

**Alliance for Competitive Elections (ACE)**

**2025 Northern Colorado  
Limited Local Election Assessment**

**Preliminary Statement**

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## **Study Overview**

ACE conducted a limited election study between October 20 - November 4, 2025 focusing predominately on the cities of Fort Collins, Boulder, and Longmont. The purpose of this study was to observe the overall campaign and election ecosystem, as well as assess candidates' ability to freely compete within local elections. This limited election assessment will serve as the groundwork towards more robust election observation missions conducted by the Alliance for Competitive Elections in the future.

### ***Methodology***

According to the Colorado Revised Statutes, only candidates and ballot measure interest groups may appoint official poll watchers to observe at specific polling stations. Additionally, only the Secretary of State may appoint "Official Observers" or approve observers appointed by the federal government. Due to these restrictions, ACE observed local elections in a private citizen capacity, conducting informal interviews with nongovernmental organizations, candidates, campaign managers, and officials. This study is predominately qualitative in nature and thus is not statistically representative statewide.

Locations were chosen to understand differences between campaign environments operating under different electoral systems which have recently implemented election reforms. Locations were also chosen in geographically adjacent areas due to logistics limitations.

## **Acknowledgements**

ACE thanks the election officials, county clerks, poll workers, party representatives, and civil society organizations who work to ensure competitive elections in Colorado. ACE also thanks the numerous individuals who met with observers during this study to better understand the context of Colorado local elections.

## **Disclosures**

ACE remains committed to being a transparent, nonpartisan organization. Clayton King received funding towards organization startup from Courageous Colorado. Kyle Beaulieu, a member of the board, was also a candidate for Lafayette city council during this study.

## Executive Summary

The Alliance for Competitive Elections (ACE) conducted a limited assessment of local elections in Fort Collins, Boulder, and Longmont between October 20 and November 4, 2025. The study examined how electoral rules, campaign regulations, and local administrative practices shape candidates' ability to freely and competitively participate in municipal elections. While this domestic observation mission was limited in scope, ACE's findings offer an evidence-based foundation for future observation missions.

Across all three municipalities, ACE found that elections were administered professionally, transparently, and in accordance with Colorado law. County clerks and election staff demonstrated strong operational competence, particularly in managing Colorado's all-mail ballot system, implementing secure ballot-processing procedures, and communicating deadlines and curing requirements.

Voter turnout across the study area reflected healthy participation for an off-year local election cycle, with Boulder County approaching roughly 48 percent turnout (including Boulder and Longmont),<sup>1</sup> and Fort Collins exceeding turnout expectations for its first citywide ranked-choice voting (RCV) election. Early indications suggest that mail-ballot familiarity and strong voter-education infrastructure contributed to stable turnout despite national-level uncertainty.

That broader uncertainty—stemming from heightened political violence, misinformation pressures, and the recent sale of a major voting-technology company—reinforced public sensitivity to election security and legitimacy. While ACE did not observe credible claims of fraud, intimidation, or systemic malfunction, the environment underscores the need for robust nonpartisan election observation as a tool for building trust. Current Colorado law limits watcher appointments to parties, candidates, and issue committees, preventing neutral civil-society groups from participating in structured observation.<sup>2</sup> ACE finds that expanding nonpartisan observation—domestic and international—would strengthen transparency and help counteract misperceptions about election integrity.

ACE observers also identified several legal and structural features of Colorado's nonpartisan municipal elections that shape, and at times constrain, candidate competition. Across Fort Collins, Boulder, and Longmont, city-level statutes and administrative interpretations influenced when candidates could announce, how campaigns could coordinate, and which entities could legally endorse or support candidates. In some jurisdictions—particularly Longmont—local ordinances restrict candidates from urging others to withdraw, even in good-faith attempts to mitigate vote-splitting. In others, rules governing political activity by city employees or limitations on formal party involvement created unequal access and concerns for freedom of speech.

