

Think**Tennessee**

Voting in Tennessee in 2024:

Education Series Part 1 of 5

Voter Registration

Federal laws, e.g., the 1965 Voting Rights Act, 1993's National Voter Registration Act, and 2002's Help America Vote Act, set the guidelines for the administration of elections across the country. However, elections are administered at the state level. Policies from voter registration eligibility to how voters can cast their ballots vary from state to state.

This series highlights key elements of Tennessee's election laws so Tennessee voters can successfully participate in elections.

What Tennessee voters should know about voter registration:

- **Eligibility:** Who can and cannot register
- **Registration:** When, where, and how to register
- **Maintenance:** When to update your voter registration

Each state is responsible for maintaining a voter registration database, which includes verifying and enrolling eligible applicants and keeping the list updated and current.¹ In Tennessee, those duties are performed at the county level at each of the 95 County Election

¹ In Tennessee, voters may be removed from voter registration lists by request, for changes of address, death, felony conviction, and inactivity (with proper notice), among other reasons. Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-106.

Commission offices.

TN Voter Registration Highlights:

- Tennessee residents who are U.S. citizens and at least 18 on or before Election Day (except for those with certain felony convictions) can register to vote.
- In Tennessee, you lose the right to vote with a felony conviction (with some exceptions). You may be able to have your rights restored.²
- Voter registration is managed by counties. Moves from one county to another do not transfer.
- Tennessee voters do not have to register by political party.
- You must be registered by the voter registration deadline which is 30 days before Election Day.

Eligibility: Who can and cannot register

- Who is eligible to register to vote in Tennessee?
 - **You can register to vote if:**
 - You are at least 18 years old on or before Election Day
 - You are a Tennessee resident
 - You are a U.S. citizen
 - You have not been convicted of a felony,³ or if you have, you have had your felony expunged or voting rights restored.

² If eligible, restoring voting rights is a complicated process involving multiple steps and legal assistance. You must receive either a pardon from the governor or petition the court to restore your full citizenship rights (including gun rights). In addition, you must complete a Certificate of Restoration confirming that you have completed your sentence and do not owe restitution or court costs. You must additionally be current on any child support obligations. See here for additional information: https://www.thinktennessee.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/vrr_cor_process_infographic.pdf.

³ Unless your felony conviction was for certain crimes not rendered "infamous" before January 15, 1973, or if it occurred between January 15, 1973 and May 17, 1981. These convictions did not result in lost voting rights- you remain eligible to register.

- **Did You Know?**

- **Voting is based on residency.**

- **There is no waiting period:** Once you move to Tennessee, if you are eligible, you may register.

- **College students living in Tennessee can choose where to vote.**

- Register to vote in the Tennessee county you live in for school, or
- Stay registered in your home state (or county).

- **Where you live determines who you can vote for.**

- Decisions about where to register to vote mostly impact which local elections you wish to participate in.
- All voters can vote for president, and voters anywhere in a state can vote for governor and U.S. senator. But local offices, e.g., state legislators, city mayors and councilmembers, and U.S. representatives, are based on where you are registered.

- **You can register if you will be 18 on election day.**

- You can register to vote if you are 17 but will be 18 by the time of the next election.

- **You may be eligible to register with a felony conviction (See Part 4 of this Education Series for more details).**

- If you have been convicted of a felony anywhere, you lose the right to vote in

Tennessee (with some exceptions).⁴ Except for certain convictions, you may have your voting rights restored.⁵

■ **You are eligible to register if:**

- Your conviction was for certain crimes not rendered “infamous” before **January 15, 1973.**
- Your conviction occurred between **January 15, 1973, and May 17, 1981.**
- You have had your voting rights restored or felony expunged.

■ **You are ineligible to register with the following convictions:**

- **As of July 1, 1986:** Voter fraud, treason, first-degree murder, and aggravated rape.
- **As of July 1, 1996:** Any degree of murder or rape.
- **As of July 1, 2006:** Sexual or violent sexual offenses that are felonies where the victim was a minor, or felony bribery, misconduct involving public officials and employees, or interference with government operations.

Registration: When, Where, and How to Register

- Voter Registration Deadline:
 - **30 Days before Election Day**
 - Online voter registrations must be

⁴ For the list of convictions that did not result in loss of voting rights, see <https://sos.tn.gov/elections/guides/restoration-of-voting-rights>.

