

Processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026 Primary Elections

AUDIT REPORT

Report Number 26-054-R26 | September 4, 2026



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Highlights

Background

The U.S. Postal Service handles the processing, transportation, and delivery of Election and Political Mail across the country. It is committed to fulfilling its role in the electoral process when policymakers and voters choose to use the mail as part of their election systems or as their means to vote, respectively. To do so, the Postal Service aims to employ practices and procedures to help ensure that it meets its customers' expectations — that Election Mail, especially Ballot Mail, will be delivered timely. On March 31, 2026, an Executive Order was issued pertaining to election administration, and related litigation is ongoing at the time of this report issuance. This audit did not evaluate the Postal Service's plan to implement this order, but we plan to cover allegations received at the end of August 2026 in subsequent work.

What We Did

Our objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026 primary elections. We conducted observations at nine processing facilities and 73 delivery units in eight states during primary elections from March to May 2026. In June 2026, we conducted further observations at five mail processing facilities in New Jersey and Tennessee, in response to a congressional inquiry.

What We Found

From February through May 2026, the Postal Service processed Election and Political Mail with on-time processing scores ranging from 97.75 to 98.99 percent. While most facilities we visited generally adhered to Postal Service's election-related policies and procedures, there are opportunities to increase understanding and enforcement of postmarking ballots, completing required reports for late arriving Political Mail and the daily all-clear certifications, and posting election-related training materials for employees. Additionally, we found coordination with election officials and communication with customers affected by operational changes could be strengthened. Further, we identified opportunities at specific mail processing facilities that, if employed, could support the timely delivery of Ballot Mail.

Recommendations and Management's Comments

We made 11 recommendations to address the issues identified in the report. Postal Service management agreed with 10 and disagreed with one. While the Postal Service disagreed with one recommendation, the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General considers management's comments responsive to all recommendations, as corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report. A summary of management's comments and our evaluation are at the end of each finding and recommendation, and management's comments can be reviewed in their entirety in [Appendix C](#).

Transmittal Letter



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

September 4, 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR: ISAAC CRONKHITE
CHIEF PROCESSING AND DISTRIBUTION OFFICER AND
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

ELVIN MERCADO
CHIEF RETAIL AND DELIVERY OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE VICE
PRESIDENT

PETER ROUTSOLIAS
CHIEF LOGISTICS OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

JEFFERY A. ADAMS
VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

ADRIENNE MARSHALL
DIRECTOR, ELECTION AND GOVERNMENT MAIL SERVICES

Mary H. Lloyd

FROM: Mary Lloyd
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Operations, Performance & Service

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026
Primary Elections (Report Number 26-054-R26)

This report presents the results of our audit of the Processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026 Primary Elections.

All recommendations require U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General's (OIG) concurrence before closure. Consequently, the OIG requests written confirmation when corrective actions are completed. Recommendations 1 through 8, 10, and 11, should not be closed in the Postal Service's follow-up tracking system until the OIG provides written confirmation that the recommendations can be closed. We consider recommendation 9 closed with issuance of this report.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesy provided by your staff. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Brandi Adder, Director, Strategic Initiatives & Performance, or me at 703-248-2100.

Attachment

cc: Postmaster General
Corporate Audit Response Management

Results

Introduction/Objective

This report presents the results of our self-initiated audit of the Processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026 Primary Elections (Project Number 26-054). Our objective was to evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026 primary elections. See [Appendix A](#) for additional information about this audit.

Background

The Postal Service handles the processing, transportation, and delivery of Election and Political Mail across the country. It is dedicated to supporting the electoral process whenever policymakers incorporate mail into their election systems. Election Mail is defined as any item mailed to or from authorized election officials that enables citizens to participate in the voting process. This includes mail-in ballots, balloting materials, voter registration cards, mail-in ballot applications, and polling place notifications. Political Mail includes any item mailed for campaign purposes by a registered political candidate, campaign committee, committee of a political party, or a political action committee or organization engaging in issue advocacy or voter mobilization.

To ensure proper handling of Election and Political Mail, the Postal Service uses a dedicated, full-time

“From February through May 2026, the Postal Service processed over 639 million pieces of Election and Political Mail with an Intelligent Mail Barcode.”

Election and Government Mail Services team. This team educates both postal employees and election officials regarding relevant policies and procedures. To assist election officials in planning and preparing election-related materials for mailing, the Postal Service created the 2026–2027 Official Election Mail Guide (Kit 600). This guide provides mailing recommendations designed to increase the visibility of Election Mail within the postal network, streamline processing, and enhance overall customer experience.

From February through May 2026, the Postal Service processed over 639 million pieces of Election and Political Mail with an Intelligent Mail Barcode¹ (see Figure 1). A unique barcode provides the ability to track the delivery and return of individual Ballot Mail envelopes and increases the visibility within the postal network.

Figure 1. Election and Political Mail Overview for the Period February 1, 2026, to May 31, 2026

Source: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (OIG) analysis of Postal Service data from Informed Visibility.



¹ Intelligent Mail Barcode is a barcode with bars of differing heights that encodes up to 31 digits of mailpiece data, including service type, ZIP Code, and mailer information.

“Notably, on-time processing scores for every mail type improved compared to the 2024 presidential primaries.”

During this same timeframe, monthly on-time processing scores² for Election and Political Mail ranged from 96.73 to 98.38 percent. Over the entire four-month period, the scores by mail type ranged from 97.75 to 98.99 percent (see Table 1). Notably, on-time processing scores for every mail type improved compared to the 2024 presidential primaries.³

To achieve our objective, we conducted observations from March to May 2026 at nine judgmentally selected mail processing facilities⁴ and 73 delivery units across eight states. Each observation was conducted over the state’s primary date and focused on compliance with key processes essential to ensuring proper handling, timely processing, and prompt delivery of Election and Political Mail. In

June 2026, in response to a congressional request, we expanded our scope to include observations at five additional processing facilities⁵ within two states. See [Figure 2](#) for a map of the visited locations and [Appendix B](#) for a complete listing of the states, observation dates, and specific sites reviewed.

As the Postal Service continues its network redesign, our observations covered both the “legacy” processing network (for example, processing and distribution centers and network distribution centers), and the modernized network (for example, regional processing and distribution centers, and sorting and delivery centers). We also assessed measures the Postal Service took to ensure that the regional transportation optimization (RTO)⁶ initiative did not impact timely delivery of Election and Political Mail. The Postal Service has noted⁷ that the RTO initiative can result in mailpieces arriving at their processing facilities on a different day than the mailpiece is mailed. Therefore, the date on the postmark applied at the processing facility may not match the actual date of mailing.

Table 1. Election and Political Mail Volume and Processing Scores for the Period February 1, 2026, to May 31, 2026, Compared to Processing Scores From the 2024 Primaries

Mail Type	Total Pieces Processed	Processing Scores (Percent)		
		2026	2024	Variance (+/-)
Ballots to Voters (Outbound) ⁸	30,425,044	98.78	97.01	+1.77
Ballots to Boards of Elections ⁹ (Return) ¹⁰	6,355,117	98.99	98.17	+0.82
Non-Ballot Election Mail	54,601,954	97.75	97.40	+0.35
Political Mail	547,227,724	97.83	97.47	+0.36
Total Volume and Score	638,609,176	97.88		

Source: OIG analysis of Postal Service data from Informed Visibility.

- 2 The on-time processing performance percentage from the first scan to the last scan on mail processing equipment. These scores measure mailpieces processed only within mail processing facilities and do not reflect final delivery.
- 3 Election and Political Mail processing scores for the period December 1, 2023, to April 1, 2024, were obtained from the *Election Mail Readiness for the 2024 General Election* audit, Report Number 24-016-R24, dated July 30, 2024.
- 4 Mail processing facilities included five processing and distribution centers (P&DC), two regional processing and distribution centers (RPDC), and one each of a local processing center (LPC) and mail processing annex (MPA).
- 5 Mail processing facilities included two P&DCs, one RPDC, one Network Distribution Center (NDC), and one Surface Transfer Center (STC).
- 6 RTO was designed to reduce the number of transportation trips to and from select post offices and increase the amount of mail transported on each trip.
- 7 Domestic Mail Manual, Section 600.11.3, *Information Conveyed by a Postmark*, dated January 18, 2026.
- 8 Any mailpiece containing a mail-in or absentee ballot for a federal election sent from an authorized ballot mailer to an individual voter.
- 9 Boards of Elections are individuals appointed to oversee and manage state and local elections.
- 10 Any mailpiece containing a mail-in or absentee ballot for a federal election sent from an individual voter to an election office.

