

Parallel Election (PE) Procedures

Parallel elections are a way to get people thinking about the questionable integrity of our current privatized electronic voting systems. Computers running secret corporate software are now counting the votes in almost every jurisdiction across the state and nation. Parallel elections are the only way that citizens can reclaim direct access to the vote-counting process.

Parallel elections are perfectly legal, and they are relatively easy and inexpensive to organize and conduct. Anybody can set up and run a parallel election. In this handbook, we show you how to research, publicize, prepare, conduct, tally, and report the results of a parallel election. PE documents and forms referred to in the following pages are all available from www.study-california-ballots.org in a downloadable file, PE_Forms.pdf. If any part of this procedural guide is unclear, or if you think of ways to improve the PE process, please let us know by using the contact addresses listed at the end of this paper.

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(Instructions and documents marked {LE} have legal evidentiary significance).

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I. RECRUIT ADVISORS

1. **Begin by checking <http://www.StudyCaliforniaBallots.org>.** See what parallel elections are already organized for your area, and who is working on them.
2. **Obtain a legal advisor.**

There may already be an attorney providing pro bono legal counsel to community activists on election matters in your area. If not, try to find one who will agree to volunteer their services.

A legal advisor's responsibilities are to:

- At minimum, have familiarity with local, county, and state election codes.
- Be available on the day of the PE for advice, and to remind election officials of the law.
- Be available after the PE to advise on recounts and possible legal action.

3. **Recruit one or more statisticians.**

Statisticians can analyze the voting results data and help volunteers, the public, and the press understand the PE results in relation to the official results, and the implications of any differences between the two.

II. RESEARCH POLL SITES

1. **Obtain a precinct map** from the county registrar of voters' office.
2. **Choose PE locations.** It will probably not be possible to cover all polling sites in a county, so select the best possible locations first. The best poll sites have:
 - (a) a large number of voters and a historical record of high voter turnout
 - (b) only one entrance and exit
 - (c) an area convenient for setting up a PE table more than 100 feet from the official poll entrance.
3. **Know which precincts are assigned to each of your selected poll sites.**

There may be multiple precincts assigned to the same poll site. Know the precinct numbers assigned to your selected sites, and know the number of voters registered in each precinct. If possible, select poll sites with the largest number of voters. You can obtain this information from the registrar of voters.

III. PROMOTION and PUBLICITY

1. **Prior promotion and publicity is important to raise citizen and media awareness** about what parallel elections are and why they are needed.
2. **Begin promoting public participation in the PE as early as possible.**
 - a. Send out mass e-mail announcements describing the PE plan and calling for volunteers. Include links to the StudyCaliforniaBallots.org website where complete PE guides and resources are online.
 - b. Obtain invitations to speak about PEs to interested community groups, unions, and political clubs. Distribute informational flyers and collect volunteer signups at all such events.

3. **Begin cultivating relationships with sympathetic news reporters as early as possible.**
 - a. Provide select reporters information on PEs and electronic voting system problems so they will be ahead of their competition on this news topic and have a stake in covering it well. Parallel elections make for novel and compelling news stories.
 - b. Send out a press release about the PE one week in advance of election day, and again the day before, but don't disclose the PE poll sites until election day. StudyCaliforniaBallots.org can provide sample press releases. *See example 1.*
4. Arrange to have your cultivated press contacts cover the PE poll sites on election day, and the public counting of the PE ballots later on election night.

IV. PE PREPARATIONS, SUPPLIES and DOCUMENTS

1. Advance Preparation

- a. **Prepare for the weather.** Check the weather forecast and know what conditions to prepare for on election day. Bring appropriate clothing (hats, gloves, umbrellas), sunscreen and sunglasses, etc. and be prepared to keep paper materials dry and prevent the wind from blowing them away.
- b. **Locate the nearest restrooms.** Many polling places will have restrooms, and it's OK to use them. If there are no restrooms at the poll site, locate the nearest ones ahead of time.
- c. **Locate parking.** Parking can be a problem at schools, churches, fire stations, etc. Plan a parking strategy for yourself and your fellow volunteers ahead of time to avoid parking problems on election day. Cars with political messages on them should not park near the PE polling station.
- d. **Noncontroversial Attire and Conduct.** Plan your dress the day before; avoid political shirts, buttons and other partisan paraphernalia. Look respectable and approachable. It's important that PE volunteers be able to foster a welcoming rapport with the general public, so that we achieve a high rate of participation from voters of all political persuasions.

