A GUIDE TO VOTING IN CALIFORNIA

VOTE CALIFORNIA
www.sos.ca.gov

Why vote?

Elections are a critical element of our democracy. Casting a ballot can change the course of our nation, our state, and the communities we live in. Your vote helps elect presidents, our representatives in Congress, our state legislature, city council members, judges, and many others whose decisions have a direct impact on our daily life. Through the ballot box, you also have the power to help create new laws or repeal those you disagree with.

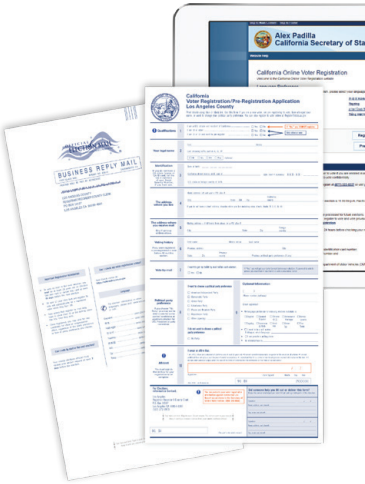
The right to vote has been hard-fought. Women, minorities, and non-landowners were all prohibited from voting earlier in our nation's history. In 1911, women gained the right to vote in California, nine years before women's suffrage was guaranteed in the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Just 50 years ago, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, landmark federal legislation designed to remove barriers to participation in the electoral process for African Americans, and later, other racial minorities. Our nation's veterans have also ensured that our democratic principles, including the right to vote, are protected.

By registering to vote and casting a ballot on Election Day, you have the power to strengthen our democracy. The California Secretary of State is committed to honoring the legacy of those who have so valiantly fought for our democracy by protecting your right to vote.

This guide describes many of the rights and responsibilities of voters and provides important information you need in order to vote and have your voice heard.

(Rev 1/2020)

Can I register to vote?



To register to vote in California, you must be:

- A United States citizen;
- A resident of California;
- 18 years of age or older on Election Day;
- Not currently in state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony; and
- Not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court of law.

How do I register to vote?

You can visit **RegisterToVote.ca.gov** or call the Secretary of State's Voter Hotline at **(800) 345-VOTE (8683)**.

Voter registration applications are provided at many places throughout the state:

- County elections offices or city halls
- Vote centers or satellite offices (where applicable)
- Public libraries
- Post offices
- Department of Motor Vehicles field offices
- State and county social services offices
- State and county mental health offices
- Department of Rehabilitation offices
- Independent Living Centers
- Department of Developmental Services Regional Centers
- Franchise Tax Board district offices
- Armed Forces recruitment offices

If you have a California identification card or driver license, you must provide the number on your voter registration application. If you do not have one of those two types of identification, provide the last four digits of your social security number. If you do not have a social security number, you will be assigned a unique identification number for voting purposes only.

When do I register to vote?

While you may register to vote or re-register at any time, in most cases you must be registered to vote at least 15 days before an election day to be eligible to vote in that election. After that deadline has passed, you will need to go to your county elections office or a polling location to complete the "same-day" voter registration process to register and vote. This process is referred to as conditional voter registration (CVR). Once your county elections official has verified your voter registration, your ballot will be processed and counted.

You should re-register to vote if you move, change your name, or want to choose or change your political party preference. The easiest way to update your registration is online at **RegisterToVote.ca.gov**.

Contact your county elections official or visit **sos.ca.gov** for more information.

How do I choose my political party preference?

You may choose one of California's qualified political parties when you register to vote. Choosing a political party preference ensures that you can vote for that party's candidates in a presidential primary election.

You may also indicate on your voter registration application that you do not want to choose a political party, which means you will be registered as a No Party Preference (NPP) voter. In presidential primary elections, some political parties allow NPP voters to help choose their candidates. In all elections, NPP voters may vote for ballot measures and candidates running for U.S. congressional, state constitutional offices, state legislative, local, and nonpartisan offices.

How do statewide primary and general elections work?

A primary election determines which candidates are nominated to advance to a general election, held a few months later. U.S. congressional, state constitutional offices, and state legislative offices are known as voter-nominated offices. In a primary election, all candidates for these voter-nominated offices are listed on one ballot. Any voter may vote for any one candidate in each contest, regardless of the voter or candidate's political party. The top-two candidates, regardless of party preference, who receive the most votes in each primary contest move on to

the general election. After a top-two primary, a general election must be held even if one candidate receives a majority of the vote (at least 50 percent +1) and even if there is only one candidate in the primary election.

