

# California Supreme Court freezes Riverside ballot seizure as warrants reveal reliance on fascist election deniers

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In an extraordinary ruling last Wednesday, the California Supreme Court ordered Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco, a Republican candidate for governor, to halt his supposed criminal fraud probe into the November 2025 special election that approved an extreme pro-Democratic redistricting plan designed to deprive Republicans of five congressional seats in the November midterm elections.

Unlike the extreme right-wing United States Supreme Court, which deliberately uses its “shadow docket” to intervene and derail cases that threaten the political agenda of the Republican Party, the California Supreme Court usually allows cases to percolate through the lower courts before considering whether to review them on the merits.

The state Supreme Court, however, ordered Bianco, his agents, employees and anyone else acting on his behalf immediately to “pause the investigation into the November 2025 special election and preserve all seized items,” principally the ballots and tally sheets. Bianco’s office must confer with state Attorney General Rob Bonta, who both provides legal services for state election officials and supervises local law enforcement officers like Bianco, on the appointment of a special master.

The ruling followed Bonta’s accusations that Bianco “willfully defied my direct orders, seized 650,000 ballots, misused criminal investigatory tools, and created a constitutional emergency in the process.”

Bonta’s characterization of Bianco’s outrageous actions was not rhetorical hyperbole. After the attorney general first voiced his concerns and ordered the sheriff to stop his investigation, Bianco obtained more warrants and seized additional election materials. By

the time the state Supreme Court acted, Bianco’s staff, which has no role in election administration, had already recounted 12,561 ballots.

The same day, a Riverside Superior Court judge granted the petition filed by media organizations, including the *Los Angeles Times* and CalMatters, to unseal Bianco’s warrants, which confirmed what critics had alleged from the beginning: there was no evidence of any election irregularity.

The warrants were based on half-baked conspiracy claims previously made public by a local fascist group that calls itself the Riverside Election Integrity Team, which claims 45,000 more ballots were cast than counted. Its allegations were answered publicly and in detail by Riverside County Registrar of Voters Art Tinoco last February. The actual discrepancy was 103 votes, a variance of 0.016 percent, typical for an election of that size.

Bianco’s investigator timed the warrants for when the rotating duty judge was Jay Kiel, a former deputy district attorney elected to the bench in 2022 on a slate endorsed by the local Republican Party, Bianco and law enforcement groups. Kiel also had the support of Tim Thompson, a prominent Christian nationalist pastor whose media organization, Our Watch, aims to “increase the influence of Judeo-Christian values” in government.

Bianco praised Kiel while he was a candidate, claiming that he should be elected to “help rein in political activism destroying the justice system.” In a 2022 interview, Kiel returned the favor, stating, “We’re so fortunate to have Chad Bianco.”

Kiel also ordered the warrants sealed, a measure usually taken to protect informants or conceal the

mechanics of investigations from their targets. There were no insider tips, confidential witnesses or forensic analysis, however, and the affidavits were not signed by the Riverside County District Attorney's Office, suggesting prosecutors never reviewed or approved them.

After reviewing the warrants, one recognized elections expert, Carl Luna of the University of San Diego, called the claims of the Riverside Election Integrity Team "the political equivalent of flat earthers."

Bianco's legal representation is not being provided by the Riverside County Counsel. Instead, he retained Robert Tyler, who heads Advocates for Faith and Freedom, an overtly Christian nationalist operation. A legal brief opposing Bianco, filed by four Riverside County voters represented by the UCLA Voting Rights Project, flagged a "concerning pattern" throughout Tyler's legal filings that contain several "real cases but point to non-existent quotes and made-up holdings," an increasing problem arising from the reckless use of AI.

Tyler admitted the errors but attributed them to the pressure of "multiple rush filings and very limited time to respond."

Bianco's antics were clearly intended to attract the attention, and endorsement, of Donald Trump in the run-up to the June 2 gubernatorial primary. Instead, on April 6, two days before the Supreme Court stopped Bianco's investigation, Trump endorsed Fox News host Steve Hilton, virtually assuring that he will be the Republican candidate on the November ballot.

Bianco's provocation is part of a broader national campaign to place elections under the control of police, intelligence agencies and armed right-wing partisans operating outside established democratic procedures.

In January 2026, the FBI raided Fulton County's election office in Georgia, seeking ballots, computers and other 2020 election materials, while Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, appearing at Trump's request, oversaw the operation politically from the scene.

In Arizona, federal subpoenas have targeted records from the discredited "audit" of the 2020 election, which found no evidence of fraud despite the claims of its right-wing proponents. In Puerto Rico, Gabbard's office seized voting machines amid unproven claims of foreign meddling.

Together with Trump's demand that Congress pass the SAVE America Act and his call to "nationalize" elections before the 2026 midterms, these actions are creating the conditions for the Republicans to brand any loss as fraud and remain in power through coercion, intimidation and anti-democratic force.

While the California Supreme Court's intervention appears to have curbed Bianco's provocations, the Democratic Party politicians are organically hostile to fair elections as well, although they focus on barring socialist and other third parties from the ballot rather than on open voter suppression.

Workers cannot afford to treat each of these episodes as isolated incidents to be resolved through the court system, an essential component of the capitalist state. They are components of a single offensive against democratic rights, and they demand a unified response from the working class, the only social force capable of mounting one.



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