At the same time, ACE found barriers to public access to election complaints. While Fort Collins maintains a visible public complaints log, Boulder's complaint submission and publication processes were difficult to access or verify electronically. Improved complaint disclosure would strengthen public accountability and ensure consistent standards across municipalities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://electionresults.bouldercounty.gov/Home/IndexCategory/49.html>

<sup>2</sup> Colorado permits appointed “watchers” at Voter Service and Polling Centers (VSPCs) and ballot processing facilities. By rule, watchers must be appointed by a political party, a candidate, or a registered issue committee (and must meet eligibility/training requirements). Currently state law does not include specific language allowing independent domestic or international NGOs to appoint observers as official election watchers.

Taken together, findings highlight a highly capable election administration system operating alongside a complex and uneven regulatory environment for candidates, shaped heavily by nonpartisan election rules, municipal statutes, and informal political networks. These dynamics do not undermine the integrity of election administration, but they do influence who can compete effectively—and how easily voters can access information needed to make informed choices.

## **Recommendations**

ACE offers the following preliminary recommendations based on observed election administration practices, candidate experiences, and regulatory impacts across Fort Collins, Boulder, and Longmont during the 2025 coordinated election. These recommendations aim to strengthen transparency, enhance fairness in nonpartisan municipal elections, and improve the ability of candidates, voters, and political organizations to participate freely and equitably in local democratic processes.

### ***To the Colorado General Assembly:***

#### **1. Enable certified nonpartisan election observation.**

The General Assembly should direct the Colorado Secretary of State to establish rules permitting formal nonpartisan election observation by domestic and international organizations. This should include clear criteria for certifying nonpartisan observer groups and standardized procedures for designating election watchers. Creating this framework would modernize oversight practices and reduce reliance on informal observation.

#### **2. Formally invite international observation missions to Colorado.**

The Colorado General Assembly should adopt a resolution inviting the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to observe the 2026 Midterm Election and future statewide elections. Such an invitation would signal Colorado's commitment to transparent and competitive elections.

### ***To the Fort Collins City Council:***

#### **3. Clarify rules governing party and quasi-party participation.**

Fort Collins should update its municipal election code to ensure consistent regulation of political parties, 501(c)(4) organizations, 527 groups, and other advocacy organizations regarding endorsements and coordinated support. Current restrictions push partisan activity into informal networks, reducing transparency and complicating compliance. Clearer rules would improve enforcement and strengthen voter understanding of candidate affiliations.

### ***To the Boulder City Clerk and City Council:***

#### **4. Improve transparency and accessibility of election-complaint procedures.**

Boulder should make election-related complaints and their resolution status publicly accessible online. Expanding transparency would strengthen accountability and align Boulder's practices with more accessible models in neighboring municipalities.

### ***To the City of Longmont:***

#### **5. Review the Fair Campaign Practices ordinance related to candidate coordination.**

Longmont should review ordinance provisions prohibiting candidates from encouraging others to withdraw. While intended to prevent coercive pressure, the current language may unintentionally restrict good-faith strategic communication and exacerbate vote-splitting in crowded at-large contests. A more narrowly tailored provision would preserve safeguards while supporting fair competition.

## Political Context

Colorado's 2025 local elections unfolded amid a heightened national climate of political violence and election-integrity concern. On September 10, 2025, conservative activist and commentator Charlie Kirk was assassinated at a public event at Utah Valley University. The event revitalized multipartisan concern about election-related security.

On October 9, 2025 voting-technology firm Dominion Voting Systems—whose equipment is used in Colorado and across the United States—was acquired by Liberty Vote, a company led by former Republican election official Scott Leiedecker. The sale occurred one day before most counties began mailing ballots. However, Colorado election officials reported they did not anticipate operational disruptions due to the ownership change.<sup>3</sup>

In 2021, the Colorado legislature passed HB 21-1071, creating a statewide framework that allows municipalities to adopt instant-runoff voting (IRV)/RCV for their coordinated elections starting January 1, 2023. The law mandates rule-making by the Secretary of State to certify voting systems for IRV and ensure proper tabulation, audit, and reporting standards.<sup>4</sup> Since then, several cities have adopted alternative methods under this framework.<sup>5</sup>

