Political Party Qualification and Information

Process, Requirements, and History
June 2, 2026, Statewide Direct Primary Election
November 7, 2028, General Election

The method by which political parties gain, and retain, qualified status in California is prescribed in Elections Code sections 5000-5200.

In order to achieve initial qualified status, thereby allowing a political party to participate in the next primary election or the next presidential general election, a proposed political party must:

1. Hold a caucus or convention to elect temporary officers and designate a party name; § 5001(a)
2. File a formal notice with the Secretary of State that the political body has organized, elected temporary officers, and declared an intent to qualify a political party pursuant to either Elections Code section 5100 or 5151, but not both. This notice must include the names and addresses of the temporary officers of the political body; § 5001(b)

and

3. Use one of two methods to qualify as a political party: voter registration or petition. §§ 5100, 5151

Method 1: Voter Registration

To qualify a new political party by voter registration requires that voters equal in number to at least 0.33 percent of the total number of voters registered on December 30, 2025 (E-154) (if intending to qualify to participate in the Statewide Direct Primary Election) or by July 7, 2028 (E-123) (if intending to qualify to participate in the presidential general election) complete an affidavit of registration, disclosing a political preference by writing in the name of the political body intending to qualify as a political party. §§ 5100(b), 5151(c)

These completed affidavits of registration must be submitted to the county elections officials by December 30, 2025 (E-154) (if intending to qualify to participate in the Statewide Direct Primary Election) or by July 7, 2028 (E-123) (if intending to qualify to participate in the presidential general election). The completed affidavits of registration should be submitted to the elections official in the counties of the voters' residences. They may be submitted to the Secretary of State's office, although this will result in delays in the counties' receipt of the affidavits. § 2187(c)(1), (c)(4)

The Secretary of State must determine, from examining and totaling the reports of registration from the counties, that the political body obtained voter registrations equal in number to at least 0.33 percent of the total number of voters registered on December 30, 2025 (the 154th day before the Statewide Direct Primary Election) or July 7, 2028 (the 123rd day before the presidential general election). §§ 5100(b), 5151(c)

Method 2: Petition

To qualify a new political party by petition, petitions must be submitted to the Secretary of State no later than January 18, 2026* (the 135th day before the Statewide Direct Primary Election) or June 25, 2028* (the 135th day before the presidential general election). The Secretary of State must determine

* Date falls on a weekend or state holiday; it moves forward to the next business day.

if a political body intending to qualify collected 1,114,662 (10% of the entire votes cast at the last gubernatorial election on November 8, 2022) petition signatures of registered voters.
§§ 5100(c), 5151(d)

Maintaining Qualified Status

Once qualified, a political party maintains its qualified status by:

1. Retaining registrants representing at least 1/15 of 1% (0.067%) of the total state registration;
§§ 5101, 5153

and

2. Having one of its statewide candidates (running for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Controller, Treasurer, Attorney General, Insurance Commissioner, or United States Senator) receive at least 2% of the entire vote of the state for that office at the last gubernatorial primary election; §§ 5100(a), 5151(b)

or

Retaining statewide registration equaling at least 0.33 percent of the total number of voters registered on the 154th day before the primary election or the 123rd day before the presidential general election. §§ 5100(b), 5151(c)

For additional information regarding political party qualification, please visit the Secretary of State's website at http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/political-parties/political-party-qualification/.

There are currently **six** qualified political parties in California: Democratic, Republican, American Independent, Green, Libertarian, and Peace and Freedom. In addition to the Democratic and Republican parties, which have participated in state primary elections since 1910, seven other parties have qualified since 1967. In 1968, both the American Independent Party and the Peace and Freedom Party qualified by the voter registration method; however, in 1998, the Peace and Freedom Party failed to meet the requirement that one of its candidates receive 2% of the vote for the particular office and therefore lost its qualified status. The Libertarian Party achieved the requisite number of registrants in 1980; the Green Party reached the required number in 1992. In 1995, the Natural Law and the Reform parties garnered the requisite number of registered voters. In 2003, the Peace and Freedom Party regained its qualified status and the Reform Party failed to meet the requirements to retain its qualified status. The Natural Law Party lost its qualified status in 2006. In 2011, the Americans Elect Party qualified using the petition method; however, it lost its qualified status in 2015.

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Since the statewide party nomination process began in 1910, 19 parties have qualified to participate in primary elections, including:

Democratic**	1910-present
Republican**	1910-present
Independence League**	1910
Prohibition**	1910-1962
Socialist**	1910-1938
Progressive (Bull Moose)**	1912-1918
Liberty	1932-1934
Commonwealth	1934-1938
Communist	1934-1944
Progressive	1934-1938
Townsend	1938-1942
Independent Progressive	1948-1954
American Independent	1968-present
Peace and Freedom	1968-1998; 2003-present
Libertarian	1980-present
Green	1992-present
Natural Law	1995-2006
Reform	1995-2002
Americans Elect	2011-2015

Prior to 1910, many parties either conducted conventions or held primary elections to select their candidates for the statewide general election.

** Active before 1910.