

# Election Security in San Francisco

The City and County of San Francisco takes election security very seriously. We have the strongest voting security standards in the country. Learn about how we protect elections.

## Addressing misinformation and disinformation

The San Francisco Department of Elections takes a proactive approach to addressing concerns regarding election misinformation and disinformation. Our strategies include:

- **Clear and Direct Communication:** We prioritize publishing clear, easy-to-understand information on our website and in printed materials. We ensure all San Francisco registered voters are informed about key election dates, rules, operational changes, and other important details.
- **Comprehensive Outreach:** We engage in robust, multilingual, outreach efforts through notices, press releases, social media channels, and live presentations.
- **Monitoring and Response:** We diligently monitor and promptly respond to any false information circulating on public platforms with official, verified facts.
- **Community Engagement:** We actively participate in various community events to engage with residents, community organizations, and outreach partners. (see our [outreach calendar!](#))

## Elections and the internet

State law prohibits online voting. Voters are not permitted to cast ballots online. Instead, voters who prefer to mark a ballot on a screen may:

- **At polling places:** mark a ballot using the ballot-marking device, which is then printed, scanned and tabulated by the voting equipment.
- **At home:** use the Accessible Vote by Mail (AVBM) system. Every county in the state is required to maintain an AVBM system. This system allows any local voter to download and mark a PDF ballot. However, the AVBM system does not store, track, or count any selections made by the voter. The marked ballot must be printed out and returned in a signed envelope, just like a regular vote-by-mail ballot.

## Voter ID

In California, voters are not required to show identification when voting, except under certain circumstances. For example, voters participating in a federal election for the first time, and who registered by mail and did not provide a Driver's License number or Social Security number, will be asked to provide one of several acceptable forms of identification. These may include a utility bill, an identification document issued by a governmental agency with the voter's name and address, or a photo ID such as a student ID card.

## Provisional ballot counting

All valid provisional ballots are counted in every election. Each election, any voter whose eligibility cannot be immediately determined (for example, a voter not listed on the precinct roster), is offered a provisional ballot. After Election Day, we review all provisional ballots cast at polling places on Election Day. If a voter is determined to be eligible and has not cast another ballot, the provisional ballot is counted. Voters may check the status of their provisional ballots via [our provisional ballot lookup tool](#) or by calling us.

## Voting system safeguards

San Francisco's voting system, which includes its voting machines, has been certified by the California Secretary of State. All voting systems certified by the California Secretary of State must comply fully with the current [California Voting System Standards](#). The numerous fraud prevention requirements described in this 175-page document include, for example, the rules that all voting machines "incorporate locks or seals," and that all "access points, such as covers and panels, shall be secured by locks or tamper evident seals."

## Vote-by-mail security

Ensuring the security of vote-by-mail ballots is a top priority for the Department. Here's how we maintain integrity through the process:

- **Verification Process:** Before accepting and counting any returned vote-by-mail ballot, Department staff process the outer envelope to confirm the ballot inside has been returned by the recipient voter to whom it was sent. This process begins with scanning the QR code, capturing an image of the voter signature on the envelope and comparing it to the linked voter record in the Department's Election Information Management System.
- **Adherence to Regulations:** When processing vote-by-mail ballots, our staff follow consistent and comprehensive internal guidelines, which are rooted in relevant state regulations. These regulations cover various aspects of election processing, including, for example, [current state rules for signature verification, ballot processing and ballot counting](#).

## Duplicate-registration and double-voting prevention

Many of the rules regarding how and when people in the United States can register to vote are found in federal law, in particular, the [National Voter Registration Act](#). In California, should a San Francisco voter re-register to vote in any other county, their San Francisco registration will be automatically cancelled. These rules and processes allow the Department to verify the identity of local registrants and confirm they do not already have a registration record in the database. Similarly, in order to prevent any San Francisco voter from casting more than one ballot, Department staff immediately update each voter's file when their ballot is counted. In the unlikely event that a voter returns a second ballot, the second ballot will be rejected.

## Ensuring accurate vote counts

In compliance with state law, the Department uses a voting system certified by the California Secretary of State, and conducts Logic and Accuracy (L&A) testing on all three types of machines used in every San Francisco's election.