This top-two primary system does not apply to candidates running for U.S. President, county central committee, or local offices.

How do Presidential Primary Elections work?

For presidential primary elections, your political party affects which candidates you can vote for the office of U.S. President. If you are registered with a political party, you can only vote for that party's presidential candidates at a primary election.

However, some parties allow voters registered with No Party Preference to vote for their presidential candidates at a primary election. No Party Preference voters must request one of these "cross-over" ballots either from their county elections official or at the polls if they wish to vote for a party's presidential candidate.

Visit **howtovoteforpresident.sos.ca.gov** for more information on how to participate in California's presidential primary.

Am I registered to vote?

To check your voter registration status, visit **voterstatus.sos.ca.gov** or call your county elections office.

Can I vote by mail?

Yes, any registered voter can vote by mail either permanently or for one election. You can permanently register to receive a vote-by-mail ballot for each election when filling out your voter registration application. If you are not registered to permanently vote-by-mail, you must request a vote-by-mail ballot from your county elections office at least seven days before an election day. Fill out the vote-by-mail ballot application in your county voter information guide, find one by visiting **sos.ca.gov**, or contact your county elections office. You may also

write out your request including your name, the address where you live, the address where you want to receive your vote-by-mail ballot, your signature, and the name and date of the election in which you want to vote by mail.

To find out if you are already registered to vote by mail, visit **voterstatus.sos.ca.gov** or contact your county elections office.

Vote-by-mail ballots can be returned either:

- **By mail:** Your voted ballot must be postmarked on or before Election Day and received by your county elections office no later than three days after Election Day.
- **In person:** You may deliver your voted ballot to your county elections office, a vote-by-mail ballot drop box, a vote-by-mail ballot drop off location, vote center, or any polling place within the state before 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.

Can I track the status of my vote-by-mail ballot?

The Secretary of State has established a system that county elections officials may use to allow vote-by-mail voters to sign up to receive notifications by email, text, or voice message regarding the status of their vote-by-mail ballot.

For more information on participating counties and how to sign up, visit **www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballottracking**.

Can I sign up to permanently vote by mail?

Yes, any registered voter may ask to permanently vote by mail and automatically receive a mailed ballot for every election. You can cancel your permanent vote-by-mail status at any time. Your county elections official will only cancel your permanent vote-by-mail status upon your request or if you do not vote in four consecutive statewide general elections.

How can I register and vote if I am a military or overseas voter?

Registering to Vote:

Military or overseas voters may register to vote using any of the following methods: (1) the Secretary of State's online form at **RegisterToVote.ca.gov**; (2) the Federal Voting Assistance Program's (FVAP) Online Assistant at **fvap.gov/california**; or (3) the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), available at **fvap.gov/uploads/FVAP/Forms/fpca2013.pdf**. County elections officials will accept FPCAs through the mail or fax.

Requesting a Ballot:

Even if you are or were registered to vote in your county, in order to receive your election materials and vote when you are absent from your county while serving and/or living overseas, you need to apply for a vote-by-mail ballot by registering online at **RegisterToVote.ca.gov** or by completing the FPCA at **fvap.gov**, as detailed above.

Returning a Voted Ballot:

Ballot return information, including method for submission of ballots, for each California county is listed on the Secretary of State's website at **sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/vote-mail/#military**. Voted ballots may not be returned by email.

How can I vote when I am away at college?

As a Californian living away from home while attending college, you have the option of registering to vote using your home address or your college address. When registering to vote, you are able to specify the address at which you wish to be registered and you can request a vote-by-mail ballot be mailed to you while attending college.

How do I know what will be on my ballot?

State Voter Information Guide:

The Secretary of State's Official Voter Information Guide is mailed to every voter household a few weeks before Election Day. This nonpartisan guide has details about statewide ballot measures, some candidates, and voter rights. Guides are provided in 10 languages: English, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese. The guide can also be viewed online at **voterguide.sos.ca.gov**.

English, non-English, audio, and large print guides can be ordered free of charge by calling the Secretary of State's Voter Hotline at **(800) 345-VOTE (8683)**, or by visiting **sos.ca.gov**.

County Voter Information Guide:

County elections officials mail a county voter information guide to each registered voter. This guide shows what your ballot will look like and includes information about local candidates, local ballot measures, your polling place address, an application for a vote-by-mail ballot, and more. The guide may also describe how voters with disabilities can vote privately and independently.

How can I vote early?

