

Nebraska's 2026 Election

A guide for newsrooms

Nebraska's 2026 general election is **Tuesday, Nov. 3**. Most of what may look strange in an election is a routine process. This guide walks through each stage and discusses what's normal, what isn't, and the false claims most likely to reach your newsroom.

This document is from Nebraska's nonpartisan **Election Protection Coalition**, which trains volunteer poll watchers, ballot count observers, and legal observers and runs a voter hotline (402-890-5291). Members include [Civic Nebraska](#), [ACLU of Nebraska](#), [The Nebraska Civic Engagement Table](#), [Common Cause Nebraska](#), and [The Good Life Institute](#). We take no position on any candidate or ballot measure.

Before Election Day

Voting is already underway: In-person early voting at county election offices opened **Oct. 5**, and mail ballots began mailing on **Sept. 28**.

Key dates and rules

Registration: **Oct. 16** online or by mail; **Oct. 23** at 6 pm CDT in person at the county election office.

Mail ballot requests: Due **Friday, Oct. 23** (exact hour varies by county). Any registered voter can vote by mail without an excuse.

Mail ballot return: Ballots must arrive at the county election office or a county drop box by **8 pm** on Election Day. A Nov. 3 postmark alone does not make a ballot count.

Photo ID: Required of every voter since the May 2024 statewide primary. Mail voters list an ID number or enclose a copy; a voter who can't obtain ID can file a reasonable impediment certification. The ID does not have to be current – acceptable IDs include a Nebraska driver's license; a Nebraska state ID; a Nebraska college ID; a Nebraska political subdivision ID (state, county, city, public school, etc); a hospital, hospice, home and community-based developmental services agency, intermediate care facility, assisted-living facility or nursing home record; a military ID, a tribal ID, or a US passport.

Equipment testing: Before every statewide election, each county tests its ballot scanners with three sets of test ballots, one of them marked by a voter registered to a different party than the election official. Results must match exactly, and each recognized political party may send one observer. It's a documented check that the equipment counts correctly, and the first link in the chain of custody (see **After the polls close**).

Recent court rulings, in plain terms

Mail ballot deadlines ([Watson v. RNC](#), June 29): The US Supreme Court ruled that states may count mail ballots postmarked by Election Day that arrive later. However, Nebraska's rule is unchanged – it never had a grace period, so ballots still must arrive by **8 pm Nov. 3**.

Citizenship checks ([SAVE](#), Sept. 25): An emergency order lets states, for now, use the Department of Homeland Security's expanded SAVE database, which now draws on Social Security data, to check voter rolls. Nebraska Secretary of State **Robert Evnen** [has said](#) Nebraska is using SAVE to check voters who do not have records with the Department of Motor Vehicles. The lower court had found risks that recently naturalized citizens could be wrongly flagged. Federal law also bars systematic list purges in the final 90 days before a federal election, a window that began in early August.

What's normal and what isn't

You may see	Normal?	Context
Long lines or heavy early-vote days at county offices	Normal	Early voting runs only at county election offices, often one site per county.
A voter's mail ballot not yet showing as received	Usually normal	Processing takes days. Voters can check status at ne.gov/go/votercheck .
Postcards or calls urging people to vote, from parties and groups	Normal	Legal, though sometimes inaccurate about dates or process; check against the county.
Letters telling registered voters they may be removed or are "not eligible"	Needs scrutiny	Ask who sent it, on what basis, and whether the voter got legal notice and a chance to respond.
Mass removals of voters from rolls this close to Nov. 3	Not normal	Systematic purges are <u>barred</u> in the 90-day window.

Texts or posts giving a “new” Election Day, text-to-vote or vote-by-phone options

False

Nebraska has no text or phone voting. Election Day is Nov. 3.

Watchouts for newsrooms

Noncitizen voting claims. Expect significant numbers from SAVE checks. A database “flag” is a lead that requires follow-up; it is not proof someone voted illegally. Ask how many flagged records were confirmed, and how many were naturalized citizens.

Eligibility denials. Watch for voters told they can’t register or vote because of citizenship, race, nationality or gender. Report these to the hotline (402-890-5291).

