CALIFORNIA 2026 LAW ENFORCEMENT QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Committee for SAFE AND SECURE ELECTIONS

This pocket reference guide contains key provisions found within the California Elections Code, Penal Provisions, Division 18, § 18000 – 18700 and other relevant sections.*

- Interfering with election officers holding an election, or with voters lawfully exercising their vote is a felony.
- Threatening force, violence, coercion, or intimidation against a voter related to their exercise of their vote is a felony.
- Unauthorized possession of a firearm in the immediate vicinity of a polling place or vote center is a felony.

** Some provisions have been abridged due to space limitations in this guide.*

VOTING HOURS

7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

2026 ELECTION DATES

Primary Election: June 2

General Election: November 3

For more information: sos.ca.gov/elections/upcoming-elections

REPORT SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR TO

Your local election official:
sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices

California Secretary of State:
(800) 345-VOTE (8683)
sos.ca.gov/elections

Unlawful Reward for Voting

CA Elec Code § 18310

A person shall not directly or through any other person pay or receive any money or other valuable consideration before, during, or after an election in order to reward any person or as a reward for voting.

Any person violating this prohibition is guilty of a felony.

Unlawful Acts on Election Day

CA Elec Code § 18370

(a) A person shall not, on election day, or at any time that a voter may be casting a ballot, within the 100 foot limit specified in subdivision (b), do any of the following:

(1) Circulate an initiative, referendum, recall, or nomination petition or any other petition.

(2) Solicit a vote or speak to a voter on the subject of marking the voter's ballot.

(3) Place a sign relating to voters' qualifications or speak to a voter on the subject of the voter's qualifications except as provided in Section 14240.

(4) Do any electioneering as defined by Section 319.5.

(b) The activities described in subdivision (a) are prohibited within 100 feet of either of the following:

(1) The entrance to a building that contains a polling place as defined by Section 338.5, an elections official's office, or a satellite location.

(2) An outdoor site, including a curbside voting area, at which a voter may cast or drop off a ballot.

Violating any of these prohibitions is a misdemeanor.

Unlawful Vandalism of Polling Places

CA Elec Code § 18380

(a) A person, during any election, shall not:

(1) Remove or destroy any of the supplies or other conveniences placed in the voting booths or compartments for the purpose of enabling the voter to prepare his or her ballot.

(2) Remove, tear down, or deface the cards printed for the instruction of voters.

(3) Remove, tear, mark, destroy, or otherwise deface any voter list or roster with the intent to falsify or prevent others from readily ascertaining voter information or the fact that a voter has or has not voted.

(4) Remove, tear down, or deface the signs identifying the location of a polling place or identifying areas within 100 feet of a polling place.

Violating any of these prohibitions is a misdemeanor.

Unlawful Interference with Canvass or Election

CA Elec Code § 18502

(a) Any person who in any manner interferes with the officers holding an election or conducting a canvass, as to prevent the election or canvass from being fairly held and lawfully conducted, or with the voters lawfully exercising their rights of voting at an election, is punishable by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170 of the Penal Code for 16 months or two or three years.

(b) For purposes of this section, "officers holding an election or conducting a canvass" include, but are not limited to, the Secretary of State as the chief elections officer, and their staff, as it relates to performance of any of their duties related to administering the provisions of the Elections Code, and elections officials and their staff, including temporary workers and poll workers, and members of a precinct board, in their performance of any duty related to assisting with holding an election or conducting a canvass.

(c) For purposes of this section, "holding an election or conducting a canvass" includes, but is not limited to, the election observation process governed by the Elections Code and applicable regulations adopted by the Secretary of State.

(d) For purposes of this section, "voting at an election" includes,

but is not limited to, voting in person at a polling place, the office of the elections official, and satellite locations, and voting by mail and returning a voted ballot pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 3017.

Any person violating this prohibition is guilty of a felony.

