

A Report by a Study Team of the
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Protecting Free and Fair Elections: The Vital Role of Election Administration



April 2024

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Protecting Free and Fair Elections: The Vital Role of Election Administration

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About the Academy

The National Academy of Public Administration is an independent, nonprofit, and non-partisan organization established in 1967 and chartered by Congress in 1984. It provides expert advice to government leaders in building more effective, efficient, accountable, and transparent organizations. To carry out this mission, the Academy draws on the knowledge and experience of its over 900 Fellows—including former cabinet officers, Members of Congress, governors, mayors, and state legislators, as well as prominent scholars, career public administrators, and nonprofit and business executives. The Academy helps public institutions address their most critical governance and management challenges through in-depth studies and analyses, advisory services and technical assistance, congressional testimony, forums and conferences, and online stakeholder engagement. Learn more about the Academy and its work at www.NAPAwash.org.

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Foreword

Free and fair elections are at the heart of American democracy, and running elections is a core responsibility of public administrators in the United States. Unfortunately, the early decades of the 21st Century have been characterized by declining public trust in our nation's elections, unnecessary barriers to voting, foreign interference, and widespread disinformation. These issues led the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) to include "[Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter Participation](#)" as one of our field's Grand Challenges in November 2019.

To assist the nation with this Grand Challenge, the Cooley Fanning Family Fund commissioned an Academy review of electoral practices that can ensure free and fair elections through effective public governance and management. The Academy formed a team that developed a shared vision [of election administration](#) and identified practical steps for consideration by elected officials and election administrators. The team concluded that effective election administration consists of 3 major pillars:

- Voter experience,
- Election security, and
- Election workforce.

This is a critically important paradigm for addressing questions of election administration. It encourages us to evaluate policies and practices by whether and to what extent they improve the voter experience, strengthen electoral security, and build the election workforce. To turn this vision into reality, the team identified a wide array of leading practices that could be considered across jurisdictions.

This report is written for a broad audience, including elected officials and the general citizenry. Change takes time, and neither the Study Team nor I expect that major changes will be implemented before this November's election. An advantage of the nation's highly decentralized election management is that it promotes experimentation and security of the overall system. Over time, elected officials—particularly those at the state level—could pass laws to authorize some of the practices highlighted in this report; citizens could push for their consideration; and administrators could consider whether their state's laws allow for implementation of new practices. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Larry Cooley, one of our Fellows, and Marina Fanning for the sponsorship that made this study possible. I appreciate the incredible work of the Study Team that authored this report and the Expert Advisory Group of Academy Fellows who provided such thoughtful guidance. I also appreciate MITRE's National Election Security Lab, which provided technical advice on the report's election security section. It is my hope that this report will enhance public understanding of our election system while fostering constructive actions over time that advance free and fair elections in the United States.

Teresa W. Gerton

President and Chief Executive Officer

National Academy of Public Administration

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	i
Acronyms and Abbreviations	ii
Executive Summary	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	3
Background: Roles and Responsibilities for U.S. Elections.....	5
Chapter 2: Diverse Practices in Election Administration	10
2.1 Voter Experience	10
2.2 Leading Practices to Improve Voter Experience	14
2.3 Election Security	21
2.4 Leading Practices for Strengthening Security	24
2.5 Election Workforce	31
2.6 Leading Practices to Bolster and Strengthen the Election Workforce	34
Chapter 3: Agile Management Techniques	42
3.1 Application to Election Administration	42
Chapter 4: Conclusion	45
Appendix A: Panel (or Expert Advisory Group) and Study Team Member Biographies	46
Appendix B: Tables of Potential Practices	48

List of Figures

Figure 1: Election Administration Pillars & Effective Practices	10
Figure 2: Election Security Factors.....	21
Figure 3: Mitigating Practices for Election Security Threats	30

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym or Abbreviation	Definition
Academy	National Academy of Public Administration
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADA	Automatic Voter Registration
AVR	Ballot Marking Devices
BMD	Bipartisan Policy Center
BPC	Cybersecurity Infrastructure and Security Agency
CISA	Center for Internet Security
CIS	Continuity of Operations
CoOp	Distributed Denial of Service
DDoS	US Department of Homeland Security
DHS	US Department of Commerce
DOC	US Department of Justice
DOJ	Election Assistance Commission
EAC	Election Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center
EI-ISAC	Federal Election Commission
FEC	Help America Vote Act of 2002
HAVA	Internet of Things
IoT	Logic and Accuracy
L&A	Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center
MS-ISAC	National Association of State Election Directors
NASED	National Association of Secretaries of State
NASS	National Election Security Lab
NESL	National Voter Registration Act
NVRA	Presidential Commission on Election Administration
PCEA	

RLAs

Risk-Limiting Audits

VRDB

Voter Registration Database

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Executive Summary

In 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration identified [Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter Participation](#) as one of our field’s Grand Challenges. In recent years, it has become even more apparent that American democracy is facing a crisis of trust and that electoral systems and practices often face attacks despite demonstrations of their overall effectiveness.

With sponsorship from the Cooley Fanning Family Fund, the Academy formed a Study Team to address the Election Grand Challenge by determining how public governance and management can best be used to ensure free, fair, and trusted elections in the United States. The Academy’s team developed a shared vision of election administration and identified effective practices for consideration by elected officials and administrators.

Effective election administration consists of 3 major pillars:

- Voter experience,
- Election security, and
- Election workforce.

Figure 1 identifies effective practices to support each of these critical pillars. These practices are discussed in more detail in later sections of this report.

Figure 1: Election Administration Pillars & Effective Practices

Voter Experience	Election Security	Election Workforce
<p>1. Challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Misinformation2. Difficult to Navigate Electoral Practices3. Long Wait Times at Voting Centers4. Accessibility Challenges <p>2. Practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increase communication2. Increase opportunities to vote<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Registration2. Voting Ease and Accessibility3. Maximizing options for voting	<p>1. Challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Cyber and Physical Security2. Workforce Security3. Election-Related Information and Communication4. Supply Chain <p>2. Practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Utilize Trusted Domains2. Leverage Hosted Services3. Develop Efficient Mechanisms to Manage Open-Records Requests4. Reinforce Chain-of-Custody Rigor5. Support and Expand Post-Election Audits	<p>1. Challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Staff Polling Places2. Setup and Store All Equipment3. Verify Voter Registration4. Provide Ballots to Voters5. Communicate with the Voter at each Step in the Process <p>2. Practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increase training and development2. Nonpartisan Administration of Elections3. Increase the Safety of Election Workers4. Building a Pipeline for the Future

Election officials in jurisdictions throughout the country must run their elections consistent with federal and state laws. They may have limited discretion to adopt these practices without specific authorization by their states, and there is no expectation that major changes or additional authorizations would be granted before the November national election.

This report is written for a broad audience, including:

- Citizens—Americans seeking a broader understanding of how elections are administered may find this paper a helpful survey;
- Legislators at all levels of government—since elections are run in many ways and in accordance with a wide variety of legal approaches, legislators may find it useful to gain a broader understanding by learning about what their peer jurisdictions are doing in this space;
- Elected executive branch officials at all levels of government, along with election boards; and
- Career election officials and volunteers: professionals in the field may gain other perspectives by learning more about the practices of other jurisdictions.

Elections in the United States take place in a decentralized system with many different parts. All Americans can play a role by learning more about the system and getting involved. Previous generations of Americans have worked long and hard to move us toward a more perfect union, and some gave their lives for the right to vote. Together, we can ensure free, fair, and trusted elections now and into the future.

Chapter 1: Introduction

American democracy is facing a crisis of trust. Division and strife of the bitterest sort have become the central facts of public life. Polarization is often accompanied by a decline in both the understanding of, and support for, our nation's basic democratic processes. With the growth of tribalism, respect for the value of democratic processes often takes a back seat to the resulting electoral outcomes. It is increasingly difficult for some citizens to take on the role of a knowledgeable, engaged participant in democracy – irrespective of membership in a particular party or group.

The result is an increasing distrust of electoral systems and practices despite demonstrations of their effectiveness. Intentional and unwarranted doubt has been sown on electoral results without evidence that systemic fraud or manipulation has affected outcomes. For democracy to work, citizens need to understand the rigor and expansiveness of current electoral practice and think through options for pacing improvements within the changing electoral ecosystem..

To be clear, issues of institutional trust broadly have been developing for decades alongside declining trust in other institutions. In 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration identified Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter Participation as the first of the 12 Grand Challenges in Public Administration, noting:

- Voting at the federal, state, and local levels is fundamental to American democracy.
- Citizens must have confidence in electoral systems, processes, and results.
- Electoral integrity and voter participation are enhanced by (1) ensuring that everyone with a legal right to vote can do so; (2) protecting critical election infrastructure, officials, polling places, vote tabulation locations, and storage facilities; and (3) safeguarding such information and communications technology as voter registration databases, voting machines, and other electoral management systems.

The Academy, with MITRE's National Election Security Lab (NESL) as technical advisor, has begun exploring ways to begin addressing this Grand Challenge. The initial result is this report, which focuses not on broad governance and policy questions, but rather on the underlying mechanics of elections. Public administration—election administration—is critical to democratic electoral processes. Although big political questions (electoral college, separation of powers, gerrymandering, voter ID) draw the most attention, strong mechanics ultimately make elections work and serve as the basis for public trust.

Administration matters.

Against this backdrop, a team of experts from the Academy and MITRE NESL have worked together to:

- **Articulate a nonpartisan vision** for strength in the election system—focused on voter experience, security, and the election workforce—that Americans of all stripes could broadly share.

- **Identify interesting examples of electoral practices** in some jurisdictions that citizens should understand, and that – recognizing every state has different legal and organizational systems – other jurisdictions might consider evaluating.
- **Synthesize key points from the many other thoughtful reports** on this topic by other good government organizations.
- **Develop options and proposals** consistent with our decentralized system and the appropriate role of administrators in the democratic process.

Our nation's dedicated election workforce has been subject to rhetorical attacks—and to actual threats of physical violence and online harassment. This workforce is critical to American democracy. Isolated incidents of untrustworthy or illegal behavior by lone officials do not justify denigrating the vast majority of those in a demonstrably dedicated, talented electoral workforce. Although election administrators are not immune from the oversight and evaluation that all government officials should face, they must be able to do their work free from harassment, discrimination, and blanket denunciations of their integrity. Our proposals are offered with the deepest respect for the vital role that the nation's election workforce plays in making American democracy a reality now and for the future.

Although the field of public administration is often viewed as the application of neutral expertise, our nation's career public administrators have a vital role to play in our democracy. For example, consistent with legal requirements, public administrators prioritize maximum access to the ballot box to lawful voters and protect the integrity of the process. Election administrators and voters should receive the support that they need. The democratic system writ large is not dependent upon election administrators alone; citizen education, candidate and governmental support, and ongoing communication must all be brought to bear for the good of the whole.

Many of the ideas in this report may require legislative action, often at the state level. This report is written for a broad audience, including:

- Citizens—Americans seeking a broader understanding of how elections are administered may find this paper a helpful survey
- Legislators at all levels of government—since elections are run in many ways and in accordance with a wide variety of legal approaches, legislators may find it useful to gain a broader understanding by learning about what their peer jurisdictions are doing in this space
- Elected executive branch officials at all levels of government, along with election boards
- Career election officials and volunteers: professionals in the field may gain other perspectives by learning more about the practices of other jurisdictions

Elections in the United States take place in a decentralized system with many different parts. All Americans can play a role by learning more about the system and getting involved. Previous generations of Americans have worked long and hard to move us toward a more perfect union, and some gave their lives for the right to vote. Together, we can ensure free, fair, and trusted elections now and into the future.

Background: Roles and Responsibilities for U.S. Elections

US elections are a complex and decentralized process involving multiple levels of government, each with its own roles and responsibilities. Nearly every week of the year includes an election occurring somewhere in the country.

State Governments:

State governments play a crucial role in conducting elections, and they have the authority to establish election laws, procedures, and regulations within their respective states consistent with federal constitutional and statutory protections. State legislatures determine processes by which the boundaries of Congressional districts and state legislative districts are set through a process known as redistricting or reapportionment. Secretaries of State or equivalent state-level officials oversee elections and voter registration, maintain voter rolls, and certify election results in accordance with a number of federal statutes, including the NVRA.¹ Governors may play a role in calling special elections and certifying the appointment of US Senators in certain circumstances.

In general, the responsibilities of state and local governments include:

- Managing and implementing all aspects of election administration and voting
- Choosing voting methods and purchasing equipment
- Determining voter eligibility and identification requirements consistent with federal law
- Securing election systems and polling places,² and
- Designating a chief election official to oversee elections in the state, in accordance with NVRA mandates

County and Local Governments:

County and local governments run elections by administering such critical processes as voter registration, polling place management, and ballot counting. Elections are usually administered at the county level, though this duty falls to cities or townships in some states.³ These governments coordinate elections in collaboration with state and municipal entities. They are heavily involved in the practical operations of elections. County clerks and local election boards implement procedures, distribute ballots and operate polling places.

Municipal Governments:

- Municipal governments play a crucial role in local elections, overseeing city council, mayor, and town board elections.

¹ National Conference of State Legislatures, "Election Administration at State and Local Levels," December 22, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/election-administration-at-state-and-local-levels>.

² Congressional Research Service, "Federal Role in U.S. Campaigns and Elections: An Overview," September 2018, accessed April 16, 2024, crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45302.

³ National Conference of State Legislatures, "Election Administration at State and Local Levels," December 22, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/election-administration-at-state-and-local-levels>.

- They manage ballot initiatives and referendums, allowing residents to influence local policies directly.
- Local officials, like city clerks, administer election logistics and maintain the integrity of local elections.
- Collaboration with county and state governments ensures effective election administration.

