

Issue Guide on Election Day Communications

As an election official, communicating with voters, media, and other community stakeholders is important. This generic, nonpartisan document provides sample statements to help guide your discussions with key audiences on what to expect on Election Day:

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We encourage you to customize the material below based on the particulars of your jurisdiction. You may also refer to our [Resiliency Toolkit](#) for basic information and links to several sources that can help officials navigate questions around election security, transparency, accuracy, and in a timely manner.

LENGTH OF TIME FOR VOTE TABULATION

Our **[staff/volunteers]** are currently verifying each ballot cast by an eligible voter to ensure they're counted properly. Our office is committed to ensuring the results for every election are reported accurately and securely, so voters can have confidence in the outcome. We appreciate voters' patience as we work hard to accurately count the results and then verify those totals.

Any results published on Election Night or in the coming days are *unofficial* until certified by the proper election authorities, as required by state law. Unofficial vote totals are expected to fluctuate as more ballots are tabulated, as occurs in every election, until the results are certified. In **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**, certification of the November 5, 2024, General Election is scheduled for **[INSERT DATE]** before the **[INSERT NAME OF CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY]**.

TIMELINESS OF RESULTS

On how voting activity prior to Election Day went in your jurisdiction:

As early voting comes to a close, we have seen *[insert local observations and enhancements made, for example: record-breaking turnout this cycle and our office has streamlined early voting processes (including secure ballot intake and verification) to help improve overall processing times and the voter experience].*

On what a higher turnout before Election Day means for timing of election results:

As early voting results typically get posted shortly after polls have closed, when early voting turnout is high, we are likely to see a larger share of votes in the early results posted online.

On what pre-Election Day activity means for expedited results:

Voters should be aware that even as some states report large numbers of early voting results relatively quickly, mail-in and absentee ballots in states that do not allow pre-Election Day processing will take much longer. *[Insert information about pre-processing, for example: That's because election officials in [State] are not even allowed to verify and validate the ballot envelopes or begin any processing steps in advance].*

Voters should know election officials will take as long as necessary to accurately and carefully count every eligible ballot. This is part of the strength of our decentralized election system and not a sign of any irregularities.

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CALLING ELECTIONS VS. COUNTING BALLOTS

CONTEXT: One common source of misconception and voter confusion results from the gap between a race being ‘called’, and the official ballot totals continuing to change in the days following Election Day. This often leads to questions from members of the public and the media such as, “If a news outlet can call the race on election night, why does it take you so long to count ballots and publish results?”

The causes are multifaceted - some states can pre-process ballots, others cannot. Some states accept ballots postmarked up until Election Day; other states have to have received them by Election Day. More than any of these process differences, the reality is that the margins of recent elections have been closer than ever, meaning it is more and more challenging to reach a statistical conclusion quickly anyway. These are sample responses to that question:

On why it takes days, or even weeks, to announce results when news outlets project winners early:

News outlets may use scientific projections to call races before all votes are counted, but our responsibility is accurate results. We count and confirm every last vote – including absentee and overseas ballots that come in by mail. So, as with every election, we will put our responsibility to the democratic process first, and we’ll do so promptly and transparently.

On why vote totals keep changing over the course of the week:

Our first responsibility will always be managing a secure, accurate, legitimate election. That means counting every eligible ballot. That means verifying signatures, canvassing ballots while public observers are present, cross-checking tabulations, and more. We aim to do this as quickly as possible while ensuring the count is above reproach, and we ask the public - and the media - to respect that responsibility.”

On why counting takes so long:

“Counting” is an umbrella term that includes several steps designed to ensure the legitimacy and security of the election. We don’t just run ballots through a counting machine and then upload that number. For in-person votes, we [... Then, we cross-reference.... For mail-in ballots, we.... Then, only while public observers are present, we....]”

UNOFFICIAL VS. OFFICIAL RESULTS

Any results published on Election Night or in the coming days are *unofficial* until certified by the proper election authorities, as required by state law. Unofficial vote totals are expected to fluctuate as more ballots are tabulated, as occurs in every election, until the results are certified. In [INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION], certification of the November 5, 2024, General Election is scheduled for [INSERT DATE] before the [INSERT NAME OF CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY].

While a candidate may declare themselves the winner of a particular race, no candidates for local, state, and federal races will have legally won their races until the [INSERT NAME OF CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY] certifies the results on [INSERT DATE]. In the presidential race, the final federal certification authority is the United States Congress, which will meet in joint session, as required by the U.S. Constitution, on January 6, 2025, to certify the next President and Vice President of the United States.

We thank the voters of [INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION] for their patience as work to accurately tally the results.

PREMATURE DECLARATION OF VICTORY

As of [INSERT TIME AND DAY], our office has tabulated [INSERT PRECISE PERCENTAGE] percent of the votes cast in the November 5, 2024, General Election. Full, unofficial results are expected [INSERT REASONABLE ETA OF 100% REPORTING/TABULATED RESULTS].



