

## Know your voting rights before, during, and after a disaster

If extreme weather disrupts local services or destroys your belongings around election day, here's how to make sure you can still cast your ballot.

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In the weeks leading up to the 2024 presidential election, Hurricane Helene made landfall, causing extensive damage and flooding from northwest Florida to inland areas of Tennessee and North Carolina. Then Hurricane Milton hit central Florida a couple of weeks later. Polling sites across the region had to be [moved at the last minute](#), and [misinformation around voting](#) in the affected areas swelled online.

Surviving a severe storm, wildfire, or other extreme weather event is an experience that many Americans have had, or will have in the future, as climate change increases the frequency and intensity of natural disasters. According to 2024 polling from the Pew Research Center, [7 in 10 Americans](#) said their community experienced an extreme weather event in the past 12 months, including flooding, drought, extreme heat, rising sea levels, or major wildfires.

The aftermath of a disaster can be terrifying and traumatic, and many survivors struggle to secure basic necessities such as food and shelter, or to fill out paperwork for disaster aid and insurance. Finding accurate information about where and how to vote is even harder — so hard, in fact, that many people who have experienced disasters don't bother to vote at all. With experts [forecasting active hurricane and wildfire seasons](#), it's more important than ever to be prepared for disruptions to the voting process for any primaries and special elections, as well as Election Day in November.

The guide below aims to help you navigate early and absentee voting, as well as what to expect on Election Day, should a disaster affect your area. (If you're not registered to vote, find your state's voter registration rules below.)

### Registration information

Register to vote or find out if you're registered [here](#). Since it's hurricane season, we've included registration links and upcoming election information for coastal states below:

**Florida:** Register to vote or check your registration [here](#). Stay updated on Florida election dates [here](#).

**Alabama:** Register to vote [here](#). Stay updated on Florida election dates [here](#).

**Mississippi:** Mississippi does not have online registration, so find out how to do so in person or online [here](#). The deadline to register is 30 days before election day. Stay updated on Mississippi election dates [here](#).

**North Carolina:** The deadline for voter registration is 25 days before Election Day; register or check your status [here](#). Stay updated on North Carolina election dates [here](#).

**South Carolina:** Learn how to register [here](#). Stay updated on South Carolina election dates [here](#).

**Louisiana:** Online [registration](#) must be done 20 days before Election Day; mail must be postmarked 30 days prior. Stay updated on Louisiana election dates [here](#).

**Georgia:** Register online [here](#). Stay updated on Georgia election dates [here](#).

**Texas:** You must register to vote 30 days before Election Day; find out your status or register [here](#). Stay updated on Texas election dates [here](#).

READ MORE: [How a disaster is officially declared](#)

## In-person voting

[If a disaster strikes](#), the governor can extend voting deadlines, allow ballots to be forwarded to a new address, allow local officials to change or add new polling places, or postpone municipal elections. Those rules are different depending on the state, and information may be hard to find in the wake of a disaster.

The U.S. Vote Foundation has [a tool](#) to access your county election office's contact information, which typically includes county clerks, supervisors, auditors, boards of elections, or election commissions, depending on the state. You can try to contact these offices, but it's not guaranteed they'll be able to answer your questions. You can also ask voting rights groups in your area and watch local news for any changes or updates.

In the wake of a disaster, first confirm where you should be voting. Has your polling place been damaged or moved? If multiple locations are combined into one, or Election Day volunteers are scarce post-disaster, be prepared to stand in long lines to vote. If you're waiting in the heat, make sure to bring water and wear comfortable shoes and appropriate clothing. (Twenty-one states prohibit campaign apparel, so keep that in mind.) [Here are some other resources](#) on heat waves.

Was your car damaged in a disaster? Need a ride to the polls? Some ride-share services and public transit systems offer free rides on Election Day. [Here's more information](#).

READ MORE: [The officials and agencies in charge of disaster response](#)

## Early voting

Most states, as well as Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands offer some form of early voting, which is voting in person before the election anywhere from a few days to more than a month early, [according to the National Conference of State Legislatures](#). However, the hours, locations, and timing differ for each. Three states — Alabama, Mississippi, and New Hampshire — do not allow early in-person voting.

Early in-person voting is a useful option if you'd like to avoid lines on Election Day or will be out of town. It's also an option for people who live in a region of the country prone to natural disasters or have been recently hit by one. In-person voting on Election Day, which comes at the tail end of "[danger season](#)," may not either be a possibility or priority. [Go here](#) to see the specific rules around early voting in your state.

## Absentee ballots

Absentee voting is often called "mail-in voting" or "by-mail voting." Every state offers this, but some require you to meet certain conditions, like having a valid excuse for why you can't make it to the polls on Election Day. Absentee voting can be a particularly useful tool for people recently displaced by extreme weather, or are at risk of being displaced. It also safeguards voters who live in the hottest parts of the country, where heat can make waiting in long lines dangerous.

The League of Women Voters explains absentee voting rules by state [here](#). If you reside in a county that gets a [federal disaster declaration](#) after a disaster hits, there may be changes to these processes that can offer you more time and flexibility.

## Voter ID Laws

Each state has a different voter ID law: Some require photo identification, others require a document such as a utility bill, bank statement, or paycheck, while still others require a signature. The National Conference of State Legislatures has a [breakdown of the rules here](#).

If your ID gets destroyed in a flood, fire, or tornado, your state may be able to exempt you from showing an ID at the polls. For instance, after Hurricane Harvey in 2017, [Texas residents](#) who lost their ID to floodwaters could vote without one once they filled out an affidavit stating that their identification was lost because of a natural disaster. Your state may also waive the fees associated with getting a new ID.

The best way to find this information is to contact your county clerk or other election official, or contact a voting rights group in your area.

## Know your rights

Just as there are strict rules in states around how people can cast ballots, there are also many others that dictate what happens outside of polling places. In most states, you can accept water and food from groups around polling places — but there is misinformation around doing so. For example, after the 2020 presidential election, Georgia passed a law prohibiting this activity within a certain buffer zone, only for a judge [to later strike down](#) part of it. So while there is no longer a ban on handing things to voters within 25 feet of the line to vote, it is still illegal to do so within 150 feet of the building where ballots are being cast.

Call or text 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683) to report voter intimidation to the [Election Protection Coalition](#). You can also find more information on voter rights [from the ACLU](#).

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This is part of the [Disaster 101 toolkit](#), Grist's comprehensive guide to extreme weather preparation, response, and recovery.

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