



POLICY FOCUS

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Securing American Elections

By Anna Pingel, Visiting Fellow

HIGHLIGHT

American voters deserve secure elections. Protecting legal votes and legal voters is integral to preserving our form of representative government. Without safeguards against error, fraud, and interference, public trust in elections declines. When abuse occurs, legal voters are effectively disenfranchised.

Safeguarding elections means requiring voter identification requirements for eligibility, ensuring accurate voter rolls, requiring excellent election administration, and supporting proper election infrastructure security.

INTRODUCTION

Our country's representative government and civic structure rest on a simple premise: that elections accurately translate the will of the people into electoral outcomes. When that translation is corrupted, whether by fraud, administrative error, or interference, the very foundation of our country is demeaned. Every illegitimate ballot counted negates the voice of a legitimate American voter. Every eligible voter wrongly turned away infringes on constitutional rights. Policies that protect the ballot box are not driven by partisan politics but rather seek to protect voting rights and avoid

disenfranchisement across all political parties and demographics. All eligible Americans have the right to have a say in their representative government.

Our Founding Fathers took the right to vote very seriously. Samuel Adams **noted**, “Let each citizen remember at the moment he is offering his vote that he is not making a present or a compliment to please an individual – or at least that he ought not so to do; but that he is executing one of the most solemn trusts in human society for which he is accountable to God and his country.”

There are four primary pillars of election security that encapsulate the policies protecting votes and voters. These are (1) requiring voter identification requirements for eligibility, (2) ensuring accurate voter rolls, (3) requiring excellent election administration, and (4) supporting proper election infrastructure security. Each of these pillars houses several specific policies that, when implemented by the federal government or the states, help ensure accurate, transparent, and accountable elections, boosting confidence in results and averting national crises due to skepticism of election outcomes. These policies are supported by the overwhelming majority of American voters, drawing support across the board from all political parties and demographics.

VOTER IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS, VOTER ELIGIBILITY: AN ELIGIBLE ELECTORATE

The standard is simple: In order to vote, election officials must be able to confirm that you are the person you claim to

be, and for you to be eligible to cast a ballot. This makes it necessary to require identification to vote in-person or by mail, as well as documentary proof of citizenship at the point of registration.

How does the American public feel about these policies? Polling from different sources, across different years, shows time and time again that Americans want voters to prove their identity at the polls. A **2024 Gallup survey** found that 84 percent of Americans support requiring all voters to provide a photo ID to vote, and 83 percent support requiring proof of citizenship when registering to vote. This obviously spans political parties and demographics in order to reach such a consensus. A **2024 Monmouth University poll** found similarly strong support at 80 percent. These policies are not fringe or partisan. And yet, this public opinion has not translated into corresponding laws. As of 2025, **36 states have enacted some form of voter ID law**, of which only eight require photo identification with no alternative.

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In the interest of equal standards, identity verification must be applied to both in-person and mail-in ballot voting. Mail-in voting has expanded dramatically since 2020, making identity verification for absentee ballots much more urgent. Currently, **most states require** at least some form of signature matching for mail ballots, but a much more secure policy is requiring a driver’s license number or

the last four digits of their Social Security number when requesting a mail ballot. Unfortunately, **only five states** have implemented this law. Mail-in ballots are processed without the same in-person, bipartisan oversight occurring at polling places, which means that robust verification is the best mechanism available to confirm that a mailed ballot was completed by the actual registered voter it is supposed to have come from.

And finally, documentary proof of citizenship is necessary to ensure that foreign nationals are not influencing American elections through direct voting. While federal law already limits voting in federal elections to citizens, there is no proof required. Often, when registering to vote, one just has to check a box affirming that one is a citizen. Foreign nationals have **ended up on the voter lists in multiple states**, largely due to the practice of automatic voter registration, in which someone applying for a driver's license is also added to the voter list in that state.

Together, these three policies—photo ID, voter ID for mail-in ballots, and documentary proof of citizenship—form an interlocking framework of election protection.

