



ANNUAL REPORT

POST- ELECTION

In November 2022, Maine conducted an overwhelmingly successful state election.

This election featured extremely high voter turnout and smooth election administration. In order to help ensure a successful election, the League of Women Voters conducted several forms of election observation and voter assistance prior to and on Election Day. The cornerstone of our work was our nonpartisan Election Observation program: volunteers and staff deployed in all 16 Maine counties conducted a total of 140 detailed polling place observations. This report offers a summary of the successes and challenges of Maine's November 2022 election, relying on the information collected through the League's election observation and assistance programs.





Top | Voters in Bridgton.

SUMMARY

The November 2022 election in Maine went very smoothly. Anticipated concerns about election misinformation, disruptions at the polls, or refusal to accept election results did not materialize; and issues reported were relatively minor and isolated.

Additionally, registration-related actions taken prior to the election, including voter list maintenance and the introduction of automatic voter registration, did not produce significant issues. **Voters and observers reported positive experiences** voting absentee by mail or dropbox, voting in person prior to Election Day, and voting on Election Day.

Long lines were a minor issue in some larger municipalities, and there were infrequent reports of incorrect signage or incorrect information given to voters. Taken together, **Maine's 2022 election provides an example of a successful, high-turnout election** with many positive lessons and some small examples of areas to improve.



VOTER HOTLINE

and Other Pre-election Work



September through Election Day. Staff and volunteers handled **61 calls**.

The League's voter hotline provided real-time help to voters around the state from September through Election Day. Staff and volunteers handled **61 calls** that ran the gamut from straightforward factual questions to requests for help with specific voting obstacles or dilemmas. Most questions fell into these general categories:

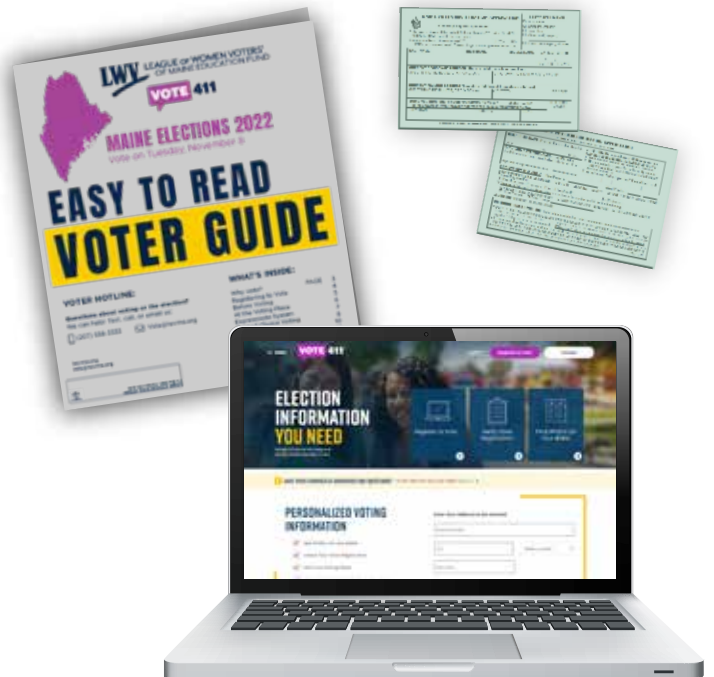
- Information about what was on the ballot/requests for League Voter Guides
- Materials needed to register to vote
- Signing or returning absentee ballots
- Poll locations

There were callers who needed transportation, had questions about ranked choice voting, and who wanted to know if noncitizens could vote. The final call came in late on Election Day; a student was worried that they didn't have the identification needed to register. As in most cases, we were able to answer the student's question immediately, confirming that they could indeed register and vote.

Several homebound voters faced obstacles at various stages of the absentee voting process. They had

received their ballots too late to return them by mail, or they were unsure who could witness their ballot or legally return it for them. We were able to inform them of the laws, but we couldn't always offer a solution to these barriers.

What was common to these cases was the callers' determination to vote. Volunteers and staff enjoyed working directly with voters and would have been happy to handle more calls. We plan to build on the hotline's success in future election cycles by promoting it as a trusted resource for libraries and other public service agencies.





Right | Voters waiting in line at St. Pius, Portland.
Top | Voters in Rockland.

Not just "watching paint dry" — Early absentee ballot processing

For clerks of cities and large towns, processing completed absentee ballots before Election Day is a critical step in managing their workload. Maine law requires that clerks post the dates and times when early processing will occur and allow members of the public to observe. On request, members of the public must also be allowed one hour to inspect boxes of unopened ballots and compare voters' signatures on the envelopes with those on their absentee ballot applications.

