

CALIFORNIA DECIDES

PROPOSITION LAB

Proposition 39

PROP 39: THE CALIFORNIA VOTER ID INITIATIVE

Quick Facts

- **Official ballot title:** “Prohibits Citizens from Voting Unless They Present Government-Issued Identification” (revised by the Attorney General July 21, 2026). The original title used to gather signatures read “Establishes Additional Voter Identification and Citizenship Verification Requirements” (September 19, 2025). The proponents are challenging the change.
- **Measure’s own name:** The California Voter ID Initiative (AG No. 25-0007A1)
- **Type:** Initiated constitutional amendment
- **A vote YES means:** Voters show government-issued ID in person or write the last four digits of a government ID number on their mail-ballot envelopes. The state must offer a free voter ID card and verify citizenship on the voter rolls.
- **A vote NO means:** California keeps its current system, which asks for no ID at the polls and verifies mail ballots by signature match.
- **Sponsor/proponents:** Reform California. Proponents of record are Assemblymember Carl DeMaio, State Senator Tony Strickland, and Don DiCostanzo (Californians for Voter ID).
- **On the ballot because:** Qualified April 2026 on roughly 1.35 million submitted signatures—the first citizen initiative to qualify this cycle, exceeding the required 874,641 signatures.
- **Full legal text:** [Initiative 25-0007A1, Office of the Attorney General \(PDF\)](#)
- **LAO analysis:** [Ballot analysis of Initiative 25-0007](#)

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1. WHAT WOULD IT DO?

Today California is one of a handful of states asking for no identification at all for in-person voting. Under this measure, anyone voting in person would have to present a government-issued ID every time they go to the polls or provide the last four digits of their ID when voting by mail.

The change that reaches more Californians is the mail-ballot provision. Over 80 percent of the state votes by mail. Under the measure, a mail voter would have to write the last four digits of a unique government-issued identification number on the ballot envelope, and that number would be matched against the voter's registration record before the ballot is counted.¹ It is worth noting that Minnesota, a very Democratic state, already uses a system of voter-specific digits to verify mail ballots.

The measure carries three more parts. It requires the state to provide a free voter ID card on request, so a voter without a driver's license can still cast a ballot. It requires the California Secretary of State's office and the counties to maintain accurate voter rolls, use government data to verify citizenship attestations, and publicly report each year what share of the rolls has been citizenship-verified.² And it is self-executing, with the California State Auditor's Office reviewing compliance every odd-numbered year and any citizen able to seek judicial review if they believe the state or a county is not complying.³

2. THE LEGAL LANGUAGE

- **Full text:** [Initiative 25-0007A1, "California Voter ID Initiative," California Office of the Attorney General](#) (as amended August 7, 2025)
- **Key language:**

"Each time a voter casts a ballot in person in any election in the State, the voter shall present government-issued identification, or if voting by mail, the voter shall provide the last four digits of a unique identifying number from government-issued identification that matches the one designated by the voter for their voter registration."⁴
- **What it amends:** Adds Section 3.1 to Article II of the California Constitution, the article that governs voting. Because it is a constitutional amendment, the legislature cannot simply repeal it, and it directs the legislature to enact implementing laws and to provide for military and overseas voters consistent with federal law.⁵

3. WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY?

- **Who got it on the ballot?** Sponsored by Reform California and led by Assemblymember Carl DeMaio, with State Senator Tony Strickland and Don DiCostanzo as co-proponents. The proponents include Republican officials and others, some directly affiliated with the party and some not. Opposition is led by Democratic officials and some voting rights organizations. The office of the attorney general, a Democrat, rewrote the ballot title in July, which the proponents call an attempt to tilt the vote.
- **What would it change about voting?** Government-issued ID for in-person voting, the last four digits of a government ID number for mail voting, a free state ID card on request, and a new duty to verify citizenship on the rolls and report the results.
- **Where would it take effect?** Statewide, in every election, written into the state constitution.
- **When would it take effect?** On the November 3, 2026, ballot. The measure is self-executing on passage, the legislature is directed to enact implementing laws, and the state auditor reviews compliance every odd-numbered year.⁶
- **Why change the way voting happens in California?** The proponents place the measure in the national debate over voter identification, citizenship verification, and the accuracy of voter rolls. Their stated goals are to deter fraud, confirm eligibility, and raise public confidence in the results.⁷

4. TRADE-OFFS

California elections show no evidence of outcome-changing fraud. Documented cases are rare, and the most rigorous review of the 2020 election found that the major statistical claims of systematic fraud did not survive scrutiny.⁸ The type of fraud that in-person ID actually stops—one person impersonating another at the polling place—is the rarest documented category anywhere. On those facts, the in-person ID requirement is a solution aimed at the smallest part of the problem.

