

Fascist local sheriff Chad Bianco seizes ballots cast in recent California referendum on redistricting

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Sheriff Chad Bianco, a former member of the fascist Oath Keepers, seized the Riverside County, California ballots cast in the November 4, 2025 special election over Proposition 50, an anti-Trump redistricting measure that passed statewide by 7.5 million to 4.1 million votes. The referendum passed in Riverside 370,000 to 285,000, a smaller but still overwhelming percentage.

The results were a repudiation of Trump and undercut Republican efforts to use gerrymandering in states where they control the election machinery, including Texas, Florida and North Carolina. With Trump's approval rating plunging, the Republicans now fear the loss not only of their narrow majority in the House of Representatives, but of control of the Senate as well.

California sheriffs, who are themselves subject to quadrennial non-partisan elections that coincide with the midterms, have no role in election administration, which is handled through county registrars overseen by the California Department of State. Sheriffs are responsible for some local law enforcement and management of the jails. Without making any allegation of criminal conduct, however, Bianco obtained three separate search warrants from compliant local judges, the contents of which are sealed.

Bianco's unprecedented action appears to have been prompted by crackpot allegations from a local election-denial group, the Riverside Election Integrity Team, which claims that the county vote total exceeded by 45,000 the number of ballots received. The Riverside Registrar of Voters has explained that the discrepancy stemmed from a misinterpretation of preliminary documentation and raw data. Regardless, the number in dispute is about one-half of Proposition 50's margin of victory in Riverside County alone.

At a March 20 press conference, Bianco, who is running

as a Republican for governor of California, said he was on a "fact-finding mission," and had ordered his staff to "physically count the ballots and compare that result with the total votes reporting."

Rob Bonta, the Democratic state attorney general, who is the official responsible both for representation of state election officials and for supervising local law enforcement agencies, denounced Bianco's actions as politically motivated. His office is seeking a court injunction, contending that Bianco's "rushed and inadequately supported criminal investigation reinforces false narratives: that elections are suspect; that the results cannot be trusted; and that election administration is compromised."

"That perception erodes public confidence in the safety and security of our elections and, in turn, chips away at our democratic system and potentially chills voter participation," Bonta added, summarizing Bianco's obvious political motivations.

What is unfolding in Riverside County is another chapter in the national campaign to place elections under the thumbs of pro-Trump fascists who have demonstrated from January 6, 2021, onward, that they will not accept unfavorable election outcomes.

Five years ago, a data breach of the Oath Keepers' internal records revealed that Bianco had been a dues-paying member of the fascist militia in 2014, prior to his election as Riverside sheriff. The Oath Keepers formed armed tactical teams during the January 6, 2021, assault on the US Capitol, and the group's founder, Stewart Rhodes, was convicted of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to a lengthy prison term before he was pardoned by Trump.

Bianco was also affiliated with the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association, a fascist

organization built around the bizarre theory that county sheriffs are the only legitimate law enforcement officials, and that they outrank state and federal law enforcement.

In June 2024, the day after Donald Trump was convicted of 34 felony counts in New York, Bianco posted an Instagram video in full uniform endorsing Trump for president. “I think it’s time we put a felon in the White House,” he said, adding, “Trump 2024, baby. Let’s save this country and make America great again.” California law explicitly prohibits public employees from engaging in overt political activity while in uniform.

The Riverside County Sheriff’s Office is already being investigated for the extraordinary number of inmates who have died in its jails, at least 91 since the beginning of 2020, making Riverside the second deadliest jail system in the United States.

Bianco’s ballot seizure follows last January’s FBI raid of an election hub in Fulton County, Georgia, resulting in the seizure of more than 700 boxes of ballots and records from the 2020 presidential election. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard personally attended the operation at Trump’s request, despite having no domestic law enforcement authority.

In Arizona, the FBI has seized records from reviews that upheld the results of the 2020 election that resulted in Biden’s narrow statewide victory over Trump, and in Puerto Rico, federal officials have seized voting machines.

Simultaneously, the Trump administration is trying to ram the so-called SAVE America Act through Congress to head off the Republicans’ looming mid-term election disaster. They aim to strip more than 21 million eligible citizens from the registered voter rolls by requiring states to hand voter rolls over to the Department of Homeland Security.

A trial run of the DHS verification algorithm in Boone County, Missouri found that more than half of voters flagged as ineligible were US citizens. Many of them lack passports or, especially in the case of married women, birth certificates that match their current identifications.

Incumbent Gavin Newsom is term-limited, leading multiple Democrats to enter the race to succeed him. Because of the state’s jungle primary system, the top two vote-getters in the primary advance to the general election, regardless of party affiliation. Preliminary polls show Bianco and Fox News host Steve Hilton leading the crowded field, raising a remote possibility that these two right-wing Republicans could advance to the general election despite Democrats holding an almost 2-1

registration advantage in the state.

Bianco’s ballot seizure is intended to bolster his candidacy by gaining Trump’s approval through his conduct of the kind of armed interference in elections that other Trump loyalists are threatening on a national scale. On Monday, as Trump deployed ICE agents to airports, ostensibly to address security delays, Steve Bannon called the operation a “test run” to “perfect ICE’s involvement in the 2026 midterms.”

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, writing in the *New York Times* on March 23, concluded with a familiar refrain: “Democrats are united in opposing the SAVE Act. We know the right to vote is not a partisan advantage to be engineered or withheld. It is the foundation of American democracy.”

It is worth asking what, precisely, that unity has produced? The Democratic Party has held the presidency, controlled both chambers of Congress, and occupied the offices of attorney general and secretary of state in numerous battleground states at various points over the past six years, yet Donald Trump escaped the political and legal consequence of his failed attempt to overturn the 2020 election by force, and in fact has been reinstalled in the White House.

The Democratic Party is incapable of mounting such a fight because it is bound to the same capitalist oligarchs as the Republicans. The defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to a party that has demonstrated, repeatedly, that it will not wage a serious fight against the forces dismantling those rights.

Workers, students, and young people must organize independently of both corporate parties, building a mass movement against ballot seizures, voter purges, and all forms of election interference. The political establishment of both parties fears this prospect far more than they fear each other.



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