Voters in Fort Collins approved RCV in 2022 with 58.15 percent support, making the 2025 municipal election the city's first conducted under the new system.<sup>6</sup> The ballot includes four contests: Mayor and Council Districts 1, 3, and 5. Seven candidates are running for mayor, while three candidates are contesting each of the open council seats. All Fort Collins local elections are "non-partisan" per Article VIII, Section 2 of the City Charter. The 2025 Coordinated Election website for Larimer County reports "Active Voters: 275,862" in the county as of the election.<sup>7</sup>

In 2020, Boulder voters approved Ballot Measure 2E, establishing direct mayoral elections using RCV, first implemented in 2023.<sup>8</sup> The 2025 election does *not* use RCV, but will use multimember districts to fill four of nine at-large council seats. Eleven candidates filed, including four incumbents.<sup>9</sup> While no mayoral race is held this cycle, council contests remain competitive. All Boulder local elections are "non-partisan" per Article III Section 27 and Section 6 of the Boulder City Charter. The Boulder County Clerk & Recorder lists total registration (active + inactive) at 254,899 and active registered voters at 238,125.<sup>10</sup>

The City of Longmont conducts nonpartisan municipal elections as part of Boulder County's coordinated election system, using traditional plurality (first-past-the-post) voting for all contests.<sup>11</sup> The 2025 ballot includes elections for Mayor, two At-Large City Council seats, and the Ward 2 seat, all filled without a primary. Unlike Fort Collins and Boulder, Longmont has not adopted RCV or other alternative voting methods, and its electoral system remains unchanged for this cycle. Longmont voters are included within Boulder County's 238,125 active registered voters participating in the 2025 coordinated election.

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<sup>3</sup> [Colorado Public Radio+3ABC News+3Axios+3](https://coloradopublicradio.org/colorado-politics/2025-colorado-elections-what-to-expect)

<sup>4</sup> <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1071>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb21-1071>. Cities include Boulder, Basalt

<sup>6</sup> ([City of Fort Collins Elections](https://www.fortcollins.gov/elections) ; Larimer County Clerk and Recorder)

<sup>7</sup> [Larimer County](https://larimercounty.org/elections)

<sup>8</sup> (City of Boulder)

<sup>9</sup> ([Boulder Reporting Lab](https://bouldercolorado.gov/elections/boulder-reporting-lab))

<sup>10</sup> <https://electionresults.bouldercounty.gov/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://longmontcolorado.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-Candidate-Guide.pdf>

In the City of Longmont, Colorado, municipal elections for November 4, 2025 include the Mayor (two-year term), one ward seat (Ward 2, four-year term), and two at-large council seats (four-year terms).<sup>12</sup> Voter registration numbers for the city fall within Boulder County's coordinated election totals.

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<sup>12</sup> [City of Longmont](#)

## Preliminary Results

As of December 9, 2025, official results released by the respective county clerk offices indicate that elections across Fort Collins, Boulder, and Longmont proceeded smoothly and reflected strong voter engagement in local governance. ACE did not encounter significant public doubt about election administration among interviewees, particularly among those already familiar with Colorado's mail-ballot and risk-limiting audit systems.

### **Fort Collins**

In the city's first municipal election conducted using *RCV*, turnout exceeded expectations for a local-only cycle. According to the Larimer County Clerk and Recorder's [Final Posting of Official Results](#) published on November 21, more than 53,275 ballots were cast for mayor. Additionally, unofficial ballot return data indicate a 48.7% turnout of active registered voters.<sup>13</sup>

Race	Winner	Percent	Total Votes	First Round Undervote <sup>14</sup>
Mayor	Emily Francis	56.25%	26,310	11.7%
District 1	Chris Conway	53.78%	4,764	10.8%
District 3	Josh Fudge	63.3%	5,655	15.5%
District 5	Amy Hoeven	57.2%	3,958	X

Unofficial results were promptly and periodically reported by the Larimer County Clerk and Recorder's Elections Division. Final results were published well in advance of the November 26, 2025 deadline in accordance with statute.<sup>15</sup>

ACE applauds the use of animated visuals clearly demonstrating votes transferred to remaining candidates following elimination of candidates in each round. This was particularly impactful for the mayoral election, where the race was not decided until the sixth round, requiring clear communication.

