



What Does it Mean to Vote in Person?



“I vote in person.” I want to make sure my vote counts!

We often hear variations of that statement from dedicated patriots who believe voting in person is the safest way to vote. Over 15 years of research and documentation have solidified EIPCa’s long-time belief in the validity of that statement.

But we also find there is often a misunderstanding about what voting in person really is.

- Sealing your ballot in the return envelope and dropping it in the mail is **NOT** voting in person.
- Sealing your ballot in the return envelope and dropping it in a community drop box is **NOT** voting in person.
- Sealing your ballot in the return envelope and giving it to a family member, friend or ballot harvester is **NOT** voting in person.
- Sealing your ballot in the return envelope and dropping it into the container designated for that purpose at a polling location is **NOT** voting in person.
- Sealing your ballot in the return envelope and dropping it off at the County Elections Office is **NOT** voting in person.
- Sealing your ballot in the return envelope and putting it directly into the hands of the County Clerk or Registrar of Voters is **NOT** voting in person.

**To vote in person is to submit a ballot that is
NOT enclosed in an envelope.**

It's that simple.

Those who choose to vote in person do so to fulfill certain goals:

- 1. Expedited counting.** Many who vote in person say they want to be sure their “vote is counted today.” A vote cast without an envelope at a polling location is counted that very day, or early the following morning if cast before Election Day.
- 2. Maintaining voter privacy and ballot secrecy.** An in-person ballot is anonymous and cannot be tracked back to who cast it.
- 3. Avoiding errors in ballot processing.** An in-person ballot avoids the delay and potential for error or intentional manipulation inherent in the processing of envelope ballots.
- 4. Maintaining chain of custody.** By law, an in-person ballot goes from the voter's hands to a secure ballot container. At the end of the day, it is moved by at least two people to a smaller transport container which is tamper-evident sealed. That container is taken by TWO trained individuals to the counting center or to a collection point, where it is transferred with signed chain of custody to the TWO or more trained individuals who will take it to the counting center.

Once at the counting center, it will be unsealed and its contents will be moved “in front of God and everybody” to the tabulation room and tabulated. **The chain of custody is never broken.**

Achieving these goals is not possible when the ballot is in an envelope.

- 1. Expedited counting.** Ballot envelopes must be sorted and scanned. Then they are signature verified, a highly subjective process which is so diluted by California's weak standards as to be basically useless, but nonetheless time consuming.

Depending on when ballots are mailed or dropped off, processing delays range from 24 hours to several weeks.

- 2. Maintaining voter privacy and ballot secrecy.** The return envelope has the voter's name and address clearly printed, as well as the voter's signature, which in most counties is not obscured under the flap but clearly visible and open to mischief as it passes through the hands of postal workers and drop-box transporters.
 - **The ballot only becomes “secret” after it is removed from the envelope** after the signature verification process.
 - **During signature verification, the verifiers have access to the voter's entire record, including party affiliation.**

- While they are not supposed to allow partisanship to influence their decisions, they are only human, and even subconsciously may be influenced by that knowledge.

3. Avoiding errors in ballot processing. Besides being vulnerable to the inherent inaccuracies in signature verification, **ballots are subject to damage** as the envelopes are mechanically sliced open and extracted from the envelope. Many are caught in the slicer and must be pieced together and re-made (duplicated) before tabulation, another process that could produce error or intentional manipulation, or even make some portions of the ballot indecipherable.

All extracted ballots are examined for damage (stains, smudges, tears, extraneous writing, water spots, etc.), and **sent to be re-made if any are detected.**

4. Maintaining chain of custody. Envelopes and the ballots they contain lose chain of custody the moment they enter the USPS system.

- They pass through many unsupervised hands during the USPS processing, are transported to and from the voter's mailbox by only ONE, unsupervised carrier, and removed from USPS mailboxes by ONE, unsupervised worker.
- Every election, media reports abound of batches of ballots found dumped in ditches or under bushes by a worker wanting to finish rounds early or just create mischief.
- Envelopes returned by community drop box sit in that box (many remote and un surveilled) for up to 96 hours by law, vulnerable to vandalism, accident or the forces of nature.
- Every election since the implementation of drop-box use, there have been media reports of burned or substance-damaged ballots inside those boxes.
- As the boxes are emptied, the ballots can be exposed to careless handling, which may misplace, "fold, spindle or mutilate" envelopes and their contents. They are also vulnerable, especially during inclement weather, to water damage.
- All of these consequences condemn the ballots to the remake process, which creates further delay in counting and subjects ballots to potential error or malfeasance.

Regardless of how you submit your ballot (mail, drop box, polling location, elections office, third person), **if it is in an envelope, it is NOT** an in-person vote!

It...

- **will NOT** be expeditiously counted,
- **is NOT** a secret ballot,
- **IS** subject to mishandling and abuse, and

- **does NOT** have chain of custody.

The **only exception** is a ballot submitted by a person who **registers to vote and votes simultaneously**.

- This process is called Conditional Voter (same day) Registration, and while the ballots are submitted in an envelope, the only processing required is the entering of the voter's information into the county and state database.
- The ballot's only vulnerability is during slicing/extraction, or if the voter somehow damages the ballot while marking it.

The decision to vote in person in California or use the envelope option is entirely the voter's, and there are pros and cons to each method of voting.

EIPCa encourages voters to consider them all, and choose the method that gives them the most comfort and satisfaction.

Currently, for many reasons--mostly nefarious (see the EIPCa article coming soon) -- the majority of Californians vote by mail. Because that is a fact, **the participation of citizen observers is critical**. Please see [EIPCa's article series](#) on how and why to become a citizen observer, and do your part in the Fall to protect the integrity of the process.