

2024-2025 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT



Is Voting Integrity Alive and Well in Orange County?

January 1, 2025

Grand Jury

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Is Voting Integrity Alive and Well in Orange County?

“The right to vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful, nonviolent tool or instrument in a democratic society. We must use it.”

--John Lewis, former Georgia congressman and civil rights leader

RECUSALS

Members of the Grand Jury are subject to recusal from participating in matters related to the Grand Jury investigation due to prior or current employment or associations, investment in public or private enterprise, financial interest, bias, or personal relationship. Accordingly, two jurors recused themselves from any involvement with this report because of their prior employment by the Orange County Registrar of Voters (ROV).

SUMMARY

Concerns about voting integrity in Orange County have become increasingly pronounced in recent years, prompting the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury (OCGJ) to conduct a comprehensive study of this issue.¹ Our study examined our local voting system with the goal of advising the 1,861,450² registered voters in Orange County as to whether their votes were counted accurately in a fair, clear, and transparent manner.

By thoroughly examining the operations of the ROV, the OCGJ sought to determine whether every aspect of the election process—from voter registration and ballot counting to post-election audits and the final certification of the votes—adheres to the highest standards of integrity. The OCGJ found that to be true.

BACKGROUND

A bedrock of our democracy is the right of every eligible citizen to vote safely and easily, and for their vote to count without fear of it being compromised. Since the presidential election of 2020, a sizable number of citizens have raised concerns about the integrity of the voting process.

Concerns expressed after the 2020 election included ballots being cast by deceased people, forged ballot signatures, duplicate ballots, credibility of the electronic voting process, safety of ballots dropped off at official ballot drop boxes, safety of in-person voting (paper) ballots,

¹ Several complaints were made to the OCGJ by concerned Orange County voters regarding voting integrity. These complaints were reviewed and investigated and found to be without merit.

² Orange County Registrar of Voters ocvote.gov December 2024

misrepresentation of voter identification, voting by non-citizens, ballot curing practices, ballot duplication, and United States Postal Services (USPS) handling of ballots. Even after votes were cast, concerns remained about the validity and accuracy of post-election activities. These concerns have continued to spread through various online platforms, including podcasts, social media, and websites.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

The OCGJ received a number of citizen complaint letters expressing concern as to the integrity of Orange County’s voting process. The OCGJ sought to determine whether the current voting procedures, protocols, and policies established by the ROV for the 2024 general election resulted in an “election of integrity.” We define the term “integrity” to mean that all persons who were eligible to vote could do so freely without unreasonable constraint, that those ineligible to vote were prevented from voting, and that the 2024 election was conducted in an impartial and equitable manner such that an objective person would see it as being fair and unbiased.

METHOD OF STUDY

The OCGJ reviewed the current procedures, policies, regulations, and laws noted in the References section to make its determination. The OCGJ notes that all fifty-eight California counties are bound by the State Elections Code. The OCGJ has no authority to examine State law or policies but may examine the way the County of Orange executes those laws and policies.

We conducted multiple interviews with key stakeholders, including ROV officials and employees, and partisan and nonpartisan observers. We toured the ROV offices, official drop boxes, and Vote Centers on numerous occasions both announced and unannounced, to observe election procedures in action.

In addition, we visited various Voting Centers on election night, November 5, 2024, observing activities and procedures. We also visited the ROV after November 5, 2024, to observe *all* post-election audits.

We reviewed the documents cited in the References section that enabled us to compile a list of best practices required to achieve voting integrity. The following publications provided the OCGJ with the most current data:

- Ad Hoc Committee for 2024 Election Fairness and Legitimacy. *24 for '24: Urgent Recommendations in Law, Media, Politics, and Tech for Fair and Legitimate 2024 U.S. Elections*. September 2023.

https://law.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/PDFs/Safeguarding_Democracy/24_for_24-REPORT-FINAL.pdf.

