

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

Poll Observer Findings from California's March 2024 Elections

VOTE HERE 

在這裡投票 | Vote aquí | Bumoto Dito

7am - 8pm

I voted at

 **Pct 9404**
March 5, 2024

Take a selfie with this sign and share it online to help encourage others to vote! Tag @elections

This Polling Place is Accessible.
Any voter with a disability may request to vote outside by calling (415) 553-0703 or asking a poll worker.

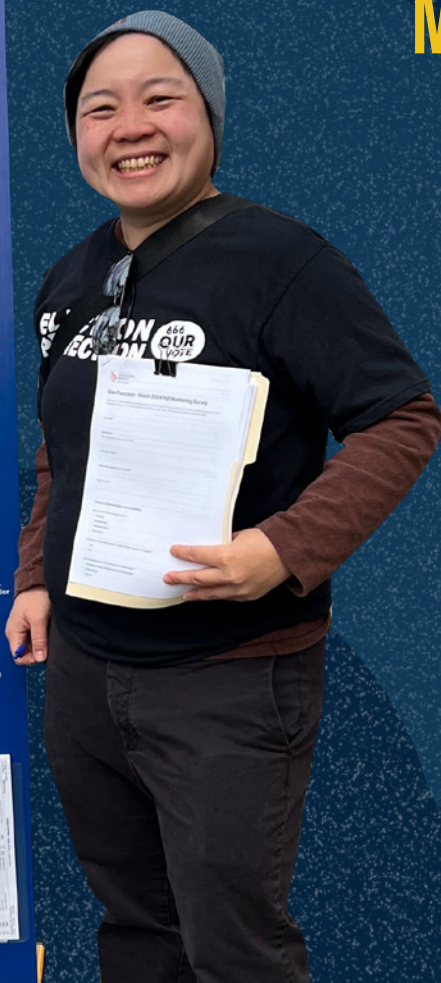
此投票站設有無障礙設施。任何殘疾人士均可要求到站外投票。請致電 (415) 553-0703 或向站內工作人員求助。| Este lugar de votación es accesible. Cualquier elector con discapacidad puede solicitar el servicio para votar fuera del lugar de votación al (415) 553-0703 o solicitarlo a un trabajador electoral. | Atención: ang Lugar ng Bumoto sa Iba. Ang tumatang bumoto na may kapangyarihan ay maaaring humingi na bumoto sa labas sa pamamagitan ng pagtawag sa (415) 553-0703 o sa pagtawag sa isang mangangap sa balota.

Any voter who is homebound or in the hospital can call (415) 554-4375 to request a ballot delivery.

Any voter who is homebound or in the hospital can call (415) 554-4375 to request a ballot delivery. | Cualquier elector hospitalizado o confinado en casa puede llamar al (415) 554-4375 y solicitar la entrega de la balota a domicilio. | Ang tumatang bumoto na hindi maaaring sa balota o sa hospital ay maaaring tumawag sa (415) 554-4375 para humingi ng balotang sa balota.

 **Help your neighbors vote!**
Scan the QR code to apply to be a poll worker in the next election!

Elections in California Information
加州選舉資訊
Información sobre elecciones en California
Informasyon sa mga Eleksyon sa California



INTRODUCTION

During the March 2024 primary election, the Asian Law Caucus (“ALC”) and California Common Cause (“CCC”) led the largest nonpartisan election observer program 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.

Our organizations worked together to observe polls in 25 counties across California, including Alameda, Butte, Contra Costa, Fresno, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Marin, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Sutter and Yolo Counties. The list includes counties that conduct traditional elections and those that conduct elections under the Voter’s Choice Act (“VCA”).¹ These jurisdictions were chosen because of their large and diverse voting populations as well as their federal and state-mandated language obligations. In total, approximately 300 nonpartisan volunteers were trained by ALC and CCC and observed over 850 polling sites across the state.

The goal of our program is to support California’s election administrators and policymakers in identifying and addressing gaps that prevent voters from having full access to the ballot. We work closely with local election offices and offer them detailed feedback on their compliance with state and federal law in order to ensure that all eligible voters can cast their ballots freely and fairly. Based on the feedback we received from our volunteer observers, most counties across the state were in strong compliance with federal and state accessibility requirements.

However, volunteers also noted several areas for improvement in California’s elections. To enhance language and disability access at the polls in anticipation of the November general election, we have developed a list of suggested improvements that we encourage county election officials to adopt. Some of these recommendations include consistent signage for accessing language services and navigating accessibility for people with disabilities, ensuring the availability of all required materials under state and federal law, and covering common voter-identified issues during poll worker training sessions.

1 See the section below for more information regarding the Voter’s Choice Act.





BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

ALC and CCC recruited approximately 300 volunteers to serve as poll observers in the March 2024 primary election. Approximately two-thirds of our program’s volunteers were attorneys; many others were law students or worked in the legal field. In certain counties, we partnered with local community-based organizations to recruit volunteers. In exchange for volunteering with our program, many poll observers were eligible to receive a \$100 stipend or *pro bono* credit through their employer or university.

Prior to serving as poll observers, all volunteers were required to attend a 90-minute virtual training session which was delivered jointly by ALC, CCC, and LCCRSF. The training covered language and disability access requirements, as well as poll observer rights and responsibilities under California law. Volunteers were asked to observe voting locations for compliance with language access laws (under both Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act and Sections 12303 and 14201 of the California Elections Code), physical accessibility, and overall voting conditions.