Californians can vote early at their county elections office beginning 29 days before an election. Your county may have vote centers and satellite locations that offer early voting. For a list of early voting locations, vote centers, and ballot drop boxes, visit **caearlyvoting.sos.ca.gov**.

How do I vote at a polling place?

Finding Your Polling Place:

When you receive your county voter information guide in the mail prior to each election, your polling place will be listed on the back cover. If you do not receive your guide, contact your county elections office. You can also find your polling place by visiting **voterstatus.sos.ca.gov**, calling the Secretary of State's Voter Hotline at **(800) 345-VOTE (8683)**, or texting the word "Vote" to GoVote **(468-683)**.

At Your Polling Place:

Polls are open in California from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Election Day. At your polling place, you will check in with a poll worker and they will explain the process of casting your ballot. The poll worker will give you a paper ballot, unique passcode, or computer memory card, depending on the voting system your county uses. If you are not familiar with how to mark a ballot or make a mistake on your ballot, ask a poll worker for instructions.

At a Vote Center:

Some counties are using vote centers. Vote centers will be open up to 10 days before Election Day and are similar to polling places. For more information, visit **voterschoice.sos.ca.gov** or contact your county elections office.

What if I have a disability or need assistance to vote?

If you need assistance in marking your ballot, you may choose one or two people to help you as long as neither are your employer, your employer's agent, your labor union leader, or your labor union's agent.

Voters with Disabilities:

State and federal laws require polling places and vote centers to be physically accessible to voters with disabilities. County elections officials inspect each site and often make temporary modifications to the sites for Election Day. Every person who works in a polling place or vote center is trained on election laws and the rights of voters with disabilities.

In addition, state and federal laws also require that all voters be able to cast their ballots privately and independently. Each polling place or vote center must have one voting machine that allows voters, including those who are blind or visually impaired, to cast a ballot without assistance. The voting machine permits you to verify your vote choices and, if there is an error, allows you to correct those choices before submitting your final ballot.

If curbside voting is available, you may get as close as possible to the voting area and an elections official will bring the voting materials to you. Contact your county elections office to determine if curbside voting is available.

Some counties offer an accessible option called RAVBM (remote accessible vote-by-mail). RAVBM allows voters with disabilities to receive their ballots at home and mark them independently and privately before sending them back to elections officials. Contact your county elections official to see if this option is offered in your county.

Language Assistance:

The Secretary of State and county elections offices offer a wide variety of election-related materials and assistance in languages covered under the federal Voting Rights Act. Covered languages may differ by county but can include: Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese. Contact your county elections office for more information.

Do I need to show identification when I vote?

In most cases, California voters are not required to show identification before they vote. If you are voting for the first time after registering by mail or online and did not provide your California identification number, driver license number, or the last four digits of your social security number on your registration application, you may be asked to show a form of identification when you go to the polls. Make sure you bring identification with you to the polls or include a copy of it with your vote-by-mail ballot. For a complete list of the acceptable forms of identification, contact your county elections office or read "Polling Place ID Requirements" at **sos.ca.gov/elections/hava-id-standards/**.

What if my name is not on the list at the polling place?

If your name is not on the polling place list, you have the right to cast a provisional ballot.

In California, provisional ballots serve as a fail-safe method of ensuring all voters who show up to the polls can cast a ballot. All provisional ballots are carefully checked by county elections officials to confirm that the person who voted provisionally is both registered and that they did not cast a ballot by mail or at another polling location on Election Day. You can check whether your provisional ballot was counted and, if it was not counted, the reason why, by visiting **voterstatus.sos.ca.gov**.

How does California secure our elections?

California elections officials take many measures to ensure the accuracy and integrity of our elections.

California has the highest certification standards for voting systems in the country. New voting systems applying for certification in California go through months of testing, including functional testing, source code review, red team security testing that involves experts trying to "break into" the voting system, and accessibility and volume testing as well. County elections officials test their systems for logic and accuracy before each election.

For over a decade, California has required that every ballot either be paper or have a voter verifiable paper audit trail. Elections officials conduct a manual audit of a random 1% of ballots after each and every election to ensure vote count machines are accurate.

What is the Voter's Choice Act?

The California Voter's Choice Act (VCA) is an election model that provides more options to voters by allowing them to choose when, where, and how to cast their ballot. In VCA counties, all registered voters receive their ballot in the mail weeks before the election and have different options for how to cast their ballot. Voters can return their ballot by mail, at ballot drop boxes, ballot drop-off locations, or in-person at any vote center. Vote centers offer early voting opportunities and enhanced services beginning 10 days before Election Day.

