

Election Day Observation Program

November 6, 2012, General Election Report

This report summarizes the work of the Election Day Observation Program conducted by the Secretary of State (SOS) during the November 6, 2012, General Election.

The November 6, 2012, General Election in California had more than 13.1 million ballots cast and involved over 100,000 poll workers in almost 25,000 precincts. SOS observers witnessed first-hand the dedication and helpfulness county election officials and poll workers showed to voters. However, no election is flawless, and on November 6, 2012, some voters and poll workers confronted a number of different issues that are discussed in this report.

Election Day Observation in 2012

For the November 6, 2012, General Election, SOS sent eight observers (two observers in Los Angeles County) to seven counties. Counties visited were:

Alameda	Los Angeles	Sacramento
Fresno	Riverside	San Bernardino
Kern		

Observers were instructed to:

- Look for posted signs and flags to determine if polling places were easy to find;
- Report on any accessibility problems related to parking or the facility itself;
- Assess the effectiveness of poll worker training and voter education;
- Report if there were any groups present at the polls trying to intimidate voters and/or other groups making sure voters were not being intimidated;
- Note if there was a high incidence of voters going to the wrong polling place, and describe how poll workers handled the situation;
- Assess the voting environment as to proper lighting, effective staging of poll worker tables and voting equipment, and voter privacy;
- Determine if all required voter information was posted or available and easy to read in all legally required languages;
- Observe whether accessible voting booths and equipment were set up and readily available;
- Assess if the voting process was well organized;
- Report if voters were required to wait in line for more than 10 minutes;
- Report any issues that appeared to be confusing to either poll workers or voters;
- Determine if security measures for ballots and voting equipment were being followed; and,

- If possible, without disrupting the voting process or disturbing voters, ask poll workers if they had experienced any difficulties with equipment, procedures, or voter confusion.

SOS observers were instructed to call in reports of any problems or challenges they felt needed immediate attention from either county election officials or the SOS. They were also asked to provide an overview on issues that were common to the polling places they visited and any apparent underlying causes and/or possible remedies.

Issues

SOS observers reported only a few problems encountered by voters and poll workers on Election Day.

The issues noted by the SOS observers in this election fall into five basic categories:

- Ballots and Registration
- Signs and Flags
- Polling Facilities
- Voting Equipment
- Poll Worker Training

Ballots and Registration

Most voter registration issues observed during the November 6, 2012, General Election were related to voters appearing at the wrong polling place and their name not appearing on the voter registration list at the polling place. In these instances, poll workers either redirected them to the correct location or instructed the voter how to cast a provisional ballot. There were also instances of individuals who had registered to vote by mail, but decided to go to the polls on Election Day. Many of these vote-by-mail voters brought their completed vote-by-mail ballots to turn in at their polling place on Election Day. For those that did not bring their vote-by-mail ballot to turn it at the polling place, the voters were instructed how to cast a provisional ballot.

Signs and Flags

The most common problems were poor visibility of polling places from the road or a lack of proper signage directing voters to the polling location. Following are problems that SOS observers found in several counties.

- Location signs were too small. Those locations that were able to hang full-sized United States flags outside the door were more easily spotted than those locations with small printed signs.
- Location signs were posted too far from the road or at an angle that was difficult for drivers to see.

- Some locations lacked directional signs to indicate the accessible path of travel to get to the polling place.
- Not all of the voter information signs required by law were posted in all polling places. This was especially true of the sign indicating that no electioneering is allowed within 100 feet of the polling place. This required sign was missing from most of the polling places observed, or in many instances, was placed right beside the entrance to the polling place. Since the sign reads “No Electioneering beyond this point” and is supposed to be posted 100 feet from the entrance, posting it at the doorway provided inaccurate information.

Although many county election officials have significantly improved their directional and polling place signage, overall this is an area that still needs to be improved. SOS staff will continue to work with county election offices to find solutions to this problem.

Another common problem was the lack of space in most polling places to post all of the required signs. Those counties that give their poll workers three-sided folding boards or sign kiosks on which all necessary signs were posted had a higher percentage of compliance than was noted in other counties.

Polling Facilities

Some SOS observers reported seeing voters taking photos at the polling place. The SOS observers pointed out to the poll workers that this was not permitted.

County election officials continue to report difficulties in finding appropriately available and accessible buildings to use as polling places.

Indoor and outdoor lighting challenges and signs indicating where the polling place is located (discussed above) appear to be the most common reported problems encountered at polling places that are otherwise accessible or mitigated to be accessible.

Because counties often combined multiple precincts into one polling location, it was not uncommon for voters to be confused about where to go within the polling place to vote. Poll workers at one polling place that housed four precincts appointed a greeter to direct incoming voters to the correct table. This eliminated voter confusion and made the process more efficient.

Voting Equipment

There were few reports of problems with voting equipment. The most frequent challenges noted were not enough wheelchair accessible voting booths in some polling places and a lack of privacy shields for voters.

Poll Worker Training

In most counties, poll workers reported that their training was excellent. SOS observers noted the workers were knowledgeable, helpful, and sensitive to the needs of voters.

Conclusion

The Secretary of State's eight observers for the November 6, 2012, General Election attended poll worker training and observed the election process beginning with the opening of the polls through the intake of ballots at the central counting location on Election Day. In the seven counties in California with SOS observers, the issues noted related to ballots and registration, signs and flags, polling facilities, voting equipment, and poll worker training.