VOTER ROLL MAINTENANCE: WHO IS ON THE LIST

The voter roll is the list of voters in any given state. Maintained digitally by states, the list serves as a form of gatekeeping. The lists should only contain the names of the eligible electorate. When registration lists contain the names of deceased individuals, people who have moved out of the jurisdiction, duplicate registrations,

ghost (non-existent) voters, or non-citizens, the accuracy of every election conducted from those lists is threatened.

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Not only is this common sense, but it's also federal law. States are legally required under the **National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)** to maintain accurate voter rolls and conduct regular maintenance on these rolls. The NVRA requires states to conduct general voter roll maintenance programs that make a reasonable effort to remove all ineligible voters from official lists. But at the same time, the law imposes strict procedural mechanisms that make voter roll maintenance very difficult. The idea is that there must be protections to make sure eligible voters are not improperly removed. However, the NVRA throws out the baby with the bathwater by constraining states *so much* that it is nearly impossible to maintain an accurate voter roll. Some examples of this include the federal 90 day blackout period prior to any election in which much voter roll maintenance is prohibited (although new voters can still be added to the rolls, in some states right up until Election Day), as well as a requirement to wait two federal election cycles (four years) before removing a voter who hasn't responded to a change of address mail notice.

States that fail to maintain accurate voter rolls face litigation: those that

under-maintain rolls face lawsuits for NVRA noncompliance. Currently, the Department of Justice **is seeking voter rolls** in several states to critically evaluate whether or not states are complying with the NVRA's list maintenance requirement.

States that take roll maintenance seriously share several common best practices. Regular matching against Social Security death records, the Department of Homeland Security's SAVE Database (which helps identify non-citizens), and jury disqualification records helps identify deceased registrants. Some states also enter into interstate compacts to cross-check voter rolls and identify voters. Unfortunately, some organizations, such as the Electronic Registration Information Center, which claim to perform this service for states, can be **vulnerable to partisan influence**. Use of **commercial data to check eligibility** is a new policy being tested out in several jurisdictions as well.

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maintenance law needs to be brought into alignment with available technologies. Elections are too important to leave exposed to inaccurate lists of participants.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION: THE REFS MUST PLAY BY THE RULES

Just like referees administer rulings across sports, elections must be administered as well. Behind every ballot cast lies a complex infrastructure of rules, procedures, records, and human decisions that determine whether the final count accurately reflects the will of the voters. This process is called elections administration. Sound election administration results in voter confidence in results, just like good referee calls inspire confidence that the game is being played within the rules and the outcome is fair.

The first principle of sound election administration is proper records retention. **Federal law requires** that election records be retained for at least 22 months following a federal election. Without complete records, post-election audits are impossible, litigation is hampered, and public transparency evaporates. Jurisdictions that allow records to be destroyed, overwritten, or inadequately preserved are not merely violating federal law; they are avoiding accountability. Every best-practice election administration framework begins with a simple principle: If you cannot reconstruct what happened, you cannot verify that it happened correctly. This is essential for voters to have confidence that their voices actually mattered.

The second principle of sound election administration is that it must be

separated from partisan pressure or politics. Bipartisan boards of elections, transparent public processes, and clear separation between election functions and political offices are critical. Equally critical are **poll watchers**, who are credentialed representatives of candidates and parties who observe polling place operations, ballot processing, and canvassing in real time. Their presence deters bad actors, creates witnesses to the process, and is sometimes used in post-election litigation. Jurisdictions that restrict meaningful poll watcher access undermine the transparency so necessary to election administration.

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Finally, it is worth noting that a prevalent policy proposal, **ranked choice voting** (RCV), is frequently promoted as a modernizing reform for elections and election administration, but falsely so. Under RCV, voters select multiple candidates, ranking them in order of preference. If any candidate wins a simple majority of first-preference votes (50 percent plus one vote), he or she is declared the winner. If no candidate wins a simple majority of first-preference votes, a ranking algorithm is applied to multiple rounds of counting, and then determines the ultimate winner. The ensuing rounds of counting, in which entire votes are eliminated, and voters end up with their third, fourth, fifth, or

seventeenth choice (in order to reach the 50 percent plus one vote threshold), rarely end up reflecting the will of the people accurately. RCV does not change the fundamentals of what makes an election secure. RCV also dramatically increases the complexity of ballot design, tabulation, and audit procedures. Results cannot be reported on election night in most cases, as multiple rounds of tabulation must be completed after all ballots are centralized, prolonging uncertainty and hurting public confidence. For voters, particularly those with limited literacy or first-time participants, ranking multiple candidates in order introduces genuine confusion that can result in ballot errors, undervotes, and unintentional disqualification of choices. In other words, RCV doesn't solve election integrity problems, but creates new vulnerabilities and complications.

