

VOTER FAQs

(Source: US ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION – EAC

<https://www.eac.gov/voters/voter-faqs>)

Voter Registration

Am I eligible to register to vote?

Generally, voters must be U.S. Citizens and at least 18 years old by Election Day. Some states may allow those under 18 to pre-register or register and participate in primary elections if they will be 18 years old before the general election. Additionally, many states require persons to live in the state for a certain period before becoming eligible to register. Use the EAC's Register and Vote in Your State tool to find your state's registration requirements.

How can I register to vote?

States offer several ways to register to vote including in person at your local elections office, by mail, and, in most states, online. Under the National Voter Registration Act, the EAC maintains the National Mail Voter Registration Form, which is an acceptable voter registration form in all states except New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Wyoming. The form and all relevant state instructions can be found [here](#).

Find your options for registering at [Vote.gov](#).

Do I need an ID to register to vote?

The Help America Vote Act creates mandatory minimum standards for states to follow when citizens register to vote for the first time. Most voter registration forms will ask for either a driver's license number or the last four digits of your social security number, but each state has different guidelines to register to vote. Please contact your local election office or [visit your state or local elections website](#) for guidance regarding voter ID requirements in your state.

How do I check to see if I am already registered to vote?

Visit the EAC's [Register and Vote in Your State](#) page, select your state or territory from the drop-down list, and click 'Get Info.' You'll be provided links directly to your state or territory's official website where you can check your registration status.

Remember to check your registration information before your state's voter registration deadline. That could be up to 30 days before the election. This gives you time if you need to re-register or make changes.

Each state makes its own voting rules, including how to confirm your registration. Check with **your state or local election office** to get the most detailed and up-to-date information for where you live.

I have recently moved, am I still eligible to vote?

If you have moved, you need to update your voter registration with your new address—especially if you have moved out of county or state. Contact your local election office to find out how to register or update your address. Many states offer both in person and online registration. Information on states that offer online registration is available at [Vote.Gov](#). You can also submit a paper [national mail voter registration](#) application to your [local elections office](#).

You may need to update your state driver's license or state ID card before the election, if an ID is required to vote and that's the ID you plan to use.

I recently moved to another state, do I need to cancel my voter registration in my previous state of residency?

Be kind to your election official and let them know you've moved. Visit our [Register and Vote in Your State page](#) to select your previous state of residency, and click on the State Election Office Website link

in red. Contact the state you lived in previously for further instructions about cancelling your old voter registration.

I have a primary residence in one state, and a weekend home in another state. Can I register to vote in more than one location?

You may only register to vote in the state that you consider to be your primary place of legal residence. Visit our [Register and Vote in Your State page](#) for links to state election official websites to contact them for further information.

How do I change my political party preference?

Some states require voters to register with a party affiliation to vote in primary elections, while others do not track party affiliation at all. Your state may give you the opportunity to declare your political party affiliation on your voter registration card. If you would like to change your party affiliation, you will need to update your voter registration. Voters can update their party preference by visiting their local election office, finding your state online portal at [Vote.Gov](#), submitting a state voter registration application, or by submitting a paper [national mail voter registration](#) application to their [local elections office](#). There are occasionally restrictions on when you may change your party affiliation during primary election season. Check with your state or local election office for the rules and deadlines on when changing your party affiliation.

Do I have to vote for the party I'm registered with?

In **general** elections, you can vote for whomever you want regardless of party affiliation. But in a primary election or presidential caucus, depending on your state's rules, you may have to vote for the

political party you have registered with. Additionally, in some states you may be asked which party's ballot you want when you go to vote in the primary.

You can check which kind of [primary elections](#) your state has so you'll know if you will be able to vote in a primary or caucus, based on your party affiliation.

When is the deadline to register to vote?

Every state and territory, except North Dakota, requires citizens to register if they want to vote. Depending on where you live, you may have to register to vote up to 30 days prior to an election, or you may have the option to register and vote the same day. Under the Voting Rights Act, voters who moved to a new state within 30 days of a presidential election and for that reason cannot register to vote in the new state must be allowed to vote in-person or by absentee ballot for President and Vice-President in their former state.

Check the EAC's [Register and Vote in Your State](#) tool to find your state's deadline for registering to vote in federal election years. Additionally, you can use the tool to access your state and local election officials' websites to find registration deadline information for non-federal elections.