Before Election Day, ALC and CCC reached out to election offices in all 25 counties. We compiled information from ROVs regarding election protocols and the expected placement of required language resources in each county, and we shared those details with poll observers in a comprehensive “County-Specific Election Information” guide. We also supplied all observers with copies of the California Secretary of State’s regulations on “Election Observations Rights and Responsibilities”.

Visits to polling sites took place on Saturday, March 2nd and Tuesday, March 5th. Observers were usually paired in teams of two and assigned a set of three to five polling sites to visit over the course of several hours. Given our program’s focus on language access, disability access, and economic access, we prioritized individual polling sites based on factors such as:

- Site-specific language requirements
- Proximity to immigrant communities and communities with limited English proficiency

- Areas in which 18 percent or more of residents live below the federal poverty level
- Anticipated usage among lower-propensity voters and voters with disabilities

For example, the voting sites we visited included many intercultural community centers, houses of worship, senior living communities, schools, and veterans associations. Observers also visited several mobile and pop-up vote centers, polling sites housed in special places like garages or living rooms, and sites where accessibility issues had been flagged in previous elections. Overall, our program’s observers visited 859 polling sites, or approximately 31 percent of all voting locations in the 25 counties we surveyed.

Upon arriving at each polling site, observers were instructed to introduce themselves to the lead poll worker and identify themselves as being nonpartisan observers with ALC or CCC. We provided volunteers with t-shirts and name badges to clearly mark themselves as observers. We instructed poll observers to respect all requests from poll workers and county election officials, adhere to state regulations on poll observation, and not disrupt the voting process in any way.

At each polling site, observers worked together to fill out a questionnaire on their mobile device or paper forms. The questionnaire asked poll 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 questions to poll workers 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.

On both days of field observation, ALC and CCC staff were available to take calls from volunteers