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Local election administrators do not declare winners in state and federal races. Once certified by **[INSERT LOCAL CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY]**, the vote totals from **[INSERT NAME OF LOCAL JURISDICTION]** are sent to **[INSERT NAME OF STATEWIDE CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY]**. For federal races, the governor of **[INSERT NAME OF STATE]** must certify the results before they are considered official.

While a candidate may declare themselves the winner of a particular race before all the results are tabulated, no candidates for local, state, and federal races will have legally won their races until the appropriate certification authority certifies the results. In the presidential race, the federal certification authority is the Congress of the United States, which will meet in joint session, as required by the U.S. Constitution, on January 6, 2025, to certify the next President and Vice President of the United States.

Any candidate or private organization declaring a winner does so before all the votes have been tallied and the legally-mandated certification steps are taken does so prematurely. The public is encouraged to only rely upon trusted sources of information for election results, such as **[INSERT NAME OF STATEWIDE CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY; e.g. secretary of state, election board, etc.]**, and not conjecture. A hallmark of American democracy is the peaceful expression of ideas and acceptance of election results no matter who wins.

UNFORESEEN DELAYS IN COUNTING BALLOTS

Earlier today, while verifying and counting ballots cast in the November 5, 2024, General Election, our office became aware of **[INSERT UNFORESEEN DELAY]**. We are **[currently are taking/have now taken]** **[INSERT MEASURES BEING TAKEN OR HAVE BEEN TAKEN]**. The safety and security of ballots cast by eligible voters was never compromised and we expect to have more unofficial election results **[INSERT REALISTIC TIME FRAME]**.

Unofficial vote totals are expected to fluctuate as more legal ballots are tabulated, as occurs in every election, until the results are certified. In **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**, certification of the Nov. 5, 2024, General Election is scheduled for **[INSERT DATE]** before the **[INSERT NAME OF CERTIFICATION AUTHORITY]**.

PRECINCT CLOSURES

Earlier today, our office **[had to temporarily/permanently]** closed precinct[s] **[INSERT PRECINCT NUMBER]** in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]** because/after **[INSERT CAUSE]**. As soon as our office became aware of **[INSERT SHORT CAUSE SUMMARY]**, we ensured voters affected by the precinct closure could vote **[INSERT ALTERNATE LOCATION(S)]**.

We have taken steps to notify those voters whose normal precinct had to close and apologize for the inconvenience. After the general election is over, we will conduct a full review of the closure[s] to try and prevent a recurrence. The safety and security of ballots already cast by eligible voters **[in that precinct/in those precincts]** was never compromised.

PRECINCT THREATS

We are grateful for the swift response from law enforcement today to ensure that a **[INSERT NATURE OF THREAT: e.g. bomb, fire, shooting, etc]** threat against **[INSERT NAME OF LOCATION AND LOCATION: e.g. precinct 10 at Anytown Elementary School]** did not prevent voters from exercising their right to cast a ballot and have their voice be heard. When the threat was received **[INSERT WHO RECEIVED THE THREAT]**, we immediately **[INSERT ACTION AND RESPONSE TAKEN]**.

While the authorities investigate, we remain vigilant for other attempts to disrupt our smooth operations on Election Day here in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**. **[INSERT IF APPLICABLE:]** Voters in line at a precinct where a disruption occurs can vote at any other precinct in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]** or will be given alternative voting location instructions by an election official on-site.

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PROTESTS

During today's General Election, several **[INSERT APPROXIMATE NUMBER OR SIZE OF GROUP]** demonstrators **[INSERT TYPE OF DISRUPTION]**. This caused **[INSERT ANY IMPACTS TO VOTING OR PRECINCTS]**.

We are committed to ensuring every eligible voter in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]** can cast a ballot safely and securely without intimidation. The safety and security of ballots already cast by eligible voters **[in that precinct/in those precincts]** was never compromised by today's demonstration.

We thank local law enforcement for their **[DESCRIBE RESPONSE, for example, prompt/professional/thorough]** response and ask all individuals to respect the sanctity of the election process and our legal system. Every voter has the right to peacefully cast a private ballot for their candidates of choice.

ELECTION LOCATION VIOLENCE

A hallmark of American democracy is the peaceful elections process where citizens make their voices heard not with violence but at the ballot box. It's a model and beacon to the world.

Today, **[INSERT TYPE OF DISRUPTION]**. This caused **[INSERT ANY IMPACTS TO VOTING OR PRECINCT]**.

Violence of any kind at precincts, election offices and against poll workers and fellow citizens is unacceptable and is a crime. We are committed to ensuring every eligible voter in **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]** can cast a ballot safely and securely without intimidation. The safety and security of ballots already cast by eligible voters **[in that precinct/in those precincts]** was never compromised by today's **[INSERT INCIDENT]**.

