



DEBRA BOWEN

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The June Primary: Frequently Asked Questions

SACRAMENTO – As the June 5 statewide primary election nears, California Secretary of State Debra Bowen provided answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Q: When will the election results be final?

A: By law, county elections officials have 31 days (until July 6) 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 results 38 days after the election (July 13). While the Secretary of State cannot announce the winner of a contest before all ballots are counted, news media sometimes choose to “call an election” sooner. In close contests, a clear winner may not be apparent for many days, as counties verify and count hundreds of thousands of unprocessed ballots that include vote-by-mail ballots, provisional ballots cast at polling places, and others. The Secretary of State’s election results website 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.

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. Voter turnout for primary elections in presidential election years since 1980 has ranged from 28.2 percent to 63.3 percent of registered voters. Some media and polling organizations survey potential voters and analyze historical voter participation statistics at www.sos.ca.gov/elections/sov/2010-primary/pdf/05-historical-voter-reg-primary-06082010.pdf in an effort to project future turnout.

Q: How many Californians are eligible to vote in the June primary election?

A: As of April 6, there were 17,037,414 Californians registered to vote. The last day to register to vote in the June 5 primary election was May 21. After all county elections officials report their data to the Secretary, a final Report of Registration will be published on June 1.

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: 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 form 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. In some cases, county 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. With more and more people voting by mail, elections officials often need the full amount of time allowed by law to complete this manual process.

Q: How many Californians vote by mail?

A: Vote-by-mail voting has steadily increased in popularity in the years since California law was changed to allow any registered voter to vote by mail. On average, about half of Californians now vote by mail in statewide elections. Go to 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, he or she has the right to cast a provisional ballot. 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.

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

A: The June 5, 2012, primary is the first statewide election conducted under California's Top Two Candidates Open Primary Act, which applies to legislative and congressional contests, but not candidates running for U.S. president, county central committees and local offices. All candidates for a legislative or congressional office will be listed on one ballot and any voter may vote for any one candidate, regardless of party preference. Then only the top two vote-getters in each primary contest will move on to the November 6 General Election.

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

A: Even if there are only one or two candidates in a legislative or congressional primary, a general election is still required under the Top Two Candidates Open Primary Act.

Q: Will no-party preference (NPP) voters get to vote in all contests?

A: Under the top-two primary law, NPP voters – previously known as decline-to-state voters – will be able to vote for legislative and congressional offices. The primary elections for U.S. president, county central committees and local offices are not affected by the new state law. Only voters indicating a preference for a party may vote for their party's presidential nominee unless a party also allows NPP voters to participate in their primary election. The Democratic and American Independent parties will permit NPP voters to request their 2012 presidential primary ballots; the Americans Elect Party has chosen not to participate in the June 5 primary; and the other four qualified parties will not allow NPP voters in their primaries.

Q: How many statewide measures are on the ballot and when could they go into effect?

A: There are two statewide propositions on the June 5 ballot and both are initiatives. An impartial analysis of each measure, the potential costs to taxpayers and much 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>. A statewide initiative requires a simple majority of the public's vote to be enacted. If approved, an initiative takes effect the day after the election, unless the initiative language specifies otherwise.

Q: What candidates are on the June ballot?

A: The Secretary of State's Certified List of Candidates for presidential, legislative and congressional offices at www.sos.ca.gov/elections/2012-elections/june-primary/pdf/june-2012-candidates-list.pdf includes contact information and ballot designations. The Secretary of State's Voter Information guide offers more information about presidential and U.S. Senate candidates. 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.

Q: What if voters still have questions on Election Day?

A: Voters may call the Secretary of State's toll-free voter hotline at (800) 345-VOTE (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.

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