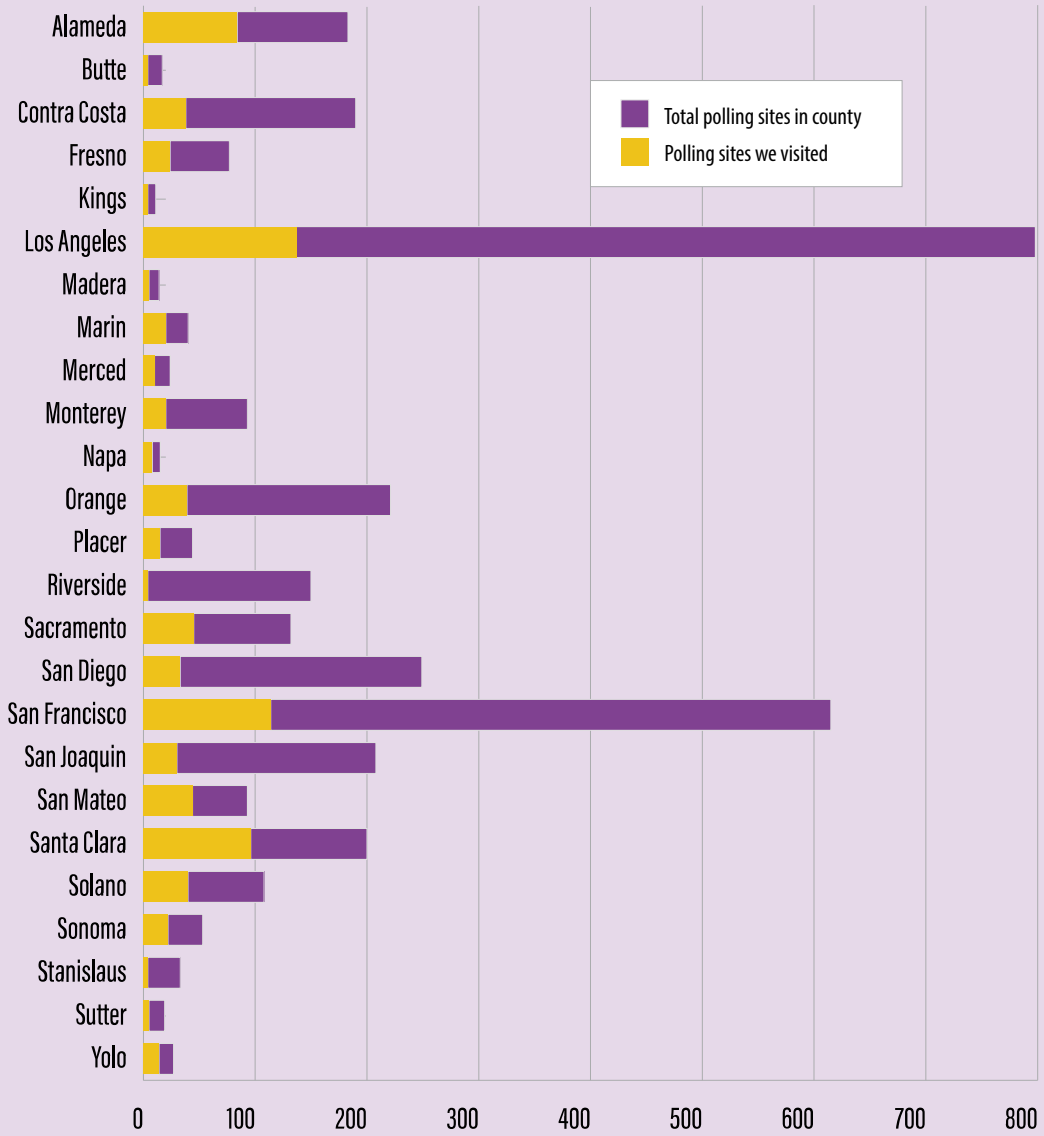


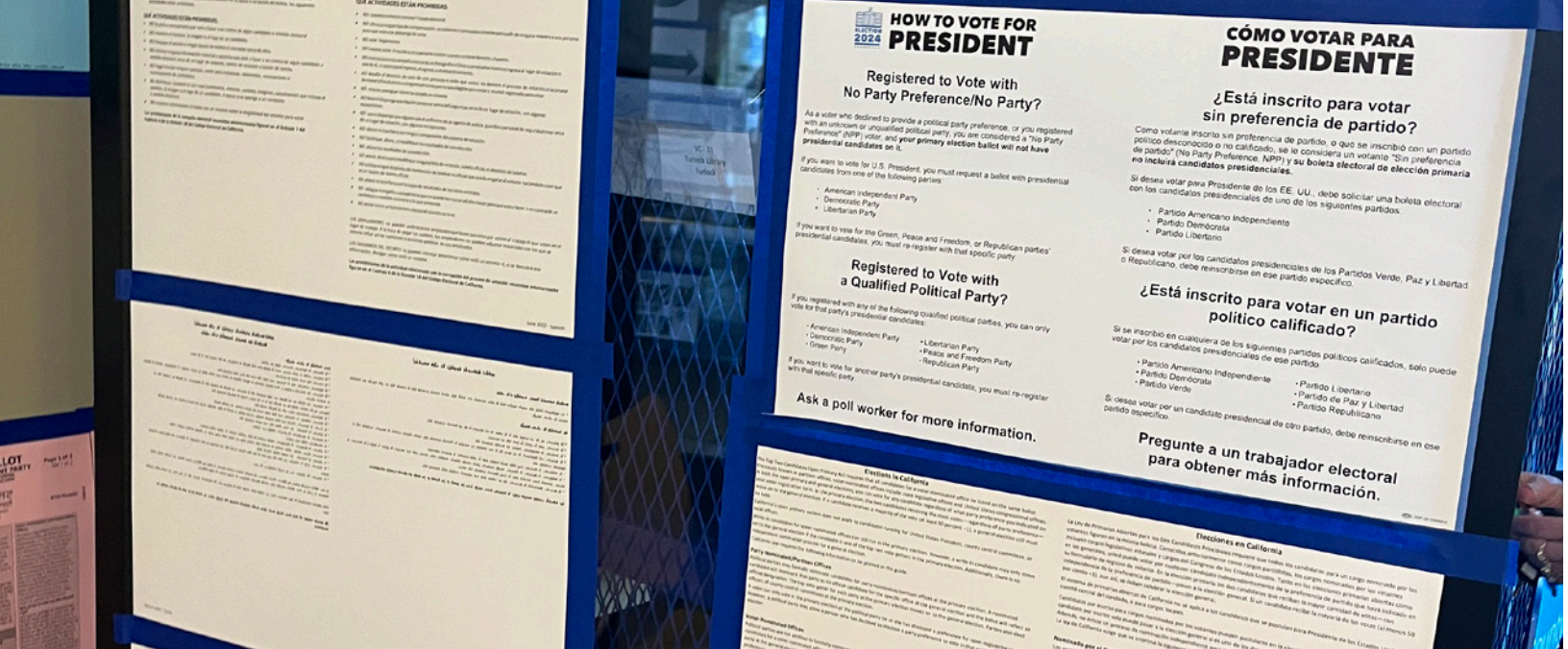
if they had questions or witnessed major issues. Occasionally, observers reported issues that our organizations immediately escalated to county elections officials so that they could resolve them promptly.

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 data reports—including detailed feedback about individual incidents and site-specific issues—to county elections offices in April 2024. We selected the title of this report, *Democracy in Action*, as a nod to the idea that participating in our democracy encompasses more than just voting; observing our elections and helping others exercise their right to vote are also hallmarks of a healthy democratic system. Our hope is that these reports will help election departments across California further improve voting access in future elections.

WHERE WE WENT





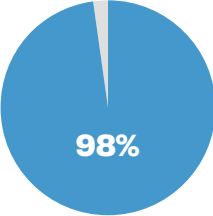


LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY

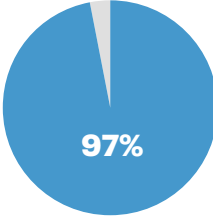
Federally-Mandated Translated Ballots & Other Election Materials

Nineteen out of the 25 counties we visited had federal language requirements under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. In those counties, all election materials—including ballots, registration forms, voter information guides, posters, and signs—must be translated into county-specific languages required by federal law. We found excellent compliance with Section 203 at nearly all voting locations. The vast majority of polling sites had all required materials available to voters in all covered languages.

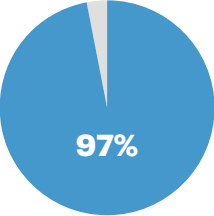
In rare cases, we found missing materials. For example, at a few vote centers in Alameda County, the printers were not working properly when our program’s observers visited. As a result, some locations did not have translated votable ballots readily available. In every observed instance, poll workers were either actively addressing the issue or in contact with an individual with technical expertise.



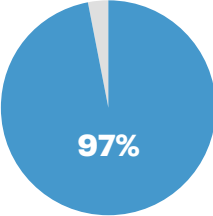
Votable ballots available in all required Section 203 languages?



Conditional registration forms and provisional ballots available in all Section 203 languages?



Supplementary materials available in all Section 203 languages?



Directional signs translated into all Section 203 languages?