- Clapman, Alice. *How States Can Prevent Election Subversion in 2024 and Beyond*. Brennan Center for Justice, September 7, 2023. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/policy-solutions/how-states-can-prevent-election-subversion-2024-and-beyond>.
- California Secretary of State. *Voting Law Compliance Handbook*. Sacramento, CA: California Secretary of State, 2021. <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/voting-law-compliance-handbook>.
- Orange County Registrar of Voters. *50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act*. Santa Ana, CA: Orange County Registrar of Voters, 2015. <https://ocvote.gov/election-library/docs/50th%20Anniversary%20of%20the%20Voting%20Rights%20Act.pdf>.
- Orange County Registrar of Voters. *Election Administration Plan 2021-2025: Secretary of State Feedback*. Santa Ana, CA: Orange County Registrar of Voters, 2021. https://ocvote.gov/fileadmin/user_upload/eap/EAP2021-2025_SOSfeedback_TC_cover.pdf.

We then applied these practices to our assessment of the County’s voting process.

THE COUNTY OF ORANGE VOTING PROCESS

Logic and Accuracy Test

This test is one of the many ways the ROV ensures that votes are accurately counted. Four hundred and fifty ballot scanners are used during the election. The ROV-trained staff marked 600 *test* ballots for the Logic and Accuracy Test for the 2024 election. The test ballots were then fed through each ballot scanner to ensure that the machines functioned accurately. A scanner will only be used if it accurately counts the votes on the test ballots. Once the machine passes the test, it is assigned to a Vote Center and prepared for delivery. This includes applying a wire seal to protect the vDrive (similar to a secure USB thumb drive) that stores the ballot images and then applying another seal when the case is closed. Before each Vote Center is opened, a team of two ROV employees confirms that the two separate seals are intact and the numbers on each seal match the chain-of-custody form for delivery. This ensures that no one tampered with the scanners or vDrives in transit. This test is performed both before and after the election to ensure that the machines functioned accurately.

Logistics

Logistics include tracing and tracking critical activities conducted in the field, such as the collection of ballots from official drop boxes and Vote Centers, using Geographics Information

Systems (GIS) technology. The location and status of these various activities are tracked centrally by a dispatch team. Ballots returned from Vote Centers are tracked using GIS. On the last day of voting, official drop boxes are closed at 8 p.m. and tracked using GIS to ensure they have all been accounted for.

Official Drop Box Ballot Collection

Teams of two ROV employees collect vote-by-mail ballots daily from official drop boxes throughout the county. Strict chain-of-custody³ procedures and security measures are followed. The teams are tracked via Global Positioning System (GPS) and communicate continually with dispatch on radios. Teams transmit photos of each official drop box they open, and routes vary daily for staff and ballot safety.

Official Drop Box Receiving

Ballots collected from official drop boxes are returned to the ROV, and the chain of custody documents are then verified. Vote-by-mail ballots are collected at official drop boxes by ROV employees. Ballot collection bags are audited. Security seals and chain of custody documents are verified. Ballots are kept separate and organized by official drop box in a secure area. Chain of custody documents are retained.

Vote Center Ballot Processing

At the conclusion of each night during the voting period, Vote Center staff conduct strict ballot chain-of-custody review of all voted ballots and ensure that they are properly secured. Vote Center staff remove and count ballots from the ballot container. At least two Vote Center staff members prepare and deliver ballots to an assigned collection center. The ballot chain of custody is used to record the number of ballots cast, including paper-voted ballots, returned vote-by-mail ballots, and conditional voter registrations (unclear voter eligibility). All ballots cast are placed in a sealed ballot transport bag and taken to the assigned collection center.

