

# DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

**Poll Observer Findings and Recommendations  
from California's 2024 General Election**





# INTRODUCTION

During the November 2024 general elections, the Asian Law Caucus (ALC) and California Common Cause (CCC) led one of the largest nonpartisan election observer programs in California. We ran our program with support from the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area (LCCRSF) and Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Southern California (AJ-SoCal). Our organizations worked together to train nonpartisan volunteers and observe polling sites in 34 counties across Northern, Central, and Southern California. In total, our program recruited more than 520 volunteer observers and monitored over 1,400 polling sites across the state.

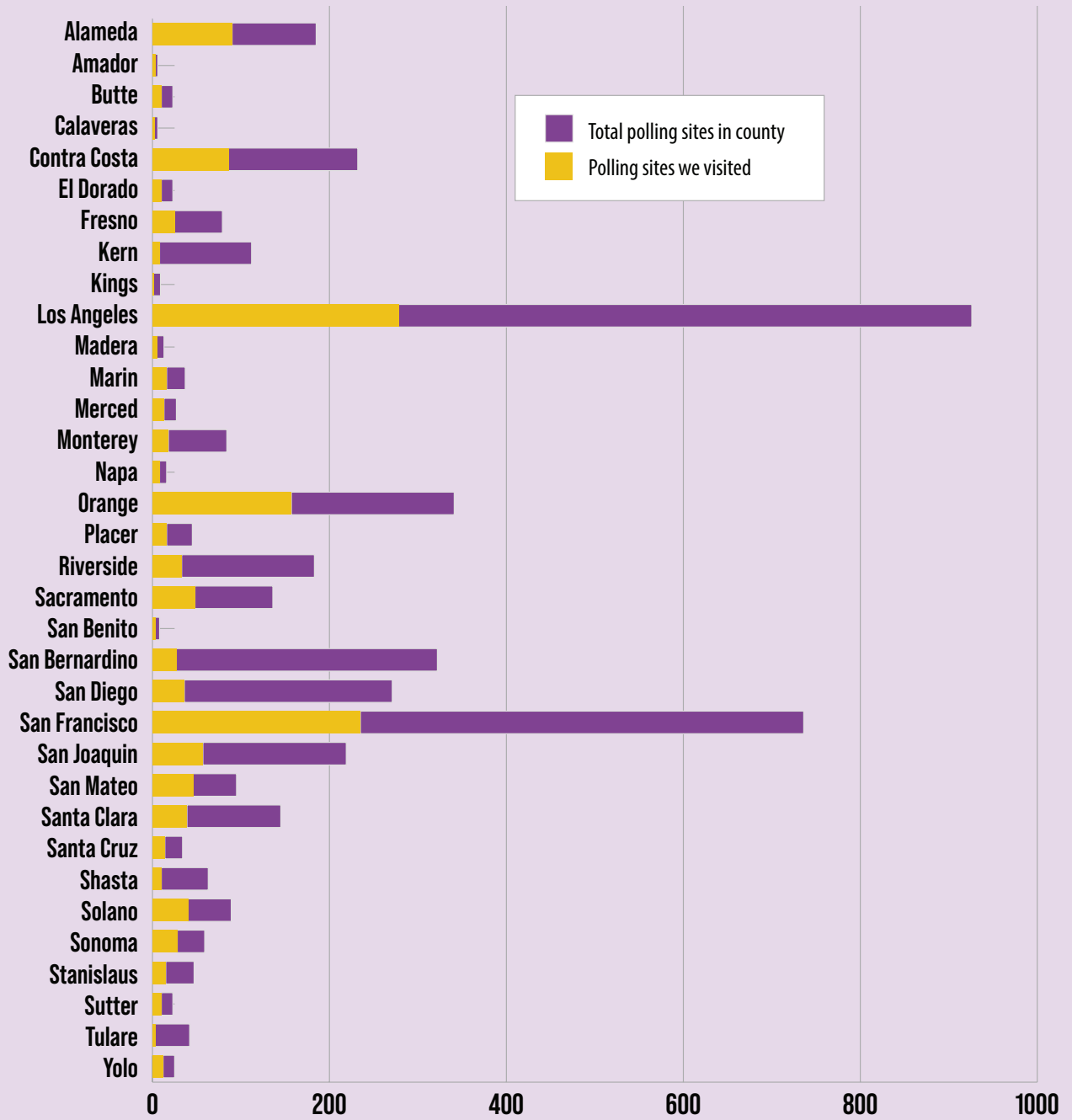
Our longstanding program aims to help ensure that all eligible voters can cast their ballots freely and fairly. We collaborate with elections officials around California to help identify and address barriers at the polls—especially language and disability access obstacles—that may prevent voters from having full access to the ballot. In addition to publishing our results here, we offer election administrators detailed feedback and recommendations based on observations made by our observers.

Overall, our volunteers found that most counties across the state complied with most federal and state accessibility requirements. The voting process generally appeared to be smooth and free of harassment or intimidation. Our volunteers also noted several areas for future improvement. For instance, they often pointed out issues regarding curbside voting, auxiliary aid availability, accessible entrances, and translated signage. To enhance voting accessibility, we have developed a list of suggested improvements that we encourage county elections officials to adopt. Please find our recommendations at the end of this report on page 24.

# BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY



ALC and CCC have conducted in-person election monitoring since at least the early 1990s. In recent years, our joint program has grown to become the largest nonpartisan election observer program in California. In the November 2024 general elections, our program observed 34 counties in Northern, Central, and Southern California: Alameda, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Marin, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Benito, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tulare, and Yolo counties.



We chose these jurisdictions for several reasons. First, these counties are home to large and diverse voting populations; combined, they represent 93% of California’s electorate. Second, we were interested in visiting counties that have recently transitioned to the Voter’s Choice Act (VCA) model of elections, a relatively new election model in California whose impact is still being evaluated. Third, because our program monitors for compliance with language access laws, we prioritized counties where comprehensive translated election materials are provided under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act, and we also monitored counties covered by Section 14201 of the California Elections Code, which requires translated reference ballots (also known as “facsimile ballots”) in certain languages. The “Language Accessibility” section of our report outlines these requirements in greater detail.

In this election, our program sent observers to 1,402 polling sites across California, or approximately 43% of the 3,274 polling sites open in the counties we covered. San Francisco had the highest number of polling sites observed (278), while Kings County had the lowest, with just one polling site visited. Observers conducted their visits during the early-voting period in VCA counties and on Election Day (Tuesday, November 5) in both VCA and non-VCA counties. We sent out observers during early voting to flag any issues that could be resolved prior to Election Day.