⁵ For the list of convictions and the qualifying date ranges that result in permanent loss of voting eligibility, see <https://sos.tn.gov/elections/guides/restoration-of-voting-rights>.

completed, and paper registration forms postmarked, by the 30th day before an election.⁶ If the deadline falls on a weekend or legal holiday, the deadline becomes the next business day.⁷

- **Upcoming 2024 State and Federal Registration Election Deadlines:**
 - **July 2, 2024:** Voter registration deadline for the **August 1, 2024** Primary Election Day
 - **October 7, 2024:** Voter registration deadline for the **November 5, 2024,** General Election Day
 - (The Presidential Preference Primary was held on **March 5, 2024**)

- **Did You Know?**

- Applications submitted after the deadline will be processed later.
 - If you submit a voter registration application after the deadline, you will not be eligible to vote in the upcoming election. Applications will be processed after the election, and if eligible, you may vote in the next election.

- **Where to Register to Vote: Required Registration Locations:**

- **State Agencies:**
 - The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)

⁶ Election officials will accept a mailed voter registration application that does not have a postmark but is signed and dated before the voter registration deadline if they receive it before the 27th day before an election. Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-109(a).

⁷ Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-109.

requires states to provide voter registration opportunities at specific state agencies.⁸

- **Departments of Motor Vehicles (the Department of Safety and Homeland Security in Tennessee).**

You must be given the opportunity to register to vote when applying for or renewing a driver's license.

- **Public Assistance Agencies.** Offices providing public assistance and state-funded programs primarily providing services to persons with disabilities also must provide the opportunity to register.

- **Other State Agencies.** Tennessee state law also designates public libraries and high schools, offices of county clerks, and registers of deeds as voter registration agencies.⁹

- **High School Registration:**

- County Election Commissions are required to conduct at least one voter registration event at every public and private high school in the county.¹⁰

- **Naturalization Ceremony:**

- County Election Commissions must also conduct voter registration events at planned and scheduled group naturalization ceremonies within the county.¹¹

⁸ Sec. 7 of NVRA, 52 U.S. Code § 20506.

⁹ Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-202.

¹⁰ Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-111(b).

¹¹ Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-111(d).

- **Additional Opportunities:**
 - **Third-Party Voter Registration Drives**
 - Third parties, i.e., non-election officials, such as HeadCount or the League of Women Voters may also collect voter registration applications.
 - **Tennessee Laws for Third-Party Voter Registration Drives**
 - Laws passed in 2020 and 2024 place requirements and prohibitions on collecting voter registration applications.
 - **Requirements:**
 - Collected applications must be submitted within 15 calendar days of when the applicant signs it, or the voter registration deadline if it is sooner.¹²
 - An applicant's information cannot be retained for non-voter engagement reasons without their consent in writing.¹³
 - **Prohibitions:**
 - Applications cannot be altered without the applicant's knowledge or consent
 - Applications cannot be pre-filled with information about the applicant

¹² Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-142(e). The legislature passed a new law in 2024 adding the requirement that the date that the applicant signs the voter registration application starts the 15-day clock for it to be turned in.

¹³ You cannot copy or retain information provided by the applicant for any reason other than voter participation, voter engagement, or voter turnout unless you inform the applicant how it will be used, and they agree in writing. The SSN may not be used in any way. Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-142(f).

- Anyone with felony convictions related to elections, aggravated perjury, or financial exploitation of elderly or vulnerable persons cannot handle or collect voter registration applications.¹⁴
 - You cannot set quotas or pay people based on the number of applications collected.¹⁵
 - However, a person can be paid or employed to conduct voter registration on an hourly or salary basis.
- How to Register to Vote: The Voter Registration Application
 - **TN Paper Voter Registration Application**
 - Available online at the Secretary of State's website (<https://sos.tn.gov/elections/services/register-to-vote-paper-form-mail-in-or-hand-deliver>) and at County Election Commissions and other government offices, public libraries, and schools.¹⁶ Military and overseas voters can also submit applications postage-free via air mail.¹⁷
 - **National Mail Voter Registration Application**

¹⁴ Relevant felony convictions include election-related felony convictions (under Title 2 of the Tennessee Code), offenses of financial exploitation of elderly or vulnerable persons (Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-15-502), and aggravated perjury (Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-16-702).

¹⁵ Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-142(c) and (d).

