

Texas voter guide for college students

The deadline to register to vote is Oct. 7. The last day to apply to vote by mail is Oct. 25. Early voting in person is from Oct. 21 to Nov. 1.

BY **LILLIAN VEST** AUG. 12, 2024 UPDATED: 3 HOURS AGO

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The Nov. 5 election is quickly approaching, and Texans will have the opportunity to vote for several federal, state and local officials, including president.

The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit and nonpartisan news organization, is dedicated to helping Texans navigate the intricacies that may come with voting by mail or voting as a student or as a Texan with disabilities. This year, we've created a series of guides in addition to our comprehensive voter guide; this is our guide for college or high school student voters.

A fraction of Texas voters cast their ballot and an even smaller number of young people vote. During the 2022 midterms, only 49% of registered Texas voters between 18 and 24 participated, compared to 86% of voters 65 and older.

Young people ages 18-25 make up nearly 15% of Texas' adult population, according to census data from 2023. The issues most older generations find important may differ from those younger people most care about.

“It sounds cliché, but young people are the future at the end of the day,” said Karyn Fu, a Rice University student majoring in biosciences and social policy analysis who is also an election judge in Harris County.

Congress and the president shape national policies that affect young Texans, like student loan payments and environmental laws. Local officials also directly affect young people when it comes to housing and transportation policies.

“There are a lot of different things that are happening on a day-to-day basis, even on the local level, that are shaped by who we elect,” said Tessa Mitterhoff, Travis County regional field coordinator for [MOVE Texas](#), a nonpartisan group that works to get young Texans civically engaged.

Young voters face [several obstacles](#) to voting under Texas’ strict voting laws. Student IDs are not an acceptable form of required identification and the state forbids same-day, online and automatic voter registration. Many colleges also lack on-campus voting locations, partially due to a 2019 state law prohibiting temporary voting sites during the 12 days of early voting.

Mitterhoff said these constraints and low turnout makes it more important that young voters cast ballots. “I think if you’re able to show up, it is like a powerful statement,” she said.

Here’s what college students and other young voters need to know to be ready for the election, including how to register, where to find voting locations and what people need to bring to the polls.

Key dates

- Election Day: Nov. 5, 2024
- Last day to register to vote: Oct. 7, 2024
- First day of early voting by personal appearance: Oct. 21, 2024
- Last day of early voting by personal appearance: Nov. 1, 2024
- Last day to apply for ballot by mail: Oct. 25, 2024
- Last day for a county to receive a mailed ballot: Nov. 5, 2024 (Election Day) or Wednesday, Nov. 6, 2024 if postmarked (see more details in our guide to [voting by mail](#))

How to check your voter registration in Texas

One of the most common issues young people face when voting is thinking they’re registered to vote when they’re not or being unsure where they should vote if they’ve moved.

You can check to see if you're registered and verify your information through the [Texas Secretary of State's website](#). You'll need one of the following three combinations to log in:

- Your Texas driver's license number and date of birth.
- Your first and last names, date of birth and county you reside in.
- Your date of birth and Voter Unique Identifier, which appears on your voter registration certificate.

How to avoid long voting lines

Limited time or schedule conflicts are another common challenge to voting for young people like busy college students. If your campus has a polling place on Election Day, the lines can be hours long. Early voting can help voters avoid long lines, but only certain polling places participate. You can check which polling places participate in early voting [here](#) or through your county. Early voting for the general election will occur from Oct. 21 to Nov. 1.

[Texas law](#) says voters have the right to vote during work hours without being penalized or losing pay, but this may not apply if a worker has two hours before or after work to vote. If Election Day is your only option, you have the right to cast a ballot as long as you're in line by 7 p.m.

How do I register to vote in Texas?

- Before you register to vote, it's important to be aware of the eligibility requirements.
- Must be a U.S. citizen.
- Must reside in the county where you're registering.
- Must be at least 17 and 10 months old, and 18 by election day.
- Cannot be convicted of a felony.

More information on eligibility criteria can be found [here](#).

The voter registration application can be obtained in several ways.

- The deadline to register to vote for the Nov. 5 election is Oct. 7.

- You can have the form [mailed](#) to your residence.
- The application can be [printed](#) out and mailed to your county election office.
- If you're allowed to renew your license or state ID online, you may be able to [register to vote online](#) through the Texas Department of Public Safety while doing so. This is the only form of online registration available in Texas following [a court ruling in 2020](#).
- Find a [county voter registration official](#) and they will help you register.
- Check to see if your campus keeps voter registration applications on hand at the library or other places.
- Organizations like MOVE Texas often set up booths on campuses around Texas to register students as the deadline approaches.

To register, you'll need identification. Here are the documents accepted:

- Texas driver's license issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety.
- Texas election identification certificate issued by DPS.
- Texas personal identification card issued by DPS.
- Texas handgun license issued by DPS.
- United States military identification card containing the person's photograph.
- United States citizenship certificate containing the person's photograph.
- United States passport (book or card)

More information about identification requirements can be found [here](#).

