

About Observe New Mexico Elections

Observe New Mexico Elections (ONME) is a nonpartisan election observation effort that works to strengthen trust and transparency in New Mexico's elections.

ONME is led by New Mexicans and supported by The Carter Center. Since 2024, ONME has recruited and trained volunteers from communities across all 33 counties to observe how elections are conducted, document what they see using standardized checklists based on state election code, and impartially report on their findings.

ONME observers aim to answer the question "can average citizens trust the election process?" and focuses on election processes rather than outcomes. Observers' standardized reports on how election law is being implemented across the state create a data-driven understanding of how election processes were conducted in New Mexico.

ONME observers monitor stages of the election process voters typically see, such as Early Voting and Election Day Voting, as well as those processes voters rarely see:

- **Poll Worker Training**, where poll workers and election judges are instructed on their roles and responsibilities.
- **Voting Machine Certification**, where machines are tested for their accuracy and sealed for use in early voting and on Election Day.
- **Absentee Ballot Processing and Counting**, where mail-in ballots are checked for validity and counted.
- Election Results Certification, where officials certify election results.



For the 2026 primary election cycle, ONME mobilized a limited number of observers in all 33 counties in the state - between one and four observers depending on the county. This important preparatory exercise assisted ONME to begin to reactivate its state-wide observation network in advance of the November 3 general election cycle, gather baseline information about election processes that are conducted at a county level (such as poll worker training and voting machine certification), and field a small-scale observation effort in voting locations across the state during early voting and on Election Day. In the spirit of transparency, ONME is sharing a report of its findings and observations.

It is important to note that findings from this limited observation effort are only representative of the locations observed and are not reflective of the overall election process in any given county or the state.

Key Findings from the 2026 Primary Election



The 2026 Primary Election was generally calm, orderly, and well-administered across the locations we monitored. Election workers were professional and prepared, voters generally moved through the process smoothly, and most issues that arose were resolved without major disruption.

Although only observing in a limited number of locations, ONME's observers did not report any information that would suggest systematic irregularities in the process. Instead, findings and recommendations highlight areas where stronger consistency may improve voter access and public confidence. This is particularly true with respect to language access, accessibility, accessible voting system instructions, and consistent adherence to current voter ID and voting procedures

Observing the 2026 Primary Election

The work of ONME would not be possible without the dedicated and hard work of its nonpartisan election observer volunteers. These are everyday New Mexicans from different political backgrounds, who all share a commitment to democracy and fair and transparent elections. They do not advocate for any party or candidate or interfere in the electoral process.

ONME mobilized a total of **42 observers** during Machine Certification, Poll Worker Training, Absentee Ballot Counting, Early Voting, Primary Election Day, and Election Results Certification across New Mexico from April 16, 2026–June 15, 2026. The specific locations and processes observed, as well as number of observations for each process, are listed in the table on page 3.

Prior to conducting observations, ONME extensively trains observers on the electoral processes they will be watching to ensure observers go into their observations well-prepared. During observations, which may last up to 15 hours in a single day depending on the process observed, election observers complete a standardized checklist. Each process-specific checklist is grounded in state election procedures as articulated in the Election Handbook of the State of New Mexico (2025 edition) and federal laws, enabling observers all across the state to consistently document those procedures that they directly observed or were able to confirm with poll workers.

Because these findings rely on human observation, ONME uses multiple safeguards to strengthen consistency and accuracy, including extensive observer training sessions, standardized checklists, data review, follow-up on unclear submissions, and ongoing improvements to observation tools and processes. ONME strives for transparency in the electoral process and in the reporting of its own observations. Ultimately, observation findings are reflective of what observers saw and reported.

In instances where observers were unable to validate that certain election procedures took place, this should not be understood as a conclusive determination that the procedure **did not** occur but should instead be interpreted on face value as a report that the observer **could not positively affirm** that the procedure occurred. Where possible throughout the report, ONME differentiates between reports from observers that expected procedures did not occur – or occurred in a manner that is contrary to state guidance – from those reports where observers could not make a determination one way or the other.