Translated Reference Ballots

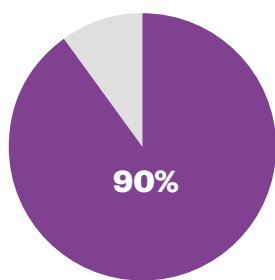
All 25 counties covered by our poll observer program had county-specific state language requirements under Section 14201 of the California Elections Code. Nearly all voting locations we visited were required to post facsimile ballots—translated, non-votable copies of the ballot for use as a reference tool—in a clear and conspicuous location, along with multilingual signage to inform voters about these resources.

Our program’s observers found that most voting locations had facsimile ballots available but that election workers were not always well-versed in how to post these resources clearly and conspicuously. Occasionally, facsimile ballots were hidden far from the voting machines, posted on an inaccessible wall behind other equipment, or simply not visible anywhere. In multiple cases, facsimile ballots were kept behind the check-in desk and displayed to voters “on request only” due to space constraints. When facsimile ballots are not clearly visible, voters are much less likely to notice and use these resources.

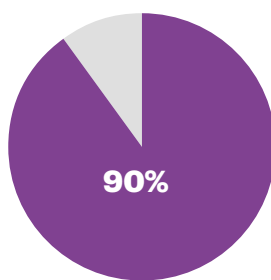
Signage about facsimile ballots was also inconsistent. To highlight some strong examples, Alameda, Fresno, Merced, Napa, Sacramento, San Diego, Stanislaus, and Yolo Counties all prominently dis-

played facsimile ballots and had clear, multilingual signs about these resources. We appreciate the increased attention that many jurisdictions have put into language resources and associated signage in recent years.

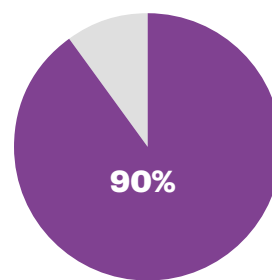
While most counties complied with their Section 14201 requirements, sometimes major oversights still occurred. For example, Santa Clara County unfortunately printed its facsimile ballots late. When observers conducted their first round of visits on Saturday, March 2, nearly all vote centers were missing facsimile ballots in Gujarati, Nepali, Punjabi, Tamil, and Telugu. This was even the case at several vote centers that had already been open for a week of early voting. The county elections department attributed this error to vendor printing delays that were specific to the presidential primary election and provided assurances that this problem would not occur again. Fortunately, Santa Clara County voluntarily provides fully votable translated ballots in Khmer, Hindi, Japanese, and Korean. Because these votable ballots *were* available, the county limited the negative effects of the facsimile ballot printing delays. We encourage election departments to learn from this issue and prepare required voting materials well in advance of the in-person voting period.



Facsimile ballots conspicuously displayed or posted?



Loose leaf copies of facsimile ballots available in all required languages?



Multilingual sign indicating presence of facsimile ballots?

Poll Workers and Language Interpretation

Voting locations were generally well staffed in every county. On average, observers counted 7.4 poll workers per voting location, with significant differences between VCA and non-VCA counties. Most polling sites appeared to be sufficiently staffed to handle the volume of voter traffic.

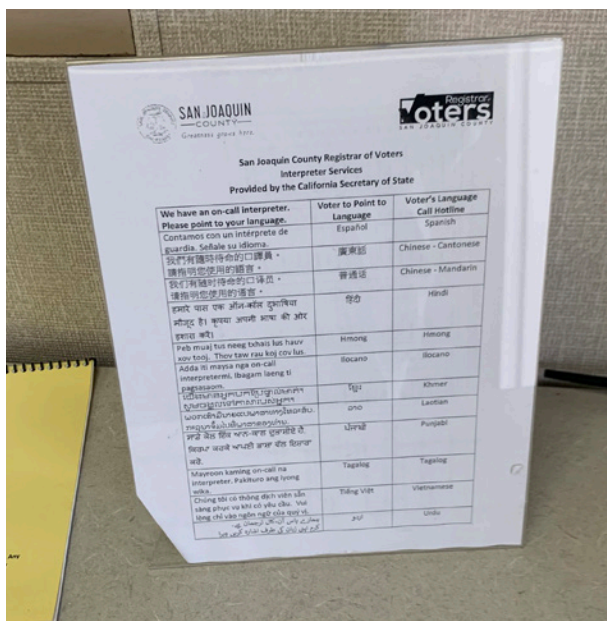
Poll workers at the voting locations we observed spoke a large number of languages, including but not limited to Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Hindi, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Burmese, Korean, Japanese, Hmong, Khmer, Telugu, and Assyrian. (This list only accounts for languages covered in each county under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act and California Election Code Section 12303.) Under California law, counties must make “reasonable efforts” to recruit bilingual poll workers. These methods include outreach to community organizations, interested individuals, and notices in media outlets catered to minority language communities.

Overall, 88 percent of voting locations had at least one bilingual poll worker on site. Similar to what poll observers found during the November 2022 general election, languages like Spanish and



Chinese were well represented across the state in March 2024. A large majority of voting locations had a Spanish-speaking poll worker. Unfortunately, election departments continued to struggle with recruitment efforts for bilingual poll workers who speak South Asian and Southeast Asian languages. For example, observers found just one Lao-speaking poll worker in the six counties with Section 12303 coverage for Lao. Languages like Thai and Mien were also poorly represented relative to their state-mandated language coverage.

