

Journal of Election Administration, Research & Practice



blending theory and practice
to advance the field

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Reflections on Practice
Research & Policy Briefs
Book and Product Reflections

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Editors' Introduction

We are excited to present the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Election Administration Research & Practice*, a biannual e-journal developed in partnership between the National Association of Election Officials (The Election Center) and the Auburn University Election Administration Initiative. The journal is the flagship of the newly formed Institute of Election Administration Research & Practice, developed through this partnership as a strategic response to building the profession. The journal is designed to bring forward and address the concerns of the practice, policy, research, vendor, and advocacy communities involved in the administration of elections in the US and abroad. We intend this as a peer-reviewed praxis journal that provides greater breadth and depth to questions about the administration of elections, offering a format and content that is accessible to practitioners, as well as content that informs better policy and research.

Free and fair elections that are safe and secure for everyone are the foundation of a democratic system of governance. The political and electoral landscapes have become increasingly polarized, and that includes issues related to election administration as well. The landscape is constantly evolving and there is no shortage of mis- and dis-information about how elections are or should be conducted. This has created greater confusion and mistrust among the general populace. As such, there is a clear need for an outlet that can address timely issues related to election administration in order to help administrators identify best practices, help policy makers pursue effective solutions, help guide academic research, and help anyone else working in this space.

Our vision for the journal is that it will serve as a setting for serious exchange of ideas about the status of and improvements to the professional administration of elections for decades to come. To achieve this goal, we have designed the journal around four major sections: policy briefs written by experts, reflections on practice written by election officials, research articles written by academics and other researchers and reviewed and commented on by practitioners, and reviews of relevant services, organizations, books, and other products meant to support the field. Achieving this vision will only be possible with active participation by the larger community of stakeholders. We encourage readers to engage in active discussion and hope that you will also volunteer to write for us.

As a joint venture between the Election Center, Auburn University faculty, and active election officials and supported by academics, practitioners, policy makers, and vendors from around the country through our editorial board, we anticipate that in certain volumes and articles there will be conflicts of interest and controversy. To that end, we have asked all authors to provide readers with any relevant affiliations to provide context for their observations, analysis, and opinions. We invite disparate opinions, difficult conversations, and significant exchanges as long as they are well-reasoned and fact-based.

In our inaugural issue, the invited authors take up issues related to elections including critical infrastructure, postal voting, ethics, the future of elections, citizen attitudes about voting in the US and Canada, and the role of legal defense and philanthropy in supporting the field. We hope you will find the material thought provoking and that—whether you agree or disagree—the content also encourages you to reach out and engage.

~Mitchell Brown, Kathleen Hale, David Stafford, Terri Stroud, and Ryan Williamson, co-editors

Empowering The Elections Workforce and Protecting Critical Infrastructure

Noah Praetz, *The Elections Group*¹

The environment for election officials is daunting. Each of the nearly 10,000 officials and their staffs are managing risk on a multitude of fronts: cyber and physical security, worker safety, operational difficulties inherent to the administration of complex systems, and pernicious effects of mis-, dis- and mal-information.

Russia's war in Ukraine likely exacerbates the risk environment significantly, as U.S. relations with Russia and its allies have deteriorated to the point that traditional deterrents against overt cyber action may have already been used or may no longer be effective. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has admonished "shields up" in response.

Election officials cannot just manage election security risks. Election officials, when not acting as CEO, must act as operational managers and front-line workers. They face capacity, competency, and resource-constrained management choices. As the chief executive, election officials have five primary duties: governance, risk management, communications, operational compliance, and funding. Governance duties include building a culture and a team equipped to administer elections. Risk management requires broad awareness of risks, monitoring those risks, and planning for the short- and long-term advancement of risk mitigation efforts. Communications are an ascendent duty, with multiple stakeholders including voters, workers, volunteers, media, policy makers, and funders, each requiring tailored efforts. Good communications and information sharing, both internally and externally, require significant investment. Operational compliance means oversight of fundamentals of election administration, ensuring the organization meets the spirit and letter of the law and that staff and workers follow standard operating procedures, policies, and practices. Finally, election officials must procure and manage the funding necessary to excel in their duties.

Election officials now spend significant time addressing incorrect information. Significant numbers of Americans remain skeptical about our elections despite tremendous efforts over the last four years to increase security and overwhelming evidence that the 2020 election was well run and secure. Information about elections, regardless of source, goes to the heart of American identity—the belief in democracy and self-governance. Informational attacks have been highly effective in undermining the essential American belief that winners and losers were determined accurately and fairly. Until recently, candidate concessions were the norm, and their voters would generally follow suit. Now faced with an environment in which candidates may not accept results, election officials must consider how to take the case for trustworthy election processes and results directly to voters.

Unfortunately, election officials cannot only address communications and must also consider scenarios that combine actual cyber events with continued foreign information influence operations, and a problematic domestic information environment. Such a scenario might require large numbers of voters in a jurisdiction to vote provisionally because their voter list gets scrambled, or it may require manually counting paper ballots because their vote counting system somehow became unreliable. In either case, contingencies are in place so voters can vote, and election officials can painstakingly count those votes and audit the results. The question for election officials is, will Americans accept those

¹ Noah Praetz is a Partner with The Elections Group. Formerly he ran elections in Cook County Illinois one of the largest election jurisdictions in the country. He consults on election administration with local, state, and federal agencies and is also an adjunct law professor at DePaul University College of Law. He is on the advisory board of the University of Chicago Cyber Policy Institute.

resilient practices? Or will such actions be used to further undermine trust in the outcomes and in democracy generally?

In defining and managing risks, (cyber, physical, informational) election officials assess the vulnerabilities, the likelihood that those vulnerabilities will be exploited, and the consequences of a successful exploit. Across the board, risks appear higher: more evident physical and information vulnerabilities, increased threats or probability of exploitation, and increased consequences given the current level of national mistrust.

Managing these various risks to the satisfaction of election officials, despite herculean efforts, has proven difficult, despite support efforts by the federal government and other non-governmental organizations. Election officials are flooded with advice from a variety of sources, but broad implementation and organizational advancement remain limited due in large part to workforce gaps. Without a complete workforce, or access to sufficient shared resourcing, election officials are under water. The field would benefit from more targeted and dynamic risk management guidance that more specifically prioritizes efforts across risk domains and that identifies specific maturity paths within domains.

Critical Infrastructure Designation and Federal Support

In 2017, The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) stepped into the arena and deemed elections as part of 16 critical infrastructure sectors. The designation was necessary because elections are “so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security.” CISA, the federal lead agency, then defined elections as a National Critical Function (NCF). In addition, CISA included “disruption, corruption, or dysfunction” in its definition of recognized dangers to the field. These statements undergird America’s “national policy to strengthen and maintain secure, functioning, and resilient critical infrastructure,” including elections.

This designation of elections as critical infrastructure was a signal to the world, and domestically, about the priority of protecting U.S. elections. However, the tools available for providing that support are limited. Article 1, Section IV, of the Constitution directs states to determine the “Times, Places, and Manner” of congressional elections, subject to Congress’s authority to “make or alter” state regulations. This sets the stage for some natural conflict between the states and the federal government concerning elections.

Since 2017, federal/state tension has been managed through CISA’s voluntary and partnership-based approach in providing federal resources and expertise in support of election officials. CISA has no actual authority outside of federal government agencies. Nevertheless, CISA has added value across the states and private sector through information sharing, training, threat briefings, services, and a willingness to meet the changing demands of election officials, even pivoting to provide risk management support around running a pandemic election in 2020, for example.

This federal approach thus far follows that provided to other sectors. Upon request, and subject to resource constraints, CISA deploys specialized advisors and automated services in cyber security and physical infrastructure security domains. The experts serve as a risk analysis field force that helps election officials and local governments understand their risk profile and consider opportunities for maturing their cyber and physical security. They also provide written products that help election officials build resilience to mis-, dis- and mal-information. This matrix style management structure may serve the other sectors but may not fill the gaps unique to the election sector.

The Election Sector Is Special

Elections are fundamentally different from other critical infrastructure sectors. Americans know whether they have electricity or not; whether their money is available at the bank; whether the dam at the edge of town is holding back flooding; whether there is cellular phone service and internet; if food is available; and whether police and ambulances respond to 911. Americans know from their individual experience whether, and to what degree, a service provider, or an entire sector, is functioning.

In contrast, Americans' experience of elections turns upon not only one's own experience and belief that their vote was counted accurately in their locality, but also their belief that votes are being counted appropriately in the locality next door, across the state, and across the country. This different relationship with elections requires that voters either take a leap of faith in the institution generally, or engage in significant work necessary to understand the complexities and nuances of election administration both locally, and around the country. That creates dual roles for elections officials. First, they must manage and communicate the complexities and trustworthiness of their own election management organizations; and second, they must stand up for the administration of democracy generally by communicating the trustworthiness of other organizations across the country over which they have no operational oversight.

The elections workforce is also different from that of other critical infrastructure sectors in the overall capacity, competency, and recognized professional status associated with its management. Election officials share a value set, norms, language, and some similar thread lines of professional development but arrive in office with many varied skillsets and have no shared baseline competencies. This gap makes it difficult for one election official to stand on behalf of colleagues around the country, and for Americans to transfer trust they develop with their local officials, to election officials serving elsewhere. The lack of shared competencies limits rapid organizational change and results in higher risks associated with changes in the legal or operating environment. The election profession would be best positioned to meet its challenges if more of the workforce shared a common baseline in the professional competencies of election security (including documentation, chain of custody, auditing, and cyber and physical security risk management), project management, leadership, logistics, and communications.

The Workforce

Since the declaration of elections as critical infrastructure, the community has been clear that workforce development, specifically education and training, is a top priority. Joint working groups between the private sector and election official community have struggled to define adequate solutions to fill the gap. The first and second sector specific plans published by the Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council (EI-GCC) leaned heavily into training and education needs. However, progress on that front has yet to meet the need, particularly as sands rapidly shift. The best effort has produced a comprehensive catalog of learning opportunities, but it has not offered prioritization or curation, and has not identified the significant educational gaps that exist. Education will be the key to workforce development and more formal professionalization of the field.

Stanford University highlighted research concluding that voters are reassured by three messages: that elections are run in a bipartisan manner; that the system is transparent; and that election administrators are trained professionals who are on the job all year long. While election officials are absolutely professionals, and on the job all year long, they are mostly professionals in the apprenticeship model.

Currently, the semi-formal education of the profession is served with several efforts. First, the Election Center (EC), in partnership with Auburn University, offers a certification program with

significant coursework. The certification is highly valuable for election officials who can afford it. It has created a relatively elite community of shared knowledge and increased understanding, creating a strong foundation for applied learning, similar to a liberal arts degree. The International Association of Government Officials, (IGO) similarly partners with Pepperdine University to offer courses in the model of traditional Continuing Education Credits offered in other professions and fields. While providing value like the Election Center program, few of those courses are targeted at the specific competency requirements for managing elections in this time, and the scale is relatively small. The Humphrey School and University of Minnesota offer a Certificate in Election Administration. Auburn University also offers a graduate certificate. Other schools have a historical commitment to election administration including Massachusetts Institute of Technology, California Institute of Technology, Harvard University's Belfer Center, University of Southern California, University of Chicago, Reed College, and others. Finally, some states and state associations of election officials offer varieties of certification and continuing education programs.

Other organizations, most notably the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), also work to help build capacity through education. CTCL brings a more granular training curriculum directly to election officials and their staffing ranks with very low-cost online training. This curriculum is focused in areas of particular interest to election officials, generally increasing awareness and skills in narrow areas. The CTCL training is parallel to a community college class curriculum with courses in cyber security, communications and website creation, among others. The knowledge transfer is excellent, and the subject matter is accessible to election officials. However, the lack of a recognized credentialing authority and the limitations of online or asynchronous learning in building relationships among students limit the general perception of their programming as bestowing a professional competency.

Shared Resourcing

In a perfect world, each election office would have trained attorneys, communication professionals, project managers, business school graduates, cyber security experts, and technical writers. However, the field will never enjoy a workforce tooled enough to offer each of the 10,000 election offices complete control over people with the expert level competencies suggested above. Shared resourcing and shared services work exceptionally well in the election space, as evidenced by the success of Illinois' and other states' Cyber Navigators programs. Navigators are workforce participants with high competency in some or all election security knowledge sets who provide support to multiple local election officials. States, associations, or regional groups of election officials can and do pool resources and get access to certain competencies, increasing individual office capacity, and readying organizations to meet some challenges of our time.

Shared election security labor, or navigators, has been recommended practice since 2018 when the EI-GCC recommended the practice. States get value from supporting their locals through Navigator programs by reducing risks to their locals, but also by reducing risks to their own reputation, decreasing the chances that something unfortunate occurs in their state, and showing the public that they have not left locals to fend for themselves. In recent years, states have either created navigator-type programs from scratch or adapted existing liaison programs to meet the service demands of locals for support in a variety of subject matter areas. However, navigators and liaisons can suffer from the same lack of common election professional standardization, particularly as increased demands for a variety of competencies are placed upon them. Helping increase competency among this shared resource workforce, or navigators pool, is a necessary step, along with reaching election officials.

Workforce Development

Given federalism concerns, different models of state support, and existing service providers with deep expertise in many competencies, election officials can nevertheless be supported through an additional workforce development program. With organizations like CISA, the Election Subsector Infrastructure - Information Sharing and Analysis Center, (EI-ISAC), the US Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the US Department of Defense (DOD), universities, and non-governmental organizations, the broad coalition can rise to the moment and contribute to the resilience of elections and demonstrate necessary commitment to the institution. Like the National War College, or our DOD's International Military Education and Training (IMET), the Officer Training School, or the National Guard, it is possible to deconflict a variety of interests, as well as maintain a functioning and valuable education marketplace, and also support rapid workforce development.

Using convening authority, and the gravitas of the federal government, in partnerships with other organizations and the states, a premier educational program could rapidly aid workforce development in elections. There are many potential partners to such a program, each of which could play a variety of roles. Given the capacity of the organizations listed herein to contribute, and the need to develop the workforce quickly, a premier education program is eminently feasible.