Locations and Observations by Election Process between 04/16/2026-06/15/2026

County	Machine Certification (April 21 - May 21)	Poll Worker Training (April 16 - June 1)	Absentee Ballot Processing (May 28 - June 1)	Early Voting (May 5 - May 30)	Election Day (June 2nd)	Election Results Certification (June 8 - June 15)
Bernalillo						
Catron						
Chaves						
Cibola						
Colfax						
Curry						
De Baca						
Doña Ana						
Eddy						
Grant						
Guadalupe						
Harding						
Hidalgo						
Lea						
Lincoln						
Los Alamos						
Luna						
McKinley						
Mora						
Otero						
Quay						
Rio Arriba						
Roosevelt						
Sandoval						
San Juan						
San Miguel						
Santa Fe						
Sierra						
Socorro						
Taos						
Torrance						
Union						
Valencia						
Total Observations (Locations)	29 (29)	35 (31)	2 (2)	36 (32)	34 (34)	32 (31)
<i>Counties in blue were observed once for the given process. Counties in yellow were observed 2-6 times. Counties in gray were not observed for the given process.</i>						

Summary of Findings - Poll Worker Training

What is Poll Worker Training?

Before each election, counties train community members who staff polling places during Early Voting and on Election Day. These poll workers handle nearly every part of the election process voters experience firsthand, including:

- Opening and closing a polling station
- Setting up and operating voting equipment
- Checking in voters and verifying registration
- Processing same-day voter registrations
- Issuing provisional ballots when registration status is unclear
- Accommodating voters with different language or accessibility needs
- Enforcing rules that keep elections fair and free of intimidation or undue influence

The quality of poll worker training matters because it helps elections run smoothly, consistently, and fairly. ONME observes poll worker training to determine what the training sessions cover and whether those sessions take place in an accessible setting.

What Went Well in Poll Worker Training

Overall, poll worker trainings were observed to be peaceful and conducted in an orderly manner. Observers reported no adverse events (including no instances of harassment, disruptions, intimidation, or other issues) during the time they observed. The training environment was described as good, with an average of about one trainer for every six trainees. All observers noted that the trainings were neither overcrowded nor hard to hear. In some trainings, observers and prospective poll workers were given additional materials including handbooks and video links, which observers described as helpful.