We also found that counties could improve how they assign bilingual poll workers to the voting locations that are most likely to serve language minority communities. For example, although 63 percent of all San Francisco polling sites we visited had Chinese-speaking poll workers, observers reported that there was a shortage of Chinese-speaking poll workers at a site in the heart of Chinatown, which prevented some voters from getting language interpretation support. Similarly, observers in Alameda County found that there were no Punjabi-speaking poll workers at the Gurdwara Sahib vote center in Fremont, a temple and hub for the Sikh community. A poll worker at this location said there were many Punjabi-speaking voters on Election Day and recommended assigning at least a couple bilingual poll workers there in future elections.



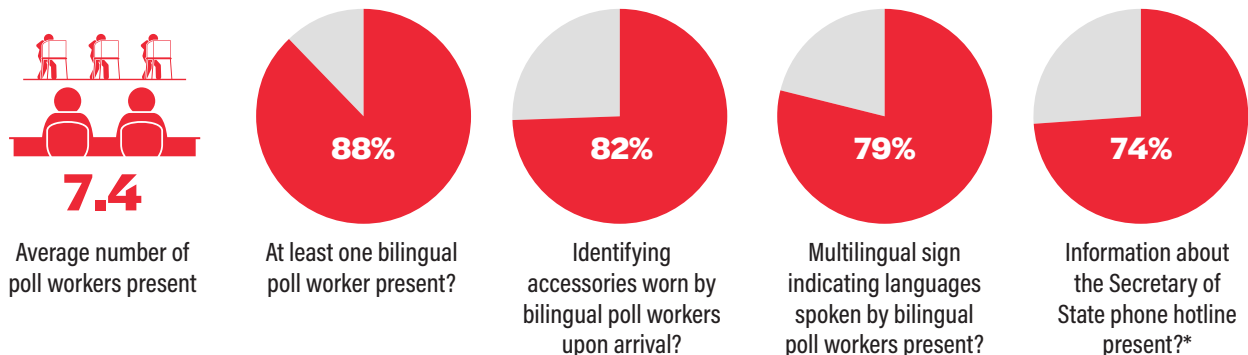


Although there was improvement from previous elections, we observed ongoing issues with bilingual poll worker identification. Many bilingual poll workers were seen not wearing badges or other identifying accessories indicating the non-English languages they spoke, even though this is a legal requirement. We recommend reminding poll workers about this requirement during training sessions and at the start of their shift. Some voting locations did not have multilingual signs indicating what language assistance was available to voters. These badges and signs are helpful resources for limited English speaking voters to easily identify language assistance.

Finally, observers shared a handful of concerning anecdotes that illustrate the importance of continued training and sensitivity around language accessibility. At one Solano County polling site, when asked whether bilingual interpretation was available, the lead poll worker pointed to a janito-

rial staff member in the building who spoke Spanish and who was not a poll worker or employed by the Registrar. Nobody at the location knew how to access Spanish and Tagalog on the accessible ballot marking device. Meanwhile, at a San Francisco polling site, the lead poll worker made a concerning comment that “if a voter asked for a Vietnamese ballot, she generally just gave them a Chinese ballot.” Thankfully the other poll workers at this location knew about Vietnamese facsimile ballots and called the elections department to address a voter’s language needs.

Still, observers’ comments about poll workers were overwhelmingly positive overall. For instance, in Orange County, observers praised bilingual poll workers for being “very friendly” and for having “lots of experience assisting Vietnamese-speaking voters.” In Sonoma County, poll workers showed observers a list of key voting terms in English and Spanish, an excellent best practice.



*Signage about the state’s interpretation phone hotline is not a legal requirement, but our organizations consider it a best practice.



ACCESSIBILITY FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

Our program also examined polling sites for compliance with state and federal accessibility standards, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Help America Vote Act (HAVA), and other federal and state laws around accessible design. These included aspects such as parking availability, curbside voting, exterior and interior

clearance for voters using wheelchairs, accessible voting machines, and auxiliary aids like magnifying glasses and signature guides. Our survey questions were written in collaboration with Disability Rights California (DRC).

Voting and Accessible Parking

As of 2024, curbside voting became a mandatory requirement at all voting sites in California with the implementation of AB 545, which is codified in Elections Code §14282. Curbside voting allows voters who are unable to physically enter their polling site to cast a ballot outside the polling site, such as from a vehicle. Poll workers come outside and bring a voter their ballot, along with any other voting materials needed to cast that ballot privately and independently. Under §14282, every polling site in the state must have signage posted outside indicating that this option is available and instructing how a voter can request curbside

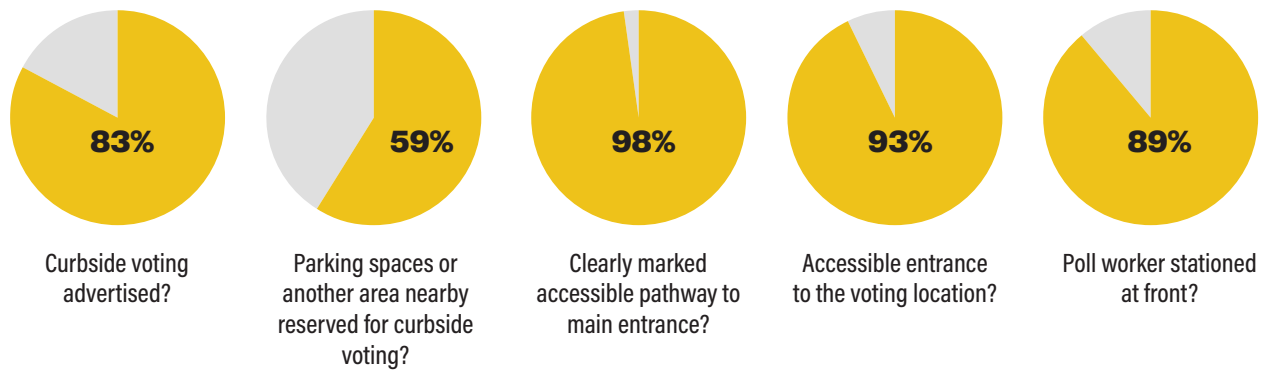
voting assistance (such as via a phone number or doorbell device).