Ballot Sorting

After vote-by-mail ballot envelopes are received from official drop boxes, post offices, or Vote Centers, they are scanned and sorted for signature verification. Vote-by-mail ballot envelopes are received from official drop boxes or Vote Centers or are collected from the USPS. They are scanned and sorted for signature verification. Vote-by-mail ballot envelopes are kept separated and organized by Vote Center or official drop box. An image is taken of each envelope so the signature can be compared to the voter's registration. Once the ballot has been scanned through the sorter, an OC Ballot Express notification is sent to the voter (if requested from the ROV—see

³ Chain of custody refers to the process or paper trail that documents the transfer of material from one person or place to the next, ensuring that the material can be accounted for at every step.

page 15) stating that their ballot has been received. Once the signature is verified, envelopes are sorted and grouped by precinct. Returned ballots that are challenged are separated into groups for further review.

Signature Verification

Every returned vote-by-mail ballot and provisional ballot undergoes the process of signature verification from qualified staff. The staff have been formally trained pursuant to the standards set forth by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The signature on the vote-by-mail or provisional ballot envelope is compared to the signature on the original sworn statement of registration *before* the envelope is opened. Signature comparison is based on the signature verification standards and regulations defined by the California Secretary of State. If, during the initial review, a signature appears to be unlike the original signature on the voter registration card, the signature is reviewed by two additional personnel. A voter whose signature was challenged is notified on the process by text, email, or USPS. The voter has until December 1, 2024, to cure their vote for the 2024 election. (See Ballot Curing section on page 11.)

Walk-in voters listed on the polling place roster are permitted to vote without additional steps. However, if a walk-in voter is not found on the roster, they must vote via Provisional Ballot. Individuals voting by a Provisional Ballot *must* execute, in the presence of an election official, a written affirmation stating that they are eligible to vote and are registered in the county.

Once the Provisional Ballot is completed, it is sealed in a Provisional Ballot envelope for return to the election official. Due to the use of the statewide Voter Registration Database's real-time exchange of voter history, Provisional Ballots can be reviewed and verified at any time during the voting and canvass periods, preventing double voting. The provisional ballots are examined, verified, and processed the same way as a vote-by-mail ballot. Each ballot is reviewed and researched before being accepted for counting, verifying the following: (1) valid signature; (2) current county voter registration; (3) prior county voter registration; (4) current registration address versus new address; (5) whether a vote-by-mail or provisional or precinct ballot was returned; and (6) the precinct where the ballot was cast.

The Provisional Ballot will be counted *after* elections officials confirm the voter is registered to vote and did not already vote in the election. While provisional voting is relatively new in some areas of the country, California's provisional voting statutes have been in effect since 1984. Provisional voting exists for two fundamental reasons. First, to ensure that no properly registered voter is denied their right to cast a ballot if that voter's name is not on the polling place roster due to a clerical, processing, computer, or other error. Second, it allows elections officials to ensure that no voter votes twice, either intentionally or inadvertently.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) extends the existing fifteen-day registration period in California to eligible voters, allowing them to register and vote provisionally fourteen days prior

to an election and on election day. Voters that complete this process must cast their Provisional Ballot at the Vote Center and cannot leave the Vote Center with their ballot and return it later. It is important to note that the voter *must* execute, in the presence of an election official, the written affirmation stating that the voter is eligible to vote and registered in the county where the voter desires to vote.

Ballot Extracting

Once vote-by-mail envelopes have been signature verified, they are opened. Ballots are separated by precinct and removed from envelopes one at a time. Envelopes that are damaged, missing ballots, or that contain more than one ballot are retained to be reviewed by the vote-by-mail processing boards. All empty vote-by-mail ballot envelopes are retained and double checked for ballots.

Vote-By-Mail Ballot Processing Boards

After vote-by-mail ballots are extracted from their envelopes, they are then prepared for scanning so they may be counted. Ballots are unfolded and flattened. Ballots that require additional processing are identified. Ballots remain grouped by precinct. Envelopes are double checked to ensure all ballots are extracted. Ballots are securely stored when not being processed.