We thank local law enforcement for their **[DESCRIBE RESPONSE, for example, prompt/professional/thorough]** response and ask all individuals to respect the sanctity of the election process and our legal system. Every voter has the right to peacefully cast a private ballot for their candidates of choice without fear. That principle has served this country well for nearly two and a half centuries.

REPLACEMENT BALLOTS

If a voter does not receive their requested **['absentee/mail-in']** ballot, they should contact our office as soon as possible for a replacement ballot. If the voter later locates the original ballot, only one will be processed – whichever is received by our office first. Any other duplicate ballots for that voter will then be invalid.

Our office uses multiple systems to track ballots once they are mailed, as well as to authenticate and verify a ballot once it is returned. In **[INSERT NAME OF JURISDICTION]**, we process a mail-in or absentee ballot by **[INSERT VERIFICATION PROCESS: i.e. signature verification, witness requirement, etc]**.

We strongly encourage voters to mail or return their ballot as soon as possible – *do not wait*. Ballots not received by our office by **[INSERT BALLOT ACCEPTANCE DEADLINE]** will not count in the Nov. 5, 2024 General Election.

If a voter has questions about their individual ballot, they can contact our office at **[INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION]**.

DISRUPTIONS AT PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public transparency and safety are our top priority. We have clear guidelines in place for observers, and protocols in place to ensure a peaceful, secure, and timely recount process. We remain committed to transparency and accuracy in this election – while making sure everyone is safe.

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SECURITY BREACH

While there may have been rare instances where voter registration systems (not tabulation systems) have been temporarily breached in prior years, data integrity has not been compromised. There is no evidence that integrity has been compromised. Every state now uses Albert sensors¹, provided by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), which act as an intrusion detection system that provides real-time information of any attempted breach of voter registration and administration systems.

Here in **[INSERT STATE NAME]**, those sensors were installed in **[INSERT YEAR]**. We thank our state and federal partners for ensuring security of elections in **[INSERT NAME OF LOCAL JURISDICTION]** is not compromised and we remain vigilant to protect the election process.

UNAUTHORIZED VIDEO SURVEILLANCE

We are aware of a **[INSERT audio/video]** recording of several **[INSERT election workers/poll workers]** at **[INSERT LOCATION RECORDING TOOK PLACE]** on **[INSERT DATE AND TIME OF RECORDING]**.

[INSERT IF APPLICABLE:] Recording of any kind during the **[INSERT: voting/vote tabulation/canvassing/etc]** process is strictly forbidden by **[INSERT STATUTE, RULE, LAW, POLICY]**.

Our election workers – many of them volunteers – have worked tirelessly to safely, securely and accurately conduct the November 5, 2024, General Election. So far, we have **[INSERT STATS OF HOURS WORKED, BALLOTS TALLIED, ENVELOPES PROCESSED, ETC, TO GIVE SCOPE OF WORK INVOLVED]**. As soon as possible, we will be conducting a review of the unauthorized **[INSERT audio/video]** recording and pursue accountability, as necessary. The individuals involved have been prohibited from further access to election offices and locations. They have violated our trust and the oath they took when they volunteered to serve their fellow citizens.

Election workers and administrators do not pick winners of races or ballot measures and their personal views do not affect vote tallies or which candidate receives the most votes. That responsibility lies with the voters alone. We will continue to do our duty until every last eligible vote is counted and the results are certified and legally binding.

CHANGING LEGAL LANDSCAPE

In a fluid legal environment, our office remains focused on ensuring the safe, secure, accurate and transparent administration of elections. When a judge directs us to take a specific action, we follow all court orders, including preserving the status quo of a subset of ballots for further litigation. *[Insert details about any recent cases that may be helpful to educate the media, key stakeholders, the public, and impacted voters.]*

Our role is to faithfully conduct the elections so that the will of the voters will be heard. We will provide the public further updates on ballot processing as soon as possible. We thank our election workers for their tireless efforts to accurately tally the results of the November 5, 2024 General Election.

INELIGIBLE BALLOT CAST

Our office has a variety of methods to confirm that only eligible voters are allowed to cast a ballot and have that vote counted. A combination of pre-election and post-election safeguards are in place.. *[Insert details about the safeguards in place for your jurisdiction.]*

¹ <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/federal-state-local-and-private-sector-partners-conduct-nationwide-exercise-test>



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On **[INSERT DATE]**, our office was made aware of an individual who may have improperly cast a ballot despite being ineligible to do so. We immediately launched a thorough review of this isolated incident and will pursue the appropriate steps necessary to ensure accountability. *[Insert details about process to follow to handle these types of issues in your state.]*

Audits and the lack of any significant number of substantiated cases of non-U.S. citizens voting are verification that the U.S. election system is accurate, secure and transparent. We will update the public as soon as our review is concluded.