

SOUTH CAROLINA

ELECTION COMMISSION

2020 General Election FAQs

Q. I am concerned about voting at my polling place in the pandemic. What are my options?

A. The SEC and county election officials are taking steps to make election day polling places as safe as possible. All voters are qualified to vote absentee in the 2020 General Election. [Click here to learn more about absentee voting in the 2020 General Election.](#)

Q. Can anyone vote absentee in the 2020 General Election?

A. All voters are qualified to vote absentee in the 2020 General Election. [Click here to learn more about absentee voting in the 2020 General Election.](#)

Q. How do I vote absentee?

A. In Person

Step 1: Visit your [county voter registration office](#) or extension office. (link extension office list).

- Begins no later than Monday, October 5.
- Ends 5:00 p.m., Monday, November 2.

Step 2: Complete an application.

Step 3: Cast your ballot.

By Mail

Step 1: Get your application (available now).

[Get the application online.](#) You must be able to print your application.

OR

[Call or email your county voter registration office.](#) You will be mailed an application.

- A member of a voter's immediate family or Authorized Representative can also request the application.

Step 2: Complete, sign and return the application to your [county voter registration office](#).

- Return by mail, email, fax or personal delivery.
- Return as soon as possible and no later than 5:00 p.m., Saturday, October 24.
- An Authorized Representative must return the application by 5:00 p.m., Friday, October 30.

Step 3: Receive your absentee ballot in the mail.

Step 4: Vote and return the ballot to your [county voter registration office](#) or extension office.

- Be sure to sign the voter's oath and have your signature witnessed.
- Return your ballot either by mail, personal delivery or authorized returnee.
- Your ballot must be received by 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 3.
- If returning your ballot by mail, mail it as soon as possible, preferably a week before election day, to help ensure timely delivery.
- You can check the status of your absentee ballot at [scVOTES.gov](#).

[Learn more about absentee voting in the 2020 General Election.](#)

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Q. I still have my absentee by mail ballot. What do I do?

A. You can vote your absentee ballot and return it to your county elections office by mail or personal delivery by 7:00 p.m. on election day. Ballots returned by mail should be mailed no later than one week prior to election day to help ensure timely delivery.

If you want to vote absentee in person or at your polling place on election day, you must first return the unvoted absentee ballot to the county voter registration office or extension office before voting in person.

Q. Do I have to have my signature witnessed on my by-mail absentee ballot? Who can be a witness?

A. Yes, the witness signature requirement for mail-in absentee ballots was reinstated by the U.S. Supreme Court on October 5.

- Under the court's order, any ballots received by county officials through October 7 will be counted regardless of whether the return envelope has a witness signature.
- To ensure your absentee ballot counts:
 - Sign the voter's oath on the return envelope.
 - Have a witness sign and provide address. Any other person can be a witness.
 - Return your ballot before 7:00 p.m. on November 3. Ballots can be returned in person or by mail. You should mail your ballot as soon as possible and at least a week before election day to allow time for delivery before the deadline.

Q. There is not enough time for me to comfortably return my absentee ballot by mail. What do I do?

A. You or an Authorized Returnee (complete Authorization to Return Absentee Ballot form included with ballot) can deliver your ballot to your county voter registration office by 7:00 p.m. on election day.

Q. Can I return my absentee ballot to my polling place on Election Day?

A. No. Poll managers cannot accept absentee ballots at polling places. Absentee ballots must be returned by mail or personal delivery to your county elections and registration office by 7:00 p.m. on election day.

Q. How can I check to see if my absentee application or ballot has been received?

A. Visit our website to [check the status of your absentee request](#). You can also find the status of your request by [contacting your county elections office](#).

Q. What are election officials doing to protect voters at polling places and in-person absentee voting sites?

A. The SEC and county election officials are taking steps to make in-person voting as safe as possible for voters and poll managers:

- Managers will receive special training on sanitizing surfaces and applying social distancing concepts.

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- Managers will be equipped with masks, face shields and gloves.
- Managers will be provided with sanitizing wipes and will regularly clean common surfaces throughout the day.
- Check-in stations and voting equipment will be spaced to keep voters and managers at least six feet apart.
- Hand sanitizer will be provided for voters and managers.
- Voters will be provided with a cotton swab for making selections on the touchscreen.
- Voters are asked to wear their own mask if they have one and to bring their own pen for signing the poll list.

