

California on Offense

The Path Forward to Strengthen Our Elections

California’s elections follow a rigorous system of checks and balances that ensures every election is free, fair, and secure. In recent years, however, we’ve seen bad actors exploit weaknesses in state law — fueling misinformation, legal battles, and spurious attempts to overturn the will of the voters.

This factsheet outlines three commonsense policy solutions that California lawmakers and election administrators can consider to close those gaps — before and after Election Day. For a deeper dive into the national context and proven solutions, see our full report, “[States on Offense: The Path Forward to Strengthen Our Elections.](#)” For more information, please [contact us here.](#)

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California Elections By the Numbers

Registered Voters: 22,900,896¹

Voter Turnout (Registered Voters %): 2022 [51 %] 2024 [71 %]²

Voting Methods (Election Day/Early In-Person/Mail %): 2022: 10%/2%/87%;
2024: 11%/5%/81%³

Recent Attempts to Exploit Election Vulnerabilities:

- [Shasta County Officials Threaten to Hand Count All Ballots](#)
- [Justice Department Sues Orange County for Unredacted Voter Records](#)

¹ “Report of Registration: Odd-Numbered Year Report”, Cal. Sec’y of State. Feb, 10, 2025. Accessed at <https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/ror/ror-odd-year-2025/complete-ror.pdf> on Sept. 3, 2025.

² 2022 EAVS Report, p. 6, Appendix A: Descriptive Tables, Overview Table 1: 2022 EAVS at a Glance; 2024 EAVS Report, p. 6, Appendix A: Descriptive Tables, Executive Summary Table 1: 2024 EAVS at a Glance.

³ *Id.*

Three Fixes for Stronger California Elections

1	Uphold the preferences of California voters by clearly requiring certification by statute.
2	Prevent the spread of disinformation narratives by accelerating the timelines for counting ballots.
3	Limit frivolous post-election challenges by clarifying the standards and deadlines for contesting election results.

Fix #1: Uphold the Preferences of California Voters

Lawmakers can establish in no uncertain terms that election officials have a clear, non-discretionary duty to certify county elections and transmit final returns to the Secretary of State once canvassing is complete.

County officials must complete the canvass and certify election results within 30 days of Election Day. While California law makes it clear that certification is mandatory following the canvass, [at least one county](#) has hesitated to fulfill its duty and incorrectly suggested that certifiers may have the authority to withhold certification for additional investigation.

Fix #2: Prevent the Spread of Disinformation Narratives

Lawmakers can shorten the timelines for canvassing and certification to prevent the spread of disinformation, which is often fueled by unfounded claims of election irregularities.

California law provides a seven-day post-election period for postmarked ballots to be delivered to election officials and for voters to correct any technical errors that might prevent their ballots from being counted. While these protections are essential, this post-Election Day interim waiting period has led to unfounded speculation of irregularities and reduced confidence in the results. Lawmakers can pursue solutions to accelerate the post-election timeline to mitigate this source of misinformation.

Fix #3: Limit Frivolous Post-Election Judicial Challenges

Lawmakers can specify limited grounds for post-election judicial challenges, require greater specificity to initiate such challenges, and establish tighter deadlines for resolution to limit frivolous challenges and bring much-needed finality to elections.

The standards for initiating a challenge are relatively low and quite broad in California. Challengers can simply say “illegal votes were cast.” As a result, challenges can drag on for many weeks, with the potential to imperil the certification of officeholders in time to assume the responsibilities of their office.

Secure Democracy Foundation is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization building stronger elections, state by state. Our work is state-focused, informed by election policy insights from a national perspective, and realized by seizing common ground.