Ballot Scanning

Vote-by-mail ballots are scanned in to be counted. Ballots that enter the scan room have been signature checked, extracted, and visually inspected from the vote-by-mail ballot boards. Scanners take a batch of approximately one hundred ballots and prepare them to be scanned. Scanners have multiple quality control processes for all scanned batches. More than one person reviews all batches and ensures all ballots were scanned. *The scanner and all other equipment used during the election are not connected to the internet or any outside network.*

Ballot Duplication

Original ballots that are damaged or have not been marked properly are duplicated to be scanned into the voting system. Voters are instructed to use black ink when filling out their ballot and to ensure that they have completely filled in the sections and not used an X or check mark. If these or other errors are made by the voter, but the intent of the voter is clear, the duplication process takes place.

Ballots requiring duplication are received from the vote-by-mail boards. Ballots are duplicated by hand or by an electronic ballot marking device, marking *exactly* what was selected from the original ballot. Original ballots are labeled “Original” and duplicate ballots are labeled “Duplicate.” Each set of ballots is numbered and logged. The original and duplicate ballots are compared to ensure accuracy of votes. Duplicated ballots are scanned, the votes are counted, and the original ballots are securely stored.



It is important to note
THAT THE TERMS **DUPLICATION OR REPLICATION** SHOULD NOT BE INTERPRETED AS A TYPE OF CORRUPT PROCESS TO CREATE ADDITIONAL BALLOTS, EITHER VOTED OR UNVOTED.

BALLOT DUPLICATION IS SIMPLY THE TRANSCRIBING OF DAMAGED OR OTHERWISE MACHINE-UNREADABLE BALLOTS AS DESCRIBED ABOVE SO THAT THESE BALLOTS CAN BE TABULATED WITH THE OTHERS.

Common causes for damaged or unusable ballots

In almost all local election jurisdictions, paper ballots are tabulated electronically using some form of ballot scanning technology. There are four common problems that arise, rendering paper ballots difficult or impossible to process with a ballot tabulation system.





-  **1.** Ballots can be damaged during the life cycle of a ballot. Anything from coffee spills to wrinkles and tears can interfere with a ballot being scanned by a tabulation system.
-  **2.** Ballots filled out with inappropriate marking implements — pencils, highlighters, colored pens, chalk, cosmetic pencils, paints, crayons and colored art pencils — cannot be processed by a tabulation system.
-  **3.** The voter's intent may be clear under a state's election laws but marked in a way that a tabulation system cannot read. For example, the voter may mark the ballot inappropriately, by circling a candidate's name when instructions indicate a bubble must be filled in.
-  **4.** The returned ballot may not be 1.) the appropriate paper stock quality and weight, 2.) the correct orientation, 3.) sized so that the voting marks and ballot positions can be read by the scanner and the ballot tabulated.

Figure 1: Duplication Definition and Four Causes.
Source: Council of State Governments

Ballot Curing

When vote-by-mail ballots collected from the USPS or gathered from official drop boxes are missing a signature or the signature does not match what the ROV has on file, the voter is notified by mail and given a statement to sign and return (multiple options to return include fax, email, USPS or delivering in person at the ROV). A voter can cure their signature issue until December 1, 2024, two days before the last day for the ROV to certify election results. This process is required by law.

Ballot Harvesting

This practice is officially referred to as third-party ballot collection and allows for a person other than the voter to collect and submit completed vote-by-mail ballots on behalf of voters. California law permits voters to authorize anyone they choose to return their ballot, whether to an official drop box or to a Voting Center. This is intended to assist voters who face difficulties in returning their ballots, such as the elderly or disabled, or those with limited transportation access. This practice also supports the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Ballot Tabulation

After ballots are scanned either centrally for vote-by-mail ballots, or in-person at the Vote Centers, they are saved onto a vDrive and then brought into the tally room for tabulation. The machines used to tabulate the votes are re-imaged before each election with the software certified by the California Secretary of State. The tabulation machines are not connected to the internet or any outside network. Access to this room is limited and has additional levels of physical security controls.