Sound election administration is unglamorous work, but without it, public confidence declines, audits are not possible, voter disenfranchisement abounds, and partisanship creeps into the process. Complete records retention, non-partisan oversight, meaningful poll watcher access, rigorous chain-of-custody protocols, and straightforward processes are the hallmarks of a well-operated election.

ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY: PREVENTING BAD ACTORS, FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC

We protect what is important to us. Just like the locks on our front doors, security protocols prevent intrusion into the sacred space of elections. Every ballot must be accounted for from the moment it is printed to the moment it is counted and

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stored. Chain-of-custody documentation, meaning tracking who handled ballots, when, and under what conditions, is the physical record that connects a cast vote to an actual outcome. Sealed ballot containers, documented transfer logs, tamper-evident packaging of mail-in ballots, and video surveillance of counting areas are minimum standards. Any break in the chain of custody is a vulnerability.

The most notable question under this principle is that of the security around voting machines. This is a hotly debated topic, but it does not need to be. The standard should be the same as any other technology that the United States **designates as critical infrastructure**. The Election Assistance Commission, which publishes standards for voting machines, has established a **testing and certification program** under the Help America Vote Act, which involves evaluating machines to see if they meet baseline security standards. A major problem, however, is that **not all voting machines in the United States are up to date** with the software updates, testing, and certification that are the baseline minimum standards. The vast decentralization of voting machine manufacturing and acquisition, paired with a lack of transparency into source coding, hardware manufacturing, and supply chain vulnerabilities, all pose serious doubts as to the reliability of voting in this manner.

For these reasons, and until federal and state governments bring modernized standards to voting machines, hand-marked paper ballots are **demonstrably superior**. They produce a voter-verified record that exists independently of any software. When a voter marks a paper ballot by hand, that physical document is the authoritative record rather than trusting the internal software of a machine (which is not subject to domestic manufacturing requirements, posing yet another vulnerability). Hand-marked paper ballots, scanned and tabulated with publicly observable logic and accuracy testing, represent the gold standard of voting technology.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the policies securing elections is to make it easy to vote, but hard to cheat, while protecting all legal votes and voters. The four pillars specified form a structure upon which elections can be built securely. Voter identification requirements are a foundational safeguard. Accurate voter rolls are equally essential. Election administration must be fair and accountable. Election infrastructure must result in votes being counted as cast. If the federal government and states abide by these principles, American voters will be protected and the very structure of our civic society preserved.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Get Informed:

Learn more about securing American elections. Visit:

- [Secure Elections | AFPI](#)
- [Statement of Principles on Elections | ALEC](#)
- [Honest Elections Project](#)

Talk to Your Friends:

Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Tell them about what's going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

Become a Leader in the Community:

Start an Independent Women's Network chapter group so you can get together with friends each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.

Remain Engaged Politically:

Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

Connect with Independent Women! Follow us on:

WE RELY ON THE SUPPORT OF PEOPLE LIKE YOU!

Please visit us on our website iwf.org to get more information and consider making a donation to Independent Women.

ABOUT INDEPENDENT WOMEN

Independent Women is dedicated to building support for free markets, limited government, and individual responsibility. Independent Women, a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) research and educational institution, seeks to combat the too-common presumption that women want and benefit from big government, and build awareness of the ways that women are better served by greater economic freedom. By aggressively seeking earned media, providing easy-to-read, timely publications and commentary, and reaching out to the public, we seek to cultivate support for these important principles and encourage women to join us in working to return the country to limited, Constitutional government.