In the days before the election, we observed absentee ballot processing in Maine's three largest cities. We saw teams of partisan inspectors checking hundreds or thousands of unopened ballots during their allotted hour. In

Bangor, a team of 12 was able to inspect 12 of 24 boxes of ballots. Our observers noted that overall, relations between municipal clerks and inspectors were friendly and respectful. We did not observe any challenges.

Town clerks like to say that observing absentee ballot processing is about as exciting as watching paint dry. It's true that the work is repetitious and routine, with multiple checks and balances to protect voters' privacy and prevent errors or fraud. Given that false claims about absentee voting irregularities were being spread in the run-up to the election, it was worth the risk of boredom for observers — partisan or nonpartisan — to witness the fair and professional handling of absentee ballots by local election workers.

Concerns about disinformation and disruption

Lies and conspiracy theories about the conduct of the 2020 election have taken root around the country, and they are still very much alive as we write this in 2023. With this in mind, we watched for possible viral outbreaks of disinformation or coordinated campaigns to disrupt the election. Staff and volunteers attended training by experts from ReThink Media, who warned that publicly denouncing lies and fringe theories could backfire by calling attention to them. We saw no new major eruptions of election disinformation in Maine before the election, but several candidates for state legislative seats shared claims that the 2020 election was "stolen" or that the election process was not to be trusted.

We were alarmed by reports of intimidation and threats targeting election workers. Maine town and city clerks reported facing anger and harassment from voters as never before. Two clerks were targeted by credible threats. We supported legislation that would strengthen the legal consequences for threatening election officials or interfering with their work. Eventually this passed as a new Class D violation of Maine's election law.

Meanwhile, the work of state and local election officials was disrupted by vague and misinformed demands for records. The Secretary of State's office received a torrent of identical letters from "aggrieved citizens" who claimed that they were contemplating suing the state over election integrity concerns. The letters demanded retention of all post-2019 election records. These boilerplate requests originated with national conspiracy theory groups and were duplicated in other parts of the country. The Maine Attorney General's office deemed the requests not credible, and informed the Secretary of State that they could be ignored.

We could not predict what effect disinformation and election denial would have on the midterms in Maine. The June primary went smoothly, and the fall campaign season seemed to be relatively uneventful. We prepared for the worst by training our nonpartisan observers on how to handle disruptions at the polls, but remained hopeful that they would never have to put these guidelines into practice.





Top | “Vote here” flag in Bridgton.

ELECTION DAY

Scope of the Program

The third year of our observation program showed that we have the capacity to run this program consistently. We once again trained and placed over a hundred volunteer observers in polling places around the state. This year, we also placed volunteers and staff in regional leader positions, each taking responsibility for a small team of observers. This made volunteer communication and support much easier, and is key to scaling up our program.

In terms of coverage, we were able to have at least one observation report filed in each of Maine’s 16 counties. Ultimately, **we had observers in 69 towns around the state**, representing over 40% of Maine’s voters. 112 observers filed 149 reports — several towns had more than one polling location, or multiple observers at different times. Those reports represent more than **300 hours** spent observing elections.

Media Coverage

In the run-up to the election, media coverage focused on security concerns and the actions of people seeking to undermine trust in elections. Our program was mentioned frequently; the League was cited as a source for election security information by several media outlets including the **Maine Monitor** and **WMTW**, and our early observations informed our responses. Media coverage of our observation program itself was limited to a **Maine Calling** feature on election day. Our executive director was a guest speaker, alongside the Secretary of State, and one of our observers called in to talk about her experiences. Both Anna Kellar and Secretary of State Shenna Bellows spoke about the role of nonpartisan League observers, and the program as a whole supported trust in our electoral process.

Maine elections clerks field “frivolous requests” in apparent effort to sow distrust

Copy cat demands for elections data mirror those in other states.

BY CAITLIN ANDREWS | SEPTEMBER 7, 2022



Spotlight on election clerks as Maine's summer primary day approaches



Updated: 7:53 PM EDT May 31, 2022



Phil Hirschhorn
Political Reporter



MAINE CALLING
maine public

Maine Calling

How Election Day is proceeding around the state—plus issues that matter to young Mainers from immigrant communities

By Jennifer Rocks, Cindy Han, Jonathan P. Smith

Published November 8, 2022 at 7:00 AM EST





Right | Voters at the South Portland Community Center.
Top | Maine Youth Power students in Cape Elizabeth.