Figure 2. OIG Observation Locations

Source: Map created by OIG based on judgmentally selected sites.



On March 31, 2026, Executive Order (E.O.) 14399, *Ensuring Citizenship Verification and Integrity in Federal Elections*, was issued requiring the Postal Service to initiate rulemaking that establishes stricter controls for mail-in voting. These controls include improved ballot tracking and prohibitions on mailing ballots to individuals not registered with the Postal Service for such voting. On August 21, 2026, the Postal Service issued a final rule to implement the E.O. when mailing ballots for general, special, or runoff federal elections.¹¹ This final rule grants the Postal Service a significant new role in election administration. This audit did not evaluate the Postal Service’s plan to implement this order, as the rulemaking process began at the conclusion of our fieldwork. However, this may be assessed in future election-related audits.

“Overall, facilities that we visited generally adhered to internal election-related policies and procedures.”

Findings Summary

Overall, facilities that we visited generally adhered to internal election-related policies and procedures, such as properly handling Undeliverable Bulk Business Mail (UBBM),¹² completing the Election and Political Mail Audit Checklist,¹³ and maintaining Election and Political Mail Logs.¹⁴ However, we also observed a lack of consistent understanding and enforcement of other policies, such as postmarking ballots and completing daily all-clear certifications.

Further, our discussions with election officials revealed a wide range of experiences with the Postal Service regarding Election and Political Mail. While some officials reported regular, helpful interactions, others experienced delayed responses as well as inconsistent communication and engagement, particularly at the local level. Additionally, in response to separate inquiries, we identified issues delaying the delivery of ballots in New Jersey and North Carolina. In New Jersey, although this was resolved and the ballots were delivered to voters, weeks ahead of the primary, it is important for the Postal Service to review the issues for lessons learned to prevent future processing impacts. In North Carolina, the delivery issues seemed to be related to unreadable barcodes.

¹¹ The final rule would not impact primary elections, or Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act ballots.

¹² Marketing Mail (which can include Election and Political Mail) that is undeliverable as addressed. Delivery unit employees validate this mail to ensure each mailpiece is undeliverable.

¹³ A self-audit containing multiple questions addressing any Election and Political Mail found at a mail processing facility that must be completed daily.

¹⁴ A mandatory log used to track all Election and Political Mail across all operations.

Finding #1: Inconsistent Application of Postal Service's Election and Political Mail Policies and Procedures

To support the timely processing and delivery of Election and Political Mail, the Postal Service established policies and procedures, developed training materials and reporting requirements, and implemented controls to monitor compliance. During our observations at select facilities, we found many facilities generally implemented these requirements. Specifically:

- 70 of 73 delivery units (or about 96 percent) properly managed UBBM;
- All nine mail processing facilities completed the Election and Political Mail Audit Checklist; and
- 76 of 82¹⁵ facilities (or about 93 percent) maintained Election and Political Mail Logs, as required.

However, we identified opportunities to increase understanding and enforcement of certain Postal Service Election and Political Mail policy and procedures. Specifically, we found deficiencies involving postmarking ballots, the Late Arriving Political Mail Report, all-clear certifications, and election training materials. Although we did not identify any significant mail delays as a result of these deficiencies, consistent adherence with policies and procedures is necessary for the Postal Service to maintain clear operational visibility. Inconsistent application increases the risk that Election and Political Mail is not handled, documented, monitored, and reported in accordance with Postal Service policy.

Postmarking Ballots

According to Postal Service policy,¹⁶ postmarks are generally applied at originating¹⁷ processing facilities, or by a Postal Service employee at a retail unit when a customer presents a mailpiece at a retail counter and requests a postmark. However, at 10 of 82 facilities (or about 12 percent), management

was not aware of the proper postmarking policy. Specifically, management at seven delivery units stated it would postmark ballots coming from the mail processing facility and destined for Boards of Elections (that is, the return ballot was already in destinating¹⁸ operations). Once a ballot is in destinating operations heading back to a Board of Elections, it has already been in the Postal Service's possession and has, therefore, missed the typical postmarking window. In addition, management at three processing facilities stated it would postmark ballots found in destinating mail after being processed in originating operations. A destinating operation cannot reliably determine the date that a mailpiece was processed after the mailpiece has gone through the originating operation.¹⁹

“We identified opportunities to increase understanding and enforcement of certain Postal Service Election and Political Mail policy and procedures.”

While most ballots are postmarked through automation, some ballots require manual postmarking. Postal Service policy²⁰ requires each plant to keep a supply of manual date stamps (or hand cancelers) to postmark any mail during originating operations. The policy further states that hand cancelers should be updated to the current date each day, and the quality of the postmark should be checked to ensure the date is legible. However, at five of nine mail processing facilities (or about 56 percent), we noted hand cancelers with incorrect dates (see [Table 2](#)). For example, during site observations at the Harrisburg P&DC in

¹⁵ The 82 facilities consist of 73 delivery units and nine mail processing facilities.

¹⁶ Domestic Mail Manual, Section 608.11.2, updated April 6, 2026.

¹⁷ Outgoing mail and local mail that enter the mailstream that is the point of origin for mail processing and delivery.

¹⁸ Incoming mail arriving for its point of final delivery through a processing facility.

¹⁹ Processing Operations Management Order, POMO-003-26, dated February 20, 2026.

²⁰ United States Postal Service Election Mail and Political Mail Guidebook, updated September 30, 2025.

May 2026, a hand canceler was being used with the date March 19, 2026 (see Figure 3). This error, which occurred on Pennsylvania’s primary Election Day, caused at least 56 ballots to be postmarked with the

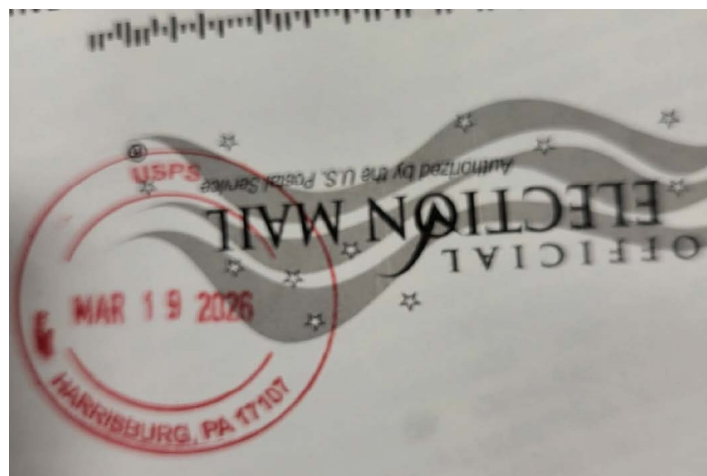
wrong date.²¹ Postal Service policy²² prohibits multiple postmarks on a mailpiece. However, there are no policies in place to correct misdated or incorrectly postmarked mailpieces by an employee.

Table 2. Facilities With Hand Cancelers Incorrectly Dated

Facility	Numbers of Hand Cancelers Incorrectly Dated	Date of Observation	Date(s) on Hand Canceler(s) ²³
Atlanta, GA, RPDC	1	May 18, 2026	March 18, 2026
Charlotte, NC, LPC	2	March 3, 2026	February 25, 2026, and February 27, 2026
Cincinnati, OH, P&DC	4	May 4, 2026	April 43, 2013, ²⁴ April 29, 2026, and May 2, 2026 (x2)
Harrisburg, PA, P&DC	1	May 19, 2026	March 19, 2026
Portland, OR, RPDC	4	May 19, 2026	April 28, 2026 (x4)

Source: OIG site observations.