One Percent Manual Tally (1% Manual Tally)

The 1% Manual Tally is a post-election audit process. It is performed before certification to ensure accuracy of the election results. A public random draw is conducted to select at least one percent of all precincts. The ballots from the selected precincts are prepared and placed in ballot boxes. A team of four tally board members hand count and manually tally each ballot, following the California Uniform Vote Counting Standards. One caller reads the votes, one observer ensures the accuracy of the tally, and two tickers tally the votes using tally sheets. The results of the manual tally are compared to the reported results.

Risk Limiting Audits (RLA)

The RLA is conducted as an additional measure to verify the accuracy of the election. Although not required by the State of California, the ROV performs this function to add a higher level of confidence in the election results. This audit method is the result of a collaboration between the ROV, Caltech, and MIT, and results from a study published in 2019 and included in the References section. The process for this audit starts with a public draw to generate a twenty-digit

random seed number. The RLA compares individual ballots to the cast vote record, ensuring that the ballot was counted as intended by the voter. Ballots are randomly selected from the audit to reach a confidence level that the outcome of the votes is correct. A four-person RLA board conducts the manual examination of ballots, following the California Uniform Vote Counting Standards.

Official Canvass⁴

During the official election canvass, the ROV finishes processing all vote-by-mail and provisional ballots. They also conduct several tests and audits (including the RLA and 1% Percent Manual Tally) and account for the equipment and materials used in the election. State law prohibits the ROV from completing this canvass before Tuesday, December 3, 2024.

In addition to the 1% Manual Tally and the RLA, the ROV canvass tasks include:

- Inspecting all materials and supplies returned from the 104 Vote Centers
- Confirming that all the vDrives from the ballot scanners assigned to the Vote Centers have been read and the votes on them added to the results
- Processing test ballots through all ballot scanners to ensure they still accurately count votes on the ballots (final Logic and Accuracy test)
- Verifying that the state-certified voting system software has not been modified

OBSERVATION OF THE ORANGE COUNTY VOTING PROCESS IN ACTION

In addition to reviewing relevant documentation, the OCGJ observed all activities supporting the voting process prior to, during, and after the election. We scrutinized all stages of the voting process and observed firsthand how the Orange County voting system functions. The following activities were observed by the OCGJ:

- Printing of vote-by-mail ballots by ROV in their facility, using their staff and in-house equipment
- Transfer of 1.8 million vote-by-mail ballots to the USPS for mailing
- Official drop box: Teams of two trained ROV employees collect vote-by-mail ballots (secured in zippered soft canvas box, ensuring that no ballots are touched by the

⁴ “The official canvass account[s] for every ballot cast...to ensure that each valid vote is included in the official results. The canvass means aggregating or confirming every valid ballot cast and counted—absentee, early voting, Election Day, provisional, challenged, and uniformed and overseas citizen. The canvass enables an election official to resolve discrepancies, correct errors, and take any remedial actions necessary to ensure completeness and accuracy before certifying the election.” Source: CA Secretary of State

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employees) from official drop boxes. They ensure a strict chain of custody procedure. Teams first inspect the box to confirm the security seal has not been damaged or tampered with. The box is then unlocked with a unique key specific only to that individual drop box. Photos of each step are transmitted to the ROV in real time. The soft canvas box holding the ballots is zipped and secured with a numbered zip tie to protect the chain of custody for transport back to the ROV. A new soft canvas box is placed in the drop box. The drop box is then locked with its unique key and a new security seal is placed on the drop box doors and a photograph is sent to the ROV. The team must wait for clearance from the ROV before they head to the next drop box. *At no time do the ROV employees touch the ballots.* All routes are changed daily and ballot transport activity is monitored by a GPS tracking system for additional ballot security. This same team is responsible for collecting the vote-by-mail ballots from the USPS.

