

Standard procedure can *look* like a cover-up

One mechanism of elections, examined in depth — the routine handling, transport, and verification steps every ballot goes through.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How This Guide Works

This is part of **Incognati Civics**, applying the field-guide format to election administration and mechanics — the procedural layer beneath the outcome, examined the same way regardless of which party or candidate it involves. Each specimen goes deep on one mechanism, with official records, court citations, and peer-reviewed or nonpartisan scholarship listed in full on the references page.

INCOGNATI CIVICS – ELECTIONS

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Chain-of-Custody Procedures Misread as Suspicious

Custodia Continuata

Governing precedent / case Ongoing Status Standard practice under state election codes

OBSERVED SPECIMEN

STANDARD U.S. BALLOT CHAIN-OF-CUSTODY PROCEDURE

*Ballots in most U.S. jurisdictions move through a documented chain: bipartisan teams handle transport between polling places and counting facilities, drop-box collections are logged and typically require two-person retrieval, and mail ballots undergo **signature verification** against voter-registration records before being opened. Each step is designed to be auditable — logged, witnessed, and often recorded on video — specifically so the custody of a ballot can be reconstructed after the fact.*

THE HOOK

Any transport, storage, or handling step shown out of context — a box being moved, a room being locked, a signature being checked by eye — can look irregular to someone unfamiliar with the standard procedure.

THE MECHANISM

Chain-of-custody procedures exist precisely because ballots move between locations and people; the documentation, bipartisan witnessing, and video logging are the safeguard, not evidence something is being hidden.

Field mark: when a handling step looks suspicious, check that jurisdiction's published chain-of-custody procedure — most of what looks unusual to an untrained eye is a documented, standard, auditable step.

See the full references page for complete citations.

References

every source checkable at the link provided; DOIs given where the source has one

PRIMARY SOURCE · FEDERAL AGENCY

U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Election Ballot Chain of Custody" resource.

<https://www.eac.gov/>

Federal agency's official guidance on chain-of-custody standards; search EAC.gov for current resource.

REFERENCE SOURCE

Brennan Center for Justice, "Ballot Security Measures" explainer.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports>

Nonpartisan summary of standard chain-of-custody and signature-verification procedures; search site for current resource.

REFERENCE SOURCE

National Conference of State Legislatures, "Signature Verification Requirements for Mail Ballots."

<https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns>

State-by-state summary of signature-verification procedure; search site for current resource.

Reading This Mechanism: A Gut Check

four questions before a headline changes what you think happened at the polls

1 Find the jurisdiction's procedure

Every step in ballot handling is typically documented publicly — check it before assuming irregularity.

2 Check for bipartisan witnessing

Most chain-of-custody steps require two people from different parties, by design.

3 Ask what's being logged

Time-stamped logs and video are the safeguard — their existence is evidence of procedure, not concealment.

4 Compare to the published standard

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission and state election codes define what “normal” looks like.

INCOGNATI CIVICS

The Series Continues

This is Specimen No. 9 of the Elections section within Incognati Civics. The full queue of twelve specimens is listed on the cover. This section joins "How Federal Laws Actually Get Created" within Civics, with local government, official data reporting, and institutional communications planned beyond it. The Incognati Atlas catalogs the underlying patterns across all of it.

Civics Field Edition · Elections · Specimen No. 9

All specimens independently sourced