Figure 3. Ballot Postmarked With Incorrect Date



Source: OIG photo taken at the Harrisburg, PA, P&DC on May 19, 2026.

Lastly, Postal Service guidance²⁵ requires hand cancelers to be properly secured. However, at the Portland, OR, RPDC and Cincinnati, OH, P&DC, we found nine unsecured hand cancelers. Figure 4 shows examples of hand cancelers left unsecured in a tub and in an unlocked desk drawer.

Figure 4. Unsecured Hand Cancelers



Source: OIG photos taken at the Portland, OR, RPDC on May 19, 2026.

²¹ The ballots were not delivered in time to be counted because extraordinary measures are not employed by the Postal Service during primary elections.

²² *Guidance on Postmarking Ballots*, dated September 26, 2024.

²³ To our knowledge, only the 56 ballots at the Harrisburg, PA P&DC were impacted by the hand cancelers having incorrect dates. No ballots were impacted in the other facilities identified within Table 2.

²⁴ Hand cancelers can be manually set to any date. This one was inadvertently set to April 43, 2013.

²⁵ Handbook F-101, *Field Accounting Procedures*, Section 3-6, Stamp Devices, dated July 2023.

Accurate postmarking and security of the round-date hand cancelers is important because, as of June 2026, 14 states; Washington, D.C.; and several U.S. territories rely on postmarks to determine ballot eligibility. Improper postmarking practices increase the risk that ballots may not receive accurate postmarks — and undermine public confidence in the Postal Service’s role in the election process.

Late Arriving Political Mail Report

A Postal Service standard work instruction²⁶ requires facilities to report late-arriving Political Mail²⁷ via a Late Arriving Political Mail Report to provide visibility into mail at increased risk of delayed processing or delivery. However, at 32 of 82 facilities (or about 39 percent), management was not aware of the established procedures to report late-arriving Political Mail. For example, a delivery unit manager stated that an unknown mailer left Political Mail on their dock after business hours. The manager input the Political Mail in Delivery Condition Visualization²⁸ (DCV), which tracks the daily condition of mail within a facility, but did not complete the Late Arriving Political Mail Report or follow the associated procedures because the manager was unaware of the requirement.

When management does not properly report late-arriving Political Mail, the Postal Service is unable to prove that the mail was entered too late for delivery or provide justification for why mail may be left unprocessed in a facility.

All-Clear Certifications

A Postal Service standard work instruction²⁹ requires all delivery units to certify twice a day that their unit is clear of Election and Political Mail committed for delivery that day. The “AM” all-clear certifications are due by 2 p.m. local time, and the “PM” all-clear certifications are due after the unit’s retail and delivery operations are completed for the day.

“Of the approximately 1.27 million Election and Political Mail pieces processed in the facilities we visited, we found 214 delayed pieces (or .017 percent).”

Additionally, mail processing facilities are required³⁰ to complete the certification at the end of each tour. However, at 13 of 82 facilities (or about 16 percent), management did not accurately complete the all-clear certification process.

Specifically, two delivery units did not complete the twice-a-day certification, as required. At one of these units, a new acting supervisor had not been instructed to complete the certification as part of the daily job functions. Furthermore, at 11 facilities, we found Election and Political Mail that was committed for delivery but remained at the facilities unreported on the all-clear certification. Of the approximately 1.27 million Election and Political Mail pieces processed in the facilities we visited, we found 214 delayed pieces (or .017 percent). The 214 delayed mailpieces consisted of 137 pieces of Election Mail and 77 pieces of Political Mail. Of the 137 pieces of delayed Election Mail, 115 were ballots. Of the 115 ballots, 110 were recovered and processed in time, while five were not recovered in time to be delivered to the Boards of Elections before primary election deadlines.

The largest singular issue of delayed ballots was identified at the Harrisburg, PA, mail processing facility, where 108 return ballots (ballots being returned by voters to the Boards of Elections) were found in the Postal Automated Redirection System³¹ (PARS) operation (see Figure 5). According to

²⁶ Standard Work Instruction, *Completing the Late Arriving Political Mail Report*, dated January 29, 2026.

²⁷ Political Mail that arrives the weekend before the election, arrives the day of or after the election, after acceptance hours, or is found unattended on the loading dock.

²⁸ DCV is a management tool that provides operational data for management at the local, district, and headquarters levels to provide a “snapshot” of the daily condition of the mail within postal facilities.

²⁹ United States Postal Service Election and Political Mail Guidebook, Standard Work Instruction, *All Clear Certification for Delivery Units for Political Mail and Election Mail*, dated September 30, 2025.

³⁰ Processing Operations Management Order, POMO-003-26, dated February 20, 2026.

³¹ A system that can intercept mail identified as undeliverable as addressed during mail processing.

Postal Service guidance,³² voter-returned ballots should never enter PARS. In this instance, a delivery unit separated ballots from all other mail received in collections and prepared them to be sent for mail processing. However, the ballots were inadvertently grouped with the unit's PARS mail. These ballots were discovered on the morning of Pennsylvania's primary Election Day and were expedited to Pittsburgh, PA to ensure they were received by election officials before the 8 p.m. cutoff.

Figure 5. Delayed Ballots in PARS



Source: OIG photos taken at the Harrisburg, PA, P&DC on May 19, 2026.

When management does not conduct a thorough sweep before submitting an all-clear certification, Election and Political Mail is at risk of being delayed, and ballots are at risk of not being delivered by the state's deadline. In addition, when the all-clear certification is not completed, management loses visibility into local operational issues that may require immediate remediation.

Election Training Materials

Postal Service policy³³ requires management at mail processing facilities to certify current election-related training materials have been communicated to all employees and are posted on the workroom floor. All mail processing facilities we visited were compliant with this requirement.

“We found no election-related training materials posted at 22 of 73 delivery units (or about 30 percent).”

Regarding delivery units, we found no election-related training materials posted at 22 of 73 delivery units (or about 30 percent). According to Postal Service Headquarters management, posting these election-related training materials in a delivery unit is considered a best practice rather than a requirement. However, the delivery unit all-clear certification³⁴ explicitly asks if the unit is familiar with the required Election and Political Mail service talks and if they are posted on the workroom floor and shared with employees (see Figure 6).

³² Stand-Up Talk: *No Voter-Returned Ballots in PARS*, updated February 2, 2026.

³³ Processing Operations Management Order, POMO 003-26, dated February 20, 2026.

³⁴ United States Postal Service Election and Political Mail Guidebook, Standard Work Instruction, *All Clear Certification for Delivery Units for Political Mail and Election Mail*, dated September 30, 2025.

Figure 6. Delivery Unit All-Clear Certification Question

Is the Delivery Unit familiar with the required service talks? Are they posted on the workroom floor and being shared with employees? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ N/A

Source: All-Clear Certification for Delivery Units for Political Mail and Election Mail, dated September 30, 2025.

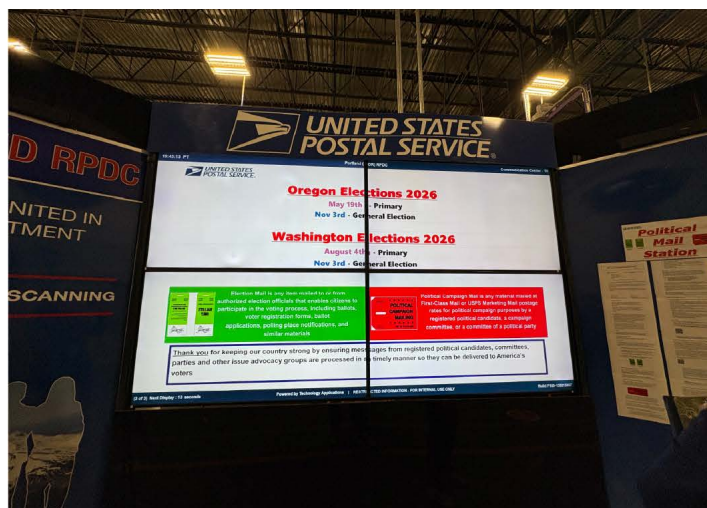
Certification processes that combine multiple questions into one without the option to answer each component separately can result in inaccurate responses. Additionally, without readily available reference materials, employees – especially new staff – may remain unaware of current requirements and procedural changes.