A possible program team might look like the following: CISA, as the federal government's lead agency on election security efforts, could facilitate program creation and administration. As coursework is developed, CISA also offers significant subject matter expertise through Cybersecurity Advisors and Protective Security Advisors. Through them, CISA can lead training both on security principles generally, but also on how best to use or administer assessments and then operationalize them. Similarly, the EI-ISAC can provide training in cyber security and information sharing. A cadre of election security subject matter experts at CISA and the EAC can provide detailed election security coursework in audits, chain of custody, and election-specific crisis communications. Universities, Auburn in particular, can provide programmatic support and help build effective coursework using adult education principles. The CTCL can share its lessons in teaching staff, and perhaps provide any online opportunities that may be made available. The DOD can help lead organizational management training bringing the battle-staff mindset to election management, particularly when elections are live, like the field-tested approach the Belfer Center at Harvard University used during its brief but effective foray into the elections support space. The goal is to teach officials to become a versatile, operational group ready to manage myriad challenges now faced.

It is America's policy to "strengthen and maintain secure, functioning, and resilient critical infrastructure." The risks to elections are increasing, and disruption, corruption, dysfunction, incapacitation, or destruction would be debilitating. It is time for intentional and innovative efforts to develop and support the elections workforce to be explored.

The Future of Voting at Home: An Analysis of 2020 Policy Changes and Effects

Amber McReynolds, *Governor United States Postal Service Board*¹

The 2020 election cycle was characterized by uncertainty, change, and massive unforeseen challenges due to a global pandemic and intense partisan politics. Election administration that was historically not intensely political was suddenly all about politics. Despite these circumstances, election officials, technical support companies, government partners, and community partners achieved monumental success through their extraordinary and heroic efforts to ensure voters could vote in a fair, accessible, secure, equitable, and safe way. Democracy is a team sport and that has never been truer than at this moment in our history.

Further, there is an opportunity now to improve our civic health and empower voters with options to vote. This voter-first approach will ensure that elections are fair, accessible, secure, transparent, equitable, and reliable. All these values matter equally in designing pro-voter policies and voter centric processes. And this policy conversation is completely nonpartisan and simply about serving voters effectively.

As election officials across the country were thrust into an election year suddenly upended by a pandemic, policymakers, experts, election officials, and civic leaders came together and worked to adjust election policies and plans. Voter interest in voting at home soared as pandemic fears grew, and the election community worked diligently to present best practices², innovative solutions, and training³ to aid states in expanding vote at home options. Most urgently, there were solutions for how to best empower and equip election officials to ensure the health and safety of both poll workers and voters, while running one of most highly anticipated and challenging elections in United States history with a record-breaking number of mail ballots.

In March of 2020, the Vote at Home Scale Plan⁴ was presented as the first and most comprehensive guidance for states looking to expand vote at home options in response to growing market demand by voters. The plan included expansive recommendations for designing mail ballots and instruction packets⁵, setting up ballot tracking systems, voter communication strategies and education⁶, procurement of new equipment for processing ballots, process improvements, and specific considerations for states of all sizes. Election officials across the country and experts consider this to

¹ Amber formerly served as the CEO of the National Vote at Home Institute and in 2021 was appointed by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate to serve as a Governor for the US Postal Service. She is co-author of the book When Women Vote, and is currently serving as a senior strategic advisor to various national organizations including Issue One, Fair Vote, Election Reformers Network, and others. She previously served as the Director of Elections for the City and County of Denver, Colorado.

² See Center for Civic Design Guide to scaling vote at home systems: <https://voteathome.org/marketplace/a-tool-kit-of-resources-for-scaling-up-vote-by-mail-center-for-civic-design/>

³ See National Vote at Home Institute Election Official Hub: <https://voteathome.org/election-official-hub/>

⁴ 2020 Vote at Home Scale Plan: https://voteathome.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/VAHScale_StrategyPlan.pdf

⁵ Guidance from Center for Civic Design on Mail Ballot Design: <https://civicdesign.org/projects/vote-by-mail/>

⁶ Communications Toolkit from the National Vote at Home Institute: <https://voteathome.org/communications-toolkit/>

be an effective roadmap for any jurisdiction looking to scale mail ballot operations while considering the pandemic and election realities.

Further, a Policy Actions report⁷ created by the National Vote at Home Institute in May of 2020, defined best practices for mail ballot processes and summarized the policy position of every state and the District of Columbia. This report made specific recommendations for state policymakers to consider in 2020 and in the future. The report categorized states based on various factors including security, existing infrastructure, access to voting from home and returning the ballot, ballot tracking, and other voter-centric programs. The National Council of State Legislatures also maintains a summary of mail ballot policies and procedures across the country and continues to update it as laws change.⁸ This resource is key for policymakers and election officials to compare and contrast voting at home terminology and policies nationwide given the variances by state.

Analysis

Voters have been choosing to vote from home since soldiers first utilized voting by mail options during the Civil War. Mail ballot voting started to expand for civilians in the late 1800s⁹ and has slowly grown steadily over time in response to evolving and expanding voter demand. In 2020, this voter-driven growth accelerated due to the pandemic and due to expanded access for voters to request a mail-in ballot. There have been significant policy shifts across states in response to the choices voters are making. This trend confirms the importance of meeting voters where they are in their everyday lives and responding to their needs.

Over time, voting at home policies and procedures have evolved and improved. Today, there are critical policy provisions, procedures, and technical systems that create the necessary baseline for an advanced, innovative, efficient, secure, and transparent system.

The following analysis and subsequent recommendations focus on voting at home systems, but it is essential for election officials and policymakers to maintain and continuously improve in-person and accessible voting options to provide voters with expanded options and choice. Efficient and effective vote at home systems include interconnected policies that expand voting options while maintaining fairness, accessibility, security, and transparency.

Policy Review - 2020 and Beyond

It is important to note the positive examples of policy changes in various states while also recognizing the challenges that persist. Disinformation and malinformation about the mail ballot process has significantly impacted the public's perception of this policy and that persists today. As with the election process broadly, this persistent disinformation campaign has a negative impact on public sentiment and decreases trust. Thus, it is also important for policymakers to recognize and fund civics and public education about the election process to combat this persistent threat.

It is important to highlight states that have expanded mail ballot options successfully. It is also critical to recognize that challenges persist in other states around the country. Election policies must

⁷ National Vote at Home Institute 2020 Analysis: <http://voteathome.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NVAHI-50-State-Policy-Analysis.pdf>

⁸ "Voting Outside the Polling Place, National Council on State Legislatures (NCSL): <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>

⁹ MIT Election Data Science Lab Explainer about Mail Ballot Voting: <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/voting-mail-and-absentee-voting>

be fair, accessible, secure, transparent, and reliable and the following state examples demonstrate this balanced approach.

Kentucky

Kentucky demonstrated how to expand options for voters in an emergency in a bi-partisan way and serves as an example for other states. The secretary of state and the governor proved that by working collaboratively to find solutions in an emergency, they could positively improve the voting experience for all voters across the state. Some of Kentucky's changes include allowing voters to request an absentee ballot online, providing a basic ballot tracking solution, accepting postmark, installing mail ballot drop-off boxes across the state, implementing a cure process for mail ballots, providing in-person early voting options at vote centers, and implementing pre-processing so that mail ballots could be processed efficiently, and timely results would be provided. Further, officials adopted recommendations for establishing vote centers and created a "super center" model to provide expansive options to voters. Kentucky's governor and secretary of state, along with local election officials, demonstrated a collaborative commitment to ensuring a safe and secure election in 2020. This effort led to permanent policy changes in 2021 which have improved and expanded voting access for all.

Vermont

The experience in Vermont demonstrated an alternate policy approach to the pandemic emergency. In 2020, legislation authorized the secretary of state to create and plan and adjust the voting process to conduct the state's November election by mail while providing in-person voting options. This approach provided more flexibility to the secretary of state's office to respond to emerging challenges due to the pandemic. The state adopted best practices to establish secure ballot drop boxes,¹⁰ provided prepaid postage on all ballots, and implemented customer-friendly solutions such as drive-through voting. Vermont's turnout rose 7% from 2016 and it ranked #1 on the 2020 Elections Performance Index¹¹ which analyzes states on multiple indicators and metrics. In 2021, the Vermont legislature enacted the 2020 election model changes permanently and will mail a ballot to all eligible voters before each election in the future. Further, the legislation passed with support across the political spectrum. Vermont is a true success story and example for other states.

Nevada

In response to the pandemic, Nevada passed legislation to enact a vote at home system for the 2020 election and mailed every eligible voter a ballot while providing in-person voting options. Nevada pre-processed mail ballots beginning fifteen days before election day and thus, was able to provide the majority of results on election night and more than 84% of all ballots by the next day. This is a testament to the state's pre-processing policy and the dedicated election officials who processed a high number of ballots under intense scrutiny. Further, Nevada offered a sophisticated ballot tracking system which allowed voters to track their mail ballot throughout the process and receive status updates via text and email. The state also implemented national best practices, including prepaid postage on all ballots as well as expansive ballot drop-off locations throughout the state. Turnout

¹⁰ See CISA Recommendations for Secure Ballot Drop-off Boxes: <https://voteathome.org/marketplace/cisa-recommendations-for-ballot-drop-boxes/>

¹¹ See Elections Performance Index (EPI): <https://elections.mit.edu/#/data/rank>

increased in Nevada in 2020 to 77%, demonstrating that implementing voter-friendly policies that are secure and accessible improves voter engagement. In 2021, the Nevada legislature made these temporary changes permanent and now election officials are focused on continuing to improve their system for the future.

California

The California legislature passed the California Voter Choice Act¹² (SB450) in 2016 which modernized elections and allowed counties to opt into a full vote at home model, expanded early voting options, established vote centers, and provided for secure ballot drop-off options. In early 2020, and due to the pandemic, California fast-tracked implementation to respond to pandemic concerns. With an executive order, followed by enacting legislation, California required counties to implement the provisions passed in 2016 including the requirement to mail a ballot to all eligible voters. The state also became one of a few states to implement a sophisticated ballot tracking and communication system so that voters had full visibility as to the status of their mail ballot. California also expanded postmark acceptance and provided extensive statewide ballot drop-off options. Finally, the Secretary of State's office, in collaboration with all counties, community partners, and national experts, worked together to enact the 2020 plans, educate the public about the new system, and launch a statewide civics education campaign called 'Vote Safe California.'¹³

Conclusion and Recommendations

More than one hundred million voters cast a ballot before Election Day in 2020 with the majority of voters voting at home. Clearly voters want to have options to vote that are not contingent on one day or in one government assigned polling place. However, vote at home policies continue to vary significantly across the United States and are specific to where you live. In some states, you must complete paperwork ahead of each election and prove that you have a reason to request an absentee ballot.¹⁴ In the most advanced states on this policy, a ballot is mailed to each eligible elector before each election. The deadlines on requesting a mail ballot vary by state and sometimes conflict with the operational mailing timelines outlined by the United States Postal Service. Further, in most states election officials can start processing mail ballots before election day but in some (such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin), election officials are not allowed to process ballots which delays results.

For the November 2020 presidential election, over 183 million voters or 85% of registered voters were eligible to receive a ballot in the mail without providing an excuse.¹⁵ This growth was driven by voters who chose to vote at home in a secure and convenient way. Thus, to respond to this increase and ensure vote at home systems are effective, accessible, and secure, we must continually improve election policies, processes, and the technical implementation of the systems.

Key Recommendations for the Future (for election officials and policymakers)

1. Allow voters to request a mail-in ballot without an excuse and without extra barriers such as: requiring a notary, requiring it to be on a paper form as opposed to an online request form,

¹² See California Secretary of State's Voter Choice Act Page: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voters-choice-act>

¹³ See Vote Safe California Campaign Ad: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwE8L_RiFw0

¹⁴ See National Vote at Home State Dashboard: <https://voteathome.org/dashboard/>

¹⁵ National Vote at Home 2020 Retrospective: <https://app.box.com/s/921nosx7pq8urxw9sbijgkc554fh5d3>

requiring voters to provide a copy of an ID without offering an alternative, or requiring voters to sign-up prior to each election.

2. Create a federal baseline for mail-in ballot rules and deadlines so that there is greater consistency nationwide. An example of a baseline would be a consistent deadline to apply for a mail ballot before an election (in states that do not already send a mail ballot to eligible voters automatically) as this would make it clear for voters nationwide, allow for national campaigns to be consistent in their communications, allow for a national mail ballot application, and create more consistency for USPS. Another example would be to cover postage nationally similar to UOCAVA ballots so that there was consistency from state to state. Finally, establishing a consistent national policy for a deadline to return a mail ballot such as the utilization of a postmark or electronic barcode scan would provide more consistency and actually improve operational efficiency for USPS and for election officials.
3. Utilize clear design for ballots, envelopes, and instructions so that they are easy to use and easy to understand. Clear design¹⁶ reduces errors, reduces confusion, and improves the voter experience.
4. Implement sophisticated ballot tracking systems nationwide to increase accountability, enhance security, and improve voter communications for mail ballots.
5. Coordinate with the United States Postal Service¹⁷ (USPS) to ensure effective mail ballot delivery. Utilize the USPS election mail kit¹⁸ and recommendations to ensure proper design for materials for optimal implementation.
6. Utilize the National Change of Address (NCOA) system proactively to ensure voter addresses are accurate. Utilize other systems such as ERIC¹⁹ (the Electronic Registration and Information Center) to improve the accuracy of voter address information.
7. Allow election officials to pre-process mail ballots so that election results are timely.²⁰
8. Improve transparency of ballot processing and counting operations to increase the public's trust of the election process.²¹
9. Invest in operational equipment and infrastructure so that election officials have the resources they need to process ballots.
10. Improve and fund voter and civic education efforts and communications from election officials so that voters can rely on trusted sources of information about the voting process.
11. Implement pro-voter validation policies and processes for mail ballots so that policies balance voter enfranchisement and election security.
12. Improve ballot printing and mailing operations across the industry to ensure there is sufficient capacity and to ensure that best practices are utilized for the production of mail ballots.