Unlawful Threat to Induce or Compel Person to Vote or Refrain from Voting

CA Elec Code § 18540

(a) Every person who makes use of or threatens to make use of any force, violence, or tactic of coercion or intimidation, to induce or compel any other person to vote or refrain from voting at any election or to vote or refrain from voting for any particular person or measure at any election, or because any person voted or refrained from voting at any election or voted or refrained from voting for any particular person or measure at any election is guilty of a felony.

(b) Every person who hires or arranges for any other person to make use of or threaten to make use of any force, violence, or tactic of coercion or intimidation, to induce or compel any other person to vote or refrain from voting or for any particular person or measure at any election, or because any person voted or refrained from voting at any election or voted or refrained from voting a particular way is guilty of a felony.

(c) For purposes of this section, "voting at any election" includes, but is not limited to, voting in person at a polling place, the office of the elections official, and satellite locations, and voting by mail and returning a voted ballot pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 3017.

Unlawful Possession of Firearm or Stationing of Uniformed Person at Polling Place

CA Elec Code § 18544

(a) Any person in possession of a firearm or any uniformed peace officer, private guard, or security personnel or any person who is wearing a uniform of a peace officer, guard, or security personnel, who is stationed in the immediate vicinity

of, or posted at, a polling place [including vote centers] may be punishable as a felony.

This section does not apply to peace officers conducting official business or at the polling place to cast their vote, security personnel hired by the elections official or manager of the property, nor persons posted at the polling place who have written authorization of the appropriate elections official (provided that neither the Secretary of State nor Attorney General objected to the authorization), under §18544(b).

Hiring Person in Possession of Firearm near Polling Place

CA Elec Code § 18545

(a) Any person who hires or arranges for any other person in possession of a firearm or any uniformed law enforcement officer, private guard, or security personnel or any person who is wearing a uniform of a law enforcement officer, private guard, or security personnel, to be stationed in the immediate vicinity of, or posted at, a polling place or a county elections office, may be punishable as a felony.

This section does not apply to the owner or manager of the property if the guard is not hired solely for Election Day; nor to a person who hires a person to be posted at the polling place with the written authorization of the appropriate elections official (provided that neither the Secretary of State nor Attorney General objected to the authorization), under § 18545(b).

Unlawful Tampering or Damaging Voting Device

CA Elec Code § 18564

(a) Any person is guilty of a felony, who, before or during an election:

(1) Tampers with, interferes with, or attempts to interfere with, the correct operation of, or willfully damages in order to prevent the use of, any voting machine, voting device, voting system, vote tabulating device, or ballot tally software program source codes.

(2)

(A) Interferes or attempts to interfere with the secrecy of voting or ballot tally software program source codes.

(B) For purposes of this paragraph, "interferes or attempts to interfere with" includes knowingly, and without authorization, providing unauthorized access to, or breaking the chain of custody to, either of the following:

(i) Certified voting technology during the lifecycle of that certified voting technology.

(ii) Any finished or unfinished ballot cards.

(3) Knowingly, and without authorization, makes or has in the person's possession credentials, passwords, or access keys to a voting machine that has been adopted and will be used in elections in this state.

(4) Willfully substitutes or attempts to substitute forged or counterfeit ballot tally software program source codes.

(b) The definitions in Section 17600 apply for purposes of this section.

Unlawful Acting as Election Officer CA Elec Code § 18575

Every person is guilty of a felony who at any election:

(a) Without first having been appointed and qualified, acts as an election officer.

(b) Not being an election officer, performs or discharges any of the duties of an election officer in regard to the handling, counting, or canvassing of any ballots.

Threatening a Public Official CA Penal Code § 76

(a) Every person who knowingly and willingly threatens the life of, or threatens serious bodily harm to, any elected public official, county public defender, county clerk, exempt appointee of the Governor, judge, or Deputy Commissioner of the Board of Prison Terms, or the staff, immediate family, or

immediate family of the staff of any [aforesaid] official, with the specific intent that the statement is to be taken as a threat, and the apparent ability to carry out that threat by any means, is guilty of a public offense, punishable as follows:

(1) Upon a first conviction, the offense is punishable by a fine not exceeding five thousand dollars ($5,000), or by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170, or in a county jail not exceeding one year, or by both that fine and imprisonment.

