

## **Brian Bickel: Ensuring fair and secure elections requires patience**

By Brian Bickel Special to the Arizona Daily Star Nov 6, 2018

On the morning of Nov. 7, Pima County residents will wake up and check websites and the media to see who won the various elections from the previous day. For more than 95 percent of the races and ballot questions, they'll likely get a definitive answer.

But some decisions will be too close to call and will remain so for a few days. That's because, if history is a guide, there will be many thousands of ballots still to count.

As chairman of the Pima County Election Integrity Commission, I can ensure you those ballots will be processed, verified and counted with the same care and security as all of the ballots that are cast and counted on Nov. 6.

Early voting has changed the immediacy of Election Day, arguably for the better. A decade or more ago, most voting occurred on Election Day and the votes were counted that day, with results released late that night or early the next morning. We knew who won by Wednesday morning.

But early voting has changed that for close races. The overwhelming majority of Arizona's voters choose to vote by early ballot. It's convenient, it avoids lines and possible delays at polling places, it prevents missed work, it's easier for voters who have mobility or transportation problems, and it helps the political parties with their get-out-the-vote efforts.

In Pima County, 4-out-of-5 registered voters in this election got an early ballot or voted at an early voting site. But not all of them will mail their ballot

to the county in time for it to be processed, verified and prepared for counting on Election Day.

Some ballots will arrive in the mail on Election Day and many early ballot voters will drop their ballot off at a polling place on Election Day.

On Nov. 6, the Pima County Elections Department will be running an election at hundreds of polling places across the county starting at 6 a.m. and ending at 7 p.m. Then, all those ballots, plus all the processed and verified early ballots that arrived in time, will be tabulated and the results posted on the internet.

The late-arrival early ballots and provisional ballots (ballots cast when there's a problem such as insufficient identification at the poll) cast Nov. 6 will be processed, verified and tabulated after Nov. 6.

How long that takes depends on how many there are. In 2014 and 2016, Pima County had more than 40,000 ballots still to count the day after the election. It took a little over a week to process, verify and count them all in both years.

Pima County is not unique — this happens in all 15 Arizona counties as well as other states that have early voting rules similar to ours.

In 2016, there were more than 600,000 ballots that still needed to be counted the day after the election, about 480,000 of them in Maricopa County. In California, there were 4 million ballots that still needed to be counted the day after the election. It's the new normal for elections in most states.

The Elections Integrity Commission is made up of a broad spectrum of county residents and includes representation from all the political parties. We

meet regularly and work closely with Pima County Elections to ensure the county runs fair and secure elections.

Pima County holds the right to vote in the highest regard. Every vote counts, and we will take the time to make sure every vote is counted.

But on Wednesday morning, for some of the races, a little patience will be necessary. But I promise, a few days on, the election will be final and all county voters and residents will have results they can trust.

Brian Bickel is the chairman of the Pima County Elections Integrity Commission.