

Ventura County Voters Want to Know!



Why does every active registered voter in Ventura County get a Vote By Mail ballot?

Quick Answer:

It's the law. (In other words, it would be illegal not to send them.) On September 27, 2021, Assembly Bill 37 was passed by the State, requiring all active registered voters in California to be sent a vote-by-mail ballot – both Voter's Choice Act or polling place election counties.

Note: Ventura County is an all paper ballot county. Every vote has a paper ballot receipt.

Ventura County Background:

Election results have shown Ventura County voters, by a majority, have preferred to vote by mail for several decades. Prior to the November 2020 Election, registered voters needed to opt in **ONCE** to receive their absentee ballots. **Effective January 1, 2002, any registered voter may become a permanent absentee voter per Elections Code 3201.** By 2020, 74% of all registered voters had chosen permanent absentee (vote-by-mail) status.

And now that all Ventura County voters receive vote by mail ballots without having to opt in, voters in our county have embraced voting by mail by an overwhelming majority. In the June 2022 Statewide Primary Election, 90% of the ballots cast were from vote-by-mail voters, and the remaining 10% came from those who voted in person.

In the November 2022 General Election, 89% of the ballots cast were vote by mail versus 11% in person. These numbers are in line with the rest of the state where, for those elections, the vote-by-mail returns averaged 91% and 88% for the State, respectively.

The vote by mail (VBM) method is easy and secure - especially in Ventura. All returning VBM envelopes are signature verified at least twice: We scan all returning ballot envelopes, first through the election equipment (using technology similar to what banks use for endorsed paper checks), then verified again manually by an election worker. The election workers review the signature against the voter's signatures on file.

What if there is a questionable signature? We contact the voter and investigate the validity of the signature. This takes a lot of effort. Signature verification is one reason there is a time lag in final election results. But we do not take shortcuts because we want to ensure every legitimate vote is counted.

Elections Deep Dive:

Vote by Mail began during Civil War times and has been helping our Military cast their lawful vote no matter where they are stationed. Read more about it below, along with the full Assembly Bill 37 Vote by Mail Legislation. Our website has the statement of votes which shows detail on vote by mail/absentee votes from each past election. There is also a link to the SOS website which gives the historical breakdown of absentee voting.

The History of Voting by Mail:

- Civil War: <https://www.history.com/news/vote-by-mail-soldiers-war>;
- WWII: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/soldier-voting-act-1942-absentee-ballots>
- How to Vote in the Military: <https://www.fvap.gov/military-voter/overview>

Assembly Bill 37 - Vote by Mail Legislation:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB37

Ventura Statements of Votes from past elections: <https://vcclerkrecorderlink.org/pastelections>

California Secretary of State Statements of Votes: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/historical-absentee>



What is the Voter's Choice Act?

Quick Answer:

The Voter's Choice Act (VCA) is a voting model where voters are no longer assigned a specific one-day polling place, instead allowing voters to cast their ballot in person at any Vote Center as early as 3-10 days before Election Day. The Vote Center locations, along with the Ballot Drop Box locations, follow the 15-point siting criteria outlined in VCA legislation to ensure widespread access for voters. In addition, of course, voters can mail their vote by mail ballot at any post office or mailbox throughout the County. Ventura County became a VCA Elections county in February 2022.

Ventura County Background:

Under the previous polling place model, Ventura County needed to secure between 350 to 400 polling places and up to 2,000 stipend election workers. This was becoming more and more difficult as polling places became harder to secure as well as to staff. Some formerly reliable polling sites like elementary schools were now reluctant to allow strangers on campus. In addition, long-time election workers expressed concern over the increasingly antagonistic attitudes they were facing from voters. This led to some of our most reliable workers choosing not to return for the next election.

When COVID hit, these problems were compounded. Many former polling sites were shuttered during the health emergency and many seniors who previously worked elections did not want to risk exposure. All voters were required to receive a vote by mail ballot. Ventura and other counties received permission the Secretary of State to conduct a "VCA-like" election in our county for the November 2020 Election. With other precautionary measures in place (moving half the election staff to a second location in case there was an outbreak, having staff prepared to disinfect used equipment and furniture, etc.), the Vote Center model performed very well and the November 2020 election broke all recent voter turnout records.

Piloting the VCA-like model revealed the benefits of conducting elections in this manner. Witnessing in real time how vote centers provided MORE opportunities, access and options for in-person voting was convincing evidence that this model provided better services for voters. In addition, vote centers allow voters to visit any location and vote their ballot, not just a single assigned polling place near their home. The fact the VCA required fewer locations and less staff (especially after even more Election Workers said they were not coming back after 2020, citing clashes with voters as a key factor), motivated Ventura to chart its course toward becoming a VCA County.

