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## Voter FAQs

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Election administration in the United States is highly decentralized with each state having a unique set of laws that govern voting procedures. Federal law provides some minimums to which the states must adhere. Therefore, the best source of practical registration and voting information is your local elections office.

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website and to find your local elections office.

Additional Voter FAQs:

- [National Association of State Election Directors \(NASED\)](#)
- [National Association of Secretaries of State \(NASS\)](#)

## **Voter Registration**

### **How do I register to vote?**

In all states except North Dakota, you need to be registered to vote to participate in an election. Eligibility requirements vary by state, but generally to register to vote, you must be:

- A U.S. citizen
- At least 18 years old by Election Day
- Meet certain residency requirements

You can register to vote in-person, by mail, and in many states online. If you are not already registered or need to update your registration, make sure to do so by your state's deadline. Several states allow voters to register on Election Day, but other states have a deadline up to 30 days before the election.

Some states may allow people who are under 18 to pre-register to vote, so they can vote as soon as they are eligible.

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://www.eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website to find more information on registration requirements. You can also download and print the National Mail Voter Registration Form. This form can be used to register to vote in every state except North Dakota, New Hampshire, and Wyoming, and it is available in 21 languages. To download this form, go to: <https://www.eac.gov/voters/national-mail-voter-registration-form>

## **How do I change my political party affiliation?**

The process to change your political party affiliation is usually the same as the process to register to vote.

Some states require you to declare your party affiliation when registering, while others do not track your party affiliation. If your state tracks party affiliation, there will be a question on your voter registration form for you to declare your political party affiliation.

Some states require voters to register with a party affiliation to vote in primary elections. In general elections (which typically take place in November), you can vote for any candidate you prefer, regardless of party affiliation.

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://www.eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website where you can find more information.

## **How do I update my voter information (name, address, political party, etc.)?**

The process to update your voter registration is usually the same as the process to register to vote.

Update your voter registration information if:

- You move
- You change your name
- You want to change your political party affiliation
- You haven't voted in the past four years

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://www.eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website to find your options for registering to vote. You can also submit a paper [National Mail Voter Registration Form](#) to your local elections office. This form can be used to re-register to vote in every state except North Dakota, New Hampshire, and Wyoming, and it is available in 21 languages.

## **How do I check my voter registration information?**

Each state makes its own voting rules, including how to confirm your registration. You can usually check your voter registration information online or by contacting your local elections office. If you are already registered to vote, it's important to check to make sure your voter registration information is current and accurate, especially if you have recently moved or

changed your name. Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website to get the most detailed and up to date information for where you live.

### **How do I cancel my voter registration?**

States and local jurisdictions have different options for voters who wish to cancel their voter registration. If you are registered to vote and would like to cancel or withdraw your voter registration, your local elections office can assist you. Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website where you can find a directory of local elections offices.

### **How do I report a registered voter who doesn't live at my address anymore or a registered voter who has died?**

If you receive election mail for someone who no longer lives at your address or who has died, contact your local elections office to let them know.

Maintaining up-to-date voter registration lists is critical for election administration. All states take steps to keep voter registration lists current, but sometimes elections offices don't know that someone has moved or died. Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website where you can find a directory of local elections offices.

## **Ways to Vote**

### **How do I vote in-person on Election Day?**

All states offer in-person options for voters to cast their ballot on Election Day. In some states, voters need to go to a specific location to vote on Election Day, while others provide vote centers where any voter in the jurisdiction can cast their ballot.

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website to find your polling location, the hours, and if you need to bring anything (such as an ID) with you to vote.

### **How do I vote early?**

Many states allow voters to cast a ballot in-person before Election Day. In some states, early voting may involve casting a ballot at the local elections office, while in others you may vote at a polling location similar to voting on Election Day. To find out if your state offers in-person voting before Election Day and where you can vote, visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote), select your state or territory, and click the link for 'Absentee/Mail and/or Early Voting Information.'