As observed at several facilities, local management proactively created information kiosks containing readily available Election and Political Mail training materials for employees. Employees at these facilities generally adhered to Postal Service’s Election and Political Mail policies and procedures during our site visit observations (see Figure 7).

Overall, these issues occurred because management oversight and monitoring controls were not always effective in ensuring consistent application of Postal Service’s policies and procedures surrounding Election and Political Mail. In some cases, local management and employees were not familiar with current Election and Political Mail requirements.

While instances of non-compliance were low relative to overall volume, the presence of similar procedural gaps across multiple facilities indicates a need for improved understanding and increased enforcement of Postal Service policies among its employees. The Postal Service relies on these controls to provide visibility over Election and Political Mail operations, identify potential service issues early, and demonstrate systemic accountability during a period of heightened public interest and scrutiny.

Figure 7. Election and Political Mail Information Kiosk Best Practices



Source: OIG photos taken at the Aurora, IL, S&DC on March 17, 2026 (left), and the Portland, OR, RPDC on May 19, 2026 (right).

Recommendation #1:

We recommend the **Director, Election and Government Mail Services**, in coordination with the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President** and the **Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President** to update election-related training material to address how to handle ballots incorrectly postmarked with the wrong date by Postal Service employees.

Recommendation #2:

We recommend the **Director, Election and Government Mail Services**, develop a process for facility management to verify every hand canceler is properly dated and secured when not in use.

Recommendation #3:

We recommend the **Director, Election and Government Mail Services**, in coordination with the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President** and the **Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President** to update the daily all-clear certification to specifically include facility management verification that the Late Arriving Political Mail Report was completed, if the facility received late arriving Political Mail.

Recommendation #4:

We recommend the **Director, Election and Government Mail Services**, in coordination with the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President** develop an automated process that electronically notifies management when the all-clear certification is not completed in a timely manner.

Recommendation #5:

We recommend the **Director, Election and Government Mail Services**, in coordination with the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President** and the **Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President** update the daily all-clear certification to specifically include facility management verification that no voter-returned ballots are in the Postal Automated Redirection System operation.

Recommendation #6:

We recommend the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President** and the **Director, Election and Government Mail Service** develop a policy requiring delivery units to post election-related training materials on the workroom floor and to update the all-clear certification questions to ensure clear, non-compounded reporting.

Postal Service Response

Management generally agreed with the finding and agreed with recommendations 1 through 6.

Regarding recommendation 1, management stated that it will update election-related training material to address how to handle ballots that are found to be incorrectly postmarked with the wrong date. The target implementation date is September 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 2, management stated that it modified the Chief Processing and Distribution Officer Political and Audit Checklist, requiring management to verify the round date stamps are set to the correct date and are secured every day. The target implementation date is September 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 3, management stated that it will modify the Chief Processing and Distribution Office Political and Election Mail all-clear and yard check certification process, requiring management to verify that the Late Arriving Political Mail Report was completed if the facility received late arriving Political Mail. The target implementation date is September 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 4, management stated it will develop an escalation process that will automatically notify district managers when the all-clear certification is not completed timely. The target Implementation date is September 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 5, management stated it will modify the all-clear certifications to include verification that the Postal Automated

Redirection System operation has been checked for voter returned ballots. The target implementation date is September 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 6, management stated it will determine what election-related training materials to include in a policy and that materials will be available to all delivery units to post on the workroom floor. The target implementation date is September 30, 2026.

See [Appendix C](#) for management's comments in their entirety.

OIG Evaluation

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to recommendations 1 through 6, as the corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Finding #2: Challenges in Localized Stakeholder Communication and Outreach

To assist election officials in learning how to prepare, induct, and track mail sent to voters and returned to election officials, the Postal Service conducts nationwide outreach to share information about mailing procedures, operational standards, and recommended best practices.

State and local election officials widely acknowledged the value of maintaining responsive relationships with Postal Service personnel and Mailpiece Design Analysts and commended the analysts for promptly addressing mail design questions. Furthermore, in some locations, election officials noted that regular calls and monthly meetings with

Postal Service staff helped build strong, collaborative partnerships. This proactive communication and information sharing facilitated timely updates, minimizing the likelihood of election mail delivery delays. However, because localized engagement varied despite the nationwide outreach, opportunities exist to improve local communication, operational coordination, and customer notification of operational changes.

Challenges in Local Communication and Operational Coordination

Despite nationwide coordination efforts, localized engagement with election officials varied. Many officials reported regular, helpful interactions, while others noted opportunities for more consistent responsiveness and engagement from local Postal Service management. For example:

- **Personnel Turnover:** Election officials commented that high turnover of postmasters can complicate building stable, long-term relationships. Communication protocols shift when there is a new postmaster, requiring additional effort to align on election coordination.

“Election officials commented that high turnover of postmasters can complicate building stable, long-term relationships.”

■ **Unresolved Delivery Restrictions (“R777” Routes):**

Election officials highlighted challenges with identifying voters who have valid physical addresses but reside on routes ineligible for street delivery (designated as “R777” addresses). The

Postal Service established R777 designations for customers who do not qualify for street delivery. Instead, most of these customers qualify for a no-fee³⁵ Post Office Box (PO Box) as their official mailing address and that is used for all mailings.³⁶ However, election officials noted a need for clearer guidance on how to identify these specific voter addresses prior to mailings.

- **Service Inquiry Resolution Timelines:** Prior to December 2025, the Postal Service — in partnership with a non-profit organization — maintained an external website through which election officials could report issues. In December 2025, the Postal Service transitioned to an internal portal allowing election officials to communicate directly with postal personnel who could resolve operational concerns. Following the transition, election officials raised questions regarding follow-up timelines. Specifically, inquiries around elections receive a standard resolution milestone (generally three business days) while cases for items like medical supplies or live animals receive “urgent” designations that are prioritized and handled more quickly. Reconsidering the designated resolution milestones for election-related inquiries would enhance tracking, support timely issue resolution, and strengthen stakeholder coordination.

³⁵ The Postal Service offers no-fee PO Box service to customers who do not receive any form of carrier delivery.

³⁶ Publication 28, *Postal Service Addressing Standards*, dated October 2024.

Inadequate Customer Notification of Operational Changes

In addition to inconsistent communication with election officials, opportunities remain for the Postal Service to enhance the timeliness and scope of communications to voters affected by the implementation of RTO in their area and the potential impacts on time-sensitive ballots.

At one specific post office we visited in a vote-by-mail state, RTO was implemented one week prior to the primary election. Local management at this facility was guided to defer public notification regarding the operational change out of concern that doing so would increase voters' concerns. Although the Postal Service stated these concerns could be mitigated if voters submit their ballots at least seven days ahead of the election, omitting public notification of operational changes is inconsistent with transparent public communication standards.

“Opportunities remain for the Postal Service to enhance the timeliness and scope of communications to voters affected by the implementation of RTO in their area and the potential impacts on time-sensitive ballots.”

The OIG has issued multiple audit reports³⁷ recommending that the Postal Service improve its public communication strategies regarding operational changes. Conducting localized customer outreach regarding RTO changes during an election season would promote the Postal Service's brand and goodwill. Prompt and transparent public notification is especially vital during election cycles so that voters

can adjust their mailing practices to meet state deadlines.

Recommendation #7:

We recommend the **Director, Election and Government Mail Services** define resolution time milestones for Election and Political Mail requests and concerns submitted through the Postal Service's Election Mail website.

Recommendation #8:

We recommend the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President**, the **Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President**, and the **Chief Logistics Officer and Executive Vice President** pause implementation of scheduled operational changes, including regional transportation optimization, that will impact mail timelines during the 2026 midterm election season.