But two things keep this from being a one-sided answer. First, rarity statistics measure the fraud we detect. A system that verifies eligibility mainly through attestation and signature matching, as California's does, cannot fully prove a negative, and that gap is precisely the proponents' argument for building verification infrastructure.

Second, the measure's real operational weight is not at the polling place. It is on the mail envelope, and more than 80 percent of Californians vote by mail. A new number requirement on well over ten million envelopes will do far more, for good or ill, than the in-person rule that gives the measure its name.

That is the trade-off voters are actually weighing. On one side, more verification and more public reporting, which can raise confidence in a system that is facing challenges to its legitimacy. On the other side, the near certainty that some eligible mail voters will make an envelope mistake and have a valid ballot rejected, plus a citizen-lawsuit provision that could invite a wave of litigation from anyone with a political ax to grind and could slow the certification of results. The measure includes a free ID card to soften the access objection, which is a real answer to a real concern.

The open question is whether the confidence it builds is worth the eligible votes it may cost. It is also worth being candid about one more thing. Generic voter ID commands supermajority support nationally, including from many Democrats. Yet the May 2026 PPIC survey found likely voters split roughly evenly on this specific measure once its citizenship-verification language and partisan branding were attached.⁹

5. POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

Potential benefits

- Passage would bring California into line with most other states. Generic voter ID commands broad, bipartisan support, and the measure addresses a real gap in how the state verifies eligibility.¹⁰
- The mail ballot last-four-digits check is a genuine verification upgrade over signature matching alone. Minnesota, a Democratic state, already uses a voter-specific-digit system.¹¹
- The free state ID card directly answers the strongest access objection, letting voters without a driver's license still cast a ballot.¹²
- Annual citizenship verification reporting and biennial state auditor review add transparency and accountability that do not exist today.¹³

Potential risks

- More than 80 percent of the state votes by mail. A new envelope requirement on well over ten million ballots will cause some eligible voters to be rejected for honest mistakes.
- The citizen judicial-review provision could generate a large volume of litigation, and unresolved suits can slow the certification of results.¹⁴
- Citizenship-verification and roll-maintenance duties can produce false flags on eligible voters, and federal law under the National Voter Registration Act limits which removals are even permitted.
- The Legislative Analyst estimates costs in the tens of millions of dollars to set up plus tens of millions to the low hundreds of millions each year to run.¹⁵
- The in-person ID headline addresses the rarest documented form of fraud, which risks overselling what the measure would actually accomplish.

6. OPEN QUESTIONS

- How many registered Californians lack a qualifying government ID, and will the free-ID program reach them before the requirement takes effect?
- Will the mail-envelope number requirement reject more eligible ballots through honest error than the fraudulent ones it prevents?
- How much litigation will the citizen-suit provision invite, and will it slow the count in close races?
- Does matching voter data against government citizenship records improve accuracy enough to justify the risk of false flags on eligible voters?
- Will the attorney general's revised ballot title survive the proponents' challenge, and how much does the wording of that title move the final vote?

7. THE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU VOTE

Voter ID sounds simple: Show your card at the polls. But more than 80 percent of Californians vote by mail, where the real change is a new number on your envelope. Before you vote, ask whether this measure mostly builds confidence in the count or mostly rewrites how the ballots that actually decide California elections get verified.

A sound election system has to do two things at once: keep ineligible votes out and let every eligible vote count. Does this measure strengthen both, or does it trade one for the other? And which risk worries you more: a ballot that should not count, or an eligible ballot that gets rejected over a number on an envelope?

ENDNOTES

¹ Full text, Initiative 25-0007A1, "California Voter ID Initiative 2026" (as amended August 7, 2025), California Office of the Attorney General, Sec. 3.1(b): [https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/25-0007A1%20\(Voter%20ID\)\).pdf](https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/initiatives/pdfs/25-0007A1%20(Voter%20ID)).pdf).

² "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 3.1(a).

³ "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 3.1©.

⁴ "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 3.1(b).

⁵ "California Voter ID Initiative," Secs. 2-3.

⁶ "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 3.1.

⁷ "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 1.

⁸ Andrew C. Eggers, Haritz Garro, and Justin Grimmer, "No Evidence for Systematic Voter Fraud: A Guide to Statistical Claims about the 2020 Election," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 118, no. 45 (2021): <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2103619118>.

⁹ Mark Baldassare, Dean Bonner, Lauren Mora, and Deja Thomas, "PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Their Government," May 2026: <https://www.ppic.org/publication/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-their-government-may-2026/>.

¹⁰ Baldassare et al., "Californians and Their Government."

¹¹ "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 3.1(b).

¹² "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 3.1(b).

¹³ "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 3.1(a), ©.

¹⁴ "California Voter ID Initiative," Sec. 3.1©.

¹⁵ Legislative Analysts Office, A.G. File No. 2025-007, September 4, 2025 (ballot analysis of Initiative 25-0007): <https://lao.ca.gov/BallotAnalysis/Initiative/2025-007>.