



Texas Secretary of State
ELECTIONS DIVISION



Observing the Vote: Poll Watchers

44th Annual
Election Law Seminar
for County Election Officials

August 10–12, 2026



Session Agenda

**Resources
available**

**What is a
poll watcher**

**Who can
appoint a
poll watcher
and how are
they appointed**

**What are
the eligibility
requirements**

**Where and
what can
poll watchers
observe**

**Recount
watchers**



Resources Available

[Chapter 33, Texas Election Code](#)

[Poll Watcher Training](#)

[Poll Watcher's Guide](#)

[Advisory 2024-28](#)

[Forms Index](#)





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What is a Poll Watcher?



Poll Watcher Defined

A poll watcher is a person appointed under the Texas Election Code to observe the conduct of an election on behalf of a candidate, a political party, or the proponents or opponents of a measure

A watcher appointed under Chapter 33 shall observe without obstructing the conduct of an election and call to the attention of an election officer any observed or suspected irregularity or violation of law in the conduct of the election



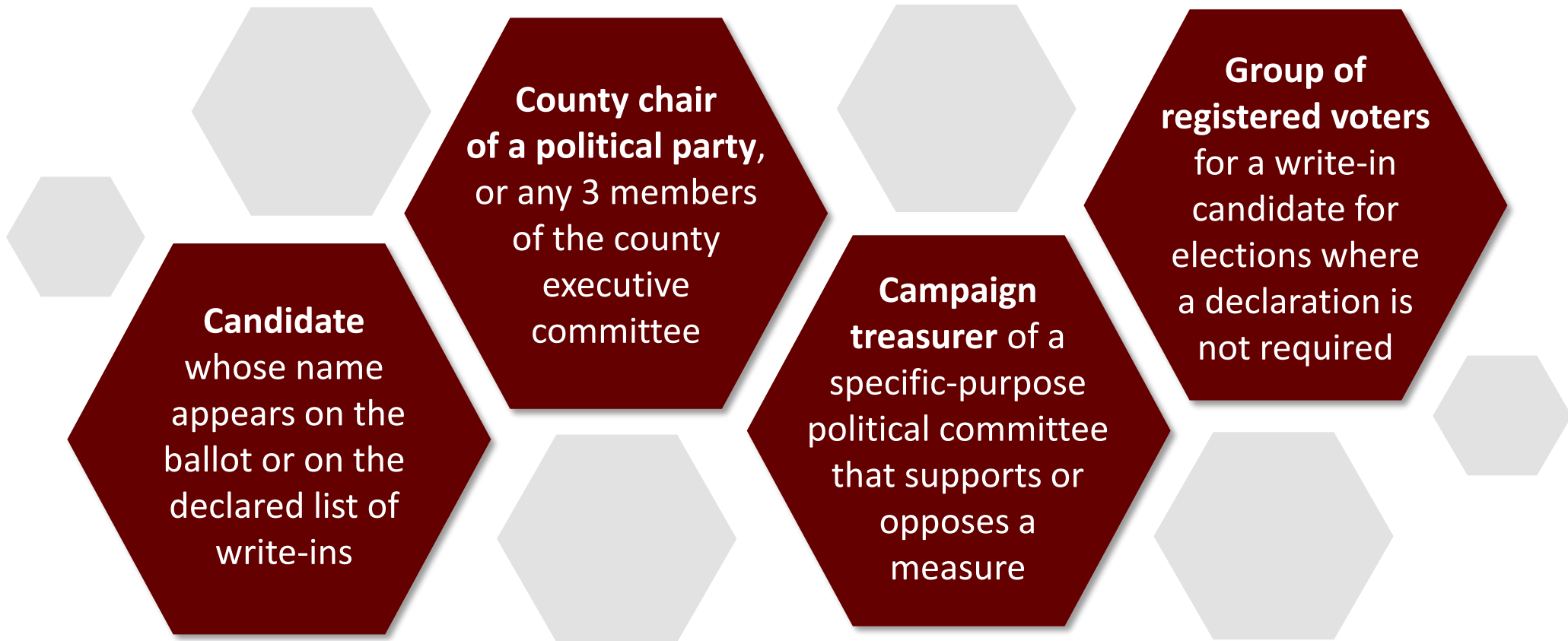
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Who Appoints Poll Watchers



Appointing Authorities





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How Poll Watchers Are Appointed



Certificate of Appointment

Different certificate depending on the appointing authority

- 4-26 Appointment by Candidate
- 4-27 Appointment by Political Party
- 4-28 Appointment for a Measure

Different for a Recount Watcher

- 14-2 Appointment of a Representative

4-26
Prescribed by Secretary of State
Sections 33.002, 33.006, 33.051, 127.201 Texas Election Code
9/2025

CERTIFICATE OF APPOINTMENT OF POLL WATCHER BY A CANDIDATE

To the Presiding Judge or Early Voting Clerk:
The following person has been appointed as a poll watcher in accordance with Sec. 33.002,
Texas Election Code.