These units include the ImageCast Evolution Ballot-Scanning Machine, the ImageCast X Ballot-Marking Device, and the ImageCast Central Scanner. During L&A testing, Department staff confirm each machine properly records and tabulates votes. The L&A Testing Board, comprised of several members of the public, reviews and approves both the L&A plan and the L&A results for each election. By law, the L&A Testing Board must certify testing results no later than seven days before Election Day. Any interested member of the public is welcome to view these processes in person or via live streaming. To learn more, please read our current [Guide to Election Observation](#).

## Ballot tracking

You have several easy, convenient options to track your ballot. If you prefer to vote by mail, you can a) log into the [San Francisco Voter Portal](#), b) sign up for the state [Ballot Tracker](#), or c) contact the multilingual staff at the Department of Elections (scroll down to the very bottom of this webpage for Department contact information). If you prefer to vote at your polling place, you will be able to cast your paper ballot or accessible ballot printout and have it tabulated by the scanning machine. By law, we archive all vital election materials after each election, including ballots, for the periods of time specified by law.

## Non-citizen participation in local elections

San Francisco law allows for certain [non-citizens to vote in local Board of Education Elections](#) only. The Department maintains a separate roll for these voters.

In 2016, voters passed Proposition N, a law allowing certain non-citizen parents to vote in San Francisco School Board elections. In 2018, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed [Ordinance No. 128-18](#) requiring the Department of Elections to implement Proposition N in several specific ways and, in October of 2018, the Board of Supervisors passed [Ordinance No. 206-21](#), making Proposition N permanent.

In July 2022, a Superior Court judge ruled Prop N unconstitutional. However, on August 8, 2023, a California Court of Appeal reversed the lower court and upheld San Francisco's non-citizen voting program. This means that certain non-citizen parents of children residing in San Francisco will once again be able to vote in the upcoming November 5, 2024, Board of Education elections.

## Official ballot drop boxes

Rules governing the design, placement, maintenance, and use of San Francisco's official ballot drop boxes can be found in [sections 20130 through 20138 of the California Code of Regulations](#). The Department is in compliance with these rules, which require, among other things, that official drop boxes be constructed of durable material, bolted to the ground, tamper-resistant, easy to use, and assigned unique identifying numbers.

Ballots are transferred from official drop boxes by San Francisco Deputy Sheriffs.

## Ballot counting and recounting

Following every election, the Department posts both [summary and detailed reports of election results and election data](#). Around the same time, the Department also posts sortable images of voted ballot cards cast on its website. Members of the public can view these ballot images for comparison against official election results. For maximum convenience and transparency, these images are sortable by various parameters such as precinct or contest. Any interested member of the public is also welcome to view ballot processing [in person or via streaming](#).

To confirm the accuracy of the vote count after each election, the Department conducts a manual count of all standard ballots cast in 1% of randomly chosen San Francisco precincts, as well as 1% of randomly-chosen citywide vote-by-mail and provisional ballots. The Department also conducts a post-election risk-limiting audit as an extra check.

If necessary, recounts requested by voters or candidates, or ordered by courts are conducted in accordance with [applicable state law](#).

### How you can help

There are a number of things you can do to help protect the integrity of our elections! Here are some suggestions to help you get started:

- [Check your voter registration record](#) regularly to make sure all information, including your address, is correct and update it as necessary.
- Follow us (@SFElections) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X \(Twitter\)](#), and [Nextdoor](#).
- Read official news, updates, and public notices sent directly to your email by subscribing [to our mailing list](#).
- [Serve as a poll worker](#) or an [elections observer](#) (you can observe election processes in person or via [live streaming](#)).
- Report misinformation to the Secretary of State's office at [VoteSure@sos.ca.gov](mailto:VoteSure@sos.ca.gov) and the Department of Elections at [sfvote@sfgov.org](mailto:sfvote@sfgov.org).
- Report suspicious activity, such as fraud, corruption, or tampering, to any of the following:
  - The Department of Elections at 415-554-4375.
  - The City District Attorney at 628-652-4311.
  - The California Secretary of State at 800-345-8683.