



Highlights of [GAO-07-774](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) protects the rights of military personnel, their dependents, and overseas citizens to vote by absentee ballot. The Department of Defense (DOD) and others have reported that absentee voting, which relies primarily on mail, can be slow and may, in certain circumstances, serve to disenfranchise these voters. In 2004, Congress required DOD to develop an Internet-based absentee voting demonstration project and required the Election Assistance Commission—which reviews election procedures—to develop guidelines for DOD’s project. In 2006, Congress required DOD to report, by May 15, 2007, on plans for expanding its use of electronic voting technologies and required GAO to assess efforts by (1) DOD to facilitate electronic absentee voting and (2) the Commission to develop Internet voting guidelines and DOD to develop an Internet-based demonstration project. GAO also assessed DOD’s efforts to develop plans to expand its use of electronic voting technologies. GAO interviewed officials and reviewed and analyzed documents related to these efforts.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO made recommendations to DOD regarding security, guidance, and plans for electronic voting initiatives and to the Commission on plans to develop the guidelines. DOD and the Commission agreed with these recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-774](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-774).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or [stewartd@gao.gov](mailto:stewartd@gao.gov).

## ELECTIONS

# Action Plans Needed to Fully Address Challenges in Electronic Absentee Voting Initiatives for Military and Overseas Citizens

## What GAO Found

Since 2000, DOD has developed several initiatives to facilitate absentee voting by electronic means such as fax or e-mail; however, some of these initiatives exhibited weaknesses or had low participation rates that might hinder their effectiveness. For example, the 2003 Electronic Transmission Service’s fax to e-mail conversion feature allows UOCAVA voters who do not have access to a fax machine to request ballots by e-mail and then converts the e-mails to faxes to send to local election officials. DOD officials told us, however, they have not performed, among other things, certification tests and thus are not in compliance with information security requirements. The 2004 Interim Voting Assistance System (IVAS)—which, DOD reported, enabled UOCAVA voters to *request* and *receive* ballots securely—cost \$576,000, and 17 citizens received ballots through it. The 2006 Integrated Voting Alternative Site (also called IVAS)—which enabled voters to *request* ballots using one tool, by mail, fax, or unsecured e-mail—raised concerns, from Congress and others, that using unsecured e-mail could expose voters to identity theft if they transmit personal data. While this IVAS displayed a warning that voters had to read to proceed, it did not advise them to delete personal voting information from the computers they used. DOD spent \$1.1 million, and at least eight voted ballots were linked to this 2006 IVAS. Both the 2004 and 2006 IVAS were each implemented just 2 months before an election. DOD also has a Web site with links to guidance on electronic transmission options, but some of this guidance was inconsistent and could be misleading. DOD officials acknowledged the discrepancies and addressed them during GAO’s review.

The Election Assistance Commission has not developed the Internet absentee voting guidelines for DOD’s use, and thus DOD has not proceeded with its Internet-based absentee voting demonstration project. Commission officials told GAO that they had not developed the guidelines because they had been devoting constrained resources to other priorities, including challenges associated with electronic voting machines. Furthermore, they have not established—in conjunction with major stakeholders like DOD—tasks, milestones, and time frames for completing the guidelines. The absence of such guidelines has hindered DOD’s development of its Internet-based demonstration project. To assist the Commission, however, DOD has shared information on the challenges it faced in implementing prior Internet projects—including security threats.

GAO observed that DOD was developing, but had not yet completed, plans for expanding the future use of electronic voting technologies. Because electronic voting in federal elections involves numerous federal, state, and local-level stakeholders; emerging technology; and time to establish the initiatives, developing results-oriented plans that identify goals, time frames, and tasks—including addressing security issues—is key. Without such plans, DOD is not in a position to address congressional expectations to establish secure and private electronic and Internet-based voting initiatives.