Name of Poll Watcher	Name of Candidate
Residence Address of Poll Watcher	Title and Date of Election
Voter Registration VUID Number of Poll Watcher	Location Poll Watcher is to serve

Signature of Candidate or
Signature of Campaign Treasurer

Signature of Poll Watcher

Printed Name of Signer

OATH OF A POLL WATCHER

The following oath must be repeated aloud by the poll watcher before being accepted for service.
"I swear(or affirm) that I will not disrupt the voting process or harass voters in the discharge of my duties"

AFFIDAVIT OF POLL WATCHER

I, _____, a poll watcher for the above appointing authority, do hereby
(printed name of watcher)
swear or affirm that I do not have, in my possession, any type of mechanical or electronic means of
recording images or sound while serving as a watcher or I will disable or deactivate the device
while serving as a watcher; and swear or affirm that I have not been finally convicted of a felony of
the first or second degree or a felony offense in connection with conduct directly attributable to an
election.

TRAINING REQUIREMENT

I understand that I must present a physical copy of the Certificate of Completion of
State Poll Watcher Training before being accepted for service. [Sec. 33.006]

Signature of Poll Watcher

Sworn to



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Eligibility Requirements



Poll Watcher Eligibility Requirements

Must be a qualified voter of the:

- County in which the person is to serve, in an election ordered by the governor or a county authority or in a primary election;
- Part of the county in which the election is held, in an election ordered by the governor or a county authority that does not cover the entire county of the person's residence; and
- Political subdivision, in an election ordered by an authority of a political subdivision other than a county.

Complete Poll Watcher Training



Poll Watcher Training

**Certificate
Valid From:**

January 1–
August 31

September 1–
December 31





Individuals Ineligible to Be a Poll Watcher

Candidate for public office

Employee or relative of election officer

Public officer

Convicted of certain offenses



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Accepting a Poll Watcher



Accepting a Poll Watcher

A watcher must deliver a:

- Certificate of Appointment
- Certificate of Completion of Training

Must deliver to either the deputy early voting clerk or presiding judge

The image displays two sample forms from the Texas Secretary of State Elections Division. The top form is the "CERTIFICATE OF APPOINTMENT OF POLL WATCHER BY A CANDIDATE", which includes fields for the candidate's name, the poll watcher's name, address, and registration number, as well as a section for the oath of the poll watcher. The bottom form is the "CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION", which certifies that a person has successfully completed the Texas Online Poll Watcher Training. It features the signature of Dave Nelson, Deputy Secretary of State, and an expiration date of August 31, 2026.



Accepting a Poll Watcher

The watcher must be accepted at the polling place

The certificate must then be retained at the polling place

Watcher must be issued a nametag





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Where Poll Watchers Can Serve



Where Poll Watchers Can Serve

Polling places

Early Voting Ballot Board

Central Counting Station

Reminder: Must indicate on their certificate where they are to serve.

- If a poll watcher is assigned to a polling place and then to the Early Voting Ballot Board, he or she must have **two different** Certificates of Appointment



Where Poll Watchers Can Serve

Risk-Limiting Audits

Post-Election Hand Count Audit



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Maximum Number of Appointed Poll Watchers



Number of Poll Watchers

Each appointing authority may not appoint not more than **two watchers** for:

- Polling places
- Early Voting Ballot Board
- Central Counting Station



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What Poll Watchers Can Observe



Observing Activity Generally

A watcher is entitled to observe any activity conducted at which the location the watcher is serving

- Entitled to sit or stand near enough to see and hear activity
- Entitled to be present at the voting station where a voter is being assisted by an election officer
- Entitled to observe the inspection and securing of the equipment
- Entitled to observe the delivery of election records
 - May accompany the officer making the delivery, or follow in a different vehicle
- Entitled to observe the sealing and transfer of data storage



Observing Activity Generally

Watchers must be allowed to make notes while on duty

- Presiding Judge at polling place may require the watcher to leave the notes at the polling place if the watcher chooses to leave while polls are open.



