

# Early Voting Observation Report: Orange County (CA)

## November 1, 2018

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### Observation Summaries

Orange County has an extensive vote center effort in place for early voting for the November 2018 general election. The vote centers are located throughout Orange County, offering voters the opportunity to cast their ballot for the November 2018 general election on-site, or to drop off a completed vote-by-mail ballot.<sup>1</sup>

Our two election observation teams visited the following early voting vote center locations for in-person observation on November 1, 2018:

- Fullerton Community Center (with drive-thru ballot drop-off)
- Costa Mesa Senior Center
- Orange County Registrar of Voters
- Anaheim City Hall
- Irvine Civic Center (with drive-thru ballot drop-off)

The Fullerton Community Center Vote Center is well marked from the street, with plenty of signage directing voters to the voting location. The voting location is in a small room in the community center, and at the time of our team's visit all of the voting machines appeared functional and we observed a small number of people voting. The staff at the location were pleasant and helpful. The 100-foot blue electioneering signs were posted, but were in a obscure location inside the building.

The Fullerton Vote Center a location with drive-thru ballot drop-off. The drop-off location was easily accessible in the center's parking lot, was staffed during our visit, and the ballot box was secure. We observed ballot being dropped off using the drive-thru process.

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<sup>1</sup>The vote center locations can be found at <https://www.ocvote.com/voting/current-election-info/2018-general-election-info/vote-centers/>.

The Costa Mesa Senior Center Vote Center was very well marked from the street, with many directional signs assisting voters to find the voting location. The staff of this vote center were exceptionally pleasant, and were quite active directing voters into the Vote Center and answering questions. At the time of our visit, all voting machines appeared function, and we observed a number of ballot drop-offs and one surrendered ballot.

At the Orange County Registrar of Voters Vote Center (OCROV), there is an external unsupervised ballot drop-off location, which was securely locked at the time we visited. The Vote Center is in the lobby of the OCROV offices in Santa Ana, which was quite busy on November 1 with many individuals arriving with many questions about registration, by-mail ballots, and of course seeking to vote in person. As a result, the lobby was a congested, and there was a constant queue of between 4-8 individuals waiting at the area marked for early voting. The voting machines were set up in two sets, one set in the lobby and the other set in a short hallway off the lobby. With respect to the first bank in the lobby, the voting machines were in close proximity to locations where others were completing paperwork, or standing in line. The second bank was not easily visible by the staff, as it was down a short hallway.

The Anaheim City Hall was well staffed and everything was functional. It may be advisable to have clearer signs between parking lots and the polling place, which are about 5 to 10 minutes walking distance apart. The polling place is located on the second floor in the City Hall, which we found with the kind guidance from the reception. It may make the receptionist's job easier to add a few direction signs inside the building. We witnessed one instance of re-registration after moving, which turned out to be more complicated than expected due to newly built apartment addresses not coming up in an address look-up system. The poll worker called OCROV to deal with this special circumstance, but the voter was still waiting for the resolution of the matter by the time we left. Preparing for different scenarios for same-day voter registrations may be necessary.

The Irvine Civic Center was quite popular, with a constant stream of incoming voters both for in-person voting and for ballot drop-offs. The parking lot was extremely crowded, and some voters likely spent considerable time trying to find a parking spot, some not realizing that they could simply drop off ballots as they drove through. The poll workers at the drive-thru drop-off location were extremely helpful and directed voters to either go inside for an in-person voting or helped them drop off their vote-by-mail ballots. The in-person voting site worked smoothly with six poll workers and 24 voting machines and 4 voting booths. There were four or more instances of registration to vote but there was no wait for voters. One voter inquired about the procedure about how the ballot box would be returned to OCROV at the end of the day, and the poll worker patiently explained the procedure.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Similar to what our early voting observations found for the June 2018 primary election, overall the in-person early voting process that we observed for the November 2018 general election was well-run. At the time that our observation teams visited these vote centers, the voting machines

were functional, in general the vote centers had plentiful signage, procedures were followed, voting machines and materials were secure, and the staff at the vote centers were friendly and helpful.

Our suggestions for future vote center activities in Orange County include:

- OCROV should consider providing larger electioneering signs for the vote centers. These signs should be placed in prominent locations, located 100 feet from the entrance to the vote center in all directions. While we did not observe any electioneering in violation of the 100-foot limit, our teams noted that these signs could be larger and placed in more visible and prominent locations.
- OCROV may consider providing one or two clipboards to each vote center. In the instances of on-site registration, poll workers may suggest voters to fill out the registration form in the voting booth, or any available table. However, many voters find it more comfortable to sit on a chair and fill out the form. In such cases, clipboards would make the process easier and more efficient.
- In the future, the OCROV might relocate vote center activities at the Santa Ana headquarters. The current vote center set-up at the OCROV headquarters is complicated, as there were many people arriving with many questions and requests. Relocation of the voting activities could reduce congestion at OCROV during the early voting period, and provide a location where those who are voting have better privacy and where OCROV staff can clearly observe all voting systems used for early voting. If relocation is not possible, we suggest that OCROV deploy staff or volunteer greeters who can quickly direct people to the correct line, and who might be able to answer some questions quickly – that might reduce congestion and lines during this busy period at OCROV headquarters.