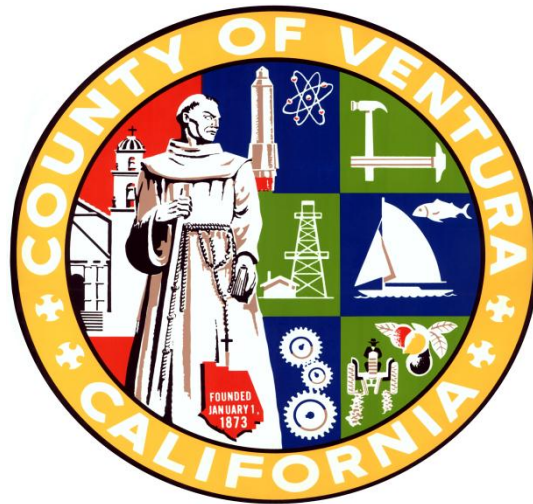


Ventura County Grand Jury 2012 - 2013



Final Report

Elections and Polling

June 6, 2013

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Elections and Polling

Summary

The Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury), in the course of overseeing the election procedures of Ventura County (County), monitored the polls on November 6, 2012 (Election Day) by conducting random visits of polling places in the County as well as the office of County Clerk and Recorder/Registrar of Voters (Elections Division). The Grand Jury observed several violations of policy and procedure at the Elections Division. This report does not address separate complaints filed with the Ventura County Campaign Finance Ethics Commission (VCCFEC) against the Clerk and Recorder/Registrar of Voters.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Elections Division develop a zero-tolerance policy with staff to assure a secure counting room.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors (BOS) set penalties for breaches of security in the Elections Division on election days. BOS should require that the Ventura County Sheriff's Department (Sheriff) monitor the entrance to the Elections Division counting room each election day.

Background

Grand Jurors visited the Elections Division in Ventura and polling places in Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Oak Park, Oak View, Ojai, Piru, Santa Paula, Saticoy, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Ventura and Westlake Village, for the purpose of ascertaining obstacles to voting and the security of the handling, processing and counting of ballots.

Methodology

Grand Jurors at the Elections Division maintained a fixed vantage point in the public access viewing area from 8-11:30 P.M. on Election Day, except for a brief period of time at 9 P.M. During that period, Grand Jurors observed the unloading of vehicles at the loading dock adjacent to the Elections Division of uncounted ballots from the polling stations across the County.

Throughout Election Day, the Grand Jurors who monitored polling places used "polling check-sheets" (Att-01) to assign a numeric value to the voting environment. To ascertain the presence or absence of obstacles to voting, Grand Jurors completed eighteen questions: eleven regarding the facilities and seven pertaining to poll workers. Each question was assigned a numeric value of 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 with "1" having the least value and "5" the most. A section for additional subjective notes for circumstances peculiar to the individual polling place was included on each sheet.

Facts

- FA-01.** At least four individuals who were not election officials entered a restricted area, the counting room, at the Elections Division on Election Day between 8-11:30 P.M.
- FA-02.** Election officials know that allowing into the counting room, individuals who are not election officials violated Election Division’s policy and procedures.
- FA-03.** Election officials believe that requiring the Elections Division to both count votes and act as a watchdog over activities of political campaigns and committees may not be the best model to serve voters in the County. [Ref- 01]
- FA-04.** Grand Jurors monitoring polling places recorded isolated problems as follows: long walks to parking and the lack of parking, trip hazards on a sidewalk, lack of pencils/pens at voting booths, road construction stopping traffic by a polling place, political signs appearing within 100 feet of poll entrances, lack of Spanish speakers as poll workers, one provisional ballot inserted into a voting machine, booths too close together, unclean facilities, newspaper dated November 6, 2012 left exposed, no flag displayed, booths lacking sufficient privacy, polling place changed location without advance notice, no access for the disabled, lack of registration correction forms, partisan advertisement visible on table, temperature too hot or too cold, inadequate signage directing voters, too few booths, lack of or too many poll workers, unfriendly poll workers, and lack of supplies (“I voted” stickers, name badges for workers, etc.).
- FA-05.** Grand Jurors monitoring polling places rated poor lighting as the worst problem while parking issues were second.
- FA-06.** Grand Jurors rated most polls as clean and in good repair, noise levels acceptable, voting booths and materials available and orderly and poll workers welcoming and knowledgeable.
- FA-07.** The duly-elected legislative body in the County is BOS.
- FA-08.** The Sheriff is the duly-elected chief law enforcement officer in the County, as provided for in the Constitution of the State of California.