### **How do I vote by mail?**

Every state has their own rules on who can vote by mail. Some states require an excuse to vote by mail, some allow anyone to request a mail ballot, and others automatically send all voters a ballot in the mail. Examples of excuses may include illness, injury, disability, over a certain age, traveling outside of your community on Election Day, being a college student away from home, or serving in the military. If you request a mail ballot, make sure to review the deadline to return your ballot in time for it to be counted (including the estimated time for mailing).

If you have received an absentee or mail ballot, carefully read the instructions on how and when to return the mail ballot.

- Fill out all the information requested on the return envelope. Some states require a notary or witness signature on the envelope when returning a mail ballot.
- Unless your return envelope says the postage is pre-paid, be sure there is enough postage on the return envelope before putting your ballot in the mail.
- Per [USPS recommendation](#), mail your ballot back at least one week prior to the state deadline to make sure it reaches the elections office in time.
- Depending on your jurisdiction's laws and procedures, you may be able to return your mail ballot in person or by a drop box in your jurisdiction.

Many states allow voters to track the status of their mail ballots online.

Note: Election officials take your privacy seriously, and multiple steps are taken to ensure that your votes remain private. Election officials keep a record of whether you cast a ballot, but they are never able to tell how you voted.

You can find more information about voting by mail in your state, including information about mail ballot tracking if offered in your state, at [eac.gov/vote](http://eac.gov/vote).

### **Accessibility for Voting by Mail**

Check with your state or local elections office for information about accessible options for requesting, marking, and returning your mail ballot. For more information about accessibility in the voting by mail process, please see [Best Practices: Accessibility for Voting by Mail](#).

### **How do drop boxes work?**

Some states allow voters to return their mail/absentee ballots in a secure drop box. Drop boxes eliminate the need for return postage because they allow voters to return their ballot directly to election officials, instead of using the postal service. This can be useful for voters who may not have enough time to return their ballot through the mail.

To vote using a drop box:

- Place your ballot inside the return ballot envelope and fill out all the information requested on the return envelope. Some states require a notary or witness signature on the envelope when returning a mail ballot.

- Return your ballot to a drop box in your community. (Note: Make sure the drop box is clearly marked as belonging to the county, city, or township in which you live.)
- If using a drop box, make sure to return your mail ballot no later than the close of polls on Election Day.

Each state has its own rules and requirements for securing drop boxes. Often, these requirements include specific locks or seals, video surveillance, and chain of custody requirements. Some states and localities only place drop boxes in government buildings or secure designated locations in a jurisdiction. Only election officials (often bipartisan teams) are authorized to collect ballots once they are placed in a drop box. To learn more about how election officials secure drop boxes, see [guidance](#) issued by the EAC and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA) on effectively using and securing drop boxes.

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website to confirm whether drop boxes are available in your area.

## **I am a U.S. citizen, but I live in another country. How do I vote?**

Military and overseas voters and their families have unique challenges to voting. Among other protections, federal law requires that (1) military and overseas voters can register and receive a ballot electronically, and (2) a ballot is mailed no later than 45 days before federal elections. Many states have additional protections for military and overseas voters for all elections, not just federal elections.

State law will determine residency requirements for overseas citizens to vote in state and federal elections. The [Federal Voting Assistance Program](#) (FVAP) has resources for service members, their families, and overseas citizens who wish to vote. Voters can use FVAP's [Voting Assistance Guide](#) to find more information about voting in their state, and how to request and return their ballot.

## **What are my rights as a voter?**

Each state has its own set of laws that govern how elections are run, but there are several federal laws that protect voting rights for eligible U.S. citizens. The 1965 Voting Rights Act prohibits discrimination and requires jurisdictions to allow voting assistance in all but a couple of circumstances, and the Help America Vote Act provides that (1) voters must be able to vote privately and independently, (2) they must be given the opportunity to change or correct their ballot before it is cast, and (3) allows voters to vote a provisional or fail-safe ballot.

## **Your Rights When Voting**

Federal election laws help protect your voting rights and the election process. Generally, voters have the right to:

- Vote if they are still in line when the polls close
- Ask for another ballot if they make a mistake

- Ask for a provisional ballot if they are not on the voter list at their polling location
- Ask for language assistance from a poll worker if they need help reading or understanding how to vote
- Not be intimidated or harassed while voting

### **Voting with a Disability**

Federal law also provides protection for voters with disabilities. Specifically, voters with disabilities have the right to:

- Vote privately and independently
- Have an accessible polling location with voting machines for voters with disabilities

Voters may either:

- Seek assistance from workers at their polling location who have been trained to use the accessible voting machine, or
- Bring someone to help them vote

Voters may request information about voting aids, voting assistance, and absentee ballot procedures that are available.

