

2020 Presidential General Election Frequently Asked Questions

Voting is changing due to the ongoing pandemic and it is important to have clear and consistent messaging in voter education and outreach materials. This resource was developed to support the election officials and nonprofit partners of the FOCE network. You can access PDF versions in both English and Spanish that will allow you to create a customizable document for use by your organization at futureofcaelections.org.

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About Future of California Elections

Future of California Elections is a network of election officials, civil rights organizations, reform advocates and civic engagement partners all working together to modernize elections and expand participation. Since 2011, FoCE has convened the elections field to collaborate and translate policy reform into policy practice by promoting best practices in election administration and the voter experience. Each election cycle, our goal is to ensure voters are informed and empowered to cast their ballot.

The 2020 Presidential Election presents the biggest challenge to elections yet. The threat of COVID-19 is changing elections. To support our network of partners we have prepared voter education materials. All of our resources are peer reviewed and research based. In the coming weeks we will roll out FAQs, fact sheets, reports, videos and social media graphics to aid public education efforts on the changes to voting this November. Learn more at futureofcaelections.org

Voting in the Presidential Election

Is California having a Presidential Election on November 3?

Yes. Federal law sets the first Tuesday after November 1 as Election Day for all federal general elections, including President. The 2020 Presidential Election is on Tuesday, November 3, with the opportunity to vote a few days earlier in many counties. This election, California voters with an active registration status will automatically be sent a ballot in the mail but will have options for voting in-person or returning their ballot by mail or at a drop-box. Contact your [elections office](#) to learn more about voting in your county and to check your registration status or visit voterstatus.sos.ca.gov

How is voting changing because of the pandemic?

Due to the pandemic, election officials are finding ways to make voting safe, secure, and accessible for everyone by sending every California voter with an active registration a ballot in the mail, all while offering several options for casting a ballot.

As a registered voter, you can choose to vote in-person, to return your ballot by mail, to drop it off at a voting location or drop box, or to have a trusted person return your ballot for you. Ballots will be mailed to the address listed with your county elections office. Check that your voter status and address are current at voterstatus.sos.ca.gov

Many counties are offering early in-person voting, including voting on a weekend and expanded hours. Contact your [elections office](#) to learn more about voting in your county.

When visiting a voting location, you are encouraged to wear a face covering and to maintain physical distancing, as indicated in public health guidelines. Follow the posed instructional signs and any indications provided by staff. All voters are guaranteed the right to vote and will be assisted.

Getting ready to vote

How do I register to vote?

Register to vote online at Registertovote.ca.gov. You can also contact your [elections office](#) to request a paper registration form.

In California, you are eligible to register and vote if you are:

- a U.S. citizen living in California
- at least 18-years-old
- registered where you currently live
- not currently in state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony
- not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court

After Oct. 19, 2020 you will be able to register and vote on the same day at a designated location or your [voting place](#). You will be able to vote and your ballot will count once your elections office verifies your registration. This is called Same Day Voter Registration. Learn more by contacting your [elections office](#).

If you are 16 or 17-years-old and meet all the other eligibility requirements above you can pre-register to vote in California. For more information see sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/. You can also learn more about the voting rights for people impacted by the criminal legal system at letmevoteca.org.

How do I check if I am registered to vote?

Check your voter registration at voterstatus.sos.ca.gov or call (800) 345-VOTE (8683). Make sure you are registered to vote at your current address. All California voters with active registrations will automatically be sent a ballot to the address currently on file.

In accordance with California state laws, voters are given an “inactive” status when a county elections office receives returned mail undeliverable without a forwarding address or receives notice that the voter has moved out of state. An inactive voter may restore their active voter status by simply voting in an election, or contacting their [elections office](#).

Under certain circumstances, inactive voters may be removed from the voter registration list if they do not confirm or update their registration, and if they do not vote in two consecutive federal elections after they are made inactive.

What should I do if I moved or changed my address since I last voted?

Update your voter registration online at [Registertovote.ca.gov](https://registertovote.ca.gov) or contact your [elections office](#) to request a paper registration form.

What is the deadline to register to vote?

To receive all of your election materials on time, you should register to vote by October 19. However, you can register and vote all the way up to and on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3. This is called Same Day Registration or Conditional Voter Registration. Your ballot will be processed and counted once your elections office completes the voter registration verification process.

Visit caearlyvoting.sos.ca.gov for a list of early voting locations where you can complete the Same Day Voter Registration Process. If your county is hosting vote centers, you can visit any vote center in the county to get assistance right through Election Day. If your county is hosting polling locations, contact your [county elections office](#) to learn where to register and vote on Election Day.