Most voting locations were found to be in compliance with these new rules by providing a curbside voting sign and/or an accessible doorbell for voters to ring for assistance. However, 17 percent of polling sites visited did not have a curbside voting option clearly advertised. In most of these cases, signage was simply missing. At one Alameda County vote center, observers noted: “Curbside voting sign is on the second floor (accessible by stairs or elevator) so it’s not evident from the curb.”

Meanwhile, at several vote centers in Los Angeles County, volunteers wrote that phone numbers on curbside voting signs had been erased due to rainy weather and recommended developing waterproof signage.

Perhaps more concerning, 41 percent of polling sites lacked a parking space or other reserved area where a voter with a disability could cast their ballot from a vehicle or easily access the entrance area. This was particularly true in traditional polling site counties, where facilities tend to be smaller and parking spaces more limited. In San Francisco, only 11 percent of polling sites we visited offered some sort of reserved curbside space. However, even in

VCA counties, the lack of accessible parking was often a problem. For instance, at a senior apartment complex in Los Angeles County, an observer noted: “Parking was very difficult. Street parking was overcrowded. One of the poll workers needed ADA accommodations and they were not able to accommodate her easily. No place for curbside parking. There were drop off spaces (...) but cars were parked there. Poll workers were unhappy and stated that this location should not be used again for the above reasons. We agreed.” While we understand that infrastructure is inherently tight in dense urban areas, we recommend that counties keep at least a few curbside parking spaces available for voters with accessibility needs whenever possible.



Physical Layout of Voting Sites

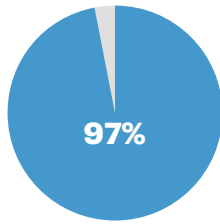
Election observers also provided us with detailed feedback on the accessibility of each voting location. Under Chapter 11B of the California Building Standards Code, polling sites must have an accessible pathway from the street or parking lot to the main entrance; if stairs are present, there should be a ramp or elevator nearby with clear signage. Doors must be wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair and should be either propped open, easy to open with very light pressure, openable via a button, or staffed by a poll worker who can offer assistance. The vast majority of polling sites we visited had an accessible pathway (98 percent), an accessible doorway (93 percent), and a poll worker stationed by the entrance (89 percent). A few exceptions stood out. For instance, at a middle school in Los Angeles County, “poll work-

ers commented on having to physically carry a wheelchair on and off the curb since there were not any ramps available.” At a community center in Kings County, poll observers wrote: “Lobby had a wheelchair sign on the glass, but there was no button and the door was closed. Poll workers tried to prop it open but it wouldn’t stay so they gave up. I asked the City employees in the lobby office how a person in a wheelchair was supposed to enter and they said ‘We have wondered that ourselves.’” Situations like these illustrate the importance of stationing greeters near entrances, especially when there may be accessibility barriers, so that they can offer assistance to voters when needed.

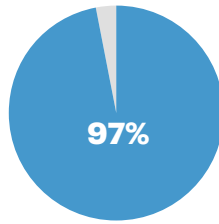
Most polling sites had enough space for mobility devices inside and offered enough room (at least

5 feet of clearance) for wheelchair users to navigate comfortably. In fact, observers praised many vote centers for being spacious, well lit, and well organized. Still, observers found occasional issues that counties should address in future elections. At one location in Monterey County, a volunteer wrote that the room was “very cramped” and that the voting machines were “closely clustered to-

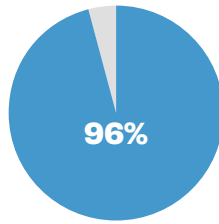
gether,” creating privacy issues as well as potential barriers for voters using wheelchairs. At two vote centers in Sonoma County, accessible voting machines were likewise positioned just 12-15 inches apart. In San Joaquin County, one location had “blockages in the hall leading to the polling room,” which was “small and not maneuverable for a wheelchair.”



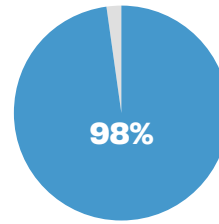
At least 5 ft of interior clearance?



Accessible ballot machines set up and turned on?



Ballot marking devices physically accessible?



Lead poll worker feels adequately trained to use accessible ballot marking devices?

Auxiliary Aids

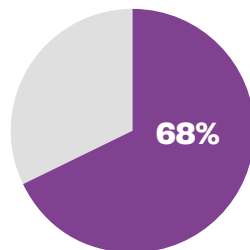
One ongoing pattern in many counties was the inconsistent provision of magnifying glasses and signature guides. A signature guide is a small, rectangular tool that assists voters with signing their name on their ballot or poll book. Both types of auxiliary aids are required under Elections Code §14105 and are important for voters with visual impairments.