Our organizations used several criteria to determine which specific polling sites to visit. As we expanded our monitoring efforts statewide, we had a particular focus on visiting neighborhoods that are home to large immigrant communities and residents with limited English proficiency. We also prioritized areas where language access compliance has been an issue in the past and where new language access provisions had recently gone into effect. For example, our targeted language communities under these specific criteria included:



- Indonesian- and Thai-speaking communities in San Bernardino County
- Japanese-, Gujarati-, and Hindi-speaking communities in Orange County
- Korean-speaking community in Riverside County
- Gujarati-, Nepali-, Punjabi-, Tamil-, and Telugu-speaking communities in Santa Clara County

In addition, we analyzed data from the Census Bureau to prioritize locations where 10% or more of the census tract population lives at or below the federal poverty line or where 5% or more of the population faces significant mobility challenges. Finally, we prioritized sites where accessibility barriers or other issues had been flagged in previous elections. The polling sites we visited included many intercultural community centers, houses of worship, senior living communities, veterans associations, mobile and pop-up vote centers, and polling sites housed in unique, intimate environments like garages and living rooms.

## Poll Observer Training and Preparation

Our volunteers included a mix of attorneys, law students, local community leaders, and other individuals interested in democracy and civic engagement. Before serving as poll observers, all volunteers attended a mandatory 90-minute virtual training session which was delivered jointly by ALC, CCC, and LCCRSF. These sessions provided a thorough overview of our election observer program, explained California’s election procedures, covered language and disability access requirements, and outlined the roles and responsibilities of nonpartisan poll observers under California law. Volunteers were trained to handle various scenarios they might encounter at polling sites while ensuring that their presence did not disrupt the work of elections officials.

Additionally, in the weeks leading up to Election Day, ALC and CCC coordinated with local elections officials in all 34 counties, attended local poll observer trainings, and met with many officials to let them know about our program and request information about any county-specific protocols. The information we obtained from county officials regarding election protocols and translated reference ballots in their respective counties was shared in a comprehensive guide with all of our poll observers.

We also provided our volunteers with copies of the California Secretary of State’s “Election Observation Rights and Responsibilities” (CC/ROV Memorandum #24057) to ensure their adherence to observation requirements. We instructed volunteers to identify themselves as nonpartisan observers with ALC or CCC upon arriving at each polling site, wear a badge and/or lanyard identifying themselves as such, respect requests from poll workers and county elections officials, and not disrupt the voting process in any way. We recognize that polling sites are busy, complicated, high-stakes environments, and some parties observing the voting

process can unintentionally (or intentionally) make things harder. We work hard to ensure this is never the case with our volunteers.

At each polling site, observers worked in pairs to fill out a questionnaire on paper or their mobile device. The questionnaire asked observers to assess the location’s interior and exterior physical accessibility, translated election materials and signage, poll worker staffing, and voter check-in procedures. The questionnaire also asked observers to note any major issues such as late openings, long lines, voter/poll worker harassment, and equipment malfunctions. When permitted, observers asked poll workers questions about voting procedures and often gathered valuable suggestions about how to improve future poll worker trainings. On average, observers remained at each polling site for approximately 30 minutes.

ALC and CCC ran a phone hotline for volunteers to call if they had questions or witnessed major issues during their field observation. Occasionally, they reported issues that our organizations immediately escalated to county elections officials so that they could resolve them promptly. Dozens of our volunteers provided direct assistance to voters and reported election-related issues to our hotlines, including:

- Site-specific language and disability access issues such as translated reference ballots that were not posted up, missing auxiliary aids, and a lack of space for curbside voting;
- Several polling sites with broken or non-functioning voting machines, which we alerted elections officials about to ensure fixes;
- Politically motivated harassment and intimidation of voters; and
- Multiple instances of electioneering<sup>1</sup> occurring near polling sites.

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<sup>1</sup> “Electioneering” means the visible display or audible dissemination of information that advocates for or against any candidate or measure on the ballot within 100 feet of a polling site building’s entrance or an outdoor site where a voter can cast or drop off a ballot. See *CA Elec Code § 319.5 (2024)*.



## County Report Card

After all poll observers submitted their questionnaires, our organizations spent several months analyzing their feedback and identifying strengths, as well as areas for further improvement. In addition to publishing this statewide summary, our organizations sent reports—including detailed feedback about individual incidents and site-specific issues—to county elections offices in January and February 2025. We hope that these reports will help election departments across California improve voting access in future elections.

In this analysis, rather than using the standard A-F grading scale, we utilized the Mastery, Proficient, Emerging (MPE) scale to assess counties' performance. To standardize the data across various counties, we utilized z-scores<sup>2</sup>, allowing for a more accurate and comparative assessment of each county's performance and compliance

with accessibility standards. This methodology enabled us to account for variations in data distributions and isolate meaningful trends, helping to identify potential issues and areas for policy recommendations.

Our poll observer questionnaire included 12 questions specific to disability access and 12 questions focused on language access. To assign a score to each county, we calculated z-scores to determine how much each county's score deviated from the average disability access score (88%) and the average language access score (89%) across all 34 counties. By using z-scores, we were able to assess how far each county's performance was from the average, highlighting counties that may require targeted interventions or further examination to meet established standards.

2 A z-score is a statistical measurement that indicates how many standard deviations a data point is from the average value of a dataset.

# LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY

A key focus of our program is monitoring compliance with federal and state language accessibility laws. We asked our volunteers to observe polling sites for compliance with language access laws,

namely Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act and Sections 12303 and 14201 of the California Elections Code. The following subsections explain those legal requirements in greater detail.

## Translated Ballots & Other Election Materials

Under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act, counties with sizable language minority populations are required to provide fully translated election materials, including votable ballots, registration forms, voter information guides, posters, and directional signs. Twenty-three of the 34 counties we visited (1,263 out of 1,402 polling sites) were subject to federal language requirements.

Our observers found excellent compliance with Section 203 in each of the 23 counties. All polling

sites had translated votable ballots available in the required languages, and 99% of polling sites had provisional ballots, same-day voter registration forms, voter information guides, and other supplementary materials available in every federally mandated language. Directional signage was nearly always translated with 97% of polling sites satisfying this requirement; in rare cases, “Vote Here” banners or signs were in English only.