### **Boulder**

In the City of Boulder, voter registration data is only available at the county level. However, 113,888 voters participated in the Boulder city council election in 2025,<sup>16</sup> an statistically insignificant difference compared to 113,374 in 2023.<sup>17</sup>

The four open at-large City Council seats were won by Matt Benjamin, Mark Wallach, Nicole Speer, and Rob Kaplan, each surpassing the unofficial threshold for election once all vote centers were reported.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.larimer.gov/clerk/elections/2025-coordinated-election-data>

<sup>14</sup> Undervote is calculated by determining the number of ballots that were submitted without voting for a specific office.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.larimer.gov/clerk/elections/results/Coordinated-Election-2025-11-13-02-13-pm>

<sup>16</sup> <https://electionresults.bouldercounty.gov/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://electionresults.bouldercounty.gov/ElectionResults2023C/>

Race	Winner	Percent	Total Votes
City Council (four seats)	Matt Benjamin	17.80%	20,276
City Council (four seats)	Mark Wallach	15.34%	17,476
City Council (four seats)	Nicole Speer	14.19%	16,165
City Council (four seats)	Rob Kaplan	13.93%	15,867

### ***Longmont***

In Longmont, the mayoral election yielded similarly statistically insignificant turnout from 2023 to 2025, with 31,844 voters participating. The Longmont election held contests for Mayor, two at-large council seats, and one ward seat. Interestingly, both at-large winners obtained more votes than the mayoral candidate.

Race	Winner	Percent	Total Votes
Mayor	Susie Hidalgo-Fahring	39.08%	12,444
At-Large (Two Seats)	Jake Marsing	29.17%	15,265
At-Large (Two Seats)	Crystal Prieto	24.64%	12,895
Ward 2	Matthew Popkin	54.06%	5,424

Across all three municipalities, ACE observers noted that ballot counting proceeded transparently and that most unofficial results were communicated promptly through official county websites and media partners. No credible allegations of fraud, intimidation, or systemic administrative failure were observed or reported by trusted sources during the election period.

## Preliminary Findings

### Election Environment

#### ***“Nonpartisan” Election Dynamics***

Colorado’s local elections are formally nonpartisan, but ACE’s observation suggests that the absence of party labels on the ballot does not eliminate partisan dynamics. Instead, many traditional party functions—candidate recruitment, data access, issue framing, and voter mobilization—are assumed by a patchwork of nonprofits, informal factions, and issue-based networks that operate alongside or in place of formal party structures. Voters still look for cues; without party labels as mental shortcuts, they must invest more time researching candidates to find ideological alignment. For lower-information voters, this can generate frustration, increase reliance on informal signals, and in some cases discourage participation altogether.

Not only does this patchwork of partisan organizations create confusion for voters, it also serves to disadvantage minor parties. The legal and regulatory structures surrounding local races, such as statutes preventing parties from endorsing candidates, creates a treacherous landscape for formal party organizations supporting campaigns. Candidates from minor parties that lack larger support structures are less able to navigate these barriers and are unable to take risks within regulatory structures without the protection of costly legal counsel that is frequently enjoyed by major parties.<sup>18</sup> For major parties, outside entities such as issue campaigns, 501(c)(4) organizations, independent expenditure committees, and neighborhood associations often act as de facto partisan blocs, shaping endorsements, messaging, and field operations. Likewise, access to voter data, volunteer infrastructure, and training is often mediated by these organizations rather than by the parties themselves.

The ability of parties to legally operate within the local election landscape also varies significantly across jurisdictions. While some municipalities impose few restrictions beyond the absence of party labels on the ballot, others enforce statutory barriers that limit or prohibit formal endorsements, coordinated support, or in-kind benefits from parties to campaigns—sometimes under threat of candidate disqualification. Participants across Fort Collins, Boulder, and Longmont described an electoral environment shaped by informal coalitions, ideological networks, donor blocs, and advocacy organizations operating parallel to, rather than within, formal party structures. Within this context, minor parties and new local groups face persistent barriers in recruitment, communication, and coordination due to limited ballot-line recognition, resource constraints, and the absence of explicit partisan identifiers.

