



## Here Comes Another Election 2026 Doing Your Part - Ballot Processing Observation - Part 1



Unlike other states that have policies allowing them to provide final election results within 24-72 hours after the close of the polls, California processes and tabulates ballots a full 29 days before Election Day and a full 30 days after Election Day. The Secretary of State does **not certify the results of the election until 45 days after Election Day.**

**Until then, any reported results are ongoing, incomplete and unofficial.**

**This unacceptable fact makes citizen oversight very complicated. Nevertheless, citizen presence while ballots and envelopes are being processed is vital to election integrity.**

While processing takes place over a 60-day period of time, the **busiest and therefore most vital weeks for the upcoming Primary Election will be May 11 through June 19.**

**It would take an army of engaged citizens to provide full oversight, but every minute provided by any one Observer matters.**

As announced in a [previous article](#), people living in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties will have access to EIPCa Official Observer training. **Please contact the EIPCa County Coordinator or inquire at [ruthweiss@eip-ca.com](mailto:ruthweiss@eip-ca.com) for details.**

**But people in other counties may still observe effectively and report findings to EIPCa.**

**We ENCOURAGE you to pick up the mantle and do so. You will have access to an EIPCa HOTLINE and report forms.**

**Please see our [previous article](#) for  
general rights and preparation information.**

There are many areas of ballot processing to observe. **Be aware that specific procedures vary from county to county**, but the following focus points are common to all.

### **1. Intake of ballots**

“Intake” also includes ballot delivery to the elections office or counting center.

Most elections offices do not have ballots delivered to them by the USPS. Instead, they send employees (must maintain 2-person chain of custody) to the USPS for a daily pickup.

#### **Observing the security of ballot transport and transfer is important.**

Ballot delivery happens for 29-days before Election Day, as well as on Election Day and each of the seven days following Election Day. (Ballots arriving after that time should be delivered, but rejected.)

Observing ballot intake is both educational and overwhelming. Almost everything is done mechanically, but **you should look for:**

- **Ballot security**—labeling, moving ballots with 2-person chain of custody, secure storage.
- **Securing of undeliverable ballot packages**—wrapping, moving with 2-person chain of custody, secure storage.
  - At some point these envelopes are processed without opening, and the voter is moved to inactive status and sent a verification postcard. Ask for details, and record the information on an EIPCa form.
- **Inspection** of postmark on ballots arriving after Election Day.

**During intake**, the following processes are accomplished through mechanical means:

- **Barcodes** on ballot envelopes **are scanned** so that voting records can be instantly updated (voter has voted) and a “received” message is generated for those who are enrolled in BallotTrax or other voter notification system.
- **Signatures on envelopes are scanned**, juxtaposed to the signature on file for the voter, and uploaded for the signature verification process.
- **Envelopes are sorted**, usually by precinct, and stored to await clearance (via signature verification) to be opened.

- **After Election Day, late ballot postmarks are inspected** (methods vary by county) to ensure eligibility.
  - **This process may be observable—please inquire or at least have the process explained to you.**
  - Ballot envelopes must be postmarked on or before Election Day.
  - If there is no readable postmark, and the date written by the voter next to the signature is on or before Election Day, the ballot must be accepted.

## 2. Signature Verification

Specifics of signature verification again vary by county. **Most counties now employ signature verification technology** which, depending on how the parameters for acceptance are set, can actually be more reliable than human verification.

Signatures outside the set parameters are rejected by the machine, and are verified by human eyes.

**You are entitled to observe this process, ask questions, and challenge decisions made by the workers.**

Counties have a great deal of leeway to determine how they will respond to the legal mandate to accommodate Observer questions and challenges.

In some counties, the questioning and challenging process may be simple and immediate (raise your hand to summon a supervisor, indicate your question or challenge, receive your answer or pull signature for further review).

In others, the process can be complicated (fill out a challenge form, leave it at the front desk, receive an answer within 24-48 hours).

**How a county handles questions and challenges should tell you a lot about their willingness to work with and respect the public, provide transparency, and be confident in their final results.**

Please contact an EIPCa HOTLINE and fill out an [EIPCa Citizen Incident Statement](#) if you feel the county is not in keeping with the spirit of the law.

**Your official documentation of your interactions using [EIPCa forms](#) will be very useful.**

**NOTE:** EIPCa is the only agency we know of nationwide that collects documentation signed under penalty of perjury.

- That makes our documentation the only actionable documentation.

- Reports submitted online are hearsay only, and minimally useful, if at all.

**Do not settle for inferior impact.**

**Make your observation time count—report through EIPCa.**

The California signature acceptance bar is VERY low. Most signatures, even those you will be appalled to let go, will be accepted.

**You should only challenge the most egregious of mismatches**, and only after you see that the verifiers are going to let it through.

Watching signature verification is quite eye-opening, and will either discourage you or rile you up. There must be a better way!!

### **3. Opening, extraction and inspection**

After the signature on the ballot envelope is accepted as genuine, envelopes are scanned again to generate the message “your ballot has been accepted and will be counted”—which is then sent to voter.

The envelope is then sliced open, generally by machine, extracted and separated from the envelope (by machine or by hand), flattened, inspected for damage and sent for tabulation or, if damaged, duplication (remaking).

**Observers should watch for and alert supervisors to the following:**

- Presence of writing implements (strictly forbidden)
- Slicers damaging ballots
- Envelopes containing more than one signature anywhere on front or back
  - If the number of ballots inside the envelope matches the number of signatures and all signatures are approved, all ballots may be counted.
  - If the number of ballots exceeds the number of signatures, all ballots should be invalidated.
- Envelopes containing more than one ballot but only one signature
  - All ballots must be rejected.
- Envelopes containing sample ballots (must be sent for re-making) or “home-made” ballots (must be rejected)

Observing at your ballot processing center to “see how the sausage is made” is educational, eye-opening and NECESSARY. Without oversight, too much can go wrong.

We hope you are inspired to become engaged in observation as a way to keep elections reliable. Mark your calendar (**May 11 through June 19**) and prepare to sally forth.

The next article will conclude the ballot processing journey.

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