

The Voter's Choice Act (SB 450)

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. 30 of California's 58 counties have adopted the VCA model and conducted the 2025 November Special Election using this model.

The Voter's Choice Act (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. Initially, only VCA counties were required to mail registered voters in the county a ballot in the mail, but beginning in 2022, 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 voting machines, 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.

According to the legislative analysis of Senate Bill 450, 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. The VCA includes more than a dozen factors that counties must consider in selecting vote centers and drop boxes. And because vote centers are staffed for multiple days, proponents of SB 450 pointed to the benefit of having smoothly run in-person voting.

1.Senate Bill 450

2.Alameda, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Humboldt, Imperial, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Marin, Mariposa, Merced, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Benito, San Diego, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Ventura, Yolo. <https://www.sos.ca.gov/voters-choice-act/vca-participating-counties>.

3 Elections Code Section 3000.5.

4 August 1, 2026, Assembly Appropriates Committee Analysis.

5 August 25, 2016 Senate Floor Analysis. DRAFT

6 August 1, 2016 Assembly Appropriations Committee and August 18, 2016 Assembly Floor Analysis.

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.

	Neighborhood Poll Site	Vote Center
Ballots in the Mail	All voters receive a ballot in the mail	All voters receive a ballot in the mail
In-Person Voting	Open on Election Day	Open at least 4 days, including Election Day. Some required to be open 11 days. However, far fewer vote centers than neighborhood poll sites.
In-Person Voting	In-person voters must go to a designated neighborhood poll site	In-person voters can go to any vote center in the county
Drop Boxes	Required, minimum 2	Drop boxes provide at each vote center and in additional locations throughout the county
Toll-Free Language Hotline		Requires a hotline for languages be available to voters and the number be posted at voter centers
		Election Administration Plans including outreach and education plans
Community Committees		Creating of Language Accessibility Advisory Committees AACs and VAACs

The VCA Taskforce has been appointed by the California Secretary of State. The Taskforce is currently comprised of 15 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.