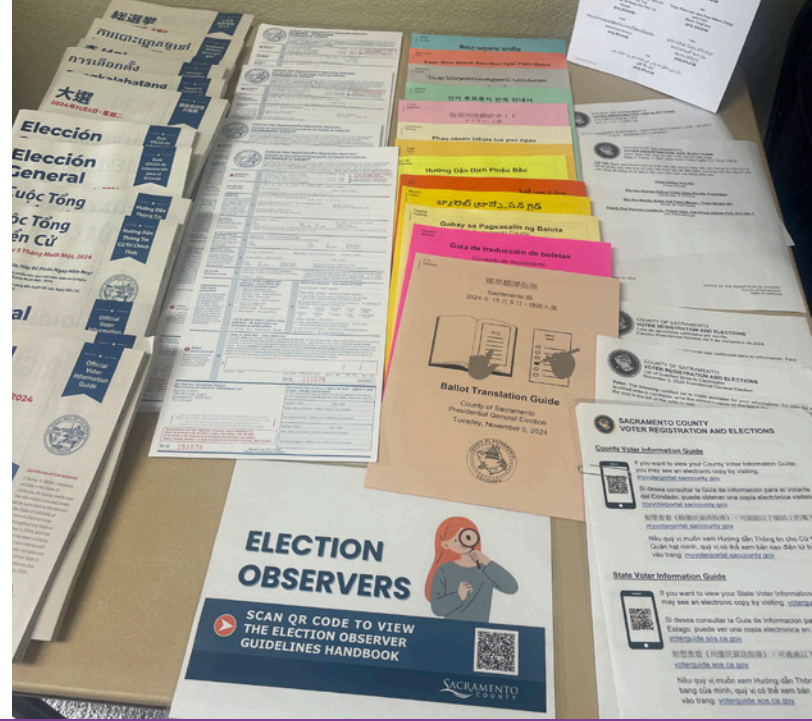
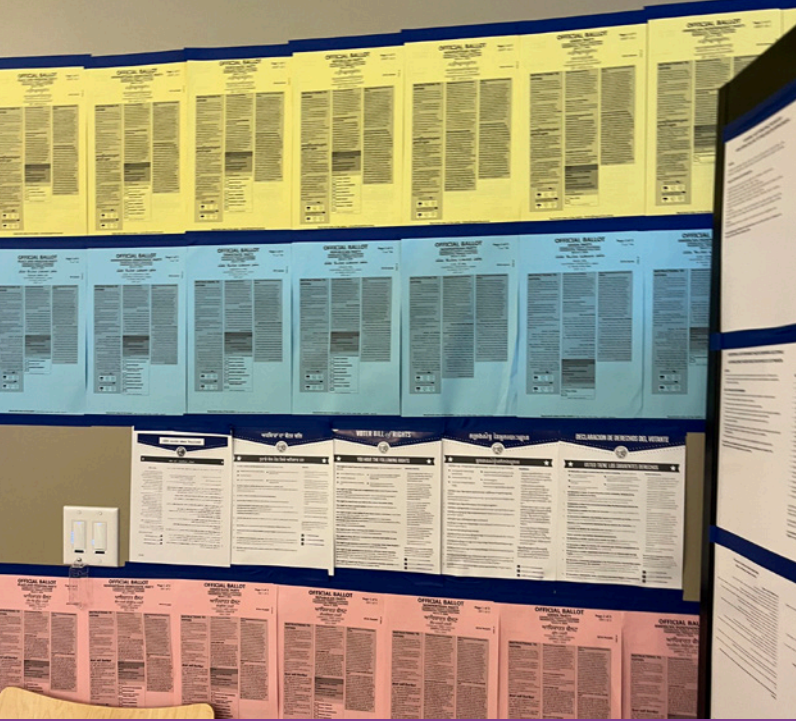
## Translated Reference Ballots

Under Section 14201 of the California Elections Code, in precincts where the population of voting-age adults with limited English proficiency exceeds 3%, polling sites are required to display translated reference ballots in a clear and conspicuous location. These resources—also known as “facsimile ballots”—are translated, non-votable copies of the ballot for use as a reference tool. There must also be copies available for voters to take into the voting booth, as well as multilingual signs to inform voters about them. Thirty-three of the 34 counties we visited were covered by Section 14201 and were therefore required to provide translated reference ballots at polling sites.

Our program found that 92% of polling sites prominently displayed translated reference ballots and had them available for voters to take into the voting booth. Many counties had “language ta-

bles” or trifold poster boards where voters could easily find translated reference ballots and other multilingual materials. To highlight some strong examples, Alameda, Fresno, Merced, Napa, Sacramento, San Diego, Stanislaus, and Yolo counties conspicuously displayed translated reference ballots and had clear, multilingual signs about these resources. We appreciate the increased attention that many jurisdictions have put into these language materials and associated signage in recent years.

Unfortunately, a handful of California counties continue to fall short in meeting their Section 14201 requirements. In some cases, our observers noted that translated reference ballots were posted on an inaccessible wall behind other equipment or kept in a box behind the check-in desk and given to voters “on request only” due to space



constraints. When translated reference ballots are not clearly visible, voters are much less likely to know about and use these resources. Counties could also improve how they vet and proofread translations. For instance, in San Francisco, our observers found that reference ballot translations in Burmese were consistently inaccurate, noting that “the characters are grammatically switched and do not translate properly.”

Finally, across the state, we saw a need for more robust poll worker training on language accessibility. At times, election workers did not know what translated reference ballots were or what languages were covered by law. In future elections, we recommend emphasizing the availability and importance of translated election materials to poll workers to ensure that they are properly equipped to support voters with language needs.

## Poll Workers and Language Interpretation

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires counties to provide oral assistance in federally covered languages, typically through bilingual poll workers or other interpretation services. Moreover, VCA counties must provide interpretation services in state-covered languages, and, under Section 12303 of the California Elections Code, all counties must make “reasonable efforts” to recruit bilingual poll workers who speak state-covered languages. Methods to achieve this goal include outreach to community organizations and interested individuals, as well as notices in media outlets catering to minority language communities. Bilingual poll workers must be identifiable through a name tag, button, sticker, or other ac-

cessory. We asked our observers to inquire about bilingual poll workers and interpretation availability at every polling site.