Voting locations usually had these materials available in theory, but poll workers often did not lay them out for voters and instead kept them in a box and brought them out only if a voter knew to ask. At some locations, poll workers were either unfamiliar with signature guides or were not able to successfully locate them. At one location in Los Angeles County, a poll worker took “at least

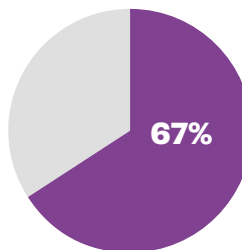


PHOTO: AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND

15 minutes” to find the auxiliary aids. We recommend that counties add slides to their poll worker training modules to illustrate what these auxiliary aids look like and how to display them in a more accessible manner. Counties should highlight how important these tools are for voters with disabilities.



Magnifying glass available and laid out?



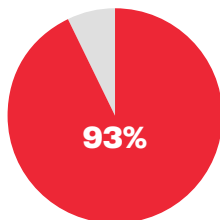
Signature guide available and laid out?



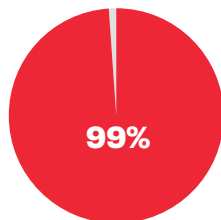
GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Beyond language and disability access, observers reported excellent feedback overall about the polling sites they visited across California. Practically all locations opened on time and were

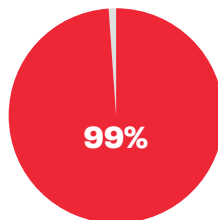
ready for use when observers arrived. Long lines on Election Day were virtually non-existent, and apart from a few cramped locations, polling sites did not feel crowded.



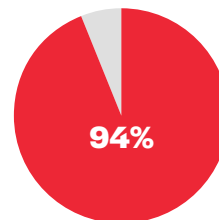
Easy to find this polling site?



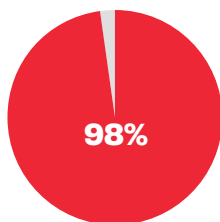
Parking available nearby?



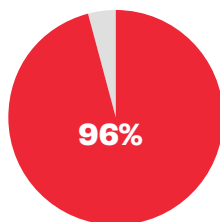
Polling site ready and open upon arrival?



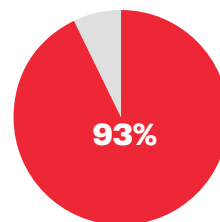
No line to enter polling site?



Check in process efficient?



Polling site not crowded?



Recommend for use in future elections?

Directional Signage

One common theme across all counties was the need for more directional signage outside vote centers. Many observers had difficulty finding their set of polling sites, even when given the exact address. In some cases, the addresses published on county websites did not align well with the actual entrance locations.

For example, at one San Diego vote center, an observer wrote that the site was “part of a large school complex with multiple entrances” and

recommended posting signage at each school entrance directing voters to the correct building. Similarly, one vote center in Placer County was reportedly difficult to find because it was housed in a large municipal facility with multiple buildings; several poll workers said that they had previously mentioned the outdoor signage issue to the county but that no real improvements had been made. At a vote center in Butte County, an observer suggested adding large banners at the street entrance since GPS was the only way to find the location.

Poll Workers & Observer Protocols

Observers described the overwhelming majority of poll workers as being welcoming, knowledgeable, and professional. There were countless anecdotes of poll workers going above and beyond to show voters extra care, assistance, and kindness. At one location in Orange County, a volunteer wrote, “Poll workers were very welcoming and provided personal attention to several elderly voters (helped them get seated, answered questions, and helped them get out of chairs). One man was 99 years old and talked about his WWII service and the fact he had voted in every election since he was 18.”

Occasionally, poll workers were a bit more skeptical or suspicious about the presence of poll ob-

servers. In Contra Costa County, one volunteer wrote that poll workers were “not trained to expect poll monitors and seemed a bit uncomfortable by our presence.” In Alameda County, the Registrar of Voters had originally instructed poll workers to impose a 15-minute observation limit, even if no other observers were present and our program’s observers were not impeding voters in any way. The 15-minute limit violated California’s rules on poll observer rights. After we raised this issue, the Registrar corrected the problem and sent out a notice about the correct observer protocols. We urge departments to ensure their handbooks and trainings are up-to-date with the current regulations on poll observer protocols.





Voter Privacy & Security

In Riverside County, one vote center was “still in the process of transition and conversion from professional offices in active use.” The designated polling area was a converted conference room with a “complete lack of privacy as all individuals had a direct line of sight to a voter’s ballot device,” according to observers. Making matters worse, the infrastructure in the converted conference room was not equipped to handle all the electronic devices required, causing power overloads and equipment failures early on. Poll workers asked our organizations to share feedback regarding these issues to the county elections office.

In Fresno County, two of our program’s volunteers reported an incident involving another observer who identified himself as being affiliated with the

Election Integrity Project (“EIP”). The EIP observer asked poll workers their opinions on various election conspiracy theories and aggressively pressed them on how they would prevent voters from casting ballots illegally. He then proceeded to take photos and videos of voters, voting equipment, and our program’s observers. Even though the atmosphere was reportedly tense, poll workers handled the situation patiently and prevented it from escalating. We anticipate that similar incidents may occur in the November 2024 presidential election and are concerned about the possibility of voter or poll worker intimidation. We encourage state and local election officials to train poll workers in how to handle these sorts of scenarios and ensure that all voters can cast their ballots safely, privately, and free from intimidation.

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, 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-service vote centers that open either ten days or three days before Election Day as well as on 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, when, and how they can vote. However, it also means that some voters have to travel farther to vote in-person. 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 the March 2024 primary election, observers visited 19 VCA counties and 6 non-VCA counties. 612 sites visited were at vote centers (71 percent of observations) and 247 were traditional polling sites (the remaining 29 percent).

