

VOTER REGISTRATION

INTRODUCTION

Voter Registration – Voter Participation – Voter Accuracy -- Voter Apathy
All are subjects for discussion these days. The California Election Code strictly controls guidelines for Voter Registration. The 2001-2002 Grand Jury scrutinized absentee ballots, sample ballots, voter signatures and annual election reports.

BACKGROUND

The Process

The local elections office may not challenge any registration form supplied by a voter. This form bears a serial number and is distributed by the Santa Barbara Registrar of Voters' office under strict control. The person who completes the form signs his or her name and certifies under penalty of perjury that all statements on the registration are true.

Sample ballots are mailed through the U.S. Postal Service at a bulk rate which does not provide delivery information. If the ballots cannot be delivered the U.S. Postal Service deposits these ballots in the dead letter file as "Non-deliverable".

As many students move between elections, the 2001-2002 Grand Jury (Jury) investigated the use of absentee ballots, particularly in and around the University of California at Santa Barbara and Isla Vista. The Jury found that the number of absentee ballots cast in this locale during the last four elections presents an insignificant opportunity for abuse.

In general, the use of absentee ballots is growing. The requesting and casting of an absentee ballot requires validation of the signature by the Elections Division using the Signature Imaging Retrieval System (SIRS). The system stores a copy of the voter's signature provided at the time of registration. If the signature is not validated by SIRS, the ballot is not counted. An individual's signatures may change over time creating problems in signature verification.

Annual Report

The Annual Reports issued by the Elections Division for FY (fiscal year) 1998–1999 and FY 1999-2000 show the voter lists are being updated on a regular basis:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number of Transactions</u>	
	<u>FY 98-99</u>	<u>FY 99-00</u>
New Registrations Adds and Verified	56,696	34,155
Changes to Voter Registration	10,290	7,792
Voter Registrations Cancelled ¹	<u>10,702</u>	<u>11,855</u>
Total number of Transactions	77,688	53,802

There are approximately 208,000 voters in Santa Barbara County divided into 488 precincts. It should be noted that the Elections Division staff has made an outstanding effort in keeping the election rolls up to date.

The Jury found the Annual Reports clearly set forth the work of the Elections Division in maintaining an accurate voter list. This report was discontinued in 2001.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: Sample ballots not delivered are discarded by the U.S. Postal Service.

Finding 2: Signatures on file with the SIRS are recorded only at the time of registration or re-registration.

Finding 3: Inability to verify an individual's signature will invalidate the ballot.

Finding 4: The Elections Division Annual Report was discontinued in 2001.

Recommendation 1: The Elections Division should, at periodic intervals, mail a group of sample ballots as First Class mail to selected precincts. Undelivered ballots would then be returned to the Elections Division, enabling records to be investigated and adjusted as appropriate.

Recommendation 2: Established residents who request an absentee ballot, should be advised in the absentee ballot mailing to re-register every five to six years, in order to record an updated signature.

¹ The Elections Division purges voter files by reviewing obituaries, use of voter correction forms available at the polling place and sending mailings to individuals who have not voted in the last four elections or have indicated a change of address with the U.S. Postal Service.

Recommendation 3: The 2001-2002 Grand Jury recommends that the Annual Report be reinstated.

AFFECTED AGENCY

County Clerk-Recorder-Assessor

Finding 1, 2, 3, 4

Recommendation 1, 2, 3