

Checks and Balances in California: Important Dates for the November 2026 Election

California's elections are governed by a number of laws and regulations that ensure there are checks and balances throughout the process. Bipartisan teams of election workers at the local, county, and state levels go through a meticulous list of steps to verify the count, check for accuracy, and ensure all rules are followed.

Below, we detail the dates for each step to provide greater transparency into the rigorous efforts underway to deliver a free and fair election in California. Importantly, this is nonpartisan educational research intended for 501(c)(3)-compliant purposes only. It is not to be used for any partisan, political, or electioneering activities by any organization.

Voting by Mail

- [**Monday, Oct. 5**](#) - County officials must begin mailing mail ballots to all active voters (29 days before Election Day). Voters registered after this date must be mailed a ballot within five days.
- [**Monday, Oct. 5**](#) - County officials may begin processing mail ballot return envelopes and verifying signatures by comparing them to voter registration records. No vote tallies may be shared until polls close on Election Day.
- [**Tuesday, Oct. 6 - Tuesday, Nov. 3**](#) - Counties must make ballot drop-off locations available during regular business hours. At least one vote-by-mail ballot drop-off location must be an exterior drop box that is available for at least 12 hours per day, including regular business hours.
- [**Tuesday, Nov. 3 - \(Election Day\)**](#) - Voters returning ballots by mail must *postmark* the returned ballot by Election Day for the ballot to be counted. Voters returning mail ballots in person must deliver them to the board of elections or any ballot drop box by the close of polls.
 - [**8 p.m.**](#) - Military or overseas (UOCAVA) voters living outside the United States or those called to military services in the U.S. within seven days before the election may return their ballot by fax.

- [Tuesday, Nov. 10](#) - In order for a mail ballot to be counted, ballots mailed and postmarked on or before Election Day must be received by the board of elections by 5 p.m. on the seventh day after the election.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 17](#) - Deadline for officials to notify voters whose mail ballot envelope is unsigned or does not match the voter record.
- [Wednesday, Nov. 25](#) - Ballot cure deadline.¹ Voters have until 5 p.m. on the 22nd day after the election to return their signature verification statement or unsigned identification envelope.

In-Person Voting (Early & Election Day)

- [Monday, Oct. 19](#) - Standard registration deadline. Voters must register in person, online, or postmark their mailed application by the 15th day before an election. Voters who register by this date may vote a regular ballot.
- [Tuesday, Oct. 20](#) - First day of same-day registration ("conditional registration"). Voters who register to vote during this period must cast a provisional ballot unless an elections official can validate their voter eligibility that day.
- [Saturday, Oct. 24](#) - In counties conducting an election under the Voter's Choice Act (VCA), at least one vote center for every 50,000 people must be open. Any registered voter in the county can use any vote center in the county.
- [Friday, Oct. 30](#) - Final day of vote center availability for counties conducting elections under the VCA.
- [Saturday, Oct. 31](#) - Counties not conducting elections under the VCA must open at least one early voting location for at least six hours on the Saturday before Election Day.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 3](#) - **(Election Day)**
 - **7 a.m.** - Polling locations open.
 - **8 p.m.** - Polling locations close. All voters [still in line](#) must be allowed to vote. Voters returning mail ballots to their board must do so by this time.
 - [Same-Day Registration](#) - Final day for voters to register and cast a provisional ballot.
 - [Address Change](#) - Last day for voters to use a written request instead of a new registration to update their address within the same county.

¹ "Curing" is the process by which a voter: 1) receives notice from election officials of a discrepancy or reasonable question regarding the signature used for the mail ballot matching the voter's registration/pre-registration signature on file; and 2) has an opportunity to correct the issue and have the ballot counted. In California, a voter may have an opportunity to [cure an identification envelope](#) if: 1) the voter failed to sign the envelope; or 2) election officials determine there is a reasonable question whether the voter's signature used for the ballot matches the voter's registration signature on file or otherwise belongs to the voter.

Counting, Canvassing, & Certification

- [Monday, Oct. 5](#) - County officials may begin processing mail ballot return envelopes and verifying signatures by comparing them to voter registration records. No vote tallies may be shared until polls close on Election Day.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 3](#) - (Election Day)
 - **8 p.m.** - Semifinal official canvass begins. County election officials begin the semifinal official canvass of votes once polls close on Election Day. Report totals are sent to the secretary of state at least every two hours until complete.
- [Thursday, Nov. 5](#) - Counties begin the official canvass. The canvass is open to the public and must continue until complete.
- [Thursday, Dec. 3](#) - County canvass deadline.² Deadline for county officials to complete canvassing.
 - **Manual tally and audit:** California counties may conduct a 1% manual tally or a risk-limiting audit. County officials must complete the [1% manual tally](#) during the canvassing period. The tally must be conducted publicly. A county choosing to conduct a [risk-limiting audit](#) must do so during the canvassing period. Local officials must submit the results of either audit along with the certification of the official canvass.
- [Friday, Dec. 4](#) - County officials must send to the secretary of state in an electronic format one copy of the statement of results for state, federal, and judicial elections.
- [Friday, Dec. 11](#) - State canvass and certification.³ Deadline for the secretary of state to prepare, certify, and file the statement of the vote from the compiled returns and issue formal certificates of election for all candidates.

Election Contests & Recounts

- [Friday, Dec. 4](#) - [Tuesday, Dec. 8](#) - During the five-day period after the completion of the official canvass, any voter can request a recount for a statewide office.
- [Tuesday, Dec. 8](#) - Latest possible day to request a recount for an office or measure contained entirely within a single county.

² “Canvassing” is the process by which the appropriate authority checks the results from each voting location and ballot counting location for accuracy and compliance with statutory procedures. After these checks, the results from each location are compiled to create results for each race on the ballot. In California, the county canvass is typically conducted by the board of elections. The state canvass is conducted by the Secretary of State.

³ “Certification” is the process by which winners in elections are officially declared following the completion of the canvass. For local races that can be determined following the county canvass, certification will occur after the county canvass. For federal, state, and multicounty races that must be determined by the state canvass, certification will generally occur immediately following the completion of the state canvass.

- [Thursday, Dec. 17](#) - Latest day for the recount process to begin. The re-tabulation must begin no later than seven business days after the request or order for the recount, and must continue daily (except weekends and holidays) for at least six hours a day until completed.
- [Saturday, January 2](#) - Deadline for a voter to file a formal statement of contest with the superior court challenging the result of an election for non-statewide office. Challenges must be based on specific statutory grounds, including a mistake, error, or misconduct that caused votes to be incorrectly counted. The verified statement of contest must be filed 30 days after the declaration of the result of the election.

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