Restrictions on Poll Watcher Activity

While on duty,
a watcher may not:

Converse with an election officer regarding the election *except* to point out an irregularity or violation of the law

Converse with a voter or communicate in any manner with a voter regarding the election

Use a wireless communication device in the polling place



Restrictions on Poll Watcher Activity

Remember:

- A watcher may call the attention of an election officer to any occurrence that the watcher believes to be an irregularity or violation of law and may discuss the matter with the officer.
- An officer may refer the watcher to the presiding officer at any point in the discussion.
- The watcher may not discuss the occurrence further with the subordinate officer unless the presiding officer invites the discussion.



Restrictions on Poll Watcher Activity

A watcher commits an offense if, before the polls close or the last voter has voted, the watcher **reveals**:

- The number of votes that have been received for a candidate or for or against a measure;
- A candidate's position relative to other candidates in the tabulation of the votes;
- Whether a measure is passing or failing; or
- The names of persons who have or have not voted in the election



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When Poll Watchers Can Be Present



When Poll Watchers Can Be Present

Polling Places

- May begin service at any time after the judge arrives, and can stay until the judge completes their duties
- If ballots are being counted, watcher must stay until counting is complete
- A watcher appointed to serve at a polling place is entitled to observe the transfer of election materials to a central counting station or any other location designated to process election materials

Early Voting Ballot Board

- May be present at any time the board or committee is processing or counting ballots and until the board or committee completes its duties
- May not leave during voting hours on election day without the presiding judge's permission if the board has recorded any votes cast on voting machines or counted any ballots, unless the board has completed its duties and has been dismissed by the presiding judge



When Poll Watchers Can Be Present

Central Counting Station

- May be present at any time the station is open for the purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station
- A watcher may not leave during voting hours on election day without the presiding judge's permission if the counting of ballots at the central counting station has begun



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Removing a Poll Watcher



Removing a Poll Watcher

A presiding judge can only remove a poll watcher when:

- The watcher violates the Election Code and the violation was witnessed by a judge or clerk; or
- The watcher violates the Penal Code, regardless of whether the violation was witnessed or not



Unlawfully Obstructing a Poll Watcher

A person commits an offense if the person serves in an official capacity at a location at which the presence of watchers is authorized and knowingly prevents a watcher from observing an activity or procedure the person knows the watcher is entitled to observe, including by taking any action to obstruct the view of a watcher or distance the watcher from the activity or procedure to be observed in a manner that would make observation not reasonably effective

- Class A misdemeanor



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Poll Watchers and Recounts



Appointing a Poll Watcher in a Recount

Certificate of Appointment of a Watcher for a Recount (Form 14-2)

Must submit this certificate to the Recount Committee Chair

14-2
Prescribed by Secretary of State
Section 213.013, Texas Election Code
2/2026

CERTIFICATE OF APPOINTMENT OF A WATCHER FOR A RECOUNT
(CERTIFICADO DE NOMBRAMIENTO DE UN OBSERVADOR PARA UN RECUENTO)

To the Recount Committee Chair: (Al Presidente del Comité de Recuento:)

The following person has been appointed to serve as a watcher. (La siguiente persona ha sido nombrada para servir como un observador.)

Name of Watcher: (Nombre del Observador:)	Candidate or Other Appointing Authority: (Candidato u Otra Autoridad Facultada para Proceder a los Nombramientos:)
Name and Date of Election: If measure election, identify the side representing. Elecciones: Si es una elección para una medida, identifique el lado que representa)	Time and Location of Recount: (Hora y Ubicación del Recuento:)

☒ Signature of Candidate or Other Appointing Authority
(Firma del Candidato u Otra Autoridad Facultada para Proceder a los Nombramientos)

☒ Signature of Watcher (Firma del Observador(a))

☒ Printed Name and Title of Candidate or Other Appointing Authority (Nombre en letra de molde y título del Candidato u Otra Autoridad Facultada para Proceder a los Nombramientos)

☒ Signature of Recount Committee Chair (Firma del Presidente del Comité de Recuento)

Watcher: (check one) (Observador: (marque uno))

Notice: No mechanical (Aviso: No mecánico)

☐ Accepted (Aceptado)