At the same time, nonpartisan elections have rewarded well-organized local networks. Successful groups—often overlapping with major-party ecosystems—have leveraged existing nonprofit and community infrastructure to benefit preferred candidates. Even in formally nonpartisan contexts, endorsement interviews became important mechanisms for member engagement, candidate vetting, and voter education. Yet the nonpartisan framework also introduced notable structural frictions. Candidates reported inconsistent clarity in administrative rules, occasional delays in their candidate information appearing on official election websites,

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<sup>18</sup> For example, statutes preventing a political party from endorsing candidates may directly conflict with first amendment rights to freedom of speech. While such a statute may not be defensible in a court of law, the excessive cost of legal proceedings would prevent a minor party from even risking an endorsement in the first place.

and municipal policies—such as broad restrictions on political activity by city employees—that some perceived as raising freedom-of-speech concerns. Local ordinances in some jurisdictions further constrained strategic cooperation by limiting how directly candidates could encourage one another to withdraw. These rules complicated efforts to reduce vote-splitting in crowded fields and, in some cases, cut off access to party resources entirely.

Fort Collins' chartered nonpartisan system restricts formal party involvement in municipal races, particularly prohibiting coordinated support or in-kind benefits from parties. As a result, parties could not provide candidates with shared data, training, or coordinated field support, resulting in fragmented and uneven campaign capacity. The Democratic Party navigated these restrictions by selling data to candidates rather than providing it as an in-kind contribution. Because the law allows non-party civic organizations, 501(c)(4)s, and neighborhood groups to engage in political activity, these entities effectively became the primary vehicles for endorsements and voter signaling. However, this arrangement also obscured ideological groupings: without party labels, voters had to decipher cues through forums, issue advocacy, and informal networks. Administrative interpretations further shaped the environment: strict restrictions on political activity by city employees and unclear guidance on candidacy announcements created uncertainty around campaign timing and visibility. Some candidates delayed entry, while others struggled to update official listings in a timely manner. In effect, nonpartisan regulations created an election environment where informal factions had outsized influence, while newer or minor-party candidates faced both regulatory barriers and informational disadvantages.

Boulder's nonpartisan framework bars party labels from the ballot but places fewer explicit restrictions on parties' off-ballot activities. As a result, candidates were technically permitted to seek and receive party-aligned support. In practice, however, major parties have historically adopted internal norms of neutrality whenever multiple ideologically similar candidates have entered a race. This self-imposed constraint—combined with nonpartisan ballot rules—shifted campaign dynamics toward issue-based organizations and civic intermediaries. These groups filled the signaling void through endorsement interviews, candidate slates, and debate hosting. Because these groups are allowed to operate freely under nonpartisan rules, they played a defining role in shaping which issues were publicly elevated during the campaign, often narrowing the agenda that reached voters. The nonpartisan structure also left the system more vulnerable to procedural controversies, such as recurring certification disputes, because there are no formal party-based mechanisms to reinforce bipartisan norms. The result was a campaign environment where the absence of ballot labels required voters to rely heavily on endorsements, issue coalitions, and civic group affiliations to understand candidate alignment.

Longmont's nonpartisan, plurality-based electoral system is less restrictive on parties in terms of formal endorsements, as the city does not prohibit political parties from publicly supporting municipal candidates. However, the system simultaneously imposes restrictive local regulations affecting campaign coordination. The Fair Campaign Practices ordinance—which, among other constraints, prohibits candidates from encouraging others to withdraw—prevented candidates with similar platforms from openly discussing consolidation strategies, even when all parties recognized clear vote-splitting risks in crowded at-large races. While non-party organizations, including issue committees, unions, and advocacy groups, may freely endorse candidates, the combination of nonpartisan ballots and coordination restrictions creates an environment where informal political alliances, rather than transparent party structures, shape perceptions of viability. Without primaries or party processes to narrow fields, disparities were amplified: candidates lacking access to major-party-adjacent training, data, or volunteer pools faced steeper structural barriers. Several candidates I reported difficulties navigating compliance,

fundraising, and communications, noting that the system's limits on formal support channels left them to navigate a complex environment with fewer resources. n

### ***Election Systems Dynamics***

Colorado's municipal elections operate under a mix of traditional plurality systems, newly implemented RCV, and varied district structures that include— both single-member and multimember seats. These system differences produced distinct campaign behaviors, voter-information demands, and patterns of coordination.