2. General Supplies

- a. **Tables.** Use a 30" x 72" folding table or two card tables to have enough space to fit everything.
- b. **Chairs.** Bring one for each team member.
- c. **Table Sign** saying "**Citizens' Audit Parallel Election.**" Clearly distinguish the PE table from the official polling site to avoid confusing voters.
- d. **Orange balloons** can also call attention to the PE table and differentiate it from the official poll.
- e. **Still or video camera.** Have a camera or videocam to document your PE. Record the opening and closing of the PE, and any unusual events during the day. Be sure to photograph the sealing of the ballot box lid at the beginning of the PE, and the sealing of the ballot box slot after the last voter inserts his/her ballot. Also, photograph the official precinct tally tape posted at the polling entrance after the poll closes.
- f. **Food and water.** Consider bringing a cooler with food and water. Remember that you will be there for a few hours, or even all day, and that you may not be able to leave for lunch.

- g. **Clips, ties, paper weights.** Keep the wind from blowing away papers and knocking over signs. Clothespins, binder clips, rubber bands, paperweights, even bungee cords can all come in handy.
- h. **Cell phones and phone list.** Have at least one working cell phone for each PE team, and a list of all team phone numbers distributed to every team. Teams must be able to communicate with each other and with PE coordinators, legal advisors, and the PE press liaison throughout election day.
- i. **Address of counting location.** Distribute to all teams maps and written directions to the location(s) where the PE ballots will be counted. Display this information at the PE stations for the public too.

3. **Parallel Election Supplies**

- a. **Ballot box.** Folding file boxes with lids, in dimensions of 12" x 15" x 10" work well as ballot boxes, and are available in office supply stores. Cut a 6 inch by ½ inch slot in the center of the lid.
- b. **Two rolls of tape {LE}**
 - 1. **clear tape** for sealing all openings in the ballot box and lid (inside and outside surfaces), and
 - 2. **masking tape** for making a writable seal
- c. **Clipboards.** Have a minimum of 3 clipboards. More is better, to avoid having voters wait in line.
- d. **Pens and markers.** Use **ballpoint pens** for signing the roster book and writing affidavits about voting irregularities. Use fine-point **Sharpies** or similar markers for marking the ballots. Retain markers by attaching them to the clipboards with lengths of string.
- e. **Voter pledge labels (example 2).** Use adhesive labels (Avery #1562) preprinted with the voter pledge. By signing the pledge, voters declare they are participating in the PE voluntarily and that they will cast the same ballot choices in the parallel as in the official election.
- f. **PE roster book.** Use stitch-bound composition books, available from office supply stores. **{LE}** *(If pages were torn out of a stitch-bound book, the page removal could be detected)*
 - 1. Paste a pledge label on the top of each right-hand page and covering with clear tape. **{LE}** *(Taping makes removal of a pledge label detectable).*
 - 2. Number every other line down the page, marking 13-14 signature lines per page.
 - 3. Number lines consecutively from page to page.
- g. **Pledge display.** Enlarge the text of the PE voters' pledge and display in a frame next to roster.
- h. **Affidavit kit.** Provide a writing tablet, two pens, and a brown envelope labeled "Voting Irregularities." Ask voters who experience or observe election irregularities to describe them in writing, sign their affidavits, and list their address. **{LE}**

4. **Parallel Election Documents**

- a. **PE ballots (example 3).** Design PE ballots to include all the information on the official ballot, but with a distinctly different layout to visually distinguish them from the official ballots. Use voter turnout information from previous elections at your polling site(s) to estimate the number of PE ballots to print. Place the PE ballots in an envelope and mark the total number of ballots. **{LE}**
- b. **PE informational flyer (example 4).** Hand this sheet to every voter as they approach the official poll site. This will provide voters a quick understanding of what the PE is for and how they can participate.

4. **PE Documents** (*continued*)

- c. **PE resource sheet** (*example 5*) about election integrity and problems with electronic voting. Hand this to voters interested in learning more about why volunteers are conducting PEs.

V. **CONDUCTING the PE** {LE}

1. **Measure 100 feet (110 feet is better) from the poll site entrance.** Section 18370 of the elections code broadly prohibits petitioning or soliciting voters within 100 feet of a poll site. To avoid the appearance of conflict with the law, conduct all PE operations outside this perimeter. A 100-foot construction tape measure is ideal, but use what you have.
2. **Meet the poll workers.** While two volunteers set up the PE table, one volunteer should go into the official polling site and introduce him/herself to the inspector in each precinct and describe what a parallel election is and how nonpartisan volunteers are conducting it.
3. **Arrange Presentation of PE Materials.**
 - a. Prominently display the PE roster and voter's pledge so voters will clearly see them as they approach the PE table.
 - b. Display near the ballot box a list showing the poll site address and the precincts included in the poll site. Ask voters to write the number of their voting precinct on their PE ballot. {LE}
 - c. Place the clipboards in front of the ballot box. Place a new ballot on the clipboards as soon as possible after a voter has voted. Keep the envelope of unvoted ballots by the ballot box.
 - d. Place the "Voting Irregularities" envelope and pen near the ballot box.
 - e. Stack the voter instruction sheets and informational handouts near the far end of the table.