Overall, our observers found that 81% of polling sites had at least one bilingual poll worker available in at least one of the required languages. A majority of polling sites had a Spanish-speaking poll worker. Counties with larger and more linguistically diverse populations tended to have higher numbers of bilingual poll workers. For example, every vote center in Santa Clara County was staffed with at least one bilingual poll worker, reflecting the county’s linguistic diversity, as well as the Registrar of Voters’ robust community out-

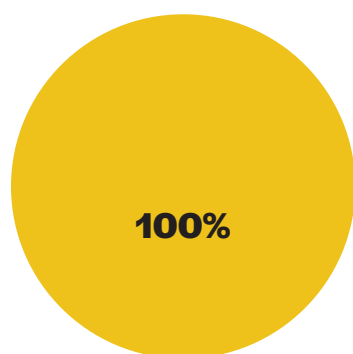
reach efforts. Most bilingual poll workers (77%) were seen wearing a badge, sticker, or other accessory indicating their language skills.

Our observers identified poll workers who could speak languages including Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Hindi, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Burmese, Korean, Japanese, Arabic, Hmong, Khmer, Armenian, Farsi, Bengali, Gujarati, Indonesian, Mongolian, Telugu, Russian, and Assyrian. (This list accounts only for languages covered in each county under both Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act and California Elections Code Section 12303.) Just as in previous elections, languages like Spanish and Chinese were well represented among poll workers across the state in November 2024. Unfortunately, many election departments continued to struggle with recruitment efforts for bilingual poll workers who speak South Asian and Southeast Asian languages. For example, observers found no Lao-speaking poll workers in any of the seven counties with Section 12303 coverage for Lao. Languages like Thai and Mien were also poorly represented relative to their state-mandated language coverage.

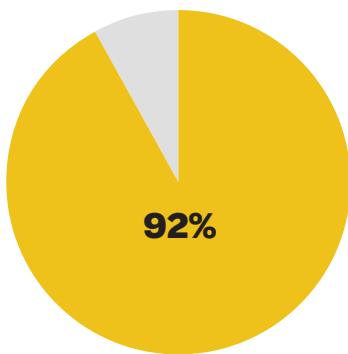
We recommend that counties improve how they assign bilingual poll workers by assigning them

to the polling sites that are most likely to serve language minority communities. For example, our observers in San Francisco described how several polling sites in the Richmond, Mission, and Portola neighborhoods had high numbers of Chinese-, Spanish-, and Vietnamese-speaking voters (respectively) but were not staffed with any bilingual poll workers, which caused some communication difficulties.

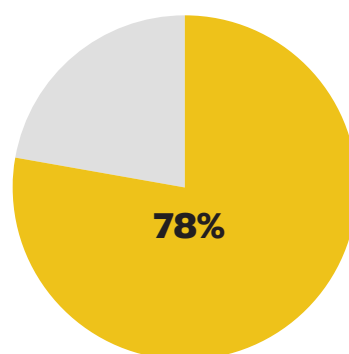
Finally, our observers gathered information on whether polling sites offered and advertised the California Secretary of State’s phone-based interpretation hotlines or similar language services, including American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation. Our organizations consider it a best practice to have signage about these resources, especially when bilingual poll workers are unavailable or when a voter needs assistance in a language not covered under federal or state law. Nearly all poll workers (91%) said they were familiar with the state’s language interpretation hotline and knew how to contact it. However, only 66% of polling sites displayed signage informing voters about this resource. We encourage all counties to invest in signs that let voters know about this valuable statewide resource.



Votable ballots available in all required languages?



Translated reference ballots clearly displayed?



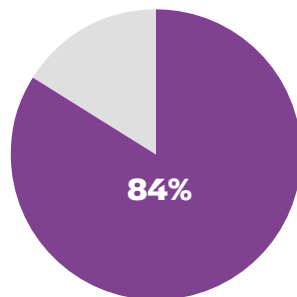
Information posted about languages spoken on site?



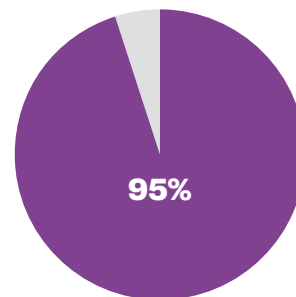
# ACCESSIBILITY FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

In addition to evaluating language access, our program conducted a general assessment of polling site compliance with state and federal accessibility standards, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), and other relevant state and federal laws. We focused on key elements of accessibility, such as curbside voting, clearance for wheelchair

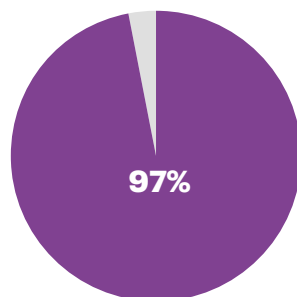
users, accessible ballot marking devices, and the provision of auxiliary aids like magnifying glasses and signature guides. Our questionnaire was developed in collaboration with Disability Rights California (DRC) to ensure that our volunteers were looking at a range of issues that can create barriers for voters with disabilities.



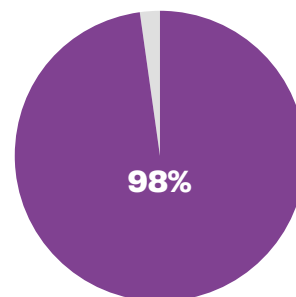
Curbside voting advertised outside?



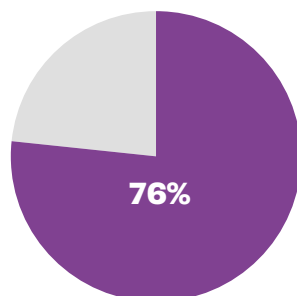
Accessible entrance to the polling site?



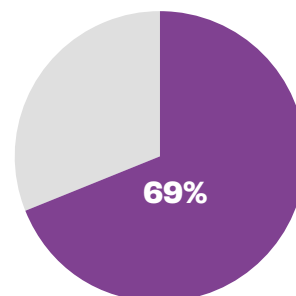
At least 5 ft of interior clearance?



Accessible voting machines set up and turned on?



Magnifying glass available and laid out?



Signature guide available and laid out?



## Curbside Voting

With the passage and subsequent codification of AB 545 (2023), all polling sites in California must now offer voters the option of curbside voting. Curbside voting ensures that voters who cannot physically enter a polling site or have a disability that makes it hard for them to do so can still cast an in-person ballot from outside the site, typically from their vehicle. Poll workers deliver a ballot or ballot marking device to the voter to ensure private and independent voting. Section 14282 of the California Elections Code also mandates that polling sites display signage indicating curbside voting availability, and they must provide a method for voters to request assistance, such as through a phone number or call bell.