VOTER EXPERIENCE

Well-Organized and Efficiently Run – with Warmth

Election Observers consistently reported that despite high turnout resulting in some delays and occasional long lines, the voter experience was a positive one overall due to the well-organized and efficient manner in which the election was conducted by clerks, wardens, and other election workers. Several observers noted election workers whose warm and cheerful manners went far beyond mere efficiency. A consistent theme, with a few exceptions notable for their infrequency, was the “welcoming” nature of the polling place, with helpful signage and workers willing to answer questions and provide direction when necessary. As an example, in certain areas translators were available to help as needed.

A Community Event

An overarching theme reported by election observers is the communal nature of elections in Maine. One observer noted that the experience at the polling place is a “community event,” while another reflected “this is what democracy looks like” — a community space packed with people of all ages behaving civilly even when positions on candidates and issues were clearly divergent. Many observers saw parents and grandparents bringing children and grandchildren with them. Multiple observers reported that polling places were serving a dual function as sites of fundraising or information dissemination by local organizations such as historical societies and libraries. Also of note is the role of law enforcement personnel, who when observed (and mostly were not) were non-threatening and unobtrusive.

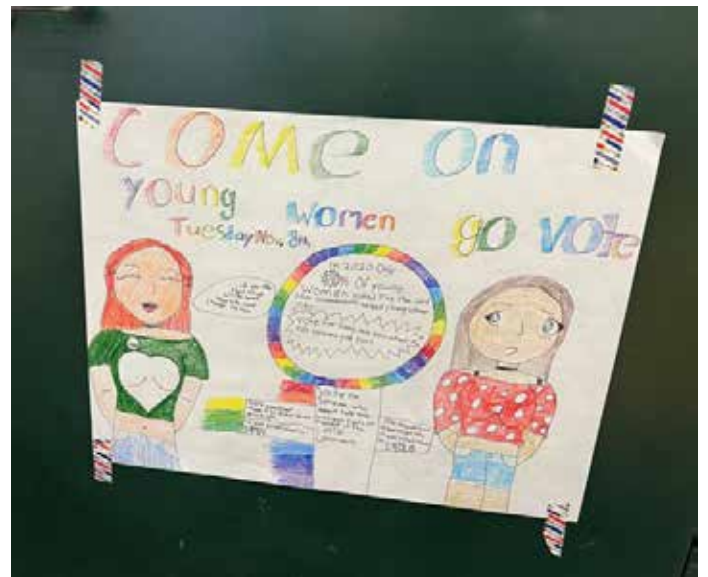
Noteworthy Anecdotes

Anecdotes of specific cases reflected perfectly the warmth of the process and the community aspect of the voter experience in Maine:

- A longtime poll worker was presented with a cake in celebration of her 99th birthday.
- One Town Clerk was notified by a friend of a voter that the voter could not be present to vote on Election Day because he had been taken to the hospital with an apparent heart attack. The Clerk gave the friend an absentee ballot request form and ballot with instructions on how to complete and return it.
- Multiple observers described the scene as “joyful,” “chatty,” and “friendly.” Not surprisingly, in some towns most voters appeared to know the election workers by name.

Cooperation among Observers

Most observers reported that partisan or other observers were also present at the polling place. Most observers appeared to be there to truly “observe” by watching the process and lines, and in some cases by taking notes and reporting to their organizations. Some observers did check specifically as to the numbers of ballots cast and of voters registering. Some noted to League observers that they were looking for incidents or disruptions. In general, our observers reported that other observers were positive and cooperative, and any fears of disruptions by partisan observers were not realized.



Top | Registering to vote in Fryeburg.

Middle | “Go Vote” sign in Winthrop.

Bottom | Voters checking in in Kennebunk.

VOTER EXPERIENCE cont.

Very few issues

Generally, voters faced few obstacles to voting or disruptions at the polling place. Broadly speaking, issues reported were isolated in nature and did not lead to large numbers of voters being prevented from casting ballots. This section will briefly summarize the issue areas which saw isolated incidents that delayed or other prevented voters from easily casting their ballots.

Long Lines

In 11 polling place observations, lines longer than 45 minutes were reported. These reports tended to be concentrated in medium to large municipalities and in several cases were connected with two specific issues: long lines to deposit ballots at scanners, or a polling place running out of ballots¹.

In the case of polling places running out of ballots, two backup options were used: municipalities received permission to use their unused absentee ballots or they were granted permission to make photocopied ballots if those were exhausted².

Generally speaking, voters were patient and understanding, and were not denied the right to vote despite some longer than anticipated lines. Four instances were reported of voters reaching the front of the line and then leaving without voting: these were instances of being told they needed to update their registration or go to a different polling place.



