



2018 Election Reform Primer: What Voters Need to Know

May 2018

California passed many new election reforms in recent years. 2018 will be the first year these laws are in place for a statewide general election. This Election Reform Primer summarizes key new laws that voters need to know. If implemented successfully, the reforms have the potential to expand participation and modernize elections.

Available at www.futureofcaelections.org/electionprimer2018





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An Overview of Selected California Election Laws

California Motor Voter	Eligible DMV customers will be registered to vote after affirming their eligibility when applying for or renewing their driver's license or state ID or updating their address. Individuals who do not wish to register to vote can opt out.
Same Day Voter Registration	If Californians miss the 15-day voter registration deadline, they can still register and vote by visiting a county elections office or designated location up to and through Election Day.
Third Party Return of Voted Ballots	Previously, only a voter's family or household member could return their vote-by-mail ballot for them. Now there are no longer any restrictions on who can return ballots on behalf of voters.
Voter's Choice Act	<u>Active only in Madera, Napa, Nevada, San Mateo and Sacramento counties for 2018</u> Voters in participating counties can choose when, where, and how they vote. Ballots will be mailed to all registered voters before an election. They have the choice of returning the ballot through the mail, at a ballot dropbox, or in-person at a vote center. Vote Centers will replace traditional polling places, giving voters the flexibility to vote in person at any location in their county during an 11-day voting period. Voters will also have access to Same Day Voter Registration, accessible voting machines, and language support at Vote Centers. All counties will have the option to participate in 2020.
Pre-Registration	Eligible 16 and 17-Year-olds can now pre-register to vote. Their voter registration will become active once they turn 18 years old and can vote.

California Motor Voter

Voter registration will be the default for eligible voters at the DMV

How it Works

The Policy:

The California Motor Voter program requires the DMV to provide a seamless voter registration process for eligible voters who apply for or renew a driver's license or state identification card, or who notify DMV of a change of address.

U.S. citizens who affirm they are eligible to vote when completing their driver's license or state ID transaction – whether at a DMV office, online, or by mail – will have their voter registration information securely and electronically transferred to the Secretary of State, unless they opt out of registering to vote. The California Motor Voter program will lead to an increase in registered voters and makes voter rolls more accurate by providing a streamlined path for updating voter registration information.

How It Works:

- During their DMV transaction, people will be required to affirm they are a U.S. citizen AND meet all of the eligibility requirements to vote before their information can be transferred to the Secretary of State and used to register them to vote or update their registration.
- People who affirm citizenship and eligibility to vote will be registered to vote unless they opt out of voter registration during their transaction.
- Both the DMV's electronic and paper applications have safeguards to ensure only people who are eligible to vote are registered.
- By law, the information of AB 60 license applicants and license holders will not be transmitted to the Secretary of State.
- Eligible 16 and 17-year-olds can pre-register to vote at DMV, and they can vote when they turn 18.
- People can provide optional voter registration information like party preference, vote-by-mail preference, and language preference during the DMV transaction and that will be transferred to the Secretary of State.
- Voter registration information will be available in the following 10 languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.
- The DMV will now have dedicated accessible computers for customers with disabilities to complete applications and register to vote.
- California will *not* automatically add all driver's license and ID holders to the voter rolls. People will only be registered to vote through DMV when they apply for or renew a license or ID, or when they submit a change of address.

What Voters Need to Know

When you apply for or renew a driver's license or state ID, or if you notify DMV of an address change, you will be registered to vote or your voter registration will be updated unless you check the opt-out box on the DMV form.

If you are 16 or 17 years old and eligible, you will be pre-registered to vote, unless you check the opt-out box on the DMV form. You will have to wait to vote until you turn 18.

To register to vote in California, you must be:

- a United States citizen, and
- a resident of California, and
- 18 years old or older on Election Day, and
- 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.

To pre-register to vote in California, you must:

- be 16 or 17 years old, and
- meet all of the other eligibility requirements to vote.

If you have pre-registered to vote, you will automatically be registered to vote on your 18th birthday.

If you are a U.S. Citizen and you are eligible to vote, you can register to vote during the following driver's license or state ID transactions:

1. When you notify the DMV of a change in your address.
2. When you apply for a new driver's license or state ID.
3. When you renew your driver's license or state ID.

Once your DMV transaction is complete, DMV will send your voter registration information to the Secretary of State. You will get a postcard in the mail that confirms you are registered to vote! You can check your voter registration status at

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/registration-status>.

DMV's driver's license and state ID applications and renewal forms, as well change of address forms are available in DMV offices in 10 languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese

The voter registration deadline for any election is 15 days before Election Day. If you miss the deadline, you will need to register and vote at your county elections office or designated location. Contact your county elections office for more information.

