overseas voters is not protected by federal law and requires in-person attendance in most cases. If the party you are affiliated with selects presidential nominees by caucus in your state contact state party officials for further information.

You can obtain a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) at [FVAP's website](http://www.FVAP.gov). The FPCA is accepted by all local election officials in all U.S. states and territories. It allows you to register to vote and request absentee ballots for all elections for federal offices (presidential and state primaries, run-off, special, and the November general elections) during the course of the year. An online wizard will help you complete the form. Depending on your state's voting requirements, you then either send in the FPCA electronically or mail it to your local election officials. To mail it, print out the completed FPCA and the (U.S.) postage-paid envelope containing the address of your local election officials. **If you bring in your forms or ballots to the U.S. Embassy, we will mail them through the United States postal service at the U.S. postal service rate, i.e., without you having to pay for international mail.** If it's easier for you to use Mali's postal system or an

international delivery provider, be sure to affix sufficient postage and allow sufficient time for international mail delivery.

U.S. Embassy Bamako's Consular Section will accept election-related materials for mailing Monday-Thursday from 07:30 until 16:30, and on Fridays from 07:30-10:30. Please note that the cost of postage is the responsibility of the sender and cannot be paid by the Embassy.

Even if your state does not have a presidential primary in the early months of 2012, it is important that you submit a new Federal Post Card Application this and every January to receive all absentee ballots for which you are eligible. By applying early, you also allow enough time for election officials to contact you and resolve any questions or problems with your registration/ballot request.

Remember that your vote counts, and that many U.S. elections within the past ten years have been decided by a margin of victory of less than 0.1%. All states are required to count every absentee ballot as long as it's valid and reaches local election officials by the absentee ballot receipt deadline.

Be an Educated Voter. Check out the FVAP links page for helpful resources that will aid your research of candidates and issues. Non-partisan information about candidates, their voting records, and their positions on issues are widely available and easy to obtain via numerous websites such as [Project Smart Voter](#). You can also read national and hometown newspapers on-line, or search the Internet to locate articles and information. For information about election dates and deadlines, subscribe to FVAP's Voting Alerts (vote@fvap.gov). FVAP also shares Voting Alerts via [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Service members overseas may express mail their absentee ballots free of charge from any APO/FPO/DPO or American embassy and consulate with Express Mail Label 11-DoD. This label allows the voter to track their ballots at www.usps.com. Find out more about this new label at www.fvap.gov.

NEW VOTER BACK-UP FEDERAL WRITE-IN ABSENTEE BALLOT NOW AVAILABLE

The online version of the revised Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) is available now at FVAP.gov. If voters have registered but not received their State ballot 30 days before the election, they can still vote by using the FWAB. Since the FWAB serves as a back-up ballot, a voter should still vote and return their State absentee ballot if they receive it before the election. The State absentee ballot will be counted instead of the FWAB if received by the State deadline. This ballot is accepted by all States from any overseas or military voter who has registered and requested a ballot for 2012. If you receive your State ballot after submitting the FWAB, vote and return it as well. If both ballots are received by the deadline, only the State ballot will be counted.

Voters can visit FVAP.gov to use the online wizard or access the PDF-fillable forms. The online wizard will populate the candidate names for federal elections 30 days prior to the date of the election.

The FWAB is a standard form accepted by all 55 States and territories for uniformed service members and overseas voters. The 2011 revised FWAB is wholly compliant with provisions of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, as amended by the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act in 2009, containing space for the required information but structured in a more logical and usable flow. FVAP conducted a series of usability assessments with the previous form resulting in substantial improvements using many established best practices for election-related forms.

If you have any questions about registering to vote overseas, please contact the U.S. Embassy's Voting Assistance Officer at (223)20-70-25-05, or at consularbamako@state.gov.

Sincerely,
The Consular Section of U.S. Embassy Bamako, Mali