4. **Secure the Ballot Box**

Ask the first voter to confirm that the ballot box is empty, then put the lid on the box, and wrap the masking tape around the entire box on either side of the ballot slot and around the box along the lid edge, completely sealing the lid to the box. Ask the voter to write his or her signature across the tape seal and onto the box (*so any breaking of the seal will be detectable*). One volunteer also signs across the seal and onto the box, and writes the time and date of PE poll opening. {LE}

5. **Assigning Tasks**

A three- or four-person team is optimal, but if necessary, two people can cover a precinct. One or two volunteers manage the PE voting station, while one or two others contact voters on their approach to the official poll, explaining about the PE and inviting them to participate. At the voting table, one volunteer manages materials (putting ballots on clipboards, keeping stock of pens and paper, etc.) while the other(s) engage with voters, answering questions and directing the flow. Switch roles periodically to give volunteers cross-training in all tasks and avoid monotony.

6. Approaching Voters

Assume that no voters know anything about a PE. Approach voters on their way into the poll, but outside the 100-foot "no-electioneering" zone. Here's a sample pitch:

"Did you know your vote will be counted by a computer running secret proprietary software? We're double-checking the accuracy of the machine count. In the parallel election, you cast your vote on a paper ballot and it's counted by hand." Give them a PE explanation flyer (*see example 3*) saying, "Please cast your official vote first, and then come cast your parallel vote afterwards. It will only take a minute of your time, and you'll be helping verify the accuracy of the vote count. Thanks!"

7. Guide Voters Through the PE Voting Process

- a. First, tell voters about the PE pledge, explaining that they will be promising to vote the same way in the PE as they did in the official election. Ask them to read the pledge, then print and sign their name in the roster before casting their ballot in the PE. {LE}
- b. Then, hand them a clipboard with a PE ballot on it, and ask them to take a few steps away from the table to fill out their ballot in private. Tell the voter to fold their ballot and insert it in the PE ballot box.
- c. Preserve the privacy of the voting process. Ask voters to step away from the table to fill out their ballots. Let voters take their time, even if there is a line. Do not touch any ballot after it has been handed to a voter.
- d. If a voter makes a mistake on his or her ballot, and requests a new one, ask them to mark it "void" and place it in the PE ballot box. (These voided ballots will be counted later to ensure that every ballot has been accounted for.) {LE}

VI. CLOSING the POLL

1. **One PE volunteer observes the closing of the poll site** and the printing of the precinct tally tapes. If the poll site uses scanners, the poll workers are required to print two tapes: one to sign and place in an envelope with the scanner memory card, and another signed copy to post on the polling site door.
The PE observer copies the results shown on the precinct tally tape, writing this information onto an unvoted PE ballot (a convenient form listing all the candidates and ballot issues in the election). In addition to entering the votes cast for each candidate and ballot issue, record the poll location, the precinct number(s) included at the poll, and the total number of ballots cast at the poll. Make a photographic record of the official precinct tally tape. {LE}

VII. CLOSING the PE STATION

1. **Seal the PE ballot box.** Seal the slot with masking tape, sign across the tape seal and onto the box, and mark the date and time. Ask the last voter to also sign across the tape seal onto the box. {LE}
2. **Count the unvoted PE ballots.** Do not discard any ballots. Count and place them in the ballot envelope, writing the number of unused ballots on the envelope. (Remember that one unvoted ballot is used to record the official poll results). The volunteer counting unvoted ballots should sign the envelope. {LE}

3. **Volunteers sign the last page of the roster** and a custodial affidavit affirming that they will not alter in any way any ballots or other PE documents in their possession. *See example 6.* {LE}
4. **Secure the PE roster and unvoted ballots.** Place the PE roster and the envelope containing the unvoted PE ballots over the slot of the sealed ballot box and wrap masking tape around the box, envelope, and roster. {LE}
5. **Secure the precinct tally tape information.** Tuck the written copy of the precinct tally tape between the roster and the ballot envelope for safekeeping.
6. **Pick up and pack away the supplies.** Various paper scraps can be gathered for recycling.
7. **Convene with other PE teams** at the designated location(s) for counting the PE ballots.