Recommendation #9:

We recommend the **Vice President, Corporate Communications** in coordination with the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President**, and the **Chief Logistics Officer and Executive Vice President** develop a process to promptly notify customers impacted by regional transportation optimization.

Postal Service Response

Management generally agreed with the finding, agreed with recommendations 7 and 8, and disagreed with recommendation 9.

Regarding recommendation 7, management stated it will facilitate biweekly cross functional Election Mail meetings to discuss requests and concerns submitted through the Postal Service's Election Mail website to provide timely resolutions and/or prevent future occurrences. Additionally, management stated it will increase the frequency of the meetings during the

³⁷ *Mail Conditions at South Houston Local Processing Center*, Report Number 24-050-1-R24, dated April 10, 2024; *Network Changes: Local Transportation Optimization*, Report Number 24-142-R24, dated December 18, 2024; and *Communication of Local Changes to Priority Mail Express Service*, Report Number 25-056-R25, dated August 18, 2025.

period close to the General Election. The target implementation date is September 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 8, management stated it will not make any operational changes that will affect the letter and flats operations between October 17, 2026, and Election Day, November 3, 2026. The target implementation date is October 17, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 9, management stated it will not have specific messaging for customers that are serviced in an area impacted by regional transportation optimization. Instead, management stated that it has chosen to focus on user-friendly tools and messaging applicable to all mailers, and that specific to Election Mail, their advice applies to all mailers with regard to their mail being postmarked accurately.

OIG Evaluation

The OIG considers management's comments responsive to recommendations 7 and 8, as the corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Regarding recommendation 9, the OIG acknowledges that the Postal Service wants consistent messaging to all customers regarding Election Mail — regardless of whether the customer is at a post office subject to regional transportation optimization or not. While management disagreed with recommendation 9, it agreed in recommendation 8 to stop all operational changes beginning October 17, 2026 — removing any potential impact to voters during the election season. With this commitment, we consider recommendation 9 closed with issuance of this report.

Finding #3: Inquiries Related to the Delivery of Ballots in New Jersey and North Carolina

During our fieldwork, we received two separate inquiries related to the delivery of ballots in New Jersey and North Carolina that prompted additional, limited reviews. Specifically, in response to a congressional inquiry, we reviewed the circumstances related to missing and undelivered mail-in ballots mailed in April 2026 for the New Jersey primary election held on June 2, 2026. We conducted a limited review to gain an understanding of the circumstances surrounding the incident.

“While management attributed this cross-network diversion to human error, the lack of visibility allowed time-sensitive ballots to travel hundreds of miles off-course undetected.”

According to management, on April 22, 2026, the Trenton, NJ, P&DC accepted the primary election ballots on pallets from a Board of Elections office. Each pallet had a tracking label designed to log when the mail was processed, loaded onto transportation vehicles, and distributed to destinating delivery units. To maximize trailer volume utilization during processing, Trenton P&DC personnel transferred the ballots from their original pallets to a different type of physical container. However, the tracking labels did not accompany the transferred mail. Because the labels were removed, the ballots lost mainstream visibility. Consequently, the Postal Service lost the ability to identify these specific containers as containing Ballot Mail.

The loss of physical container visibility directly resulted in a routing failure across multiple postal facilities. The physical containers were dispatched to the South Jersey, NJ, P&DC but were not unloaded

from the trailer. The trailer continued its scheduled route to Memphis, TN, mistakenly delivering the New Jersey ballots to the Memphis, TN, NDC on April 23, 2026.

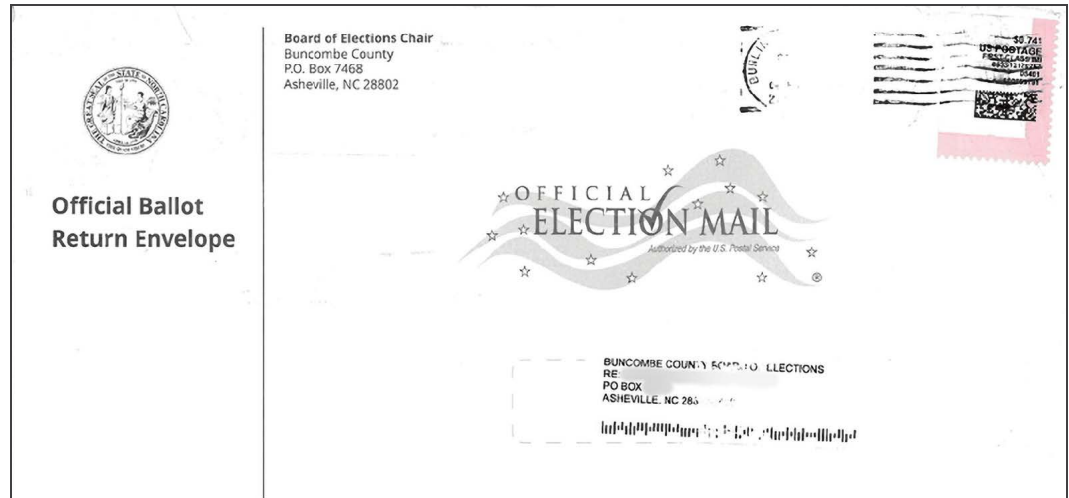
The ballots moved unmonitored through the Memphis processing network before being returned to the South Jersey P&DC on April 29, 2026 — seven days after their initial acceptance — for delivery the following day (April 30, 2026). The Memphis NDC did not maintain a log or a documented record of the ballots. Numerous interviewed employees had no recollection of handling or processing the containers. In New Jersey, a ballot must be postmarked on or before 8 p.m. on Election Day and be received by the Board of Elections on or before 6 days after Election Day. As the New Jersey primary election was scheduled for June 2, 2026, the ballots were still delivered with enough time for voters to meet the voting deadline. While management attributed this cross-network diversion to human error, the lack of visibility allowed time-sensitive ballots to travel hundreds of miles off-course undetected.

We also conducted a limited review of 171 ballots destined for Buncombe County, North Carolina, following a hotline inquiry regarding delayed ballots. We confirmed that 81 ballots (or about 47 percent) were received after the one-to-five-day service standard. Since the ballots arrived at the mail processing facility from multiple delivery units across 18 states, this is not indicative of a systemic issue in Buncombe County, North Carolina. In addition, we identified some ballots were rejected because the barcode was unreadable. For example, some envelopes included barcodes that were misaligned or smudged, or had multiple barcodes (see [Figure 8](#)). During our North Carolina site observations³⁸ we did not identify any delayed ballots or issues with barcode readability.

³⁸ We conducted observations at the Asheville S&DC on March 3, 2026.

Figure 8. Example of Return Ballot with Smudged Address and Barcode

Source: Postal Service employee located at Downtown Station, Asheville, NC, provided photographs to OIG on May 13, 2026.



Addressing processing failures quickly and applying lessons learned is critical to promote trust in the Postal Service’s ability to securely, efficiently, and timely deliver the nation’s Election Mail.

Recommendation #10:

We recommend the **Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President** and the **Chief Logistics Officer and Executive Vice President** develop and implement a standardized process to ensure that labels used to uniquely track whole pallets containing Ballot Mail remain continuously linked to the entire mailing throughout the transportation process, until it is ready to be processed, to ensure proper visibility.

Recommendation #11:

We recommend the **Director, Election and Government Mail Services**, in coordination with the **Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President** and the **Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President** develop a formal process requiring Postal Service management to notify Election and Government Mail Program Specialists when readability issues with barcoded Ballot Mail is identified so outreach to Boards of Elections – including for North Carolina – can be conducted to address identified issues.

Postal Service Response

Management generally agreed with the finding and recommendations 10 and 11.

Regarding recommendation 10, management stated it will reiterate and reinforce scan compliance and placard integrity for all types of mail, including Ballot Mail. Placard work instructions will ensure placards that track whole pallets will remain continuously linked to the entire mailing during transportation when destined for processing at a single processing facility. The target implementation date is September 30, 2026.

