

League of Women Voters Guide For New California Voters

Activate Your Power



The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. We operate on a national, state and local level, and welcome members and volunteers of all genders. This voting guide is produced by LWV of Palo Alto (<https://www.lwvpaloalto.org/>).

1. Register to Vote

Are you Eligible to Register to Vote? Yes! If you are

- A United States citizen and a California resident
- 18 years old or older
- Not currently serving a state or federal prison term for the conviction of a felony
- Not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court

** If you do not meet these eligibility requirements, you may not register to vote, but you can influence voters by talking to them about issues you care about. Read on to learn more about the United States election process.

Are you Eligible to Pre-register to Vote? Yes!** If you are

- 16 or 17 years old and meet all of the other eligibility requirements.

(If you pre-register under [California's pre-registration law](#)¹, your registration will become active when you turn 18.)

Are you already registered or pre-registered to vote? Maybe! If you have a California Driver's License or ID card, you might already be pre-registered or registered to vote because of [California's "motor voter"](#)² law under which eligible citizens are offered the opportunity to register or pre-register to vote when interacting with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

Let's Check! Go to the League of Women Voters [VOTE411](#)³ website to check your voter registration status. You will need your **California Driver's License or ID** and the **last four digits of your Social Security number**. (If you move away from California in the future, you can use VOTE411 to link to the registrar of voters in every state and review their unique rules and procedures.⁴)

If you are already registered, Congratulations! Go to Step 2 – learn about your ballot.

Register Today! If you aren't yet registered or aren't sure, fill out an online voter registration form today at registertovote.ca.gov. (Don't worry about registering twice, the Registrar of Voters system automatically removes duplicates.⁵) To register, you will need the last four digits of your Social Security number. The form also asks for your California driver's license or ID, but if you don't have one you will simply need to print the online form, sign it, and send it in. Paper forms are also available from the League of Women Voters, libraries, the post office, and other public locations. The Registrar of Voters will contact you if they need more information.

Registering is easy. But you will be asked to choose a political party preference. It's important to [Learn](#)⁶ about your options, but if you do not have a preference you can choose the box that says "I do not want to choose a political party preference." When you become a No Party Preference (NPP) voter, presidential candidates will not appear on your primary ballot. Learn more about NPP voters' ballots [here](#).⁷ Voters need to [re-register](#) to change their party preference.

Deadlines? The deadline to register is 15 days before an election, **but**, if you miss that deadline, you can still register and vote at a Vote Center all the way up to election day. Learn more about this option called [Conditional Voter Registration \(CVR\)](#).⁸

Re-register to vote if you: change your party preference, change your name, change your home address.

¹ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/pre-register-16-vote-18>

² <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/california-motor-voter>

³ <https://www.vote411.org/check-registration>

⁴ There are no national voter registration laws, so [The League of Women Voters](#) (<https://www.lwv.org/voting-rights>) has joined political leaders and other voting rights organizations to empower voters in every state.

⁵ Do you have questions about election security? Read about [California election security](#) and [California trusted information](#).

⁶ https://cavotes.org/sites/default/files/downloads/2020PoliticalParties_1.pdf

⁷ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/political-parties/no-party-preference/>

⁸ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/same-day-reg>

2. Learn What's On Your Ballot

Learn about both candidates for office and [state](#) and local ballot propositions by visiting [VOTE411.org/California](#), [Ballotpedia](#) and [CalMatters](#).

Find the website of your local League of Women Voters and check out their schedule of candidate forums.

Ask candidates questions by reaching out to them through their websites.

Learn how to [evaluate ballot measures](#).⁹

Go to your county's Registrar of Voters website to find out when [county voter information guides](#)¹⁰ are available – and go green to get an electronic copy emailed to you.

Understand your options in primary elections if you are a no party preference voter. California has “top-two” primaries for all statewide and national offices except for the office of President of the United States. All candidates for each office appear on everyone's ballot regardless of the voter's party preference, and the top two vote-getters in the primary election (regardless of party) move on to the general election. During a presidential election year, voters who registered **with a party preference** receive a primary ballot with all the candidates as well as presidential candidates running in their preferred party. No party preference voters will not see presidential primary candidates on their ballots unless they re-register or request a different ballot. Find out more [here](#).¹¹

3. Vote!

Watch for your ballot in the mail! Thanks to the [Voter's Choice Act](#),¹² all registered California voters receive a Vote by Mail ballot, which is sent a month before election day.

[Make a Voting Plan](#).¹³ Make a plan for learning about candidates and propositions; sitting down to mark your ballot; and returning your ballot by mail, at a drop-box, or at a Vote Center. Also, [sign up](#)¹⁴ to receive election reminders from our partner, Rock the Vote!

Follow the instructions in your ballot for how to mark it (no pencil!).

And don't forget to sign the back of the envelope! The ROV compares this signature to the one they have on file from either your DMV application or your paper voter registration form.

Return your ballot! There are three safe and secure ways to return your ballot on or before election day:

- Mail your ballot in the postage-paid first class envelope.
- Drop the ballot off in a secure drop-box location (locations are listed in your ballot or online).
- Go to any county Voter Center to: Drop off your ballot; get a new ballot if you made a mistake; or even register if you missed the registration deadline and cast a [CVR Provisional Ballot](#).¹⁵

Use [Where's My Ballot](#)¹⁶ to track your ballot's progress.

If you are away from home at election time, you can ask a family member to send you the ballot inside another envelope; or ask the registrar of voters (in the county where you registered) how you can change the mailing address on your voter registration.

Activate Your Power  1. Register to Vote 2. Learn About Your Ballot 3. Make a Plan 4. VOTE!

Produced by  LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF PALO ALTO for use in schools across California.

⁹ <https://lwvc.org/how-to-evaluate-ballot-propositions/>

¹⁰ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices>

¹¹ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/political-parties/no-party-preference/>

¹² <https://www.sos.ca.gov/voters-choice-act>

¹³ <https://www.vote411.org/make-your-plan>

¹⁴ <https://www.rockthevote.org/how-to-vote/get-election-reminders/>

¹⁵ <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/same-day-reg>

¹⁶ <https://california.ballottrax.net/voter/>