## Physical Layout of Polling Sites

According to Chapter 11B of the California Building Standards Code,<sup>3</sup> polling sites must provide an accessible pathway from the street or parking lot

to the main entrance. If stairs are present, an alternative ramp or elevator must be available, with clear signage to guide voters. Doors must be wide

On average, 84% of polling sites displayed signage about curbside voting availability, and 90% had a phone number, call bell device, or poll worker stationed at the entrance who could assist curbside voters. In addition, 73% of polling sites reserved an area outside for curbside voters to park. These statistics mark an improvement from the March 2024 primary election, the first major election in which these new statewide requirements went into effect. Nevertheless, we still found some issues around missing signage, signage with very small and unclear instructions, malfunctioning devices, or poll workers who were not familiar with curbside voting. For example, in San Mateo County, our observers found that many call bells did not work due to dead batteries.

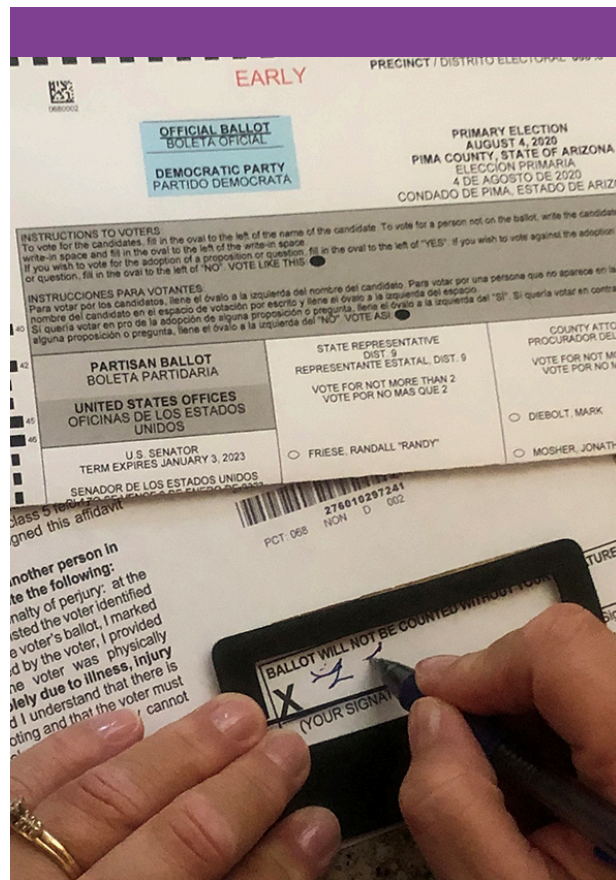
3 For more detail, please see the California Secretary of State polling site accessibility guidelines: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/polling-place-accessibility-guidelines>

enough to accommodate wheelchairs, and they should be propped open, easy to open with minimal pressure, automated via a button, or staffed by poll workers who can assist with opening. We found that polling sites generally met these requirements, with 98% of polling sites in compliance with providing clearly marked accessible pathways and 95% ensuring accessible entrances.

In addition to evaluating exterior accessibility, our team also assessed the interior of polling sites. The vast majority of polling sites (97%) provided at least five feet of clearance for wheelchair users, the minimum amount of space required in California. Whenever there was insufficient clearance for mobility devices, the root cause was usually that the polling site was located within a small room or hallway.

## Accessible Ballot Marking Devices

Our observers also checked whether accessible ballot marking devices were operational and counted them to verify that each polling site had at least the minimum number required by law (three in VCA counties and one in non-VCA counties). Of the polling sites visited, 98% had a sufficient number of accessible ballot marking devices that were ready for use when our observers arrived. This means that the machines were turned on, keypads were plugged in, and headphones were available. Our observers reported that similarly high numbers of polling sites provided sufficient space (5 feet) around accessible ballot marking devices (98%). When asked whether they felt adequately trained in how to use ballot marking devices, 97% of lead poll workers responded affirmatively. Still, many of them—particularly poll workers with fewer years of experience—suggested that they would appreciate more opportunities for hands-on training around setting up and operating this equipment.



Example of a signature guide. Photo from the American Foundation for the Blind.



## Auxiliary Aids

Polling sites were additionally evaluated on whether they complied with legal requirements to provide auxiliary aids to support voters with disabilities. Magnifiers (e.g., magnifying glasses) and signature guides are both required under Section 14105 of the California Elections Code and are critical for voters with visual impairments. Signature guides are tools that help voters find where to sign their name, such as in the check-in roster/poll book. This area of accessibility showed the greatest need for improvement, as many counties (23 out of 34 observed) fell short in providing these auxiliary aids.

Although most polling sites had these materials available, they were often not easily accessible to voters. In many cases, these aids were kept in boxes and only brought out when a voter specif-

ically requested them. Only 76% of polling sites made magnifiers readily available to voters, while signature guides came in even lower at 69%.

Whenever auxiliary aids were not visible, our observers typically asked whether poll workers had them available somewhere else. Once prompted, 85% of polling sites that did not initially make magnifiers readily available were able to provide them upon request. Similarly, 62% of polling sites were able to provide signature guides upon request. Unfortunately, in the majority of counties, there was at least one instance of poll workers being either unaware of or unable to locate a signature guide. These findings highlight the need for increased awareness, better enforcement, and targeted improvements to ensure equitable voting access for people with disabilities across the state.



# VOTER EXPERIENCE & OTHER OBSERVATIONS

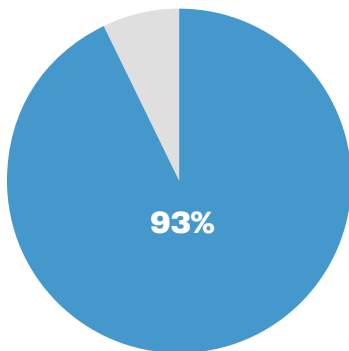
Volunteers also shared feedback on other aspects of the voter experience, such as parking availability, directional signage, wait times, the

voter check-in process, youth voting in Alameda County, and the presence of voter intimidation or electioneering.

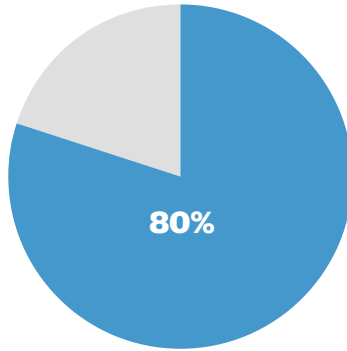
## Parking Availability

Insufficient parking near polling sites was an issue that we noted across the state. Access to parking is incredibly important for ensuring that voters can reach polling sites easily, and the lack of free parking either onsite or within a few hundred feet of a polling site can discourage voters from casting a vote. In Los Angeles and Orange counties, parking challenges were particularly pronounced.