Political Parties and Candidates:

- Political parties play a significant role in the US election process by nominating candidates for various offices and participating in campaign activities.
- Candidates for federal, state, and local offices run for election based on the rules established by each state. They typically need to meet certain eligibility requirements and gather signatures or pay filing fees to appear on the ballot.

Voters:

- US citizens who meet specific eligibility criteria, such as age and residency, have the right to vote in federal, state, and local elections. Voter registration is often required to participate in elections.
- Voters cast their ballots either in person at designated polling places on Election Day or through early voting and absentee voting methods.

The Election Workforce

Elections in the United States are run by the states, and the people who run them vary between states. Some roles, however, are present in all states, although they may have different titles. Throughout this paper, the term “Election official” is used to refer to election administrators such as the chief election officials at the state and local level, their staff, and personnel in supporting offices. The terms “volunteer workers” and “poll workers” refer to people involved in supporting Election Day activities. They are not election workers year-round. Finally, the term “election workforce” will be used to refer to both categories: the election officials and the volunteer workers.

Terms used throughout this paper:

- Election Official
- Volunteer/ Poll Worker
- Election Workforce

Federal law requires each state to have a chief election official responsible for elections in that given state; however, the way that states determine the chief election official differs. In 33 states, the voters select the chief election official, and this is often synonymous with Secretary of State, though the chief election official is the lieutenant governor in Alaska and Utah. In six states, the chief election official is appointed by the governor and called the Secretary of State in all but 2 of these states, which refer to them as the commissioners of elections. In four states, the chief election official is chosen by the state legislature. Finally, there are seven states and Washington,

DC in which the chief election official is chosen by either the commission of elections or the state board.

In addition to the chief election official, 17 states and Washington, DC have a board or commission that oversees elections in these jurisdictions. In 10 of them, the chief election official is a member of the board. The other members are often appointed by the governor and confirmed by the senate. These boards are often structured in a way to promote bipartisan decision making. In the other seven jurisdictions, the chief election official and the board are separate, with the responsibilities of running elections split between the two. The role of the chief election official and their office varies, but this often includes high-level election management tasks such as ensuring that election laws are followed by local officials, administration of the statewide voter registration database, providing training material, and testing and certifying voting equipment.

In total, there are more than 10,000 election administration jurisdictions in the United States, and all need local election workers to run elections and support the day-to-day activities leading up to elections, on Election Day, and following elections. Locally, elections are often run by a single person or entity or a combination of the two. In 34 states, elections at the local level are led by a single individual or entity. For example, in 26 of these 34 states, the primary responsibility falls on a single individual, often the county clerk. In 8 of the 34 states, a local board or commission, typically appointed in a bipartisan manner, is responsible. In the remaining 16 states, local election administration is the responsibility of two or more individuals or entities. Examples of this include an elected county clerk responsible for a wide range of tasks, including the day-to-day operations of registration and voting, and a three-member county board responsible for establishing Election Day procedures.

The most familiar group of election workers are the poll workers. In 2016, there were 917,694 poll workers, the largest group of election workers. The total number of poll workers declined to 775,101 in 2020 due to COVID.⁴ Duties and pay for these workers vary by jurisdiction; however, the main function of the volunteer workers is to handle such Election Day tasks as setting up polling places, checking voter registrations, issuing ballots, aiding voters throughout the process, ensuring proper accounting of ballots at the polling place, and other tasks depending on the laws of the precinct.

Federal Government:

The US Constitution establishes the framework for federal elections. For instance, it outlines the qualifications and procedures for electing members of Congress and the President. The Electoral College, a body of electors chosen by the states, is responsible for electing the President and Vice President. Each state's number of electors is determined by its total number of Senators and Representatives in Congress.

Consistent with this governance framework, the federal government oversees and regulates certain aspects of elections, primarily through laws enacted by Congress. Key federal agencies

⁴ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "2020 Election Administration and Voting Survey Report," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/2020_EAVS_Report_Final_508c.pdf

involved include the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and the US Department of Justice (DOJ).

- The EAC contributes significantly to the security of elections through its testing of voting systems and its introduction of the Election Supporting Technology Evaluation Program (ESTEP). ESTEP creates “draft standards that can be used by voting system test laboratories or other testing partners.” ESTEP supports security and accessibility criteria alongside this voluntary certification scheme for vendors, state, and localities to ensure poll books are subjected to rigorous testing.
- The DOJ supports the enforcement of both civil and criminal federal voting rights laws through the Voting Section of the Civil Rights Division, the Public Integrity Section of the Criminal Division, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- In 2021, the DOJ established a cross-agency Election Threats Task Force that included the Department of Homeland Security among its partners to address threats of violence against election workers.⁵

There are six broad categories of law through which the Federal government affects campaigns and elections: campaign finance (FEC and DOJ), election oversight and assistance (EAC and DOJ), election security (DHS and DOJ), redistricting and qualifications (DOC and DOJ), contested elections (House and Senate), and voting rights (DOJ).⁶ Within these categories, the federal government's role includes activities such as:

- Providing the Census Bureau data to the states to facilitate redistricting
- Providing some funding to states to improve federal elections
- Facilitating voluntary information-sharing and best practices among states
- Regulating campaign finance in federal elections
- Prohibiting voter discrimination based on color, race, or language
- Facilitating access to absentee voting by members of the uniformed services and overseas civilians, and their families, and
- Assisting states with election security to respond to threats that are beyond normal state or local capabilities⁷

Several federal statutes have significant effects on election administration, including:

- Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (most recently updated in 2009)
- Help America Vote Act (2002)
- National Voter Registration Act (1993)
- Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act (1984)
- Voting Rights Act (1965)

⁵“Justice Department Launches Task Force to Combat Threats Against Election Workers,” accessed: April 15, 2024, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/blog/justice-department-launches-task-force-combat-threats-against-election-workers-0>.

⁶ Congressional Research Service, "Federal Role in U.S. Campaigns and Elections: An Overview," September 2018, accessed April 16, 2024, crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45302.

⁷ Ibid.

- Civil Rights Act (1964)⁸

The impact of these laws on electoral practices will be described in more detail in later sections.

⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Diverse Practices in Election Administration

The United States has a decentralized election system consistent with its founding principles. Each state has considerable autonomy in determining its election processes within the boundaries of federal statutory and constitutional requirements. As a result, election practices and procedures in different states and localities understandably vary across the country.

We've identified three core pillars of an effectively administered electoral system:

- Voter experience
- Security
- Workforce

This section highlights effective electoral practices used by different states for each pillar. Electoral practices frequently evolve due to legal changes, public demands, and lessons learned, and effectiveness in one jurisdiction can present legal or operational problems in another – no one size fits all. The data cited reflects research that is current as of this report's publication.

Figure 1: Election Administration Pillars & Effective Practices

Voter Experience	Election Security	Election Workforce
<p>1. Challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Misinformation 2. Difficult to Navigate Electoral Practices 3. Long Wait Times at Voting Centers 4. Accessibility Challenges <p>2. Practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase communication 2. Increase opportunities to vote <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Registration 2. Voting Ease and Accessibility 3. Maximizing options for voting 	<p>1. Challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cyber and Physical Security 2. Workforce Security 3. Election-Related Information and Communication 4. Supply Chain <p>2. Practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilize Trusted Domains 2. Leverage Hosted Services 3. Develop Efficient Mechanisms to Manage Open-Records Requests 4. Reinforce Chain-of-Custody Rigor 5. Support and Expand Post-Election Audits 	<p>1. Challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff Polling Places 2. Setup and Store All Equipment 3. Verify Voter Registration 4. Provide Ballots to Voters 5. Communicate with the Voter at each Step in the Process <p>2. Practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase training and development 2. Nonpartisan Administration of Elections 3. Increase the Safety of Election Workers 4. Building a Pipeline for the Future

2.1 Voter Experience

Election Day is a key moment in the United States' democratic process, and every eligible citizen should have free and fair opportunities to cast their ballot. To make this a meaningful right and to inculcate the lifelong habits of participatory citizenship, election officials want the voter experience to be as seamless and equitable as possible within a given jurisdiction. Ensuring that all voting processes (including registration, communications, and vote casting) are understandable, accessible, equitable, and straightforward is critical to delivering a positive voter experience.

Voters who have positive experiences, especially early in their lives, may be more likely to vote in the future.⁹ Negative voter experiences can lower turnout, reduce the inclusiveness of the democratic process, and undermine trust in the electoral results.

Key characteristics of a good voter experience include:

- Accurate information about when, where, and how to vote
- Easy and clear processes to register and cast a vote
- Accessibility for all eligible voters within a jurisdiction on equal terms
- Brief wait times across precincts
- Consistent practices within a state and within individual counties
- Opportunity for individuals and groups to provide feedback on their experiences; voter ability to communicate with election officials if and as needed
- Confidence that the vote will be counted as cast

Although these descriptions of voter experience sound simple, it takes effective, sustainable public administrative practices to make a good voter experience a reality during every election cycle.

However, there can be major impediments to a positive voter experience.

First, deliberate misinformation has become much more rampant. Although misinformation in elections is not new, the spread of it surrounding elections has grown more prevalent in the internet age and eroded trust in the United States's election system. In 2022, only 20% of Americans reported feeling "very confident" in the integrity of the election process. Misinformation can stem from both internal and external sources. During the 2020 election cycle, foreign actors used online mechanisms to spread false information and increase mistrust in the US election process. With the growth of social media, election officials are facing new threats and new tactics. Social media algorithms harvest users' online activity to determine their preferences, habits, and political affiliation—this data collection results in targeted advertisements that spread misinformation and feed into confirmation bias. Social media and targeted advertisements present new challenges because they are accessible to a large majority of people at low or no cost, and it can be difficult to discern misinformation from the truth. Researchers have found that misinformation on social media is 70% more likely to be shared than truthful information. Furthermore, the newness of social media and misinformation on social media means that election officials have not had much time to adapt and create communication strategies to address this spread of misinformation.

Second, electoral processes and updates to those processes can be challenging for some people to discern.¹⁰ Election officials must continue to focus intently on clear communication about these processes and garner feedback on any emerging topics. Voter experience encompasses a variety of areas, starting from registration and continuing until Election Day. To have a positive voter experience, all aspects of voting should be accessible, adaptable, and clear, and voters should be able to complete the steps easily. Aspects of voter experience include registration, communication

⁹ Democracy Fund, "2018 CCES Report," June 2020, accessed April 16, 2024, https://democracyfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2018_CCESReport_vFinal.pdf.

¹⁰ The Elections Group, "Telling Our Story: An Elections Communication Guide," May 18, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, [Telling Our Story: An Elections Communication Guide - Elections Group](#).

from election officials to voters, accessibility and equality for voters, and the process that voters encounter on Election Day.

Successful voter registration should be easy and accessible for all voters, with mechanisms for tracking across state lines, and deadlines should be clear and manageable for election officials and voters. Voters should have access to secure voting methods that account for the various obstacles that may come up, enough resources to comfortably accommodate all voters, an effectively run system that does not require an unreasonable time commitment from the voter, and an overall sense of security and trust while casting their ballot. No matter where a voter is casting their ballot within a given state, they should be able to vote freely, fairly, and safely.

Third, voters have, on occasion, experienced long wait times at voting centers, especially within certain jurisdictions. As a result, election officials and state election boards today increasingly focus on making wait times manageable. As of 2016, according to Bipartisan Policy Center and MIT, eight percent of precincts had an average wait time greater than 30 minutes, four percent of precincts had an average wait time of 30 to 60 minutes, and four percent of precincts reported an average wait time of over an hour.¹¹ These long wait times not only impact voter experience and likelihood to cast their ballot, but also have an economic cost and decrease voter confidence in the election. Research by scholars such as Lonna Atkeson, Mike Alvarez, Thad Hall, and Paul Gronke tells us that voters tend to be more confident when they don't wait a long time to vote, when they encounter polling place officials who seem competent, and when they vote in person rather than by mail.¹²

Equal access to voting is a foundational part of the United States' democratic process. During the 2020 election, despite the record number of early and absentee voters, long vote times still presented a challenge. Voting took longer in poorer and more racially diverse neighborhoods compared with affluent and whiter neighborhoods:¹³

- In 2018, on average across jurisdictions, African American voters waited 11.5 minutes on average to vote, Hispanic voters waited 11.7 minutes, and white voters waited 8.8 minutes to vote.
- Residents in densely populated areas, on average across jurisdictions, waited 25% longer than those in other areas.¹⁴

Resource availability and allocation, precinct size and location, and timing may all contribute to these disparities across communities.

¹¹ Matthew Weil, Charles Stewart III, "Improving the Voter Experience: Reducing Polling Place Wait Times by Measuring Lines and Managing Polling Place Resources," Bipartisan Policy Center, April 27, 2018, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/improving-the-voter-experience-reducing-polling-place-wait-times-by-measuring-lines-and-managing-polling-place-resources/>.

¹² "Voter Confidence," MIT Election Data and Science Lab, last updated April 2, 2021, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/voter-confidence>.

¹³ Nate Cohn, "How Long Will Vote Counting Take? Estimates and Deadlines in All 50 States," *The New York Times*, January 4, 2021, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/04/upshot/voting-wait-times.html>.

¹⁴ Matthew Weil, Charles Stewart III, Tim Harper, Christopher Thomas, Erin Barry, Sarah Kline, and Owen Minott, "The 2018 Voting Experience: Polling Place Lines," Bipartisan Policy Center, November 4, 2019, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/the-2018-voting-experience/>.

Fourth, voters with disabilities and language barriers may face challenges exercising their voting right. Accessible voting enhances voters' accessibility to certain parts of the process. Accessibility includes ensuring that voters with disabilities can register through the preferred process without facing barriers, creating websites that are accessible to all voters, and ensuring that voting systems allow for privacy and do not cause unnecessary burdens on the voter. By improving accessibility in elections, election officials improve the process for all voters, not just those with disabilities. Automatic voter registration and online registration can increase accessibility.