The introduction of single-winner RCV in Fort Collins shaped campaign behavior in more modest ways than anticipated. While candidates and civic groups invested in voter education, the nonpartisan context limited the emergence of coordinated ranking strategies. Without party labels or formal structures to guide “rank each other” alliances, candidates largely approached RCV as an individual competition system. ACE did observe some candidates encouraging supporters of competitors to rank them as their secondary choice, but such practices were not widespread.. Early indicators suggest that RCV may have reduced negative campaigning in some districts, but it did not broadly drive cross-candidate coalition-building or slate formation during this cycle. RCV's potential to encourage broader consensus-building appears constrained in settings where parties cannot openly coordinate and where informal networks—not formal party structures—serve as the primary engines of political organization.

In multimember settings, such as Longmont's two-seat at-large race, plurality voting created strong strategic tensions. Candidates with similar constituencies could not coordinate to prevent vote-splitting due to statutory prohibitions on urging others to withdraw and the absence of RCV or proportional methods meant that even substantial support bases faced the risk of failing to secure representation. This dynamic was widely recognized by candidates and local advocates, contributing to renewed interest in exploring proportional RCV reforms for future cycles.

Voter adaptation varied by system. RCV jurisdictions required higher levels of informational engagement, and while voters in Fort Collins generally expressed confidence in navigating ranked ballots, many relied on civic organizations—not candidates or parties—to explain how rankings translate into outcomes. In multimember plurality contests, voters reported difficulty evaluating large candidate fields without party labels, and several expressed uncertainty about how to use their vote strategically.

Across all three cities, the election systems in place interacted strongly with local nonpartisan regulations: systems designed to encourage coalition-building (such as RCV) struggled to do so without mechanisms for open party coordination. At the same time,systems prone to vote-splitting (such as multimember plurality contests) provided no structured outlet for candidates to mitigate fragmentation. These dynamics collectively highlight the degree to which electoral system design interacts with legal and organizational constraints, shaping both campaign strategy and the representativeness of election outcomes.

### ***Complaints Process***

Across the three municipalities, the volume, accessibility, and focus of complaints varied considerably. Fort Collins recorded a high number of campaign-finance and disclosure complaints, nearly all filed by one resident. Longmont registered only three formal objections, all directed at nomination petition filings. Boulder did not make complaint records publicly accessible, requiring ACE to request them through CORA. These differences reflect distinct

administrative practices, transparency norms, and reporting environments across the jurisdictions.

In Fort Collins, nineteen official complaints had been filed as of October 27, 2025, nearly all submitted by a single resident and none involving political parties as complainants or respondents. The city maintained readily accessible online records, and the filings focused primarily on campaign-finance reporting and disclosure requirements. Early complaints cited missing “paid-for-by” statements, unreported expenditures, attribution of LLC contributions, and unclear beginning balances; later complaints questioned contribution limit compliance, expenditure timing, and the completeness of committee registrations. Several filings also raised questions about potential coordination between candidates and the New Era Colorado Action Fund’s issue and political committees. Many of the early technical issues were marked as cured, while questions related to coordination and financial sequencing remained under review.

Election-related complaints for Boulder were not accessible online at the time of review. Upon ACE’s request for copies of all submitted complaints, the Boulder City Clerk’s Office indicated that such materials must be obtained through a CORA request. ACE plans to submit a CORA request for these records and will include a full analysis in the final report once the documents have been received and reviewed.

