



You choose **when, where, and how** to vote
A Project of Future of California Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated December 7, 2017

1. How will the new voting process work?

Every registered voter will receive a ballot in the mail one month before the election. Voters will have three options: (1) return their ballot by mail postmarked no later than Election Day, (2) place it in one of the secure dropboxes located throughout their county, or (3) vote in person at a vote center.

At vote centers—which will replace polling places—you can drop off your ballot or request a replacement ballot and vote in person. You also may register to vote and cast a ballot the same day. Professional staff will be trained to support all voters, including those with disabilities and those who may need language assistance. All vote centers will be open from the Saturday before Election Day through Election Day at 8 p.m. Some will be open a full 11 days, including the two weekends before Election Day.

2. Will vote centers be open on the weekends?

Yes. All vote centers will be open the weekend before Election Day, and some will be open for two weekends.

3. What if I lose my ballot or make a mistake?

You can visit a vote center and request a replacement ballot.

4. What is a dropbox?

A dropbox is a secure, locked structure where voters may deliver their ballots from the time they receive them by mail up to 8 p.m. on Election Day. Election officials will place dropboxes in convenient, accessible locations, including places close to public transportation routes. Voters are encouraged to recommend potential dropbox locations to election officials.

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Future of California Elections 1000 North Alameda Street, Suite 240, Los Angeles, CA 90012
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5. Can I vote at any vote center?

Eligible voters can use any vote center in the county in which they live, so long as that county is participating in the Voter's Choice Act. They may also use any dropbox in the county.

6. Why can't we use my polling place?

In some cases, former polling places will be used as vote centers. However, many former polling places will no longer be in use. Polling places under the VCA must be available for 4 to 11 days and meet other requirements. Many traditional polling places may not be available, accessible, or meet other requirements under the VCA.

7. What if I've moved since the last time I registered to vote?

You might not receive a ballot in the mail, but you may still vote. Visit any vote center in your county, and you will be able to register at your new address and vote.

8. What if I'm not registered to vote?

You will not receive a ballot in the mail, but if you are [eligible to vote](#), you may still do so. Visit any vote center in your county to register and vote the same day.

9. How will the vote centers look and feel?

Vote centers will be well-organized, professional, and accommodate voters with disabilities.

10. Who decides where the vote centers and dropboxes will be placed? Which criteria will be used?

The county elections office will decide where to place vote centers and drop boxes based on [14 criteria](#) outlined in state law. These include considering where the population lives, access to public transit and parking, how frequently a community votes by mail, and accessibility for people with disabilities. Additionally, they must consider which sites are available for up to 11 continuous days of voting. Community input is also important. Counties will want to hear from a wide variety of local residents to ensure every community has access to the polls.

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11. Will vote centers be accessible to people with disabilities?

Yes, all vote centers will be accessible to people with disabilities. Counties participating in the VCA also are required to create a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC) if they do not have one already. A VAAC is comprised of voters with disabilities and is integral during the planning process to make voting accessible in the transition to a vote center model. Please contact your county's registrar of voter if you are interested in joining the VAAC.

12. What about voters who speak languages other than English? Will they be able to use the vote centers?

Yes, vote centers will accommodate voters with limited English proficiency. Vote centers will have well-trained staff at every location prepared to support voters with translated voting materials in languages required by law. To the greatest extent possible, counties will aim to have multilingual staff and volunteers available to help voters at vote centers.

13. I don't have a car. How will I get to a vote center?

Participating counties are required to make efforts to ensure vote centers are accessible by public transit. Election officials will use data on bus and train routes as well as input from community members. They want to learn from local voters where you think it would be most convenient for those using public transportation to vote. Additionally, all voters have the options of returning their ballots by mail or in the dropboxes we will place throughout the county.

14. Are there going to be long lines at the vote centers?

Because this is a new system, the answer is not certain. However, lines at vote centers are not expected to be long. In fact, they may be shorter than lines at current polling places because voting will be spread over many more days. In their planning, county officials will consider factors that affect wait times, such as the length of the ballot and the types of equipment being used. Also, new features of vote centers will speed up the process. For example, counties will use computers to check people in instead of paper registration rolls.

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15. Who made the decision to switch to this new process?

State legislators and the Secretary of State designed the Voter's Choice Act with extensive input from community groups that represented a wide range of California voters. The law provides 14 counties the opportunity to try out the VCA first. If a county's election official and board of supervisors decide to implement the new model, the county's elections office is required to involve the public in deciding the details of how to implement the new law, such as where dropboxes and vote centers should be located.

