

Frequently Asked Questions

This is intended to provide answers to questions the Elections Office believes you might have about the printing error that occurred in the ballots for the March 5, 2024, Presidential Primary election. As you can imagine, the Elections Office's primary focus has been on remedying the error so that everyone has the ability to cast their ballot in March. The following responses are based on the information available as of February 9, 2024.

What is the source of the ballot error?

The Mendocino County Registrar of Voters engaged Integrated Voting Systems to provide ballot compilation, printing and mailing services. Every county in the state contracts out these services. There are strict regulations about which companies can perform these services and the Secretary of State must approve a company before a county uses the company. Integrated Voting Systems is one of 12 ballot print vendors approved by the Secretary of State. In this case, the Registrar of Voters was informed of the errors Wednesday, February 7. After learning of the errors, the Registrar of Voters contacted Integrated Voting Systems and was informed that Integrated Voting Systems utilized a third-party vendor to assist them in the process and that the third-party vendor sent an incorrect data file to Integrated Voting Systems for printing and mailing. The third-party vendor was selected and hired by Integrated Voting Systems without involvement by the County. The Secretary of State's Office has been informed about this error and the County has been informed that it is conducting its own investigation.

What is the process for checking ballots for errors?

The process for checking ballots for errors involves numerous checks and balances. In this case, the ballots were proofread by the Mendocino Elections Office and approved for printing. The Mendocino Elections Office informed Integrated Voting Systems that the ballots were correct and ready to be printed and mailed. We are informed that the third-party vendor sent Integrated Voting Systems an incorrect data file for printing and mailing, after the ballot images were reviewed and approved by the Mendocino Elections Office.

Is the ballot printing and mailing completely handled by outside company?

No. There are numerous steps in the ballot compilation, printing, and mailing process. The Mendocino Elections Office is involved in many of the steps and proofreads the ballots before they were transmitted to Integrated Voting Systems to be printed and mailed. In this case, the Mendocino Elections Office approved correct ballots. The error occurred when the third-party vendor used by Integrated Voting Systems transmitted an incorrect data file to it to print and mail.

What is the protocol for checking ballots?

The Secretary of State has oversight responsibilities for the conduct of elections and sets forth rules and procedures that each county must comply with. Section 20200 et seq. of Title 2 of the California Code of Regulations sets forth many of these regulations. There are also other provisions of law that govern this process. Mendocino County complied with the regulations for checking ballots.

How did this ballot printing error occur?

Based on what we know at this time, this appears to be an unfortunate case of a simple human error at the last steps of the process.

How long has the County had a relationship with this ballot printing vendor?

Mendocino County used Integrated Voting Systems for approximately 15 years, until approximately 2 years ago. After utilizing a different vendor for a short time, the County returned to using Integrated Voting Systems in Fall 2023 because it felt that Integrated Voting System was more responsive.

Who vetted the ballot printing vendor? What are the requirements for a vendor to manage an entire county's election materials?

The vendor is one of 12 vendors approved by the California Secretary of State for ballot printing. Chapter 4, Title 2 of the California Code of Regulations governs ballot printing, including certification of ballot printers.

What are the errors in the ballots for the actual Republican voters in the First District?

The County is concerned that there may be errors on even the ballots for those individuals registered as Republican in the First District that could cause the ballots to be read incorrectly. In an abundance of caution the County is asking that all ballots be reprinted, and that voters use the reprinted ballots, to ensure that all ballots are processed without error.

How do you know the overseas and military ballots were not affected?

The Elections Office prints and mails the overseas and military ballots.

When did the Elections Office learn about the ballot error?

On February 7, 2024, the Elections Office began receiving reports that some voters had received incorrect ballots. That evening the Elections Office determined that all voters in the County had received a ballot with the same ballot image. The County immediately began working to determine the best way to remedy the error and notify the public.

How will the County ensure that every registered voter can vote?

The Elections Office is working with our ballot printing vendor to get correct ballots mailed out to every active registered voter. Voters will receive corrected ballots with sufficient time to submit ballots by mail or in person. The Elections Office also has procedures in place to identify incorrect ballots that are submitted and to provide voters with an opportunity to submit correct ballots.

How will the County ensure that no one votes in a primary election for which a person is not permitted to vote?

If the Elections Office receives any of the incorrect ballots mailed that have been filled out, the Elections Office will attempt to contact the voter to ensure that the voter fills out a corrected

ballot. The Elections Office will not count votes cast for any election in which the individual casting the vote is not permitted to vote.

How will the County ensure that no one is able to vote more than once?

When Elections Office receives a ballot the privacy label is removed, the addressed scanned and the file is uploaded into the elections management system. If a challenge code comes up in the election management system, the ballot is put aside for the elections official to review.

Additionally, Elections Office staff check the signature on each ballot envelope by hand. If there is a discrepancy in the signature it is challenged in the elections management system and brought to the Elections Official for signature verification. If the Elections Official verifies the signature, the challenge is removed, and the ballot is filed by precinct to be opened and counted. If the signature does not match the Elections Office contacts the voter to re-sign and/or complete a new registration form (a person's signature may change over time).

If a voter sends in one ballot and then sends in a second ballot, the system will recognize that the person has already voted and challenge the second ballot. Elections staff will research to verify the reasons for any subsequent ballot. If the reason is a result of the mailing of incorrect ballots, the incorrect ballot will be voided.

Is this error being reviewed by any outside agency?

The County has been in contact with the California Secretary of State regarding this ballot error. The Secretary of State agrees with the process being used by the County to correct the error. Additionally, the County is informed that the California Secretary of State is conducting its own investigation into what occurred. The County is appreciative of the assistance provided by the California Secretary of State regarding how to remedy the error and for its review of this situation.