Mail voting confusion. National coverage of *Watson* may lead Nebraskans to think a postmark is enough. Here, it isn’t; inform mail voters to use a dropbox in the final week before Nov. 3. Pay close attention to whether syndicated or wire coverage running on Nebraska-based media’s social feeds gets confused with local coverage, and add a Nebraska note where state rules differ. Social media feeds often strip the location from headlines and descriptions, so a rule from another state can easily be read as Nebraska’s. On Election Day, that risks sending voters the wrong deadline, polling place, or procedure.

Election Day: Tuesday, Nov. 3

Nebraska polling places are open 8 am to 8 pm Central (7 am to 7 pm Mountain), and anyone in line at closing may vote.

How it works

Assigned polling place: Each voter must vote at their own precinct site. A voter at the wrong site is directed to the right one.

Provisional ballots: A voter who lost or spoiled an early mail-in ballot, never received one, or has moved can vote provisionally. It counts once officials confirm no other ballot was cast for that voter. A voter without photo ID also votes provisionally and must show ID to the county election office by close of business **Tuesday, Nov. 10**.

Electioneering: Campaigning is illegal within 200 feet of a polling place entrance or a ballot dropbox, and campaign gear is not allowed inside. Signs on private property within 200 feet are legal if the polling place isn't on that property.

Poll watchers: Appointed by parties, candidates or groups, never by election officials. They wear a county- or state-approved credential and may observe. They may not talk to voters while they are voting, or to try to interfere with or intimidate the ballot-casting process. They may not interact with or interfere with poll workers. Complaints go to the county election commissioner, county clerk, or secretary of state's office.

Law enforcement: Local officers may respond to a genuine incident. Since 1865, federal law has made it a crime for any federal officer to bring troops or armed men to a polling place (18 U.S.C. § 592). Military officers are separately barred from interfering in elections (§ 593), and intimidating a voter is a federal crime, whoever does it (18 U.S.C. § 594; 52 U.S.C. § 10307(b)).

What's normal and what isn't

You may see	Normal?	Context
Lines at 8 am and after work	Normal	Peaks are predictable.
A voter asked for photo ID	Normal	Required by state law. A voter without ID can still cast a provisional ballot, which counts if they show ID to the county election office within one week, by close of business Tuesday, Nov. 10.
A voter given a provisional ballot	Normal	It's a safeguard, and most are reviewed and counted when valid.
A voter turned away with no provisional ballot offered	Not normal	Federal law guarantees a provisional ballot to voters who believe they're eligible. A voter not on the list should first be directed to their correct polling place, and offered a provisional ballot there.
A voter challenged as unqualified by a poll worker or another registered voter	Normal	Allowed by state law (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 32-926 et seq.). A challenged voter who answers the required questions and signs

		an oath affirming citizenship, residence and age may vote.
Repeated, blanket or baseless challenges aimed at a group of voters	Not normal	Possible intimidation; report it to the county and the hotline.
A machine or scanner glitch; voters told to leave ballots in a secure bin	Normal	Paper ballots are kept and scanned later. Every Nebraska voter marks paper.
Credentialed poll watchers, or Justice Department monitors, following state rules	Normal	Allowed by law.
A polling place opening late or closing early	Not normal	Report it; courts can order extended hours.

Watchouts for newsrooms

Viral clips. A video of a confused voter, a jammed scanner or a long line is usually a local hiccup. Before amplifying it, confirm the location, time, and resolution with the county election office.

Intimidation and interference. Real threats include people confronting voters about citizenship, photographing voters, or claiming to be “monitoring” for immigration enforcement. Get specifics and report them.

False rumors of closures. Posts claiming a site is closed, moved, or “ICE is there” can suppress turnout. Verify before repeating, even to debunk, and lead with the accurate information: Federal law bars armed agents from polling places, and a voter who sees something concerning should stay in line, vote, and report it. Coverage that is heavy on threat and light on the law can keep voters home on its own.

After the polls close: 8 p.m. CST, Nov. 3

Election-night numbers are unofficial and incomplete by design; official results always come weeks later, after every county canvasses and the state certifies.

How counting works

8 p.m. CST: Results begin posting at electionresults.nebraska.gov, refreshed every few minutes. The first wave is usually early ballots, which counties may begin counting one day before Election Day.

Later that night: Election Day precinct results arrive. Totals can shift as these come in. In Lancaster County, Election Night has run similarly across recent elections: 8 pm releases early-vote results, then three Election Day releases at 9:15, 10:15 and 11:15 pm (the last one only if needed). In 2024 in Douglas County, the 8 pm release covered early ballots turned in before noon Monday, followed by releases at 8:45, 9:45 and 10:45 pm.