To learn more about the Voter's Choice Act and to see if your county is participating, visit **voterschoice.sos.ca.gov**.

VOTER BILL OF RIGHTS

YOU HAVE THE FOLLOWING RIGHTS:

1. **The right to vote if you are a registered voter.** You are eligible to vote if you are:

   - A U.S. citizen living in California
   - At least 18 years old
   - Registered where you currently live
   - Not currently in state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony
   - Not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court

2. **The right to vote if you are a registered voter even if your name is not on the list.**
   You will vote using a provisional ballot. Your vote will be counted if elections officials determine that you are eligible to vote.

3. **The right to vote if you are still in line when the polls close.**

4. **The right to cast a secret ballot** without anyone bothering you or telling you how to vote.

5. **The right to get a new ballot if you have made a mistake,** if you have not already cast your ballot. You can:
   Ask an elections official at a polling place for a new ballot,
   Exchange your vote-by-mail ballot for a new one at an elections office, or at your polling place, or
   Vote using a provisional ballot.

6. **The right to get help casting your ballot** from anyone you choose, except from your employer or union representative.

7. **The right to drop off your completed vote-by-mail ballot at any polling place** in California.

8. **The right to get election materials in a language other than English** if enough people in your voting precinct speak that language.

9. **The right to ask questions to elections officials about election procedures** and watch the election process. If the person you ask cannot answer your questions, they must send you to the right person for an answer. If you are disruptive, they can stop answering you.

10. **The right to report any illegal or fraudulent election activity** to an elections official or the Secretary of State's office.

County Elections Offices

Alameda
1225 Fallon St, Rm G-1
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 272–6933

Alpine
P.O. Box 158
99 Water St
Markleeville, CA 96120
(530) 694–2281

Amador
810 Court Street
Jackson, CA 95642-2132
(209) 223–6465

Butte
25 County Center Dr,
Suite I
Oroville, CA 95965
(530) 538–7761

Calaveras
Government Center
891 Mountain Ranch Rd
San Andreas, CA 95249
(209) 754–6376

Colusa
546 Jay St, Suite 200
Colusa, CA 95932
(530) 458–0500

Contra Costa
P.O. Box 271
555 Escobar Street
Martinez, CA 94553
(925) 335–7800

Del Norte
981 H St, Rm 160
Crescent City, CA 95531
(707) 465–0383

El Dorado
P.O. Box 678001
2850 Fairlane Ct
Placerville, CA 95667
(530) 621–7480

Fresno
2221 Kern St
Fresno, CA 93721
(559) 600–8683

Glenn
516 W Sycamore St
Willows, CA 95988
(530) 934–6414

Humboldt
3033 H St, Rm 20
Eureka, CA 95501
(707) 445–7481

Imperial
County Admin. Center
940 W Main St, Rm 206
El Centro, CA 92243
(442) 265–1060

Inyo
P.O. Drawer F
168 N Edwards St
Independence, CA
93526
(760) 878–0224

Kern
1115 Truxtun Ave
Bakersfield, CA 93301
(661) 868–3590

Kings
1400 W Lacey Blvd
Hanford, CA 93230
(559) 852–4401

Lake
255 N Forbes St
Lakeport, CA 95453
(707) 263–2372

Lassen
220 S Lassen St, Ste 5
Susanville, CA 96130
(530) 251–8217

Los Angeles
P.O. Box 1024
[w/ zip 90651]
12400 Imperial Highway
Norwalk, CA 90650
(800) 815–2666

Madera
200 West 4th Street
Madera, CA 93637
(559) 675–7720

Marin
P.O. Box E [w/ zip 94913]
3501 Civic Center Dr, Rm 121
San Rafael, CA 94903
(415) 473–6456

Mariposa
P.O. Box 247
4982 10th St
Mariposa, CA 95338
(209) 966–2007

Mendocino
501 Low Gap Rd, Rm 1020
Ukiah, CA 95482
(707) 234–6819

Merced
2222 M St, Rm 14
Merced, CA 95340
(209) 385–7541

Modoc
108 E Modoc St
Alturas, CA 96101
(530) 233–6205

Mono
P.O. Box 237
Annex I,
74 N. School St
Bridgeport, CA 93517
(760) 932–5537

Monterey
P.O. Box 4400
[w/ zip 93912]
1370 S Main Street #B
Salinas, CA 93901
(831) 796–1499