An estimated one-sixth of American voters are people with disabilities. These disabilities vary considerably and include mobility, physical, communicative, visual, and other challenges. In accord with the ideal that all eligible citizens should be able to vote and federal laws, such as Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act, states should strive towards accessible voting starting with registration and continuing through Election Day.¹⁵ Despite these protections, voters with disabilities often face challenges throughout the election process.

- In 2020, even with the changes made to voting due to the COVID-19 pandemic, eleven percent of voters with disabilities reported facing some difficulty when voting. This is higher than any other group.¹⁶
- While registering to vote, people with disabilities may face inaccessible Departments of Motor Vehicles, additional documents necessary to qualify for a driver's license, inability to complete paper registration forms and return them by mail, and inaccessible official webpages used for online registration.¹⁷
- While voting in person, voters with disabilities may face inaccessible voting locations, lack of accessible voting methods, and insufficient privacy when voting.

Finally, in-person election centers may experience problems on the days of voting such as power outages, natural disasters, active shooters, and public health emergencies. During the 2018 election, for example, some election officials and voters in Tennessee faced an unexpected complication: the power went out at a polling place, and the backup generator failed—an unforeseen, but not uncommon complication. During the 2020 election, wildfires throughout the Pacific Northwest displaced thousands of voters just two months before Election Day, and election officials had to determine how they would ensure voting access for these citizens. In 2020, throughout the US, election officials were grappling with the reality that they had to run a safe and fair election in a global pandemic. One thing is for certain: numerous unknown challenges can crop up before election day, and agility and adaptability within the election workforce are critical to handling them.

¹⁵ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Accessibility Checklist for Voter Registration," accessed April 16, 2024,

https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/bestpractices/Accessibility_Checklist_Voter_Registration.pdf.

¹⁶ Brian Dimmick and Aaron Madrid Aksoz, "Voting With a Disability: Breaking Down Barriers to the Ballot," American Civil Liberties Union, October 26, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024,

<https://www.aclu.org/news/voting-rights/voting-with-a-disability>.

¹⁷ Danielle Root and Mia Ives-Ruble, "Enhancing Accessibility in U.S. Elections," Center for American Progress, July 8, 2021, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/enhancing-accessibility-u-s-elections/>.

2.2 Leading Practices to Improve Voter Experience

Since elections are largely decentralized in the United States, voters can expect to encounter different election administration practices depending on where they live. Nevertheless, jurisdictions can consider adapting several proven practices to improve the voter experience in their communities. For example, jurisdictions can increase communication with voters about all aspects of the electoral practice and increase opportunities to vote by improving registration, enhancing voter ease and accessibility, and maximizing options for voting.

Increase communication with voters about all aspects of the electoral process

Easy access to reliable information gives voters confidence entering the election process, provides more instruction on the steps they must take, and reduces barriers. By sharing information and being transparent about the process, election officials can avoid an overload of questions from people who are confused about the requirements and statements that the process is unclear and unsecure. They can save time and money by being direct and open upfront.

Weber County, Utah maintains a very detailed elections webpage which includes information directed towards explaining what steps voters need to take in order to successfully vote. Their website also includes videos that show what the election workforce does at each step of the election process. This includes information about post office pickup, every step of receiving and counting mail-in ballots, adjudication of the election, and much more.¹

A positive voting experience depends on having essential information, such as voter registration details, deadlines, documentation requirements, and polling place locations.¹⁸ Communities where election officials share this information experience higher registration and mail-in ballot success rates.¹⁹ And educating voters about the election process itself, especially at the state and local levels, fosters trust.²⁰

¹⁸ Mara Suttman-Lea and Thessalia Merivaki, "The Impact of Voter Education on Voter Confidence: Evidence from the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election," September 21, 2022. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f2330015209a9636ed4afd7/t/632b2bc944223724f086bd26/1663773642431/EIP_ESRA_Confidence_Paper+%285%29.pdf

¹⁹ Mara Suttman-Lea, "Local Election Official Use of Websites and Social Media During the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election," MIT Election Data and Science Lab, June 17, 2021, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/articles/local-election-official-use-websites-and-social-media-during-2020-us-presidential-election>.

²⁰ Mara Suttman-Lea and Thessalia Merivaki, "The Impact of Voter Education on Voter Confidence: Evidence from the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election," September 21, 2022. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f2330015209a9636ed4afd7/t/632b2bc944223724f086bd26/1663773642431/EIP_ESRA_Confidence_Paper+%285%29.pdf

Minnesota Case Study

Minnesota has implemented procedures to improve voter experience by increasing accessibility and voter outreach. The default voting method in the state is in-person at an assigned precinct, though voters can now sign up without an excuse to permanently receive a mail ballot for each election. The state also makes voting easier with same day registration and the ability to check registration, ballot status, and more online. Voters with disabilities may vote from their car, can request an accessible absentee ballot, may designate an “agent” to deliver their absentee ballot for them, and may cast their vote (in certain counties) with machines that provide accessible features for reading and marking ballots. Hennepin County (the most populous county) provides a comprehensive set of voter outreach materials for use by community organizations in six languages and conducted voter surveys focused on barriers to voting for traditionally underrepresented communities in 2022, 2021, and 2019, although it is less clear how the survey results affect the county’s practices. On the state level, translation in 3 languages is required and “language minority districts” must have the necessary translators and translated materials at the precinct. These practices contribute to Minnesota’s historically high voter turnout, which was highest in the nation in 2020 and top five in 2022.

Election officials can leverage existing resources, such as "An Election Communication Guide," that election officials can download and then tailor to their specific state or jurisdiction.²¹ The National Association of State Election Directors (NASED) also has an Election Communications Toolkit with guidance on social media, videos, and tip sheets.²² The EAC also provides important resources on such topics as contingency planning, election calendars, and communications with voters.

Social media can be used to enhance direct-to-voter communication and improve the reach of election officials. To ensure that voters have quick and easy access to necessary information about voting times, locations, and poll closures, states can offer an option for voters to sign up for text and email updates whenever they interact with the election office (for example, when they register to vote or request a mail-in ballot). This promotes timely communications that improve the voter experience.

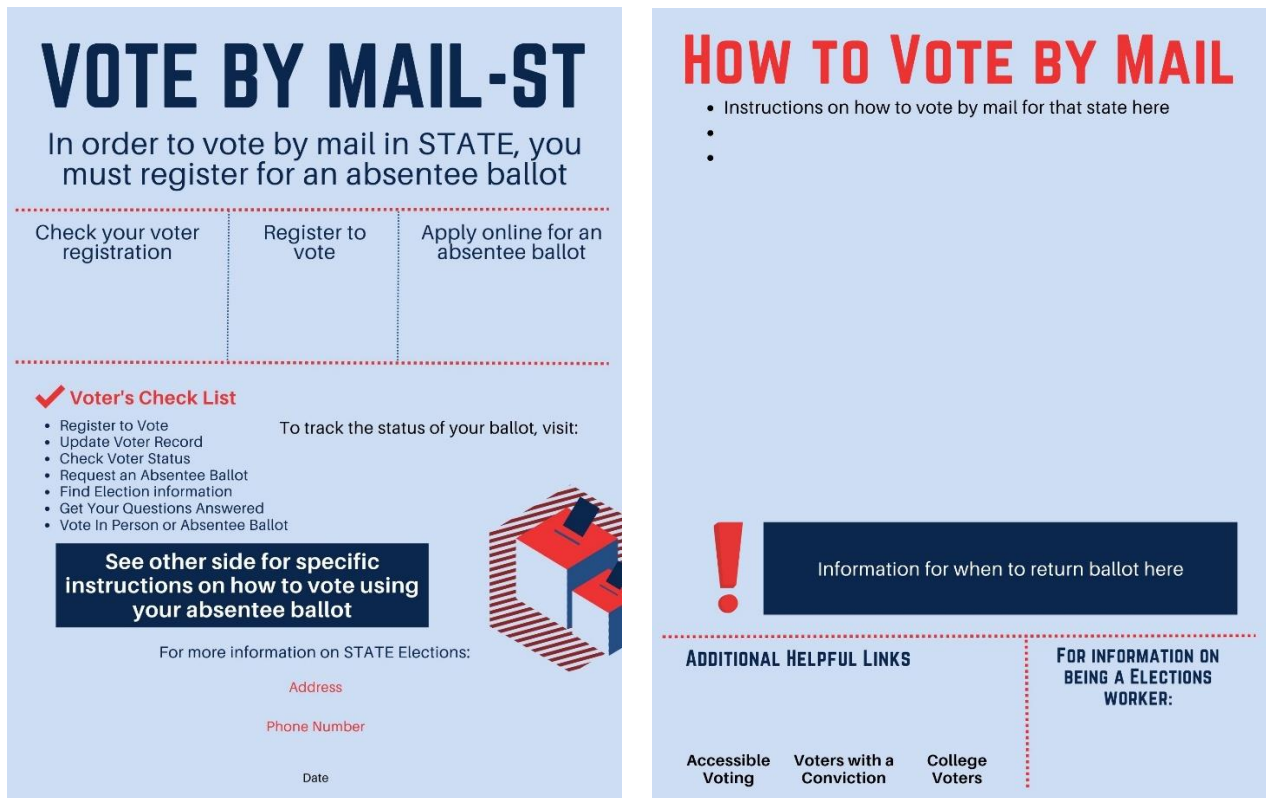
Some social media platforms offer powerful services to election officials. Seminole County in Florida was recognized by the Election Assistance Commission in 2022 for coordinating with META to make Facebook Voting Alerts available to election offices

around the state. Facebook Voting Alerts allowed the county election offices to immediately send notifications to all Facebook users in their county at no cost – which proved to be very useful for quickly getting the word out about election dates, times, and deadlines.

²¹ The Elections Group, "Telling Our Story: An Elections Communication Guide," May 18, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.electionsgroup.com/telling-our-story-guide>.

²² National Association of State Election Directors, "Election Communications Toolkit," accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.nased.org/electioncommstoolkit>.

The Academy created a sample vote-by-mail informational flyer to demonstrate an effective, efficient, and equitable way to distribute information. The design provides a streamlined means of disseminating critical information around registration steps, with hyperlinks and QR codes, and the state elections/Secretary of State office's physical address and phone number. The flyer meets accessibility standards and features a date to help verify the accuracy of its information should policies change. Such a flyer can be used to provide clear and concise information to the public about their jurisdiction's electoral practices and would need to be kept updated to ensure consistency with revised laws, policies, and practices. Such an up-to-date flyer can be promoted on state and county websites, shared on social media, and distributed to voters through the mail.



Increase Opportunities to Vote

Registration

States have taken different approaches to increasing the number of registered voters, making registration accessible, and avoiding confusion on Election Day. To ensure that voter registration is easily accessible to voters, 23 states allow citizens to use the state's Department of Motor

California, Colorado, Connecticut, Washington DC, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming allow same day registration on Election Day.

Vehicles, or other social service agencies, to register to vote and update their registration. Having this widely available, with the option to opt out, allows eligible citizens to complete registration easily and helps election officials keep track of registered voters that have moved. This method also ensures that citizens clear eligibility checks prior to voting registration, which can address some concerns surrounding voter fraud. The overall goal of Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) is to simplify and automate the process to increase accuracy and limit challenges for future election officials and voters. Other benefits of AVR include proper registration for voters moving across state lines and more efficient, cost-saving electronic information transfer. States that have implemented automatic voter registration have seen a consistent increase in the number of registered voters. While AVR has many advantages, it has been challenging for some jurisdictions because the registration deadlines in many states were set before automation was possible and there is the possibility of accidentally registering non-eligible people when using an aggressive back-end AVR policy.²³

Online registration is another option for states to make voter registration easier and more accessible. It has led to more secure and accurate voter rolls. Having a process that can be completed entirely online also allows for more access for voters with disabilities and reduces the workload of election workers who no longer need to sift through mail and paperwork.²⁴ Currently, 41 states allow voters to register and update their registration online; however, some states have not made the switch entirely and still rely on printed registration rolls.

Voting Ease and Accessibility

Enhancing voting ease and accessibility is critical to improving the voter experience. Establishing voting centers, prioritizing standardization, reducing wait times, offering different methods of voting, and following accessibility best practices all also advance this critical pillar of election administration.

Vote centers--strategically placed locations where any citizen can vote--can be more accessible to voters and consume fewer public funds. They are currently used in 18 states including Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Iowa, and Texas. Voters can use whichever center is closest to them instead of going to a pre-assigned polling location.²⁵ Vote centers also reduce the number of staff members, especially temporary staff members, required to run an election.

While vote centers are valuable, their effective use requires intentional planning from election officials and can be challenging for municipalities. The EAC offers guidance on accessibility metrics and scaling up the initiative after a pilot stage. Key factors include setting standards for the number of vote centers and ensuring accessibility, ADA compliance, and public transit

²³ "Automatic Voter Registration," MIT Election Data and Science Lab, last updated February 16, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/automatic-voter-registration>.

²⁴ Matthew Weil, Charles Stewart III, Tim Harper, Christopher Thomas, Rachel Orey, "Logical Election Policy," Bipartisan Policy Center, January 16, 2020, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/logical-election-policy/>.

²⁵ "Vote Centers," National Conference of State Legislatures, January 19, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/vote-centers>.

proximity. Transitioning during smaller, local elections is preferable to doing so during a large national election.²⁶

Electronic poll books are utilized in vote centers to share information across the centers to prevent people from voting more than once. Expansion of these electronic poll books to all polling locations can provide numerous benefits. 41 states currently authorize the use of electronic poll books, but many of their laws limit their utilization.²⁷ Electronic poll books have the advantage of both improving the voter experience and also simplifying the work of election officials and poll workers. Rather than sifting through paper records, poll workers can use the electronic poll books to identify registrants or even scan their ID (improving accuracy by limiting the possibility of checking someone in under an incorrect name). Electronic poll books are updated automatically and have the most timely and accurate data, which makes them especially useful to states with later or same-day registration deadlines.²⁸ Electronic poll books can face some threats including purposeful attacks, viral intrusions, human error, and outdated technology.²⁹ To protect against these threats, States can use Secure Sockets Layer Security, software or hardware VPNs, and Verizon Wireless Private Network.