¹⁶ Center for Civic Design: <https://civicdesign.org/program/election-design/>

¹⁷ USPS Election Mail Materials and Guide: <https://about.usps.com/what/government-services/election-mail/>

¹⁸ USPS Election Mail Kit 600: <https://about.usps.com/kits/kit600.pdf>

¹⁹ ERIC (Electronic Registration Information Center): <https://ericstates.org/>

²⁰ NCSL Summary of Pre-processing mail ballots: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx#process>

²¹ Carter Center and NVAHI Guide to Transparency:

<https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/democracy/tips-for-transparency.pdf>

Driving the Future of Elections as Public Service: The Role of Ethics

Susan Gill, *Chair, Election Center Board of Directors*¹

ABSTRACT

Ethics is at the core of elections. It sets the stage for the confidence people have in elections and results. The environment in which election officials work today has changed, particularly since the 2020 election. In the past, if a voter was confused or upset, we could sit down with them and talk. We could walk them through the process, show them our facilities, invite them to watch canvassing, and in the end they would feel satisfied. Now, too often they come in with preconceived ideas and are not there to learn but rather to verify and validate their misconceptions. This is an extraordinarily difficult environment in which to work, but ethics is the core of engaging the public in a positive way.

Ethics and Trust

There is a clear relationship between ethics and trust. That said, voters don't usually use the term "ethics." They often don't understand the elections process, so they want assurances that it is transparent. There are times voters do not like the laws election officials must follow. Ethics means you are doing the right thing and following the law.

The 24-hour news cycle and social media also confuse voters. The constant flow of information from these sources means that voters are now much more likely to hear about something that is going on in another state that they think is wrong, and then question whether it is happening—or might happen—in their own state. This results in people reaching out to their local election officials to explain that certain things are wrong, even when the circumstances don't apply or are simply unfounded.

The challenges election officials face are not partisan. However, some of what the public views as unethical are actually partisan decisions made by state legislatures. This mismatch poses a challenge for election officials. And when something actually does go wrong, it is most often more an issue of mismanagement or human error rather than a partisan or unethical choice.

Even so, there are instances in which we must be prepared for partisanship resulting in unethical behavior. Often this comes from temporary poll workers. Once I had a poll worker who called a voter a "tree hugger" after a voter turned in a ballot. The poll worker was sent home, and I spoke with him about how important it is to be completely non-partisan and neutral in working elections. In Florida, we have polling place parity between the two major parties, but given the current hyper-partisanship, this kind of behavior is a real possibility. So appropriate ethics training is important for all those who touch the election system.

¹ Susan Gill has more than 25 years of experience in the election world, first as candidate and then for 24 years as the Supervisor of Elections for Citrus County, Florida, retiring in 2020.

The Gatekeepers of Democracy and the Role of the Election Center

In Georgia's 2020 election, Secretary Brad Raffensperger did not budge from doing the right thing, despite what appears to be pressure from the White House. This underscores how essential it is to have an ethical code for election officials that supersedes partisan preferences or loyalties.

The Election Center, also known as the National Association of Election Officials, embodies the ethics of election administration in several ways. Since 1997, the Principles of Election/Registration Officials have stood as a statement of the values of the election administration profession. Crafted by Election Center members, the principles below reflect the obligations and responsibilities of election professionals as "gatekeepers of democracy."

Principles of Election/Registration Officials

- Freedom is an inherent human right, but it is also fragile and can be lost through neglect or misuse.
- Freedom requires responsibility.
- Freedom can best be maintained and nurtured through the democratic process. The success of the democratic process requires fair and open elections which accurately reflect the intent of the electorate.
- Therefore, it is our unique role as election officials to serve as gatekeepers of democracy.

It is our sacred honor to protect and promote public trust and confidence by our conduct of accurate and fair elections.

As the guardians of freedom within a democratic society, we are responsible for the integrity of the process. Our role demands that these principles must be placed above personal or partisan gain.

Nurturing and protecting democracy is a team effort in the profession of elections administration. Our task requires wisdom, courage and the desire to remain focused on our vision of free and impartial elections despite changes in our society and its laws.

By dedicated adherence to these principles and standards of conduct, we demonstrate our loyalty to freedom, pride in our profession and a commitment to the excellence of the democratic process.

In addition, when election officials graduate from the CERA/CERV program as Certified Election and Registration Administrators, or as Certified Election and Registration Vendors, they take an ethical oath to the profession. Election administrators and vendors who are members of the Election Center recognize that this profession requires that we think about specific issues, and that we confront them. This is that oath:

The Election Administrator's Oath

My personal pledge to freedom, to democracy, and my profession:

- I uphold the Constitution of the United States and the laws, policies, and court decisions of federal, state and local jurisdictions;
- I commit to excellence and competence by maintaining the highest level of knowledge of expertise in the elections process through continuing education and self-evaluation;
- I am accountable for maintaining public confidence in honest and impartial elections which I conduct in a fair, efficient and accurate manner;
- I dignify voters by providing equal opportunity to participate in the democratic process;

- I am responsible for just and equitable treatment of the general public, elected officials and members of my profession;
- I manifest a positive role in community relations by being accessible and receptive to both individuals and groups;
- I have the courage and stamina to protect the public's interest from manipulation for personal or partisan gain while respecting the rights of all;
- I am flexible and innovative within the framework of the law in carrying out my duties on behalf of the public's interest;
- I conduct all fiscal responsibilities with wisdom and integrity, and am accountable for all funds and resources committed to my charge;
- I maintain a productive and efficient operation through a well-managed elections environment; and
- I maintain the highest level of integrity in performing all duties of my profession.

The Principles and the Oath are displayed on the walls of election offices across the country whose staff are proud members of the Election Center.

This oath distinguishes CERA/CERV graduates as election officials and stakeholders who are different from those who are just hired to work in an election office, whether full or part-time. All election officials, no matter the level, should be guided by ethical principles of non-partisan, law-abiding, transparent work to ensure integrity of the process and the outcome. The Election Center's focus on ethics as a part of membership is a mark of distinction in this area.

Also distinctive is the Election Center's focus on ethics as part of its professional development and certification. In the CERA/CERV certification curriculum, election officials are engaged in learning about ethics. This includes working with their colleagues from across the country to consider ethical scenarios, reflect on ethical challenges, and apply ethical principles to problems that they face.

Concluding Thoughts

Conversations about elections are critical. Greater attention to ethical codes might help people respond to pressures within their own party and provide greater public confidence about the integrity of the field. The Election Center is an ideal place to continue these conversations and to help develop messages that election officials and others can deliver to concerned voters to help build confidence in the processes and the people who run elections.

As an election official, I loved my work because I believed I was doing something critically important to our democracy. If we lose this, what do we have left as a country? It feels like we are approaching the brink, and election officials must continue to tell our story about what we do, how we do it, and most importantly, why we do it. We must stay the course and continue to tell the truth.

What Do Our Experiences in 2020 Mean Going Forward?

Ricky Hatch, *Clerk/Auditor, Weber County, Utah*¹

ABSTRACT

During the 2020 presidential election, record turnout, a global pandemic, misinformation, and foreign influences stressed our nation's election infrastructure like never before – and things haven't slowed down since then. Traditional methods used by local election officials to collaborate and share information are insufficient to meet today's demands. We need a new, real-time national network of local election officials to match the increased scrutiny, threats, and misinformation surrounding election administration. Two existing national organizations are poised to meet this need.

You may have noticed how being the President of the United States appears to age a person quite rapidly. Presidential election years have the same effect on election officials. The added stress of the 2020 election likely quadrupled that, which means almost every election official in the country should soon be able to retire!

Election officials function as referees. Of course, we all have our personal views on politics and policy, but when we step into our roles as election administrators, we set personal views aside, put on our referee caps (or more recently, our umpire face masks, chest protectors, and shin guards) and work as objective administrators. It must be this way.

My first presidential election as an elected County Clerk/Auditor was 2012. I spent most of my time ensuring that we had enough polling places, that they were adequately supplied and staffed, and had properly tested and functioning direct-recording electronic voting machines (DREs). I spent Election Day visiting the locations and trying to keep the lines short. In 2020, just eight years and two presidential elections later, most of my time was spent on the phone answering questions from voters concerned about the fraud that they heard was running rampant throughout the country. I spent time begging the media to report on our processes and safeguards. I tweeted and posted fact-checks and "Did you know?" posts to combat mis-, dis- and mal-information, and I frequently checked notifications from the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC) on emerging threats across the country.

The population of Weber County, Utah increased seven percent from 2016 to 2020 (265,000 people). However, the increase in voters during that same period was 17 percent, with 127,000 active registered voters in 2020. Long before November, we knew 2020 would not be a "normal" presidential election. In every presidential election before 2020, we needed only one election worker to answer the phones. In 2020, we needed four. I suspect other jurisdictions had a similar increase in demand.

¹ Ricky Weber has served as the elected Clerk/Auditor since 2011, and serves as the chair of the Elections Subcommittee, National Association of Counties; Treasurer, International Association of Governmental Officials; Advisory Board Member, U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), Center for Tech and Civic Life, and Center for Civic Design; and a member of the EAC Local Leadership Council, Election Infrastructure Subsector Government Coordinating Council, Election Center Legislative Committee.

Every election administrator in the country has a story that goes something like this:

Voter: “I just heard that [insert story here: ‘ballots thrown in a ditch in Pennsylvania,’ ‘suitcases of ballots suddenly appearing in Georgia,’ ‘overnight vote flipping in Michigan,’ ‘Sharpiegate in Arizona,’ and ‘Nancy Pelosi and Venezuela co-own Dominion Voting Systems.’]” The list goes on and on.

Election Official: “I can’t speak for other jurisdictions, but I can tell you about the safeguards that we have in our jurisdiction to make sure our elections are secure, accurate, and trustworthy.” The election official then goes into as much detail as they feel would assuage the voter’s concerns, but as quickly as possible so they can get back to actually administering the election.

Voter: “Well, I trust YOU. I know you do things right. I just don’t trust [insert state name here]. You know...they’re run by [insert party name here].”

Voters naturally project these allegations to all elections nationwide, except for their local election official unless, of course, the local jurisdiction is of a different political persuasion than the voter. Even though voters tend to have greater trust the closer the governmental entity is to home, they also tend to lump “the government” into one conglomerated entity, so they worry that these stories about other places must also apply to their local jurisdiction.

It is this mental merging of city, county, state, and federal governments that makes a national network of local election officials crucial. Imagine a scenario like this: a prominent political figure alleges an egregious incident of election fraud that quickly propagates across network news, specialty news, and social media. Election officials from across the country begin receiving calls from concerned voters that the integrity of their own jurisdiction’s elections may also be at risk. Now, local and state election officials have to respond to these allegations in addition to focusing on actually administering their own elections. These election officials are caught off-guard and have no more access to reliable or detailed information than the voters asking the questions.

With that scenario in mind, imagine a nationwide network where local election officials could quickly get the full details from trusted sources and be able to respond more effectively to their local voters. A small patchwork of such networks currently exists with outstanding organizations like the Election Center and the International Association of Government Officials (iGO). Unfortunately, actively participating in these organizations is not cheap. Consequently, over 90 percent of the country’s 8,800 election jurisdictions are missing out. The EAC and the EI-ISAC provide some networking options at little or no cost, but still actively reach fewer than 40% of jurisdictions.

With the increased scrutiny of, threats to, and misinformation about election administration, election officials need to collaborate with each other more than ever. The limited reach of these patchworked national organizations and the current model of local election officials sharing information annually at a state conference are no longer sufficient. Threats and misinformation impact jurisdictions across state lines. Election officials need to develop a new model, one that transcends geographical, budgetary, and jurisdictional-size boundaries. While each local jurisdiction is unique, the challenges we face are universal, and election officials need to all hang together, or they will all hang separately (apologies to the ineffable Benjamin Franklin).

Fortunately, we already have examples of how well this network could work. On October 20, 2020, thousands of emails were sent to voters in at least four states, purportedly from the Proud Boys, saying that the group was “in possession of all your information,” and “You will vote for Trump on Election Day or we will come after you.” Within 24 hours, the Department of Homeland Security

held a call with state and local officials and provided details of the allegations and additional intelligence about Iran being the source of this breach. This was likely the fastest-ever public disclosure of such intelligence by the U.S. government. The local election officials who participated in these calls were able to confidently speak to the story with current, credible, and consistent facts. This timely and fairly widespread dissemination of information is an excellent example of the benefits of nationwide information sharing. But it needs to be easily accessible to ALL local election officials, including those in very small jurisdictions.

Another example comes from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). One of CISA's greatest contributions in 2020 was the establishment of an election-specific Rumor Control page, designed to provide to the public, media, and election officials a fact-check on the rampant allegations of election fraud. This page, which should be expanded to address emerging allegations in real-time, can be a tremendous resource for election officials who receive questions from citizens who have concerns. Unfortunately, most local election officials do not even know this resource exists.

The COVID-19 pandemic rocked our world, forcing election officials into an almost apocalyptic science fiction scenario that previous tabletop exercises had not really considered. Most states had to entirely rethink how to effectively serve their voters. Even states that were already conducting their elections by mail had to consider the challenges of social distancing in their ballot processing centers.

As states scrambled for solutions, election officials from across the country quickly banded together. Election officials have always been a tight-knit bunch, openly embracing the concept of CASE (Copy and Steal Everything) and being willing to give and take in equal measure. In the spring of 2020, webinars and calls on ramping up vote-by-mail were held almost weekly. By summer, several best practice documents circulated throughout the election community, most of them free of charge. These documents were written by busy election officials for busy election officials, providing essential tips and tricks for ensuring a secure and efficient mail-ballot process. Some jurisdictions visited election shops in other states to see the administration first-hand. Phone calls and emails supplemented more formal documents. Election officials mobilized and helped each other in a way that perhaps no other governmental profession had before. Ours is a fairly unique industry, where the failure of one jurisdiction doesn't translate into gains for another; instead, any failure anywhere causes all election officials to suffer. We genuinely want each other to succeed.

