

Ballot Processing in L.A. County—Making Democracy Work

How does L.A. County process the millions of ballots that come in for every election? Carefully, very carefully. Why does it take so long for L.A. County to process those ballots? Every ballot from L.A. County goes through a step-by-step process at one enormous Los Angeles County Ballot Processing Center established in 2024 in the City of Industry in East L.A.

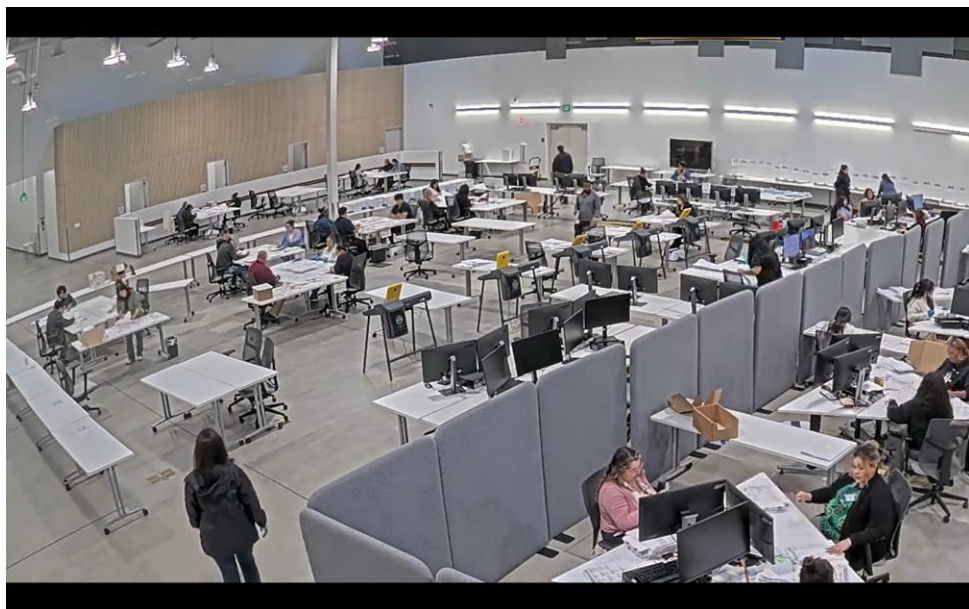


Figure 1 Ballot processing in L.A. County as it wound down in mid-June 2026.

Like a group of eleven LWV and AAUW members who toured the Center on Wednesday, June 3, 2026, [you can visit](#) and watch as it happens. As Senior Deputy for Los Angeles County Registrar Recorder/County Clerk Kathay Feng told us, the goal is to create a voter-centered experience both through the whole voting process and during a visit to the Center. The California Elections Code allows members of the public to observe the Center in action during posted operating hours. It is not necessary to make arrangements in advance, but it's a good idea to do so, as our group leader, Co-President of the LWV of L.A. County Margo Reeg, did.

Each of three Vote Center staffers, Kathay, Leah, and Mike, took us on a part of a guided tour of the five stations of the ballot certification process. Although we, and members of the press who were reporting as we toured, were allowed to see every station and observe the operations taking place, none of us was allowed to get physically close to or in any way touch a ballot envelope or ballot.

Before the tour began, we had to sign in, be given a badge to wear, return purses and/or cellphones to our cars, watch a short video, and be instructed on the basic rules of behavior expected during the tour. We were encouraged to ask questions as we observed, and our group did so frequently. If you'd like to get a view of the Center from home, [CLICK HERE](#) to watch a live feed available during operating hours.

What you'll see on the live feed is one or more of the five stations governing the validation process. The first step is to receive the ballots from the six hundred Vote Centers in L.A. County, the USPS, and the 400+ ballot boxes placed throughout the county. Those ballots have been signed and sealed by each voter. The envelopes are checked to make sure that they have not been damaged or tampered with, and then they proceed to step 2, a Blue Crest signature verification machine. Any ballot envelope rejected because the signature has not been verified or the envelope has been damaged goes through another verification process. Trained staff, who will be looking for identifying characteristics in the signatures, will compare the signature on the envelope to a complete recorded history of all signatures on file in California records for that signature. If there is doubt or a question, the signatures will be compared by two or more experts, including a supervisor.

Once that has been done, in step 3, the ballots are extracted by hand and separated from the envelopes in preparation for step 4: anonymous scanning and tabulating. The envelopes and scanned ballots, although separate, will be saved and stored for 22 months in case a need arises to examine them again.

In addition, at the Command Center, the whole voting process is under review. Here, individual ballots are not checked; rather, conditions like long lines or a shortage of poll workers at Vote Centers on Election Day can be monitored.

Why does it take so long to achieve a final tally of votes in California? It takes so long because of the care taken to verify each ballot while still protecting the privacy of every voter. Even with the relatively low turnout of voters for a primary election, L.A. County processed over 2 million ballots for the June 2 primary, step by step, most of them submitted through the USPS or deposited in a ballot box. The first ballots to be tabulated were likely to be ballots that were cast in person and verified at Vote Centers or ballots that were sent in by mail or deposited in a ballot box during the 29 days before election day. Those ballots, which went through signature verification as they arrived at the Processing Center, were also likely to be among the first to be extracted, scanned, and tabulated beginning on Election Day.

Voting by mail in L.A. County is secure and reliable. Discussion is ongoing for accelerating the verification, scanning, and tabulation processes at the local and state levels. California is committed to making democracy work.

—Laura Noell, Communications Committee