Notable Issues in Poll Worker Training

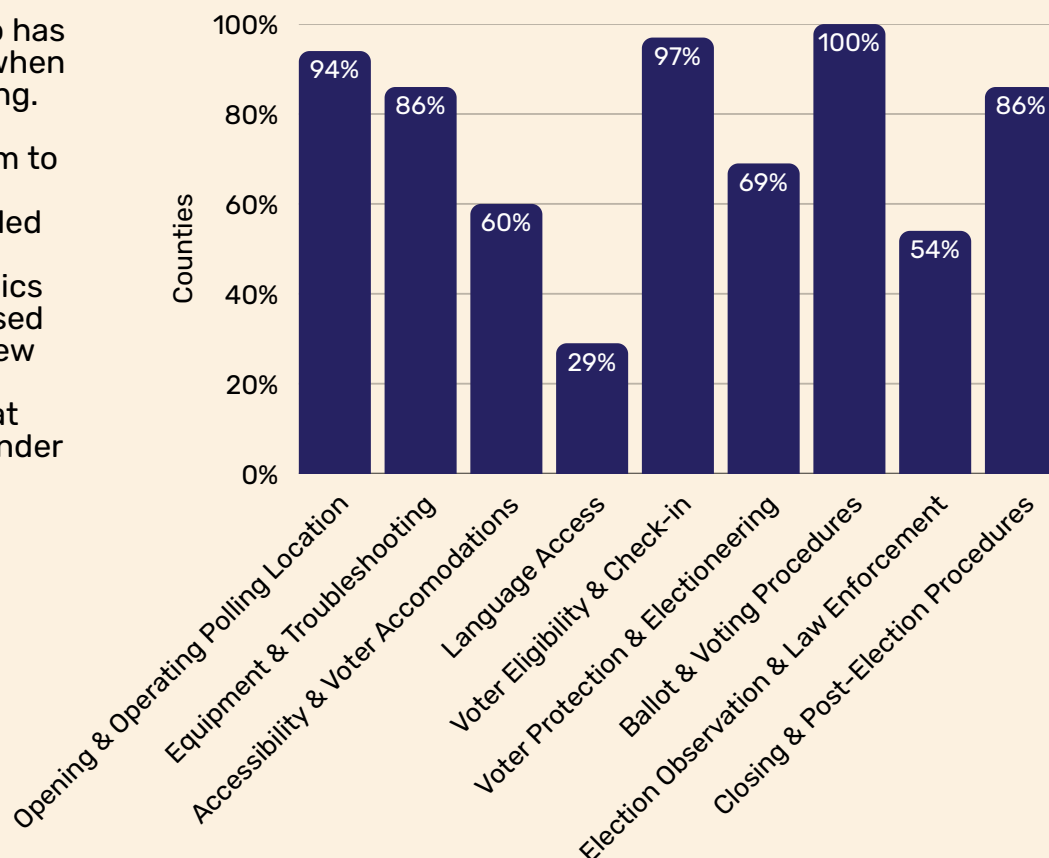
There was some variability with the accessibility of the venue where poll worker training sessions were hosted. In 21 of the 35 training locations observed, observers reported that the locations were fully accessible along all metrics assessed, including that the locations had designated accessible parking spaces, obstacle-free paths from the parking lot into the venue, and wheelchair accessible entrances that were both a main entrance and unlocked. One location in Catron County was observed to be particularly inaccessible for participants with disabilities. The observer reported that while the training location had an obstacle-free path, it did not have any of the other features that would improve accessibility of the venue. Ten of the 35 trainings observed included accommodations for those taking the training, such as American Sign Language interpretation.

Multiple observers reported that the training content coverage varied. Several observers provided additional qualitative comments that they believed training was short and did not cover a lot of the expected information because the poll workers present were veteran poll workers. For example, one observer reported that, *"All poll workers were repeat poll workers from previous years. Because of this, the training was very brief. The poll workers were told that everything was basically the same as last year except for the addition of a new scanner option. Poll workers were given a training booklet to take home with them and read. They were instructed to call the county clerks [sic] office with any questions."* Another observer reported that, *"All the people participating in the training had been poll workers before, [and] they moved fairly quickly through the training."* Another illustrative report noted that, *"There might have been little details left out since all of the poll workers have been doing this for a very long time. There were no new poll workers."*

Twenty-nine percent of counties addressed language access in the specific training ONME observed. ONME recommends that all counties update their training content to provide clear guidance to poll workers of their obligations under state and federal law, including clearly noting what language translation, oral interpretation, and other services are available in each county and how voters should be supported to access these services

Percentage of Counties that Covered Training Topics

Each county in New Mexico has discretion about how and when to deliver poll worker training. ONME watchers used a structured observation form to evaluate whether the poll worker training they attended addressed each of 40 pre-identified topics. These topics were selected by ONME based on its assessment of the New Mexico state elections handbook and of issues that were likely to be relevant under New Mexico state election procedures.



Poll Worker Training Recommendations

ONME recommends that counties provide more consistent training to all poll workers to ensure that all poll workers understand both new and standing guidelines, laws, and rules. ONME also recommends that counties consider making poll worker training mandatory and track attendance, if they do not do so already. Such a tracking mechanism could support election officials to ensure that every poll worker in the county attends a training in the same year that they plan to work the polls and that they attend a training regardless of their experience level.

