

# DEBRA BOWEN

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Contact: Shannan Velayas  
(916) 653-6575

### California's June Primary: Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Will the unofficial election results change after election night? When will all election results be final?**

**A:** Yes, election results will change throughout the canvass period as many more vote-by-mail ballots, provisional ballots cast at polling places, and other ballots are tallied. Depending on the volume of these types of ballots, it may take up to 28 days for county elections officials to verify voter records and determine if ballots have been cast by eligible voters. How often results are updated will vary based on the size of each county and the process each local elections office uses to tally and report votes. State law allows county elections officials until July 4 to complete their official canvass and certify final election results to the Secretary of State, and they often need that full month to finish the work. The Secretary of State will then compile and report all statewide results by July 11.

While the Secretary of State cannot certify the winner of a contest before all ballots are counted by county elections officials, news media and campaigns sometimes choose to “call an election” sooner. The Secretary of State’s election results website at <http://vote.sos.ca.gov> will be updated as county elections officials report results. County elections officials sometimes update their own websites before reporting to the Secretary of State. For county contact information go to [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections\\_d.htm](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_d.htm).

**Q: What is the Secretary of State’s voter turnout prediction?**

**A:** The Secretary of State does not predict voter turnout and discourages voters from focusing on such predictions. Since 1984, voter turnout for primary elections in non-presidential primaries has ranged from 28 percent of registered voters in 2008 to 42 percent of registered voters in 1998. Some media and polling organizations survey potential voters and analyze historical voter participation statistics at [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/sov/2012-primary/pdf/04-historical-voter-reg-primary.pdf](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/sov/2012-primary/pdf/04-historical-voter-reg-primary.pdf) in an effort to project future turnout.

**Q: Are vote-by-mail and provisional ballots always counted – even in “landslide” elections?**

**A:** Yes, every valid ballot returned to county elections officials by 8:00 p.m. on Election day is counted in every election, regardless of the ballot type or the margin in any particular contest.

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**Q: How do county elections officials count vote-by-mail and provisional ballots?**

**A:** Vote-by-mail ballots that are received by county elections offices before Election day are typically counted on Election day. Many more vote-by-mail ballots are dropped off at polling places or arrive at county elections offices on Election day. In some counties, elections officials begin processing vote-by-mail ballots up to seven business days before the election, though no results can be released until all polls close on Election day.

Counting several million vote-by-mail and provisional ballots is a labor-intensive process. For each ballot, a county elections official must compare the voter's signature on the outside of the envelope to the signature on the voter's original registration application to ensure the signatures match. To preserve secrecy, the ballot is then separated from the envelope and added to the pile of ballots to be tallied.

**Q: How many Californians vote by mail?**

**A:** Since 1979 any Californian has had the option of voting by mail without having to provide a reason or an excuse. More than half of the ballots cast in the last three statewide primaries were sent in by mail. Go to [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/hist\\_absentee.htm](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/hist_absentee.htm) for historical vote-by-mail statistics in statewide elections.

**Q: What is provisional voting?**

**A:** Provisional voting ensures that no properly registered voter is denied the right to cast a ballot. If, for any reason, a voter's name is not on the polling place list, the voter has the right to cast a provisional ballot in the county where he or she is registered. The provisional ballot will be counted after county elections officials have confirmed the voter is registered to vote and the voter did not already cast a ballot elsewhere in the election.

**Q: How can a voter find out if his or her ballot was counted?**

**A:** Under federal law, a voter who casts a provisional ballot is entitled to find out from the county elections office whether the ballot was counted and if not, why not. Under state law, a voter who casts a vote-by-mail ballot can find out if the ballot arrived at the county elections office. County elections officials may provide this information through websites, by telephone, or both. To access a county's website or phone number for checking ballot status, voters can go to [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-status](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-status).

**Q: How does the top-two primary work?**

**A:** California conducts top-two primaries for legislative, congressional and constitutional offices. In top-two primary all candidates for an office are listed on the same ballot and anyone can vote for any candidate, regardless of party preference. Only the two candidates who receive the most votes in each primary contest will move on to the general election in November.

**Q: Is a general election needed if there are only one or two candidates in a primary?**

**A:** Even if there are only one or two candidates in a constitutional, legislative or congressional primary contest, a general election is still required under California's top-two primary law.

**Q: What do party preference and no party preference (NPP) mean? Do NPP voters get to vote for all top-two primary contests?**

**A:** Under the top-two primary law, Californians who were known before 2011 as decline-to-state voters (because they did not have a party affiliation) are now referred to as NPP voters. If a legislative, congressional or constitutional candidate does not state a preference for a qualified political party, the phrase “no party preference” is listed next to the candidate’s name. NPP voters may vote for constitutional, legislative and congressional offices.

**Q: How many statewide measures are on the ballot? How many votes are needed to pass a statewide ballot measure?**

**A:** There are two statewide propositions on the June 3 ballot and both were put on the ballot by the Legislature. An impartial analysis of each measure, the potential costs to taxpayers and more information are in the Secretary of State’s Official Voter Information Guide that is mailed to each voting household and available at <http://voterguide.sos.ca.gov>. Each measure requires a simple majority of the public’s vote to be enacted.

**Q: What candidates are on the June ballot?**

**A:** The Secretary of State’s Certified List of Candidates at [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/statewide-elections/2014-primary/updated-contact-info.pdf](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/statewide-elections/2014-primary/updated-contact-info.pdf) includes contact information for all candidates for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Controller, Treasurer, Attorney General, Insurance Commissioner, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Board of Equalization, congressional and legislative offices up for election. County elections offices have further information about candidates for U.S. House of Representatives, State Assembly and State Senate since such districts include precincts in just one or a few counties. County office websites are listed at [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections\\_d.htm](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_d.htm).

**Q: Can workers take time off to vote on election day?**

**A:** The polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on election day. State law allows workers up to two hours off to vote, without a loss of pay, if they do not have enough time to do so in their non-work hours. The law requires workers to give their employers two working days’ notice before the election if they will need to take time off to vote.

**Q: What if voters still have questions on election day?**

**A:** California voters may call the Secretary of State’s toll-free voter hotline at (800) 345-8683, which will be answered live throughout election day and the day before. Voters can get the address of their polling place, ask election-related questions, or confidentially report potential election fraud or voter intimidation.

Keep up with the latest California election news and trivia by following @CASOSvote on Twitter. To subscribe to state election news via email, RSS feed or Twitter, go to [www.sos.ca.gov/multimedia](http://www.sos.ca.gov/multimedia).