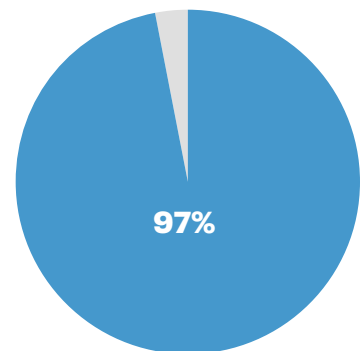
In Los Angeles county, just 40% of the 278 polling sites offered parking options on the premises or nearby on the street. The lack of nearby parking spaces can present extra challenges for voters with disabilities or older voters. In San Francisco, the city's dense urban layout meant that just 57% of polling sites offered space for accessible parking.



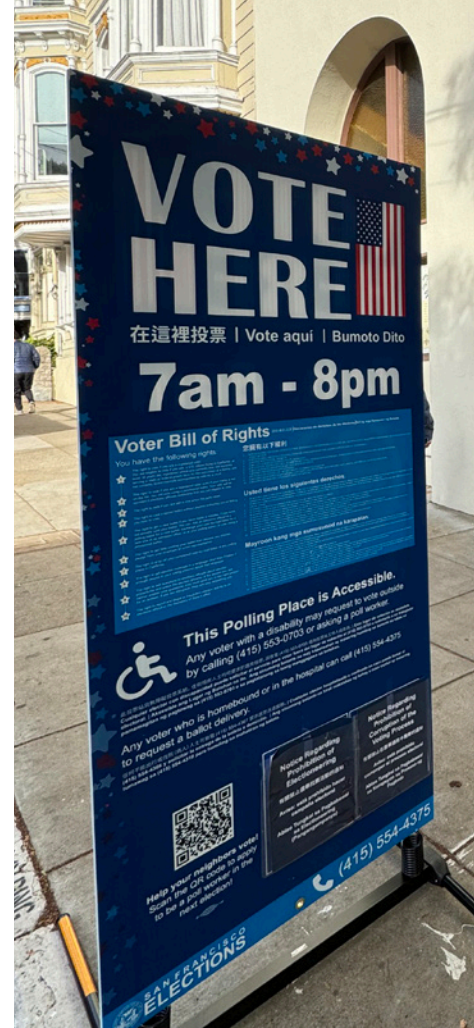
Polling site easy to find?



Parking available nearby?



Check-in process moved efficiently?



## Directional Signage

Our observers said that 93% of polling sites were easy to find, meaning that most voters could locate their polling site without difficulty. They tended to have more trouble in Kern, Tulare, and Butte counties, where certain polling sites were hard to find due to a lack of signage or entrances that were not very apparent. A potential solution could involve placing additional signs guiding voters to

the front entrance and ensuring that ADA-compliant entrances are clearly marked. Elsewhere, our observers discovered that polling site locations were not always advertised accurately. For example, at one Alameda County polling site, the address listed on the county’s election website brought voters to the wrong side of a building; the correct entrance was on a different street.

## Long Lines

Another issue that poll observers reported was long wait times on Election Day, often over an hour long. Polling sites became noticeably more crowded during the afternoon and evening hours of Election Day. For instance, at polling sites in Los Angeles, San Mateo, Fresno, and Placer counties, our observers arrived to find over 50 people waiting in line; some lines even stretched as long as 100 people. At one polling site (at a senior center)

in Los Angeles County, our observers noted that “there were not enough staff working or [they] needed more machines because people had been waiting an hour and the line had only gotten longer [to] 80 people.”

This was an especially severe problem on college campuses. Eight of the 39 calls to CCC’s Election Day headquarters concerned college campus wait

times. Large universities and community colleges alike saw wait times of around one to two hours, which was likely due to the high density of voters in the area, as well as the large number of first-time voters and same-day registrants.

Poll workers did their best to handle the late surge in voters and move them along efficiently. Our observers noted that the bottlenecks tended to happen at either the check-in stage (due to an insufficient number of check-in counters) or the actual voting stage (due to an insufficient number of voting booths). High turnout among first-time voters as well as the high use of conditional voter

registration likely slowed down the check-in process at many locations. For all counties, we recommend that elections officials prioritize increasing the number of poll workers and ballot marking devices at historically popular sites. In particular, we urge election officials to find additional polling sites and/or higher-capacity venues on college campuses to reduce wait times and improve the flow of voters.

In VCA counties, we also recommend encouraging voters to cast their ballots early could help shorten wait times; our observers did not report any long lines during the early-voting period.

## Voter Check-In Process

Upon arriving at each polling site, our observers noted whether the site was open for voting and whether the voter check-in process was running smoothly. Across the state, 99% of polling sites were open and ready for voting when our observers arrived; the few that opened late were usually delayed due to staffing shortages, technical malfunctions, or site-specific logistical oversights (see “Polling Site Selection” section for more detail). Observers said that 97% of polling sites appeared to be processing voters smoothly and efficiently. Reports that lowered overall efficiency noted that long lines resulted from a limited number of check-in staff despite an abundance of voting machines being open.

Occasionally, during the check-in process, our observers reported scenarios that highlighted the need for more thorough poll worker training around voter ID and registration procedures. For example, in San Francisco County, poll workers at two locations were unsure about voter ID requirements, and a poll worker at another site was ac-



tively challenging someone’s right to vote because they were not able to show proof of identity.<sup>4</sup> In another case, poll workers incorrectly believed that same-day voter registration was only possible at City Hall and said they did not have same-day registration forms available. In San Bernardino County, we received a report that poll workers at one site were improperly asking every voter for ID; thankfully, this issue was corrected prior to our poll observer’s departure.

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<sup>4</sup> In nearly all cases, eligible voters do not need to present ID in order to cast a ballot in California. Voters may be asked to present ID if they registered to vote by mail, did not provide a Social Security number, driver’s license number, or California state ID number when they registered, and are voting for the first time.