States can enhance the equity of voter experiences across their jurisdiction by establishing guidelines for early voting sites, the number of voting machines based on population, and uniform resource allocation practices. Employing a resource allocation calculator optimizes the number of voting machines and staff at polling places.³⁰ For example, New York requires one early voting site for every 50,000 registered voters, while New Jersey mandates standards based on county size (there are seven to ten sites for counties with more than 300,00 voters, five to seven for counties with 150,000 to 300,000, and three to five for all other smaller counties). Such uniform standards have helped to avoid confusion and to ensure that voters have the resources necessary for a positive experience.

Reducing wait times at polling locations is crucial to creating a positive voter experience. The PEAC, for example, recommends a maximum 30-minute wait to vote. Progress on this issue can be difficult to track given limited data on wait times at polling locations (and this data is not something polling locations track from election to election). The Bipartisan Policy Center and MIT engaged 88

In Colorado, the City of Denver used 10,777 provisional ballots in 2012; however, after transitioning to a vote center, they only used 340 provisional ballots in 2016. This saved them \$17,395 in provisional ballots alone¹.

²⁶ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Chapter 9: Polling Place and Vote Center Management," accessed April 16, 2024,

https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/Chapter_9_Polling_Place_and_Vote_Center_Management.pdf.

²⁷ <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-poll-books>

²⁸ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Bipartisan Elections Task Force Report," January 2020, accessed April 16, 2024, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Bipartisan_Elections-Task-Force_RO1-2.pdf.

²⁹ "Electronic Poll Book Security," Robis Elections, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.robiselections.com/electronic-poll-book-security>.

³⁰ Presidential Commission on Election Administration, "PCEA Final Report," January 2014, accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.nased.org/s/PCEA_FINAL_REPORT_JAN_2014.pdf.

jurisdictions in a 2018 study on tracking and publishing wait times. Implementing hourly line data collection utilizing Little's Law (which is a fundamental equation in queuing theory and, in this context, the service/response time equals the number of people divided by the throughput time) during every election, as demonstrated by St. Louis County, can improve resource allocation and communication of wait times to voters.³¹³² To address the morning rush and ensure that the long morning line does not impact the wait times for the rest of the day, states can allow for and utilize part time poll workers, as seen in Alaska, Rhode Island, Missouri, and New York.³³ Allowing poll workers to serve a split shift can also increase the retention of poll workers by allowing those who cannot commit to a twelve-hour shift to be able to serve.

As previously mentioned, election centers must comply with federal law and ensure that they are accessible for voters with disabilities. To ensure compliance with federal and state laws, election officials can partner with organizations that specialize in disability rights and access. Such partnerships bring these organizations into the conversation to provide guidance on how to increase accessibility for voters with disabilities, and they also can be useful in training the election workforce (discussed in more detail below).

States have also expanded electronic ballot delivery and marking options for voters with disabilities and for uniformed and overseas absentee ballot voters.³⁴ So far, 31 states and DC have allowed uniformed and overseas voters to return their ballots electronically, and 13 states have expanded electronic ballot return options to people with disabilities.³⁵ Since many states already have the systems and technology for electronic ballot returns, allowing voters with disabilities to utilize them should be feasible within their existing election administration systems.

Maximizing Options for Voting

Offering voters various methods of voting and ensuring that the voting process is adaptable is one part of ensuring a positive voter experience. As of 2022, 48 states offer voters at least seven days of early in-person voting. To work around conflicting schedules and other obstacles, states can ensure that polling locations for early voting are open throughout the day. Another common practice is allowing voters to vote by mail without an excuse. Due to the pandemic during the 2020 election, more people voted by mail and in-person than ever before. In the United States, 38 states allow voters to vote by mail without an excuse, and in 8 states and DC, voters are able to register for a mail in ballot for multiple elections with only one application. In 1998, Oregon was the first state to issue all ballots by mail, and now Washington, Colorado, Hawaii, and Utah have adopted this policy. In vote by mail elections, voter turnout tends to be two to eight percentage points

³¹ St. Louis County used an online tool where they were able to report how many voters were in line at all polling locations in the county. This allowed them to calculate wait times and determine the distribution of voters throughout the day.

³² <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/improving-the-voter-experience-reducing-polling-place-wait-times-by-measuring-lines-and-managing-polling-place-resources/>

³³ Matthew Weil, Charles Stewart III, Tim Harper, Christopher Thomas, Erin Barry, Sarah Kline, and Owen Minott, "The 2018 Voting Experience: Polling Place Lines," Bipartisan Policy Center, November 4, 2019, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/the-2018-voting-experience/>.

³⁴ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Elections Policy to Carry Us Beyond the Next Election," April 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/BPC_Elections-Policy-to-Carry-Us-Beyond-the-Next-Election.pdf.

³⁵ Ibid.

higher. One challenge with absentee voting and vote by mail has been the number of ballots that are rejected because they have been filled out incorrectly or concerns about the legitimacy of the signature. States can address these challenges by providing ballot tracking options and ballot curing options. Ballot tracking instills greater confidence in voters that their ballot was received and counted as it should be. Ballot curing allows voters to correct eligibility deficiencies that are caught to ensure that their ballot is counted. 41 states already offer ballot curing in their elections.³⁶

Develop Efficient Mechanisms to Manage Open-Records Requests

The ability of citizens to request government records is important to build the transparency and trust required for a democratic society. For elections, this gives the public assurance that the integrity of the system remains intact. Efficiency in the open record request process is key to ensuring citizens' rights are upheld while also ensuring that operations run smoothly. Some jurisdictions have adopted records management systems that allow for tagging and other methods of indexing documents to find records and follow retention requirements more easily. Some have also found success maintain a repository of records requests and the responses given, allowing them to reuse the work done responding to previous requests, and to analyze trends in the types of requests received to share with neighboring jurisdictions.³⁷³⁸³⁹ The Election Assistance Commission has put together a guidance document with several case studies of records request response techniques that have worked for different areas around the nation.⁴⁰ These techniques, in full or in part, may be useful in other areas, bearing in mind differences in legal requirements.

³⁶ "Table 15: States With Signature Cure Processes," National Conference of State Legislatures, December 28, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-15-states-with-signature-cure-processes>.

³⁷ "6 Tips to Help Cities Respond to Open Records Requests," VC3, February 5, 2019, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.vc3.com/blog/6-tips-to-help-cities-respond-to-open-records-and-foia-requests>.

³⁸ Luke Price, "City of Bloomington Launches New Public Records Request Software," *Indiana Daily Student*, May 23, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2023/05/city-bloomington-launches-new-public-records-request-software>.

³⁹ Alexander Ewald, "City, EPD to Launch New Online Open Records Request, Management System Monday," *Enid News & Eagle*, October 3, 2021, https://www.enidnews.com/news/city-epd-to-launch-new-online-open-records-request-management-system-monday/article_e158d69c-23f0-11ec-b266-9b270c32bfa4.html.

⁴⁰ "Best Practices: Public Records Request," U.S. Election Assistance Commission, March 22, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/best-practices-public-records-request>.

2.3 Election Security

In January of 2017, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) designated elections as critical infrastructure. This designation marked an official acknowledgement of the growing need to prioritize election security as a matter of national security.⁴¹ Threats to election security continue to emerge and evolve, forcing states to seek additional resources, bolster existing procedures, and forge new channels of collaboration at all levels of government to secure the vote.

Election security aims to protect the confidentiality and integrity of the electorate's decision, and to ensure the information and processes of the election are available to the electorate. The vote should accurately represent the will of the people, and the people should be able to have confidence that the results correctly represent their will. Election security accomplishes these goals through risk identification and mitigation in four main areas:

- Cybersecurity
- Physical Security
- Supply Chain
- Workforce Safety

Figure 2: Election Security Factors



⁴¹ "History Of Election Security," Citizens Clean Elections Commission, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.azcleanelections.gov/election-security/history-of-election-security>.

Given ongoing challenges and attacks, it is important that election officials—and all of us—remain vigilant and continue to strengthen existing security practices consistent with the latest capabilities.

Major election security issue and challenges

First, the quantity and impact of misleading election information (whether intentional or accidental) have been amplified in recent years due to the ubiquity of social media and its influence on traditional media.⁴²⁴³⁴⁴ The election workforce now is increasingly aware of the time and energy needed to develop, maintain, and secure trusted resources and outreach channels. In this environment, the election workforce has had to work even harder to ensure that the public receives accurate, current election information. Official websites hosting election information are vital sources of truth needed by voters to verify polling details amidst incorrect information circulating in the public forum. Social media accounts, while very powerful tools for transmitting information, are ripe targets for adversaries wishing to spread false information. There are concerns that new technologies such as AI will exacerbate these problems.

Second, high volumes of open records requests, resulting from increased scrutiny of the election process, have also proven to be an increased burden for election officials on the information front in recent years. Additionally, updated integrity procedures and records like ballot and equipment chain of custody procedures and documents, alongside auditing controls, have become increasingly important in bolstering defensible confidence in election results amidst controversy.⁴⁵⁴⁶

Third, it has become necessary to adopt newer technology to maintain a strong cybersecurity posture for election infrastructure and officials. Election technology ranges from Voter Registration Databases to electronic poll books to Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) to printers and scanners and, after the polls close, tabulation, election night reporting systems, and independent verification of End-to-End Verified Voting technology. Voter Registration Databases (VRDBs) were the first widely discussed target of foreign adversaries.⁴⁷ In 2021, the Election Assistance Commission developed the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines 2.0 to provide requirements for

⁴² NYU Stern Center, "Spreading the Big Lie," September 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6df958f8370af3217d4178/t/6321e2ca392ecd06e5d60c4c/1663165130817/NYU+Stern+Center+report+-+Spreading+the+Big+Lie_FINAL.pdf.

⁴³ Greg Miller, "As U.S. Election Nears, Researchers Are Following the Trail of Fake News," *Science*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.science.org/content/article/us-election-nears-researchers-are-following-trail-fake-news>.

⁴⁴ <https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/37365484/Benkler-et-al-Mail-in-Voter-Fraud-Anatomy-of-a-Disinformation-Campaign.pdf?sequence=1>

⁴⁵ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Chain of Custody Best Practices," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/bestpractices/Chain_of_Custody_Best_Practices.pdf.

⁴⁶ "Election Security Spotlight – Chain of Custody is Crucial for Election Offices," Center for Internet Security, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.cisecurity.org/insights/spotlight/election-security-spotlight-chain-of-custody-is-crucial-for-election-offices>.

⁴⁷ Danielle Root, Liz Kennedy, Michael Sozan, and Jerry Parshall, "Election Security in All 50 States," Center for American Progress, February 12, 2018, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/election-security-50-states/>.

which voting systems can be tested.⁴⁸ Technology providers, security researchers, the Election Assistance Commission, and DHS' Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA) all play a role in identifying and managing methods for technology security.⁴⁹⁵⁰⁵¹⁵²⁵³

Fourth, securing voting infrastructure in physical locations is a more recent challenge, brought to the fore during COVID-driven adaptation. Faced with the need to distribute voter density and reduce in-person contact, many jurisdictions innovated to increase ballot drop boxes, for instance. Lessons learned are accruing and are readily available.⁵⁴

Physical security controls have always been a key component of election security. Unauthorized access to storage facilities and equipment, or equipment during transit, can negatively affect equipment operation, and integrity unless they are known and addressed. Knowing how to respond to incidents like broken tamper seals is key to preserving election integrity and can mitigate further issues; as workforce turnover continues in this sector, security-response procedures must be part of new-personnel training to expedite awareness and remediation when needed.

States with long experience of extreme weather (snowstorms in the Northeast, hurricanes in the South) have developed tried and true practices through years of experience handling adverse weather. As climate patterns shift, election officials in historically temperate locations may also consider developing or refreshing Continuity of Operations plans.⁵⁵ These plans are also necessary to build resiliency to respond to other emergency scenarios, such as power outages and wildfires.

Additionally, while violence at voting facilities is extremely rare, it is important to have plans in place to protect voters and election staff should a violent incident arise. Relationships with local law enforcement, points of contact on text and speed dial, and a preestablished plan of action are now important parts of contingency and continuity planning.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Voluntary Voting System Guidelines Version 2.0," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/TestingCertification/Voluntary_Voting_System_Guidelines_Version_2_0.pdf.

⁴⁹ "Election Security," Electronic Privacy Information Center, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://epic.org/issues/cybersecurity/election-security/>.

⁵⁰ Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency, "Russian State-Sponsored Advanced Persistent Threat Actor Compromises U.S. Government Targets," last revised December 1, 2020, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/cybersecurity-advisories/aa20-296a>.

⁵¹ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Voluntary Voting System Guidelines Version 2.0," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/TestingCertification/Voluntary_Voting_System_Guidelines_Version_2_0.pdf.

⁵² "Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC)," Center for Internet Security, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.cisecurity.org/ei-isac>.

⁵³ "Election Security Pilot Event Convenes Builders and Breakers," Unisyn Voting Solutions, September 20, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.unisynvoting.com/electionsecuritypilotevent>.

⁵⁴ "7 Strategies for Enhancing Ballot Drop Box Security," The Elections Group, September 20, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.electionsgroup.com/enhancing-ballot-drop-box-security>.

⁵⁵ "Contingency Planning," U.S. Election Assistance Commission, accessed April 16, 2024, [Contingency Planning | U.S. Election Assistance Commission \(eac.gov\)](https://www.eac.gov/contingency-planning).

⁵⁶ See, for instance, [Active Shooter \(fema.gov\)](https://www.fema.gov/active-shooter)

Finally, supply scarcity is a potential risk that could impact the future ability to fairly conduct an election. While the United States has had the good fortune of ample and robust supply chains for decades, geopolitical, climate-related, and transportation-related complications require a clear-eyed assessment of supply-backup options and advance planning.

