



## 2021 Issue Paper: Election Security

### Position Statement

In order to ensure integrity and voter confidence in elections, the LWVUS supports implementing voting systems and procedures that are “secure, accurate, recountable, accessible, and transparent.” The League supports only voting systems designed so that:

- A voter-verifiable paper ballot or other paper record is used as the official record of the voter’s intent.
- The voter can verify that the paper ballot/record accurately reflects the voter’s intent during the voting process.
- The paper ballot/record is used for audits and recounts.
- The vote totals can be verified by an independent hand count of the paper ballot/record.
- Routine audits of the paper ballot/record can be conducted and the results published.

Election security has become daily national news, but the issue of securing our elections is not new. Over the last decade, multiple state and national reports have recommended securing elections by ensuring that every vote has a voter-verified paper ballot or record and that routine postelection audits use statistical methods to ensure high certainty in the election outcome. Although Washington State is in a better position with election security than many other states, there is room for improvement.

### Summary of Issues for the 2021 Legislative Session

The League will work with legislators during the 2021 legislative session to improve election security by supporting:

- **Greater postelection audit result reporting:** County auditors are now required to perform at least one of four types of postelection audits, including the option to perform a risk-limiting audit, which limits the risk of certifying an incorrect election outcome. The other audit methods require procedures to escalate the audit if discrepancies are found. In February 2019, Snohomish County became the first county in Washington to pilot a risk-limiting audit. We anticipate working with election officials and the secretary of state to advocate for further risk-limiting audit pilots during 2021.

Currently, in order to know which type of postelection audit was performed or to obtain the results of postelection audits statewide, each county must be contacted individually. The League supports HB 1821, which would require each county to submit their audit results to the secretary of state’s office. The secretary of state would then create a summary report of the results. Clear and accessible postelection audit results would increase voter confidence

in election outcomes and would allow for continual quality improvement in postelection audit performance.

- **Ballot acceptance and rejection information reconciled by precinct:** Reconciling ballot acceptance and rejection numbers by precinct has several benefits. Ensuring that the number of ballots accepted matches the number of ballots processed across all precincts guards against software errors. In addition, reporting ballots rejected by precinct allows for tracking and understanding barriers voters may be experiencing when returning their ballot. Reasons for ballot rejection include signature mismatch and late postmark, which may impact some communities and cultures more than others. Precinct-level data allows for targeted outreach and education.
- **Improved tracking and procedures for chain of custody of voted ballots:** A large number of voted ballots aren't counted every election because they are postmarked after election day. Technology exists for voters to be notified via email or text message once the post office has scanned their ballot envelope, notifying them that their ballot has been postmarked. Tracking ballots returned through the postal service can improve rejection rates, ensure ballots are not lost prior to receipt by election officials, and improve communication with voters about the status of their voted ballot.

Once election officials receive voted ballots, robust chain of custody requirements ensure that ballots are not misplaced or modified. Advances in technology allow for how the tabulation system interprets a ballot to be easily modified electronically. Procedures should require that all steps in ballot handling, both manual and electronic, be performed with at least two persons.

- **Public access to election records, including cast vote records when voter privacy and ballot anonymity can be maintained:** In order for the public to fully participate in postelection audits, there must be access to how the tabulation system interpreted the ballot. Many recent tabulation systems produce electronic images of the scanned ballot and a data file containing the "cast vote records" (CVR). The CVR is a record of all votes produced by a single voter on their ballot. With this information, the public can reproduce the postelection audit on their own, allowing for increased confidence in the election results.

### **Additional Resources**

- LWVUS [Report of the Election Audits Task Force](#)
- National Academies of Sciences Engineering Medicine report [Securing the Vote: Protecting American Democracy](#)
- [King County Elections Could Further Reduce Risks and Barriers to Voting](#)

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