

UNDERSTANDING REJECTED MAILED BALLOTS IN WA STATE

Findings from Individual Voter Interviews

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do voters experience the vote-by-mail, ballot return, and ballot curing processes?
- To what extent are challenged ballots cured by voters?

PROCESS

The EPIC team identified

34

respondents from our voter survey who's ballots were rejected in the November 2022 general election willing to participate in an in-depth interview.



Between June 20 and September 29, 2023, 18 voters were interviewed about the voting experiences in Washington.



Interviews occurred over Zoom and were recorded.



Participants received a \$50 gift card upon completion of the interview.

GENERAL FINDINGS

Most voters indicated that their ballot was challenged due to a mismatched signature, but relatively few voters were aware that the signature was most likely matched to the signature captured at the Department of Licensing (DOL) when they registered to vote.



"It didn't match what I have on my driver's license, which is back from when I was 16 and didn't know what my signature would be. So, I just wrote my name down."

Voters chose to not cure their ballot for various reasons:

- They received notification about their challenged ballot after election day.
- Voters were too busy or found the process too much of a hassle.
- Voters intended to cure their ballot but forgot.
- Voters thought the process was confusing.



"Now, I didn't remediate it because my vote would not have changed any of the outcomes in that election, and it was kind of a hassle to figure out where to go and what to do."



"I think the process as a whole makes sense...But I did get kind of confused by what the letter was for, so I don't remember if it said like, I don't know. It just looked very serious, and it kinda spooked me for a second, so I didn't really know what was going on. So, I guess that would be my only complaint, but like besides that it was pretty straightforward."

Voters noted that they don't have a "standard" signature. The signature used on their driver's license may be quite different from everyday signatures, such as those used when signing credit card receipts.



"I got married and changed my name, and I don't sign my name very often, and so I don't really have a signature for my new last name. And so, I think whenever I sign it, I just kind of sign it without having like an established signature in my mind. And so, every time I think it turns out a little different, and so pretty much, I think every time I find I do it I get it back, saying that it's challenged."

Some voters preferred placing their ballot in ballot boxes due to perceptions of greater security.



"Yeah, I feel it's way more secure when I drop it in the drop box because, in my eyes, no one else is putting their hands on it before it gets to the people that are like working in the election that are meant to see it."

Half of voters returned their ballots via a drop box and about half returned their ballots through USPS.



"I trust my mailman, I trust in the mail system. So, I feel like it should be secure and not tampered with. Same thing with dropping in the drop box."

Many voters indicated that they had found a ballot box that was convenient and anticipated using this same drop box location in future elections.



"I usually end up taking my vote down to the ballot box down the street from us."

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Evaluate areas impacting voters such as timing and methods of ballot cure notices, local contexts like drop box locations and competitive elections, and signature quality across platforms.

Investigate the impact over time of mailed signature update letters on voters.

Pursue research collaboration with county elections offices to measure the impact of innovative practices, such as methods of contacting voters, automatic signature verification, modified cure letter formats and methods of verification, or new ballot processing technology.

LET'S COLLABORATE

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