Top | Long line at Grace Baptist Church, Portland

One additional issue noted in several pollings places was a substantially longer line for one part of the alphabet; for example, a polling place might have a long line for last names A through L and a small or no line for M through Z.

Notes:

1. In one instance, the scanners programmed for specific local ballots had gone to the wrong polling places, causing significant delays at the beginning of the day. Once the scanners were returned to the correct polling places, these delays disappeared
2. Without explicit permission, it is a federal offense to copy ballots. In the case of photocopied ballots, these ballots were hand counted.



Top | Voters waiting in Bath.

Inaccurate Voting Instructions

Almost uniformly, voters received correct and helpful instructions from election workers on the requirements and information needed to vote or to register. In two polling places, some college students who needed to register to vote initially received incorrect or incomplete information, but in both situations this was remedied. All other instances of incorrect information reported given by a poll worker were also quickly corrected. One instance was reported of a municipality with a sign listing incorrect requirements to register to vote, and one instance was reported of an election official refusing to give any information on how to complete a ranked-choice ballot.

AVR Registration Deadline

One potential issue the League was monitoring for was confusion over late registration using automatic voter registration (AVR) at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV). Under state law, voter registrations taking place at the BMV fewer than 21 days before Election Day are not applied to that election, so the League was monitoring for any confusion from affected voters. However, Maine's same-day registration law allows these voters to register on Election Day, so major issues were not reported. At a couple of polling places with longer same-day registration lines, such as the Portland Expo, this caused frustration for a few voters, but it did not prevent them from voting.

Pictured | Voters waiting in Portland.



Wrong Polling Place

In larger municipalities such as Portland and Gorham, several instances of voters arriving at the wrong polling place were reported³. In nearly all instances, the voters left intending to go to the correct polling place, but in at least four instances with long lines (see above) the voters stated that they would not vote. In at least one instance, a voter reported looking up their polling place on Maine.gov and receiving the wrong location. In at least two instances, voters opted to cast a challenged (provisional) ballot instead of going to another location.

Accessibility

In general, observers found that polling places met accessibility standards. Ramps and elevators were available, as were wheelchair-accessible booths and accessible voting systems (AVS) for the visually impaired. Several observers noted that access for voters with disabilities could have been better marked and that long lines and narrow aisles could have presented barriers for voters with mobility challenges. In these situations, though, poll workers — as well as other voters — seemed to go out of their way to ensure people were able to vote.

Where there were long lines, voters with physical limitations were offered chairs or encouraged to move up in the line; where doorways or aisles were narrow, poll workers helped clear a path; and where accessible entrances or exits were not clearly marked, poll workers showed voters where to go. Poll workers also supported voters who needed assistance in filling out their ballots.

Overall, in some polling places infrastructure improvements could be made to enhance the experience for voters with disabilities, allowing them to vote independently, and improve overall flow. However, challenges with current infrastructure did not seem to keep people from voting.

Notes:

3. Note that towns with multiple polling places conducted redistricting in 2021, since the last federal election, so for some voters, their polling place had changed since the last time they voted.

OTHER ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS



Top | Collecting signatures in South Portland.

Signature gatherers

Most election observers noted the presence of signature gathering tables at polling places. The LWVME election observers reported that most signature gatherers at the polls were related to citizen's initiatives at the state level. Notable among these were: "Right to Repair", Paid Family Medical Leave, and Voter Approval for Certain State Borrowing.

Some of the tables were gathering signatures relative to specific city/town issues. Included among these were local ordinances (solar farms, food trucks), and funding of nonprofits (such as food pantries and historical societies).

Some community organizations also had tables at the polls. Examples of these

were historical societies, local nonprofits and libraries. Exit polls were reported in two places.

Tables were located both in and outside of the polling place. At some of the smaller polling places, it was noted that the indoor tables caused some crowding of space.

Inactive Voters

In the summer of 2022, Maine performed its federally mandated voter list maintenance. This resulted in many voters who had not voted in several elections being changed to "inactive" status. This did not cancel their registrations, but observers were trained to watch for any issues arising from confusion around inactive voter status.

Few incidents relative to inactive voter concerns were reported and most were resolved by the voter stating their address of residence, or re-registering the voter with identification and residence credentials. In some cases, the voter left, and returned to register with the credentials needed. At one polling place the inactive voter list created some frustration which was resolved with proof of residence.

In Gorham, there was some confusion due to a recent renaming and renumbering of streets. The issues were resolved, and people were able to vote.

Observer and Clerk Experience

As with the voter experience, observer and Clerk experiences were positive overall, as reflected by the efficient and positive manner in which the election was conducted. Few specific comments relating to observer and Clerk experiences (as opposed to the voter and overall experience) were reported, but the general reports of “smiles”, cheerfulness, helpfulness and apparent “joyfulness” of the election workers would lead one to believe the experience was a positive one for all!