For more information, visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) or contact the U.S. Election Assistance Commission by phone at 866-747-1471 or by email at [listen@eac.gov](mailto:listen@eac.gov). Information about the Americans with Disabilities Act is available at [ada.gov](https://ada.gov).

### **Additional Resources**

The best source of information for your state's voter registration and voting laws is your state or local elections office. Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website.

You can find more information about federal laws on Civil Rights Division's website [justice.gov/crt/voting-section](https://justice.gov/crt/voting-section).

For a list of federal voting rights laws and protections, as well as other voting information, visit [usa.gov/voting](https://usa.gov/voting) and [vote.gov](https://vote.gov).

## **How Elections Work**

## **Who is in charge of elections in my state?**

Each state has a chief election official, who has an oversight or advisory role over state and federal elections. However, elections are usually administered at the county level, though in some states cities or townships run elections. No two states administer elections in the same way, and there can be variations within a single state. Elections can be run by a single individual or department, a board or commission of elections, or a combination of two or more entities.

Election administration in America is highly decentralized. There are more than 10,000 election jurisdictions in the U.S. The size of these jurisdictions varies, with the smallest towns having only a few hundred registered voters and the largest jurisdiction in the country with over 5 million. Local election officials also rely on trained poll workers (often bipartisan) who assist voters during early voting and on Election Day. Through its clearinghouse function, the EAC provides guidance and best practices to assist election officials, but the EAC does not have regulatory oversight of elections.

Find out more about who runs elections in your state, by visiting [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote).

## **What does a poll worker do? How do I volunteer?**

Poll workers are essential to running elections. Poll workers are responsible for opening the polls on election morning; checking in voters and issuing ballots; assisting voters; implementing election laws and procedures; maintaining the chain of custody of ballots, voting equipment, and supplies; closing the polls; and reconciling the number of voters checked in with the number of ballots cast at their location.

Typically, poll workers are trained by local election officials and work in teams (often bipartisan). Poll workers swear an oath to uphold election laws and protect the security of the election.

Contact your local elections office or visit [helpamericavote.gov](https://helpamericavote.gov) to find information about how to sign up as a poll worker in your state.

## **Who can observe the election?**

Election observers, sometimes called “poll watchers,” are members of the public that may observe steps in the election process. Each state has its own laws and procedures on who can observe the election but generally, election observers may be members of organizations such as a political party or nonpartisan group, candidate representatives, international observers, exit polling groups, academics or relevant federal and state agencies.

The role of a poll watcher is to observe and monitor the election, without violating voter privacy or disrupting the election. The rules that govern poll watchers vary by state. Contact your local elections office for more information about the rights and responsibilities of poll watchers in your community. Find out more about election observation in your state by visiting [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote).

## **Where do I find election results?**

Preliminary election results are transmitted by local jurisdictions to state election officials after the polls close on Election Day. Unofficial results are then posted on the state's election website and reported to the media. Those preliminary results may change after Election Day as election officials continue to count all eligible ballots, including provisional ballots, absentee and mail ballots, and ballots cast by military and overseas voters. Once all ballots are counted, reconciled, and certified in what is called a canvass, final results are posted and reported, which may take several days or sometimes weeks.

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://www.eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website for information about state election results.

## **Why do election results change after election night? When are election results final?**

Election officials count as many ballots on election night as possible, but election night results are unofficial and never final. Each state has different rules for when mail, provisional, and military and overseas ballots can be counted. For example, some states require all mail ballots to be received by Election Day. Others allow mail ballots to be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day and received by a certain date.

Once all the ballots have been received, the canvass begins. This process usually involves analyzing vote totals to identify and resolve any discrepancies between the number of voters and the number of ballots cast. Most states also conduct audits to further verify the vote totals are accurate.