Q. What hours will the polls be open?

- A. Polling places will be open 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. If you are in line by 7:00 p.m., you will be allowed to vote.

Q. Where do I vote? Will my polling place be open?

- A. Vote at the polling place assigned to your precinct. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, some polling places have been relocated. Be sure to check your polling place before going to vote on election day. [Click here to Find Your Polling Place.](#)

Q. What do I take with me to the polls to vote?

- A. When voting in person, you will be asked to show one of the following Photo IDs:
- A valid SC Driver's License
 - includes standard license and REAL ID
 - SC Department of Motor Vehicles ID Card
 - includes SC Concealed Weapons Permit
 - SC Voter Registration Card with Photo
 - US Passport
 - Federal Military ID
 - includes all Department of Defense Photo IDs and the Department of Veterans Affairs Benefits Card

Q. What if I don't have one of these Photo IDs?

- A. If you do not have one of these Photo IDs, you can make your voting experience as fast and easy as possible by getting one before Election Day. If you are already registered to vote, you can go to your county elections office to get a SC Voter Registration Card with Photo. You will need to provide your date of birth and the last four digits of your Social Security Number. You can do this even on Election Day. Free DMV ID Cards are also available from the Department of Motor Vehicles.

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If you cannot get a photo ID, bring your non-photo voter registration card with you to the polling place. You may vote a provisional ballot after signing an affidavit stating you have a reasonable impediment to obtaining a photo ID. A reasonable impediment is any valid reason, beyond your control, which created an obstacle to obtaining a photo ID. Some examples include: a disability or illness, a conflict with your work schedule, a lack of transportation, a lack of a birth certificate, family responsibilities, a religious objection to being photographed, and any other obstacle you find reasonable. This ballot will count unless someone proves to the county board of voter registration and elections that you are lying about your identity or having the listed impediment. To vote under the reasonable impediment exception:

1. Inform the poll managers that you do not have a photo ID and could not get one.
2. Present your current, non-photo registration card.
3. Sign the affidavit provided by the poll managers stating why you could not obtain a photo ID.
4. Cast a provisional ballot that will be counted unless the county board of voter registration and elections has reason to believe your affidavit is false.

Q. What happens if I have a Photo ID but forget to bring it to my polling place?

A. If you forget to bring your photo ID to your polling place, you may vote a provisional ballot that will count only if you show your photo ID to your county elections office prior to certification of the election (on Friday after the General Election).

Q. I've lost my Photo ID. Can I still vote?

A. Yes. See answer to previous Question "What if I don't have one of these Photo IDs?" for details.

Q. I've lost my non-photo voter registration card. Can I still vote?

A. Yes. Your voter registration card is your notification that you have registered to vote and shows your precinct and polling place. Your non-photo voter registration card is not necessary to vote unless you are voting under the reasonable impediment exception. See answer to previous Question "What if I don't have one of these Photo IDs?" for details.

Q. I've moved since the last election and haven't updated my voter registration card. Can I still vote?

- A. If you...
1. ...moved to another residence within your precinct, you can update your address at your polling place and vote a regular ballot.
 2. ...moved to a different precinct within your county, you are eligible to vote Failsafe (see below).
 3. ...moved to another residence in another county within 30 days of the election, you are eligible to vote Failsafe (see below).

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4. ...moved to another residence in another county prior to the October 4 registration deadline, you are not eligible to vote. You would be required to register prior to the deadline.

Two Options for Voting Failsafe:

1. The voter may vote at the polling place in his previous precinct using a failsafe provisional ballot. A failsafe provisional ballot contains only federal, statewide, countywide, and municipality-wide offices.
2. The voter may go to the voter registration office in the county in which he currently resides, change his address, and vote a regular ballot there.

Q. I moved to South Carolina after the October 4 voter registration deadline. Can I vote?

- A. Voters who move from State A to State B after the deadline to register to vote in State B can vote a ballot in State A for President and Vice President only (42 U.S.C. § 1973aa-1(e)). Contact election officials in your previous state of registration to find out how to get your ballot.