In 2026, similar to 2025 and 2024, ONME recommends that poll worker training, especially in covered counties under section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, address the county's language access obligations to ensure that every voting location follows applicable federal laws and that poll workers have sufficient information to assist voters with accessing required services where warranted.



Summary of Findings - Voting Machine & Equipment Certification

What is Voting Machine & Equipment Certification?

Voting machine and equipment certification is the process by which each county in New Mexico verifies that voting and tabulation (vote counting) equipment is working correctly. Officials run a set of test ballots with known results through the equipment and confirm the machines produce the expected vote counts. Machines are also tested for their ability to correctly identify and set aside ballots that require human review to determine the voter's intent, such as a ballot with a stray mark or an over-voted ballot. Machines are checked for accuracy and sealed to be transported.

ONME observes this process to verify that all parts of the certification process are executed correctly. Since this process occurs over a number of days, and ONME usually only observes one day, unobserved processes are not indicative that certain testing did not occur.

What Went Well in Voting Machine & Equipment Certification

No adverse or disruptive events were observed at any point during ONME's observation of voting machine and equipment certification. The process was observed to be calm and orderly. All observers were able to watch the process.

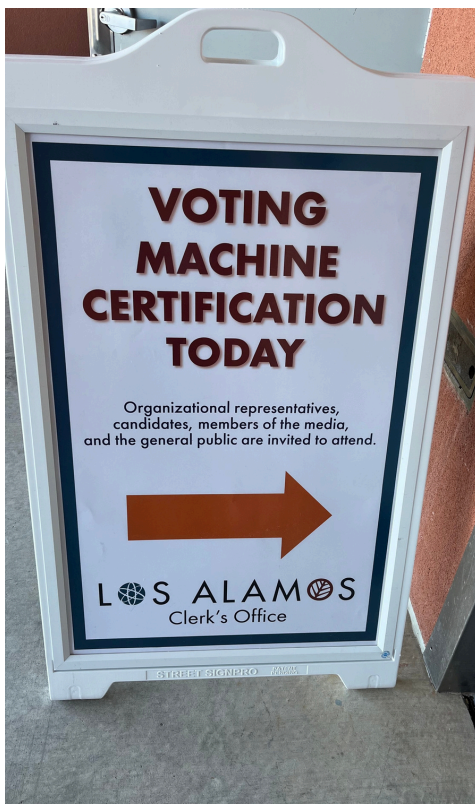
Observers described the testing environment as optimal, with election staff available at every observed location to answer questions. Every location provided either verbal explanations of the testing process to observers (25/29), or made both handouts and verbal explanations (4/29) available. Most observers were able to observe multiple phases of the testing process, including the testing of election equipment and the equipment's ability to process the different ballot styles in use for the election. In addition, most observers were invited to review the results of the test and were also able to observe that tested equipment was sealed after the test.

Notable Issues in Voting Machine & Equipment Certification

The accessibility of the testing venues to individuals with disabilities was reported to be inconsistent. Observers in 15 of 29 locations reported that the venues possessed all the accessibility features ONME observers looked for, including accessible parking, obstacle-free paths, and wheelchair accessible entrances that were both a main entrance and unlocked. However, observer reports suggest that nearly half of testing venues could take additional steps to make the testing process accessible to those with disabilities.

Voting Machine & Equipment Certification Recommendations

ONME recommends that all venues used for any step in electoral processes are accessible for all who are eligible to and wish to observe. We recommend enhancing accessibility for wheelchair users during Voting Machine & Equipment Certification.



Summary of Findings - Absentee Ballot Processing

What is Absentee Ballot Processing?

Absentee voting allows registered voters to receive a ballot by mail, complete it at home, and return it by mail, secure ballot drop box, or in person, with ballots processed by trained election workers at county election offices or at designated counting facilities. ONME observers monitor absentee ballot processing to document whether required procedures are followed, including voter verification, ballot handling, tabulation (counting), accessibility, transparency for observers and the public, secure storage of ballots and materials, and whether the process remains free from disruption, intimidation, or unauthorized access.