One observer did note that the Assistant Clerk at that location expressed appreciation for the advance notice that the observer would be present. One or two observers noted questions by partisan observers as to the League’s role, and one reported snide comments about nonpartisan election observation by a member of the public when leaving the polling place.

Again, there were not many comments as to the specific experiences of observers and election workers, but the overall reports of positive and “uplifting” atmospheres suggest that those specific experiences were positive as well. Many observers noted they would volunteer again, which is further evidence of a positive experience.



Top | Poll workers in Falmouth.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislative and Local Policy/Practice

The November 2022 election provides an opportunity to learn and reflect on what makes Maine's elections so successful and what additional policies and practices can improve them further.

Clarify Absentee Ballot Return Procedures

Procedures for properly returning absentee ballots were an occasional source of confusion prior to and on Election Day. One recurring issue that has been observed is that if a voter is no longer able to return their own ballot close to Election Day and they do not have an immediate family member able to return it, there is no provision in law for the voter to easily have a third party (such as a friend or community member) return their ballot.

With the rise of absentee drop boxes, it may be worth considering who can return ballots to drop boxes to facilitate returning these ballots. Additionally, when voters bring absentee ballots back to a polling place that is not the town or city hall, this often causes confusion; in some municipalities the ballot can be returned there, in other municipalities the ballot must be brought to town/city hall or spoiled. This is confusing for both voters and polling place workers, and it may be worth considering legislation and technology upgrades to allow ballots to be returned to all polling places.



Top | AVR launch ceremony in Scarborough.

Streamline BMV Registration Process

Voters who register to vote using AVR at the BMV fewer than 21 days before Election Day have to re-register on Election Day since their BMV registration is not processed prior to Election Day under current state law and procedures. This was observed to cause confusion and frustration for some voters who believed they were fully registered to vote, particularly in polling places with long same-day registration lines. It may be worth considering legislation and technology upgrades to shorten or eliminate this 21 day cutoff period.



Pictured | Voter signs in Limerick.

Implement Modern Voting Technology

Maine has forward-thinking election laws that allow voters many options for casting their ballots, which plays a major role in the overall success of Maine elections. One obstacle to more accessible elections is fully modern technology that gives voters more information and flexibility. Technologies widely used elsewhere such as electronic pollbooks would improve the ability of municipalities to track and accept absentee ballots. Other technological advances to improve voting, such as online voter registration and a modern central voter registration system (CVR), are expected in the next two years and stand to improve the voting experience.

Adopt More Accurate and Consistent Signage

One issue that continues to generate occasional problems for voters is incorrect or unclear information about various aspects of the voting process, including requirements for registration and the deadline (and exceptions to the deadline) for requesting absentee ballots. While training and education go a long way towards ensuring voters have correct information, not all voters are able to access these resources when needed. Providing more uniform and accurate election signage at polling places and local government offices on and before Election Day would help establish a baseline of understanding among voters, poll workers, and municipal staff. And having this signage developed by the Secretary of State's office would ensure the accuracy and consistency of the messages being received and disseminated across the state.

CONCLUSION

Pictured | Boothbay Harbor.



Mainers should be proud of how smoothly and professionally the November 2022 election was run. Election administrators, poll workers, and voters worked hard, and worked together, to make this election a success. In this time of heightened scrutiny and pressure on elections, the November 2022 election provides reassurance that Maine's election laws and administration are effective in ensuring voters are able to cast ballots and have their votes count.

The election also provides lessons that are useful to consider in advance of high-profile elections in 2024. Particular attention should be paid to line management; bottlenecks such as limited ballot scanners, unbalanced check-in lines, or ballot shortages that caused delays in 2022; while they were significant but reasonable in 2022, in a presidential election these sorts of delays could create unacceptably long lines. Additionally, consistent and uniform voter information should be a priority for 2024. Voters receiving inconsistent information about voter registration requirements, absentee voting procedures, and more, is always a concern, but it is an especially important consideration for the 2024 presidential election, when we expect a high turnout of infrequent and first-time voters. Standardization of signage and other voting resources will create a better election experience for both voters and local election officials.

Maine has a proud and distinctive election tradition. Our municipal system consists of more than 500 cities and towns, each running its own elections. This system has its challenges and inefficiencies, but these drawbacks are balanced by strong local connections between election officials and voters. As our observers testify, voting is a community event. Maine can build on its history of extraordinarily high voter turnout by continuing to improve and modernize our safe, secure, and accessible elections and by supporting our hardworking election officials.