So where do we go from here? Election officials do not need another association. We do not need to start from scratch in forming a nationwide professional network of local election officials. We simply need to leverage the existing organizations to further enhance our connection. But someone has to spin the web that links these organizations together. The two entities best poised to do that together are the EAC and the National Association of Counties (NACo). The EAC, which has a congressional mandate to assist election officials, established the Local Leadership Council in 2021. The Local Leadership Council is a federal advisory council made up of two local election officials from each state. Although its purpose is to advise the EAC, natural side benefits will be the first-ever fully-representative nationwide convening of local election leaders and, perhaps one of the most elusive yet important benefits, an up-to-date national contact list of local election officials. Combine these benefits with NACo's national network of local governments, established communications infrastructure, and influence in Washington DC, and the framework for a sustainable structure to quickly and widely disseminate information appears to be within reach.

In the past, interstate collaboration and networking were available primarily to larger jurisdictions that could afford membership in Election Center and iGO. With the new EAC Local Leadership Council, NACo's increased involvement in elections, and various other organizations dedicated to supporting election officials (including the Bipartisan Policy Center, Center for Tech and

Civic Life, Center for Civic Design, and many, many more), smaller jurisdictions with limited funding now have the opportunity for more access to a national network.

This nationally supportive network of local election officials would weave together relationships and structures from the following organizations:

State associations: Almost every state has an association of election officials that provides networking, training, information sharing and legislative coordination. These state associations have been the backbone supporting U.S. elections.

National associations: The Election Center and iGO provide national conferences, webinars, certification programs, and other ample opportunities to network and share information. While not dedicated exclusively to election officials, NACo provides tremendous resources in the areas of research and legislative awareness and influence.

Federal governmental entities: The EAC is a tremendous resource. Created by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) after the 2000 elections, the EAC has received spasmodic attention from Congress over the years, both positive and negative. After several years of not having a quorum of Commissioners and multiple attempts from Congressmen to defund it, the EAC has dramatically expanded its resources and, consequently, its support of election officials. The EAC Clearinghouse is a huge repository of best practices, technical guides, and videos.

The Election Infrastructure Subsector Government Coordinating Council is comprised of state and local election officials, with a few federal representatives as well. Its focus is on sharing information and best practices regarding election security. Through CISA, it provides free and low-cost tools and services to election jurisdictions of all sizes, including assessments, incident response, monitoring, training, and consulting from expert advisors.

Many other public, philanthropic, and private organizations contribute to the effort of providing election-related resources and connecting election officials.

These organizations each fill a unique and valuable role in connecting and strengthening election officials, and thus our national election infrastructure. Election officials would do well to incorporate these organizations into their support structure.

Just like the national transportation system provides the infrastructure for our nation's economy, our election system provides the infrastructure for our nation's almost 250-year history of the peaceful transition of power. This infrastructure is facing threats and is under scrutiny like never before. In response, election officials nationwide must band together as never before to maintain public trust in the security, accuracy, and integrity of our election system.

Postal Voting in the 2020 Election

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ABSTRACT

Using a large-scale nationally representative survey of voters, we offer a depiction of voting by mail during the 2020 presidential election cycle. During this election-cycle mail voting was by far the most prevalent form for voting, accounting for 46% of all votes cast. The 2020 election-cycle was characterized not only by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also efforts in many states to expand the vote by mail option as a means of mitigating the effects of this health crisis. Running counter to this effort was former President Donald Trump's assertion that vote by mail was tainted by high levels of voter fraud. In this short article, we seek to create a profile of who voted by mail in the 2020 presidential election, the reasons they did so, and how these voters evaluated the overall process. In general, fear of COVID-19 was positively associated with the usage of mail in voting, although rates did vary by presidential vote choice with Trump supporters less likely to have relied on this form of voting. In terms of voter confidence, vote by mail actually scored higher than early in-person or Election Day precinct voting. Again, evaluations were colored through the lens of partisan perceptions as Trump voters demonstrated lower confidence levels for vote by mail. While the pandemic has abated, the future of vote by mail utilization levels would appear to hinge on a number of factors, including partisan perceptions of the process and the ease of the process within the state in question.

The 2020 Presidential election produced the highest voter turnout in over 100 years. This occurred despite the first worldwide pandemic in a century and an unprecedented attack on the institution of mail-assisted voting by an incumbent President and his party.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, states and local jurisdictions sought out ways to protect voters and poll workers from contracting and spreading the virus during the 2020 election. In addition to encouraging social distancing and the wearing of face masks, many states and voters took up mail voting as means of avoiding in-person contact and exposure to the virus.

In 2020, 11 states expanded voter opportunities to vote by mail (VBM) (NCSL 2020). According to the Current Population Survey (CPS) dataset, an estimated 46% of voters cast a mail ballot in 2020, up from 21% in 2016. The increase in mail voting occurred despite President Donald Trump's persistent claims that "mail-in ballots will lead to massive electoral fraud and a rigged 2020

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election” (Rizzo 2020). How did fear from COVID-19, Republican partisan resistance to mail voting, and states’ efforts to protect voters and poll workers shape mail voting in the 2020?

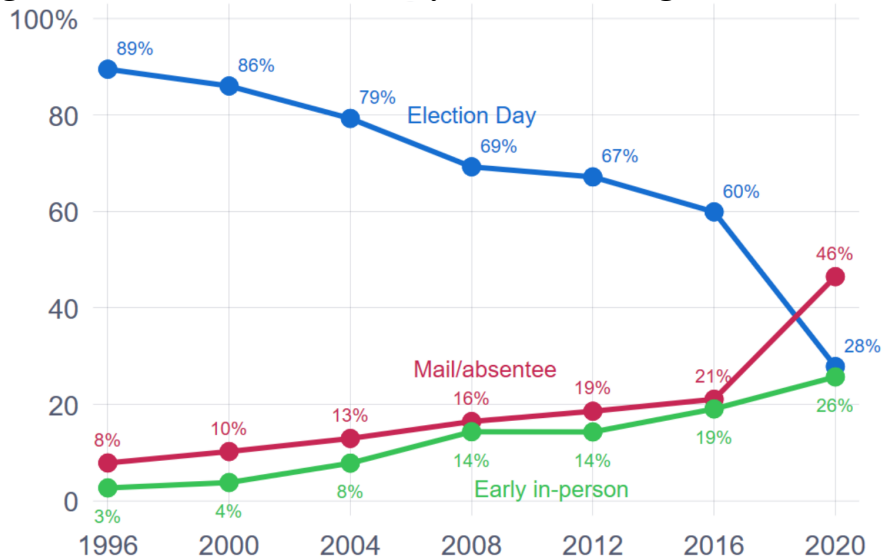
We address four questions about mail voting in the 2020 election in this article: Who voted by mail in 2020 and why? Who switched to mail voting from another mode of voting in 2020 and why? What were the experiences of mail voters in the 2020 election? Who is likely to continue voting by mail in the future and why? Our inquiry and answers to these questions are descriptive and more suggestive than definitive of how the 2020 election may shape the incidence of postal voting in future elections.

Drawing on a national post-election survey of 2020 voters, we identify first-time mail voters and continuing mail voters in states with different and new opportunities for mail voting. Our sample of all 2020 voters is sufficiently granular (approximately ten thousand mail voters) to distinguish between the experiences of mail-in voters in states with different types of postal voting, threats from COVID-19, and partisan preferences.

The History of Mail Assisted Voting

Mail-in voting has been practiced in U.S. federal elections since 1864. In 1978, California (Patterson and Caldeira 1995) was the first state to adopt no-excuse mail-in voting, allowing any eligible voter to vote by mail-in ballot even if they were not going to be away from their residence on Election Day and/or did not otherwise have a qualifying excuse (e.g., over 65 or voter with a disability). Since then, the practice has expanded dramatically. By 2018, 27 states had adopted no-excuse mail-in ballot systems. More recently, and largely due to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, all but five states allowed no-excuse mail-in voting in the 2020 presidential election. The remaining states allowed mail-in voting for persons over 65 years of age, disabled persons, persons out of the jurisdiction on Election Day and, in some states, incarcerated persons.

Figure 1: Fraction of Ballot Cast by Different Voting Modes, 1996-2020



Data sources: Census Bureau, Voting and Registration Supplement, 1996 - 2016; SPAE, 2020

The popularity of mail-in voting is best measured by the proportion of votes cast by mail. As is apparent in Figure 1, since the turn of the century, the share of votes cast by all forms of mail-in

voting has risen nearly three-fold, from 7.8% in 1996 to 21.1% in 2016. In 2020, the percent of votes cast by mail rose to 46%.

In 2020, every state and the District of Columbia allowed at least some of its voters to cast their ballots by mail (NCSL 2020). Mail-in voting, however, comes in several forms. Consistent with the U.S. federal system, states offer different options for mail-in voting and allow for local variation within each state to account for more specific considerations.² There are three distinct types of mail-in voting defined largely by who can exercise this option and how voters obtain and return their mail-in ballots. Table 1 groups states by these three categories. The most restrictive form is excuse-only mail-in voting. Five states in the 2020 presidential election restricted mail-in voting to specific individuals, usually voters who were over 65 years old, disabled, or out of the jurisdiction on Election Day.³ The largest number of states (36) practiced no-excuse mail-in voting in 2020, allowing any person to vote by mail regardless of whether they have a reason. In 27 of these states, persons eligible and seeking to vote by mail had to request a mail-in ballot application prior to the election.⁴ Nine states with mail-in voting automatically mailed every voter an application to vote by mail in 2020. Another nine states and the District of Columbia in 2020 conducted universal vote-by-mail elections in which the state (or a local entity such a county or municipality) mailed all registered voters a ballot before each election without a voter having to request one (NCSL 2020).

Table 1. Mail Voting in the 2020 Presidential Election

Category	States	% of Total Registrants
Ballots Mailed to All Registrants	CA, CO, DC, HI, NJ, NV, OR, UT, VT, WA	21.3% [44.6 mil.]
No Excuse (Includes Pandemic Exception)	AL, AK, AZ, AR, CT, DE, FL, GA, ID, IL, IA, KS, KY, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NH, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, PA, RI, SC, SD, VA, WV, WI, WY	64.6% [133.7 mil.]
Non-Pandemic Excuse Required	IN, LA, MS, TN, TX	13.8% [28.6 mil.]

Sources: 2020 EAVES Report; [fivethirtyeight.com](https://www.fivethirtyeight.com).

²In some states the number, type, and location of places for dropping off mail ballots vary by county. States vary when mail ballots have to be returned and whether local jurisdictions can mail unsolicited mail ballot applications to eligible voters.

³New York and South Carolina require an excuse to vote by mail. Because of the pandemic, voters in these two states were allowed to vote by mail without an excuse during the 2020 presidential election.

⁴Although some states allow voters to request a mail-in ballot online, most require mail-in ballots to be requested in-person or by mail. Some states have permanent mail-in voting for those eligible. This allows the eligible mail-in voter to obtain a mail-in ballot before each election without having to make a separate request for each election.

Data and Measures of Voting in the 2020 Election

We draw on a national survey of 2020 voters to study both mail and in-person voting. Surveys were conducted online, with voters in all 50 states. Email addresses for 1.2 million voters were purchased from several commercial vendors of voter files.⁵ Surveys were solicited and completed between November 11, 2020, and February 9, 2021. We obtained 19,475 completed surveys from all 50 states, with at least 200 responses from each state. Completed surveys included 10,145 persons who reported voting by mail in the 2020 election. Responses were weighted to represent the national share of votes cast in each state and for selected demographics from the *2020 Current Population Survey* including age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and mode of voting. An important feature of our survey is that we can determine the voting histories of our respondents from official voting records; thus, we do not rely on respondents' self-reported voting history.⁶

Who Voted by Mail in 2020?

Previous research (Stewart 2016) shows little demographic variation in the use of mail ballots during the 2016 election. The exception is age, where many states with excuse-only mail voting do allow persons over 65 to vote by mail. A higher proportion of Republicans voted by mail in the 2016 election cycle, but this was due in part to the greater share of Republican voters over the age of 65. The age profile of mail voters changed very little in 2020. A substantially higher proportion of voters in all age categories voted by mail, but the age differential did not change. In 2016, Stewart (2016) reports a nine-percentage point differential in the proportion of voters over 65 (31%) and under 65 (22%) voting by mail. As seen in Table 2, we find that 54% of voters over 65 voted by mail in 2020 compared to 44% of voters under 35, for a 13-percentage age differential among the oldest and youngest categories of voters.

**Table 2: Respondent Age by Voting Method
(% by Row)**

Age	Voting Method			Total N
	Mail	Early	Election Day	
< 35	44.20	24.13	31.68	4,921
35-65	39.64	24.74	35.62	9,158
65+	53.71	23.02	23.27	3,46
Total N	7,640	4,239	5,616	17,496

⁵ On-line surveys were solicited from approximately 1.2 million registered voters in all 50 states. Email addresses for registered voters were purchased from L2. A total of 12,140 online surveys were completed from L2's sample of registered voters for a response rate of 1%. An additional 7,225 online interviews were conducted in selected states using Dynata's *Voter Research Panel*. For a further discussion of the sample, response rates, survey questions and frequencies go to: <https://voteintegrity.blogs.rice.edu>

⁶Validated voting histories for all survey respondents were purchased from L2 and Dynata. Neither L2 nor Dynata provide validated method of voting. We rely on the respondent's self-reported method of voting.

As demonstrated in Table 3, differences among partisans voting by mail skewed in the 2020 election, with a significantly greater proportion of Democrats (55%) reporting they voted by mail than Republicans (31%). Only 36% of Trump supporters over the age of 65 reported voting by mail. Sixty-four percent of Biden supporters over the age of 65 reported voting by mail. This is a remarkable change from 2016 when less than a quarter of partisans of either major party reported voting by mail (Stewart 2016).