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices>

Important Reminders:

- By law, the information of AB 60 license applicants and license holders will not be transmitted to the Secretary of State and they will not be registered to vote.
- To pre-register, register, or to update your voter registration, you must complete the voter registration section of the DMV form by affirming that you are a U.S. citizen and that you are eligible to vote.
- You can also use the DMV form to choose a political party, get voting materials in a different language, or become a permanent vote-by-mail voter.

Same Day Voter Registration

Don't be discouraged if a voter misses the voter registration deadline. Eligible voters can still register and vote on the same day all the way up to and through Election Day!

How it Works

Same Day Voter Registration allows a voter to register and vote after the 15-day voter registration deadline.

To register after the deadline, a voter may register by completing the form online (registertovote.ca.gov) or by using a paper voter registration card. However, they must visit their county elections office or a designated location to vote.

Same Day Voter Registration, officially known as conditional voter registration, was enacted in 2012 (AB 1436, authored by Assemblymember Mike Feuer) and became effective January 1, 2017 after California certified its statewide voter registration database.

What Voters Need to Know

You can still register and vote even if you missed the voter registration deadline.

Go to your county Elections Office – up to and through Election Day.

It's 3 simple steps you can complete in 1 visit.

1. You **register** to vote.
2. You **vote**.
3. You **seal** your ballot in a special envelope and **sign** it.

To learn where you can register and vote contact your county Elections Office:

www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices

We strongly recommend that all voters VOTE at the county elections office or designated location where and when they register.

Once you register, you will be registered for future elections.

Votes will be counted once election officials verify your voter registration and confirm that you have not already voted elsewhere. You can check the county website for your ballot status to see if your ballot was counted, and if not, why not.

If you register after the deadline, you will only be able to vote at your county elections office or a specially designated location. To learn where you can register and vote contact your county Elections Office: www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices

Same Day Voter Registration Offers Opportunity for Students

In past elections, the registration deadline was a particular barrier for students. Students are often new voters and may not be aware of elections deadlines, or they may move without updating their voter registration. Additionally, some students register to vote at their parent's address and don't receive any voting information at their campus residence.

Same Day Voter Registration solves these problems as long as students know that they must visit the county elections office or a designated location to register to vote and vote.

If you are registering students, contact the county elections office in your county and urge them to create a specially designated location for Same Day Voter Registration near or on campus.

After the 15-day voter registration deadline, be prepared to point unregistered students to the nearest specially designated location. They will not be able to register or vote at a standard polling place.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the voter registration deadline?

The 15-day deadline for the next election is May 21, 2018.

Why does the voter registration deadline matter?

There are several milestones as we get close to Election Day:

- If you register 29 days before the election, you receive your state and county voter guide in the mail with all the information you need to vote.
- If you register 15 days before the election, your name is on the voter list at your polling site and you still have time to vote by mail.
- If you register after the 15th day, you must go to a county elections office or designated location to vote.

Where to check if you are registered to vote?

Visit voterstatus.sos.ca.gov or call (800) 345-VOTE (8683). You can look up your registration or find your polling place.

If I register to vote and then vote, will my ballot be treated the same as everyone else's?

You will fill out a standard ballot, place it in an envelope, fill out some information, sign it, and submit it. Your ballot will be counted if:

- Your signature on the ballot envelope matches the one on your voter registration form.
- You provide all the information needed to identify you on your voter registration form -- including your name, address of residence, and date of birth.
- This is the only ballot you cast in this election.

Third Party Return of Voted Ballots

California law has changed to permit anyone to return anyone else's ballot

How it Works

Californians who cast vote-by-mail ballots can now have anyone return their voted ballots once they place their voted ballot inside the ballot envelope, and seal and sign the envelope.

California lawmakers enacted a law (AB 1921, authored by Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego) that removes restrictions on who can return vote-by-mail ballots on behalf of others.

Under the previous rules, only members of a voter's immediate family or household could return a completed vote-by-mail ballot for them. Under the new rules, there are no restrictions on who can return ballots for others. This new law took effect in 2017, and 2018 is the first statewide election where it will be in effect.

A person designated to return a vote by mail ballot is subject to punishment under state law if they knowingly and willingly engage in criminal acts related to that ballot. Additionally, state law prohibits a person from receiving compensation for returning ballots on someone's behalf.

What Voters Need to Know

1. You have the right to cast a secret ballot and do not have to tell anyone how you voted
2. You should only give your ballot to someone else to turn in if you trust that person
3. You have the right to refuse a request from anyone to turn in your voted ballot

If you have someone else return your ballot envelope, remember to ask that person to print and sign their name on the return section of your envelope. They must also describe their relationship to you.