Although staffing is, and it appears will continue to be, a challenge during elections, the VCA model now allows Elections the chance to obtain background checks and additional training for all election workers. To help save funds and utilize existing resources, the County CEO's office has encouraged County Employees from other agencies to assist with Election Day activities.

Elections Deep Dive

Senate Bill 450 (Vote Center voting model) -

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB450

Secretary of State and the VCA - <https://www.sos.ca.gov/voters-choice-act>

County of Ventura VCA information - <https://vcclerkrecorderlink.org/VCA>



What is the EAP?

Quick Answer:

The Election Administration Plan (referred to as the EAP) outlines the details of how the County will implement the requirements of the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) for elections. It must initially be approved by the Secretary of State before the County can conduct elections under the VCA model and is amended and renewed at two- to four-year intervals after that.

Ventura County Background:

Ventura's first EAP was approved by the Secretary of State on February 11, 2022. Prior to the final version, there were multiple workshops, public comment periods, a public hearing, online surveys, videos, press releases, social media, and online postings. Per VCA requirements, some of the meetings specifically addressed the needs of the voters with disabilities and limited English-proficient sections of the population.

The EAP outlines the process for determining accessibility for Vote Centers and Ballot Drop Boxes in the community. The EAP also details the schedule for various timed outreach efforts throughout the County.

An amended Ventura County EAP was approved by the Secretary of State on September 29, 2023 for a four-year renewal. Prior to approval, like the initial EAP, the draft of the amended EAP was available to the public for community meetings, a 14-day public comment period and surveys, and a public hearing was held, which was followed by an additional 14-day public

comment period. All legal suggestions (that were not in violation of Election Law) were considered for the amended Plan.

Elections Deep Dive:

SOS VCA Participating Counties EAP: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/voters-choice-act/vca-participating-counties>

Ventura County Active EAP Document: <https://vcclerkrecorderlink.org/EAP>

EAP Page including archives of Voter Outreach: <https://vcclerkrecorderlink.org/EAPPage>



Why don't we manually count the elections?

Quick Answer:

Per Assembly Bill 969 passed in September 2023, counties in California are prohibited by law from performing an official election using a manual vote count if it is on an established election day and if there are more than 1,000 registered voters participating. For non-established election days, a manual vote count is not permitted if there are more than 5,000 registered voters.

Ventura County Background:

The Elections Division does perform a manual vote count audit (as do other California counties) during all regular elections per Election Code 15360. This audit is called the One Percent Manual Tally and it is open for public observation.

Ventura County Elections does perform some other manual counts when necessary. Following the November 2022 general election, Ventura performed a manual vote recount for the Mayor of the City of Ojai race which had a 42 vote difference between the two candidates. The recount was paid for by a registered voter at a cost of \$27,770. There were 3,604 ballots which took 34 different people about four days to tally this single contest. The recount showed the same final results as the original tabulator count.

But, for full primary and general elections it is a completely different situation. Election ballots do not contain one contest. There are multiple contests on every ballot and sometimes over 200 ballot types of the various election races for over 200,000 – 500,000 voters.

There is no record of any manual vote count even being successfully completed under those circumstances, much less being correct.

Elections Deep Dive:

AB 969: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB969

One-Percent Manual Tally - Election Code 15360:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC§ionNum=15360



Did we stop counting the ballots by hand in the polling places when we went to a Vote Center model? Did we formerly have a non-centralized method of counting ballots?

Quick Answer:

No. We did not count ballots by hand in the polling places. Polling places did have a scanner with a memory cartridge installed. The paper ballots would be fed into the scanner, and at the close of voting the memory cartridge was removed and transported by teams of election workers to the Elections Office. The memory cartridges were then fed into the “centralized” tabulator which downloaded its data and compiled the numbers.

Ventura County Background:

The earlier system of the tabulators and memory cartridges at each precinct is now changed to the paper ballots themselves being transported back to the Elections office, known on Election Night as the Central Counting Place. There is a strict chain of custody over the ballots, with supervisor-signed seals on all boxes that are transported by teams of deputized election workers, with the full chain of custodians being documented and retained. We moved back from a partial digital system to a full paper ballot system of tabulation which is recognized as the most transparent and secure.

Any voting system that is used by a county must be certified by the California Secretary of State’s Office of Voting Systems Technology Assessment following rigorous testing by security experts in a process that takes six months to a year.

