



COMMUNITY RESOURCE

VOTING AS A NEW AMERICAN WHAT NEW CITIZENS NEED TO KNOW

Congratulations on becoming a United States citizen! Now that you have taken your citizenship oath, you can register to vote and participate in local, state, and national elections. Below, we answer questions new citizens like you often have about voting in the United States.

Why should I vote?

- It's your right, and it's one of the most important ways to participate in our democracy.
- It's how you elect the people who decide how to invest your taxes and decide on issues you care about.
- It's how you make your voice heard. Your vote makes a difference, and many elections are decided by a small number of votes.

What kind of elections can I vote in as a US citizen?

Primary, General, Runoff, and Special Elections

Political parties hold **primary elections** to determine their nominees. These nominees become the candidates in the **general elections** in which the winner is elected to office. **Runoff elections** occur when neither candidate needs more votes to win the election. Lastly, **special elections** are held when an elected official leaves office unexpectedly due to death, illness, resignation, or any other reason that prevents them from finishing their term.

Local, State, and National Elections

Local elections elect your local leaders, such as the mayor, members of the school board, and members of the city council. **State elections** decide who will lead your state in positions like governor, members of the state legislature, and your state's attorney general. **National elections** elect the people representing your state in the US Senate and the US House of Representatives. There are also national elections for the president and vice president.

What types of things can I vote for?

During an election you can vote on two types of things:

Candidates want to become local, state, or national elected officials.

Ballot measures or **propositions** are proposals for local or state policies. There are usually two options for your vote: yes or no.

What do I need to do before voting?

1. You need to register to vote

Registering to vote means confirming with your state's election administrator that you are eligible to vote because you are over 18-years-old and a US citizen. You can learn more about eligibility in your state at this website: <https://vote.gov/>.

2. You need to prepare to vote

Reading about the issues and candidates and [reviewing a sample ballot](#) before an election can be helpful. You can find a guide to your local ballot on this [website](#). You can discuss the issues and candidates in an upcoming election with your friends, family, or community. You can decide where and how you will vote.

Where do I go to vote?

Cities and towns in the United States are divided into different voting districts known as polling precincts. Each polling precinct has a specific place where people go to vote on Election Day. However, there are multiple ways to vote in elections, and the rules for each are different across states and counties. This [website](#) lists the ways you can vote in your state.

“In-person” voting is when you fill out your ballot at an official polling place. Some states allow voters to fill out a ballot at home before Election Day and either drop it off or mail it in. There may be rules about who can vote this way; in some states, you must confirm that you cannot physically make it to a polling place, while in others, anyone who wants to vote by mail can do so if they request a mail-in or absentee ballot. There are many reasons why someone may want to vote by mail. Physical disability, a busy schedule, or travel on election day are examples.

What will I use to vote?

Paper ballots. One way to vote is with a pen and a piece of paper called a ballot. This [website](#) has a sample ballot for each election in your area.

Voting machines. Some areas also vote using voting machines. These machines come in various types, each with its own method for recording and tallying votes.

Can I vote in a different language?

Yes. In every state and county, voters can bring a companion to translate ballots or help communicate with poll workers. This companion cannot be an employer or union representative. In some counties with large immigrant communities, polling places provide bilingual assistance and translated voting materials. You can see a list of counties that offer bilingual election support in Asian languages [here](#) and a list of every county that provides language assistance [here](#).

What if someone tells me that I’m not allowed to vote?

If anyone tries to prevent you from voting, you should contact an Election Protection hotline right away.

- English: 866-OUR-VOTE / 866-687-8683
- Español: 888-VE-Y-VOTA / 888-839-8682
- Asian Languages: 888-API-VOTE / 888-274-8683
- Arabic: 844-YALLA-US / 844-925-5287

MORE QUESTIONS? CHECK OUT THE NAC’S COMPREHENSIVE VOTER GUIDE FOR NEW AMERICANS.

The NAC’s comprehensive voter guide for new Americans contains critical information on the civic engagement process in the United States and answers to frequently asked questions new Americans have about voting in the United States.

