

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

Iowa'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 Iowa. 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

- [**Tuesday, Aug. 25**](#) - First day to request mailed absentee ballots. Requests received before this date are returned to the voter as required by law.
- [**Saturday, Sept. 19**](#) - County commissioners may begin mailing mail-in ballots to military and overseas (UOCAVA) voters.
- [**Wednesday, Oct. 14**](#) - Counties must begin sending early (mail) ballots to voters (other than military and overseas voters) with accepted applications.
- [**Monday, Oct. 19**](#) - Deadline to request a mailed absentee ballot. Applications to receive a mail-in ballot by mail must be received by **5 p.m.**
- [**Saturday, Oct. 31**](#) - Deadline for county commissioner to conduct a preliminary review of absentee ballot affidavits for completeness (limited to whether the voter's signature is missing). Absentee ballots received by **5 p.m.** undergo this preliminary review.¹
- [**Tuesday, Nov. 3 \(Election Day\)**](#) - Absentee ballots returned by any method must be received by **8 p.m.**

¹ If the commissioner determines that the affidavit is incomplete, the commissioner must notify the voter within 24 hours and allow the voter an opportunity to replace the ballot. The original ballot is not counted and marked defective.

In-Person Voting (Absentee/Early & Election Day)

- [Wednesday, Oct. 14](#) - In-person absentee (early) voting begins.
- [Monday, Oct. 19](#) - Deadline for regular vote registration at 5 p.m. Eligible voters may still register and vote during the in-person absentee (early) voting period or on Election Day.²
- [Monday, Nov. 2](#) - Last day of the in-person absentee (early) voting period.
- [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.

Counting, Canvassing, & Certification

- [Monday, Nov. 2](#) - The absentee and special voters precinct board may convene to process absentee ballots on the Monday before Election Day in certain circumstances.³ For the General Election, the board may also begin tabulating absentee ballots as authorized by law. Vote totals must remain confidential until after the polls close.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 3 \(Election Day\)](#) - After the polls close at 8:00 p.m., precinct election officials complete the count of Election Day ballots, and the absentee and special voters precinct board completes the count of absentee ballots.⁴ All absentee ballot counting must be completed by 10 p.m. Unofficial election results are reported to the county commissioner of elections.
- [Wednesday, Nov. 4](#) - Deadline for all precinct election tally lists to be received by the county commissioner of elections. If any tally lists have not been received by 12:00 noon, the commissioner must send messengers to obtain them.
- [Tuesday, Nov. 10](#) - The county board of supervisors, acting as the county board of canvassers, meets to canvass the election returns, prepare the official abstracts of votes, and certify the election canvass summary report.
- [Monday, Nov. 30](#) - The state board of canvassers meets to conduct the state canvass, review the county abstracts, approve the canvass if the results are accurately tabulated, prepare the official state abstract, and declare successful candidates elected for statewide offices (other than governor and lieutenant governor), members of Congress, members of the General Assembly, judicial offices, district offices and statewide public measures.

² [Iowa Code § 48A.7A](#)

³ (1) The county commissioner of elections has provided the required secrecy envelopes or folders, and (2) The commissioner determines that early removal is necessary because the county has received a large number of voted absentee ballots, as allowed under Iowa Code § 53.23(3)(a).

⁴ “Canvassing” is the process by which the appropriate election authority reviews the official election returns to verify that the results have been compiled and reported in accordance with applicable law. Following this review, the authority determines the official vote totals for each contest and finalizes the official election results as required by state law.

Recounts & Election Contests

- [Wednesday, Nov. 11](#) – Deadline for a candidate to request a recount. The candidate must file a written request no later than 5 p.m.⁵
- [Wednesday, Nov. 18](#) – Latest possible deadline for the commissioner to convene the recount board. The recount board must convene no later than 9:00 a.m.⁶
- [Monday, Nov. 30](#) – Deadline for the recount to be completed and report filed.
- [Monday, Nov. 30](#) – Deadline to file a notice to contest an election for county offices.
- [Wednesday, Dec. 2](#) – Deadline to file a notice to contest an election for presidential electors or members of Congress.
- [Wednesday, Dec. 30](#) – Deadline to file a notice to contest an election for state offices (except governor and Lt. governor).
- [20 Days before the first day of the next session of the General Assembly](#) – Deadline for notice of contest to be filed for elections for General Assembly.
- [20 Days before the first day of the next session of the General Assembly](#) – Deadline for notice of contest to be filed for elections for governor and lieutenant governor.

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⁵ For statewide offices, members of the General Assembly, and federal offices, the state commissioner of elections must order the recount to begin within seven days after receiving the request. Iowa Code § 50.48(1)(c). Iowa law does not establish a comparable deadline for the county board of canvassers to order a recount for county or local offices.

⁶ Iowa Code Chapter 50 does not establish a separate statutory procedure to appeal a decision denying a recount request.