How do I decide where to register to vote as an out-of-state student?

Deciding where to register to vote as an out-of-state student depends on your preference. As a full-time student, registering to vote in your college state is more manageable because you'll spend most of your time there. With elections typically occurring during the school year, accessing polling places is convenient, eliminating the need to request a mail-in ballot. Getting registered on campus is accessible at most universities in Texas and some campuses

have polling places where students can vote on Election Day.

If you are really involved in your community back home and want to stay registered there, [absentee voting](#) may be a good option. However, you'll need to plan ahead of time. You can see the Texas deadlines for absentee and vote-by-mail [here](#).

What if I can't make it to the county I'm registered to vote in on Election Day?

If you can't make it to the county you're registered to vote in on Election Day, there are a few avenues you can take.

- Early vote
- Absentee vote
- Request a limited ballot (only if the county you're registered in and the county you're voting in are both in Texas)

Early voting in person takes place 17 days before Election Day and ends four days before Election Day. Early voting polling locations are supposed to be listed [here](#) two days before early voting starts. It's the same online tool to check if you're registered to vote and shows all the nearest polling places for both Election Day and early voting.

Absentee voting is voting by mail. In order to be eligible, you must be out of the county on Election Day and during the period for early voting in person. More eligibility criteria can be found [here](#). To vote by mail, you must fill out the application for a mail-in ballot. You can request the application [here](#) or print it yourself and mail it to your [county's early voting election clerk](#). If you need to vote by mail, apply early to give yourself as much time as possible to get your ballot sent to you and to mail it back by Election Day. Applications must be received — not postmarked — by the early voting clerk in your county by Oct. 25. You can learn more about the absentee voting process in our [guide to voting by mail](#).

If you can't make it to the Texas county you're registered to vote for, but will still be in the state, you can request a limited ballot. You can vote in person or by mail with a limited ballot and can only vote early. If voting in person with a limited ballot, you can only vote at the main early voting location, which is usually the office of the election administrator or county clerk [who runs elections in your county](#). The main early voting polling place should be noted in a county's list of early voting locations. Upon request for a limited ballot, you will be required to fill out a [limited ballot application](#). The limited ballot only includes statewide and federal elections. It will not contain any county or precinct elections.

What you'll need to bring with you to the polling place

- When voting in person, you must bring one of the seven approved photo IDs to vote in Texas:
- A state driver's license (issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety)
- A Texas election identification certificate (issued by DPS)
- A Texas personal identification card (issued by DPS) A Texas license to carry a handgun (issued by DPS)
- A U.S. military ID card with a personal photo
- A U.S. citizenship certificate with a personal photo
- A U.S. passport

Check out [this story](#) for more details.

If you don't have one of those photo IDs or have an out-of-state ID, but you're registered in Texas, then you can still vote by filling out a [Reasonable Impediment Declaration](#) and will have to present one of the following types of supporting identification documents:

- A valid voter registration certificate
- A certified birth certificate
- A document confirming birth admissible in a court of law that establishes your identity (which may include a foreign birth document)
- A copy of or an original current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other document that shows the voter's name and address. (Any government document that contains a voter's photo must be an original.)

You can cast a provisional ballot if you have a valid photo ID but forgot it. Still, you will have to visit the local voter registrar's office within six days of Election Day to present an acceptable ID or documentation in order for the ballot to be counted. A registered voter without a valid photo ID or any of the supporting documents can also cast a [provisional ballot](#).

Phones or any other device that can communicate wirelessly or be used to record sound or

images are not allowed in the polling booth. So it's helpful to research a sample ballot, which you can find through your county or other organizations, beforehand and bring a paper list of your election choices. [Here](#) is more information on what's allowed in the polling place.

Here are some resources that can help make voting more accessible for you.

- Early voting is a great resource if you have a busy schedule because you're less likely to have to wait in line for hours and can even vote on weekends.
- You can find your sample ballot and some voter guides on [Vote411](#). The Texas Tribune and many other news organizations also post information about elections and what you may see on your ballot, so keep an eye out for that.
- If you're looking to get more involved in elections, you can sign up to be a poll worker. Polling locations are understaffed, it's a paid position and you can vote there. Learn more about becoming an election clerk [here](#).
- [The Secretary of State's Office](#) has a helpline at 1-800-252-VOTE (8683) to reach state attorneys available to assist voters and election officials with questions.
- A [coalition of voting rights groups](#) runs voter protection hotlines in several languages. Disability Rights Texas also offers a [helpline](#) for people with disabilities.

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Correction, Aug. 12, 2024 at 11:58 a.m.: Correction: A previous version of the Texas college student voter guide incorrectly stated the day of the 2024 November election. The correct date for Election Day is Nov. 5.

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