Following days: Early ballots dropped off Monday or Election Day are verified and counted, along with provisional ballots. Douglas and Lancaster counties have released these batches on the Thursday or Friday after the election. The secretary of state also posts unofficial updates, usually on Fridays.

Canvass and audit: All 93 county canvassing boards account for every ballot. A post-election audit randomly samples 10% of precincts, including at least one in every county, hand-counts three contests and compares them with machine totals.

Certification: The State Board of Canvassers meets to certify official results on **Nov. 30**.

Recounts: Automatic when the margin between the top two candidates is 1% or less of the winner's vote, in races with more than 500 votes cast. Recounts re-tabulate the paper ballots.

Chain of custody, defined. This is the documented, unbroken record of who controlled every ballot and machine, from creation to archiving. Ballots and equipment stay with county election officials under state law throughout. National best practice, set out in a September 2026 *Election Chain of Custody Blueprint* from [Advance Elections](#), the [Election Law Program](#) and [Verified Voting](#), rests on five standards: **Continuous logging, two-person bipartisan handling, access limited to staff who need it, dated verification signatures, and independent reconciliation.**

A gap is not a stolen election. Courts have generally let results stand when a custody lapse shows no evidence of tampering. Where a problem touches an identifiable batch, courts have set aside just that batch. New elections have been ordered only where the record shows actual tampering.

What's normal and what isn't

You may see	Normal?	Context
A candidate's lead shrinking or flipping as counts come in	Normal	Early, Election Day, and late ballots lean differently. The order of counting affects only the running total.
Results still changing days after Nov. 3	Normal	Late-arriving early ballots and provisionals are still being counted.
A county pausing its count overnight	Normal	Counties stop when they finish their election-night batches.
Small corrections during the canvass	Normal	Catching errors is the purpose of the canvass.
Calls to stop counting valid ballots, or to discard a category of them	Not normal	Every legal ballot that arrived by 8 pm must be counted. The same goes for any attempt by federal agencies or the military to take custody of ballots or machines; <u>county officials hold them under state law.</u>
Officials refusing to certify, or a demand for a hand recount outside the law	Not normal	Certification is a legal duty; Nebraska recounts follow statute.

Watchouts for newsrooms

“Fraud” built on normal processes. Late batches, shifting leads and overnight pauses are the most common raw material for fraud claims. Explain the process before the claim spreads.

Claims about machines. Every Nebraska ballot is paper. Scanners count them, audits check them, and recounts re-tabulate them. When someone alleges a “chain-of-custody breach,” ask what specifically happened: Which ballots or machine, which step, and

whether there is any evidence of tampering. Describe it as a gap in the handling record until shown otherwise, and treat an office that reports a gap promptly as the safeguards working. Custody disputes in Michigan, Georgia and California explain why this term is circulating; they say nothing about Nebraska.

Noncitizen “proof.” Expect lists or database matches offered as evidence. Ask for confirmed cases, reviewed by the county attorney or attorney general.

Pressure on canvass boards. Public demands to delay or withhold certification are a story in themselves; cover the legal deadline alongside them.

Before you report a claim

Ask four questions of any election claim: Who saw it, where and when, what the county says, and whether it was resolved.

- ☐ Confirm the specific polling place, county and time.
- ☐ Call the county election office for its account before publishing.
- ☐ Distinguish a flag, allegation or complaint from a confirmed finding.
- ☐ Lead with accurate information when correcting a rumor, and avoid repeating the false claim in headlines.
- ☐ Note what happened next: A fix, a provisional ballot, an extended hour.

Where to verify

Who	For	Contact
County election commissioner or clerk	Local polling places, counts, results	County contact list
Nebraska Secretary of State, Elections Division	Statewide rules, results, certification	402-471-2555
Voter lookup (VoterCheck)	Registration, polling place, ballot status	ne.gov/go/votercheck

Nebraska Election Protection
hotline

Voter reports from the field

402-890-5291 (call or text)

National Election Protection
hotline

Voter help in any state

866-OUR-VOTE (Spanish:
888-VE-Y-VOTA)

Coalition media contact

Interviews, field
observations

402-890-5291