In Longmont, three formal objections were filed, all submitted by sitting local officials and focused on the sufficiency of nomination petition materials for two candidates. The objection concerning mayoral candidate Susie Hidalgo-Fahring raised issues about signer-provided information, including unmarked city fields, circled pre-printed “Longmont” entries, and redacted street addresses on public petition copies. Two additional objections regarding council at-large candidate Jake Marsing focused on the candidate’s sworn documents, noting discrepancies between handwritten dates and notary jurats, unauthenticated alterations, and multiple signatures appearing within affidavit execution fields. In each case, the Clerk determined that the filings met the standard of apparent conformity, relying on the notary’s jurat as the controlling element. The Longmont complaints collectively addressed petition formatting requirements, signer-information completeness, and documentation practices related to public inspection and access.

### ***Debates***

Across all three municipalities, ACE observers noted that the planning and structure of campaign debates were frequently determined by civic nonprofits, neighborhood associations, and issue-based organizations rather than by candidate parties or electoral officials. In the absence of party-label driven infrastructure, these hosting groups played a central role in deciding which issues were elevated and how questions were framed. Some candidates expressed frustration that the topics emphasized in forums did not always align with the full range of concerns they raised in their campaigns. This dynamic was particularly acute in races with many candidates or where non-party forums selected narrow issue sets, limiting opportunities for comprehensive candidate contrast and deeper voter comparison.

Debates in Fort Collins focused heavily on housing affordability, growth management, and fiscal policy. Forums hosted by groups such as League of Women Voters of Larimer County incorporated voter education about the city’s first use of RCV.<sup>19</sup> Candidates noted that debate

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<sup>19</sup> [Coloradoan+2Coloradoan+2](#)

topics remained tightly aligned with the interests of sponsoring organizations, thereby shaping the policy frame through which voters encountered their campaigns.

In Boulder, debates centered on housing, homelessness, and climate adaptation—longstanding focal points of local civic groups. The candidate questionnaire and canvassing coverage indicate those issues dominated campaign discourse.<sup>20</sup> Organizations including Boulder Progressives, PLAN-Boulder County, and the Working Families Party of Colorado (and forums hosted by the League of Women Voters) shaped access and agenda-setting.

In Longmont, debates featured development, land-use, and infrastructure topics, reflecting a campaign environment where issue-sponsoring organizations shaped forum agendas. Civic associations, housing and environmental groups, and business coalitions hosted or influenced the structure and content of candidate forums. Several candidates reported that the crowded at-large field and constrained forum formats limited their ability to address the full scope of their campaign platforms.

## **Election Administration**

### ***Candidate Registration***

Across Boulder, Fort Collins, and Longmont, ACE found that candidate registration was generally administered on schedule and in compliance with municipal procedures. However several recurring issues shaped candidate experiences. While the formal filing steps were straightforward, candidates frequently reported delays in being publicly listed on official city websites, which affected early visibility, event invitations, and media outreach. Confusion over residency and eligibility rules—including when a candidate may announce after moving into a district—also surfaced, with some candidates describing inconsistent guidance from municipal staff.

### ***Mail Ballot Process and Timeline***

In Colorado, every *active registered voter* automatically receives a mail ballot at the address on file, in accordance with the state's all-mail ballot system.<sup>21</sup> Counties may begin mailing ballots up to 22 days before Election Day and must complete the mailing no later than 18 days before Election Day.<sup>22</sup> For the November 4, 2025 Coordinated Election, counties including Boulder, Larimer, Weld, and Denver issued public notices indicating that ballot mailing would begin between October 10–16, consistent with statutory timelines. All ballots must be received—not postmarked—by 7:00 p.m. on Election Day in order to be counted.<sup>23</sup> Voters may return ballots

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<sup>20</sup> [The Boulder Reporting Lab+2](#)

<sup>21</sup> (Colorado Secretary of State — <https://www.coloradosos.gov/pubs/elections/FAQs/MailBallots.html>; C.R.S. §1-7.5-104 — <https://law.justia.com/codes/colorado/2022/title-1/article-7.5/section-1-7.5-104/>)

<sup>22</sup> (Colorado Secretary of State Election Calendar — <https://www.coloradosos.gov/pubs/elections/calendar/2025/2025ElectionCalendar.pdf>; Denver Elections Division — <https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Clerk-and-Recorder/Elections-Division/Upcoming-Elections/Mail-Ballots>).