(2) If the person has been convicted previously of violating this section, the previous conviction shall be charged in the accusatory pleading, and if the previous conviction is found to be true by the jury upon a jury trial, or by the court upon a court trial, or is admitted by the defendant, the offense is punishable by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170.

(c) The following definitions shall apply:

(1) "Apparent ability to carry out that threat" includes the ability to fulfill the threat at some future date when the person making the threat is an incarcerated prisoner with a stated release date.

(2) "Serious bodily harm" includes serious physical injury or serious traumatic condition.

(3) "Immediate family" means a spouse, parent, or child, or anyone who has regularly resided in the household for the past six months.

(5) "Threat" means a verbal or written threat or a threat implied by a pattern of conduct or a combination of verbal or written statements and conduct made with the intent and the apparent ability to carry out the threat so as to cause the person who is the target of the threat to reasonably fear for his or her safety or the safety of his or her immediate family.

(d) As for threats against staff or immediate family of staff, the

threat must relate directly to the official duties of the staff of the [aforesaid] official in order to constitute a public offense under this section.

Challenging Right to Vote without Probable Cause; Conspiracies; Penalty

CA Elec Code § 18543

(a) Every person who knowingly challenges a person's right to vote without probable cause or on fraudulent or spurious grounds, or who engages in mass, indiscriminate, and groundless challenging of voters solely for the purpose of preventing voters from voting or to delay the process of voting, or who fraudulently advises any person that he or she is not eligible to vote or is not registered to vote when in fact that person is eligible or is registered, is punishable by imprisonment in the county jail for not more than 12 months or in the state prison.

(b) Conspiring to violate subdivision (a) is a felony.

Offenses at the Polls; Penalties

CA Elec Code § 18568

Every person is punishable by a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars ($1,000), or by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170 of the Penal Code for 16 months or two or three years, or by both that fine and imprisonment, who:

(a) Aids in changing or destroying any poll list or official ballot.

(b) Aids in wrongfully placing any ballots in the ballot container or in taking any therefrom.

(c) Adds or attempts to add any ballots to those legally polled at any election by fraudulently putting them into the ballot container, either before or after the ballots therein have been counted.

(d) Adds to or mixes with, or attempts to add to or mix with, the ballots polled, any other ballots, while they are being

counted or canvassed or at any other time, with intent to change the result of the election, or allows another to do so, when in the person's power to prevent it.

(e) Carries away or destroys, attempts to carry away or destroy, or knowingly allows another to carry away or destroy, any poll list, ballot container, or ballots lawfully polled or who willfully detains, mutilates, or destroys any election returns.

(f) Removes any unvoted ballots from the polling place before the completion of the ballot count.

(g) Displays a container or provides an envelope for the purpose of collecting or returning ballots, with the intent to deceive a voter into casting a ballot in an unofficial ballot or returning a ballot in an unofficial ballot return envelope. Evidence of intent to deceive may include using the word "official" on the container or envelope, or otherwise fashioning the container or envelope in a way that is likely to deceive a voter into believing that the container or envelope is an official collection box or official ballot return envelope that has been approved by an elections official.

(h) Directs or solicits a voter to place a ballot in a container or envelope prohibited by subdivision (g).

(i) Knowingly takes a package containing voted ballots or its contents from the custody of the elections official in violation of subdivision (d) of section 15551.

Interference

CA Elec Code §15007

(a) A peace officer shall not interfere in any manner with the administration of any election in this state and in the discharge of duties by the Secretary of State, a county elections official, an election worker, or a volunteer performing required elections-related tasks prescribed by this code or any other provision of state law except as necessary to respond to urgent threats to public health and safety.