Once the canvass (and in many states, audits) has been completed, the election results are certified as final. For more information about election results, canvass and certification, see: <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/election-results-canvass-and-certification>

Some races or contests may be recounted after the certification process because the contest was close or a candidate or interest group requests it. Recounts differ from audits in that every ballot in a contest or a subset of contests in the election is recounted, and the official results of the election may change as a result.

## **Are voting systems secure?**

The security of voting systems is essential to trustworthy elections. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) develops voluntary voting system guidelines (VVSG), which are a set of specifications and requirements, including security and integrity standards, that voting systems must meet in order to receive certification. The EAC also accredits voting labs that test voting systems to these standards. Participation in the EAC testing and certification program is voluntary, but most states use the EAC's testing and certification program. States may also choose to enact stricter requirements for voting systems.

Every state and local jurisdiction utilizes common-sense procedures and tools to safeguard the voting process and ensure its election results can be trusted. Common best practices include using locks, tamper-evident seals, security cameras, system testing before and after elections, audits, and physical and cybersecurity access controls. Each state also has a chief election official who ensures these laws and procedures are strictly followed.

### **Common security measures for voting systems:**

- Purchasing tested and certified voting systems
- Programming all devices according to local laws and regulations
- Testing the accuracy of voting equipment before elections
- Conducting elections with bipartisan poll workers and observers
- Verifying the total number of voted ballots matches the total number of voters
- Auditing the ballots to ensure that the voting equipment counted votes accurately
- Documenting and verifying by at least two (ideally bipartisan) witnesses the transfer of all ballots and voting equipment from one team or place to the next
- Maintaining physical security access controls

Ballots always remain in the custody of the local election officials conducting the election. Ballots are also required to be securely stored after the election so that they can be reviewed as part of an audit or recount. For more information about election security, see: <https://www.eac.gov/voters/election-security>.

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://www.eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website for information about election security in your state.

### **Can I trust the outcome of the election?**

There are many processes and procedures in place to assure the public that the outcome of elections can be trusted. Election officials often receive state training and professional instruction in election administration. Almost every part of the election process requires the participation of two or more trained officials who've sworn an oath to uphold all election laws and protect the security of the election. Election observers, sometimes called "poll watchers," may also be present to monitor or observe the election.

Voting machines, including ballot scanners are tested and certified to [certain accuracy standards](#). Most states require logic and accuracy tests on voting systems prior to each election. In addition to pre-election testing, most states also require audits after every election. During an audit, election officials review paper ballots to confirm the accuracy of the machine count. Audits ensure the ballots were counted as voters intended and that the results of the election are reliable. More information about audits can be found in the EAC report [Election Audits Across the United States](#).

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://www.eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website for information about how ballots are counted in your state.

## **How do election officials prevent someone from voting twice?**

One of the basic tenets of democracy is that each person has only one vote. Election officials take many steps to ensure that voters only cast one ballot in an election, or if a voter casts more than one ballot (i.e., votes a mailed ballot and then attempts to vote in person on Election Day), that only one ballot is counted. To do this, election officials are responsible for maintaining current and accurate voter lists, and many states compare registration and voting records with other states. Election officials keep detailed records of when voters are issued ballots, and whether those ballots are cast.

If a voter's eligibility cannot be verified (e.g., the voter was not on the list of eligible voters, the voter's information was incomplete or not accurate, or the voter had already received a ballot in the mail and was allowed to vote), they may be allowed to vote a provisional or fail-safe ballot. Provisional ballots are kept separate from other ballots and will only be processed and counted if the election official has verified the voter is eligible and has not already voted in the election.

When a voter requests a mail ballot, election officials verify that the request was made by the voter before issuing the ballot. When a ballot is returned to the elections office, officials (often bi-partisan teams) verify the signature or other identifying information on the ballot envelope to make sure it was cast by the voter. If required information is missing or incomplete, or if a signature is required and doesn't match the one on file, the ballot will not be counted. In some cases, the voter may be notified and given an opportunity to correct the issue.

Visit [eac.gov/vote](https://eac.gov/vote) for quick links to your state or territory's elections website for information about how ballots are tracked and counted in your state.