16. Will this make it harder for me to vote in person?

Most voters will have to travel farther than in previous elections to reach a vote center where they can vote in person. However, in many other respects, the law makes it easier to vote:

- You get to choose when you vote. Vote centers will be open four to 11 days, including on the weekends.
- You can vote at any vote center in our county, which means you can vote where you work, where you go to school, or where you run errands.
- You will be supported by well-trained professional staff.
- You can register to vote or update your registration at a vote center.
- You will automatically receive a vote-by-mail ballot and can use it to vote anytime in the month before the election.

17. Is this an attempt to disenfranchise voters?

No. In fact, the VCA may increase voter turnout. The law is modeled after a similar program in Colorado. When Colorado made the switch, voter turnout increased significantly. Lawmakers hope California will have a similar outcome. Still, it is very important that elections officials and community organizations ensure voters know about the new system. This is part of the reason why Voter's Choice California was created, to identify and engage diverse partners who can educate voters and promote participation within their communities.

18. Why can't I vote close to home?

One of the VCA's foreseeable challenges will be transitioning away from traditional polling places. However, a substantial number of improvements will be gained: more voting days, the flexibility to vote anywhere in the county, automatic vote-by-mail ballots, increased accessible options for people with disabilities, and more.

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19. Why will I be mailed a vote-by-mail ballot when I didn't ask for one?

State lawmakers designed the Voter's Choice Act to increase voter turnout and make voting more convenient. One convenience for voters in participating counties is no longer needing to request a vote-by-mail ballot. If you don't want to vote by mail, you may visit a vote center and ask to vote in person.

20. Will I need to show photo identification at the vote center?

California voters are not required to show identification at their polling place. However, if you are a newly registered voter, you may be asked to show identification the first time you vote, per federal law. Acceptable forms of identification include a copy of a recent utility bill, the sample ballot booklet you received from your county elections office, or another document sent to you by a government agency. Other examples include your passport, driver license, official California identification card, or student identification card. For more information on identification to use when you vote for the first time check [the complete list](#) or call the Secretary of State's toll-free voter hotline at (800) 345-VOTE (8683).

Please note that every individual has the right to cast a provisional ballot even if he or she does not provide documentation.

21. Could this make it easier for people to commit voter fraud?

No. The Voter's Choice Act vastly improves protections against potential voter fraud:

- When a voter uses a vote center, county officials will verify in the statewide voter database that no other votes have been cast by that voter.
- The VCA nearly eliminates the need for provisional ballots, which also enhances security.
- Voters' signatures at vote centers will be captured electronically and compared to records in the event of a challenge to their eligibility.
- Vote-by-mail ballots also require voter signatures which must match official records, and the use of vote-by-mail will increase.
- Vote centers will be staffed by trained professionals with strong knowledge of the law and proper voting procedures.
- The Voter's Choice Act requires the use of new voting equipment with enhanced security standards.

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22. Will the dropboxes be secure?

Yes. Dropboxes must be secure and locked.

23. Will the Voter's Choice Act cost taxpayers more money?

Some counties will need additional resources to purchase new equipment necessary to participate in the Voter's Choice Act, such as secure dropboxes. But over time, counties should save a considerable amount of money because they will need to purchase and maintain fewer voting machines.

24. How might the Voter's Choice Act affect political campaigns?

The Voter's Choice Act will improve the capacity of campaigns to target and track voters:

- All voters will receive vote-by-mail ballots at the same time, enabling greater predictability and consistency in campaign calendars.
- Campaigns will be able to access real-time data from vote centers to learn who has cast their ballots.
- The Voter's Choice Act should nearly eliminate the use of provisional ballots, which will provide campaigns with more visible data on voter patterns and behavior.
- With fewer sites reporting and few provisional ballots, participating counties should be able to provide election results more quickly.

25. Is my county switching to the Voter's Choice Act?

Fourteen counties were authorized to participate in the Voter's Choice Act starting in 2018: Calaveras, Inyo, Madera, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sacramento, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Shasta, Sierra, Sutter, and Tuolumne. Five counties have chosen to participate: Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento, and San Mateo. The other authorized counties have decided not to participate in 2018.

California's 44 other counties are authorized to make the switch starting in 2020. Officials in each county will decide whether to adopt the Voter's Choice Act model.

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