## Youth Voting in Alameda County

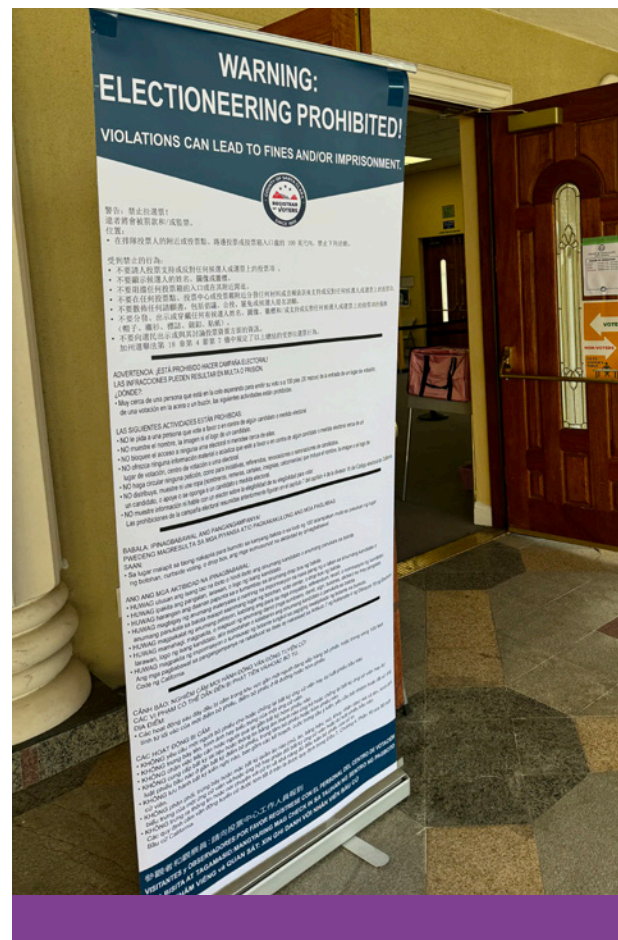
In November 2024, for the very first time in California’s history, youth voters were able to cast their ballot in local school board races in Berkeley and Oakland. Voters in both cities had passed ballot measures several years prior that extended voting rights in these races to 16- and 17-year-olds, and the November 2024 election was the first in which this new process was implemented. Registered voters aged 16 and 17 in Berkeley and Oakland were able to submit their ballots by mail, at a dropbox, or in person at the Alameda County Registrar’s Office.

One of our program’s goals was to observe the rollout of this new process, examine how widely it was used, and gather feedback for the county Registrar of Voters. We were pleased to hear from our poll observers that poll workers were knowledgeable about the youth voting process. Unfortunately, our volunteers did not find any signage about youth voting at any vote centers or the Registrar’s office.

## Voter Intimidation and Electioneering

Voter intimidation and electioneering were not common issues seen throughout the state in this election. However, we received three reports of voter intimidation from our poll observers as well as our CCC’s broader 866-OUR-VOTE phone hotline. The first report was of a man wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat yelling in voters’ faces while they walked to a voting line in Los Angeles County. This instance occurred a few hundred feet away from the polling site, but the observer noted that it clearly made voters uncomfortable. The second report was of a man located 50 feet away from a ballot drop box yelling at voters and waving banners and flags. The man eventually moved to a nearby parking spot but was still in the vicinity of the drop box. The third incident involved a man in Sacramento County yelling false information and threatening criminal action against voters via a megaphone from his truck. Our observer said that some voters left when they were getting yelled at by the person. Poll workers seemed hesitant to confront the man.

Our observers also encountered multiple cases of less aggressive (albeit still illegal) electioneering at the polls. In one incident, a cardboard cut-out of a candidate was placed within 100 feet of the polling site entrance, and campaign materials were being distributed in line. In another case, very loud music with the name of a candidate was “blasting on repeat all morning” right outside a



polling site in Santa Clara County, prompting us to inform the local elections department. To address these situations, we recommend that poll workers be trained to periodically survey the lines and monitor for electioneering during their shifts.

# POLLING SITE SELECTION

Overall, counties generally selected polling sites that were in thoughtful and strategic locations. There was high voter participation at public facilities and venues in residential areas. For example, libraries, community centers, schools, and college campuses typically attracted large numbers of voters. Most facilities were spacious enough to accommodate voters easily and ensure a smooth and private voting experience. When asked whether they would recommend using each polling site again in future elections, our observers responded affirmatively 91% of the time.

Nevertheless, at times we saw a need for more thoughtfully selected polling sites. Some sites caused voter access difficulties due to poorly positioned locations, logistical oversights, or other barriers. One issue that our observers repeatedly noted was sites that required voters to pass through security gates or show proof of identity to enter the premises. For example, at one polling site (at a religious temple) in Alameda County, a security guard was stationed near the locked front entrance. The guard required ID from our poll observers before they were allowed access into the facility. Similarly, several polling sites located on college campuses required our observers and voters to show ID before entering. At one campus polling site, individuals without a university-issued ID card could only access the voting area with the help of a staff member.

Another problem that our observers encountered was polling sites that opened very late due to logistical oversights. For instance, one site (at a hair salon) in San Francisco opened an hour and a half late because the salon was only scheduled to open at 8:30 am, not 7:00 am. As a result, poll workers had to set up on the street instead. At another site (at an elementary school) in Los Angeles County, the voting process was delayed because the



school was locked when poll workers arrived. We strongly recommend that counties confirm the timing of their operations with host facilities, since late openings can cause voter confusion and frustration. Worse yet, individuals may leave without voting if polling sites are not set up on time.




Finally, our observers noted that certain polling sites were situated inside very small venues that made it difficult for poll workers to accommodate the flow of voters. At one site (inside an elementary school) in San Joaquin County, our observers wrote: "The space is just too small. The poll workers improvised and moved one set of voting booths (4 voting booths) outside." Beyond the accessibility issues described earlier, small polling sites can impede the flow of voters and reduce voter privacy.



# IMPACT OF THE VOTER'S CHOICE ACT

In addition to providing feedback to local election offices, another goal of our poll observer program is to study how the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) has impacted voters' experiences at the polls. The VCA is a relatively new, optional model of election administration in California that was approved by state lawmakers in 2016. In counties that have adopted the VCA model, traditional polling sites are consolidated into a smaller number of full-ser-

vice vote centers that open either ten days or three days before Election Day and remain open through Election Day. Rather than being assigned a specific polling site, voters can cast a ballot at any vote center in their county of residence. This gives voters greater flexibility in where and when they can vote. However, it also means that many voters have to travel farther to vote in person than they did under the traditional polling site model, and

	VCA Counties	Non-VCA Counties
 <b>Centers with at least one bilingual poll worker</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>75%</b>
 <b>Accessible parking spaces</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>78%</b>
 <b>Space reserved outside for curbside voting</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>61%</b>

early voting hours in VCA counties (usually 9 am - 5 pm) can make it hard for some voters to take advantage of this flexibility. The chart on the next page displays the data points where poll observers saw the largest discrepancies between VCA counties and traditional polling site counties. In this election, our observers visited 24 VCA counties and 10 non-VCA counties. Out of the 1,402 polling sites we observed around California, 908 (65%) were VCA vote centers and 494 (35%) were traditional polling sites.

