

## Five Easy Ways to Help Protect Wisconsin Elections from Electronic Miscounts

Before voting machines, citizens routinely observed vote-counting. Now that our votes are counted by computer programmers inside black boxes, hardly any citizens observe anything related to vote-counting—even though *observing can still make a difference*.

Fraud becomes more difficult and carelessness less likely when citizens are present to view critical election tasks. Malfunctions are more likely to be noticed and less likely to be swept under the rug. Most clerks welcome citizen observers because their presence protects honest, competent clerks from suspicion and can provide independent verification of the election's integrity.

The EI Action Team has published instructions and pointers for citizen observers: check out the links at [www.wisconsingrassroots.net/ei\\_observer\\_instructions\\_all](http://www.wisconsingrassroots.net/ei_observer_instructions_all). Your county clerk or municipal clerk will probably also be able to explain some of the basics.

To keep updated on EI Action Team projects, follow us on Facebook (Wisconsin Election Integrity) or visit our website, [WisconsinElectionIntegrity.org](http://WisconsinElectionIntegrity.org).

### 1 Let your local election officials know you want voter-marked paper ballots.

Between touch-screen voting machines and optical scanners, the latter provides more security. Voter-marked paper ballots provide an independent record of the voters' choices that does not exist with touch-screens.

Although Wisconsin law requires touch-screen machines to print a "voter-verifiable paper trail," studies have shown that only a fraction of voters look at the paper trail, and only a fraction who notice errors report them. Mechanical problems can also prevent the trail from printing properly. If your county uses touch-screen machines, remind all your friends to *check the paper trail* before they leave the voting booth, and to report any problems immediately to the poll workers.

Regardless of what kind of voting machine you use now, let your clerk know your preference for voter-marked paper ballots and optical scan systems. Machines wear out, and could be replaced before the next election. Unless voters make their preferences known, county and municipal clerks will be influenced only by the voting-machine vendors who want to sell them the more profitable touch-screen machines. Contact your county clerk and municipal clerk at any time. Write to your local paper. Talk to your friends and family and have them do the same.

### 2 Observe voting-machine tests before every election.

Within 10 days before each election, your municipal clerk tests each voting machine to verify it is set up correctly for the election. The value of citizen observation includes providing the clerks with witnesses to the quality and completeness of their testing; making sure the tests are in fact done; and making sure any problems are noted and corrected before Election Day.

### 3 Observe poll-closing activities at your precinct.

Most poll-watchers depart when polls close, leaving poll workers without citizen observation for such important tasks as reconciling the number of ballots with the number of voters; processing write-in votes; sealing ballot bags; and more. This is the most complicated of the processes open to citizen observers, but it's not rocket science. Sign in before polls close with your precinct's 'chief inspector,' follow his or her directions, and you'll do fine.

### 4 Observe county canvass meetings.

Within a few days after each election, small "Boards of Canvass" meet in each county to review the results from all the precincts; review the records from Election Day; resolve any loose ends such as late-arriving but valid absentee votes and any challenged or provisional votes; check the totals when all the precincts' results are added together, and make the election results final and official.

This is the last chance to notice and correct problems in the vote-counting, and citizen observers can help to ensure that anomalies—such as a suspiciously high number of blank ballots, which might have resulted from a malfunctioning voting machine—are noticed and resolved.

### 5 Ask for and observe post-election voting-machine audits

A small number of randomly selected municipalities conduct post-election voting machine audits in the 4-8 weeks following each November election, *and clerks may on their own initiative or at citizen request, verify results at any time*. These audits consist of hand counts of the paper ballots or for touch-screen machines, the paper trail.

Citizen observers can provide clerks with independent witnesses who can verify they performed the audits correctly; ensure the chain of custody of the ballots was adequately protected; and make sure any oddities that are noticed are not dismissed without being recorded and resolved.