

Election Day Polling Place Observation Report: Orange County (CA) June 5, 2018 Primary Election, Preliminary Report

June 15, 2018

Executive Summary

On June 5, 2018, many Orange County voters went to polling places to drop off their completed vote-by-mail ballots, or to vote in person. As part of our election evaluation pilot project, we sent three teams of election observers to polling places in two parts of Orange County; these election observers collected information about polling place locations, the procedures being used in each polling place, and about voting wait times. In this preliminary report, we provide some of our most salient observations, as well as some recommendations for the Orange County Registrar of Voters.

Introduction

On Primary Election Day (June 5, 2018), our team of election observers participated in polling place observations in fifteen polling locations in Orange County. The polling locations selected were clustered in two geographic areas of Orange County: ten in Costa Mesa, and five in the Brea area. Further details about the polling place locations is provided in the Appendix.

Observers were provided with three different data collection instruments per polling location: one which collected information about the polling location itself, a second which was used to record the number of potential voters entering the polling location, and a third which was used to record the time it took for specific voters to check-in and then the time it took for them to cast their ballot. We will produce a more complete report with these data in near future.

Our general observations were that poll workers were polite and helpful to voters, as well as to our election observers. Overall, polling places were well-staffed, most voters appeared quite satisfied with the service provided by poll workers, there were no significant lines, nor were wait times an

issue on June 5, 2018. Thus, there were no significant issues observed on Election Day.

We did note a few issues in some polling places which we wished to highlight in this report: the opening of polls, signs showing the locations of polling places, provisional balloting procedures, procedures regarding surrender of vote-by-mail ballots, and voting machine availability.

Opening of Polls

One of the locations our teams visited for the opening of the polls had difficulty opening on time, and was unable to provide full functionality just until after 8am on Election Day. This was apparently due to an issue with access to the election materials in the facility. With a large number of polling locations on Election Day, we recognize that this happens.

The Clerks and Inspector at this location were of course stressed and under some pressure, but our observers noted that they handled this difficult situation well. At 7am two potential voters were present, and the poll workers informed them of the situation and offered them the opportunity to vote a paper ballot (they preferred to return and vote electronically). All of the potential voters who arrived before the availability of electronic voting were given the opportunity to vote a paper ballot — some did, some preferred to wait or return later.

Signs

In many of the polling places our teams visited, they noted that plastic “VOTE” signs to indicate the polling location from the street were inadequate (and in some cases, apparently lacking). The “VOTE” signs indicating the location of a polling place were relatively small, often placed low to the ground, and were not easily visible from all driving directions. In one polling location they noticed that a sign got detached from the attached position and fell onto the floor.

Our observers also overheard voters making the same comment about inadequate “VOTE” plastic signs. This seemed to be an issue in areas where voters may have been assigned to new polling place locations, or where polling place locations have changed.

Provisional Balloting and Voters in Incorrect Locations

In some locations, we observed voters who were in the wrong polling location, who would indicate that they had voted in this location in the past, and they were unsure where to go to vote. At certain polling places, voters were always given information about where their correct polling place was, and were given a choice of completing a provisional ballot or to go to the correct polling place.

However, in a limited number of polling places, we observed voters being told to go to another voting location without specific confirmation of which polling place to go to and where it might be located. In one case, a voter was simply told that her name was not on the list without any further instructions, and as she was unsure whether she registered, and apparently not very well informed about the voting process or about the availability of provisional balloting, she left the polling place without voting. While the training materials are clear that in these situations the poll workers should consult with ocvote.com/lookup, we did not always witness poll workers using an electronic device to assist these voters with that tool. Our observers overheard some voters reporting to the poll workers that they were not aware that their polling location had changed, and that they did not see a change of polling places in the materials they received.

Provisional balloting is an important procedure, to help resolve situations where the voter's name does not appear in the roster but they wish to vote in the polling place. However, these procedures can be difficult to implement in a polling location, in particular when the polling location is busy. Our observers noticed inconsistent implementation of provisional balloting procedures; for example, in one location, we observed a voter who currently lives at an address different than that in the Street Index was provided with a provisional ballot, but in another location, we observed a situation where it seemed that the poll worker allowed a voter to cast a regular ballot, despite the fact that the voter stated having moved to a different address in the same area (with instructions to the voter to contact OCRV to update their address).

Procedures

We observed many voters who entered polling locations with vote-by-mail ballots. Most of these voters were dropping voted ballots off in the polling location. However, some of these voters were surrendering their vote-by-mail ballot, so that they could vote in person. Our observers noticed some confusion about handling of the surrendered ballots. In most locations, poll workers followed procedure: they wrote "SURRENDERED" on the back of the vote-by-mail envelope, and placed the vote-by-mail materials in the SURRENDERED/SPOILED ballot envelope located at the official table. However, in one polling location we observed a surrendered vote-by-mail ballot placed into the ballot box.