Regarding recommendation 11, management stated it will facilitate biweekly cross functional Election Mail meetings, in which readability issues, along with any other acceptance, processing, or delivery related issues with Election Mail, can be escalated. The target implementation date is October 1, 2026.

OIG Evaluation

The OIG considers management’s comments responsive to recommendations 10 and 11, as corrective actions should resolve the issues identified in the report.

Looking Forward

In addition to the established procedures the Postal Service has in place to handle Election and Political Mail for the upcoming 2026 midterm elections, it will also implement extraordinary measures beyond its normal course of operation. These measures will accelerate the delivery of ballots when the Postal Service is able to identify the mailpiece as a ballot. Extraordinary measures will be used between October 27 and continue through Election Day (Tuesday, November 3, 2026) and extend through the last day in each state that Boards of Elections will accept completed mail-in ballots as timely. These measures will be consistent with Postal Service measures implemented in the 2020 federal election cycle. A detailed memorandum providing further information about the Postal Service's extraordinary measures will be issued to all Postal Service employees prior to the midterm election.

“In addition to the established procedures the Postal Service has in place to handle Election and Political Mail for the upcoming 2026 midterm elections, it will also implement extraordinary measures beyond its normal course of operation.”

Further, while the Postal Service has established procedures to handle Election and Political Mail for the upcoming 2026 midterm elections, it may have to navigate complex implementation requirements under E.O. 14399, *Ensuring Citizenship Verification and Integrity in Federal Elections*. In response to the E.O., the Postal Service issued a final ruling³⁹ on August 21, 2026, amending its mailing standards to establish stricter, uniform mail-in voting controls for

general, special, or runoff elections. These changes were incorporated into a new section of the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM Section 705.24). Specifically, the new standards include:

- **Mandatory Envelope Design Standards:** All outbound and return ballot envelopes must utilize the official Election Mail logo, meet “automation compatibility” parameters for mail processing equipment, and incorporate a uniquely serialized Intelligent Mail Barcode for individualized tracking.
- **Federal Ballot Mail Portal Integration:** States who want to use the Postal Service for mail-in voting must enroll voters through a newly established Federal Ballot Mail Portal. Authorized election mailers will be required to upload the name, address, and unique barcode assigned to both the outbound and return ballot envelopes for every individual voter prior to induction.
- **Strict Intake Verification and Rejection Procedures:** The Postal Service will inspect ballot mailings before final acceptance. If an outbound mailing does not match the uploaded state voter participation list, or if the state fails to certify compliance, the entire mailing will be rejected and returned to the election office.

There have been several lawsuits filed and court decisions around whether the E.O. can be implemented in part or in full, and final decisions were pending as of the issuance date of this report. Implementing the DMM revisions alongside ongoing litigation creates a dynamic and potentially challenging operational environment as the November midterm elections approach. The OIG will continue to monitor Postal Service implementation plans, within the upcoming audit on the *Processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026 Midterm Elections*, as the final rule and litigations unfold. In addition, the OIG received whistleblower allegations around the implementation of the E.O. We are analyzing and plan to conduct a separate review of the whistleblower allegations.

³⁹ *Ballot Mail for Federal Elections*, 91 Federal Register 54966, effective August 21, 2026 (to be codified at 39 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 111).

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Appendix A: Additional Information

Scope and Methodology

The scope of our audit includes the controls and processes in place as it relates to the Postal Service's timely processing and delivery of Election and Political Mail, and its compliance with policies and procedures during the primaries from March to June 2026. To accomplish our objective, we:

- Analyzed service performance data on Election and Political Mail.
- Reviewed the Postal Service's Election Mail processing strategies, policies, and related documents and tools, including the Postal Service's Election Mail website.
- Judgmentally selected and conducted unannounced site visits at nine mail processing facilities and 73 delivery units from March through May 2026. The observations spanned across eight states and fell on each state's primary election date in the eight states. At each location, we verified compliance with specific Election and Political Mail policy and procedures and noted any opportunities for improvement. Specifically, we observed if management and/or designees at:
 - Delivery units properly identified, logged, and placed UBBM in designated locations.
 - Mail processing facilities and delivery units timely completed online, daily all-clear certifications to indicate the facilities were all clear of Election and Political Mail scheduled for processing and delivery.
 - Mail processing facilities and delivery units appropriately completed an Election and Political Mail Log daily to document all Election and Political Mail accepted.
 - Mail processing facilities and delivery units properly postmarked ballots going to Boards of Elections, and secured hand-cancelers when not in use.
- Mail processing facilities completed the Election and Political Mail audit checklist daily. This checklist includes verifications that the daily all-clear certifications are being completed, a designated Election and Political Mail staging area exists, and service talks and procedures are shared with employees.
- Conducted a limited review in response to a congressional inquiry of the circumstances surrounding a ballot mailing that was misrouted for the New Jersey primary election. In total, we conducted unannounced site visits at three mail processing facilities in New Jersey, and two mail processing facilities in Tennessee.
- Conducted a limited review in response to a hotline inquiry of delayed ballots destined for Buncombe County, North Carolina.
- Interviewed Postal Service Headquarters Management within the Chief Processing Distribution Office, Chief Retail and Delivery Office, Chief Logistics Office, and the Director of Election and Government Mail Services to understand significant changes to Election Mail-related procedures and any impact to operations.
- Discussed Postal Service and election-related concerns with election officials at the Election Center Workshop in April 2026.
- Identified lessons learned and analyzed actions taken since the 2024 Election Mail readiness audit.

We conducted this performance audit from February through September 2026 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as we considered necessary under the circumstances. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our

audit objective. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on August 7, 2026, and included its comments where appropriate.

In planning and conducting the audit, we obtained an understanding of Election and Government Mail Services, Processing, and Retail and Delivery Operations internal control structure to help determine the nature, timing, and extent of our audit procedures. We reviewed the management controls for overseeing the program and mitigating associated risks. Additionally, we assessed the internal control components and underlying principles, and we determined that control environment, control activities, information and

communication, and monitoring components were significant to our audit objective.

We developed audit work to ensure that we assessed these controls. Based on the work performed, we identified internal control deficiencies related to control environment and activities, information and communication, and monitoring that were significant within the context of our objectives. Our recommendations, if implemented, should correct the weaknesses we identified.

We assessed the reliability of data by reviewing the data we obtained from Informed Visibility. We determined that the data was sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

Prior Audit Coverage

Report Title	Objective	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact
<i>Service Performance of Election and Political Mail During the 2024 General Election</i>	Evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's service performance of Election and Political Mail during the November 2024 general election and the visibility of election-related mail.	24-143-R25	4/21/2025	\$15,400,055
<i>Election Mail Readiness for the 2024 General Election</i>	Evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's readiness for timely processing and delivery of Election and Political Mail for the 2024 general election.	24-016-R24	7/30/2024	None
<i>Service Performance of Election Mail for the 2022 Midterm Elections</i>	Evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's service performance of Election Mail during the November 2022 midterm elections.	22-187-R23	3/27/2023	\$23,033,770
<i>Election Mail Readiness 2022 Midterm Election</i>	Evaluate the Postal Services readiness for timely processing of Election Mail for the 2022 midterm election to be held Tuesday November 8, 2022.	22-093-R22	9/26/2022	None
<i>International Election Mail Observations for the 2020 General and 2021 Georgia Senate Runoff Elections</i>	Evaluate the Postal Service's international mail operations during the 2020 general election and the state of Georgia Senate runoff elections.	21-007-R21	4/29/2021	None
<i>Service Performance of Election and Political Mail During the November 2020 General Election</i>	Evaluate the U.S Postal Service's service performance of Election and Political Mail during the November 2020 general election. We also evaluated the handling of mail for the Georgia Senate runoff election held on January 5, 2021.	20-318-R21	3/5/2021	None
<i>Military, Diplomatic, and Other International Election Mail</i>	Evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's preparedness for processing international election mail, including military and diplomatic mail.	20-271-R20	9/30/2020	None
<i>Processing Readiness of Election and Political Mail During the 2020 General Elections</i>	Evaluate the U.S. Postal Service's readiness for timely processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2020 general election.	20-225-R20	8/31/2020	None