What Went Well in Absentee Ballot Processing

Overall, observers reported that absentee ballot processing was calm, orderly, and professionally conducted in the two counties where ONME observers were present. Election staff were welcoming to observers, available to answer questions, and provided either verbal explanations or written handouts to help explain the process.

All observed locations made space available for observers, and observers reported that ballots were handled with oversight from at least two election workers during the sorting, processing, and tabulation steps they were able to observe. Where observers were able to see voter verification, workers checked signatures and the last four digits of Social Security numbers against voter records in accordance with established state practice. No absentee ballots were challenged, and observers reported no unauthorized ballot handling, attempts to alter or manipulate ballots, unauthorized access, disruptions, intimidation, or other adverse incidents.

Observers also noted that ballot processing consistently followed a clear, phased process with observers able to clearly document that ballots moved through established steps for sorting, signature and Social Security number verification, removal of outer envelopes, removal of secrecy envelopes, tabulation, and adjudication when needed.



Summary of Findings - Early Voting

What is Early Voting?

Early voting gives New Mexicans more flexible opportunities to cast their ballots in person before Election Day, thus reducing the length of Election Day lines and expanding access for voters with different schedules. Each ONME observer monitors one early voting site for an entire day, arriving before the polls open and leaving after they close. Observer data allows ONME to document whether required procedures are followed during opening, setup, voting, and closing, with attention to accessibility, language access, voter check-in, ballot availability, ballot security, and the conduct of other observers or watchers.

What Went Well in Early Voting

Almost all observed locations were well prepared at set up, including opening on time, having voting stations set up to ensure privacy, and having at least two election officials present at opening. Observers noted that voter check-in went smoothly for the most part. In all locations, poll workers checked voter information against the list every time a voter came to vote. No voters were inappropriately asked for voter ID. Same day registration was observed to be available in 15 locations, and only one voter was observed to have left because it took too long to register.

Voters with disabilities were consistently allowed to have their assistants accompany and support them during the voting process. The closing processes observed were seamless and without issue. Almost all observers were able to observe the closing of the polls; in 27 out of 32 locations. Verbal announcements of the close of the polls were made in most locations; in 19 out of the 27 locations where observers saw the closing. There were no lines at closing in any of the observed locations, and no voters arrived after polls had closed.

Notable Issues During Early Voting

Notable issues were isolated. Although every location had at least one accessible feature ONME looked out for, only 21 out of 32 locations were reported to have all of them, suggesting that election administrators may wish to conduct a site review of voting locations ahead of the November 3 election and appropriately retrofit locations to enhance accessibility. Two locations, one in DeBaca County and one in Hidalgo County, were staffed with only one election official at opening. Instructions on how to use accessible voting systems were observed in only nine out of 32 locations, or 28%.

Observation of compliance with language access provisions in section 203 of the Voting Rights Act was inconsistent. One location in McKinley had voting information available in English, Spanish, Navajo, and Zuni. Five voters observed requesting translation assistance in Navajo in Bernalillo County were all provided with appropriate assistance. At one site, the observer verified with a poll worker that no language access services were available at the site – including through telephone or other technology, despite that county having obligations to provide assistance to designated language minorities under the Voting Rights Act.



One unhoused individual from California who lived in a shelter was not offered a provisional ballot despite the state requirement that provisional ballots be offered to any individuals for whom voter eligibility cannot be verified. Two observers, one in Quay County and one in Valencia County, noted that they could not or were not allowed to observe opening because it had not been arranged with staff in advance.

Language Access Requirements Under Voting Rights Act vs. Languages Observed

Individual Polling Location:	Required under VRA				Observed			
	Spanish	Navajo	Pueblo lang.	Ute	Spanish	Navajo	Pueblo lang.	Ute
Bernalillo 1								
Bernalillo 2								
Bernalillo 3								
Bernalillo 4								
Catron								
Chaves								
Cibola								
Doña Ana								
Guadalupe								
Hidalgo								
Lea								
Luna								
McKinley								
Mora								
Rio Arriba								
Sandoval								
San Miguel								
Socorro								
Taos								



Early Voting Recommendations

ONME recommends that every location, regardless of size, is staffed with at least two election officials at all times to ensure ballots are handled with oversight.