**Table 3: Respondent Party by Voting Method
(% by Row)**

Party	Voting Method			
	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total N
Rep	31.21	27.24	41.55	7,195
Ind	45.82	20.71	33.47	2,646
Dem	54.65	22.61	22.73	7,658
Total N	7,644	4,240	5,616	17,501

The strong partisan skew in mail voting in the 2020 election cycle most likely reflects President Trump's charge that mail voting was be used by Democrats to "steal" the 2020 election (Rizzo 2020). The President's charge of fraudulent mail-in voting was a continuation of the same charge he made about the 2016 election. To illustrate the extent to which Trump's message of election fraud shaped his supporters' perception of the 2020 election, we examine whether voters believed that election fraud changed the outcome of the election in their state. Seventy percent of Trump voters believed that absentee mail ballots are stolen and discarded most or all of the time. Only 12% of Biden voters believed this was true in the 2020 election. This demonstrates the effectiveness of Trump's electoral fraud message and can help explain the extent to which this may have had an impact on what mode of voting his voters opted to use in the 2020 election.

Table 4: Mail Ballots are Stolen and Thrown Away by Presidential Candidate Choice

Presidential Candidate Choice	Voted absentee ballots are stolen and thrown away after being submitted					
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	All of the time	Total N
Trump	7.35	11.90	10.22	51.22	19.30	6,339
Biden	53.16	25.23	9.53	7.11	4.96	6,962
Total	4,167	2,511	1,311	2,742	1,569	13,301

How influential were President Trump's charges about mail voting on his supporters' decision to vote by mail, especially given the threat from COVID-19? One means of answering this question is to examine the proportion of voters citing concern about contracting and spreading COVID-19 as a reason to vote by mail by Presidential vote choice. Among Biden supporters, 78% cited fear of contracting COVID-19 as a reason for voting for mail. Only 16% of Trump supporters cited COVID-19 as a reason for voting by mail. For Trump supporters, the modal reasons for voting by mail were

work conflicts (37%), disability (37%), and travel out of the voting jurisdiction (47%), all traditional reasons for absentee mail-in voting.

All survey respondents were asked how concerned they were about contracting and spreading the COVID-19 virus (see Table 5). Eighty-seven percent of Biden supporters reported some concern about exposure to the COVID-19 virus compared to only 48% of Trump supporters.

Table 5: Presidential Choice by Concern with COVID-19
(% by Row)

Presidential Candidate Choice	How worried are you that you or someone in your family will be exposed to COVID-19				
	Not worried at all	Not too worried	Somewhat worried	Very worried	Total N
Trump	22.57	29.44	30.49	17.50	7,638
Biden	3.23	9.97	40.02	46.78	8,529
Total N	1,999	3,099	5,742	5,326	16,167

Biden voters were clearly motivated to vote by mail if they were *somewhat* or *very worried* about contracting or spreading the virus. Eighty-seven percent of Biden supporters who reported voting by mail also reported some concern about COVID-19. There is a muted relationship between the likelihood of Trump voters to vote by mail and their concern about COVID-19. Among Trump voters who reported voting by mail in the 2020 election 44% reported they were not at all concerned or not too concerned about COVID-19; 56% of Trump supporters who voted by mail said they were somewhat or very concerned they or someone in their family would be exposed to COVID. We infer from these findings that President Trump's supporters entered the 2020 election with considerably less fear about contracting COVID-19 and less motivated to vote by mail. Together, these findings suggest that President Trump's supporters were very susceptible to his reproach to voting by mail, either directly or because of diminished concern about contracting the virus.

Eligibility to vote by mail is an obvious constraint on a voter choosing to vote by mail. In 2020, all states afforded their voters an option to vote by mail. More than two-thirds of states did not require an excuse to vote by mail and 11 more states relaxed excuses for voting by mail to include fear of contracting COVID-19 for the 2020 election. Did these changes in state laws regulating mail voting in the 2020 election attract new mail-in voters? States that adopted no-excuse mail voting for the 2020 election experienced a higher rate of voting by mail (33%) than those states that continued to require an excuse to vote by mail (26%). In states with no-excuse mail voting, 55% of the vote was cast by mail, and in states with only mail-in voting, 79% of votes were cast by mail.⁷

In 2020, African-American voters reported lower levels of mail voting (35%) than white voters (43%). Forty-five percent of Hispanic voters reported voting by mail. The highest rate of mail voting occurred among Asian-American (65%) and voters of Middle Eastern origin (85%). An equal proportion of women and men (43%) reported voting by mail in 2020.

The partisan skew in mail voting in the 2020 presidential election was influenced by President Trump's attack on the legitimacy of mail voting and efforts by Democrats to expand mail voting as a means of protecting voters and poll workers from contracting and spreading COVID-19. The threat

⁷Though all voters in states with vote by mail elections receive an unsolicited ballot in the mail, on average, a third of voters return their ballots in-person on or before Election Day (Menger and Stein 2020).

⁸ In 2021, twelve states enacted new laws restricting mail voting ("Voting Laws Roundup: October 2021").

from COVID-19 and expanded opportunities to vote by mail worked to swell the ranks of mail voting, but largely among Democrats and Biden supporters. Conversely, attacks on mail voting from President Trump depressed Republicans from taking up mail voting, even among those who feared contracting COVID-19.

Who Switched to Mail Voting in 2020?

Another means of assessing who voted by mail in 2020 is to identify first-time mail voters. All mail voters were asked whether they had previously voted by mail. Those who responded “no” were identified as first-time mail voters. Among voters who cast their ballot by mail in 2020, 22.6% reported voting by mail for the first time. Why? Were first time mail voters more likely to choose mail voting for different reasons than voters were who voted by mail in previous elections?

Fifty-seven percent of first-time mail voters cited fear from contracting COVID-19 as a reason for voting by mail in 2020. For those who had previously voted by mail prior to 2020, 42% reported COVID-19 as reason for voting by mail in 2020. For first-time mail voters, fear of COVID-19 was a motivating factor in choosing to vote by mail. Moreover, first-time mail voters in 2020 were frequent voters; all first-time mail voters in 2020 reported voting in 2016, and 89% voted in the 2018 midterm election. We infer from this information that first-time mail voters converted from in-person voting to mail voting largely to avoid the threat of COVID-19.

Two-thirds (68%) of Biden supporters reported voting by mail for the first time in the 2020 election; only 32% of Trump voters reported they voted by mail for first time in the 2020. Concern for contracting and spreading COVID-19 was cited by first time voters among both Trump and Biden supporters as a reason for voting by mail in 2020. Among Trump supporters who reported voting by mail for the first time in the 2020 election, 35% cited concern about COVID-19 as a reason for voting by mail. Among Biden supporters who reported voting by mail for first time, 32% reported COVID-19 as a reason for voting by mail.

First-time mail voters were responsive to the threat from COVID-19 and their respective states’ new opportunities to vote by mail. Moreover, these relationships, at least for first time mail voters, were not muted by partisanship and the strong anti-mail voting messaging from President Trump.

Table 6: Reasons for Voting by Mail (Multiple Responses Allowed)

	Previous Mail Voters	New Mail Voters
Convenience	61.0%	38.9%
COVID-19	42.3%	57.6%
Total N	3,883	3,554

Note: New mail voters are defined as voters who voted by mail in 2020 and reported having never voted by mail before.

Among previous mail voters, a plurality (39%) cited convenience as the reason for voting by mail. In contrast, more than half (58%) of new mail voters reported the pandemic as a reason they voted by mail in the 2020 presidential election. Whether new mail voters continue to vote by mail in the future could rest on their voting experience in 2020, and the continued threat of a pandemic, a topic we turn to in the next section.

Voting Experience and Confidence

Survey respondents were asked to rate their voting experience in the 2020 elections. Mail voters were also asked whether they would vote by mail in future elections. Fifty-nine of all voters rated their voting experience as excellent. Voter partisanship differentiates their voting experience in 2020, but only modestly. Among Trump supporters, 87% rated their voting experience good or excellent; 97% of Biden supporters rated their voting experience as either good or excellent (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Presidential Choice by Voting Experience
(% by Row)**

Presidential Candidate Choice	Q4.1 - How would you rate your voting experience overall?				
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Total N
Trump	4.13	8.74	40.37	46.76	7,448
Biden	0.32	2.75	25.16	71.77	8,595
Total N	346	913	5,291	9,794	16,346

Table 8 examines voter experience by voting method for the 2020 presidential election. The highest rated mode of voting in 2020 was mail voting. Sixty-six percent of mail voters rated their voting experience as excellent, compared to 54% of early in-person voters and 54% of Election Day votes. Sixty-three percent of new mail voters rated their voting experience as excellent; 71% of experienced mail voters in 2020 rated their voting experienced as excellent.

**Table 8: Voting Method by Voting Experience
(% by row)**

Voting Method	Q4.1 - How would you rate your voting experience overall?				
	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Total N
Absentee/vote by mail	2.59	4.30	27.64	65.47	7,635
Early in-person	1.78	5.98	38.35	53.89	4,239
Election Day in-person	2.13	8.13	35.88	53.86	5,609
Total N	393	1,037	5,748	10,305	17,484

Voters' confidence that their ballot was counted as they intended is a critical test for the integrity of any voting system and election. Mail voters, unlike in-person voters, rely on a larger number of actors to secure, complete, and return their mail ballot on time and for accurate tabulation. Past research (Alvarez et al 2008; Atkeson 2014; Atkeson and Saunders 2008; Bryant 2020) reported that mail voters were less confident than in-person voters that their ballot was counted as they intended. In the 2020 presidential election, this trend was reversed; fifty percent of mail voters reported they were *very confident* their ballot was counted as they intended (see Table 9). This compares with 23% and 26% of in-person early and Election Day voters who reported they were very confident their ballots were counted as they intended.

Table 9: Voter Confidence by Method of Voting

Q4.2 - How confident are you that YOUR vote in the General Election was counted	Voting Method			
	Mail	Early	Election Day	Total N
Not at all confident	33.89	29.30	36.80	1,382
Not too confident	26.64	30.97	42.38	1,305
Somewhat confident	34.77	24.20	41.03	4,342
Very confident	50.78	22.77	26.45	10,451
Total	7,633	4,239	5,607	17,481

Again, partisanship is strongly related to voter confidence among mail voters. Only 39% of Trump voters who voted by mail were very confident their ballot was counted as they intended. Among Biden supporters who voted by mail, 84% were very confident their ballot counted as they intended.

Table 10: Voter Confidence Among Mail Voters by Presidential Choice (% by row)

Presidential Candidate Choice	Q4.2 - How confident are you that YOUR vote in the General Election was counted				
	Not at all confident	Not too confident	Somewhat confident	Very confident	Total N
Trump	17.19	12.33	30.97	39.52	2,265
Biden	.68	1.02	13.82	94.49	4,865
Total	32	49	672	4,110	7,130

Despite partisan attacks on mail voting and challenges election officials faced in meeting increased demand for mail ballots, mail voters typically rated their experience in a positive light. This uniformity of opinion among mail-voters did not generalize to voter confidence. The lack of confidence Trump mail-voters had that their mail ballot was counted accurately suggests these voters might seek another means of casting their ballot in future elections, especially if threats from the COVID-19 virus abate and attacks on the integrity of mail voting continue from Republican candidates.

The Future of Voting by Mail

Mail voters were asked if they would vote by mail in future elections based on their voting experience in 2020. Sixty-five percent of all persons who voted by mail in 2020 reported they would be very likely to vote by mail in future elections. Less than half (45%) of first-time mail voters reported that they would be very likely to vote by mail in future elections. Seventy-nine percent of voters who voted by mail in previous elections reported they would be very likely to vote again by mail.

The decision to vote by mail among first-time mail voters in 2020 was shaped by concern with contracting and spreading COVID-19. This was not a major reason for voting by mail in 2020 among persons who had voted by mail in previous elections. As the threat from COVID-19 abates, the demand for and incidence of mail voting could also decline.

Again, partisanship is a strong correlate of 2020 mail voters' intentions to vote by mail in future elections. Only 11% of Trump supporters who voted by mail for the first-time in 2020 reported they

would vote by mail in future elections. Even among Trump supporters who were experienced mail voters, only 62% said they would vote by mail in future elections. Among Biden supporters, 55% of first-time mail voters and 80% of previous mail voters reported they would be very likely to vote by mail in future elections.

Discussion

The future of mail-in voting is likely to be determined by a constellation of factors that are in tension with each other. Voters' fear from public health threats (e.g., COVID-19), partisan concerns with the integrity of mail voting, and state laws regulating this process have opposing and variable effects on voters' intention and ability to cast a mail ballot. All three conditions are subject to change in the near term. Moreover, how these factors interact to influence mail voting is unclear and should be the subject of future investigations. For these reasons, we have avoided offering a specific estimate of the proportion of votes that might be cast by mail in near term elections. Fear from public health threats would seem less likely to shape future mail voting, while partisan challenges to voting by mail and state laws regulating voting by mail remain salient influences on the incidence of mail voting.⁸

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Response to Postal Voting in the 2020 Election

Joe Gloria, *Registrar of Voters, Clark County, Nevada and Member, Election Center Board of Directors*¹

The research and report on “Postal Voting in the 2020 Election,” examines what drove voters to vote in record numbers using the mail ballot option in the 2020 election cycle. The authors look at the large increase in the use of mail voting during the 2020 election among all 50 states and seek to identify what motivated voters to make use of the mail ballot option during the COVID pandemic. Work along these lines will be very useful to election officials looking to determine whether the increase in mail voting will continue in future elections. Although the authors don’t make any “definitive” estimations on what can be expected in future elections, they make it clear that their work serves as a “suggestive” look at what mail voting might look like in the future based on the 2020 election cycle.

The work provides research on the history of mail ballot voting in the United States, as well as the increase of no excuse mail ballot access across the country due to COVID-19 in 2020. The study works to determine why it is that so many voters chose to vote by mail despite former President Donald Trump’s claim that mail ballot voting would result in election fraud in the 2020 election. The authors also identify those states that were open to providing more access and those who still restricted access to mail voting to only those who qualify, for different reasons. Their survey includes the following variables: age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, party preference, and mode of voting. They also verify the respondent’s mode of voting using past election history, rather than using a response from the survey participant. This distinction is important to accurately distinguish those who have used the mail ballot option in the past from those who were first time mail ballot voters.

This report should open a window of opportunity for election officials to look at what they can do to improve how voters feel about the use of mail ballot voting. Election officials can work in the following areas at the state and local level to increase confidence in mail ballot voting:

- Increase the use of risk limiting audits
- Educate voters on what is done to uphold the integrity of voting
- Provide comprehensive documentation on the mail ballot process for observers and voters
- Increase outreach to voters to educate them on the process

The future success of mail ballot voting in the United States will require all voters, parties, and political representatives to be confident that their votes are being counted and the process for counting them is reliable and adds integrity to the voting process.

