

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

# YOUR VOICE, YOUR VOTE: VOTING IN CALIFORNIA



Voting is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of American government. Our democracy works best when all voices are represented, but some politicians still try to use voter suppression tactics to silence underrepresented communities. Don't let them!

When voters turn out for federal, state, and local elections, we can hold politicians accountable and make critical decisions about how our tax dollars are spent and what we want for our communities.

Vote like your rights depend on it! [Register to vote today.](#)

What you'll find inside this guide: **WHO** can vote, **HOW** to register to vote, **WHEN** and **WHERE** you can cast your ballot, and **KEY TIPS** on being an informed voter.

## WHO CAN VOTE?

**You *can* register and vote in California if you are a United States citizen and a resident of California who is 18 years old or older on Election Day.**

You are eligible to vote if you meet these criteria and you are also:

- **A student:** Attending a college, trade school, or technical school out of state. Learn more [here](#).
- **A military or overseas voter:** Register early to ensure you receive your voting materials on time. Learn more [here](#).
- **Unhoused:** You may register to vote at a location where you spend most of your time. You must describe the location clearly enough for the elections official to establish your right to vote in a specific precinct (such as cross streets or a shelter address).

This ensures accurate election materials can be provided to you. A mailing address, if available, should be provided in order for you to receive election materials; this can be any place you receive your mail.

- **Someone with a criminal conviction and:**

- In county jail serving a misdemeanor sentence (a misdemeanor never affects your right to vote); as a condition of probation (misdemeanor or felony); or serving a felony jail sentence,
- On probation, mandatory supervision, post-release community supervision, or federal supervised release,
- On parole,
- Pre-trial or awaiting trial for any crime,
- Have a juvenile adjudication, or
- Have completed your sentence.

**You *cannot* register and vote if you are not a United States citizen and a resident of California, or if you are:**

- Younger than 18 – *but* you can pre-register to vote if you are 16 or 17 years old. Pre-registration does not change the voting age, which is 18. Youth who pre-register to vote will have their registration become active once they turn 18 years old. Learn more [here](#).
- Currently serving a state or federal prison sentence. Once you are released from prison your right to vote is restored, but you must register (or re-register) to vote. Learn more about voting rights in California for people impacted by the criminal legal system at [LetMeVote.org](#).
- Currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court.

.....

## REGISTERING TO VOTE

You can [register to vote online](#), by mail, or at the DMV, public assistance offices, your local post office, public library, or your [local county elections office](#) if you want to vote in an election that is **more than** 14 days away.

[Same-day voter registration](#) (also called conditional voter registration) is available if the election **is within** 14 days. Same-day registration is available until polls close on Election Day at all county elections offices, polling places, and vote centers. These ballots are processed and counted once the county elections office has verified the voter's eligibility.

## Do I need a California driver's license or California identification card to register or pre-register to vote online?

No. All Californians who are eligible to register to vote may fill out a voter registration application online. If you do not enter a California driver's license, identification card, or social security number, the website will create a pre-filled voter registration application for you to print, sign, and mail. Voters who do not provide one of these numbers when registering may need to provide some form of identification, such as a student ID or utility bill, when voting for the first time. A full list of acceptable identification is [available here](#).

## When is the last day to register to vote?

In California, you can register to vote or change your registration at any time, including on Election Day. The deadline to register online or by mail is 15 days before Election Day.

## When do I need to re-register to vote?

You must register to vote again if you:

- Move,
- Change your name,
- Wish to update your political party preference,
- Recently regained the right to vote, or
- Change your preferred language.

You can update your voter registration online. Not sure if you need an update? [Check your voter registration status and register to vote online](#).



*continued →*

## CASTING YOUR BALLOT

### In California, you can vote in two ways:

- 1. By mail.** All voters with an active registration will automatically be mailed a ballot before each election. You can return a completed vote-by-mail ballot by:
  - Mailing it to your local elections office. Mail ballots must be postmarked no later than Election Day. **Remember to sign your vote-by-mail envelope.** There is no postage required to return a California vote-by-mail ballot.

Due to recent USPS changes, if you drop off your ballot at a post office on Election Day it may not be counted unless you ask for a postmark. Alternatively, you can safely mail your ballot before Election Day or drop it at one of the locations listed below.

  - Dropping it off at a ballot drop box, local elections office, polling place, or vote center. Learn more about voting by mail [here](#).
- 2. Voting in person at your local polling place, vote center, or county elections office.** Your polling place or nearest vote center will be listed on the sample ballot you receive in the mail once you are registered to vote as well as on your [county elections office's website](#). You can vote in person at one of these places:
  - **Polling Place** — a designated place to vote in your neighborhood that is open on Election Day from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.
  - **Vote Center** — [29 counties](#) in California have opted to adopt vote centers. All vote centers are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day and some will be open up to 10 days before Election Day. You can vote early in person, drop off your ballot, get a replacement ballot, vote using an accessible machine, get assistance in multiple languages, and register to vote at any vote center in the county.
  - **County Election Office** — each [county has an office for elections](#) where you can vote early or on Election Day from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

You can also [check here online](#) or call your [county elections office](#) to find out where you vote.

### Can I bring someone to help me vote?

Yes! You have the right to bring up to two people to help you cast your ballot. The individuals assisting the voter may not be the voter's employer, an agent of their employer, or union representative.

### Can I get time off work to vote?

Yes! California law allows workers to take time off with pay to cast their ballot on Election Day if they do not have sufficient time outside of their normal working hours. Your [employer can require](#) advance notice and is allowed to ask that you take time at the beginning or end of your shift.

Check out the [California Voter Bill of Rights](#) to learn more about your right to vote.

### Someone else offered to drop off my ballot, is that okay?

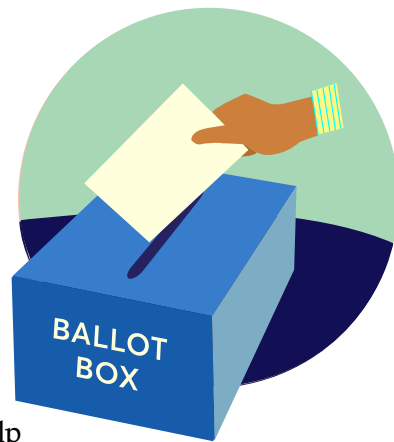
Yes! You can let someone else return your ballot for you if they aren't being paid based on how many ballots they return. Just fill out the authorization section on your ballot envelope.

### What happens if my signature doesn't match or I forget to sign my vote-by-mail ballot envelope?

Before your ballot is rejected due to a missing or mismatched signature, the county must notify you before the election results are certified so you can correct the issue to ensure your ballot is counted.

### How can I be sure my ballot is counted?

You can track your ballot by visiting [Where's My Ballot?](#)



---

## BE AN INFORMED VOTER

### How do I get election materials in my preferred language?

County elections offices provide election materials in [various languages](#), in addition to English. Contact your [county elections office](#) directly to ask whether your county's voting-related materials are available in your preferred language.

### Where can I find more information about candidates and issues?

[Vote411](#) California and [Ballotpedia](#) are comprehensive, nonpartisan online guides to elections covering federal, state, and local races in California. Visitors can generate a personalized sample ballot by entering their address and get information about candidates, ballot measures, and who supports them.

### Where can I find more information about voting?

Call the California Secretary of State at 1-800-345-VOTE (English), 1-800-232-VOTA (Spanish), or visit the [election website](#). Visit your [local county elections office's website](#) for local information.