ONME recommends that every voting location allow observers to watch opening procedures, without adding extra requirements such as prior communication with county staff.

Similar to 2024 and 2025, ONME recommends that every polling location demonstrate an understanding of its obligations under section 203 of the Voting Rights Act and comply with those obligations, including making availability of language assistance services readily apparent to voters where appropriate.

Summary of Findings - Primary Election Day

What is Election Day?

On Election Day, polling locations across New Mexico are open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. for voters to cast their ballots in person or drop off completed absentee ballots, with most sites operating as Voter Convenience Centers where any registered voter in the county may vote. ONME observers monitor Election Day sites from opening through closing to document whether required procedures are followed.

What Went Well on Election Day

In the Election Day locations observed by ONME, voting generally proceeded smoothly, with locations opening and closing on time, equipment issues resolved quickly, and voters largely able to cast their ballots without significant disruption.

No issues were reported at any of the observed locations during opening. Almost all observers were able to observe opening and all locations opened early or on time. Nineteen out of 34 locations had small or moderate lines at opening. Set up was mostly described as being done well. Observers reported that most locations (25 out of 34) had instructions at each voting station on how to cast a vote, while the remaining locations offered reasonable alternatives. Only half of observed polling locations had instructions on how to use accessible voting systems.

The voting process, in general, was observed to go smoothly with one notable exception (further described under Notable Issues on Election Day). Poll workers consistently verified voters' information in all locations. Same Day Registration was observed in almost all locations, 29 out of 34. Voter issues were resolved professionally and in line with laws and rules.

Voters with disabilities requesting assistance were observed in 18 out of 34 locations. All were allowed to have assistants accompany and assist them with the voting process. No voter eligibility challenges were observed. All locations were noted to have enough staff and equipment to run smoothly. All observers were able to observe closing, which occurred smoothly. Every location closed on time, and at least two election officials were observed to be present at closing.



Notable Issues on Election Day

Overall, Election Day was observed to occur in a calm and smooth manner, with minimal disruptions or problems in most locations.

In all but one location observed on Election Day, observers reported that poll workers followed the state's voter ID law. In one Union County polling location, however, observers reported that poll workers inappropriately requested voter ID from 150 voters throughout the day, in contradiction with New Mexico's law. Poll workers noted they were getting voters used to producing voter ID.

Some polling locations lost power during the day due to a storm in the area. Observers reported that voters were informed of the next closest voting location and in one instance, Socorro County clerk staff brought a generator to the voting location, allowing voting to resume.

Election Day Recommendations

To ensure that voting is conducted in accordance with state law, ONME recommends that all polling locations in Union County update voter check-in procedures to align with state law. New Mexico does not require registered voters to present a physical form of voter identification.

ONME also recommends that all counties and polling locations ensure that their language access services comply with state and federal law and are readily apparent to voters where appropriate.

Summary of Findings - Election Results Certification

What is the Election Results Certification?