Follow up work in this area will be crucial to allowing election officials to make use of the data from the first report. It may be of interest to determine what efforts are being made to educate voters about mail ballot voting security in the states where they survey voters in the future. For those first-time mail ballot voters who were unsure of the validity of their cast ballots in 2020, it will be important to see if education or legislative efforts, in states with respondents, have increased the number of voters who feel more comfortable with the ballot counting in their local jurisdictions.

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Response to Postal Voting in the 2020 Election

Alysoun McLaughlin, *Election Director, Montgomery County, Maryland*¹

This article discusses four questions about mail voting in the 2020 election:

- Who voted by mail in 2020 and why?
- Who switched to mail voting from another mode of voting in 2020 and why?
- What were the experiences of mail voters in the 2020 election?
- Who is likely to continue voting by mail in the future and why?

These questions are at the front of election administrators' thoughts after the dramatic shifts that we saw in voter behavior in the 2020 presidential election. How many voters will continue voting by mail? How many will return to voting in person? Election administrators have spent much of the past year considering these questions and making decisions, ranging from staffing levels for processing ballot applications to the number and placement of drop boxes, based on our expectations of voter behavior.

This article offers a reminder that election officials need not go it alone in our efforts at data-driven decision-making. There is an entire field of survey research focused on voters' experiences navigating the election process.

Examining the data at a national level, however, is of limited value to practitioners. It can provide some context for our own on-the-ground observations and voter feedback, and to some extent may allow us to compare our own voters' experiences with others across the country. There is such variation, however, in our laws and circumstances that any article describing nationwide data tends to raise more questions than it answers. For example, this article notes that 76% of voters who had previously voted by mail said that they would be very likely to do again, but only 48% of first-time mail voters said the same thing. Any election administrator looking at this data will quickly wonder, "Is that true in my jurisdiction? Is it true in this part of my county/that part of my city?"

Questions emerge quickly when you consider the answers to these questions in relation to administrative practices. "Will voters be more likely to cast their ballot by mail if there is a ballot drop box within a certain distance of their house/work/shopping location?" "Will PSAs influence voter turnout toward one voting method or another?"

The sample size of this survey suggests that we may be able to compare voters' responses at a jurisdictional level and ask such questions as:

- What answers did voters give to the survey questions in a particular jurisdiction?
- Are there any characteristics of a voting system, such as prepaid postage or the per capita number of drop boxes, that correlate to how voters rated their voting experience by mail?
- Were the partisan differences referenced in this article consistent across the country, or were there differences in this across the country, particularly where state and local government officials and other opinion leaders made statements that may have influenced voters' attitudes about voting by mail?

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Public Perceptions of Electoral Management in Canada

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ABSTRACT

Elections Canada is widely respected as one of the oldest, most established, and well-regarded institutions of electoral management around the world. But what do Canadians think of their electoral management body? Furthermore, what individual-level variables can predict variations in levels of confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness in Elections Canada? This paper harnesses questions about Elections Canada asked in the Canadian Election Study from 2008-2021. It finds that Canadians have high levels of confidence, satisfaction and perceptions of the fairness of their EMB. Additionally, we find that, in general, confidence tends to increase with age, income, education, and political interest, but that women are likely to have lower levels of trust.

It is sometimes said that elections are only as good as they are trusted. If voters have confidence in the electoral process they may be more willing to participate, abide by the decisions made by their governments, and remain satisfied with their democracy (Norris 2014b). But when this trust in elections erodes, citizens can choose not to participate in the democratic process, leading to the breakdown of democratic governance. For these reasons, the question of what engenders trust in elections is an important one for scholars and practitioners alike.

One key component of trust in elections is perceptions of the electoral officials and electoral management body (EMB) responsible for the technical administration of elections. A variety of government bodies, boards, ministries, and commissions are responsible for the nuts and bolts of running elections, from registering voters to counting the ballots (Catt et al. 2014). The models of electoral management that exist around the world vary greatly, from independent agencies to governmental models where elections are run through an existing ministry or department. There are additionally variations in their levels of de jure and de facto autonomy or independence (van Ham and Garnett 2019), levels of centralization (James 2016; James et al. 2019) and capacity to perform their functions (Garnett 2019a). But because they fulfill such important tasks, trust in these institutions of electoral management is an important determinant of trust in elections more generally (Garnett 2019b).

Among these bodies of electoral management, Canada's centralized, independent EMB, Elections Canada, is widely respected as one of the oldest, most established, and well-regarded institutions of electoral management (Ace Project 2012). Founded in 1920, under the leadership of the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada oversees most of the major electoral management tasks for national level elections in Canada (Elections Canada 2022). The EMB receives a high reputation in international rankings. The latest release of the Variety of Democracy dataset, a globally-respected

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cross-national set of expert ratings related to democracy, for example, put Canada within the top 5 countries (ranked 4) on capacity scores and among the top 30 countries in EMB autonomy scores (ranked 26) (Varieties of Democracy Institute 2021).

But what do Canadians think of their electoral management body? Furthermore, what can predict variations in levels of confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness in Elections Canada? This paper harnesses one of the few datasets globally that specifically asks respondents about confidence in a specific electoral management body over multiple election years. It examines these data over a series of the five most recent Canadian elections from 2008 to 2021, using data from the Canadian Election Studies, which have asked these questions of a nationally representative sample of Canadians after each federal level election. It focuses on three measures of trust in Elections Canada – confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness.

This paper therefore uncovers Canadians' opinions on their EMB, but also can help to understand among which population groups trust is lacking. This knowledge, in what could be considered one of the 'best case' scenarios of electoral management, can help us understand the differential levels of trust among populations for election administrators, knowledge which will be useful to electoral officials around the globe as they attempt to engender trust in their activities and elections more generally.

Public Trust and Electoral Institutions

Public trust in elections is widely agreed to be crucial to democratic governance, and research has demonstrated that perceptions of electoral institutions, notably electoral officials and election management bodies, factor into this relationship (Garnett 2019b; Norris 2015). Thus, an examination of electoral management bodies is a necessary component of uncovering the determinants of confidence in elections.

In the classic literature on electoral management, it was commonly assumed that independent model EMBs (those that operate at arm's length from the legislative and executive branches of government), are more trustworthy than their governmental counterparts (which operate from within government ministries or departments) (Catt et al. 2014). Among the international literature, independent or agency models were cited as the 'gold standard' of EMBs. However, more recent work has suggested this is not always the case, arguing that structures matter less than broader autonomy and impartiality. For example, van Ham and Garnett demonstrate a relationship between impartiality and electoral integrity. Bringing in potential intervening variables, Kerr and Luhrmann demonstrate a positive relationship between EMB autonomy and individual perceptions of electoral integrity, with media freedom as a linking variable (Kerr and Luhrmann 2017, 57).

Yet while many studies are concerned with the structure and independence of the EMB itself, several studies indicate that the organizational structure of EMBs is only one small (but not insignificant) factor of many. In one article, James et al. identify seven distinct dimensions of EMB organizational design which impact electoral integrity the most: centralization, independence, capacity, scope and division, relation to external actors, technology, and personnel (James et al. 2019). Norris likewise broadens this discussion of the characteristics of high-quality electoral managing, noting that electoral integrity was strongest in states characterized by "effective governments with the capacity to deliver high quality public services as well as in states where the ethos of public administration is regarded as impartial and professional" (Norris 2014a, 136). Thus, the role of the organizational structure (government, agency, or hybrid) is less of a strong indicator of electoral integrity than previous research seems to suggest, and the presence of the governmental models do not immediately mean greater risks of political interference and partisan bias (Norris 2014b).

At the individual level, this relationship between electoral institutions and public trust is borne out in empirical research. Garnett, for example, uses data from the 6th wave of the World Values Survey to note a relationship between perceptions of electoral officials and confidence in both the fairness of the vote count and perceptions of overall quality of democracy (Garnett 2019b). In other words, if citizens trust their electoral officials, they are also more likely to trust other political actors, including the election process in general.

This trust in electoral management can also extend to behaviours like voting. In the American context, Bowler et al. find that while even accounting for institutional factors like state income, and individual factors like low confidence populations, voter turnout has a strong correlation with the administrative quality of the EMB's. This means that people were more confident that election officials were fair, and that electoral integrity was maintained, in states that had higher administrative quality scores (Bowler et al. 2015).

However, one of the major advances in the study of electoral integrity in recent years is an acknowledgement of the differential perceptions and experiences of population groups. Perceptions of electoral management bodies will not be the same for all population groups: some are more likely to trust government institutions, while some may have different experiences of, or familiarity with, elections and electoral administration. However, we have little research specifically considering differential perceptions of confidence in electoral institutions.

Case Selection: Canada

The case used to further explore public trust in electoral management is that of Canada, where an independent model EMB, Elections Canada, runs elections at the federal level. The Canadian context is particularly apt for this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a relatively conservative case where electoral management has been demonstrated to be conducted at high quality. International indicators consistently place Canada among the countries with the highest levels of electoral integrity (Norris and Grömping 2019; Varieties of Democracy Institute 2021). Thus we will be able to capture whether individual perceptions still vary where there is relatively high quality electoral management.

Secondly, Canada's centralized electoral management system, in which Elections Canada implements the same rules across the country, offers a particularly useful case study. In contrast with more decentralized systems, variations in public opinion are not likely the result of regional variations in electoral management. Furthermore, having a known central EMB, that communicates regularly with the public, means there is less likely to be confusion about survey questions regarding Elections Canada; while we know that electoral management is not always on the top of citizens' minds, there is more likelihood they will be able to respond to questions about it in the Canadian context. Finally, the Canadian case has available data over multiple election cycles, and multiple years, and a wealth of individual correlates, thanks to the consistent questions asked in the Canadian Election Study.

To understand Elections Canada currently, we must delve briefly into its history. There are two key dates important to elections in Canada: 1) In 1874, secret balloting and simultaneous voting was implemented. 2) In 1920, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer was created (Courtney 2004, 106). Prior to this period, partisanship, gerrymandering, non-simultaneous elections, and open voting systems vulnerable to intimidation or corruption were commonplace. The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, now commonly known as Elections Canada, is an independent, non-partisan agency created with the mandate to "[ensure] that Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate" (Elections Canada 2022). The head of Elections Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer, is appointed by the house of commons for a period of 10 years, reporting directly to Parliament and removable only by the Governor General (and therefore not by the government of the day). While

the staff under the CEO consist of 500 permanent employees, this number can balloon to 235,000 during periods around elections or referendums. Under the Canada Elections Act, Elections Canada mandates assume a wide variety of responsibilities, to include:

- “administering elections
- registering political parties and third parties
- maintaining the National Register of Electors
- appointing and overseeing its officers for its 338 electoral districts
- disclosing contributions to candidates, parties and third parties, examining their financial returns, and reimbursing expenses when criteria has been met
- ensuring access to voting for all citizens
- providing support to independent commissions charged with the readjustment of federal electoral boundaries” (Elections Canada 2022).

Thus, when an election is called, Elections Canada is involved in all aspects of electoral management. Through Elections Canada, voter cards are issued to all citizens listed in the National Register of Electors, and supplies are prepared to be shipped to pre-selected polling stations in every district. Each district officer then sets up an office as an HQ for their district, from which to hire and train the incoming staff. At the same time, candidate and party campaign expense limits are calculated, including maximum advertisement airtime, as all official candidate nominations are collected and transferred to the ballot. Elections Canada also deals with distributing and collecting mail-in ballots, conducting advance voting at polling stations that run on 4 distinct days before election day, and collect ballots from eligible voters in hospitals or in penitentiaries. On election day, polls are mandated to be open for 12 consecutive hours in each district, during which EC collects and counts all regular votes. Finally, after the vote, its officers validate the results for each district, carry out recounts if necessary, and declare the winning candidate to the Chief electoral officer, after which political parties and candidates may be reimbursed some expenses for adhering to elections rules. Elections Canada is crucial at every step of the electoral process, and thus understanding perceptions of Elections Canada is crucial to understanding perceptions of elections themselves.

Objectives

This paper has two objectives. First, it seeks to uncover the levels of trust in electoral management, across five elections, within the Canadian context. Second, it seeks to discover whether levels of trust in electoral management vary by certain individual-level variables. Understanding the variations in opinion by individual characteristics will shed light on the differential experiences and opinions of citizens with their system of electoral management, thus providing scholars and practitioners with important insights into which population groups may have the lowest levels of trust in the electoral system.

We therefore consider a number of these individual predictors, beginning with socio-demographic variables,² There is some evidence that women may trust elections less than men, possibly related to feelings of efficacy with the system (Bowler et al. 2015; Flesken and Hartl 2018). We also note that previous studies have demonstrated that older citizens are more likely to trust elections, perhaps due to greater levels of experience with, or engagement in, the system (Birch 2010; Flesken and Hartl 2018). Education has been noted to be a predictor of confidence in elections in

² Race is not explicitly asked in the CES and thus cannot be included in this study, though we do note that minority status can be an important predictor of trust in elections and government institutions in general.

previous research (Birch 2010); individuals with higher levels of education may understand the political system and electoral institutions better, and thus be more likely to trust it. Likewise, wealth tends to be positively related to trust in elections (Flesken and Hartl 2018), perhaps because they have the resources available to engage fully in the voting process without the high costs that affect those with more unstable employment and residential mobility. Additionally, income (like education) may impact access to the political networks that encourage engagement in the system.

Considering political variables, we expect that political interest will engender knowledge and attention to the system, and thus engender trust. Relatedly, if a citizen has first-hand experiences with the electoral management body, their trust should increase. Previous research has suggested this to be the case (Mochtak, Lesschaeve, and Glaudić 2021) via a socialization effect. There are many studies, particularly in the American context, that consider ideology and party support as it relates to confidence in elections (Norris, Garnett, and Grömping 2019). Fewer studies on this phenomenon exist in the Canadian context, though we may expect to see some variation based on party support.³

Together, these variables will provide a comprehensive picture of the potential correlates of satisfaction, confidence, and perceptions of fairness in Elections Canada, taking into account both socio-demographic and attitudinal variables.