If you are not registered to vote and cannot leave your house to go to a voting location, contact your county elections office to ask how you register and vote remotely by using “Remote Accessible Vote by Mail.”

Receiving your ballot in the mail

Why did I get a ballot in the mail when I did not request one?

The California Legislature passed new laws, Senate Bill 423 and Assembly Bill 860, to ensure all voters have the option to vote through the ongoing pandemic. The new laws require that every California voter with an active registration automatically receive their ballot in the mail all while ensuring election offices maintain options for voting in-person, voting by mail, or dropping a ballot off at a drop box or voting location.

Ballots will be sent in early October. Sign up to be notified of the status of your ballot at california.ballottrax.net/voter. Contact your [elections office](#) to learn more about voting in your county. Select your language preference for election materials at <https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>

How do I return my ballot?

If you are a registered to vote, you will automatically receive a ballot in the mail for the 2020 Presidential Election. Fill out the ballot, then seal, date and sign the envelope. You do not need a stamp. Simply return your ballot by mail, drop the ballot off at any clearly marked ballot drop box or at any voting location, or have a trusted person return your ballot for you.

You can return your ballot at any time and no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day. Ballots sent by mail will be counted if postmarked by Election Day and received within 17 days after Election Day. If planning to return your ballot by mail, send it in as soon as you can.

Sign up to track your ballot at california.ballottrax.net/voter

How do I check the address of where I am registered to vote?

Check your voter registration at voterstatus.sos.ca.gov or call (800) 345-VOTE (8683). Make sure that you are registered to vote at your current address. All California registered voters will automatically receive their ballot in the mail at the address currently on file.

Will my vote count if I use the ballot sent to me in the mail?

Yes. Your ballot will count if you have signed the envelope and if you return it by Election Day. Ballots sent by mail must be postmarked by Election Day and received no later than 17 days after Election Day. The last day to return ballots at a drop box or voting location is 8 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3.

Sign up to track your ballot at california.ballottrax.net/voter

How can I confirm my ballot was received and counted?

Contact your elections office to confirm your ballot was counted.

You can also sign up for automatic notifications on the status of your ballot at california.ballottrax.net/voter. You will be able to stop, start and schedule text or email notifications on your ballot status.

Voting in-person

Will I be able to vote in-person?

Yes, all California counties, except for Alpine, Plumas and Sierra, will offer the opportunity to vote in-person. Find the address of your local voting location at sos.ca.gov/elections/polling-place/

In some counties you may be able to vote early and through extended hours. Contact your [elections office](#) to learn more about voting in our county.

When visiting a voting location, you are encouraged to wear a face covering and to maintain physical distancing, as indicated in public health guidelines. Follow the posted instructional signs and any indications provided by staff. All voters are guaranteed the right to vote and will be assisted.

Will voting in-person be different?

When voting in-person voters are encouraged to follow all public health guidelines, including wearing face coverings and maintaining physical distance from others. Follow all signage and instructions offered from election workers to check-in and vote your ballot.

Election officials are taking great steps to ensure public safety through the pandemic. You can read the Memorandum on guidance under COVID-19 for the General Election here elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/ccrov/pdf/2020/july/20154jl.pdf

What assistance can I receive at a voting location?

You can visit a voting location to replace a ballot, receive election materials in a supported language for your county, vote on accessible technology, and get your “I voted” sticker. You will also be able to register to vote all the way up to and on Election Day, this is called Same Day Registration. If your county is hosting vote centers you can register and vote at any location in your county. If your county is hosting polling places that are linked to your home address, contact your [elections office](#) to learn where you can register and vote on the same day.

Voting early

Can I return my mail ballot early?

Yes, please do!

No postage is needed to return your ballot. Seal your ballot and sign the envelope. Return it by mail or drop it off at any drop box location. Contact your [elections office](#) to find drop box locations.

All ballots must be postmarked by Election Day and be received within 17 days after Election Day.

You can also return your ballot to any early voting location in your county or have a trusted person drop it off for you.

Can I vote early in-person?

Yes, please do!

Many counties will open early voting locations and offer extended hours. Contact your [elections office](#) to find a location to vote early.

Voting from home for voters with disabilities

What is Remote Accessible Vote by Mail?

A remote accessible vote-by-mail ballot allows voters with disabilities to vote at home using their own assistive technology to mark their ballot. For the 2020 Presidential Election, remote accessible vote-by-mail will be available to all voters. Any voter can print, mark and return their ballot in the provided envelope. Contact your county [elections office](#) to ask how you can vote using remote accessible vote-by-mail or other options.