- Return of the ballots from the Official Ballot Drop Boxes to the ROV or designated location and witnessing the adherence to strict chain of custody procedures
- Ballot duplication
- Ballot sorting and extracting
- Layout and operations at Vote Centers
- Logic and accuracy testing: the OCGJ viewed the voting machines being tested before and after the election.
- Processing of vote-by-mail ballots and signature verification
- Scanning of ballots
- Tabulation of ballots
- Official Canvass
- Hand counting of all ballots from one percent of the precincts to ensure the accuracy of election results
- Risk limiting audits to verify the accuracy of the election
- Ballot curing
- Observed multiple billboards, social media posts, and bus stop signage promoting voting options and other important information for voters

In addition to our observations, many of the activities were livestreamed to the public on the ROV website including election night return of ballots from the Voting Centers, RLA, 1% Manual Tally, and the Logic and Accuracy testing of all voting machines done both prior to and after the election.

VOTING RESULTS IN ORANGE COUNTY TAKE TIME TO COUNT

Under California law, voting results are not due until December 5, 2024. Among the claims made by those who challenge the trustworthiness of the voting process is that the vote count was manipulated during the period between the end of voting and December 5, 2024. We found this claim to be without merit. We identified several reasons why it takes as long as it does to count and certify the election, including the following:

- Orange County is the seventh largest voting district in the nation and its population exceeds that of twenty-one states. As a result, there are a significant number of votes to count.
- Voters have until December 1, 2024, to cure their ballot.
- If a vote-by-mail ballot is postmarked by the end of election day, it must be counted if received within seven days of election day. Thousands of ballots were received in this manner.
- Every vote-by-mail ballot undergoes a signature verification process to ensure it matches the voter’s registration signature. This step is time intensive, but essential for election integrity.
- Many ballots are submitted in which the intent of the voter is clear, but the ballot cannot be read by the machine. For example, the ballot squares have check marks rather than being fully filled in with a black pen/marker. Therefore, a duplicate ballot is prepared that the machine can read.
- California allows voters to cast provisional ballots if their voting eligibility is unclear at the time of voting. These ballots require additional review before being counted.

Party	2024 Ballots	Percent of Voters
Democratic	516,309	37.5%
Republican	516,116	37.5%
No Party Preference	266,837	19.4%
American Independent	51,468	3.7%
Libertarian	14,199	1.0%
Green	4,536	0.3%
Peace and Freedom	4,121	0.3%
Miscellaneous	3,364	0.2%
Total Voters	1,376,950	100.0%
Total Registered Voters	1,861,450	
Voter Turnout	74.0%	

Table 1: 2024 Voters by Party Preference in Orange County.
Source: ROV

INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS

The OCGJ observed that the Orange County voting system offers a flexible and accessible approach because of the following factors:

1. **Vote Centers:** Instead of traditional polling places, Orange County utilizes 184 Voting Centers throughout the county. Innovative mobile pop-up Voting Centers are strategically placed in areas of high voting traffic.
2. **Vote-by-Mail:** All 1,861,450 registered voters in Orange County receive a vote-by-mail ballot. This allows them to vote from the privacy of their homes. If a voter prefers to vote from home, they can exercise any of the following options:
 - a. Physically submitting their ballots at any Vote Center
 - b. Placing their ballot in an official Ballot Drop Box
 - c. Mailing their ballot through the USPS
 - d. Exercising their right to ballot harvesting and designating someone to return their completed ballot to any Vote Center, official Ballot Drop Box or USPS
3. **Official Drop Boxes:** For added convenience, a voter can securely drop off a completed ballot at any one of the 123 official Ballot Drop Boxes located throughout the county.
4. **OC Ballot Express:** Voters can track their ballot from start to finish. Using Ballot Express, they can view the state of their ballot through the entire mailing process and see the status of their returned ballot. Voters can also sign up on the ROV website (ocvote.gov) for updates through text and emails.
5. **Tracking:** This system allows tracking from the time the ballot is mailed to a voter to the time the ballot is received and counted by the ROV. Voters are able to use the online OC Ballot Express system located on the ROV web site to monitor their ballot's status. Signatures contained on the vote-by-mail ballot are also verified against ROV records.
6. **Rule of Two:** All activities involving the handling of ballots require a minimum of two personnel.
7. **Physical Security:** Each official drop box is locked with a unique key specific to that individual drop box, equipped with a tamper-evident seal, and bolted to the ground. The drop boxes also contain fire suppression devices to protect against arson.
8. **Cybersecurity:** All ROV processes related to voting “stand alone.” This means the processes are not connected to any outside source or to the internet. All voting data is securely gathered on a vDrive. All computers and voting machines are certified by the California Secretary of State.
9. **Tally Room Security:** The Vote Count Room (Tally Room) is protected by a combination of biometric and security-cleared technology. A fingerprint and uniquely issued security badge are required for entry by authorized personnel. This room is protected by a 24-hour monitoring alarm service and video surveillance.

