



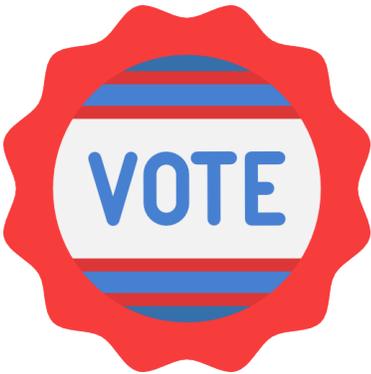
Easy Read Edition

They Work For Us: **A Self-Advocate's Guide to** **Getting Through to your** **Elected Officials**

Part 8: All About Voting

8. All about voting

Why should I vote?



We decide who our elected officials will be by voting in elections.

We vote to decide who gets to be:



- **A member of Congress**
- A State representative
- A State Governor
- The Mayor of a city
- The President of the United States



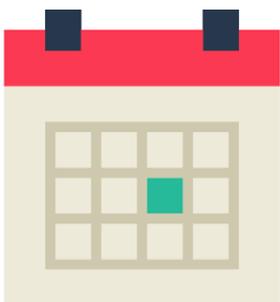
When someone wants to be an elected official, they need to **run for office**. When they run for office, they explain their ideas and ask people to vote for them.



People running for office in an election have different ideas about what the government should do. You might like some of these ideas better than others.

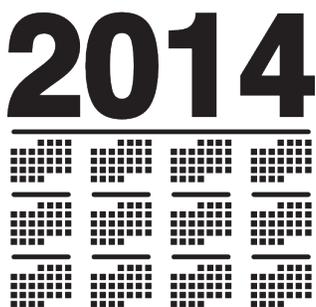


You should vote for someone if you like their ideas the most.



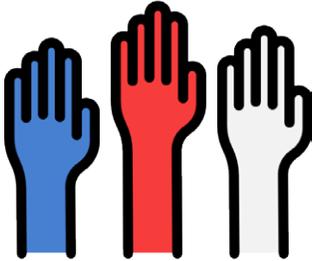
When do I vote?

Elections usually happen at the beginning of November.



Elections for the **state government** or the **federal government** usually happen in years that end in an even number.

For example, the most recent election for **members of Congress** was in 2016, and the next one will be 2018.



Sometimes, there might be “special elections” in other years.

For example, there might be a special election at an unusual time if a politician leaves their job and needs to be replaced.



Some local elections (like for Mayor or City Council) happen in years that end in an odd number.



You can find out when elections will happen by going to MyTimeToVote.com.

How often do I need to vote for different elected officials?



Different positions in government have different **terms**. A term is how long someone is allowed to be an elected official before they need to run for office again.

For example:



- A **Senator's** term is 6 years.

A Senator who was elected in 2012 gets to be a Senator until 2018.

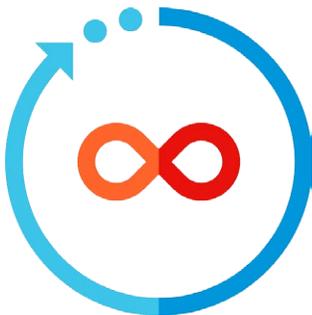
To stay a Senator, they need to run in an election in 2018 and get elected again.



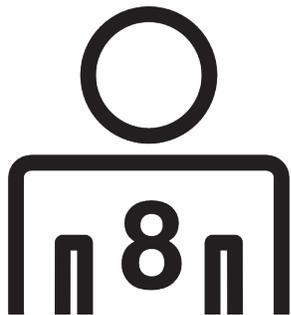
- A **Representative's** term is 2 years.



- The President's term is 4 years.
- Different states have different terms for their Governors and State Legislatures.



Senators and Representatives can have as many terms as they want, as long as people keep electing them.



The President can only have two terms. That means no one can be President for longer than 8 years.



In most states, Governors can only have two terms in a row.

What do I need to do to vote?

1. =
2. =

Different states have different rules about voting.



Some states say that you need to have a photo ID to vote - like a driver's license or state ID card.



In some states, you need to prove that you live in your state before you vote there. If you rent a house or apartment, you can do this by showing a copy of your lease. There are also other ways to prove you live in your state.



Find out about your state's rules by going to [Headcount.org's Voter Info page](https://www.headcount.org/voter-info) and clicking on your state.