¹⁶ Tennessee's Application for Voter Registration is available at <https://sos.tn.gov/elections/services/register-to-vote-paper-form-mail-in-or-hand-deliver>.

¹⁷ Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-6-501

- Residents of any state can use this form, created by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). It is available at this website, <https://www.eac.gov/voters/national-mail-voter-registration-form>, along with each state's specific instructions.¹⁸
- **TN Online Voter Registration Application**
 - If you have a Tennessee driver's license or ID issued by the Department of Safety, you can register to vote online at this website, <https://ovr.govote.tn.gov/>, and through the Go Vote TN app.
- **Did You Know?**
 - **Full Social Security Numbers are required.**
 - You must provide your full Social Security Number on the voter registration application.
 - **Filling out the voter registration application with a felony conviction.**
 - The application asks:
 - **If you have a felony conviction:** If your record has been expunged, answer "no."
 - **For the crime, date, and place of conviction:** This information is not required.
 - **If you have had your voting rights restored:** Include a copy of that verification with your registration

¹⁸ EAC's National Mail Voter Registration Application is available at https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/Federal_Voter_Registration_ENG.pdf.

application.

○ **How you register matters.**

- Voter registrations are either considered “in person” or “by mail,” and they mean different things about how you can cast your first ballot.
- If you register by mail, you cannot vote absentee unless you have first verified your identity with your County Election Commission by:
 - Voting in person (in a previous election in the county.)
 - Going to your County Election Commission and asking them to update your registration in person.
- In-person registrations are completed with state officials (at your County Election Commission, Department of Safety, or a registration drive with election officials) who can verify your identification.
- By-mail registrations are completed without identification verification (paper applications mailed to election offices, applications submitted online, or registration drives by non-election officials).

Maintenance: When to Update Your Registration

- When to update your voter registration:
 - Moves and name changes
 - Because voter registrations are based on your name, address, and the county you

live in, voter registration records must be updated if those change.

- **Moves within the same county:**

- Update your address on your existing registration record through the online voter registration site, by mail, or in person with your County Election Commission office.¹⁹

- **Moves to a new county:**

- Voter registrations do not transfer across counties. If you move from Nashville (Davidson) to Franklin (Williamson) or Kingsport (Sullivan) to Knoxville (Knox), re-register in your new county.

- **Name changes:**

- If you change your name, you may update your existing voter record either through the online voter registration site or with your County Election Commission.

- **Did You Know?**

- **What happens if you move within the same county?**

- You may still be able to cast a ballot if you have moved within the same county and haven't updated your record in time.

- **Where you cast your ballot depends on when you are voting:**

¹⁹ Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-129(a). The Secretary of State's website also provides relevant information on updating voter registration, available at <https://sos.tn.gov/elections/guides/how-to-update-your-voter-registration>.

- **Voting during Early Voting:**
 - Because you may use any polling location in your county during Early Voting, you can update your address and vote at any polling location.
- **Voting on Election Day:**
 - If your new address is in the same polling precinct as your old address, you can cast a ballot.
 - If your new address puts you in a different polling precinct, you will have to go to that precinct to cast your ballot (except for in counties with Convenience Vote Centers where you can change your address and cast your ballot in any location in your county.)²⁰
- **What happens if you move after a voter registration deadline?**
 - Voters who move after a voter registration deadline may still be able to vote for at least some offices.
 - If you move to a new Tennessee county from another Tennessee county.
 - You can still cast a ballot in state and federal primary and general elections by voting in your former county (if you were registered there) for up to 90 days.
 - If you moved to Tennessee from another

²⁰ Convenience Voting Centers (Vote Centers) are used on Election Day and act the same as Early Voting polling places. Voters in counties with Vote Centers may choose any polling place in the county to vote on Election Day, whereas those in counties without Vote Centers must vote at their assigned polling place.

state within 30 days before Election Day.

- You cannot vote in Tennessee.

However, you can vote for president at your previous voting location either in person or absentee.²¹

- If you move out of Tennessee within 30 days before a presidential election.

- If you are unable to register to vote in a state because their deadline has passed, you can vote for president at your old Tennessee address.²²

²¹ The Voting Rights Act, 52 U.S. Code § 10502(e), protects your right to cast a ballot in a presidential election after a change of residence close to Election Day.

²² Tenn. Code. Ann. § 2-2-103.