How can I report the death of a loved one and cancel their voting mail and registration?

Contact your state or county directly. Many states receive periodic notification of deaths from state and local agencies and remove the deceased persons from the voter registration rolls. States may also allow removal after notification of death from a family member. Notice may need to be given in writing, by affidavit, or accompanied by a death certificate.

The contact information for each state is available [here](#).

What safeguards are in place for registration?

The Help America Vote Act requires first-time voters who registered by mail and have not previously voted in a federal election in the state, to present a form of identification to the appropriate state or local election official on or before Election Day.

It is a crime to knowingly complete a voter registration form with false information. Voter registration fraud carries serious penalties, including fines and jail time.

Is my voter registration information public?

Some voter registration information is public information and is often available to political campaigns, researchers, and members of the public, frequently for purchase. Public information is typically limited to your name, address, party affiliation (if any), and voting history (i.e., which elections you voted in, NOT how you voted).

Review the EAC's report on the [Availability of State Voter File and Confidential Information](#) to see what information your state makes public.

Poll Workers

How can I sign up to be a poll worker?

Call your local elections office or visit helpamericavote.gov to find information about how to sign up as a poll worker in your state.

To get the most up to date information about current poll worker requirements, including student poll workers and language assistance, visit your state or territory's elections website. Additionally, the EAC created a [Compendium of State Poll Worker Requirements](#), last updated in 2020, as a framework for understanding who can serve as a poll worker in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories.

What do Poll Workers Do?

Poll workers are essential to the elections process and Election Day is not possible without them. 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) to facilitate the voting process.

Does the EAC have Poll Worker Resources for Election Officials?

The EAC has compiled a variety of [resources](#) election officials can use as they recruit poll workers and plan for Election Day. The resources include highlighting jurisdictions who have won the Clearinghouse Award for "Best Practices in Recruiting, Retaining and Training Poll Workers."

The EAC also established [National Poll Worker Recruitment Day](#) with the goal of encouraging potential poll workers to sign up to Help America Vote in 2020. Even though the day has passed, local election officials can still use the resources and information to help recruit future poll workers.

I sent my application in to sign up as a poll worker but haven't heard back yet. What do I do?

If you have signed up, to be a poll worker but haven't heard from your local election office please be patient as they may still need your help but may need some extra time to respond to you while they are working diligently preparing for the upcoming election.

You may also check with your [local elections office](#) to confirm whether they received your request to be a poll worker.

National Voter Registration Act

Who can use the National Mail Voter Registration Form?

the fifty United States or the District of Columbia may use this form, with the following exceptions:

North Dakota, Wyoming and U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Guam) do not accept this form.

New Hampshire accepts the form only as a request for an absentee ballot.

- Uniformed service members and overseas voters should not use this form to register to vote. For information, please contact the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) at (800) 438-8683. You may also visit www.fvap.gov to access the newest **Federal Post Card Application form**.

Do I need to show identification when I vote if I register using the National Mail Voter Registration Form?

If you are voting for the first time in your state and are registering by mail, Federal Law may require you to show proof of identification the first time you vote. This proof of identification includes the following (or if voting by mail, a COPY of the following):

A current and valid photo identification; OR

A current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or government document that shows your name and address.

Federal law does not require you to show proof of identification at the polling place or when voting by mail if (1) you provided COPIES of the above with your National Mail Voter Registration Form; (2) your voter registration form has been verified by an election official; or (3) you are entitled by federal law to vote by absentee ballot. Please note that individual states may have additional voter identification requirements.

Which part of the National Form do I need to mail in?

Only the one-page application is needed.

What can I do if my registration form is rejected?

If you feel your registration form was unjustly rejected, contact your local election official. You may also contact the voting section of the Department of Justice at (800) 253-3931, or your state's Attorney General's office.

How can I be sure my form was processed, and I'm registered to vote?

After you have submitted your registration form, you may receive a confirmation from your local election office that you are registered. If you do not receive a confirmation, call your local election office before the registration deadline to confirm you are registered.

Can the National Mail Voter Registration Form be photocopied?

Yes. States that accept the National form will allow for copies of the application printed from the computer image on regular paper stock to be submitted.