2.4 Leading Practices for Strengthening Security

Jurisdictions can consider adopting several proven practices to strengthen security by addressing emerging threats through utilizing trusted domains, leveraging hosted services, and increasing voter-communication channels and reinforcing accurate messages.

Utilize trusted domains

Taking a proactive approach to establishing trustworthy and authoritative election information is a powerful strategy in combatting false information that may circulate in the public sphere. Hosting official election websites within the .gov top level domain (instead of .com, .org, .net, etc.) is a simple step to take towards this goal. Using the .gov top level domain provides a level of security and authenticity to users, as only official government entities can host pages in the .gov domain.⁵⁷ Nearly all states and many local jurisdictions host websites in the .gov domain detailing polling procedures, locations, and times. Hosting up-to-date information on a trusted .gov domain helps make the voting system available to the voter, by making sure they know what they need to show up, where they need to show up, and when.

Consider the Option of Leveraging Hosted Services

Managing a website entirely in-house can be time consuming and costly. Many web content and cloud hosting providers have programs designed to serve the needs of state and local municipalities, which has led some states to look at the option of using hosted services. These services often include automatic security patching and can be run at a much lower cost than self-hosted or using other hosting services.⁵⁷⁵⁸⁵⁹⁶⁰ Some services provide protection against Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks and other attacks to election related entities free of charge. Such protections preserve the integrity of election data and the availability of election systems for voters. At the same time, it should be noted that using these platforms is not a “silver bullet” for security, as hosting platforms can also suffer security breaches; it is important to partner with trusted platforms and to incorporate them into continuity of operations plans. This can be an option for jurisdictions with limited IT and cyber staff and should be assessed by each jurisdiction relative to the costs and benefits of their various options.

Increase Voter-Communication Channels and Reinforcement of Accurate Messages

State and local election departments in many different states have established a strong presence on social media platforms to keep the public informed of voting requirements, procedures, updates to polling locations and times. Using the broad distribution options of these accounts and followings for regular, pre-election outreach helps prime the voting population to turn to the same resource for truthful information as elections proceed; these channels, once built, can also alert

⁵⁷ ".gov Registry," get.gov, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://get.gov/about/>.

the public to potential election-related scams and affirmatively correct false information.⁵⁸ Correcting inaccurate information on social media requires tact and care; when done well, this can improve the availability and integrity of the voting experience for everyone. Websites and social media accounts take effort to develop and sustain; jurisdictions and states may benefit from explicitly naming the work and specifying the budget needs for the higher-cadence voter-communication programs that today's election ecosystem requires.

Reinforce Chain-of-Custody Rigor

Publishing proof of custody documentation has proven helpful in answering challenges to integrity in the electoral process, for ballots, voting machines, and other voting supplies. The ability to demonstrate that these components operate as intended, with the evidence of an unbroken chain of custody, is one of the linchpins in defending election integrity. Election offices have found it helpful, even where it is not required, to log the time, date, and reason that seals are broken and replaced in (for instance) ballot containers, with the signature of at least 2 people.

When updating or creating chain of custody guidelines, states can look to the EAC for best practices.⁵⁹ To prepare for unexpected challenges in chain of custody process execution,

Virginia Case Study

Virginia has made efforts to centralize their election system and make the state a leader by pursuing two lanes of progress: cyber security and post-election audits. The State Election Board was able to go to the state legislature and ask for the establishment of minimum-security measures. Members of the state staff, the municipal league, and the county league collaborated to establish minimum standards which are updated annually to adapt to changes in the cybersecurity world. Virginia utilized Soch, Inc to track the standards for each jurisdiction and prioritize the needs of each jurisdiction as it relates to cybersecurity. Virginia has also been able to use the data collected to make detailed requests for funding and resources to the general assembly. Virginia is also a member of the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC) which brings together various US government structures to collaborate on election security, provide leadership with toolkits, training materials, and best practices to improve the overall security of the US and US elections. Virginia Department of Election has also partnered with DHS and the Virginia Information Technologies Agency for expert cybersecurity services. Finally, Virginia law requires the conduction of annual post-election Risk-Limiting Audits of ballot scanner machines. Virginia Department of Elections posts the videos and results of these audits on its official website to promote transparency. Virginia Board of Elections has also partnered with Virginia Public Media to provide a three-part video series on Election Security in Virginia on the official election website.

⁵⁸ "Cloud for State and Local Governments," Microsoft Azure, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://azure.microsoft.com/en-us/explore/global-infrastructure/government/state-and-local>.

⁵⁹ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Chain of Custody Best Practices," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/bestpractices/Chain_of_Custody_Best_Practices.pdf.

Utah Case Study

Utah uses pre-election audits and ballot security measures that adhere to known best practices. Voting systems are required by statute to be certified by an EAC-Accredited Voting System Test Laboratory and anything that counts votes is never connected to the internet. At installation, before every major election, and at other random times, all election software is also audited to ensure it is working correctly and hasn't been compromised. Each county also conducts public Logic and Accuracy Testing before each election to ensure ballot markings and vote tabulation is coded correctly. Once voters have begun casting ballots, the state has procedures in place to ensure these ballots remain secure. Utah conducts all-mail elections, which means that securing drop boxes is of utmost importance through video surveillance and physical monitoring during drop off hours, and by logging all ballot collections before processing of the ballot in public view. Voters who opt to send in their ballot by mail can track their ballot at any time by using a barcode on the envelope and can even sign up to receive daily emails with scanned images of their mail. These methods build confidence and trust in the security of Utah's elections.

contingency plans should be developed as part of the Continuity of Operations (CoOp) plan or in a separate policy.

Support and Expand Post-Election Audits

Post-election audits are increasingly common. In 2014, the Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA) recommended that states conduct audits on their voting equipment regularly; by 2020, 44 states required a post-election tabulation audit. In 2021, over 68 post-election audit bills were introduced by state lawmakers.⁶⁰ States such as Arkansas and Michigan also require an audit of their election procedures and some states require an audit of their voting devices. There are states, such as Nebraska, where post-election audits are not required, but the election office still conducts them without formal guidance.⁶¹ The National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) released some guidelines in 2021, but further research and guidance is still needed.⁶² Audits in general are sensible practice; states can reasonably consider pursuing Risk Limiting Audits if they are not already using them.⁶³

With post-election audits becoming a standard practice, states still have latitude to determine which audit they would like to conduct. There are traditional post-election audits, risk-limiting audits (RLAs), procedural audits, and post-election logic and accuracy (L&A) testing. These audits verify the integrity of different

⁶⁰ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Election Audits Across the United States," March 11, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/election-audits-across-united-states>.

⁶¹ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Election Audits Across the United States," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/bestpractices/Election_Audits_Across_the_United_States.pdf.

⁶² National Association of Secretaries of State, "NASS Vote Verification Task Force Recommendations," 2021, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.nass.org/sites/default/files/Summer%202021/NASS%20Vote%20Verification%20Task%20Force%20Recommendations.pdf>.

⁶³ Beyond RLAs, there are also procedural audits, Texas and South Carolina have created audit divisions, and South Carolina and Florida use automated independent audits.

stages of elections, and most are mutually inclusive. L&A testing of voting machines verifies proper functioning of election equipment, procedural audits verify proper functioning of policy and personnel, and RLAs and other counting audits verify the accuracy and integrity of the final tally. 13 states use risk-limiting audits to bolster confidence in their election process and which are cheaper and quicker than other methods, and other states are considering this approach.⁶⁴⁶⁵ The power of RLAs is that validating results against eleven percent of ballots has a 95% chance of identifying incorrect results.⁶⁶ RLAs can be completed in two hours or less when there is a large margin, compared to traditional post-election audits that require four hours or more on average.⁶⁷ The use of an RLAs may help reduce expenses relative to full recounts when consistently operated and yield accurate results.

Enhance Physical Security

To bolster the physical security of election equipment, election officials can use the EAC and CISA's guidelines to ensure they are prepared.⁶⁸ Key practices include:

- Establish relationships with local law enforcement, first responders, and emergency management leaders before the election. This allows for a clear action plan and limits time spent trying to determine next steps if there is a challenge. Having multiple contacts for these entities has been helpful to some when one contact is unavailable while dealing with an ongoing situation.
- Contact CISA Election Security Advisors for further guidance and preparation relating to election security.
- Ensure election workers are trained on how to handle election equipment and informed of election security procedures. For example, all personnel handling the election equipment or materials with tamper-evident seals should

Los Angeles County partnered with AT&T to provide ballot tracking through an Internet of Things (IoT) platform. The ballot boxes were tracked as they were transported from the voting centers to the Tally Operations Office. This provided frequent reports of where the boxes were and allowed for a documented chain of custody trail for the ballots.

Orange County, California is implementing a pilot program in which ballot drop boxes have a scanner attached which allows voters to scan their ballots before putting them into the drop box. By scanning the QR code, voters can then track their ballot which instills greater confidence in the election process.

⁶⁴ "Risk-Limiting Audits," National Conference of State Legislatures, September 22, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/risk-limiting-audits>.

⁶⁵ Congressional Research Service, "Election Administration: An Introduction to Risk-Limiting Audits," accessed April 16, 2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11873>

⁶⁶ Jacob Hoffman-Andrews, "Voting with Risk-Limiting Audits: Better, Faster, Cheaper," Electronic Frontier Foundation, December 16, 2016, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2016/12/audit-better-faster-cheaper>.

⁶⁷ Jerome Lovato, "Risk-Limiting Audits - Practical Application," U.S. Election Assistance Commission, accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/6/Risk-Limiting_Audits_-_Practical_Application_Jerome_Lovato.pdf.

⁶⁸ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Election Management Guidelines," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/EMG/EAC_Election_Management_Guidelines_508.pdf.

be aware of the proper procedure for checking for broken seals, reporting broken seals, and resolving a situation in which the seals were broken.

- Use tamper-evident devices to ensure proper access control for election equipment. These can be placed on voting machines, USB port locking devices, and physical access controls.
- Log access to voting equipment storage facilities; provide 24-hour video surveillance of storage facilities, inventory and maintenance logs for all stored equipment; and protect election buildings.

Ballot drop boxes are another aspect of elections that could be vulnerable to threats. Key ballot drop box security practices include:

- Clearly post rules, regulations, and important information. This can include contact information if the ballot drop box has been tampered with, penalties for tampering with ballot drop boxes, information about surveillance, and more.
- Collaborate with local law enforcement and ensure shared knowledge on the rules surrounding ballot drop boxes to help secure them and make the process smoother if there is an incident. Use ballot drop boxes with built-in security features. Features include a lock and tamper-evident seal, small openings, a base that is secured to the ground, fire tampering devices, and heavy-duty material to make up the box itself. When planning on where to put ballot drop boxes, election officials can take into consideration accessibility and security. Place ballot drop boxes in high-traffic areas with sufficient lighting near local law enforcement or government buildings that have their own security systems.⁶⁹
- Train employees on security methods when working with the ballot drop boxes. Training can include reminding workers that there should be two people whenever the box is accessed, reminding them to prevent contamination of the ballots and report it if something does occur, requiring chain of custody paperwork to be completed when collecting ballots, and training staff on how to engage with observers and other civilians around the ballot drop boxes to limit dangerous interactions.

When looking to improve cybersecurity and the security of election systems, election officials do not need to create strategies from scratch. There are resources such as the Global Cyber Alliance Election Security Toolkit and the CISA Cybersecurity Toolkit which can be accessed for free.

When acquiring new voting equipment, states can reduce future work by prioritizing cybersecurity when systems are purchased. Key practices here include:

- Utilize a thorough cybersecurity assessment process including assuring that any vote counting systems procured meet the standards of the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines.
- Create a detailed process for procuring and implementing new election technology, including assuring that any systems procured meet the standards of the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines and performing independent security assessments.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ "7 Strategies for Enhancing Ballot Drop Box Security," The Elections Group, September 20, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.electionsgroup.com/enhancing-ballot-drop-box-security>.

⁷⁰ "Voluntary Voting System Guidelines VVSG 2.0," February 10, 2021, accessed: April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/TestingCertification/Voluntary_Voting_System_Guidelines_Version_2_0.pdf.

- Develop procurement plans alongside the local election officials, subject-matter experts, and individuals with cybersecurity experience
- Ensure that election officials receive training on account safety and cyber hygiene. They can also invite help from federal and state professionals to continuously check and improve cybersecurity. For example, the Virginia Department of Elections works with the Department of Homeland Security and the Virginia Information Technologies Agency when addressing cybersecurity concerns and making changes. CISA has also partnered with the Center for Internet Security (CIS) to create the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS-ISAC) and Election Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC) that work to improve cybersecurity in State, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) government organizations, especially elections. This is done at no cost through a sharing of toolkits and training, conversations between election officials across the nation, and distribution of best practices.
- Use professionally managed security services to access the most cost-effective and efficient guidance.

Figure 3 shows common threats to election security and various mitigating practices that can be utilized by election offices. Each threat has various mitigating practices that can be implemented over time to increase election security.

Figure 3: Mitigating Practices for Election Security Threats

Threat	Mitigating Practice
Mis/Dis/Mal-information	Utilize Trusted Domains
	Increase Voter-Communications Channels
	Reinforce Accurate Messages
	Develop Efficient Mechanisms to Manage Open Records Requests
Denial of Service Attacks	Leverage Hosting Services
	Open Records Mechanisms
Malware	Leverage Hosting Services
	CIS Services (including CrowdStrike)
	Utilize Thorough Cybersecurity Assessment Process
	Cyber Hygiene Training
Ballot Tampering and Fraud	Reinforce Chain of Custody Rigor
	Support and Expand Post Election Audits
	Utilize Tamper Evident Seals
	Keep Equipment Access Logs
	Continual Equipment Storage Surveillance
Physical Disruption	Establish Relationships with Key Safety Stakeholders
Supply Chain	Detailed Procurement and Integration Process

2.5 Election Workforce

As noted earlier, elections in the United States are a decentralized system administered by individuals trained to operate under a combination of federal, state, and local laws. The election workforce serves as the system's lynchpin, adhering to the numerous legal and operational details specific to each state and locality. Most election workers serve locally in cities, counties, and towns across the country. Their actions contribute significantly to the other two pillars of election administration: Voter Experience and Election Security.