Appendix B: List of States and Observation Sites

State	Site Visit Date(s)	Mail Processing Facility	Delivery Unit
North Carolina	March 2-4, 2026	Charlotte, NC, LPC	Oakdale Post Office
			New Hope Post Office
			Charlotte Westside S&DC
			Asheville, NC, S&DC
			Lake Lure Post Office
			North Tryon Post Office
			Northeast Post Office
			Independence Annex
			Downtown Charlotte Post Office
Texas	March 2-4, 2026	Fort Worth, TX, P&DC	Arlington Post Office
			Bardin Road Post Office
			Denton, TX, S&DC
			Downtown Fort Worth Post Office
			Eighth Avenue Post Office
			Fort Worth North Carrier Annex
			Glencrest Post Office
			North Richland Hills Post Office
			Seminary Hill Post Office
Illinois	March 16-18, 2026	South Suburban, IL, P&DC	Aurora, IL, S&DC
			Cragin Post Office
			Des Plaines Post Office
			Elk Grove Village Post Office
			Fort Dearborn Post Office
			Henry W McGee Post Office
			Irving Park Post Office
			Northbrook Post Office
			Round Lake Post Office
Ohio	May 4-6, 2026	Cincinnati, OH, P&DC	Corryville Post Office
			Dabel Post Office
			Dayton View Post Office
			Loveland Post Office
			Mason Post Office
			Mid City Cincinnati Post Office
			Mount Washington Post Office
			Sycamore Post Office
			Washington Twp, OH, S&DC

State	Site Visit Date(s)	Mail Processing Facility	Delivery Unit
Georgia	May 18-20, 2026	Atlanta, GA, RPDC	Atlanta, GA, S&DC
			Conyers Post Office
			Fairburn Post Office
			Lawrenceville Post Office
			Lawrenceville North Post Office
			Lithonia Post Office
			Loganville Post Office
			Mount Bethel Post Office
			Sprayberry Post Office
Kentucky	May 18-20, 2026	Louisville, KY, P&DC and Louisville MPA	Bowling Green Post Office
			Campbellsville Post Office
			Columbia Post Office
			Downtown Louisville Post Office
			Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Post Office
			Hikes Point Post Office
			Middletown Post Office
			Saint Matthews Post Office
			Shelbyville Post Office
Oregon	May 18-20, 2026	Portland, OR, RPDC	Beaverton, OR, S&DC
			Clackamas Post Office
			Creston Post Office
			East Portland Post Office
			McMinnville Post Office
			Multnomah Post Office
			Rose City Park Post Office
			Salem, OR, S&DC
			Tigard Post Office
Pennsylvania	May 18-20, 2026	Harrisburg, PA, P&DC	Camp Hill Post Office
			Carlisle Post Office
			Chambersburg Post Office
			Lower Paxton Post Office
			Mechanicsburg Post Office
			Middletown Post Office
			Swatara Post Office
			Uptown Post Office
			York East PA S&DC
			York West PA S&DC

State	Site Visit Date(s)	Mail Processing Facility	Delivery Unit
New Jersey*	June 1-3, 2026	Trenton, NJ, P&DC	N/A
		South Jersey, NJ, P&DC	N/A
		Phillipsburg, NJ, STC	N/A
Tennessee*	June 1, 2026	Memphis, TN, NDC	N/A
		Memphis, TN, RPDC	N/A

Source: OIG judgmentally selected sites based on primary election dates and congressional inquiry.

*Note: Observations in New Jersey and Tennessee were added based on congressional inquiry. The site visit to New Jersey coincided with the state's primary date.

Appendix C: Management's Comments



August 26, 2026

LAURA LOZON
DIRECTOR, AUDIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: Processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026 Primary Elections (26-054)

Thank you for providing the Postal Service with an opportunity to review and comment on the findings and recommendations contained in the draft audit report, *Processing of Election and Political Mail for the 2026 Primary Elections (26-054)*. While we acknowledge that we can always reinforce and amplify our internal processes and procedures (and will continue to do so between now and November) – overall ballot mail performance is strong.

The Postal Service is committed to continuous improvement in all areas, including the timely processing and delivery of Election Mail and Political Mail. We have proven processes for proper handling and timely delivery of Election Mail, and during every federal election cycle we make efforts across the nation to inform local and state election officials about mailing procedures, our operational standards, and our recommended best practices for utilizing the mail. We also work closely with election officials at all levels of government to provide recommendations on mailpiece design, mailing preparation and timeliness of entry.

Finding #1: Inconsistent Application of Postal Service's Election and Political Mail Policies and Procedures:

The Postal Service acknowledges that, as should not be surprising given the scope, size, and scale of our Election Mail efforts, there have been some instances where our employees did not follow our Election Mail Policy and Procedures. We therefore agree with this aspect of this finding. That said, there are aspects of the findings that do not accurately reflect our policies depending on the facts and circumstances. For example, regarding the all clear process, finding Election Mail and/or Political Mail in the facility after management completed an all-clear certification does not necessarily mean that the certification was incorrect. Election Mail and Political Mail identified in a facility may not be committed for delivery that day (which is what the certification represents).

The Postal Service would like to emphasize that we appreciate the OIG's ongoing communication of observed deficiencies throughout the audit period and the acknowledgment that the deficiencies found did not materially impact nationwide timely processing of Election Mail and Political Mail.

Finding #2: Challenges in Localized Stakeholder Communication and Outreach

The Postal Service acknowledges that there are challenges in outreach with local election officials. Although we encourage relationships with local Postmasters, the 50 Managers, Customer Relations are the primary point of contact for local election officials, not the local Postmasters. The Managers, Customer Relations coordinate with officials in all state, county, and local jurisdictions including Secretaries of State, Directors of Elections by State and Territory, Administrators of Elections, Boards of Elections, Election Clerks, and Registrar of Voters. The Managers, Customer Relations conduct two formal outreach presentations for all election officials in each state and territory.

The Election and Government Mail Services Team sends a physical copy of the Postal Service's Kit 600, "Official Election Mail Guide," which includes Publication 631, "Official Election Mail – Graphic Guidelines and Logos," and Publication 632, "State and Local Election Mail – User's Guide," to every election jurisdiction in the nation each Federal Election year. Kit 600, Publication 631, and Publication 632 are available on our external election website as well.

Regarding unresolved delivery restrictions, address hygiene guidance is provided to election officials through the Manager, Customer Relations outreach presentations, and Kit 600 and Publication 632.

Finding #3: Inquiries Related to the Delivery of Ballots in New Jersey and North Carolina

Management generally agreed with Finding #3. However, issues cited in Finding #3 in New Jersey and North Carolina, were clearly isolated incidents. As soon as the issues were discovered, mitigation efforts were immediately put in place.

Recommendation 1:

OIG recommends the Director, Election and Government Mail Services, coordinate with the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and the Executive Vice President and the Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President to update election-related material to address how to handle ballots incorrectly postmarked with the wrong date by Postal Service employees.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The Director, Election and Government Mail Services, will update election-related training material to address how to handle ballots that are found to be incorrectly postmarked with the wrong date by Postal Service employees.

Target Implementation Date:

September 30, 2026

Responsible Official:

Director, Election and Government Mail Services

Recommendation 2:

OIG recommends the Director, Election and Government Mail Services develop a process for facility management to verify every hand canceler is properly dated and secured when not in use.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The CPDO Political and Audit Checklist survey has been modified to ensure management must verify the round date stamps are set to the correct date and verify the round date stamps are secure every day.

Target Implementation Date:

September 30, 2026

Responsible Official:

Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President and Director, Election and Government Mail Services

Recommendation 3:

OIG recommends the Director, Election and Government Mail Services coordinate with the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President and the Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President to update the daily all-clear certification to specifically include facility management verification that the Late Arriving Political Mail Report was completed, if the facility received late arriving Political Mail.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The CPDO Political/Election Mail Tour "All Clear Process" & Yard Check Certification survey will be modified to ensure management must verify that the Late Arriving Political Mail Report was completed if the facility received late arriving Political Mail.