(b) The following persons may bring a civil action to enforce the provisions of this section:

(1) The Attorney General.

(2) The Secretary of State.

(3) A county elections official with respect to violations that occur within the elections official's county.

Restricted Access

CA Elec Code §15553

(a) In no event shall any individual permit an agent of a law enforcement agency to access, disrupt, modify, or take possession of rosters, combined rosters, or voter lists unless authorized by a court order or to investigate a violation of Section 18560. This subdivision shall not be construed to prohibit an individual, in accordance with a written agreement between the elections official conducting the election and a law enforcement agency pursuant to Section 18544 or Section 18545, to permit agents of that agency to provide logistical, transportation, or security support during the voting period, on election day, or during the canvass of the vote.

(b) For the purposes of this section, "law enforcement agency" means all of the following:

(1) Any law enforcement agency, department, or other entity of the state or any political subdivision thereof, that employs any peace officer described in Chapter 4.5 (commencing with Section 830) of Title 3 of Part 2 of the Penal Code.

(2) Any law enforcement agency of another state.

(3) Any federal law enforcement agency.

Inspection of Voting Equipment

CA Elec Code §19230

(b) An individual shall not allow an agent of a law enforcement agency to access, disrupt, modify, or take possession of certified voting technology or a portion thereof unless authorized by a court order. This subdivision shall not be construed to prohibit an individual, in accordance with a

written agreement between the elections official conducting the election and a law enforcement agency pursuant to Section 18544 or Section 18545, to permit agents of that agency to provide logistical, transportation, or security support during the voting period, on election day, or during the canvass of the vote.

(c) For the purposes of this section, "law enforcement agency" means all of the following:

(1) Any law enforcement agency, department, or other entity of the state or any political subdivision thereof, that employs any peace officer described in Chapter 4.5 (commencing with Section 830) of Title 3 of Part 2 of the Penal Code.

(2) Any law enforcement agency of another state.

(3) Any federal law enforcement agency.

Strict Penalties for Seizing Election Documents; Disrupting Processes

CA Elec Code §18579

(a) Notwithstanding any other law, any person who seizes or causes or assists in the seizure of ballots, election records, or certified voting technology or any portion thereof, before election results are certified pursuant to Section 15372, is guilty of a felony.

(b) Any person with authority who directs one or more other persons subject to their supervision or authority to engage in the conduct prohibited by subdivision (a) shall be guilty of a felony.

(c) For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

(1) "Seize" and "seizure" mean the removal from the custody and control of authorized elections officials, as specified in subdivision (d) of Section 15551, except as provided by Sections 15553 and 19230.

(2) "Certified voting technology" has the same meaning as defined in Section 17600.

(3) "Election record" means any document or record that is or

will be subject to the preservation requirements in Section 17300 to Section 17306, inclusive.

Interference with Return of Completed Vote by Mail Ballot

CA Elec Code §18577

(a) Any person having charge of a completed vote by mail ballot who willfully interferes or causes interference with its return to the local elections official having jurisdiction over the election is guilty of a misdemeanor.

(b) Any person having charge of a vote by mail ballot who willfully interferes or causes interference with its delivery to a voter is guilty of a misdemeanor.

(c) Any person with authority who directs one or more other persons subject to their supervision or authority to engage in the conduct prohibited by subdivision (a) or (b) is guilty of a felony.

(d) For purposes of this section, "interference" includes, but is not limited to, providing unauthorized access to, breaking the chain of custody for, or tampering with a vote by mail ballot, or, having been designated to return a ballot under Section 3017, failing to return that ballot to the applicable elections official.

Safe spaces at the polls

CA Elec Code § 403

A law enforcement officer shall not arrest any person within 200 feet of a polling place on election day during the time in which the polling place is open, except for a crime related to disrupting the operation of the polling place, a crime against a person, or a crime against property. This section does not provide legal amnesty for any crime committed within the buffer zone on election day.

This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2031.