We also noted in some polling locations that the "SURRENDERED/SPOILED" ballot envelope was not necessarily placed in a secure location behind the official table. We finally noted that paper ballots and voter rosters were sometimes (infrequently) unattended, and that ballot boxes were (infrequently) placed in potentially less secure locations in a few polling places.

Functionality of eSlate machines

We observed in some polling places that the eSlate machine(s) had their lid closed, and were not being used. While the voting machines had been tested and were functional when they were delivered to polling places, sometimes they may not have been properly set up during the opening of the polls, or were not functional during Election Day. Regardless, voters were generally able to vote on other functioning eSlate machines, but we did observe in these locations a slight delay during periods when a large number of voters came to cast their votes, especially in smaller polling places with a smaller number of eSlate machines.

Recommendations

Recommendation: Provide polling locations with larger “VOTE” signs to be placed at street entrances to the polling location. These signs should be large, and should be placed high enough off the ground so they are easily seen from vehicles in the nearby street. Polling locations with multiple street entrances (especially those located on corners) should have signs placed at each entrance, visible from all driving and walking directions. Inspectors should check the signs every few hours to make sure they remain in their attached positions and that they point toward the correct direction throughout the day.

Recommendation: In areas where polling locations have recently changed, provide poll workers with easy-to-use reference materials and maps to redirect voters who are in the incorrect location. Provide poll workers with directions to those locations to assist voters to find the correct polling location. For voters assigned to a new polling location, the ballots or materials sent to them should clearly note the change of polling location in a clear and informative manner. Inspectors should ask whether the voters who are instructed to go to a different polling location think they can make to other polling location, and point out they can cast a provisional ballot if they have difficulty going to the other polling location.

Recommendation: The OCRV’s poll worker training materials describe administrative procedures from the opening of the polls, to Election Day activities, to poll closing. As we observed, there were some situations where polling place practices on Election Day could be improved, and we recommend that the OCRV review current poll worker training materials with respect to the opening of poll sites on Election Day; eSlate setup and connection procedures; provisional ballot procedures; procedures regarding the surrendering of vote-by-mail ballots. We also recommend that OCRV review guidelines for polling places regarding secure locations for paper ballots, voter rosters, surrendered ballots, and the ballot box. Finally, we recommend that during Election Day, coordinators can help reinforce poll worker knowledge of procedures regarding provisional balloting, the handling of surrendered vote-by-mail ballots, and the security of paper ballots and the ballot box in polling places.

Appendix: Polling Places

The polling locations below were visited by our team on June 5, 2018. The polling location is provided, followed by the voting precincts at that location in parentheses. The polling locations were selected from two geographic areas: one sample in the Costa Mesa area, the other in the Brea area. Geographic clustering is helpful for in-person election observation, as it allows observation teams to visit a larger number of polling locations on Election Day, and it also helps to control for demographic, political, and administrative differences across large election jurisdictions like Orange County.

Costa Mesa Area

- Boys and Girls Club of Costa Mesa, 2131 Tustin Ave, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 (52173A, 52173B, 52213).
- Costa Mesa High School, 2650 Fairview Rd, Costa Mesa, CA 92626 (52166).
- Costa Mesa Senior Center, 695 W. 19th St, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 (52016, 52197, 52212).
- Harbor Village Apartments, 2500 Merrimac Way, Costa Mesa, CA 92626 (52053, 52061, 52208).
- Harper Assessment Center, 425 E 18th St Bldg A, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 (52004, 52024, 52184).
- Iglesia Adventista Del Septimo Dia, 617 Hamilton St, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 (52032).
- Presbyterian Church of The covenant, 2850 Fairview Rd, Costa Mesa, CA 92626 (52167).
- The Lighthouse in Costa Mesa, 1885 Anaheim Ave, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 (52003, 52006, 52196A, 52196B, 52196C, 52196D).
- Whittier Elementary School, 1800 Whittier Ave, Costa Mesa, CA 92627 (53381).
- Whittier Law Library, 3333 Harbor Blvd, Costa Mesa, CA 92626 (52131, 52132, 52188A, 52188B, 52188C).

Brea Area

- Brea Community Center, 695 E. Madison Way, Brea, CA 92821 (05319, 05388).
- Brea Senior Center, 500 Sievers Ave, Brea, CA 92821 (05311).

- Fire Station 3, 2600 E Santa Fe Rd, Brea, CA 92821 (05379).
- Mariposa Elementary School, 1111 Mariposa Dr, Brea, CA 92821 (05307).
- Stewart Residence, 322 E Elm St, Brea, CA 92823 (05389).