Findings

- FI-01.** The Grand Jury finds that the security of the counting room was compromised when election officials allowed individuals who were not election officials into the counting room, a restricted area, on Election Day. (FA-01-02)
- FI-02.** The Grand Jury finds that the Election Division should concentrate on the secure counting of votes as its primary responsibility to County voters. (FA-03)

FI-03. The Grand Jury finds that, in the face of makeshift polling places and the issues caused by shortness of time and materials, there were no substantial obstacles to voting county-wide. (FA-04-06)

FI-04. The Grand Jury finds that the BOS could set any and all penalties for breach of security at the Elections Division on election days and the BOS could request that the Sheriff assign a uniformed deputy to monitor the counting room to ascertain credentials of persons entering on election days.(FA-07-08)

Recommendations

R-01. To secure the area where ballots are counted and to avoid the appearance of cronyism, the Grand Jury recommends that the Elections Division develop and enforce a new zero-tolerance policy to assure a secure counting room. (FI-01-02)

R-02. The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS should set penalties for breaches of security in the Elections Division and that the BOS direct the Sheriff to assign a uniformed deputy at the entrance to the Elections Division counting room on election days. (FI-04)

Responses

Responses Required From:

County of Ventura Clerk-Recorder/Registrar of Voters
(FI-01, FI-02, FI-04) (R-01-02)

County of Ventura Board of Supervisors
(FI-01, FI-02) (R-02)

Responses Requested from:

County of Ventura Sheriff's Department
(FI-01, FI-02, FI-04) (R-02)

Commendation

The Grand Jury commends the Ventura County poll workers referenced in this report for their hard work and dedication to removing the obstacles to voting for all voters. (FI-03)

References

Ref-01 Willer-Allred, Michele. "County Supervisors OK changes to campaign finance law." Ventura County Star, May 15, 2013.

Attachment

Att-01. Polling Check Sheet

Glossary

TERM

DEFINITION

BOS	County of Ventura Board of Supervisors
County	County of Ventura
Election Day	November 6, 2012
Elections Division	County Clerk/Recorder and Registrar of Voters
Grand Jury	Ventura County Grand Jury
Sheriff	Ventura County Sheriff’s Department
VCCFEC	Ventura County Campaign Finance Ethics Commission

Attachment 01

Polling Check Sheet

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Polling Check Sheet

Location of report:

1=worst 5=best

FACILITIES:

1 2 3 4 5

- 1. Was the location clean?
- 2. Was the lighting adequate?
- 3. Was the handicap parking and walking area easily accessible?
- 4. Was the location in good repair?
- 5. If there was a community pool were the locks adequate?
- 6. Was the noise level to excess?
- 7. Were all the voting materials in orderly?
- 8. Were the voting booths orderly?
- 9. Was there ample parking?
- 10. Were the bilingual ballots in stock?
- 11. Election posters within 100 feet of polling place?

STAFF:

- 1. Was the staff friendly and welcoming?
- 2. Was the staff knowledgeable?
- 3. Did the staff appear to work together?
- 4. If there were problems were did the staff handle it discretely?
- 5. Was the staff helpful?
- 6. Was there a "coffee clutch" atmosphere apparent?
- 7. Was there newspapers/cell phones/tablets in use by staff?

Notes: