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Polls are Closed in California—What to Expect During Vote Counting

SACRAMENTO – The polls are now closed in California, and county elections officials will be hard at work counting ballots throughout the night. Election results can be viewed at vote.sos.ca.gov.

“County elections officials are hard at work processing and counting ballots,” Secretary of State Alex Padilla said. “Ensuring the accuracy and the integrity of the vote count is critical to our democracy. State law gives county elections officials up to 30 days after Election Day to complete vote counting, auditing, and certification. In California, we work to ensure every ballot is counted properly and every ballot is accounted for,” Padilla added.

NOTE: The Secretary of State’s office does not issue, receive, or count ballots. Elections officials in each of California’s 58 counties process and count ballots, and transmit results to the Secretary of State’s office. The Secretary of State’s office compiles all of these results in the official Statement of Vote.

What are the first results we will be seeing on Election Night?

The first election results are typically ballots received before Election Day. County elections officials may begin opening vote-by-mail ballot envelopes up to ten business days before Election Day, but those results cannot be accessed or shared with the public until all polls close on Election Day.

Why do some counties show no precincts have reported, yet some votes have been counted?

Many county elections officials choose to tally and report these early voted ballots before results come in from precincts, which are sometimes far away from county headquarters. Early voted ballots simply appear as raw vote totals because, in this initial stage, the ballots are not attributed to individual precincts.

Why have some counties not reported any results immediately after the polls close?

Each of the 58 county elections offices processes ballots differently, and the distances poll workers must travel from polling places to county offices vary greatly. State law requires county elections officials to send their first batch of results to the Secretary of State’s office no more than two hours after they begin tallying votes after polls close on Election Day. County elections officials continue to report results periodically on Election Night until all precinct vote totals

have been reported. County elections officials will continue to count ballots up to 30 days after Election Day.

Why do some contests show a high percentage of precincts reporting, yet the number of votes continues to change?

Some counties will show an entire precinct as having reported even if only one ballot from that precinct has been counted. This is why the election results website specifically notes the data is from precincts “partially reporting.”

Once a county submits its final ballot-count report for Election Night, “SF” for Semi-Final will be noted in the Report Type column. Election Night results can be viewed as a snapshot in time here.

When are vote-by-mail ballots counted?

Vote-by-mail ballots that are received by county elections officials before Election Day are typically counted on Election Day. Many more vote-by-mail ballots are dropped off at polling places, drop box locations, or arrive at county elections offices on Election Day. State law requires that vote-by-mail ballots postmarked on or before Election Day and received by county elections officials no later than 3 days after Election Day must be processed. The third day after this election is Friday, November 9. Depending on the volume of these types of ballots, it takes up to 30 days for county elections officials to verify voter records and determine if ballots have been cast by eligible voters. The frequency of updated results will vary based on the size of each county and the process each local elections office uses to tally and report votes.

How and when are provisional ballots counted?

In California, provisional ballots serve as a fail-safe method of ensuring all voters who show up to the polls can cast a ballot.

All provisional ballots are carefully checked by county elections officials to confirm that the person who voted provisionally is both registered and that they did not cast a ballot by mail or at another polling location on Election Day. Due to the additional human review and verification needed for provisional ballots, they are typically counted after Election Day and vote-by-mail ballots.

When will the vote counting period end and election be certified?

Election results will change throughout the canvass period as vote-by-mail ballots, provisional ballots, and other ballots are processed. Depending on the volume of these types of ballots, it may take up to 30 days for county elections officials to verify voter records and determine if ballots have been cast by eligible voters. The frequency of updated results will vary based on the size of each county and the process each county elections office uses to tally and report votes. County elections officials must report their final results to the Secretary of State by December 7. The Secretary of State will certify the results to the Governor by December 14, 2018.

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