

# Poll watchers will be a part of the election process

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*FILE - In this Aug. 11, 2020, file photo, a voter casts a ballot at a drive-thru voting station in the Barre Civic Center in Vermont's statewide primary in Barre, Vt. Voting will look a little different this November. States are considering drive-thrus, outdoor polling places and curbside voting as they examine creative ways to safely offer same-day polling places during a pandemic. Poll watchers may play a part in ensuring the process is fair and equitable. (AP Photo/Lisa Rathke, File)*

SALT LAKE CITY — This week registered voters will start to get their mail-in ballots in Utah. And from now past election night, volunteer poll watchers are keeping an eye on the process. Candidates, groups, and political parties have poll watchers, and state law allows it. Officials say they welcome the extra eyes.

“I think it is imperative to have third parties check the process,” said Utah County Clerk/Auditor Amelia Powers Gardner. “I think it is great to have confidence in our elections.”

Gardner says her office facilitates and welcomes poll watchers. They cut large windows in the wall of the ballot center so anyone from the public could watch the tabulation.

## How poll watchers do their work

Davis County Clerk/Auditor Curtis Koch says poll watchers don't just come on election night. They can watch as workers tabulate and verify Utah's mail-in ballots for the next three weeks.

“The caveat is, based on the election area that they are watching, there can be limited poll watchers (because of social distancing). So we do give preference to candidates, initiatives and political parties,” said Koch.

Some poll watcher volunteers come from the ACLU of Utah. Voting Rights Coordinator Niki Venugopal says she wants them to report any major issues at a polling place to the ACLU.

“But we are not expecting those,” she said.

Venugopal says volunteers are also driving around the counties in Utah, checking secure locked boxes. Though she said they have not had any issues with drop boxes before, either.

### **Poll watching on social media**

She also assigns ACLU volunteers to watch social media.

“We are all inundated on our social media feeds with a lot of information and not a lot is accurate,” said Venugopal. The watchers are supposed to look out for attempts to mislead voters or suppress voters with misinformation or disinformation.

Powers does a lot of correcting people online as well. She reminds them that elections are different state by state and even county by county.

“That can cause some confusion if you see your cousin in California posting something that’s different than in Utah County,” she said.

She said people should go to the source to get the information for their location. Then share correct information and give your county clerk’s website or [vote.utah.gov](http://vote.utah.gov).

Koch says knowing the facts helps with public trust in the elections.

“We have wonderful staff that are your friends and neighbors that are running this election. And that’s what you see statewide. That’s part of the security of the system.”

Read more about the rules for poll watchers in various states [here](#).