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## **What to Expect During the California Vote Count Process**

**SACRAMENTO** – On March 3, 2020 California county elections officials will work through the night counting ballots. In California, the vote count process does not end on Election Night. Due to state laws that ensure voters' rights, ballots will continue to arrive and be counted after Election Day.

“In California we prioritize the right to vote and election security over rushing the vote count,” Secretary of State Alex Padilla said. “By law, county election officials have 30 days to count every valid ballot and conduct a post-election audit. Several safety nets exist to protect voting rights, including Same Day Voter Registration, provisional ballots, and the postmark-plus-three days rule for vote-by-mail ballots. Every county is required to conduct a post-election audit of the results to ensure the accuracy and integrity of election results. In California we'd rather get it right than get it fast.”

“In most contests we will have a good picture of the outcome on Election Night. The outcomes of the closest contests may take days or weeks to settle. April 3rd is the deadline for counties to complete their vote count and post election audits. I will certify the statewide results on April 10th. April 10th is well before the end of the national primary schedule and well before the political parties' nominating conventions. As California's Chief Elections Officer, voting rights and election integrity are my top priorities,” Padilla added.

### **Who counts ballots in California?**

California counties handle the printing, mailing, and processing of ballots. The Secretary of State's office does not process ballots in any way.

### **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 10 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.

### **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 three days after Election Day must be processed. The third day after this election is Friday, March 6. 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.

### **How and when are Same Day Voter Registrations processed?**

[Same Day Voter Registration](#), also known as Conditional Voter Registration in state law, is a safety net for Californians who miss the deadline to register to vote or update their voter registration information for an election.

Eligible citizens who need to register or re-register to vote within 14 days of an election can complete this process to register and vote at their county elections office, polling place, or vote center. Their ballots will be processed and counted once the county elections office has completed the voter registration verification process.

### **How will we know how many ballots remain to be counted?**

On the second day after the election, counties must provide the Secretary of State an estimate of their remaining unprocessed ballots report. The Secretary of State's office will post this

“unprocessed ballots report” online and provide daily updates as new estimates are provided from the county elections offices.

**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 April 3. The Secretary of State will certify the results to the Governor by April 10, 2020.

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