Although the specifics of election administration vary considerably across the nation, one core issue is the same everywhere: recruiting and equipping election workers to execute the laws in a nonpartisan manner. The country has witnessed increasing challenges to this cadre of workers that threaten to undermine the public's confidence in not only the mechanics of elections but, ultimately, in both specific election results and our whole system of electing leaders.

This workforce performs vital functions within the US election system. Election officials in state and local government are supplemented with volunteers (such as temporary poll workers) to ensure successful elections. Together, the government's election workforce and volunteers are responsible for:

- Updating plans to reflect new laws and other new developments
- Procuring various types of equipment (voting machines, electronic poll books, office computers – plus the special paper and forms that the machines use)
- Continual recruitment and training of staff
- Staffing polling places – at early voting sites, for absentee ballots, on Election Day, and for any recounts
- Testing, maintenance, and setup of all equipment
- Maintaining secure facilities for storage of equipment and paper ballots
- Developing and updating online information portals
- Handling voter registration and updating of records
- Designing, producing, and providing ballots to voters, both in person and by mail
- Communicating with other state and local officials
- Communicating with the general public and voters

A highly trained and competent election workforce that can manage these functions effectively is essential to upholding our democracy. It is critical to ensure that this workforce is sufficiently resourced and empowered to support voters by answering questions, offering guidance, and creating a safe environment. A strong workforce is another step leading to a greater sense of public trust in elections and US democracy.

The key features of a good election workforce include:

- Recruitment and retention of adequate numbers to run elections and manage pre- and post-processes
- Training
- Safety
- Nonpartisan implementation of election law and processes

- Knowledge building and sharing
- Adequate resources, including financial support
- Pipeline for the future

Training standards vary between states and even among jurisdictions within states. Some states require that training be conducted at the state level. Other states conduct training at the county level. Currently, a total of 42 states and Washington, DC, have training requirements for election workers¹. Although the vast majority of election workers are trustworthy and working to uphold the democratic process of voting, the election workforce must remain vigilant of insider threats and misinformation associated with the workforce. In 2022, for example, a Michigan poll worker was charged with falsifying records and tampering with voting equipment.⁷¹ Election officials must continue to take seriously the vetting, training, and continuous education processes to counter any such threats.

Although elections must be run in a nonpartisan manner, the major political parties also have important roles to play under various state laws.

In fact, the representation of different political parties can provide an additional level of transparency and instill confidence in the validated results. All 50 states use some partisan process to select the election workers and election board in charge of running elections within the jurisdiction. There are 33 states that elect their chief election official; in other states, the governor or legislature is responsible for appointing a state board or chief election official. Even at the local level, most top election officials run under a specific party or are appointed by a partisan board¹. In more than 70 other democratic countries, constitutionally independent bodies oversee elections. Compared to other democratic countries, the United States is the outlier in this respect.

Since 2000, eleven secretaries of state have co-chaired a presidential campaign in their state. and 50 secretaries have endorsed candidates while overseeing their election. Funding for the 2022 secretary of state races increased by 250 percent compared to past races, and some candidates spoke openly about disputing the 2020 election results while campaigning. The United States election system relies on partisan officials acting in a non-partisan manner when overseeing elections.⁷² Over the past few years, election officials and poll workers have faced increasing threats to their physical safety. In response, the Justice Department created the Election Threats Task Force. It includes members from the Criminal Division, the Civil Rights Division, the National Security Division, and the FBI. Still, the threats against election workers and the lack of prosecutions against the perpetrators have continued to create challenges. According to a recent survey, about 1 in 6 election officials have experienced threats. Nearly one-third of election officials report knowing someone who left their election position due to security concerns.

⁷¹ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Elections Policy to Carry Us Beyond the Next Election," April 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/BPC_Elections-Policy-to-Carry-Us-Beyond-the-Next-Election.pdf.

⁷² Grace Gordon, Matthew Weil, Al Vanderklipp, and Kevin Johnson, "The Dangers of Partisan Incentives for Election Officials," Bipartisan Policy Center, April 6, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/the-dangers-of-partisan-incentives-for-election-officials/>.

Over the past few years, election officials have faced harassment, threats, and lack of support, which has led to a challenge in retaining election workers. The limited funding for elections has also led to several resignations. In one survey, nearly three-quarters of local election officials reported a need for increased budgets to adequately address upcoming election needs. One survey found that around eleven percent of current election officials say they are very likely or somewhat likely to leave before November 2024.⁷³ Nearly one-third of poll workers during the 2020 election stated that they are unlikely to register to serve again in future elections.⁷⁴ These retention challenges risk a large loss of institutional knowledge and a need to recruit new, dedicated workers.⁷⁵

Since the creation of the Task Force, in June 2021, until the Summer of 2022, Colorado has reported at least 500 threats and Arizona has reported more than 100. The total number of threats, however, may be even larger. More than half of the threats against election officials go unreported and most of the threats that are reported are done so to local and state officials rather than federal law enforcement.

Recruiting an election workforce, especially poll workers, has become more difficult. Just weeks before the primary election in Baltimore, the Baltimore City Board of Elections was still seeking an additional 1,000 poll workers to staff their polling places, and this jurisdiction is not alone in facing such a challenge.⁷⁶ In 2023, 88 percent of election offices have fewer than six full-time staff members.¹ Furthermore, the election workforce is an aging workforce. In 2018, six in ten poll workers were 61 years old or older and around 27 percent were over the age of 70.⁷⁷ In 2022, 76 percent of the nation's local election officials were over the age of 50, and by 2024, around one-third of them will be eligible to retire.⁷⁸ Since 2018, the majority of election offices have reported to EAC of difficulties with recruiting enough volunteers

⁷³ Ruby Edlin and Lawrence Norden, "Poll of Election Officials Shows High Turnover Amid Safety Threats and Political Interference," Brennan Center for Justice, April 25, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/poll-election-officials-shows-high-turnover-amid-safety-threats-and>.

⁷⁴ Barry Burden and Robert M. Stein, "Opting Out? Recent Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining Poll Workers," MIT Election Data and Science Lab, February 28, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/articles/opting-out-recent-challenges-recruiting-and-retaining-poll-workers>.

⁷⁵ Ruby Edlin and Lawrence Norden, "Poll of Election Officials Shows High Turnover Amid Safety Threats and Political Interference," Brennan Center for Justice, April 25, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/poll-election-officials-shows-high-turnover-amid-safety-threats-and>.

⁷⁶ Amy Sherman, "Poll workers are short-staffed, under attack — and quietly defending democracy," PolitiFact, July 6, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.politifact.com/article/2022/jul/06/poll-workers-are-short-staffed-under-attack-and-qu/>.

⁷⁷ Michael Barthel and Galen Stocking, "Older People Account for Large Shares of Poll Workers and Voters in U.S. General Elections," Pew Research Center, April 6, 2020, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/04/06/older-people-account-for-large-shares-of-poll-workers-and-voters-in-u-s-general-elections/>.

⁷⁸ Paul Gronke, "Staffing the Stewards," Election Voting Information Center, Reed College, January 2020, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://evic.reed.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Staffing-the-Stewards.pdf>.

for elections.⁷⁹ In some jurisdictions, as many as 30 percent of volunteer poll workers don't show up on Election Day.⁸⁰

2.6 Leading Practices to Bolster and Strengthen the Election Workforce

Jurisdictions can consider adapting several proven practices to bolster and strengthen their election workforce. For example, they can increase training and development opportunities, protect nonpartisan administration of elections, enhance safety protections for election workers, build a pipeline of election workers for the future, and enhance public engagement.

Increase training and development opportunities

The proper training of the election workforce, which in the US includes over 700,000 employees and volunteers, strengthens each facet of the election process. In our decentralized election system, every state has a different way of training election workers. A total of 8 states do not require training of election workers at the state level, though they do encourage it taking place at the local level. Differences in training practices within a state, while offering the benefit of flexibility for different local needs, can also result in different levels of preparation.

Some innovative practices and ideas for consideration here include:

- Online resources, videos, in-person meetings, and a variety of other options.
- Regular and convenient training sessions for permanent staff and volunteers
- Strategic development of the workforce by offering:
 - Opportunities to earn certificates or other forms of academic recognition
 - Pay increases for training certification
 - Paid training days to temporary workers
- Partner with organizations in different fields including cybersecurity, disability access, and physical security to leverage existing resources for training material

Initial training is important—and so is ongoing training and education of those running elections, including volunteers. After elections, states have opportunities to gather feedback from these individuals to determine the impact of training on their preparation for the election and to identify potential training improvements. Training can increase awareness of new legal requirements and electoral practices. Many states already require certification programs that employed election officials need to keep updated. In New Jersey, for example, election officials are required to

⁷⁹ "Finding – and Keeping – Qualified Poll Workers," National Conference of State Legislatures, August 24, 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/finding-and-keeping-qualified-poll-workers>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

complete training and certification every two years.⁸¹ Continued training can also be a retention incentive for the workforce.

Beyond training, election officials can consider other ways to continue to develop their workforce to increase the public's trust in the election process. For example, they can create terms of employment for election workers that outline their roles and responsibilities in their specific jobs. Terms of employment ensure accountability for election worker misconduct and outline the expected punishment for misconduct in the workplace. By providing this to election workers, at either the state or local level, election officials avoid confusion and inconsistency in determining punishable offenses and the severity of that punishment. Another successful practice is to require election workers to take an oath when hired. 42 states and Washington DC already require an oath at the state level, and four states have oaths required at a local level. Such oaths emphasize the solemn duties and responsibilities of election workers. States may take this further by publicly displaying the Oath in their offices and polling locations.

Procedure manuals and election calendars are also useful tools for election workers. Elections are subject to many changes in laws and guidance. The unclear status of laws, whether disputed in court or newly implemented, can cause confusion. To provide election officials with clarity, states and election officials can work together to create a procedures manual that is updated regularly and made available to the public

for informational purposes. Having a state-wide procedures manual can provide election officials around the state with clarity and promote consistency within the state.⁸² Election calendars are used throughout most of the US and the EAC has various resources on the creation and

Louisiana provides its election officials with a seven point annual compensation enhancement when they have an active Certified Elections/Registration Administration (CERA) certification .

Maricopa County, Arizona offers their temporary election workers two full days of paid training .

El Paso, Texas has partnered with Disability Rights Texas to provide their election workers with training on interaction with voters with disabilities .

District of Columbia Board of Elections participated in the Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center training and tabletop exercises regarding cybersecurity in elections .

⁸¹Grace Gordon and Rachel Orey, "Fortifying Election Security Through Poll Worker Policy," Bipartisan Policy Center, October 17, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/poll-worker-policy/>.

⁸² Bipartisan Policy Center, "Elections Policy to Carry Us Beyond the Next Election," April 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/BPC_Elections-Policy-to-Carry-Us-Beyond-the-Next-Election.pdf.

maintenance of an election calendar.⁸³ An election calendar assists officials with tracking deadlines, assigning tasks, and understanding the work of outside parties. It can also be shared publicly to keep the citizens informed of the process.⁸⁴

Protect the Nonpartisan Administration of Elections

Although the US differs from many other countries in having elected State Secretaries of State, the US still takes very deliberate steps to prevent partisanship from impacting the administration of elections and the validity of their results. Some states require each major political party to have a certain number of election workers involved in each election to try to find balance. Other states just require poll managers to be members of different political parties. Some states specify the necessary proportion of unaffiliated voters who can work in elections.⁸⁵ Although important clear steps have been taken, some outside observers have offered suggestions for how to further ensure non-partisan administration. For example, the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) offers three potential administrative structures that could prevent partisanship from impacting electoral administration:

- Provide civil service protections to election officials to prevent partisan-motivated dismissals.
- Require the election board to be bipartisan or have dual state election directors, one from each party.
- Require chief election officials to run unaffiliated with a party.⁸⁶

Implementing these BPC recommendations would generally require state legislation.

⁸³ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Election Calendar: EAC Quick Start Guide," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/QuickStartGuides/Election_Calendar_EAC_Quick_Start_Guide_508.pdf.

⁸⁴ U.S. Election Assistance Commission, "Election Management Guidelines," accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/EMG/EAC_Election_Management_Guidelines_508.pdf.

⁸⁵ Grace Gordon and Rachel Orey, "Fortifying Election Security Through Poll Worker Policy," Bipartisan Policy Center, October 17, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/poll-worker-policy/>.

⁸⁶ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Elections Policy to Carry Us Beyond the Next Election," April 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/BPC_Elections-Policy-to-Carry-Us-Beyond-the-Next-Election.pdf.

Enhance safety protections for election workers

With increasing attacks on election workers, it's necessary to increase protection for their physical security and increase their preparedness in the event of a threat.

- Partnerships with law enforcement agencies. The Committee for Safe and Secure Elections provides the election workforce with resources and helps build relationships between the election workforce and local law enforcement. Having too many law enforcement members present at polling places may deter some voters, specifically those in historically marginalized communities.
- **De-escalation training.** The Election Group has created a De-escalation Pocket Guide and Poster with guidelines on how election workers should handle themselves when threatened or dealing with an aggravated voter.⁸⁷ States United Democracy Center also has a de-escalation training toolkit that the election workforce can modify to fit their state's or jurisdiction's needs.⁸⁷
- **Tabletop Exercises.** States should consider incorporating tabletop exercises in the training. Tabletop exercises allow the election workforce to discuss their roles and responsibilities in case of an emergency or threat.