VIII. COUNT the BALLOTS

1. **With a videocamera recording, unseal the ballot boxes and remove the ballots.** {LE}
2. **Unfold and stack the ballots** in preparation for tallying.
3. **Form teams of three to tally.** One person reads the results, one person records the vote on the tally sheet, and the third person observes. *See example 7.*
4. **On the initial tally, count the total votes for every candidate and issue on the ballot.**
5. **Sort the ballots into piles according to candidate or ballot issue.** Count the votes for each candidate and the yes and no votes for each ballot issue into piles of ten. Double-check these vote totals against the results of the initial tally. Repeat this process, counting the ballots for each of the remaining candidates and ballot issues into piles of ten and double-checking totals against the results of the initial tally.
6. Another team member **counts the signatures in the PE roster book.** Double-check to be sure that the number of roster signatures matches the ballot total.
7. **Count the ballots once or twice more to arrive at a final total.** Have more than one team member count the piles of sorted ballots. In case of a discrepancy between roster signature and ballot totals, the ballots are definitive. Any discrepancies will most likely be because one or more voters failed to sign in the roster book.
8. **Record on a final tally the confirmed vote totals** for each candidate and ballot issue in each precinct.
9. **Record the confirmed total of ballots cast in each precinct.**
10. **Store the PE ballots, roster books, and tally sheets** of the PE and official voting results in a safe place if needed for possible legal action in the future.. {LE}

IX. CALCULATE and COMPARE RESULTS

1. **Report voting results from each PE site** to a designated PE records manager (if PE teams have counted ballots at multiple locations, as is likely to be the case in large counties).

2. **Calculate the PE results for individual precincts and for aggregated poll sites.**
 - a. If more than one precinct was located at a poll site, record the candidate and ballot issue results for each precinct separately.
 - b. Add together the separate precinct results from 2 (a) above to arrive at an aggregate number of votes cast for each candidate and ballot issue at that poll location.
 - c. Calculate the PE votes cast for each candidate and ballot issue in each PE precinct as a percentage of the total PE votes cast in that precinct.
 - d. Calculate the PE votes cast for each candidate and ballot issue in each aggregated PE poll site as a percentage of the total PE votes cast in that aggregated poll site.

3. **Calculate the official election results for individual precincts and for aggregated poll sites.**

Repeat steps 2 (a) through (d) above using the official election results for those same precincts and aggregated poll sites.

4. **Compare the PE results to the official election results.**

- a. Record the PE results by candidate and ballot issue for each precinct and each aggregated poll site.
- b. Record the official election results by candidate and ballot issue for each PE precinct, and for each aggregated poll site.
- c. Line up the results of the PE vote calculations recorded in step 4 (a) next to the results of the official vote calculations recorded in step 4 (b). This will provide a comparative display of the PE and official election results by precinct and by aggregated poll site.
- d. Compare the candidate and ballot issue results for each PE precinct to the official results for each of those precincts.
- e. Compare the candidate and ballot issue results of the aggregated precincts in each PE poll site, to the official results for those aggregated precincts.

X. ANALYZE RESULTS

1. **Analyze the PE and official vote results within individual precincts and aggregated poll sites.**

- a. Statistically analyze the comparative results described in step 4 (d) above to determine if the relative proportions of PE votes cast for candidates or ballot issues within precincts diverge from statistical probability when compared to the relative proportions of official votes cast in those same precincts.
- b. Statistically analyze the comparative results described in step 4 (e) above to determine if the relative proportions of PE votes cast for candidates or ballot issues among the aggregated poll site precincts diverge from statistical probability when compared to the relative proportions of official votes cast in those same aggregated poll site precincts.

XI. PUBLICIZE RESULTS

1. **Set the news agenda with prompt press releases.** Act swiftly to shape favorable PE news coverage, rather than reacting after the fact to uninformed or unfavorable coverage.
 - a. Release as much PE vote data as you can prepare in time for TV news on election night.
 - b. Follow up the next morning with preliminary statistical analyses.
 - c. Continue issuing updates as more election results and statistical findings develop.

2. **Do contingency media planning.** Anticipate possible election outcomes and have rough draft press releases prepared in advance addressing them. As soon as result details are known, refine the appropriate draft and get it in circulation.

Here are some post-election PE questions to address:

Did the PE results corroborate the official vote count, or are there significant discrepancies?

If there are discrepancies, how statistically significant are they?

Were there disruptive incidents at the polls, or irregularities in counting and tabulating votes?

Did poll officials and the county election department conduct the election fairly and in accord with the state election code?

Is there cause to file for a recount?

XII. BE PREPARED to FILE for a RECOUNT

If statistical analysis of the PE and official election results indicates good cause to suspect the validity of the official vote count, consider filing for a recount. Know the procedures and deadline for filing a recount request. Check sections 15620-15634 of the California Elections Code (available at <http://tinyurl.com/8ggts>) and also inquire with your county registrar of voters for this information.

Ideally, you will have begun raising funds for a potential recount weeks in advance of the election, so you will be prepared to pay for one should circumstances require.

CaliforniaBallots.org can provide advice based on our experience with the San Diego recount.

This PE Procedure guide and all related PE documents and forms are available for download at:

<http://www.studycaliforniaballots.org>

Have additional questions? Send e-mail to: judyalter@mac.com or ca.voteraction@sbcglobal.net

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