Learn more about remote accessible vote by mail at www.disabilityrightsca.org/publications/many-voters-with-disabilities-can-vote-by-mail-privately-and-independently#

Voting for people with a criminal history

Can I vote if I have a criminal history?

Yes! You can vote if you are in county jail:

Serving a misdemeanor sentence (a misdemeanor never affects your right to vote)

As a condition of probation (misdemeanor or felony)

Awaiting trial

On probation, mandatory supervision, post-release community supervision, or federal supervised release

Finished with parole

Learn more about the voting rights for people impacted by the criminal legal system at letmevote.ca.org

Receiving translated election materials

Where can I find translated election materials?

The translation of election materials in each county is determined by federal and state law. Contact your [elections office](#) to learn the languages for which assistance is available in your county.

For California, federal law requires voter information and assistance in Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai and Vietnamese. State law requires translated materials in the federally identified languages as well as Bengali, Burmese, Gujurati, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Mien, Mongolian, Nepali, Punjabi, Tamil, Telegu, and Urdu.

You can find voter information on the California Secretary of State website for the federally covered languages: [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [Hindi](#), [Japanese](#), [Khmer](#), [Korean](#), [Tagalog](#), [Thai](#) or [Vietnamese](#). Additionally, you can find voter hotlines for these languages at sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/voting-california/voter-hotlines

To automatically receive translated election materials, select your language preference when you register to vote registertovote.ca.gov or update your voter registration at voterstatus.sos.ca.gov

How do I get a ballot in a language other than English?

To receive translated ballot and election materials, select your language preference when you register to vote registertovote.ca.gov or update your voter registration at voterstatus.sos.ca.gov
You may also contact your [elections office](#) to request a translated ballot.

Getting assistance and information

What are my rights as a voter?

The Voter Bill of Rights is available in English and other languages at sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-bill-rights

You have the following rights:

The right to vote if you are a registered voter. You are eligible to vote if you are:

- a U.S. citizen living in California
- at least 18 years old
- registered where you currently live
- not currently in state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony
- not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court

The right to vote if you are a registered voter even if your name is not on the list.

You will vote using a provisional ballot. Your vote will be counted if elections officials determine that you are eligible to vote.

The right to vote if you are still in line when the polls close.

The right to cast a secret ballot without anyone bothering you or telling you how to vote.

The right to get a new ballot if you have made a mistake, if you have not already cast your ballot. You can:

- **Ask an elections official at a polling place** for a new ballot,
- **Exchange your vote-by-mail ballot** for a new one at an elections office, or at your polling place, or
- **Vote using a provisional ballot.**

The right to get help casting your ballot from anyone you choose, except from your employer or union representative.

The right to drop off your completed vote-by-mail ballot at any polling place in California.

The right to get election materials in a language other than English if enough people in your voting precinct speak that language.

The right to ask questions to elections officials about election procedures and watch the election process. If the person you ask cannot answer your questions, they must send you to the right person for an answer. If you are disruptive, they can stop answering you.

The right to report any illegal or fraudulent election activity to an elections official or the Secretary of State's office.

Where can I go if I have questions about completing my ballot materials?

Contact your elections office at sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices

How do I vote if I get sick?

Every voter in California will automatically be sent a ballot in the mail, even if they do not request one. You can mark your vote by mail ballot and return it by mail. No postage is necessary. Remember to seal and sign your ballot envelope.

If you cannot return it by mail, you can designate a trusted person to return your ballot on your behalf. Remember to seal and sign your ballot envelope. Additionally, you will need to fill out the authorization section found on the outside of your ballot envelope before it's returned by someone else.

You may also request a remote accessible vote-by-mail ballot to access your ballot at home. Contact your elections office to learn more.

What is on my ballot?

In the Nov. 3, 2020 General Election, you can vote for:

- President
- Candidates for U.S. Congress and the California State Legislature
- Several proposed laws for California
- Other local candidates and proposed laws, depending on where you live

To learn more about the candidates and issues on your ballot visit votersedge.org/ca

When will California have final election results?

California election laws help ensure every vote gets counted, and this takes time. For example, election officials must give vote-by-mail voters with a missing or messy signature an opportunity to provide a clear signature. Additionally, given postal delays due to the pandemic, vote-by-mail ballots that are postmarked by Election Day or earlier will be counted if received up to 17 days after Election Day. Finally, California has more voters than any other state in the nation, and it takes time to accurately process this large number of ballots.