In general, there were few statistically significant differences between VCA and non-VCA counties in terms of their compliance with language and disability access laws. Both types of counties did a similarly good job providing translated ballots and other election materials, posting translated reference ballots, setting up accessible voting equipment, and processing voters efficiently. VCA counties benefited from more robust staffing at vote centers, which in turn allowed for more comprehensive language coverage. On average, 84% of VCA vote centers had at least one bilingual poll worker, compared to 75% of traditional polling sites. A greater proportion of bilingual poll workers in VCA counties were also wearing accessories identifying the language they spoke.

Moreover, VCA vote centers were significantly more likely than traditional polling sites to follow the best practice of having accessible parking spaces (a 16 percentage point difference) and comply with the requirement of reserving a space outside for curbside voting (a 19 percentage point difference). These differences are not altogether surprising. In many counties, vote centers tend to be housed in more spacious public facilities with ample parking and more modern, ADA-compliant infrastructure, such as schools, community centers, and government buildings. In contrast, traditional polling sites are sometimes housed inside smaller venues like churches, restaurants, residential garages, and even living rooms. These facilities may not always have accessible parking or dedicated curbside voting space nearby.

Interestingly, traditional polling sites tended to score higher on certain other metrics, such as posting information about the state’s language interpretation hotline and displaying magnifying glasses. Our observers also reported that traditional polling sites were slightly easier to find, which may be because traditional polling sites can be housed in smaller, neighborhood-focused venues that do not require as much navigation as a large building or multi-building complex.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

During the November 2024 general elections, ALC and CCC ran California’s largest nonpartisan election observer program. Our teams visited more than 1,400 polling sites across 34 counties. Observers noted that elections throughout the state proceeded without major systemic issues. Most polling sites complied with federal and state accessibility requirements, allowing voters to cast their ballots freely, fairly, and easily.

This report also identifies ways in which counties can continue to improve the in-person voting experience, particularly for voters with disabilities and voters who have limited English proficiency. To further enhance election accessibility, we encourage state and local elections officials to adopt the following practices and recommendations.

## Language Accessibility

- ✓ Create dedicated language tables inside polling sites where voters can find translated resources in one convenient place.
- ✓ Ensure that translated election materials are accurate by asking native language speakers to proofread them before printing and distribution.
- ✓ Add signage at every polling site about the California Secretary of State’s phone-based interpretation hotline or similar resources, including ASL interpretation services.
- ✓ Continue strengthening outreach efforts to recruit bilingual poll workers. When assigning them to polling sites, prioritize neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of voters who have limited English proficiency.

## Access for Voters with Disabilities

- ✓ Strengthen the enforcement of AB 545 by ensuring that all polling sites consistently and proactively display clear and visible signage about curbside voting.
- ✓ Ensure that all polling sites have auxiliary aids, such as magnifying glasses and signature guides, that are readily available and displayed, instead of just upon request. Include more information about auxiliary aids, their use, and their importance in poll worker trainings.
- ✓ Partner with organizations like Disability Rights California (DRC) to ensure that accessibility policies and procedures reflect the needs of voters with disabilities and that polling sites are in full compliance with the law.

## General Recommendations

- ✓ Increase the number of poll workers and check-in stations at polling sites with historically high voter traffic. In particular, consider adding more polling sites at college campuses and finding spaces that can accommodate larger numbers of voters.
- ✓ In VCA counties, encourage voters to cast their ballots early and consider expanding early voting hours to allow more voters to cast their ballot earlier and spread out voter traffic.
- ✓ Install “Vote Here” banners and directional signs that are clearly visible outside every polling site, especially at large buildings or multi-building facilities. Ensure that addresses listed online and in voter information guides accurately reflect the entrance locations of each polling site.
- ✓ Avoid selecting polling sites that require voters to present an ID to access the premises, or ensure that venues adjust their ID protocols during elections so that voters do not get turned away.
- ✓ Strengthen poll worker training on voter ID requirements and conditional/same-day voter registration procedures.

## Questions or Comments?

For inquiries about this study or our methodology, please email [pollmonitor@asianlawcaucus.org](mailto:pollmonitor@asianlawcaucus.org) and [cacommoncause@gmail.com](mailto:cacommoncause@gmail.com).

## Acknowledgements

Co-authored by Jala Abner, Rebekah Becerra, Russia Chavis Cardenas, Sietse Goffard, and Aashika Srinivas. Designed by Kerstin Diehn.

Special thanks to Chriselle Raguro, Nikki Endsley, Shannon Arancibia Chacon, Pedro Hernandez, Deanna Kitamura, Niketa Kumar, Karie Lew, Paul Spencer, Major Mischel, Sarah Andre, and Jonathan Mehta Stein for their contributions to our November 2024 poll observer program and to this report. We express our deep gratitude to the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area (LCCRSF) as a program and recruitment partner, to Disability Rights California (DRC) as a consulting partner for disability access, to Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (AJ-SoCal) for their support in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, and to the Asian Law Alliance (ALA) for their support in Santa Clara County. We also wish to thank the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr Fund for its generous continued support of our work. Finally, we express enormous appreciation to our wonderful volunteers for their energy, dedication, and keen observations.

## **About Asian Law Caucus & California Common Cause**

The Asian Law Caucus (ALC) was founded in 1972 as the nation's first legal aid and civil rights organization serving low-income, immigrant, and underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. Our nonprofit organization works to promote immigrant justice, economic security, and a stronger democracy through direct legal services, community empowerment, and policy advocacy. We are based in the Bay Area and work closely with low-income and immigrant communities across Northern and Central California.

Common Cause was established in 1970 to provide everyday citizens with a platform to engage in the political process and hold elected officials accountable to the public interest. As a nonpartisan, grassroots organization, California Common Cause (CCC), an affiliate of Common Cause, works to strengthen democracy through grassroots organizing, coalition building, policy development, research, public education, legislative advocacy, and litigation in California. Over the years, CCC has been at the forefront of key reforms, including the establishment of independent, community-led redistricting processes in California and Los Angeles, advocating for money in politics reforms that amplify the voices of ordinary citizens, and advancing voting reforms that significantly expand access to the ballot. Together, ALC and CCC operate our election protection program in partnership with Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (AJ-SoCal) and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area (LCCRSF).