Ventura’s system is a Dominion system used by 20 California counties including Sonoma, San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Kern, Contra Costa, and Sacramento in addition to hundreds of other jurisdictions across the United States.

Our County received funding assistance from the State for purchasing the equipment. The Voting Modernization Bond Act of 2002 was created after numerous problems with older voting systems during the 2000 Election. The requirement from the Secretary of State for counties to upgrade election equipment is supported by grant funding.

Elections Deep Dive:

SOS Office of Voting Systems Technology Assessment: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ovsta>
Certification of Voting Systems and Voting Modernization Bond Act
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC&division=19.&title=&part=&chapter=3.&article=5.



Are Ballot Drop Boxes safe?

Quick Answer:

An Official Ballot Drop Box is a quick and efficient way to get your ballot to the Elections Office. During elections, Ballot Drop Boxes are picked up by Elections Division workers. Voters always have the option of using a regular USPS mailbox or post office, but the ballot drop box is a way to avoid the time lag of going through the postal system.

Regardless of whether you mail in your ballot, deposit it in a ballot drop box, or drop it off at a Vote Center, all voters can sign up with Ballottrax to track the progress of their ballot.

Ventura County Background:

Before the Voter's Choice Act, permanent 24-hour ballot drop boxes were augmented by temporary ballot drop boxes set up in the offices of each City Hall in the County.

The VCA requires a ballot drop box for every 15,000 registered voters in the County. The locations are determined by the 15-point siting criteria mandated by the Secretary of State and the Elections Code. Their construction is determined by Elections Code 20132. The boxes are built from quarter-inch heavy-gauge steel and mounted on heavy-duty steel posts that are bolted into the ground with special security bolts. The design of the opening is narrow and the box contains internal safeguards to protect the ballots from being tampered with. They are clearly marked as an Official Drop Box on three sides with the Seal and name of the County Clerk-Recorder & Registrar of Voters on the front. There is information in multiple languages and a toll-free contact number for the Election Division for questions or concerns. These Official markings are designed to distinguish themselves from any fraudulent boxes possibly designed to fool the public.

Please note: Nothing deposited in the box is considered a valid voter ballot until it has gone through our signature verification process. If there is a problem with the signature verification, we contact the voter.

We are aware that there have been claims against drop boxes in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Each state has its own rules and we can't speak to them or even to different California counties. For example: Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico and Vermont do not do signature verification on their absentee ballots.

Elections Deep Dive:

SOS and the California Code of Regulations:

<https://www.sos.ca.gov/administration/regulations/current-regulations/elections/vote-mail-ballot-drop-boxes-and-drop-locations#20132>



Ventura County Voters Want to Know ! Part 2

What would change if we weren't a Voter's Choice Act ("VCA") County?

- Q: **Would there still be Vote By Mail ballots sent to all active registered voters?** A: Yes. It's the law in California.
- Q: **Would there be fewer days for voters to receive their Vote By Mail?** A: No, All ballots would continue to be mailed no later than 29 days before the day of the election.
- Q: **Would voters have less time to return their Vote By Mail ballots?** A: No, nothing would change. They still would need to have it returned no later than 8:00 P.M. Election night if they are depositing it in a Ballot Drop Box or at a Vote Center. If they mailed the Vote By Mail ballot, they would still need to have it postmarked Election Day and the Registrar of Voters would still need to receive it within seven days after Election Day.
- Q: **Would there still be ballot drop boxes?** A: Yes. Ventura would still have to follow Election Code 3025 which has ballot drop box requirements.
- Q: **Would there still be Same Day Voter Registration/Conditional Voter Registration?** A: Yes, Conditional Voter Registration, Election code 2170 was put in place in 2017.
- Q: **Would there still be a centralized tabulator?** A: Yes, we no longer allow cartridges to transport the vote count from polling stations. Only paper ballots are counted.
- Q: **Would we do hand counting?** A: No. Ventura County does not use hand counting. There used to be a tabulator in the Polling Places and that information was put on a cartridge which would be installed in the centralized tabulator. They did not count by hand. Also, hand counting would be against the law now that Assembly Bill 969 is in place.
- Q: **Would we continue to use the paper ballots that we use now?** A: Yes.

References

Assembly Bill 37 - Vote by Mail Legislation:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB37

Election Code 3025 – Vote By Mail Voting

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC§ionNum=3025

Election Code 2170 – Conditional Voter Registration

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=ELEC&division=2.&title=&part=&chapter=2.&article=4.5

Assembly Bill 969 – Voting Systems

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB969



Don't see an answer to your Question? What questions would you like answered?

Email us at elections@ventura.org