Can my organization supply just the application and simply provide the instructions separately as hand-outs or on posters?

You may furnish a supply of only the voter registration applications either, printed on card stock according to the FEC specifications, or produced on 8.5' x 11' regular weight paper. Include envelopes with the regular weight applications. The general and state instructions may be photocopied and handed out with each application, or enlarged and posted at the registration site.

I'm organizing a massive voter registration drive. Is there a limit to the number of applications I can copy?

- No. Voter registration groups may make as many copies of the National Mail Voter Registration Form as they would like. Furthermore, there is no limit on the number of completed forms a voter registration group may submit to local election offices. However, voter registration groups should endeavor to institute quality control measures to make sure each completed registration application they deliver to their local election offices is filled in completely and legibly.

The number of Voter Registration Forms that a state distributes is usually at the discretion of the state's chief election official. Many states base the number of forms they distribute on the size of the target population of the proposed registration drive, method of distribution, number of individuals registered by the organization in any previous voter registration drive and a number of other variables.

Can my organization mail the completed forms we receive from our registration drive, or do the applicants need to mail them personally? If we can mail them, do they have to be individually stamped or can they be bundled?

An organization may mail completed Voter Registration Applications to the appropriate election office(s) individually or in a bundle. The Department of Justice interprets the cost of first class postage to fall into the realm of "facilitating" voter registration, and not as an attempt to induce an individual to register to vote by giving something of value, which would be prohibited by the "vote buying" provisions of the Voting Rights Act.

Voting

Where can I vote on Election Day?

Local election offices provide and staff Election Day polling locations. In some states, voters are assigned to vote at a specific location on Election Day, while others provide vote centers where any voter in the jurisdiction can cast their ballot. At the time of registration, you may have received a voter card that identifies your precinct and polling place location. However, prior to Election Day, you should check if your polling location has changed. You may call or email your local election office and they will inform you of the proper polling place. Additionally, most states and local election offices provide polling location information on their websites. Visit the EAC's [Election Day Contact Information](#) page to find your state's polling location information.

Do I need an ID to vote?

The Help America Vote Act requires that first-time voters who registered by mail and have not previously voted in a federal election in the state, to present a form of identification to the appropriate state or local election official before or on Election Day. Additionally, some states require voters to show an identification document each time they vote at the polls. These requirements will be different, depending on where you live.

Find out about [ID requirements where you plan to vote](#).

What do election officials do to ensure deceased individuals are not voting?

Federal and state laws prohibit voter impersonation, including casting a ballot on behalf of a deceased individual. Election officials regularly remove deceased individuals from voter registration rolls based on death records shared by state vital statistics agencies and the Social Security Administration. Additionally, election officials may have the authority to remove deceased voters after review of obituaries and confirmation of death or notification from the family or relatives.

When there is lag between a person's death and their removal from the voter registration list, mail ballots or other official election mail may be delivered to the address of a deceased voter. However, when a ballot is returned, election officials verify the voter is still registered when checking the signature and other identifying information on the return envelope. Death records provide a strong audit trail to identify any illegal attempts to cast ballots on behalf of deceased individuals. Additional election integrity safeguards, including signature matching and information checks, further protect against voter impersonation and voting by ineligible persons.

In some instances, a person may return their mail-in ballot or vote early in-person and then pass away before Election Day. Some states would still count the voter's ballot, while others use procedures to identify and retract such a ballot to exclude it from tabulation.

What are my rights as a voter?

U.S. election laws date back to [Article 1 of the Constitution](#), which gave states the responsibility of overseeing federal elections. 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 example, the Help America Vote Act provides that voters must be able to vote privately and independently, they must be given the opportunity to change or correct their ballot before it is cast and allows voters to vote a provisional or fail-safe ballot. Federal law also provides protections for voters with disabilities, prohibits discrimination, and ensures service members and overseas civilians can vote. For a list of Federal Voting Rights Laws, visit [usa.gov](https://www.usa.gov).

Election Results

Where can I find official election results?

Every two years, the FEC publishes [Federal Elections](#), a compilation of official, certified federal election results. These publications include primary, runoff and general election results for the Senate, the House of Representatives and (when applicable) the President.

For information about state elections, such as Governor, you can find your state elections office to view official election results, [here](#).

For information about local election results, such as county or city office, you can find your local elections office to view official election results, [here](#).