10. **Audits and Testing:** Regular audits, including risk-limiting audits, are conducted to verify the accuracy of election results. Voting machines and systems undergo rigorous testing before and after the election to ensure they functioned correctly.
11. **Partnerships and Training:** The ROV collaborates with federal, state, and local agencies to share intelligence and best practices. Election workers receive extensive training on security protocols and incident response, both in person and online. All ROV employees pass FBI security clearance.
12. **Military and Overseas Voters:** These voters can receive their ballots electronically, which are available thirty days prior to regular ballots, giving them more time to return them. They can also receive their ballot via email or USPS. If a ballot is faxed back to the ROV, it must include a copy of the envelope that the ballot was sent with to provide signature verification.

DOES ORANGE COUNTY COMPLY WITH VOTING INTEGRITY BEST PRACTICES?

Our study revealed that the election process in Orange County is complex, involving multiple related parts, requiring stringent coordination and accurate execution. The OCGJ’s study of this process demonstrated that the 2024 election was executed in a fair, secure, and transparent manner such that it upheld the highest level of voter integrity.

The OCGJ questioned whether it was sufficient to solely observe the current practices used by the ROV during the 2024 Election. We reviewed the best practices, recommendations, and policy guidelines set forth by recognized experts regarding what constitutes the highest standards in voting integrity.

These publications are as follows:

1. “Electoral Integrity in the 2020 U.S. Elections” by Pippa Norris—This study from Harvard University’s Electoral Integrity Project offers expert assessments and recommendations for improving electoral integrity.
2. “Six Steps to a Safe, Trusted Election” by MITRE Corporation⁵—This report outlines six key actions to make voting safer and to counter misinformation, based on recommendations from official sources like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Election Assistance Commission (EAC).
3. “International election monitors can help boost people’s trust in the electoral process – but not all work the same way ” by Sarah Bush and Lauren Prather—This article

⁵ “The MITRE Corporation is an American not-for-profit organization...[that] manages federally funded research and development centers supporting various U.S. government agencies in the aviation, defense, healthcare, homeland security, and cybersecurity fields, among others.” Source: Wikipedia

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discusses how international election monitors can boost public trust in the electoral process.

4. "How Right—Wing Activists are Pushing States to Dismantle Voter Integrity Safeguards" by Nation of Change—This article explores the impact of misinformation campaigns on voter integrity safeguards.

The recommendations in these publications include the following:

- The necessity for accuracy of voter registration and rolls
- The necessity for protection of poll workers and the public
- Promotion of early voting and vote-by-mail ballots
- Distribution of safe and secure official drop boxes
- The necessity of post-election audits and regularly auditing election results to verify accuracy
- Training of election officials and staff
- The necessity of a transparent election process
- The importance of accessibility for voters
- The importance of secure ballot handling

To determine how the County of Orange stacked up in its voting process, we compared the above-listed practices with those we observed. We concluded that the County's practices and procedures were as follows:

1. Voter registration logs and voter rolls were kept accurate and current.
2. Poll workers and the public were safe and protected.
3. Official Ballot Drop Boxes were safe and secure.
4. Every vote was represented by a voter-verified paper ballot and could be verified by a paper trail.
5. Election misinformation and disinformation was addressed by the ROV through regular communication provided in their Orange County Elections newsletters, press releases and their open-door policy for the public to come into their location and observe *all* election activities.
6. To help the observers have better access to the processes, the ROV had overhead cameras installed so the observers could see exactly what the staff were handling and working on.
7. In addition to these communication efforts, the ROV held an open house on October 8, 2024, and invited the public to come and learn more about the voting processes from staff who were available at their workstations and locations, repeatedly providing presentations and throughout the event.

