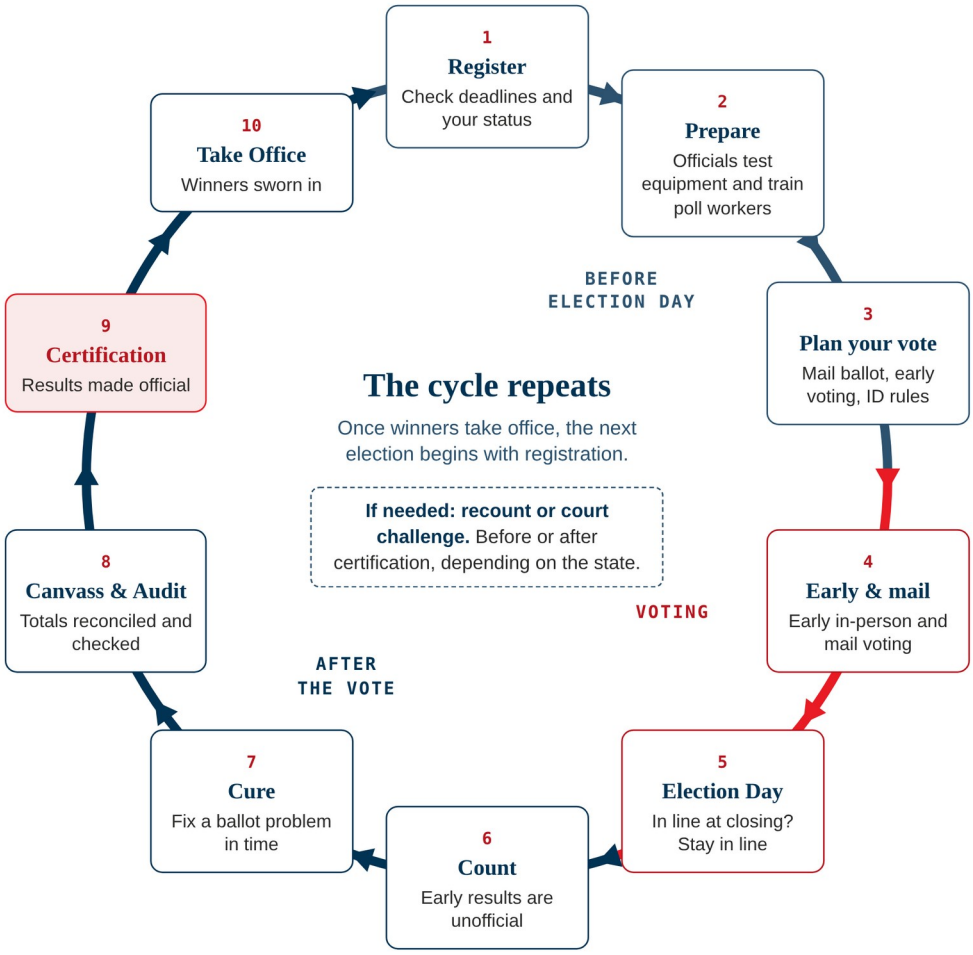
DEMOCRACY RENEWAL GROUP

ELECTION SEASON TOOLKIT

The Election Cycle

Every election moves through the same broad steps, and the end of one leads into the next.

Timing and rules vary by state, so confirm the details where you vote.



Step by step

What happens at each stage, and where voters take part.

01 Before Election Day

✓ **Register.** Deadlines vary by state. In 24 states and D.C., you can register and vote at the same time, during early voting, on Election Day, or both. Check your registration early.

✓ **Prepare.** Election officials finalize ballots, recruit and train poll workers, and test voting equipment, often in public.

✓ **Plan your vote.** Request a mail ballot if you need one, check early voting options, and confirm your polling place and ID rules.

02 Voting

✓ **Vote early or by mail.** 47 states and D.C. offer early in-person voting. Return mail ballots by your state's deadline, not just Election Day.

✓ **Vote on Election Day.** If you're in line when polls close, stay in line. If your eligibility can't be confirmed, ask for a provisional ballot.

03 After the Vote

✓ **Count.** Counting continues for days or weeks. Election night results are unofficial, and media calls are projections.

✓ **Cure.** In 36 states and D.C., voters are told about a signature problem on a mail ballot and can fix it before a deadline.

✓ **Canvass & Audit.** Officials review and reconcile every total. All 50 states and D.C. now have a post-election audit law, with types of audits varying by state.

✓ **Certification.** Officials formally confirm the results, usually county first, then state. It is a required duty with set deadlines.

↳ **If needed: recount or court challenge.** It can come before or after certification, depending on the state.

✓ **Take Office.** Winners receive certificates of election. Congress convenes January 3; state and local terms follow state law.

Questions at any step?

866-OUR-VOTE

Trained, nonpartisan volunteers can help with registration, voting, checking whether your ballot was counted, and fixing a ballot problem.

Additional resources: CanIVote.org (registration, polling places, and ballot tracking by state) · NCSL certification deadlines (state-by-state timelines) · State counts: NCSL, 2026.

Election rules and deadlines vary by state. Always confirm specifics with your state or county election office.

Follow the election cycle.