<sup>23</sup> (Colorado Secretary of State — <https://www.coloradosos.gov/pubs/elections/FAQs/MailBallots.html>; Boulder County Elections — <https://bouldercounty.gov/elections/>)

by mail, drop them in any official 24-hour drop box within their county,<sup>24</sup> or deliver them to a Voter Service & Polling Center (VSPC), which open statewide ahead of Election Day.<sup>25</sup>

#### ***Communication of Ballot Mailing and Drop-off Timelines***

County clerks communicated ballot-mailing schedules and return deadlines through election-specific webpages, the statewide election calendar, and public announcements. Additional reminders were distributed through county social media channels, local government newsletters, and community event calendars, such as the University of Colorado events listing.

ACE observed consistent public communication across Boulder, Fort Collins (Larimer County), and Longmont (Boulder/Weld Counties), though the clarity and prominence of posted information varied by county website.

#### ***Results Tabulation Timeline***

Across Boulder, Larimer, and Weld Counties, ACE observers reported that tabulation proceeded normally, with counties posting initial unofficial results shortly after 7:00 p.m. on Election Night, consistent with Colorado's all-mail ballot procedures. Observers did not identify any irregularities, delays, or operational issues in the handling or reporting of results.

All three counties continued counting ballots in the days following the election—primarily late-arriving drop-box ballots, ballots requiring signature cure, and overseas/military ballots—reflecting standard Colorado practice rather than any deviation from expected timelines. ACE observers noted that this multi-day process was consistent with Colorado law, which permits counties to finalize tabulation and complete the canvass up to 22 days after Election Day.<sup>26</sup>

Counties varied in how frequently they updated unofficial results during the canvass period. ACE observers confirmed that Boulder County published regular updates on its election results page, while Larimer and Weld Counties published fewer interim updates, though all counties met statutory deadlines. This variation reflected differences in county communication practices, not evidence of administrative problems.

No allegations of delays, technical issues, improper ballot handling, or tabulation errors were observed or reported to ACE. All counties completed ballot processing and canvass activities consistent with state requirements. Based on direct observation, ACE concludes that tabulation processes were orderly, timely, and transparent, though public understanding of the multi-day counting process remains uneven, which may contribute to perceptions of delay in close contests.

#### ***Risk-Limiting Audit (RLA) Process***

Colorado law mandates that following each coordinated, general, or primary election, every county must conduct a risk-limiting audit (RLA) to provide statistical confidence that the reported winners accurately reflect voter intent. A risk-limit of, for instance, 3% means that there is at most a 3% chance that an incorrect outcome escapes detection by the audit.<sup>27</sup> For the

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<sup>24</sup> (Colorado Ballot Drop Box Directory —

<https://www.coloradosos.gov/pubs/elections/Resources/CountyElectionContacts.html>)

<sup>25</sup> (El Paso County Clerk — <https://clerkandrecorder.elpasoco.com/elections/>)

<sup>26</sup> (C.R.S. §1-10-101)

<sup>27</sup> [Colorado Secretary of State+1](#)

November 4, 2025 coordinated election, the Colorado Secretary of State has set the risk-limit at 3% and published the list of counties that will conduct comparison RLAs (including Boulder, Larimer, Weld, Denver and most other counties) on its website.<sup>28</sup> Audit events for many counties (for example, Broomfield County) are scheduled for mid- to late-November.<sup>29</sup>

## **Next Steps**

This Preliminary Statement is published by ACE as a conversation starter, with the goal of enabling more competitive elections. As part of this process, ACE will continue monitoring the certification processes of elections in Fort Collins, Boulder, and Longmont, Colorado. Additionally, ACE will continue collecting information to better inform a Final Report, which will be published as a follow-up document to the Preliminary Statement. ACE will collect insights through follow-up conversations with election officials, former candidates, and additional stakeholders, and invites any inquiries, concerns, or requests for clarification for inclusion in the Final Report to be directed to [Admin@CompetitiveElections.org](mailto:Admin@CompetitiveElections.org). ACE looks forward to ongoing engagement to support accurate, comprehensive and constructive reporting.

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<sup>28</sup> [Colorado Secretary of State](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Broomfield+1](#)