Why do election results change after election night?

The results from the Associated Press and television networks may be based, in part, on unofficial local election results, but they are based on other factors including projected results. These are not local or state official results. Many states, counties, or local jurisdictions provide election results in real time, as ballots are being tabulated and updated into election management systems and election night reporting systems. However, these results are unofficial until all votes have been tallied and reviewed and the election has been formally certified. Since each state has different procedures for voting, ballot tabulation times vary across the country. For example, some states require that all ballots are received by no later than the close of polls on Election Day. Others allow ballots to be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day and received by a certain date.

Additionally, voters in many states have an opportunity to correct issues after Election Day if they were required to vote a “provisional” ballot or there was an error in an absentee or mail ballot that may be cured by the voter prior to final certification. Provisional ballots may be issued to voters who do not have the correct form of ID or were not on a voter list when they vote at the polls. These voters typically can provide information at their local election office after the election for their ballots to be counted, if needed.

Once all ballots are received, and the deadline for fixing any ballot issues has passed, then the results of the election can be formally certified. This pre-certification process typically begins immediately following the election and may run between one or several weeks. As part of the “canvass” (the post-election certification of results), the total number of voters in an election is compared to the total number of ballots cast. Some states may conduct “tabulation audits” (the process of verifying that the totals in a given jurisdiction or contest are correct) during the canvass period.

Some races or contests may also be recounted at some point during the certification process. Recounts differ from audits in that every ballot in the election is recounted, and the official results of the election may change as a result. Typically, a recount is either triggered automatically (because the outcome of a contest falls within a legally required margin), or at the request of a candidate or interest group.

Once the canvass, audits, and any recounts have been completed, the election results are certified as official.

Why does it take so long to count ballots?

The time it takes to count ballots varies greatly across the country because each state has its own unique set of rules and procedures. For example, many voters cast ballots by mail in Arizona, and these ballots are processed as they are received by local elections offices. Other states, like Pennsylvania, do not count absentee ballots until after the polls have closed on Election Day. It is not uncommon for some states to be able to report 100% of their unofficial results within hours of the polls closing on Election Day while others take up to 30 days before final results are available.

Variations in state processes may also mean ballots cast through different methods (e.g., early in-person voting, mail-in voting, and election day voting) are counted and unofficially reported in different orders.

Check with [your state or local election office](#) to get the most detailed and up-to-date information on ballot counting procedures and reporting timelines.

Did my ballot count?

State and local election officials know if you voted, but not how you voted. Your state or local election officials can typically verify whether you participated in a specific election. In many jurisdictions, election officials will maintain a “voter history” file—an electronic record of voters who participated in a particular election. Many states and local election offices make this record available on their

websites. In many cases, if your vote was not counted for some reason, the jurisdiction will inform you by mail or electronic communication.

How do I know my votes were accurately counted?

Nearly all voters in the United States mark ballots on paper, or on devices that create a voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT). Ballots that are marked on paper are typically counted by a scanner or ballot tabulator that reads the individual marks on each ballot. Prior to every election, election officials conduct Logic and Accuracy Testing on the voting equipment to ensure it correctly records votes for every candidate and for or against each issue.

Many states require tabulation audits after every election. During an audit, election officials review the paper record 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.

The paper record of each ballot is also required by law to be maintained for at least 22 months after each federal election. While this paper record can be reviewed, all election officials make great efforts to ensure that all voters can cast a secret ballot. All voters appear on a poll list (a list of individual voters who participated in an election), and they are issued a specific ballot style. However, this ballot becomes anonymous once it is tabulated. Ballots have no identifying information on them, only the selections made by the voter. The secrecy and accuracy of the election is maintained by verifying that the total number of ballots cast matches the number of voters at the election during the post-election canvass process.

Are ballots ever counted overseas?

All ballots are tabulated locally in the jurisdiction that administers the election. Though some voters may live overseas, their ballots must be sent back to their local elections office to be counted. In some jurisdictions, Election Day ballots are tabulated in the polling place and the results sent back to a centralized office and the absentee or mail ballots counted at a centralized office or tabulation center. Election results reported by the media or made available by election officials on election night are always unofficial and ballots themselves always remain with the local election officials.

Accessibility

What are my rights as a voter?

