

## **California Election Safeguards**

The Secretary of State's Office is committed to ensuring that elections are free, fair, safe, secure, accurate, and accessible. There are various safeguards in place to ensure transparency and establish accountability of the election process through the election cycle. Here is some information about how elections officials work to make sure that your vote is kept safe and secure and is counted with integrity.

### **1. Election Security and Sources of Election Information**

Election security is our number one priority. The right to vote is the foundation of our democracy. As the nonpartisan, official election source in the State of California, the California Secretary of State's Office works around the clock to ensure every vote is safe and secure.

Through the continuous investment in new tools, systems, and infrastructure, the Secretary of State's Election Security Program serves California with the sole purpose of keeping every Californian's vote safe from online interference, especially the spread of mis- and disinformation. Misinformation, intentional or otherwise, continues to confuse voters and sow distrust in the electoral process.

The Election Security Program works to make sure every Californian is equipped with the accurate information they need to vote and trust that their vote counts.

More information on our election security efforts can be found here:

<https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/election-cybersecurity>.

### **2. Voting System Certification**

Security is layered into every aspect of California's voting technologies.

California conducts source code review and evaluation, hardware and software security penetration testing, open-ended vulnerability testing, operational testing to validate system performance and functioning under normal and abnormal conditions, and more to identify any vulnerabilities that voting system vendors must resolve or mitigate prior to being certified for use in California.

California voting systems and tabulators ARE NOT connected to the internet, nor do they have modems or hardware in them that could be remotely "activated."

Vendors and county officials follow strict physical security and chain of custody requirements for all voting technology software, firmware, and hardware which meet or exceed federal guidance including that of the US Department of Justice, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and the Election Assistance Commission.

Every county must validate before every election that the voting system is identical to what was approved by the Secretary of State during certification to ensure it matches the approved version of the system and has not been modified.

For more information about voting system testing and certification, see: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ovsta/certification-and-approval>.

### **3. Chain of Custody - Voting Equipment and Ballots**

Strong chain of custody procedures and documentation safeguard and support the integrity of the election and provide a foundation to enable election officials to successfully administer elections. Elections officials must maintain control of voting equipment and ballots at all times. The collection, storage, and transfer of all voting equipment and ballots are documented including dates and times of collection and transfer, and the purpose of the transfer (such as when it is taken to the voting location or returned to the county elections office). In addition, county elections officials must provide their ballot collection and chain of custody procedures to the Secretary of State 30 days prior to an election.

For more information on voting equipment certification and security, see: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ovsta>

For more information on ballot collection, see: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/administration/regulations/current-regulations/elections/vote-mail-ballot-drop-boxes-and-drop-locations>.

### **4. Same Day Voter Registration (Conditional Voter Registration)**

Conditional Voter Registration, known as Same Day Voter Registration, is a safety net for Californians who miss the deadline to register to vote or update their voter registration information for an election.

Eligible citizens who need to register or re-register to vote within 14 days of an election can complete this process to register and vote at their county elections office, polling place, or vote center. Their ballots will be processed and counted once the county elections office has completed the voter registration verification process.

### **5. "My Voter Status"**

The Secretary of State's "My Voter Status" page is a secure platform allowing voters to check their voter registration details and voting history (the elections in which they have cast a ballot). All county elections officials are required to track and confirm the receipt of voted vote-by-mail ballots which are uploaded into the system. In order to log into the system, the voter's personal information is verified to protect the voter's data and prevent unauthorized access. Voters can see when their ballot was mailed, received, and counted, providing transparency throughout the election process.

To utilize “My Voter Status”, please visit: <https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>.

## **6. Ballot Printing**

The Secretary of State certifies ballot printers for use in all elections held throughout the state. Regulations govern the manufacture, finishing, quality standards, distribution, and inventory control of ballot cards for use in California elections. The Secretary of State’s Office issues specific ballot tint and watermarks for each election to ensure uniformity of ballots throughout the state. Strict regulations and standards guarantee quality and security of the ballots, and the integrity of elections.

## **7. Vote-by-Mail Ballots**

All active California registered voters are automatically mailed a vote-by-mail ballot for every election.

Voters can track and receive notifications on the status of their ballot through the entire process by signing up for the Secretary of State’s “Where’s My Ballot?” ballot tracking system. Voters will receive automatic notifications by text (SMS), email, or voice call when their ballot has been mailed and when their voted ballot is received and counted by their elections official or if there are any issues with their ballot so they can be corrected.

For more information or to sign up for “Where’s My Ballot” visit: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-status/wheres-my-ballot>

## **8. Provisional Ballots**

A voter may be issued a provisional ballot if:

- The voter’s name is not on the roster at the voting location, but the voter believes they are registered to vote, or
- The voter wants to vote at their polling place or a vote center, but they did not receive their ballot or do not have their ballot with them, and the elections official is unable to verify that the voter has not already returned their vote-by-mail ballot.

A provisional ballot will be counted after elections officials have confirmed that the voter is registered to vote in that county, and did not already vote in that election. A voter may vote a provisional ballot at any polling place in the county in which they are registered to vote; however, only the election contests they are eligible to vote for will be counted.

Every voter who casts a provisional ballot has the right to find out from their county elections official if their ballot was counted and, if not, the reason why it was not counted. This information is also available after the election by logging on to the Secretary of State’s “My Voter Status” website at: <https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>.

More information regarding provisional ballots can be found here:  
<https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/provisional-voting>

## **9. Ballot Drop Boxes and Ballot Collection**

State and federal law prohibit tampering with the election process. As such, there are safeguards to protect ballots returned by voters. The typical drop box is made of heavy high-grade metal, which is bolted to the ground and is equipped with additional security features such as tamper-evident seals, minimal ballot insertion size, locks, and water/fireproof materials. Elections officials may place the drop box in a public location with 24-hour video surveillance.