Napa
900 Coombs St, Rm 256
Napa, CA 94559
(707) 253–4321

Nevada
950 Maidu Avenue
Nevada City, CA 95959
(530) 265–1298

Orange
P.O. Box 11298
[w/ zip 92711]
1300 S Grand Ave, Bldg C
Santa Ana, CA 92705
(714) 567–7600

Placer
P.O. Box 5278
[w/ zip 95604]
2956 Richardson Dr
Auburn, CA 95603
(530) 886–5650

Plumas
520 Main St, Rm 102
Quincy, CA 95971
(530) 283–6256

Riverside
2724 Gateway Dr
Riverside, CA 92507
(951) 486–7200

Sacramento
7000 65th St
Sacramento, CA 95823
(916) 875–6451

San Benito
440 Fifth St, Rm 206
Hollister, CA 95023
(831) 636–4016

San Bernardino
777 E Rialto Ave
San Bernardino, CA 92415
(909) 387–8300

San Diego
P.O. Box 85656
[w/ zip 92186]
5600 Overland Ave
San Diego, CA 92123
(858) 565–5800

San Francisco
1 Dr Carlton B Goodlett Pl,
Rm 48
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 554–4375

San Joaquin
P.O. Box 810
[w/ zip 95201]
44 N San Joaquin St,
Ste 350
Stockton, CA 95202
(209) 468–2885

San Luis Obispo
1055 Monterey St, D-120
San Luis Obispo, CA 93408
(805) 781–5228

San Mateo
40 Tower Rd
San Mateo, CA 94402
(650) 312–5222

Santa Barbara
P.O. Box 61510
[w/ zip 93160]
4440—A Calle Real
Santa Barbara, CA
93110
(805) 568–2200

Santa Clara
PO Box 611360
[w/ zip 95161]
1555 Berger Dr, Bldg 2
San Jose, CA 95112
(408) 299–8683

Santa Cruz
701 Ocean St, Rm 210
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 454–2060

Shasta
P.O. Box 990880
[w/ zip 96099]
1643 Market St
Redding, CA 96001
(530) 225–5730

Sierra
100 Courthouse Sq, Ste 11
P.O. Drawer D
Downieville, CA 95936
(530) 289–3295

Siskiyou
510 North Main St
Yreka, CA 96097
(530) 842–8084

Solano
675 Texas St, Ste 2600
Fairfield, CA 94533
(707) 784–6675

Sonoma
P.O. Box 11485
[w/ zip 95406]
435 Fiscal Dr
Santa Rosa, CA 95403
(707) 565–6800

Stanislaus
1021 "I" St, Ste 101
Modesto, CA 95354
(209) 525–5200

Sutter
1435 Veterans
Memorial Cir
Yuba City, CA 95993
(530) 822–7122

Tehama
P.O. Box 250
444 Oak St, Rm C
Red Bluff, CA 96080
(530) 527–8190

Trinity
P.O. Box 1215
11 Court St
Weaverville, CA 96093
(530) 623–1220

Tulare
5951 S Mooney Blvd
Visalia, CA 93277
(559) 624–7300

Tuolumne
2 S Green St
Sonora, CA 95370
(209) 533–5570

Ventura
800 S Victoria Ave,
L-1200
Ventura, CA 93009
(805) 654–2664

Yolo
P.O. Box 1820
[w/ zip 95776]
625 Court St, Rm B05
Woodland, CA 95695
(530) 666–8133

Yuba
915 8th St, Ste 107
Marysville, CA 95901
(530) 749–7855

For more information about voting and elections, call (800) 345-VOTE (8683) or visit www.sos.ca.gov.

TTY/TDD (800) 833-8683

To find your polling place, visit voterstatus.sos.ca.gov or text the word "Vote" to GoVote (468-683).

To find your voter registration information and other elections information related to you, visit voterstatus.sos.ca.gov.

The Secretary of State provides voter assistance in 10 languages:

English (800) 345-VOTE (8683)

中文 **/Chinese** (800) 339-2857

हिंदी **/Hindi** (888) 345-2692

日本語 **/Japanese** (800) 339-2865

ខ្មែរ **/Khmer** (888) 345-4917

한국어 **/Korean** (866) 575-1558

Español/Spanish (800) 232-VOTA (8682)

Tagalog (800) 339-2957

ภาษาไทย **/Thai** (855) 345-3933

Việt ngữ/Vietnamese (800) 339-8163

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RegisterToVote.ca.gov

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California Secretary of State Alex Padilla
www.sos.ca.gov

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