Target Implementation Date:

September 30, 2026

Responsible Official:

Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President and Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President.

Recommendation 4:

OIG recommends the Director, Election and Government Mail Services coordinate with the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President to develop an automated process that electronically notifies management when the all-clear certification is not completed in a timely manner.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The CRDO Command Center will develop an escalation guardrail process that will automatically notify District Managers when the all-clear certification is not completed in a timely manner.

Target Implementation Date:

September 30, 2026

Responsible Official:

Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President.

Recommendation 5:

OIG recommends the Director, Election and Government Mail Services coordinate with the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President and the Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President to update the daily all-clear certification to specifically include facility management verification that no voter-returned ballots are in the Postal Automated Redirection System operation.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees to modify the all clear programs to include verification that the Postal Automated Redirection System operation has been checked for voter returned ballots. Management does not agree that it is operationally feasible for an employee to look through every piece of PARS mail due to the amount of time required. Management does agree to have management conduct a spot check in the PARS operation and verify using the daily all-clear certification.

Target Implementation Date:

September 30, 2026

Responsible Official:

Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President and Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President

Recommendation 6:

OIG recommends the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President, and the Director, Election and Government Mail Services develop a policy requiring delivery units to post-election related training materials on the workroom floor and to update the all-clear certification questions to ensure clear, non-compounded reporting.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The Chief Retail and Delivery Officer will collaborate with the Director, Election and Government Mail Services, to determine what election related training materials should be included in this policy. All materials will be available for units to download and post from the CRDO Resource Library and the Election and Government Mail Services internal website.

Target Implementation Date:

September 30, 2026

Responsible Official:

Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President and Director, Election and Government Mail Services

Recommendation 7:

OIG recommends the Director, Election and Government Mail Services define resolution time milestones for Election and Political Mail requests and concerns submitted through the Postal Service's Election Mail website.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation and would like to clarify the current process. The Postal Service moved the Election Ticket System internally for increased visibility, tracking, and accountability. Election Tickets require initial contact within one working day of submission and require resolution within 3 working days of submission. These cases are escalated directly to the District Manager, Customer Relations to resolve. The resolution is escalated to the Area Director, Customer Relations, for approval prior to responding to the election official.

The Chief Customer and Marketing Officer and Executive Vice President will facilitate the biweekly Cross Functional Election Mail Touchpoint meeting with representatives from all organizations on August 25, 2026. Area Directors, Customer Relations, and District Managers, Customer Relations are required to discuss their assigned Election Tickets. The organizational stakeholders will take action to provide timely resolutions and/or prevent future occurrences. The meeting frequencies will increase during the period close to the General Election.

Target Implementation Date:

September 30, 2026

Responsible Official:

Director, Election and Government Mail Services and Vice President, Customer Experience

Recommendation 8:

OIG recommends the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President, the Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President, and the Chief Logistics Officer and Executive Vice President pause implementation of scheduled operational changes, including regional transportation optimization, that will impact mail timelines during the 2026 midterm election.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management agrees with this recommendation. The Postal Service will not make any operational changes that will affect the letter and flats operations between October 17, 2026, and Election Day, November 3, 2026.

Target Implementation Date:

October 17, 2026

Responsible Official:

Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President, Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President, and Chief Logistics Officer and Executive Vice President.

Recommendation 9:

OIG recommends the Vice President, Corporate Communications in coordination with Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President and the Chief Logistics Officer and Executive Vice President develop a process to promptly notify customers impacted by regional transportation optimization.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management disagrees with this recommendation. The Postal Service does not have specific messaging for customers that are serviced in an area that has implemented regional transportation optimization. The Postal Service has chosen to focus on user-friendly tools and messaging that is applicable to all mailers, rather than tools and messaging aimed at specific locations that may be subject to regional transportation optimization schedules.

A Post Office being subject to regional transportation optimization does not determine the actual service standard for a mailpiece. The origin and destination of the mailpiece must be considered. The Postal Service's intent is to provide information to customers that is most useful and understandable.

Regarding Election Mail, the Postal Service's advice applies to all mailers, regardless of where they are mailing from. A customer can ensure that their mailpiece receives a

postmark, and that the date on the postmark aligns with the date of the mailing, by taking the mailpiece to a Postal Service retail location and requesting a manual (local) postmark at the retail counter when dropping off the mailpiece. Manual postmarks will be applied free of charge.

If a customer is a non-military voter located in the United States and chooses to use the mail to return their completed ballot, our longstanding recommendation is that, as a common-sense measure, they mail their completed ballot before Election Day, and at least one week prior to the deadline by which their completed ballot must be received by their election office. Some states may recommend allowing even more time for mailing completed ballots.

Target Implementation Date:

Not Applicable

Responsible Official:

Not Applicable

Recommendation 10:

OIG recommends the Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President, and the Chief Logistics Officer and Executive Vice President develop a process to ensure that labels used to uniquely track whole pallets containing Ballot Mail remain continuously linked to the entire mailing throughout the transportation process, until it is ready to be processed, to ensure proper visibility.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management generally agrees with this recommendation. The Postal Service will reiterate scan compliance and placard integrity to reinforce that placard work instructions are followed for all types of mail and packages, including Ballot Mail. Placards that track whole pallets/containers will remain continuously linked to the entire mailing throughout the transportation process when destined for processing at a single processing facility.

Target Implementation Date:

September 30, 2026

Responsible Official:

Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President, and Chief Logistics Officer and Executive Vice President.

Recommendation 11:

OIG recommends the Director, Election and Government Mail Services coordinate with the Chief Retail and Delivery Officer and Executive Vice President and the Chief Processing and Distribution Officer and Executive Vice President to develop a formal process requiring Postal Service management to notify Election and Government Mail

Program Specialists when readability issues with barcoded Ballot Mail is identified so outreach to Boards of Elections – including North Carolina – can be conducted to address identified issues.

Management Response/Action Plan:

Management generally agrees with this recommendation. Retail and Delivery and Processing Employees currently notify their District Manager, Customer Relations of all Election Mail acceptance, delivery, and processing issues. The District Managers, Customer Relations escalate all readability issues to their Directors and the Election and Government Mail Services Team.

The Chief Customer and Marketing Officer and Executive Vice President will begin the biweekly Cross Functional Election Mail Touchpoint meeting with representatives from all organizations on August 25, 2026. Area Directors, Customer Relations, and District Managers, Customer Relations will escalate readability issues, along with any other acceptance, processing, or delivery related issues with Election Mail.

The Director, Election and Government Mail sends a letter to election officials and their managed service providers when elements of ballot envelope designs cause delays in processing or delivery of Ballot Mail, including when they are caused by barcode readability issues.

Target Implementation Date:

October 1, 2026

Responsible Official:

Director, Election and Government Mail Services

E-SIGNED by ISAAC S CRONKHITE
on 2026-08-27 09:29:30 EDT

Isaac S. Cronkhite

Chief Processing and Distribution Operations Officer & Executive Vice President

E-SIGNED by ELVIN MERCADO
on 2026-08-26 13:56:13 EDT

Elvin Mercado

Chief Retail and Delivery Officer & Executive Vice President

E-SIGNED by PETER ROUTSOLIAS
on 2026-08-26 12:36:11 EDT

Peter Routsolias

Chief Logistics Officer & Executive Vice President

E-SIGNED by Steven Monteith
on 2026-08-26 12:51:18 EDT

Steven W. Monteith

Chief Customer & Marketing Officer & Executive Vice President

E-SIGNED by JEFFERY A ADAMS
on 2026-08-26 12:25:11 EDT

Jeffery A. Adams
Vice President, Corporate Communications

E-SIGNED by MARC.D MCCRERY
on 2026-08-26 12:29:17 EDT

Marc McCrery
Vice President, Customer Experience

cc: Manager, Corporate Audit Response Management

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE



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