You have the right to:

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

Additionally, you may:

- Seek assistance from workers at your polling place or bring someone of your choice to help you cast a ballot (**Note:** there are a few exceptions. Under federal law, you may not receive voting assistance from your employer or an agent of your union. Additionally, some states have limitations on who or how someone may assist you).
- Request that your local election officials to tell you about any accessible equipment, aids, or procedures that are available to help you vote.

What can I do if I am unable to vote in my polling place on Election Day?

Reach out to your local election official to identify your voting options, including casting an absentee ballot. Many states have options available for you to vote in-person before Election Day, vote by mail, or, in some cases, it may be an option to vote an emergency ballot. Some states require voters to provide a reason for being issued an absentee ballot—if this is the case in your state, being absent from your community, having a disability, or being over a certain age are likely valid reasons to be issued an absentee ballot.

You can find information on alternative voting options for your state using the EAC's [Register and Vote in Your State](#) tool.

Voting By Mail

How can I vote my mail?

Every state has their own rules on who can vote by mail. Some states require an excuse to vote by mail, while other states automatically mail every registered voter a ballot before an election. Examples of excuses may include illness, injury, disability, traveling outside of your residence on Election Day, being college student or serving in the military.

Visit our [Register and Vote in Your State page](#) to select your state of residency and click on the State Election Office Website link in red for further instructions on how to vote by mail where you live.

How do I change my mailing address for mail ballot or absentee ballot delivery, but keep my residential address the same?

Generally, you may provide a mailing address for your absentee or mail ballot request to your local election office. All changes to your voter registration, mailing address or otherwise, need to be made through your local election office or through a state online registration portal. Visit our [Register and Vote in Your State](#) page for more information about registering to vote, updating your voter registration address, and contacting your local election office.

I have a Power of Attorney for a voter and am receiving all of his/her mail at this time. Am I able to receive his mail ballot or absentee ballot as well?

State election laws differ regarding who can assist voters and under what circumstances. Visit our [Register and Vote in Your State page](#) to select the state where the voter resides and contact that local election office for further direction.

How can I return my ballot?

If you have received an absentee or mail ballot, either upon request or in advance of an upcoming election, please carefully read the instructions on the proper return of the ballot and pertinent deadlines. Some states require a notary or witness signature on mail ballots. Your mailed ballot includes a return envelope with your local elections office's address pre-printed on the envelope. Depending on your jurisdiction's laws and procedures, you may have three main ways to return mailed ballots:

- By mail
- By drop box
 - Place your ballot inside the envelope, and sign and date where required.
 - Most states and localities require voters to pay the return postage for mailed ballots.

Add the necessary first-class postage and place your ballot in the mail.

- Review your state's postmark deadline (if any) and, per [USPS recommendation](#), mail

your ballot back at least one week prior to your state's ballot receipt deadline.

- Place your ballot inside the provided envelope, and sign and date where required.
- Return your ballot to a local drop box designated by your jurisdiction. (Note: Make sure you are returning your ballot in a drop box that is clearly marked as belonging

to the county, city, or township in which you live.)

- Make sure to return your ballot during the hours when the drop box is available, and

no later than the close of polls on Election Day.

- In person

- Some states allow you to return an absentee or mailed ballot to a polling place. If so, place your ballot inside the provided envelope, and sign and date where required.

Return your ballot to your local elections' office or polling place, as authorized by your state. (Note: Be sure to check the office's hours. Some jurisdictions may be open to issue or accept ballots for additional weekend or evening hours in the weeks prior to Election Day.)

How do election officials know that I am the one casting my mailed ballot?

Election officials verify each mailed ballot by first, verifying the ballot was received from a voter who was properly issued a ballot, and secondly, making sure that the signature and/or other identifying information on the ballot envelope matches the voter's information on file.

If the signature on a ballot envelope does not match the signature on file, the ballot may be rejected. In some cases, the voter may be contacted to either update their signature or correct the issue.

How can I protect my ballot when voting by mail?

Follow the instructions provided with your mail ballot to ensure its safe return. States provide specific envelopes for voters to return their ballots in. Complete the information necessary on the envelope, including providing your signature, and seal the ballot inside when you are finished voting. Do NOT give

your unsealed ballot to any other person. Not only could the ballot be tampered with, but in many states, it is illegal to give your ballot to someone else to return for you, even a close friend or family member. If you need assistance returning your ballot, check with your local elections office to find your best option for returning your ballot.

