

2021-2022

Comprehensive Election Audit Report



Eastland County

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

In 2021, the Texas Legislature enacted [Senate Bill 1](#) (87th Leg., 2nd Called Special Session), which included a provision requiring the Office of the Secretary of State to conduct audits in four randomly selected counties. [Section 127.351](#) of the Texas Election Code provides that the Secretary of State shall conduct an audit of the elections held in the preceding two years after the most recent November uniform election occurring in an even-numbered year. On July 28, 2022, the Secretary of State conducted a drawing to determine which counties would be audited for the 2021-2022 election period. In this drawing, Eastland County, along with Cameron, Guadalupe and Harris counties, was selected as one of the counties to be audited in the 2021-2022 election cycle.

Comprehensive Findings

The audit of all elections conducted for the 2021-2022 election period revealed, as cited in this report, both election-specific concerns and broader patterns within the administration of elections in Eastland County. These findings identify areas in which the county is consistently meeting legal requirements and areas of needed improvement.

Notable Findings

Voter Registration & List Maintenance

Eastland County utilizes the statewide system as their primary voter registration system. Because of this, the Secretary of State has substantial insight into all county voter registration activities.

As of November 2022, the county reported 12,282 registered voters¹ eligible to vote in the November 8, 2022 General Election resulting in a registration rate of 87.9% of the voting age population. During the audit period, the county saw a 3.4% increase in voter registration.

Both state and federal law require counties to continuously update their voter registration lists to ensure that only eligible voters are registered to vote in the county in which they reside. Eastland County consistently performs list maintenance activities and retains all required voter registration records in accordance with state law. During the audit period, the county cancelled 519 voter registrations following a county review of voters who may have been deceased and 2 voter registrations were cancelled due to non-citizenship. There were no voter registration cancellations due to felony conviction. A total of 780 voter registrations were cancelled for duplicate registration records for voters who may have moved to other Texas counties. The

¹ <https://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/historical/nov2022.shtml>

county cancelled 71 voter registrations following an effort to confirm residency in Eastland County.

Eastland County should continue processing voter registration applications and record updates in a timely manner. Likewise, the county should prioritize all list maintenance activities to ensure that only eligible voters are able to cast a vote in Eastland County.

Continuous Improvement & Reconciliation

After reviewing multiple elections, it is evident that Eastland County has made a considerable effort to improve their process and procedure with each election. Specifically, the evolution of their chain of custody forms demonstrates the county's effort to improve their tracking of election technology and supplies. This instills more confidence in the security of election systems, and the granularity of information also leads to a more streamlined process for reconciliation.

Areas for Improvement

Election Security & Contingency Planning

Eastland County does not have a Written Information Security Plan (WISP). Information technology services in Eastland County are provided by a third-party vendor. Though the contracted vendor representatives verbally explained the policies and procedures used to maintain, monitor, and secure the county technological infrastructure, the county does not have their own written documentation. The county should have their own Incident Response Plans and a Continuity of Operations Plan to ensure the county can consistently meet their statutory duties related to elections. Likewise, a written vendor risk management plan should be in place for all vendors providing services for the county election office and accessing sensitive and confidential voter registration and election data. Extensive training should be provided to all county personnel on security and contingency planning.

Many counties in Texas with limited resources for information technology and security services rely on third-party vendors for the oversight of these services. However, the ultimate responsibility of ensuring the security of elections falls on the county. Counties must implement effective policies and procedures that include the monitoring of these technology and security services and must have safeguards in place to ensure that services are being provided based on the contractual agreements and in compliance with all legal requirements.

Training of Election Workers

The county training program should include more detailed instructions and written documentation related to the responsibilities of a presiding judge, as the materials did not prepare election judges with adequate instruction. The county's current training lacks specificity in polling location procedures, the completion of required documentation, and a thorough understanding of the importance of these responsibilities. Training materials should, but do not, include examples of properly completed forms, troubleshooting guidance on common

equipment issues, and signature requirements which verify the essential two-person verification of chain of custody and reconciliation activities.

Retaining Election Records

While voted ballots, voting equipment, and electronic media are maintained in a secure storage area limited to only county election staff, the remaining precinct election records and election supplies were not stored in a secure area free from potential damage and destruction. Eastland County could not produce all required precinct election records upon request. This shortcoming varied from isolated documents in specific polling locations to entire categories of records from specific elections. The county must maintain all precinct election records in an organized manner and in compliance with state law.

Conclusion

While Eastland County has a comprehensive voter registration program and has made great strides in improving their physical security and documentation, these audit findings identify several key areas in need of improvement. Making necessary improvements in these areas will not only further safeguard their elections but will demonstrate to the voters of Eastland County that they can have confidence in their election process and outcomes.