Many threats to the election workforce begin online. Some steps that can be taken to prevent online harassment and attacks include:

- Determining what personal information is available online,

⁸⁷ States United Democracy Center, "De-Escalation: A Toolkit for Election Officials," October 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://statesuniteddemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Dees-Toolkit-Final.pdf>.

North Carolina Case Study

The Director of Elections of Durham County, North Carolina has joined the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections. North Carolina has also made intimidation and threat of an election official a felony. To ensure that people are abiding by North Carolina laws, North Carolina has established the position of chief judge at each polling site. The chief judge is responsible for ensuring voters can freely and safely vote and for protecting order at the polls. The chief judge receives specific training on de-escalation and peace keeping in relation to elections. North Carolina has also acknowledged the need to balance the presence of law enforcement officers at the polling centers for safety with the potential for voters to feel intimidated. To address this, the State Board partnered with North Carolina's Sheriff's Association and the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police to develop an elections guide that covers the entire election process, categorization of activities under the law, and expectations of law enforcement officers.

- Using services to delete personally identifying information,
- Using complex passwords and two-step authentication to secure accounts and
- Creating a public-facing contact information different from personal contact information (e.g. using a non-personal email address).
- Blocking the harasser, reporting the threat, and warning those who may also be impacted.⁸⁸

Build a Pipeline of Election Workers for the Future

Election workers are a vital part of our democracy, but with all the challenges and threats that they are facing, the number of workers is declining, and many election offices are unable to retain their workforce. Election officials must prioritize the recruitment and retention of election officials and poll workers.

To enhance recruitment, especially of younger generations who have historically been under-represented in the election workforce, leading practices include:

- **Utilizing internships and fellowships.** These pathways would allow for young people to work in election offices while also receiving school credits and valuable work experience.⁸⁹
- **Partnering with community colleges and universities.** Election officials can also partner with community colleges and universities to recruit temporary election workers. Election administration internships could be included in the curriculum, or students could receive credit for serving as a poll worker. Recruitment can even happen in high schools. The Montgomery County, MD, Board of Elections Future Vote Student Worker Program, for example, allows high school students to sign up to work elections. They also provide the students with service-learning hours or a stipend for their participation.⁹⁰
- **Encouraging other public employees and veterans to serve.** Hamilton County, Ohio, started the Partners in Democracy campaign to work with local private and public entities to recruit poll workers. These partner organizations allow employees to become poll workers without having to use their vacation or sick leave. They are also offered an additional personal day to use anytime throughout the year after their service.⁹¹ Veterans already have already demonstrated their dedication to public service and are a great source of poll workers. To this end, Vet the Vote is a national campaign to recruit veterans and

⁸⁸Security Positive and the Elections Group, “Defending Democracy: Protecting Election Officials from Digital Threats,” April 2021, accessed: April 16, 2024, https://fe905b4f-785c-4a89-a73e-5999b9031591.filesusr.com/ugd/346ddd_9b3b967e26964ccc9ddcb2fbadd216c6.pdf.

⁸⁹ Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the City of Boston Elections Department allows high school students to work alongside poll workers.

"BPS Students Participate in Student Poll Worker Program on Election Day," Boston Public Schools, November 6, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/site/Default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&PageID=1&ViewID=6446ee88-d30c-497e-9316-3f8874b3e108&FlexDataID=22617>.

⁹⁰ The EAC offers Help America Vote College Program which encourages college students to assist State and local governments in elections by acting as poll workers and assistants.

⁹¹"Partners in Democracy," Hamilton County Board of Elections, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://votehamiltoncountyohio.gov/become-poll-worker/partners-in-democracy/>.

military family members to become the next generation of poll workers that has recruited more than 60,000 poll workers throughout the country.⁹²

- **Participating in national recruitment campaigns.** Charleston County, South Carolina has initiated Day of Democracy, which incentivizes public servants to become poll workers, and Adopt a Polling Location, which works with nonpartisan organizations to help staff polling stations.⁹³ Civic Holidays, such as National Worker Recruitment Day

Arizona piloted an internship and fellowship program in 2002. Democracy Corps, the fellowship program, hired three fellows that supported election officials in the year leading up to a presidential election. Two of the three fellows in 2020 have since accepted full-time positions in the state election office⁴.

Arizona's Initiative Internship Program hired 50 interns that provide short-term help focusing on processing initiative petitions. Interns received training and work experience. After the internship, the secretary of state's office found that there were cost and time-savings and increases to the overall quality of work.

and Election Hero Day, recognize the work of election offices and poll workers and provide election officials with toolkits on recruiting and celebrating workers.⁹⁴ Participating in nationwide recruitment initiatives can be especially beneficial for jurisdictions with more limited resources.

- **Establish a designated hotline for information.** Election offices can create a hotline for election workers to call if they have questions, face a challenge, or need general support.

Retaining Talent

After recruitment, election offices need to focus on the retention of election officials and temporary election workers. Some of the major reasons that workers leave the election workforce, including safety and age, have already been discussed in prior sections. Other issues include pay. In 2022, only 57 percent of election officials made \$50,000 or more annually. Election officials are not paid competitive wages. Public leaders in jurisdictions can investigate their state and local job classifications to determine if election officials qualify for reclassification. With the increased use of technology and the ever-growing challenges that election officials face, reclassification to match other government departments may be necessary and feasible.⁹⁵ To provide state and federal governments with a clear understanding of the turnover rates and challenges in the

⁹² "Vet The Vote," We The Veterans, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://vetthe.vote/>.

⁹³ <https://www.charlestoncounty.org/departments/bevr/adopt-a-polling-location.php>

⁹⁴ "12 Tips for Retaining Election Workers," The Elections Group, December 24, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.electionsgroup.com/12-tips-for-retaining-election-workers>.

⁹⁵ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Elections Policy to Carry Us Beyond the Next Election," April 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/BPC_Elections-Policy-to-Carry-Us-Beyond-the-Next-Election.pdf

election workforce, it is important for jurisdictions to collect and report data on pay, tenure, and turnover as the first step to designing a solution.⁹⁶

Providing election workers with resources and recognition can also increase retention. Given the workload and limited resources, election officials often face burn out. State associations of election officials can share some of the workload by creating a community of practice in which individuals share concerns and potential solutions, discuss effective practices, and receive updates on changes in state law. These associations can also increase uniformity across the state in how voters experience the election, how workers are trained, and various other aspects of the election. And they can work with the state legislature on election administration and resource availability. By working together, these state associations can alleviate some of the stress and reduce some of the work facing individual election officials.⁹⁷

If creating an association isn't feasible in the short-term, there are many other, lower-commitment practices to increase retention. For example, a designated hotline for election workers who need guidance while working an election can be created. Providing workers with this support makes them more likely to return.⁹⁸ Another way to encourage workers to return is to celebrate their work personally and publicly. Hosting a celebration following Election Day for election workers is a simple way to convey appreciation. Election offices can also publish appreciation posts on their social media that highlight one worker or a group of workers.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Bipartisan Policy Center, "Elections Policy to Carry Us Beyond the Next Election," April 2023, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/BPC-Elections-Policy-to-Carry-Us-Beyond-the-Next-Election.pdf>.

⁹⁸ "12 Tips for Retaining Election Workers," The Elections Group, December 24, 2022, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://www.electionsgroup.com/12-tips-for-retaining-election-workers>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Ohio Case Study

Innovative solutions to recruit poll workers and collaborative efforts to train election officials have made Ohio a leader in election workforce recruitment and training. Counties' poll worker recruitment efforts are heavily supported by the Secretary of State's office, who regularly update a public poll worker recruitment tracker, produce posters and postcards for recruitment, and host an easily accessible sign-up form on their website. The office also organized an EAC Clearinghouse Award-winning program to give lawyers, accountants, realtors, social workers, and librarians continuing education credit for serving as a poll worker. Such creative solutions are necessary because of strict requirements for equal party division at each precinct and the state still had issues recruiting enough poll workers for an August 2023 election. Additionally, every single poll worker is required to have completed training and to go through additional training at least every three years.

Enhance Public Engagement

This report has highlighted practices that government and public leaders can take to improve the voter experience, ensure election security, and develop the election workforce in conjunction with their fellow citizens. In a democracy, the election system belongs to all of us, and all citizens have an opportunity to get involved in constructive ways to ensure that it functions effectively.

Fellow citizens can actively become involved in the elections process by:

- Enhancing their knowledge and awareness of the election system and sharing it with others
 - Learn about the operational aspects and challenges of running elections.
 - Be aware of key federal, state, and local laws and procedures.
 - Know how elections are operated in your community.
 - Share this information with family, friends, and colleagues.
- Acting to bolster and protect elections in communities and across the nation.
- Fostering civic engagement
 - Volunteer to be a poll worker.
 - Encourage others in their community to be poll workers.
 - Promote voter registration and share information about registration deadlines and requirements with family, friends, and neighbors.
- Reaching out to their local election office
 - Identify ways to help in the administration of elections (during early voting, on election day, and on preparatory or other tasks at other times).

Chapter 3: Agile Management Techniques

Instituting new practices can be challenging. Limited financial and time resources can constrain the ability to think strategically about implementation steps for these practices. Utilizing agile management principles, election leaders can help test and pilot new electoral activities, ensure that they are tailored to the environment of a given jurisdiction, and help them to evolve over time to keep pace with changing conditions.

In November 2019, the National Academy of Public Administration and the IBM Center for the Business of Government established the Agile Government Center to help the public sector become more innovative, nimble, flexible, and responsive. Agile organizations (1) continuously learn and innovate to meet the needs of stakeholders in real time and (2) use innovative methods for internal management, decision-making, and stakeholder engagement.

Agile is about testing and learning. Agile organizations and leaders have a mindset focused on:

- **Continuous Learning and Innovation:** Agile organizations, driven by the pursuit of excellence, continuously learn and innovate. By embracing this characteristic, government can enhance its public governance efforts, respond proactively to emerging challenges, and offer efficient and effective services.
- **External Engagement:** By making needed adjustments based on changing external conditions and engaging stakeholders, government can increase trust and inclusivity while improving transparency and community engagement. Agile practices ensure that decisions consider external perspectives and evolving needs, enhancing accountability to residents and visitors.
- **Leadership and Empowerment:** Timely, evidence-based decisions are a hallmark of agile leadership. By adopting this practice, government leaders can eliminate roadblocks, empower teams, and help teams achieve higher performance and increase accountability.
- **Internal Culture and Management:** Agile practices utilize transparent processes, a data-drive framework with useful metrics, and cross-functional teams. This can enhance accountability and streamline operations.

3.1 Application to Election Administration

As administrators adopt over time the practices described in this report, they can utilize agile management tenets and practices to ensure sustainable, effective, and efficient electoral process over the long-term.

1. Understanding Changing External Conditions and Evolving Societal Needs

For much of the 20th century, election practices and procedures remained relatively stable. Since the turn of the century, however, the pace of change in election law, policy, and technology has increased significantly. To ensure a safe and secure election, election officials today increasingly must combine a heightened awareness of shifts in the environment with their understanding of their local area's tolerance and appetite for change. Administrators must now receive and incorporate new information about emerging threats, manage evolving dynamics that impact voting equity within communities, and monitor new ballot management methods.

Staying abreast of the evolving environment is a significant undertaking. Malevolent actors also acquire new knowledge with each election cycle, and inaccurate information can move with lightning speed through communities. Election administrators can use an agile mindset and associated techniques to identify changing conditions and anticipate future scenarios. In this complex and rapidly changing ecosystem, election administrators must continue to understand external conditions to uphold each citizen's ability to vote.

2. Collaborating Across Stakeholder Groups:

To devise effective implementation strategies, election administrators today can combine implementation of new practices with a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which they operate and the potential impacts of varying implementation paths. Seeking input from the public can provide valuable perspectives on how to design and implement administrative process changes. This feedback loop serves as a critical tool for election administrators to safeguard security, fairness, and accessibility in elections while building public understanding and support for changes.

Consistent with existing law, election officials can use a variety of mechanisms to involve external stakeholder groups. Meeting with these groups at various points can ensure connection with the public from the very start of the process, which can reduce the risk of inequitable outcomes, public misunderstanding, or unintended consequences.

Finally, election administrators can use technology to communicate and collaborate more frequently and easily than before. Given developments in the speed and scale of information about elections, administrators have more opportunities to provide intentional, regular channels for communicating and building awareness in the community about election-related matters.

3. Unlocking Internal Processes:

Election administrators can continually strengthen their internal processes by using small and inclusive cross-functional teams, ensuring transparency in design plans during the development and deployment of new practices, and leveraging modern technological tools for process automation where applicable. Administrators can also consider using parallel processing internally to avoid unnecessary bottlenecks. Such steps ensure that diverse perspectives are incorporated into administrative decisions, increase visibility into ongoing work among team members, streamline the implementation of policy designs, and expedite the deployment of these designs.

4. Continuous Learning: understand the impact of policies/methods.

Enhancing effectiveness is best achieved by actively piloting, scaling up, and subsequently adopting new work methods when deemed suitable. Election administrators can employ a strategy known as “validated learning” to guide their experimentation with novel approaches and

evaluate their effectiveness.¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹ A crucial aspect of process improvement initiatives is maintaining a willingness and capability to experiment. Assessing the election design implementation process and analyzing the impact of these designs are essential for gaining a deeper understanding of successful practices and areas that can be enhanced.

¹⁰⁰

Annelore Arnold, "Let's Focus on Validated Learning," Medium, February 3, 2020, accessed April 16, 2024, <https://medium.com/serious-scrum/lets-focus-on-validated-learning-instead-of-failing-54646ab1fc5b>.

