

# Purpose and History of the Voters Choice Act

The Voter's Choice Act (VCA), enacted through Senate Bill 450 in 2016, authorized participating counties to adopt a modernized election model designed to increase voter access, convenience, and participation. The model expanded vote by mail, introduced countywide vote centers, and provided multiple ballot return options. The adoption of the bill authorized 14 counties to pilot the new voting model beginning in 2018, allowing all counties to move to the new model in 2020. Twenty-nine of California's 58 counties conducted the 2025 November Special Election using this model.

Legislative analysis of Senate Bill 450 conveys the purpose of the VCA is to increase voter participation. The bill author based the VCA on Colorado's election model given the high rate of participation in that state. Instead of requiring everyone to vote on Election Day during the hours of 7am and 8pm, voters are given options. All voters receive a ballot in the mail and are provided multiple days and multiple ways to cast a ballot, choosing the most convenient way for them. Because vote centers are staffed for multiple days, proponents of SB 450 pointed to the benefit of having smoothly run in-person voting.

The VCA allows counties in California to replace Election Day neighborhood poll sites with a reduced number of multi-day vote centers. All vote centers must be open for at least four days starting the Saturday before Election Day, with a portion being opened eleven days. Voters in a VCA county can vote at any vote center in their county, while voters in non-VCA counties must vote at their designated poll site.<sup>1</sup> Initially, only VCA counties were required to mail registered voters in the county a ballot in the mail, but beginning in 2020, all counties are required to mail a ballot at least 29 days before an election. At all voting locations, whether a neighborhood poll site or a vote center, additional services are provided to support voters. Both offer services such as providing voters the ability to register and vote a provisional ballot, translated election materials and interpretation, accessible ballot marking device, and the ability to drop off a ballot received in the mail. The VCA requires counties to create an Election Administration Plan, to conduct outreach and education to voters, and to create Language Accessibility Advisory Committees and Voter Accessibility Advisory Committees.

The VCA sets a statutory floor for voter access. *Except for special elections, counties must provide 11-day vote centers at a minimum ratio of one per 50,000 registered voters, and 4-day vote centers at a minimum ratio of one per 10,000 registered voters, and at least two ballot drop-off location, or one for every 15,000 registered voters, whichever results in more.* In addition to establishing minimum requirements for official ballot drop-off locations and vote centers, it creates a baseline for accessible voting equipment, voter

services, language assistance, outreach, and accessibility. It is especially geared toward communities that have historically faced barriers, requiring counties to account for more than a dozen factors like proximity to public transportation, disability access, low-income communities, low vehicle ownership, and historically low vote-by-mail use when setting vote centers and drop boxes. And through the Election Administration Plan, the Act makes those obligations public and enforceable by requiring a detailed process of noticed meetings, public comment, draft revision, accessible publication, and state review.

The VCA also requires mailed direct contacts to go at least once to voters sharing a surname and address in each requested language, requires vote centers to post information about available county or Secretary of State language-assistance services and hotlines, and - through 2029 - requires counties with more than 500,000 registered voters to establish a Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee and hold at least one dedicated public meeting on voter education and outreach during development of the Election Administration Plan. Just as importantly, it creates a more defined pipeline for community input by requiring Language Accessibility Advisory Committees and Voter Accessibility Advisory Committees to meet before the public planning meeting and requiring that meeting to occur before the draft Election Administration Plan is noticed, helping ensure affected communities have a meaningful opportunity to shape the plan before it is finalized. The VCA also sets a firm 120-day pre-election deadline for final Election Administration Plans, requires counties to post election cost reports within nine months of certification, requires the Secretary of State to submit its final report within six months after each election, and reestablishes a standing taskforce to review each VCA election and report recommendations to Legislature.

Because new equipment and additional planning is required to implement the VCA, the upfront cost to run an election is significant. The state and counties incur ongoing cost to implement the various components of the VCA.

**Requirements During the November 2025 Election**

	<b>Neighborhood Poll Site</b>	<b>Vote Center</b>
<b>Ballots in the Mail</b>	All voters receive a ballot in the mail as of 2020	All voters receive a ballot in the mail

<b>In-Person Voting</b>	Open on Election Day	<i>Minimum 1 vote center for every 60,000 voters for 11 days and minimum 1 voter center for every 30,000 voters for 4 days (including Election Day)</i>
<b>In-Person Voting</b>	In-person voters must go to a designated neighborhood poll site although those with comprehensive electronic voting rosters are able to vote anywhere in the county	In-person voters can go to any vote center in the county
<b>Official Ballot Drop Boxes</b>	Minimum 2 official ballot drop boxes in county	Minimum 1 official ballot drop box for every 15,000 voters and at each vote center
<b>Toll-Free Language Hotline</b>		Language hotline availability and hotline number posted at voter centers
<b>Election Administration Plan</b>	Voter Education and Outreach Plan	Plans must include voter education plan, a description of how media will be used to promote elections. Requires public meetings, postings with feedback.
<b>Community Committees</b>		Language Accessibility Advisory Committee, Voter Accessibility Advisory Committee, and Voter Education and Outreach Advisory Committee (in large counties)

The VCA Taskforce has been appointed by the California Secretary of State. The Taskforce is currently comprised of 16 members, representing county election officials and individuals with experience in the field of elections, including experience working on disability and language access issues. Beginning in 2025, the California Secretary of State's VCA Taskforce is charged with reviewing VCA elections and providing comments and recommendations to the Legislature.