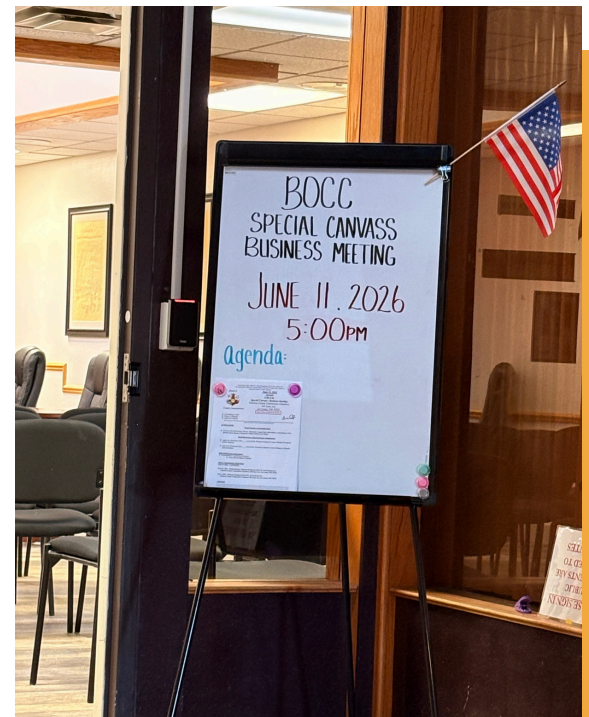
Election Results Certification is the public meeting where the Board of Election reviews and certifies official county election results before transmission to the Secretary of State. ONME observers monitor the canvass to document board attendance, concerns about election returns or discrepancies, requests for machine rechecks, whether certified results are made available to the public, and the presence and conduct of other observers or watchers.

What Went Well in the Election Results Certification

Overall, Election Results Certification was observed to be calm, orderly, and professionally conducted in almost all counties observed. County clerks, election staff, and boards of county canvassers presented and reviewed results in public, and observers generally described the process as brief, clear, and well run.

Across submitted observations, no board members raised concerns about missing election returns or improperly executed certificates of results. No candidates, voters, or canvassing board members requested a recheck of voting machines, and no political party observers, candidate observers, or members of the public raised objections to announced results. Observers also reported no adverse or disruptive events in all but one observation.

Where automatic recounts were noted, they appeared to be handled as part of the normal post-election process rather than as signs of broader problems. Most observers also reported that watching the canvass helped them better understand the election process.



Notable Issues During Election Results Certification

Notable issues were limited, but themes emerged related to public access, transparency, and consistency. Public wayfinding was inconsistent. Only four of the 31 individuals who observed the results certification meeting in person noted posted signs at the venue indicating where to find the Election Results Certification meeting.

Observer and public access was uneven. Most in-person observations reported a designated area for observers and members of the public, but seven did not. While most in-person locations had the accessibility features ONME tracks, several locations were missing one or more features, and two observers reported accessibility barriers.

Public access to election returns was inconsistent. Copies of election returns were reported as available to observers or members of the public in 18 observations, but not available in 15.

The most significant issue observed occurred in Mora County, where one board member who was also a candidate reportedly refused to certify the returns. The observer did not hear a reason given for the refusal or next steps described for resolving the certification issue.

Election Results Certification Recommendations

ONME recommends that counties strengthen public access and transparency during Election Results Certification. Counties should post clear signs at building entrances and meeting rooms and make election returns available at the meeting or clearly explain where and when certified returns can be accessed.

ONME also recommends that all Election Results Certification venues meet basic accessibility standards, including clearly marked accessible parking, obstacle-free paths, and unlocked, clearly marked wheelchair-accessible entrances.

Finally, ONME recommends that counties clearly explain any recounts, discrepancies, delays, refusals to certify, or next steps on the record during the canvass.



Observer Access in Sandoval County

ONME previously reported on Sandoval County's unique identification requirements for ONME observers in 2024, and the negative impact this had on election transparency during its observation of election machine certification.

Election watchers play a critical role in promoting credible elections and the legitimacy of democratic institutions. ONME was pleased to be informed after the conclusion of the 2026 primary elections that moving forward these requirements can be treated as voluntary.





Conclusion

ONME found that the 2026 Primary Election was calm, orderly, and professionally administered across the processes and locations observed.

ONME encourages election officials to ensure the availability of federally required language access, improve physical accessibility across election venues, strengthen observer access and public transparency, and reinforce compliance with voter-check in procedures.



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For questions on this report, please reach out to Carmen López at carmen@observenmelections.org

All photos in this report were taken by ONME observers or staff.