Q. What candidates and/or offices are on the ballot today? How can I get a sample ballot?

- A. The candidates and offices on a particular ballot will differ depending on the county and districts in which you reside. [Click here to Get Your Sample Ballot.](#)

Q. How can I volunteer to be a poll manager?

- A. [Click here to learn about serving as a poll manager and to apply online.](#)

Q. How is the ballot order determined for candidates and political parties?

- A. Candidates for partisan offices appear on the ballot in party order. Party order rotates every two years at the time of the general election. When party order rotates, the party that was previously first in the order moves to the bottom of the list. "Petition" is included in this party rotation so that the place for petition candidates rotates with the parties. Multiple petition candidates are ordered alphabetically by last name. Candidates for nonpartisan offices are ordered alphabetically by last name. The write-in space always appears last in the list of candidates for a particular office.

Q. How does straight party voting work?

- A. Whether to vote "Straight Party" is the first choice a voter must make on a General Election ballot. Voting straight party is optional. Each political party that has nominated a candidate appearing on the voter's ballot is represented in the straight party selection area. If a party is selected under straight party, every candidate of that party is automatically selected. Voters have the option of overriding the straight party vote for any one office by voting for a candidate other than the party's nominee (also known as "crossover voting"). While the "crossover" vote will override the straight party selection for that particular office, the straight party selection will continue to apply to all other offices for which no selection was made. Voters should be aware that a straight party selection does not apply to nonpartisan offices

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and questions. These contests must be voted individually. As always, voters should carefully review their choices on the review screen before casting their ballot.

Q. Is there a write-in option for President and Vice President?

A. No. In South Carolina, there is no option to write-in a vote for President and Vice President. State law prohibits write-in vote for President and Vice President (S.C. Code of Laws Section 7-13-360).

Q. What is South Carolina's new voting system and how does it work?

A. South Carolina has been using the ExpressVote ballot-marking system in all elections since October 1, 2019. After checking in at your polling place, you will be given a blank ballot and be directed to an ExpressVote. You insert the ballot into the ExpressVote to begin making your selections on a touchscreen. Making selections on the touchscreen is very similar to making selections on the old voting system. After making your selections, you will do a final review then print your ballot. To cast your vote, you will be directed to a ballot scanner. Review the selections on your printed ballot and insert it into the scanner. The scanner tabulates the votes on your ballot and feeds the ballot into a locked ballot box. The paper ballots are then used to verify and audit election results. [Click here for more on South Carolina's Voting System.](#)

Q. What are the benefits of a ballot-marking device?

- A. Ballot marking devices (BMDs) offer many of the benefits of touchscreen voting machines while also providing the assurance and security of a paper ballot.
- BMDs are fully accessible for people with disabilities allowing every South Carolinian to vote independently using the same equipment. Hand-marked paper systems are not accessible and require voters with disabilities to vote with assistance or on a device different from other voters.
 - BMDs prevent voters from overvoting (selecting more candidates than allowed). Hand-marked paper ballots can be overvoted. Election officials are unable to determine voter intent in an overvoted office leading to the voter's vote not being counted.
 - BMDs prevent stray marks. Unintended marks on a paper ballot can cause overvotes or votes to be cast differently than intended.
 - BMDs prevent improper marks. Voters do not always mark paper ballots by filling in the oval as instructed. It is common for voters to circle a candidate's name, make a check mark, or even cross through a name. Improper marks require election officials to try to interpret these marks to determine voter intent. Ultimately, marking the ballot differently than instructed can cause a voter's vote to not be counted.
 - BMDs reminds voters if they have undervoted (missed an office or voted for fewer candidates than allowed).
 - BMDs offer the easiest transition for voters. South Carolinians have been voting on touchscreens for the past 15 years. Voting on the ExpressVote will offer a familiar experience with the added assurance of verifying their vote on a paper ballot.