In 2017, some campaigns sent representatives door-to-door asking voters to give them their voted ballots to turn in on their behalf. Some voters objected to these tactics and filed complaints with election officials. Remember you have the right to refuse anyone offering to collect your ballot.

Check with your county's elections office to find the ballot return locations available in your area.

Find your county elections office contact information here:

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices/>

Voter's Choice Act

Voters choose when, where and how to vote

How it Works

The Voter's Choice Act or VCA (SB 450, authored by Senator Allen) is designed to make voting more convenient and accessible. As part of the VCA, the following changes will be implemented:

- All voters will receive their ballot by mail.
- Voters can fill out their ballot at home and return it 1) via mail, 2) via a Ballot Dropbox or 3) in-person at **any** Vote Center in their county.
- Voters with disabilities may use their own accessible technology to mark their ballot at home.
- Voters can vote in person at a Vote Center for up to 11 days -- even on the weekends.
- Vote Center staff will be available to provide assistance in multiple languages and to help voters with disabilities.

In 2018, Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento and San Mateo counties will implement the VCA. All counties may choose to participate in the VCA starting in 2020.

What Voters Need to Know

In 2018, **Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento and San Mateo counties** are the only counties conducting their elections under the new VCA model. Voters will have **3 choices** for how to vote.



VOTE-BY-MAIL

You can mail your ballot as soon as you receive it.



BALLOT DROPBOX

You can drop off your ballot at any secure Ballot Dropbox as soon as you receive it. No postage is required at Ballot Dropboxes.



VOTE CENTER

You can vote in person by visiting any Vote Center in your county. All Vote Centers will be open for at least 4 days: from Saturday, June 2 through Tuesday, June 5. Some Vote Centers will be open for 11 days starting Saturday, May 26. At every Vote Center you can:

- Vote in person.
- Register and vote the same day, all the way up through Election Day.
- Drop off your completed ballot.
- Vote with an accessible voting machine.
- Get help and voting materials in multiple languages.

Same Day Voter Registration and the Voter's Choice Act

All Vote Centers offer Same Day Registration and early voting. Voters can visit any Vote Center in their county to register and vote.

Voter Education Resources

Future of California Elections launched the Voter's Choice California Project to support communities implementing the Voter's Choice Act. There are local implementation hubs in each of the five Voter's Choice Act counties, Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento and San Mateo. Email vcc@futureofcaelections.org to get more information.

Visit VotersChoice.org to access open source voter education resources such as a fact sheet, sample text for materials, a Power Point and translated information.

The Secretary of State's Office developed a short PSA video explaining the Voter's Choice Act. Watch the video at <https://youtu.be/8qfcejXjIQ0>

Additional voter education materials developed by the Office the Secretary of State are available at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voters-choice-act/vca-toolkits/>

Voter Pre-registration for 16 and 17-Year-Olds

Pre-register at 16. Vote at 18.

How it Works

Eligible 16 and 17-year-olds in California can pre-register to vote today and their registration will become active once they turn 18 years old.

Pre-registration of 16 and 17-year-olds was enacted in 2014 (SB 113, authored by Senator Jackson) and became effective once California certified its statewide voter registration database in September 2016.

Who is Eligible?

Any 16 or 17-year-old who is:

- A U.S. Citizen and California resident
- Not currently in prison or on parole for a felony conviction
- Not found to be mentally incompetent by a court

What Voters Need to Know

If you are an eligible 16 or 17-year-old, you have 3 options to pre-register:



ONLINE: Anyone who meets the eligibility requirements can fill out the application online at www.registertovote.ca.gov/

If you have a California driver's license or ID you can submit the form online. If, however, you do not have a driver's license or ID then you will need to print the application, or have your county election official send you a copy, and mail it in.



BY PAPER: Pre-registration is available on paper registration forms and can be used by anyone. Applications are available at any county elections office, the DMV, or many other government offices. Contact your county office to have an application mailed to you or call the Secretary of State's toll-free voter hotline at (800) 345-VOTE.



IN PERSON AT THE DMV: 16 and 17-year-olds will be pre-registered to vote at the DMV when completing eligible transactions, as part of California's Motor Voter program.

You will receive a postcard confirmation in the mail notifying you that your pre-registration application was received and processed.

Strategies for Reaching Young People

In our increasingly digital world, it's most effective to reach young people online with clear, actionable resources. Here are a few tips:

- Use social media platforms and leverage authentic messengers to distribute the call-to-action beyond your existing audience.
- Build on the national narratives and connect them to local issues and races with a direct call to pre-register.
- Utilize SMS to connect (i.e. send an SMS to every voter once they turn 18).
- Integrate your efforts into events they're already attending (like a concert!).
- Cultivate an ongoing relationship outside of Election Day.

Visit the California Secretary of State website for additional voter education resources on pre-registration <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/pre-register-16-vote-18/>