Methodology

This article uses data from the Canadian Election Study for the five most recent federal elections: 2008 (Gidengil et al. 2009), 2011 (Fournier et al. 2011), 2015 (Fournier et al. 2016), 2019 (Stephenson et al. 2020b, a) and 2021.⁴ These surveys were collected via online, mail, and telephone samples both during the campaign and in the post-election period. These data provide one of the most comprehensive public opinion survey results specifically concerning electoral management in a country. Three major dependent variables will be considered that gauge trust in electoral management in Canada:

1. **Confidence** – “Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following: Elections Canada (A great deal, quite a lot, not very much, none at all)”
2. **Satisfaction** – “How satisfied are you with the way Elections Canada runs federal elections? (Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not satisfied at all)”

³ We have chosen not to study the ‘winner’ effect (Singh, Karakoç, and Blais 2012; Anderson and Tverdova 2001) because of the Canadian parliamentary system, where votes are cast for local candidates, not national-level leaders. However, while we know that national-level dynamics are key in Canadian politics, it is difficult to clearly state for each voter whether they believe they voted for the ‘winner’ or not.

⁴ Citations for Canadian Election Study Datasets:

Gidengil, E, Everitt, J, Fournier, P and Nevitte, N. 2009. The 2008 Canadian Election Study [dataset]. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Institute for Social Research [producer and distributor].

Fournier, P, Cutler, F, Soroka, S and Stolle, D. 2011. The 2011 Canadian Election Study [dataset]. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Institute for Social Research [producer and distributor].

Fournier, P, Cutler, F, Soroka, S and Stolle, D. 2016. Canadian Election Study, June 2015 [Canada]. [Study Microdata]. Toronto, Ontario. Institute of Social Research [distributor]

Stephenson, Laura B., Allison Harell, Daniel Rubenson and Peter John Loewen. The 2019 Canadian Election Study – Online Collection. [dataset]

Stephenson, Laura B., Allison Harell, Daniel Rubenson and Peter John Loewen. The 2019 Canadian Election Study – Phone Collection. [dataset]

(Garnett 2019b)

Stephenson, Laura B., Allison Harell, Daniel Rubenson and Peter John Loewen. 2022. The 2021 Canadian Election Study. [dataset]

3. **Fairness** – “Thinking about this election, would you say that Elections Canada ran the election... (very fairly, somewhat fairly, not very fairly)”

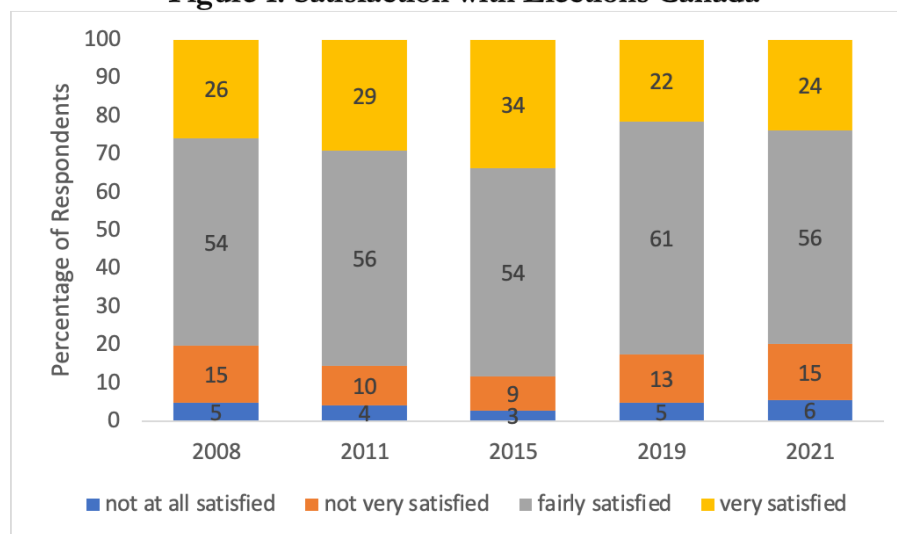
There are, of course, some limitations to these data. The questions here are drawn from the post-election survey (second wave), thus individuals agreed to not only participate in the initial pre-election survey but participate again in the post election survey, and therefore may be more likely to take an active participation in political activities. Secondly, respondents were only contacted via the electronic survey, and therefore may be more technologically literate than the telephone-only survey participants.

Ordered logistic regression models are used to test the predictors of these dependent variables, using self-reported socio-demographic and attitudinal responses to the survey. The election years are reported separately, since the election studies had small differences in collection and means of surveying between election years. We note that there are few instances of regional variation in electoral management across Canada due to the highly centralized nature of Elections Canada. However, province is included as a control variable to account for any variations that may be uncovered. National survey weights are used. See Appendix A for all variable coding.

Results

First, we consider the descriptive statistics regarding what Canadians think about electoral management in their country over the past five election years. Figure 1 shows that satisfaction with Elections Canada is quite high, with at least 80 percent of Canadians fairly or very satisfied with the way they run federal elections in any election year.

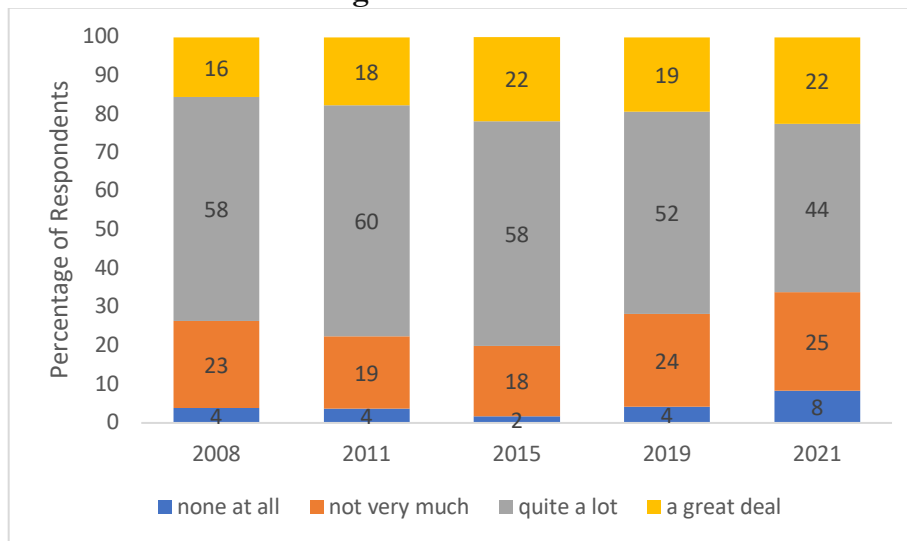
Figure 1: Satisfaction with Elections Canada



*Question Wording: How satisfied are you with the way Elections Canada runs federal elections?
(Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not satisfied at all)*

Confidence is likewise high, with between about 65 and 80 percent of Canadians responding they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in Elections Canada (Figure 2). There is a notable dip in 2021, but it is impossible to pin-point the main reasons behind this, be it an increase in alternative voting mechanisms due to the COVID-19 pandemic or a spillover of electoral fraud rhetoric from the United States after the contentious 2020 Presidential election.

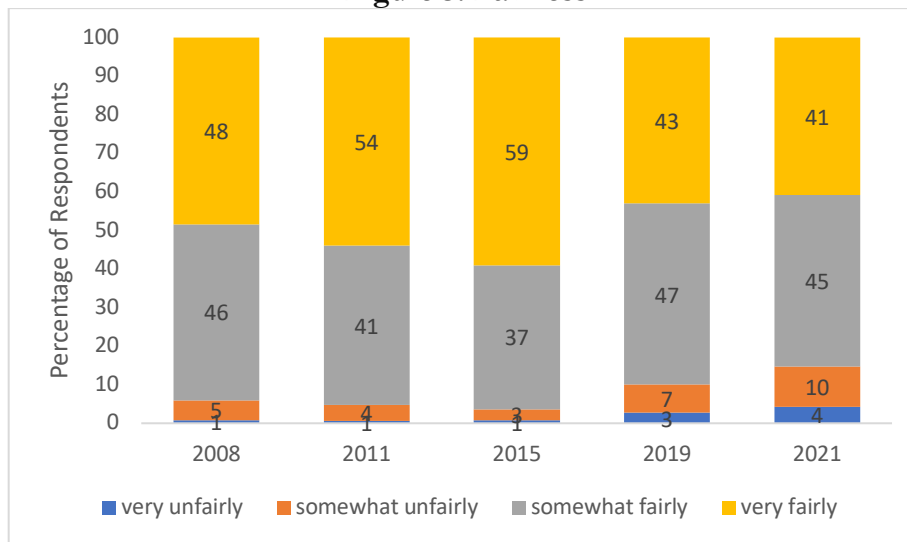
Figure 2: Confidence



Question Wording: Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following: Elections Canada (A great deal, quite a lot, not very much, none at all)

Perceptions of fairness are especially high with between about 85 and 95 percent of respondents saying that Elections Canada runs very or somewhat fairly. Here we also note a slight dip in perceptions of fairness in 2021. But in general, we see that trust in Canada’s EMB is consistently quite high in recent years, with very few respondents having serious concerns about the fairness of their EMB.

Figure 3: Fairness



Question wording: Thinking about this election, would you say that Elections Canada ran the election... (very fairly, somewhat fairly, somewhat unfairly, not very fairly)

However, previous research has demonstrated that there are often important differences in levels of trust in elections and electoral management based on other individual-level variables. In other words, these feelings of confidence or trust are not consistent across all population groups. Tables 1-3 present the results of an ordered logistic regression that considers some of these potential predictor

variables for the entire sample. Each year is reported separately. In this section, we note the major trends across all elections, by independent variable.

Table 1: Satisfaction with Elections Canada

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	2008	2011	2015	2019	2021
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01***	0.01***
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Between \$30&\$60k	-0.12	0.12	0.35*	0.18	-0.01
	0.15	0.16	0.19	0.14	0.10
Between \$60 -&\$90k	0.01	0.35**	0.40**	0.16	0.03
	0.16	0.17	0.19	0.14	0.09
More than \$90k	0.27*	0.39**	0.60***	0.34***	0.11
	0.16	0.17	0.18	0.13	0.09
Completed High School	0.08	0.21	0.27	0.33*	0.49***
	0.19	0.18	0.24	0.20	0.19
Some or Completed College	0.18	0.11	0.19	0.33*	0.55***
	0.18	0.19	0.23	0.18	0.18
Some or Completed University	0.33*	0.40**	0.35	0.71***	0.92***
	0.18	0.18	0.22	0.18	0.18
Female	-0.17*	-0.22**	-0.14	-0.16**	-0.20***
	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.06
Political Interest	0.04*	0.10***	-0.01	0.08***	0.07***
	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.01
Voted	0.28*	0.58***		0.73***	0.71***
	0.16	0.15		0.14	0.10
cut1					
_cons	-2.54***	-1.99***	-3.18***	-0.64*	-1.23***
	0.39	0.39	0.43	0.34	0.40
cut2					
_cons	-0.98***	-0.65*	-1.58***	0.83**	0.27
	0.38	0.37	0.40	0.34	0.39
cut3					
_cons	1.57***	2.16***	1.24***	3.82***	3.00***
	0.38	0.38	0.40	0.35	0.40
N	2049	2167	2185	4325	7068

Standard errors in second row, * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Models: Ordered Logistic Regression

Reference categories: Income – Under \$30k, Education – Less than High School

Voted variable not included in 2015 because all respondents of the Satisfaction question had voted.

Dummy variables for Province included in models, but not reported due to space limitations (Respondents from the Territories are dropped from these analyses due to low response rates)

Dummy variables for Province included in models, but not reported due to space limitations (Respondents from the Territories are dropped from these analyses due to low response rates)

Table 2: Confidence in Elections Canada

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	2008	2011	2015	2019	2021
Age	-0.01*	0.00	-0.00	0.01***	0.01***
	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
Between \$30&\$60k	-0.06	-0.01	-0.33	-0.18	0.12*
	0.22	0.26	0.25	0.23	0.06
Between \$60 -&\$90k	0.34	-0.17	0.19	-0.13	0.20***
	0.23	0.27	0.26	0.23	0.06
More than \$90k	0.42*	0.20	0.33	0.10	0.29***
	0.23	0.28	0.26	0.22	0.06
Completed High School	0.10	0.91***	-0.31	-0.47	0.21*
	0.28	0.30	0.33	0.30	0.12
Some or Completed College	0.34	1.04***	-0.28	-0.09	0.32***
	0.29	0.29	0.32	0.28	0.12
Some or Completed University	0.60**	1.63***	-0.04	0.54*	0.83***
	0.28	0.29	0.32	0.28	0.12
Female	-0.08	-0.24	-0.11	-0.07	-0.22***
	0.14	0.15	0.13	0.13	0.04
Political Interest	0.19***	0.17***	0.11***	0.15***	0.14***
	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.01
Voted	0.79**	-0.15	0.56	1.13***	0.77***
	0.31	0.31	0.34	0.26	0.06
cut1					
_cons	-2.02***	-1.37**	-2.70***	-0.71	0.07
	0.66	0.67	0.67	0.60	0.24
cut2					
_cons	0.28	0.89	-0.01	1.61***	1.97***
	0.66	0.66	0.63	0.60	0.24
cut3					
_cons	3.34***	3.94***	2.80***	4.20***	4.13***
	0.67	0.68	0.63	0.61	0.24
N	1072	962	1154	1459	14522

Standard errors in second row, * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Models: Ordered Logistic Regression

Reference categories: Income – Under \$30k, Education – Less than High School

Dummy variables for Province included in models, but not reported due to space limitations
(Respondents from the Territories are dropped from these analyses due to low response rates)

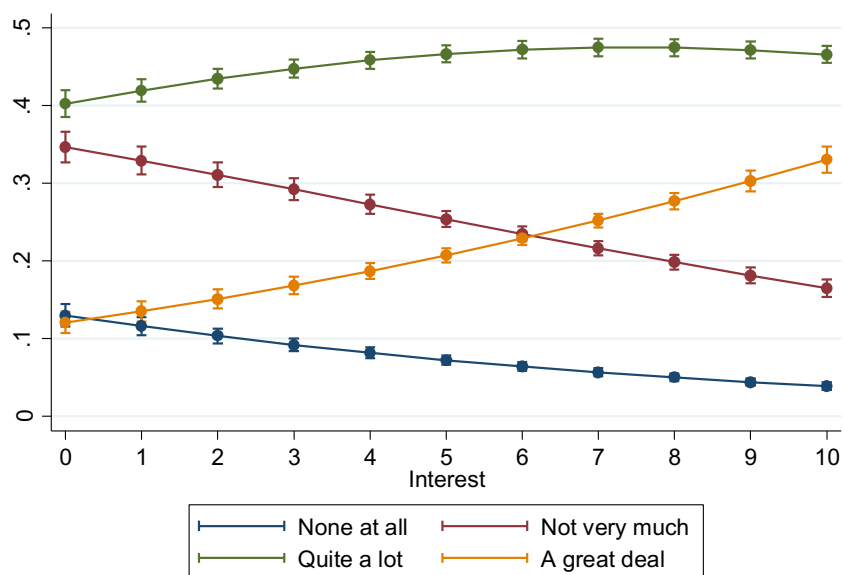
dependent variable and age is only consistently positive and statistically significant in the final two election years.