¹⁰¹ Esther Gons, "What is Validated Learning, and how to apply it?" GroundControl, December 30, 2015, last updated May 24, 2023, <https://togroundcontrol.com/blog/validated-learning/>.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The three pillars identified in this report are each critical to good election administration:

- Voter experience
- Election security
- Election workforce

As shown in the report, jurisdictions across the country have adopted many effective practices that advance each of these pillars. Because elections in the United States take place in a decentralized system with many different parts, all Americans can play a role by learning more about the system and getting involved. This report is written for a broad audience, including:

- Citizens—Americans seeking a broader understanding of how elections are administered may find this paper a helpful survey
- Legislators at all levels of government—since elections are run in many ways and in accordance with a wide variety of legal approaches, legislators may find it useful to gain a broader understanding by learning about what their peer jurisdictions are doing in this space
- Elected executive branch officials at all levels of government, along with election boards, and
- Career election officials and volunteers: professionals in the field may gain other perspectives by learning more about the practices of other jurisdictions

Previous generations of Americans have worked long and hard to move us toward a more perfect union. Some gave their lives for the right to vote. Together, we can ensure free and fair elections for ourselves and future generations of Americans.

Appendix A: Panel (or Expert Advisory Group) and Study Team Member Biographies

Expert Advisory Group of Academy Fellows

Steve Hagerty: Mayor, City of Evanston; Founder and President, Hagerty Consulting, Inc.; Principal Consultant, Pricewaterhouse Coopers; Staff /Senior Consultant/Manager, Pricewaterhouse Coopers; Advisory Board Member, Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, Syracuse University.

Valerie Lemmie: Director of Exploratory Research, Kettering Foundation; Director, Eastern Interconnection States Planning Council; District Director, Congressman Mike Turner's Office; Commissioner, Ohio Public Utilities Commission; Scholar-in-Residence, The Charles F. Kettering Foundation; City Manager, City of Cincinnati Ohio; City Manager, City of Dayton, Ohio; City Manager, City of Petersburg, Virginia; Director, Department of Environmental Services, City of Arlington, Virginia; Assistant Professor, Howard University; Deputy Director, Department of Consumer/Regulatory Affairs, Government of the District of Columbia; Assistant to the Director, Department of Consumer/Regulatory Affairs, Government of the District of Columbia; Project Director, Minority Business Development Services, One America, Inc; , Office of Business and Economic Development; Financial Policy Analyst/Course Manager, Office of Comptroller, Labor Department (on assignment from Kansas City, Missouri).

Nancy Tate: Co-chair, Women's Vote Centennial Initiative; Visiting Fellow, The Council of Independent Colleges; Executive Director, League of Women Voters of the United States and League of Women Voters Education Fund; Chief Operating Officer, National Academy of Public Administration; Project Director, Irving Burton Associates; Division Director, Office of Utility Systems, U.S. Department of Energy.

Study Team

Dr. Joseph Mitchell III, *Director of Strategic Initiatives, National Academy of Public Administration.* Dr. Mitchell leads the Academy's thought leadership activities. He runs the Grand Challenges in Public Administration campaign and the Agile Government Center, facilitates high impact strategic planning sessions with public agencies, manages the Academy's externally sponsored events, and oversees the Center for Intergovernmental Partnerships. Previously, at the General Services Administration, he worked with other leaders in the Office of Government-wide Policy to stand up the Office of Shared Solutions and Performance Improvement and led a team responsible for cross-agency efforts in support of the President's Management Agenda. Before serving at GSA, he led the Academy's organizational studies program, managed projects requested by the U.S. Congress and agencies, and served as a senior analyst on reviews of a wide array of agencies across the federal government. He received a Fed 100 Award in 2022 for his contributions to increasing the agility of the federal government and moderated a joint series with the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee that received the Public/Private Partnership Award from the Council of Inspectors General (CIGIE). He served two terms on the National Science Foundation's Business and Operations Advisory Committee. He holds a Ph.D. from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, a

Master of International Public Policy from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, a Master of Public Administration from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and a BA in History from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He's currently completing an Executive Certificate in Public Leadership at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

James Higgins, *Research Analyst, National Academy of Public Administration*. Mr. Higgins is an Analyst at the Academy on the Strategic Initiatives team responsible for supporting the Grand Challenges in Public Administration campaign and the Agile Government Center, consulting with federal agencies such as the Selective Service System, and producing the Management Matters podcast. Mr. Higgins has previously worked on studies for the Department of Defense, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the United States Trade and Development Agency, and the project, Increasing the Agility of the Federal Government. James graduated with a B.A. in International Studies with a focus on Asia from Dickinson College, and a M.A. in Global Policy with a focus on Security and Foreign Policy from the University of Maine School of Policy and International Affairs.

Kate Kellen, *Research Associate, National Academy of Public Administration*. Ms. Kellen is a Research Associate in the Academy's organizational studies program. She joined the Academy in 2023. Before joining the Academy, Ms. Kellen earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, International Relations, and Spanish from Gonzaga University. During her undergraduate education, she interned at the Academy and helped conduct research interviews on Agile Government and the Academy's Grand Challenges.

Matthew Ruppert, *Intern, National Academy of Public Administration*. Mr. Ruppert was an Intern at the Academy on the Strategic Initiatives team during the summer of 2023, where he worked on the Elections Report and updated research on the Grand Challenges. Previously, he interned in the Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar and worked as a District Field Organizer for campaigns in his home state of Minnesota. Matthew is a senior at Columbia University, pursuing a B.A. in Political Science and Human Rights.

Appendix B: Tables of Potential Practices

Voter Experience Potential Practices	
POTENTIAL PRACTICES FOR CONSIDERATION	STATES/JURISDICTION INFORMATION (based on the best available information at the time of report publication)
Establish a minimum standard for the number of early voting sites.	For example, NY requires one site for every 50,000 registered voters, up to seven per county. NJ mandates 7-10 sites for counties with greater than 300,000 voters, 5-7 for 150,000 to 300,000, and 3-5 for all other counties.
Provide voters with an option of voting early and in-person for a period of at least 7 days in advance and keep early-voting polling locations open for much of the day.	In 2022, 48 states offered at least 7 days of early in-person voting.
Allow voters to receive a ballot by mail for multiple elections with one application	In AZ, DC, IL, MD, MI, MT, NJ, PA, and VA any voter can request to be a permanent absentee voter.
Election officials can process mail-in ballots starting at least 7 days before election day but are prohibited from producing early results.	In AK, AZ, AR, CA, CO, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, KY, ME, MA, MN, MT, NE, NV, NJ, NY, NC, OR, RI, TN, TX, VI, VA, and WA processing may begin 7 days or more before election day.
Offer alternative ways of voting, including mail-in voting and early in-person voting.	8 states + DC offered statewide all-mail elections in 2022. 46 states/territories have no excuse early voting
Allow voters to vote by mail without an excuse.	38 states do not require an excuse to vote by mail.
Provide ballot tracking options and ways to cure ballots' eligibility deficiencies	AZ, AR, CA, CO, DE, DC, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MS, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OR, PA, RI, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, and WI allow ballot curing.
Expand electronic ballot delivery and marking options for UOCAVA voters to voters with disabilities	At least 13 states have extended electronic ballot return options to voters with disabilities, and the types of electronic return include fax, email, and an online portal.
Local election officials can employ a resource allocation calculator to optimize the number of voting machines and staff at polling places to reduce long lines.	FL, MD, and SC are among the states that have used such resource calculators.
Allocate resources to polling stations to address the morning wait times. This can be done by instituting half-day poll workers.	AK, RI, MO, and NY allow half day poll workers.

Polling locations can collect hourly line data to calculate wait times and communicate this information to voters.	The Bipartisan Policy Center and MIT engaged 88 jurisdictions, including San Diego County, CA, Dallas County, TX, Prince William County, VA, and Oscoda County, MI, to calculate line lengths during the 2016 election.
Encourage the use of schools as polling places and schedule Election Day as an in-service day for students and teachers.	In New York City, public schools are regularly used as polling sites and in 2022 students were given the day off.
Implement electronic poll book check-in at all voting sites.	AL, AS, AZ, AR, CA, CO, DE, DC, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, VI, UT, VA, WV, WY, and WI all use electronic poll books.
Set voter registration deadlines to the fewest days necessary to prepare for the election to provide voters a reasonable opportunity to register.	CA, CO, CT, DC, HI, ID, IL, IA, ME, MD, MI, MN, MT, NV, NH, NM, UT, VT, VA, WA, WI, and WY all allow same day registration on election day.
Implement an online voter registration system that is accessible and secure.	AL, AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, GU, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, NE, NV, NJ, NM, NC, OH, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, and WI allow voters to register and update their registrations online.
Allow citizens using a state’s Department of Motor Vehicles or other social service agencies to register to vote or have their registration updated unless they opt out.	AL, AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, FL, GA, IL, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, NV, NJ, NM, RI, SD, VA, and WA automatically register voters using certain state services unless they opt out.
Join ERIC	25 states + DC are members of ERIC as of October 2023.
Prior to an election, create a crisis communication plan for the spread of disinformation.	Various states have a crisis communication plan and the Elections Group has free guidelines on the development process. ¹⁰²
Invest in voter education and outreach at state and local levels.	Ahead of the 2021 June Primary Elections, New York City allocated \$15 million to voter education. In 2023, King County Elections and the Seattle Foundation allocated \$1 million in grant funding to community-based organizations for voter education.
Utilize direct-to-voter communication efforts to streamline updates, ballot tracking, and curing.	CO uses email to tell voters that their ballots need curing and facilitates such curing over text. CO voters can also choose to receive alerts via email or text as their ballot is mailed and processed.

¹⁰² <https://electionsgroup.com/resource/developing-a-crisis-communications-plan/>

Election Workforce Potential Practices

POTENTIAL PRACTICES FOR CONSIDERATION	STATES/JURISDICTIONS (based on the best available information at the time of publication)
Join the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections to help mature and accelerate partnerships between election officials and law enforcement for the purpose of keeping election workers and voters safe.	Members are from states including, Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Utah, and Wisconsin.
Provide election workers with de-escalation training and resources.	In 2022, Travis County, Texas, New York, and other counties paid for de-escalation training for election workers.
Provide election workers with training on how to protect themselves and their information from digital threats.	In Jackson County, Oregon, the elections office shares a building with the Community Justice Program to better allow for cross-agency cooperation and collaboration ¹ .
Participate in tabletop exercises to prepare all election workers for threats.	In 2020, around 2,100 people involved in the election process participated in the DHS's three-day tabletop exercise.
Partake in contingency planning so that election workers are prepared for a variety of disasters or situations.	Although not all states have statutory requirements to develop contingency plans, most states develop them even in the absence of a legislative requirement.
Form an association of election officials within their state to promote community, share best practices, and advocate for election offices to the state legislators.	As an example, a statute in Washington State law requires the establishment of an election assistance and clearinghouse program.
Collect and report data on their workforce including information such as pay, tenure, and turnover. Use this data to compare with other public and private sector roles.	This data is not readily available to the public.

<p>Reevaluate election officials and their staffs' roles and compensate them at a competitive rate. Compare classification and pay with other government department jobs. Consider including additional pay such as overtime and bonuses for election officials.</p>	<p>Montgomery County, Maryland has their pay rates publicly available including the potential bonuses for the working full Election Day, full Early Voting Day, and half day shifts.</p>
<p>Provide election workers with a designated hotline where they can call to get questions answers or if they run into a problem.</p>	<p>Delaware County, Pennsylvania has a designated Poll Worker Hotline that provides workers with answers to various questions that may come up before or on Election Day.</p>
<p>Celebrate election workers after each election to show appreciation and increase retention rates.</p>	<p>Jefferson County, Colorado celebrated Election Heroes Day by having employees wear capes and by promoting their work on the Election Hero Day webpage.</p>
<p>Participate in National Poll Worker Recruitment Day, Election Hero Day, and other Civic Holidays to increase participation in elections.</p>	<p>The Governor of Michigan declared November 7, 2022, Election Hero Day and has consistently applauded the work of election workers.</p>
<p>Offer internships and fellowships to increase participation. States can also partner with community colleges and universities to increase young participation in the workforce.</p>	<p>Ohio partnered with professional organizations for lawyers, librarians, accountants, and more to offer continuing education for those members that were poll workers.</p>
<p>Have election workers take an oath and sign terms of agreement to clarify performance expectations and terms for dismissal.</p>	<p>Georgia creates and distributes a Poll Worker Manual that clearly states the terms of employment and requires the workers to take an oath.</p>
<p>Look into administrative structures that implement a non-partisan or bipartisan approach to election administration.</p>	<p>New York elections are overseen by a Board of Election that is bipartisan.</p> <p>The house and senate minority and majority leaders each appoint 2 members to the Hawaii election Commission and the final spot is chosen by the 2/3 vote of the members.</p>

<p>Produce an election procedures manual every two years to communicate legislative and implementation changes.</p>	<p>Arizona law requires the Secretary of State to produce an election procedures manual every two years.</p>
<p>Create and manage election calendars that clearly define deadlines, tasks, and assignments.</p>	<p>Many states create and utilize election calendars; however, the exact number is unclear. States such as Arizona, Virginia, New York, Washington and Michigan have their calendars clearly displayed on their websites.</p>
<p>Create standards of conduct, review them annually, and include them in the training of election workers.</p>	<p>Fairfax County, Virginia's Office of Elections has their standard of conduct posted on their website for public viewing.</p>
<p>Incentivize or require training for new and returning election officials. Ideally, training would be regularly evaluated, created in partnership with academia, and offered regularly and at convenient times. States can incentivize training and continuous learning by offering increased pay or benefits to election officials.</p>	<p>As of 2016, 32 states require training of their election officials.</p>
<p>Election Officials can partner with local government bodies to encourage public servants to sign up as temporary workers.</p>	<p>Seminole County, Florida reached out to and worked with local government officials to recruit poll workers leading up to the 2020 election.</p>
<p>Election offices can partner with non-profit organizations or businesses that specialize in various areas to offer training or receive guidance/ best practices.</p>	<p>Nebraska's Secretary of State partnered with Disability Rights Nebraska to offer statewide training for all election officials.</p>



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