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8. Many election activities were live streamed on the ROV website for the public.
9. Ballot duplication was checked twice by two separate staff, and any errors were corrected immediately and then rereviewed prior to the duplicate ballot being scanned.
10. Post-election audits that included both the 1% Manual Tally (this audit alone required over 100 employees working eight to ten hours per day for up to fourteen days), and the risk limiting audit that was completed before the ROV could certify the election results on December 3, 2024.
11. The ROV operated a transparent department and ensured that all votes were counted safely and accurately.
12. Early voting made accessible to all OC residents through utilization of vote-by-mail ballots, Vote Centers with hours to accommodate various work schedules, Official Ballot Drop Boxes, and use of the USPS.
13. From July 2024, and through the certification of the election, the ROV published 135 social media posts. All social media posts were published on their social media accounts, Meta, Instagram and X.
14. Twenty-eight Election newsletters (robust, current and applicable information about voting in Orange County) were published from July until November 2024 and distributed via email to key stakeholders along with any of the public that signed up to receive them. In addition, they were posted on the ROV website. These newsletters are still available for viewing on the ROV website. They have received positive feedback from the community and plan to continue publishing these newsletters throughout the year, not just during the election period.
15. The ROV blanketed the county with promotional billboards during the election period to help voters stay informed about their many voting options.
16. The ROV developed a Communications Took Kit for the 2024 general election. It was a resource that provided a variety of tools to help people and organizations stay informed about how, when and where to cast a ballot. This tool kit was shared with the ROV community partners so they could help push out messaging about the election to their own networks of people.

The ROV takes allegations of voter fraud seriously and encourages anyone who witnesses or suspects illegal activities related to voting or any aspect of the voting process to report these concerns immediately to the Orange County District Attorney's Office. The ROV not only met but exceeded the recommended practices for ensuring voting integrity. Its proactive approach provided major protection against any fraud. Additionally, its implementation of comprehensive voter education programs that reached a widespread and diverse audience fostered engaged participation. The ROV's commitment to transparency was evidenced by their frequent public audits and open communication channels.

The Grand Jury’s analysis confirms that the 2024 election maintained the highest level of integrity for Orange County voters.

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

- F1. There was no evidence of fraud or election interference ascertained in the 2024 general election in Orange County.
- F2. Voting in Orange County is fair, secure, and transparent.
- F3. The ROV communications and outreach programs promote transparency and public confidence in the voting process. Orange County eligible voters can feel secure in knowing that the ROV provided an election of the highest recognized standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

None

COMMENDATIONS

The entire ROV staff is highly commended for their excellent performance in the coordination and management of the 2024 presidential election. Their commitment to best practices supporting voting integrity, meticulous planning, and rigorous security measures ensured that the voting process was fair, secure, and transparent. The ROV upheld the highest standards of electoral integrity, thereby reinforcing public trust in this critical institution and setting an example for all government entities to follow in performing their public duties.

RESPONSES

California Penal Code Section 933 provides in pertinent part:

(c) No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on

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the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

Section 933.05 further provides:

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

(2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

(3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

Responses Required

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are required from:

Orange County Board of Supervisors:

F1, F2, F3

ACRONYMS

CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CVR	Conditional Voter Registration
EAC	Election Assistance Commission
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
OCGJ	Orange County Grand Jury
RLA	Risk Limiting Audit
ROV	Registrar of Voters
USPS	US Postal Service

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