Every ballot is subject to a strict chain of custody process, whether that ballot is issued to a voter in person or by mail. When a ballot is returned to an election office by mail, it must be in a sealed envelope that has been signed by the voter and, in some cases, include witness signatures or unique identification

information to help verify the voter's identity. Once a signature is compared to the voter's signature on file, and if the ballot has been properly returned, the ballot will be counted.

Are drop boxes secure?

The EAC, in conjunction with CISA, issued [guidance](#) on effectively using and securing drop boxes. All official drop boxes should have a lock or tamper-evident seal and be subject to staff monitoring or video surveillance. Jurisdictions strategically place drop boxes in secure locations where you can safely submit a completed mail ballot. Some states and localities place drop boxes in government buildings or designated locations in a jurisdiction. Only election officials (often bipartisan teams) can access a ballot once it's placed in a drop box.

Check with your [local elections office](#) to confirm whether official drop boxes are available in your area.

Do absentee or mailed ballots get counted, even when the contest isn't close?

All valid ballots are counted in every election, regardless of the outcome or closeness of any contest.

How can I verify that my mailed ballot was counted?

Your state or local election officials can typically verify whether you participated in a specific election and maintains the voting history of registered voters; however, they are not able to see how you voted. Ballots that are marked on paper are typically counted by a scanner or ballot tabulator that reads the individual marks on each ballot. If a ballot is not counted due to failing to arrive in time to be counted or a non-matching signature, the voter is often provided notice that the ballot was not counted. If there is time prior to certification of the vote, the individual may be contacted and provided an opportunity to cure the ballot, depending on the laws and regulations of the jurisdiction.

Many states allow voters to track the status of their ballots online. To see if online ballot tracking is available where you live, choose your state [here](#).

Military & Overseas Voters

Can members of the military or U.S. citizens living overseas vote?

Yes, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of 1986 ensures the voting rights of service members, their eligible family members, and U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S. The [Federal Voting Assistance Program](#) (FVAP) maintains resources and aids service members, their families, and overseas citizens who wish to vote. States employ special rules for UOCAVA voters to

expedite the voting process as much as possible. Use FVAP's [Voting Assistance Guide](#) to review whether your state is having a federal election and the requirements for requesting and returning your UOCAVA ballot.

I have recently returned from overseas, how can I update my home address for my voter registration?

You may be able to update your registration address online or fill out a state specific application with your new address. Visit the [Register and Vote in Your State page](#), select the state in which you reside,

click Register to Vote, and follow the prompts on your state's website. You may also complete the National Mail Voter Registration form and return it to your local election office.

I am serving in the military overseas and I didn't receive my ballot; can I still vote?

Military members, their families, and overseas citizens, can use a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to both register and vote. Depending on your situation, your best immediate resource may be the Voting Assistance Officer (VAO) assigned to your command or installation. If there isn't enough time to send back your ballot before the election, you may also use a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) as a back-up ballot. You may visit www.fvap.gov to access the newest **Federal Post Card Application form** or newest **Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot**. For information on your FPCA or FWAB form, please contact the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) at (800) 438-8683.

Election Administration

Who runs elections in my state?

Election administration is highly decentralized. No two states administer elections in the same way, and there could be variations within a single state. Each state has a chief election official, who has an oversight or advisory role over state and federal elections. These officials seek to implement state voting laws in a uniform manner throughout their states.

Elections are usually administered at the county level, though in some New England and Midwestern states it falls to cities or townships to run elections. This normally includes the operation of the election office and any satellite offices, if applicable. The local election office will identify appropriate polling places, train poll workers to assist voters, and manage the voting process in early voting or election day polling places throughout the jurisdiction. In all, this means that there are more than 10,000 election administration jurisdictions in the U.S. The size of these jurisdictions varies dramatically, with the smallest towns having only a few hundred registered voters and the largest jurisdiction in the country with over 5 million.

At the local level, elections can be run by a single individual, a board or commission of elections, or a combination of two or more entities. Through its clearinghouse function, the EAC identifies and provide guidance on implementation of best practices in election administration to assist local election officials. Find out more about who runs elections in your state, by visiting the [National Conference of State Legislatures website](#).