Eligibility Requirements

Not required to
complete the training

Not required to be a
registered voter of the
political subdivision

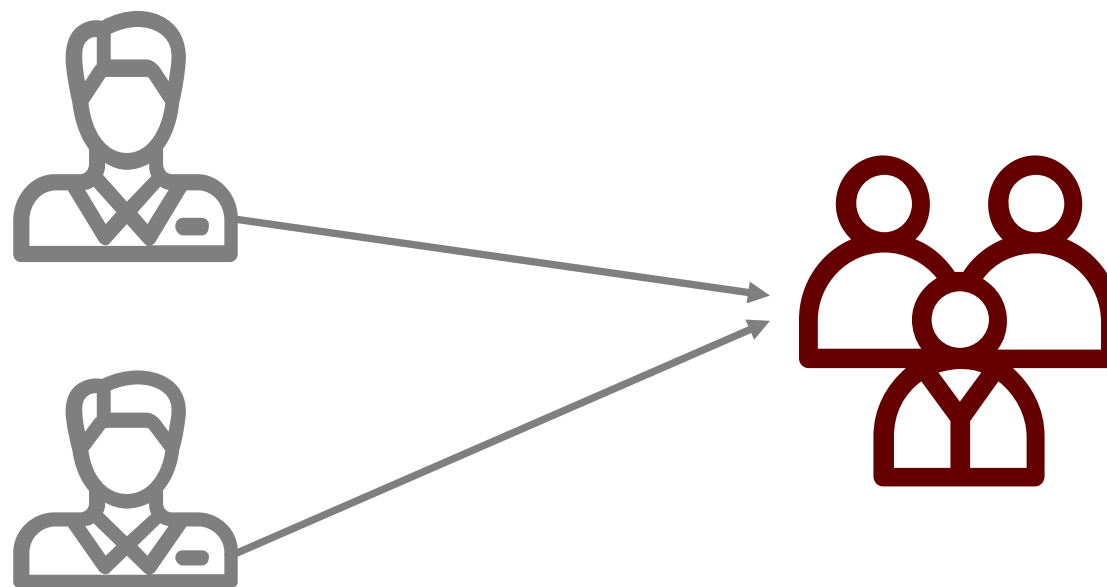


Number of Watchers Appointed

Each candidate may have two watchers if there is just one counting team or watchers in a number equal to the number of counting teams if there is more than one counting team