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. In both types of counties, nearly all polling sites had votable ballots available in all federally-mandated languages. Non-VCA counties significantly outperformed VCA counties in terms of posting facsimile ballots and having loose leaf copies of facsimile ballots available, but this difference was driven almost entirely by Santa Clara County and therefore cannot be generalized. Excluding

Santa Clara County, there were no statistically significant differences in the provision of facsimile ballots between VCA and non-VCA counties.

Similarly, we did not observe major discrepancies in physical accessibility between VCA and non-VCA counties. One exception was curbside voting and parking. Observers found that curbside voting was more consistently advertised in VCA counties than non-VCA counties (85 percent of vote centers versus 78 percent of polling sites), even though all counties must now offer curbside voting and post signage about its availability. Moreover, vote centers were significantly more likely than traditional polling sites (69 percent vs. 34 percent respectively) to reserve parking spaces or another nearby area for curbside voters. 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 often housed within smaller venues such as churches, restaurants, residential garages, and even living rooms. These facilities tend to have less parking or curbside space available.

VCA counties also benefited from more robust staffing at polling sites. While traditional counties had an average of 6.1 poll workers at each polling site, VCA counties had an average of 8 poll workers at each vote center. In turn, better staffing allowed for more comprehensive language coverage. Ninety percent of VCA vote centers had at least one bilingual poll worker, compared to 81 percent of traditional polling sites. A greater proportion of bilingual poll workers in VCA counties were also wearing accessories identifying the language they spoke.

	VCA Counties	Traditional Counties
Voting locations visited	612	247
Standard, votable ballots available in all required languages?	98%	100%
Supplementary materials available in all required languages?	96%	99%
Provisional ballots and same-day reg forms available in all languages?	96%	98%
Are directional signs clearly posted in all 203 languages?	97%	100%
Facsimile ballots clearly posted?	86%	98%
Facsimile ballots available as loose leaf copies?	86%	98%
Multilingual sign about facsimile ballots?	89%	91%
Average number of poll workers present	8.0	6.1
Bilingual poll workers present?	91%	81%
Bilingual poll workers wearing identifying item?	85%	75%
Multilingual sign about language assistance?	78%	80%
Information about the Secretary of State phone hotline?	73%	75%
Curbside voting advertised?	85%	78%
Parking spaces or another area nearby reserved for curbside voting?	69%	34%
Clearly marked accessible pathway to main entrance?	98%	97%
Accessible entrance to the voting location?	94%	92%
Poll worker stationed at the front of the voting location?	88%	90%
5 feet of interior clearance?	97%	98%
Accessible ballot machines set up and turned on?	97%	99%
Ballot marking devices physically accessible?	97%	95%
Lead poll worker adequately trained on accessible ballot marking devices?	98%	96%
Magnifying glass available and laid out?	61%	87%
Signature guide available and laid out?	65%	67%
Easy to find this polling site?	93%	95%
Parking available nearby?	99%	98%
Polling site ready and open upon arrival?	100%	97%
No line to enter the polling site?	94%	95%
Check in process efficient?	98%	99%
Polling site not crowded?	96%	96%

CONCLUSION & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

ALC and CCC conducted the largest nonpartisan election observer program in California during the March 2024 primary elections. Our organizations visited over 850 polling sites in 25 counties. Overall, our program’s observers found that elections across the state ran smoothly and did not find major systemic irregularities. Polling sites were mostly in compliance with federal and state accessibility laws, and voters were usually able 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 Access

- ✓ Reiterate the importance of bilingual poll workers wearing identification indicating the languages they speak
- ✓ Prioritize voting sites with high need for specific languages during bilingual poll worker assignments
- ✓ Develop recruitment tactics for bilingual poll workers who speak underrepresented languages
- ✓ Provide poll workers with a translated sheet of common voting-related terminology in Section 203 and Section 14201 languages.
- ✓ Provide consistent multilingual signage for language services at every polling site
- ✓ Provide poll workers with instructions on how to clearly place multilingual materials
- ✓ Advertise the Secretary of State’s multilingual voter hotline at all voting sites

Disability Access

- ✓ Provide poll workers with an illustrated checklist of accessibility materials, including auxiliary aids like magnifying glasses and signature guides
- ✓ Ensure curbside voting signage has a doorbell and/or phone number to call for assistance
- ✓ Station one poll worker as a “greeter” at or near the polling site entrance to assist voters as they arrive

General

- ✓ Provide increased and enlarged outdoor directional signage that can be posted near the street and parking lot, particularly at polling sites that are housed within large or busy facilities
- ✓ Ensure polling site addresses published online always reflect the actual entrance locations
- ✓ Ensure that voting areas are spacious enough to allow for voters to cast their ballots privately
- ✓ Include best practices on conflict de-escalation during poll worker trainings

Questions or Comments?

For inquiries about this study or our methodology, please email pollmonitor@asianlawcaucus.org and cacommoncause@gmail.com.

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About Us

The Asian Law Caucus (ALC) was founded in 1972 as the nation's first legal and civil rights organization serving low-income, immigrant, and underserved Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. The nonprofit organization works to promote immigrant justice, economic security, and a stronger democracy through direct legal services, community empowerment, and policy advocacy.

California Common Cause (CCC) is dedicated to building a democracy that includes everyone. The nonpartisan, nonprofit organization is a leader in voting rights, redistricting reform, media and de-mocracy issues, and money in politics. California Common Cause strives to end structural inequities in our state and local democracies and to create governments at all levels that are accountable to and reflective of California's communities.