Q. Are South Carolina's elections secure? How can I trust that my vote will count?

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A. South Carolina election officials take election security seriously and have taken all reasonable measures to protect the statewide voter registration system, the voting system, and the election process in general. South Carolina election officials work with a broad-based team of law enforcement, intelligence, and cyber security professionals to ensure we are doing everything we can to protect the election infrastructure. It is important to know that voting machines and computers used to tabulate results are never connected to the internet. The voting system was tested on the federal and state levels before implementation, and each machine is tested by local election officials before every election to ensure the machines are working properly. The State Election Commission conducts a comprehensive, statewide post-election audit of data from every voting machine and every computer used to tabulate results in the state to ensure votes were counted accurately and completely. South Carolina's elections are conducted transparently by nonpartisan election professionals who are dedicated to protecting the sacred right to vote. Voters can go to the polls on Election Day knowing that significant checks and balances are in place to give them the assurance that their vote will count. Click [here](#) to learn more on what is being done to secure South Carolina's elections.

Q. When and where will results be reported?

A. Unofficial results will be reported by the State Election Commission (SEC) on election night at [scVOTES.gov](#). Results are reported as the SEC receives them from each county elections offices. Results are also reported locally at each polling place and at county elections offices.

Q. When is a recount necessary?

A. When the difference between any winning candidate and any other non-winning candidate is 1% or less of the total votes cast for all candidates for that office, a recount is mandatory.

Q. I saw a candidate/member of candidate's campaign at my polling place talking to voters. Can he do that?

A. Yes, but there are restrictions:

Inside the polling place: No campaigning is allowed. Candidates may be inside the polling place and talk to voters as long as they are not campaigning, intimidating voters, or interfering with the election process.

Within 200 feet of an entrance to a polling place: Candidates and campaign staff may campaign as long as they are not intimidating voters or interfering with the election process. However, no campaign literature, signs, or posters are allowed. Candidates are allowed to wear a badge no larger than 4.25" x 4.25" featuring only the candidate's name and office sought. Candidates must remove their badge upon entering a polling place.

Q. A candidate is definitely campaigning while in the polling place, or there is campaign material within 200 feet of the entrance. What can I do?

A. Inform the poll clerk immediately. If the issue is not resolved, contact the county elections office. The board will address the complaint.

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Q. Can candidates or their representatives take people to the polls to vote?

A. Yes. It is permissible for any person, even a candidate, to give a voter a ride as long as it is being done solely to help facilitate voting. However, no one can give a voter anything of value in exchange for voting.

Q. Are there any laws about candidates posting their signs along the roadway?

A. Yes, there are several state laws addressing political signs on roadways, as well as county and municipal ordinances. See SC Code of Laws Sections 57-25-10, 57-25-140, and 7-25-210. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the entity that maintains the road (state, county, and municipality) to enforce applicable sign laws.

Q. When I left the polls, I was asked to participate in an “exit poll.” Is this legal?

A. Exit polls are legal and participation is voluntary. They are NOT conducted by the State Election Commission or county election offices. Exit polls may not be conducted inside the polling place, and voters should not be approached as they enter the polling place. If you feel threatened or intimidated by a pollster, report it immediately to the poll clerk.

Q. Do employers have to give you time off to vote?

A. No. There is no state or federal law mandating that employers give time off to employees to vote. Voters who know they will not be able to visit the polls on Election Day should vote absentee before the election.

Q. Can I take my child with me to vote?

A. Yes. Minor children (under age 18) of a voter may accompany the voter in the voting booth.

Q. Are “ballot selfies” legal? Can I take a picture of my ballot and share it with others?

A. No. State law prohibits anyone from showing their ballot to another person (S.C. Code of Laws Section 7-25-100). The use of cameras is not allowed inside the voting booth.

Q. Can alcoholic beverages be sold on Election Day?

A. Yes.

Q. Can lottery tickets be sold on Election Day?

A. Yes.

Q. Where can I report an issue or file a complaint about the election?

A. Any issues or complaints regarding a polling place on Election Day should first be addressed to the poll managers. Poll managers may be able to quickly resolve the issue. If not resolved at the polling place, or if the issue or complaint is regarding some other aspect of the election, voters should contact their county elections office.

Q. I can't find an answer to my question, are there other resources?

A. Contact your [county voter registration and elections office](#) for more information.

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