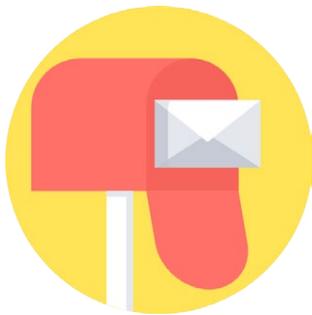
Voting absentee



Sometimes people **vote absentee**. This means voting by mail.



If you vote absentee, you get a **ballot** sent to you in the mail. A ballot is the official form you use to vote.



Once you get the ballot in the mail, you fill it out and send it back.



Some states will let you vote absentee for any reason. Other states only let certain people vote absentee.



Find out about your state's rules by going to [Headcount.org's Voter Info page](https://www.headcount.org/voter-info) and clicking on your state.

Registering to vote



Before you can vote, you have to get on the list of people who can vote in your state. This is called **registering to vote**.



Many states let you register to vote online.



You can also register to vote through the mail by filling out a document called the [National Mail Voter Registration Form](#).



You can register to vote in person by going to a [state or local election office](#).



You can find out more about registering to vote in your state by going to Vote.gov.



In most states, you need to register before the election that you want to vote in.



In some states, you can register to vote by going to your polling place in person on the day of an election. If you do this, make sure to bring the things your state needs to register you (like a photo ID or a copy of your lease).



You can find out when you need to register to vote on [RockTheVote.com's](https://RockTheVote.com) [page about voter registration deadlines](#).

Where is my polling place?



If you vote in an election in person, you have to vote at a specific place. The place where you vote is called your **polling place**.



You can find out where you can go to vote by going to [RockTheVote.com's Find Your Polling Place page](https://www.rockthevote.com) and typing in your address. This information might not be updated until a couple of weeks before an election.



Different states have different hours that polling places are open. Check your state's polling hours and make sure that you plan to get to your polling place before it closes.



Sometimes there is a line at the polling place if lots of people are waiting to vote.



As long as you are in line before your polling place closes, you will be allowed to vote, even if the line is long.

What if I have a problem registering to vote or voting?

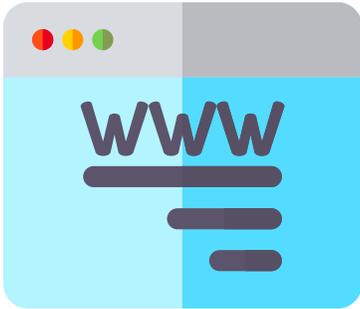


If you have a problem with registering to vote or voting, get in touch with your state's **Protection & Advocacy Agency**.



Protection & Advocacy Agencies are groups that help protect the rights of people with disabilities. There is one in each state. [Click here](#) to find the Protection & Advocacy Agency for your state.

How do I learn more about who to vote for?



People who are running for office usually have their own websites.



You can visit these sites and learn about their ideas. Think about whether their ideas would work to fix problems that are important to you.



Remember that people who are running for office want to say things that will get people to vote for them. They might try to make their ideas sound better than they really are.



Because of this, you should look for more information about people running for office, not just their own website.



There are other websites to help you find out more about the people running for elected office. Three websites you can use are:

1. [VoteSmart.org](https://www.vote-smart.org)

2. [Ballotpedia.org](https://www.ballotpedia.org)

3. [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org)



You can enter your address on these websites. Then, the site will tell you who the people running for office are. They will also tell you how these people feel about specific issues.



This can help you choose who to vote for.

Glossary



ballot

A ballot is the official form you use to vote.



federal government

The government that is in charge of the entire country and is based in Washington, D.C. The federal government makes federal laws.



members of Congress

Members of Congress are the people who have the power to make federal laws.



Protection & Advocacy Agency

Protection & Advocacy Agencies (or P&As) help protect the rights of people with disabilities. The government funds these organizations.



registering to vote

Registering to vote means getting on the list of people who can vote in your state. You have to register to vote before you can vote.



Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.



run for office

When someone wants to be an elected official, they need to run for office. When they run for office, they explain their ideas and ask people to vote for them.



Senators

Senators are the elected officials in the Senate.



state government

State governments are almost exactly the same as the federal government. State governments are just on a smaller scale. State governments make laws that apply to their states.



term

How long an elected official can serve in government before another election.



vote absentee

Voting absentee means you vote by mail instead of going somewhere to vote.

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