

What is the canvass?

The canvass is the official tally of votes for any given election. The purpose of the canvass is to account for every ballot cast and ensure that every valid vote cast is included in the election totals. The canvass accounts for every ballot cast on Election Day, every on-time absentee ballot, every accepted provisional ballot, and every on-time overseas and military absentee ballot.

What about the election results I see in the news on election night?

Results posted on election night after polls close are unofficial. They do not include provisional ballots and on-time absentee ballots that arrive between Election Day and the official canvass.

When is the canvass held?

Election canvass dates vary based on the type of election being held and the statutes authorizing the election. If the canvass date is a public holiday, the date of the canvass must be moved to the next business day.

What happens at the county canvass?

Results are certified by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) based upon the abstract of votes prepared by the Auditor/Commissioner of Elections. The BOS does not count ballots. The BOS has no authority to examine any ballots or write-in documents other than the tally lists from each precinct. The BOS declares the winners for county and township offices (nominees in the case of a Primary Election). This declaration is included in the county abstract of votes.

The Board of Supervisors also canvasses the county vote totals for state and federal offices. The county abstracts are mailed immediately to the Iowa Secretary of State (SOS) following the county canvass so the state canvass of votes may start.

In the case of a tie, the BOS will draw lots to settle the vote. The result of the drawing must be entered on the abstract of votes and a certificate of election sent to the declared winner. If there is a tie vote for a public measure, lots are not drawn. The measure fails.

What is in the abstract of votes?

The abstract for each elected office must include all of the following information:

1. Name of each person who received votes for each office and the number of votes each person received
2. Name and number of votes received by each write-in who received more than five percent (5%) of votes cast for an office
3. Scattering (the collective votes for any write-in candidates who each received less than five percent of the votes cast for an office or who each received fewer than ten votes and was not determined to be elected)
4. Total number of votes cast in the county for each office (the votes for all of the candidates, including write-in candidates; does *not* include overvotes or undervotes)

The abstract for each public measure must include all of the following information:

1. Number of votes for and against each question (if any)
2. Total number of votes cast in the county for each question (if any); does NOT include overvotes and undervotes

What is the state canvass?

As soon as the abstracts begin arriving from the counties, the SOS begins tabulating the county results for state and federal offices.

The State Board of Canvassers must meet no later than 27 days after the election. The State Board of Canvassers is made up of the Iowa Executive Council which consists of the Governor, Secretary of State, State Auditor, State Treasurer, and the Secretary of Agriculture. The Board reviews the canvass materials prepared by the SOS and signs the abstracts and certificates of election for federal and state officers and judges. The two political parties are invited to send observers to watch the tabulation of votes.

For a presidential election, the presidential electors will meet at the Capitol on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December to elect and certify their choices.

Who can attend the canvass?

The canvass is open to the public and minutes must be kept. According to an Attorney General opinion, open meeting laws do not apply. It is not necessary to publish and post the agenda before the meeting. Story County chooses to publish and post the agenda.

Where are canvass records kept?

The abstracts are the official permanent record of the election. They are kept in the Auditor's Office and may be examined during regular working hours, Monday – Friday, 8 am to 4:30 pm.