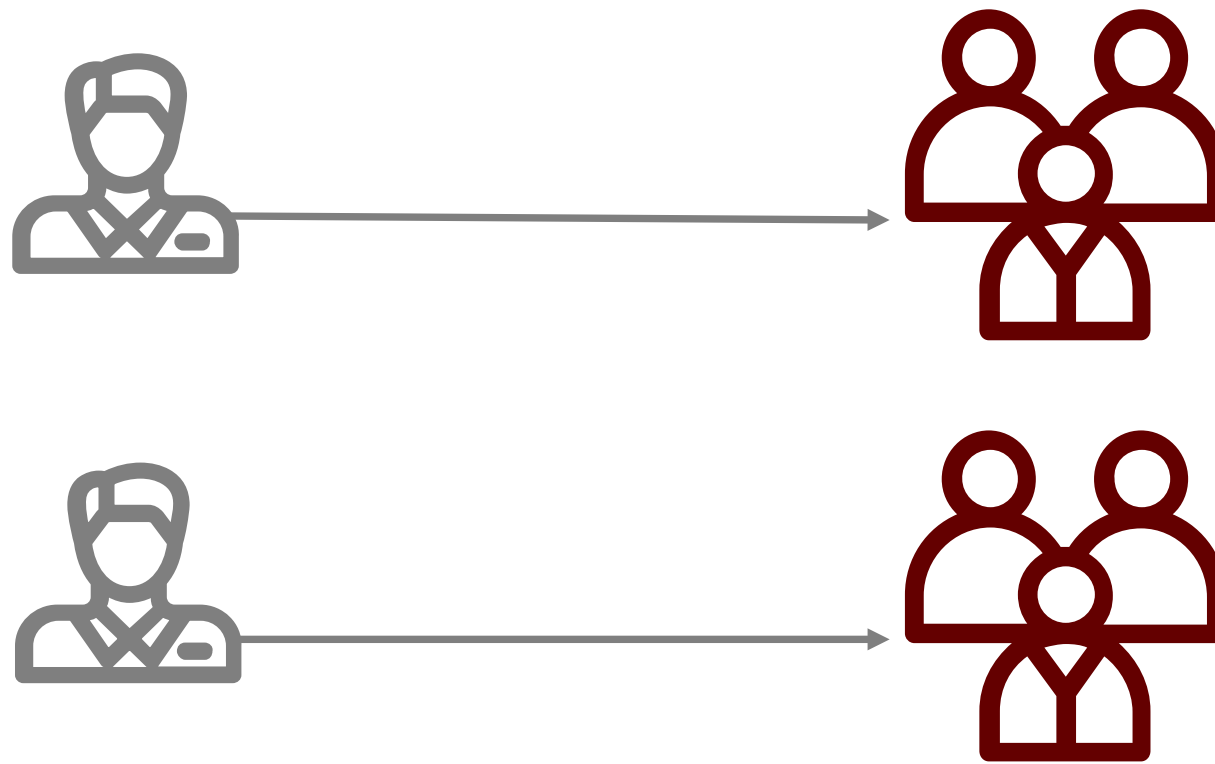


Example 1: One Team



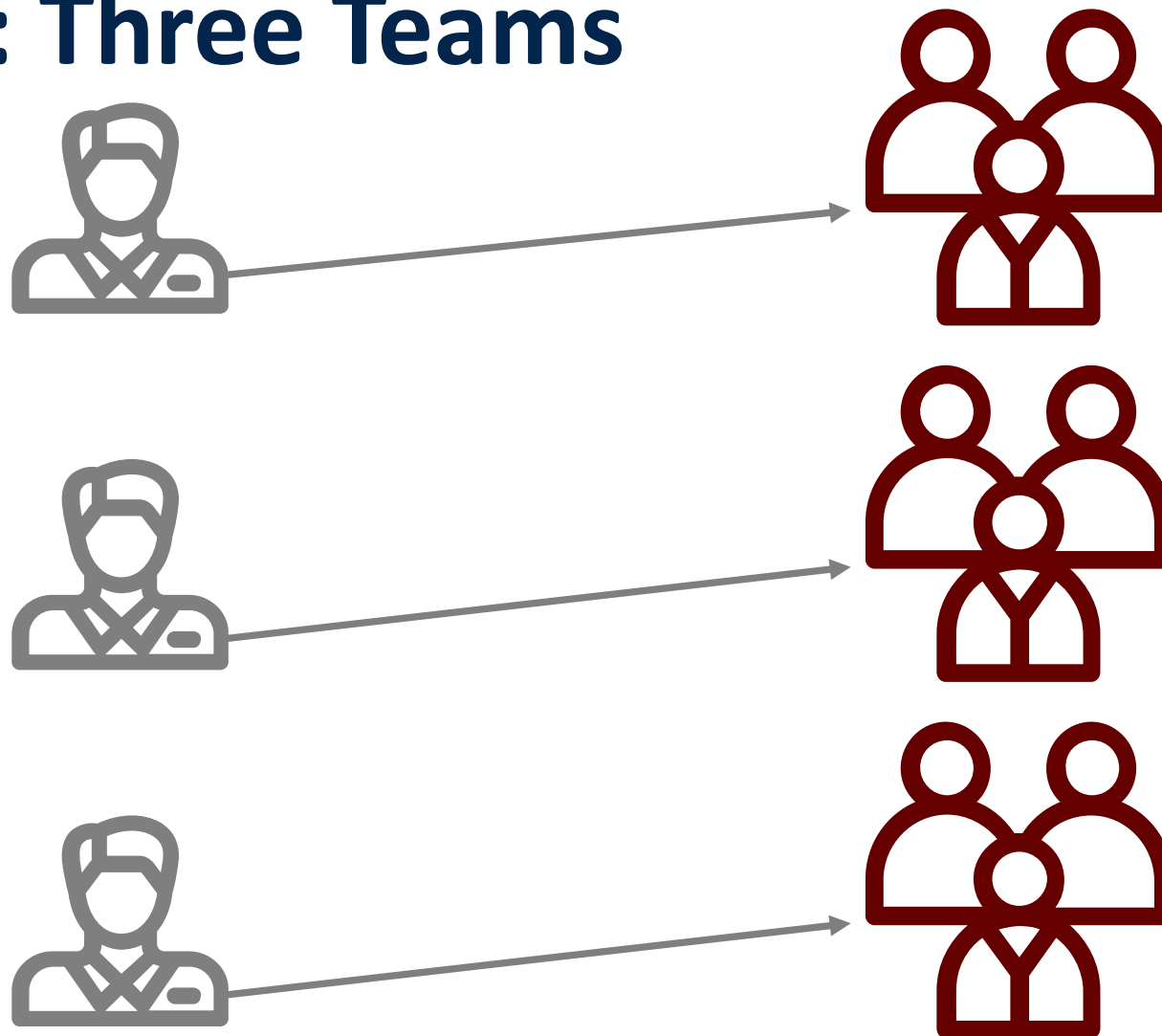


Example 2: Two Teams





Example 3: Three Teams





What Poll Watchers Can Do at Recounts

Observe the counting teams

Challenge ballots

Photocopy challenged ballots



Available Support



WEBINARS



TRAINING



RESOURCES

elections@sos.texas.gov

800-252-VOTE • 512-463-5650

sos.texas.gov