State law and regulations require county elections officials to assign at least two designated staff to retrieve voted ballots from voting locations and drop boxes. When collecting polling place ballots, the names of the designated staff must be communicated to the precinct inspector or vote center lead immediately prior to the opening of the polls. Ballots must be collected in pairs and the county elections official, or their designee, must inspect the secure ballot container for evidence of tampering and must sign a retrieval form to document the date and time of receipt.

For more information on vote-by-mail ballot drop boxes and drop-off locations, see:  
<https://www.sos.ca.gov/administration/regulations/current-regulations/elections/vote-mail-ballot-drop-boxes-and-drop-locations>.

For more information on early ballot retrieval at voting locations, see:  
<https://www.sos.ca.gov/administration/regulations/current-regulations/elections/early-ballot-retrieval>.

## **10. Signature Verification Process**

When a vote-by-mail or provisional ballot is returned, elections officials verify the voter's identity through signature verification. If the elections official determines that the voter's signature does not compare to their signature(s) on their voter registration record or if their signature is missing, the identification envelope will not be opened, and the ballot will not be counted until the identification of the voter is confirmed. Elections officials are required to notify voters if the signature on their envelope is does not compare to their signature on file or is missing and provide the voter an opportunity to "cure" their ballot by providing a signature verification statement. For the November 5, 2024, General Election, voters have until 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 1, 2024, to cure their signature and have their vote counted.

## **11. Election Related Complaints**

Observers and elections officials are prohibited by state law from interfering with the election process such as collecting private voter information, violating ballot secrecy, campaigning, and other interference. The Secretary of State investigates election-related criminal violations, as provided by the California Elections Code. Examples of

Elections Code violations can be found on our website at:

<https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/fraud-complaints/pdfs/common-elections-fraud-violations.pdf>, as well as all of the penal provisions of the [Elections Code \(sections 18000 through 18700\)](#).

If you feel that you have been a victim of voter intimidation or have witnessed suspicious behavior, please report the complaint to the California Secretary of State. Complaints may be submitted to the Secretary of State [online](#), by mail, or by phone.

More information regarding voter complaints may be found here:

<https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/voter-complaint>

## **12. Election Night Reporting of Vote Results**

On Election Night, county elections officials must begin reporting results to the Secretary of State no more than two hours after they begin tallying votes after the polls close. County elections officials then continue to report results periodically throughout Election Night until all precinct vote totals have been reported. Election Night results will begin to be posted to the Secretary of State's Election Night Reporting website at [www.electionresults.sos.ca.gov](http://www.electionresults.sos.ca.gov) after the polls close on Election Day.

The first election results are typically ballots received before Election Day, which include vote-by-mail ballots and early voting location ballots. County elections officials may begin opening and processing vote-by-mail ballot envelopes up to 29 days before Election Day, but those results cannot be accessed or shared with the public until all polls close on Election Day.

Election results posted on Election Night are semi-official results based on the in-person ballots cast at voting locations on Election Day, any early voted ballots cast in person prior to Election Day, and any vote-by-mail ballots received and processed prior to Election Day.

The complete tally of votes is never finished on Election Night as vote-by-mail ballots postmarked on or before Election Day and received within seven days after the election, as well as any provisional ballots cast, must still be counted. These ballots are always counted during the official canvass period in the 30 days after Election Day.

## **13. Canvass Period**

By law, California county elections officials have 30 days, also known as the canvass period, to count every valid ballot and conduct a required post-election audit.

During the 30-day canvass period, county elections officials will process and count provisional ballots, ballots from voters who registered and voted conditionally (Same Day Voter Registration), and vote-by-mail ballots postmarked by Election Day and received within seven days of the election. This process includes a comparison of signatures on envelopes to the signatures on file. If a signature is missing or does not

compare to the signature on file, state law requires county elections officials to reach out to voters to verify their signature to ensure that their ballot can be counted. By law, voters are allowed to verify their signature up to 26 days after Election Day. These processes ensure that all valid votes cast by eligible voters can be counted.

During the canvass, county elections officials are required to update and post vote results at least once per week and to provide an estimated unprocessed ballot report with each update to the Secretary of State. Vote results and the reports of the number of estimated unprocessed ballot are posted daily on the Secretary of State's website throughout the canvass period. Vote results are provided daily on the Secretary of State's election results website at [www.electionresults.sos.ca.gov](http://www.electionresults.sos.ca.gov), and unprocessed ballot reports can be found at: <https://electionresults.sos.ca.gov/unprocessed-ballots-status> beginning two days after the election.

#### **14. Post-Election Audits – 1% Manual Tally**

California requires county elections officials to verify the results of each election during the official canvass by performing a 1% Manual Tally of the ballots cast in order to verify the accuracy of the automated count. Elections officials manually tally all the ballots in 1 percent of the precincts, selected at random by the elections official. For each race that is not included in the initial group of precincts, the elections official must count one additional precinct to include all races in the manual tally. The 1% Manual Tally is open to the public. This procedure is conducted during the official canvass to verify the accuracy of the automated count.

#### **15. Recounts**

Any registered California voter may request a recount of votes in any election contest. There are no provisions for an “automatic” recount in any election contest. More information on how to request a recount may be found here: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/recounts>

#### **16. Certification**

County elections officials must complete the canvass, certify the results, and submit them to their board of supervisors before submitting their certified results to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State then compiles results from all 58 counties and certifies statewide results in the Statement of the Vote 38 days after the election.