Voting Technology & Election Security

How do election officials prevent someone from voting twice?

One of the basic tenets of democracy is that each person has one vote, and only one vote. Election administrators 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 maintain current and accurate voter lists, and many states compare registration and voting records with other states. In addition, only eligible voters may cast a ballot. If a voter is not already on the voter rolls, they may be allowed to vote a “provisional ballot.” A provisional ballot will only be processed and counted once the elections office has verified that the individual is eligible to vote and has not already voted in the election.

For each election, election officials keep real time records when someone votes in person or by mail. This prevents a person who votes by mail from also voting in person on Election Day or during the early voting period or vice versa.

How can I tell if election information is a rumor or reality?

Elections are administered by state and local officials who are trusted sources of accurate information. Opinion and characterization of the voting process and safeguards may not always be 100% factual or include important context. Misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation narratives can spread rapidly online. It is always best to check with your [local elections officials](#) to find out if something is true or not, before sharing it with others to ensure that you are not unintentionally spreading false and misleading election information. State election websites may also provide answers to frequently asked questions or rumor control explanations. The last line of defense in election security is you - the American voter. Be a smart consumer and sharer of information.

Do ballots have watermarks?

Local election offices have security and detection measures in place that make it highly difficult to commit fraud through counterfeit ballots. While the specific measures vary, in accordance with state and local election laws and practices, ballot security measures can include signature matching, information checks, barcodes, watermarks, and precise paper weights.

Some states, like California and Tennessee, have specific requirements for watermarks on printed or absentee ballots, while many states do not use this ballot feature. Whether a watermark design is added to a ballot or not, ballots are still anonymous and do not provide information that can be tracked or traced back to individual voters.

Can the voting equipment used to count ballots be trusted?

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) created the Election Assistance Commission, which mandated to create voluntary voting system guidelines and certify voting equipment. In addition to using EAC certifying voting systems, election officials use additional procedures to ensure the accuracy of the election. These procedures include:

- Purchasing elections systems that have been tested and certified by the EAC.
- Programming all devices according to local laws and regulations.
- Testing voting equipment for accuracy prior to elections and allowing the public to attend.
- Conducting elections with bipartisan poll workers and observers.
- Verifying that the total number of ballots matches the total number of voters.
- Auditing the ballots or verifiable paper trail to ensure that the voting equipment counted votes accurately.

- Maintaining a strict chain of custody, verified by at least two witnesses (often from opposing parties).
- Maintaining physical security access controls

Many states have their own testing and certification program to approve voting systems that meet specific state guidelines and authorized to be used within the state. Most localities also conduct logic and accuracy testing of voting machines prior to each election. While the details involved in these steps vary by state, many of these processes are open to the public, and your local election official can provide detailed information about what makes the voting process fair, accurate, and secure.

How does the EAC certify voting equipment?

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) mandates that EAC accredit voting system test laboratories and certify voting equipment. Participation by states in EAC's certification program is voluntary. The EAC provides oversight of testing voting systems per Section 231(a) (1) of HAVA, via the EAC Voting System Testing and Certification Program. This program provides clear procedures for EAC accredited Voting System Test Labs (VSTLs) as well as voting system manufacturers for the testing and certification of voting systems against federal standards, which are called Voluntary Voting System Guidelines, or VVSG.

Each voting system in test with the EAC is subject to a thorough technical analysis and testing by a VSTL. This analysis and testing may include, but is not limited to documentation review, source code review, physical and functional configuration audits, electrical and environmental testing, functional tests, and system level integration tests.

Prior to any testing, a build of source code is performed by the VSTL to ensure that the VSTL has full chain of custody over the tested voting system configuration. At the completion of testing, a test report is provided by the VSTL to the EAC that contains test results, the tested configuration of the system, and hash codes collected by the VSTL that can be used to confirm the exact version(s) of the software tested.

The information in the EAC certified voting system test reports allow state certification programs and local election officials to confirm the exact hardware and software they are using during their logic & accuracy testing, acceptance testing, and pre- election verification. This process ensures quality and compliance in voting system equipment, as well as voter confidence in using the voting systems on Election Day.

For more information about voting equipment certification, please visit our [Voting Equipment Frequently Asked Questions webpage](#).