We see a general trend of increases in confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness as income and education levels increase. This is especially visible for the top education category (containing those who have completed at least some university-level education), which tends to be consistently positively related to all three measures of confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness (the one exception being a negative relationship with confidence in 2015). We see a similar relationship where satisfaction increases with income levels, though this does not consistently repeat for the two other dependent variables. Like with age, we expect the relationships between income or education and more positive perceptions of Elections Canada may be related to positive experiences with Elections Canada. Those with higher income and education levels likely have greater resources (cognitive and material) and residential stability, thus their voting process is easy, and interactions with Elections Canada more straightforward. These positive experiences lead to greater perceptions of fairness, confidence, and satisfaction. There is also likely some influence of the (well-researched) greater trust in democratic and government systems found generally among older, wealthier, and more educated individuals, spilling over to confidence and satisfaction with electoral management.

Our results also reflect previous research that women have less trust in elections. For all five election years, and all three dependent variables, women have more negative perceptions of Elections Canada. As mentioned earlier, this could be related to more negative experiences among women with participation in the political system.

For political attitudes and behaviours, we note more confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness as political interest increases (except for satisfaction in 2015). We notice this trend particularly if we visualise the predicted margins of confidence in Elections Canada by political interest, as depicted for 2021 in Figure 4. We note that as interest increases, the predicted response of ‘a great deal or quite a lot’ of confidence increases, whereas predicted responses of ‘not at all’ and ‘not very much’ decreases. We expect that those with a great interest in politics, who pay the most attention to electoral management, and those with familiarity, gain additional confidence in Elections Canada.

Figure 4: Predicted Probability of Confidence in Elections Canada, 2021 by Political Interest



Surprisingly, the results are not as consistent when comparing voters and non-voters. In general, satisfaction with Elections Canada is much more positive for voters, but we note a dip in confidence and perceptions of fairness for 2011 and 2015 in particular. However, we do note (like with most election studies) that our sample has a particularly high rate of voters, with fewer respondents in the non-voters category.

Finally, we include a variable that captures which party the respondents said they supported in the last election in the models,⁵ but we do not note any clear trends that are consistent across elections. This could be due to the shifting of political parties over election cycles, and also a relative lack of stable partisanship (when compared with other countries) that has been noted in Canada (LeDuc et al. 1984). We likewise do not note any patterns of perceptions of confidence, satisfaction, or fairness that correspond with the party winning government in the election studied.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article makes two main contributions to the study of electoral management. Firstly, it presents a unique dataset on confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness in an electoral management body. Access to multiple questions, over five election years, is rare in the study of electoral management bodies, and thus this article provides one of the few detailed analyses of trust in EMBs within a country. The results of this analysis show that Canadians do think highly of their EMB, with strong confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of its fairness. It also shows relative consistency over the years. There are some slight dips in the most recent elections, but we are currently unable to determine whether this is related to factors relating specifically to the EMB, or to general trends in loss of satisfaction with democratic institutions.

The second major contribution of this article is the study of which population groups tend to have the most and least confidence, satisfaction, and perception of fairness of their EMB. We find that, in general, confidence increases with age, income, and education, but not consistently across all election years and questions. Additionally, we note a trend of women being less trusting in the EMB, while citizens with higher levels of political interest are more trusting. It is important to know which population groups do not trust electoral management, since this can have broader implications on feelings towards democratic governance. Additionally, it may elucidate for Elections Canada, and other EMBs around the globe, which groups require additional consideration, particularly in terms of their experiences with electoral officials and the electoral system more generally. These findings may be actionable with public outreach and further consideration about the barriers these groups may face when interacting with electoral management.

Scholars and practitioners of American electoral management will also find these results interesting, even though the system of electoral management is remarkably different in the American context, with electoral administration at the discretion of each state. Nonetheless, there have been recent discussions regarding efforts at greater centralization, through innovations like the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) at the federal level, and through joint initiatives by states like the the Electric Registration Information Center (ERIC). The experience of Canada suggests that there are benefits to standard and centralized experiences of the registration and voting systems, as evidenced by the fact that high perceptions of trust in electoral administration did not vary significantly between Canadian provinces.

⁵ See models in Appendix B due to space limitations. Party supported not included in the initial models since we only have these data for voters.

Another notable difference between the Canadian and American systems of electoral management are levels of independence. Elections Canada works at arm's length from the government of the day, whereas many electoral officials in the United States are elected positions themselves. High levels of trust in Elections Canada may support calls to increase the autonomy of electoral administrators in the United States. However, it is important to note that the structures of independence are only helpful if they are accompanied by perceptions of fairness, as is found to be the case in the Canadian context.

Thus, election administrators and scholars from around the world have much to learn from Canada's well-trusted, and well-respected model of electoral management, as evidenced by high levels of trust found in the survey data presented here.

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Appendix A: Variables

Variable	Coding
Confidence	<p>“Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following: Elections Canada (A great deal, quite a lot, not very much, none at all)”</p> <p><i>Other variations include:</i></p> <p>“How much confidence have in: Elections Canada (A great deal, Quite a lot, very much, None at all)” (2008); “Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following institutions: Elections Canada (A great deal, quite a lot, not very much, none at all)” (2011; 2015)</p>
Satisfaction	<p>“How satisfied are you with the way Elections Canada runs federal elections? (Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not satisfied at all)”</p>
Fairness	<p>“Thinking about this election, would you say that Elections Canada ran the election... (very fairly, somewhat fairly, not very fairly)”</p> <p><i>Other variations include:</i></p> <p>“Thinking about this last federal election in Canada, would you say that Elections Canada ran the election... (very fairly, somewhat fairly, not very fairly)” (2011; 2015) AND “Would you say that Elections Canada ran the election... (very fairly, somewhat fairly, not very fairly)” (2008)</p>
Age	Numerical variable, age at time of survey
Income	<p>Categories:</p> <p>Under \$30 000 (Reference)</p> <p>Between \$30 and \$60 000</p> <p>Between \$60 000 and \$90 000</p> <p>More than \$90 000</p>
Education	<p>Categories:</p> <p>Did not complete High School (Reference)</p> <p>Completed High School</p> <p>Some or Completed College</p> <p>Some or Completed University</p>
Gender	Female (1), Male (0), Other/Prefer not to say marked as missing

Interest	0-10 scale of interest in politics generally
Voted	Whether the respondent voted (1) or not (0), self-reported since verification is not possible in the Canadian context. Note a variety of question wordings were used through the five cycles of the Canadian Election Study
Party	Party options: Liberal Party of Canada Conservative Party of Canada New Democratic Party of Canada Bloc Quebecois Green Party of Canada Other: Note: People's Party of Canada (which emerged on the national scene in 2019, is included in 'other')
Province	Ten provinces included. Territories excluded due to low response rates

Appendix B: Models with Only Voters, Including 'Party Voted for' Variable

Table 1: Confidence (Only Voters, With Party Voted for)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	2008	2011	2015	2019	2021
Age	-0.01**	0.00	-0.00	0.02***	0.02***
	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
Between \$30&\$60k	-0.05	0.04	-0.31	-0.26	0.12
	0.24	0.27	0.28	0.27	0.07
Between \$60 &\$90k	0.19	-0.19	0.19	-0.16	0.23***
	0.24	0.28	0.30	0.26	0.07
More than \$90k	0.38	0.14	0.27	0.05	0.36***
	0.25	0.29	0.28	0.24	0.07
Completed High School	0.02	0.89***	-0.44	-0.73**	0.07
	0.32	0.33	0.33	0.32	0.15
Some or Completed College	0.17	1.09***	-0.36	-0.48	0.17
	0.34	0.32	0.33	0.29	0.14
Some or Completed University	0.55	1.63***	-0.15	0.16	0.59***
	0.34	0.32	0.32	0.29	0.14
Female	-0.13	-0.33**	-0.12	-0.20	-0.38***
	0.15	0.16	0.14	0.14	0.05
Political Interest	0.19***	0.15***	0.11***	0.17***	0.14***
	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.01
Voted Liberal	-0.89	-1.18	0.91	0.01	2.39***
	0.63	1.06	0.66	0.62	0.13
Voted Conservative	-1.04*	-1.27	0.33	-1.09*	0.99***
	0.63	1.06	0.67	0.62	0.13
Voted NDP	-1.24*	-1.18	0.57	-0.20	1.92***
	0.66	1.06	0.67	0.62	0.13
Voted Bloc Quebecois	-1.01	-1.00	0.69	-0.90	1.67***
	0.65	1.08	0.75	0.69	0.14
Voted Green	-1.07	-1.12	0.66	-0.20	1.48***
	0.69	1.13	0.69	0.67	0.17
PE	-0.56	-0.17	0.58	-0.06	1.16***
	0.51	0.50	0.41	0.66	0.38
NS	0.05	-0.46	-0.00	-1.21**	0.46*
	0.56	0.60	0.41	0.57	0.26
NB	0.05	0.01	0.25	-0.70	-0.10
	0.53	0.46	0.42	0.59	0.27
QC	0.44	0.16	0.71**	-0.68	0.50**
	0.44	0.43	0.33	0.54	0.23
ON	0.15	-0.18	0.42	-0.60	0.07
	0.42	0.43	0.33	0.52	0.22
MA	0.16	-0.13	0.19	-0.96	0.17

	0.53	0.53	0.43	0.59	0.25
SK	0.01	0.38	0.40	-0.63	0.34
	0.51	0.51	0.44	0.57	0.27
AL	-0.74	0.09	0.46	-0.89	0.29
	0.53	0.51	0.42	0.54	0.23
BC	0.08	0.08	0.10	-0.58	0.30
	0.44	0.46	0.36	0.54	0.23
cut1	-3.65***	-2.52**	-2.77***	-3.28***	0.98***
	0.89	1.24	0.87	0.93	0.30
cut2	-1.25	-0.28	-0.00	-0.78	2.99***
	0.88	1.23	0.84	0.92	0.30
cut3	1.85**	2.77**	2.80***	2.04**	5.35***
	0.88	1.24	0.84	0.93	0.31
N	910	852	1063	1183	12438

Standard errors in second row, * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Models: Ordered Logistic Regression

Reference categories: Income – Under \$30k, Education – Less than High School, Province – NFLD (Respondents from the Territories are dropped from these analyses due to low response rates); Party – Other (including People’s Party).

Table 2: Fairness (Only Voters, With Party Voted for)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	2008	2011	2015	2019	2021
Age	0.01	0.00	0.01**	0.02***	0.02***
	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
Between \$30&\$60k	0.29	0.15	-0.26	0.13	0.19*
	0.29	0.27	0.31	0.17	0.12
Between \$60 &\$90k	0.39	0.34	0.03	0.05	0.21**
	0.31	0.28	0.33	0.16	0.11
More than \$90k	0.53*	0.22	-0.12	0.18	0.40***
	0.29	0.28	0.31	0.16	0.11
Completed High School	-0.43	0.63*	0.22	0.27	0.06
	0.30	0.35	0.35	0.20	0.23
Some or Completed College	0.05	0.20	0.34	0.37*	0.21
	0.30	0.35	0.34	0.19	0.23
Some or Completed University	0.35	0.98***	0.78**	0.77***	0.47**
	0.28	0.33	0.33	0.19	0.22
Female	-0.42***	-0.39**	-0.20	-0.29***	-0.26***
	0.16	0.16	0.15	0.09	0.07
Political Interest	0.05	0.15***	0.08*	0.07***	0.05***
	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.02
Voted Liberal	0.36	0.13	-1.14	0.59**	2.23***

	0.59	0.92	1.14	0.27	0.20
Voted Conservative	0.62	0.30	-1.25	-0.37	1.05***
	0.58	0.91	1.14	0.27	0.20
Voted NDP	0.23	-0.11	-1.51	0.33	1.78***
	0.61	0.90	1.15	0.27	0.20
Voted Bloc Quebecois	0.06	-0.49	-1.54	-0.52*	1.51***
	0.61	0.92	1.20	0.29	0.21
Voted Green	-0.07	-0.38	-1.83	0.29	1.70***
	0.63	0.99	1.17	0.30	0.26
PE	-0.27	-0.17	0.79	0.91	-0.74
	0.71	0.57	0.52	0.80	0.46
NS	0.39	-0.72	0.10	0.36	0.35
	0.75	0.65	0.49	0.33	0.39
NB	-0.17	-0.05	0.19	0.29	-0.35
	0.84	0.76	0.57	0.34	0.40
QC	-0.63	-0.97**	-0.28	0.12	-0.20
	0.65	0.46	0.42	0.25	0.31
ON	0.47	-0.06	0.57	0.05	-0.20
	0.63	0.45	0.42	0.24	0.31
MA	0.50	0.45	0.34	0.09	0.21
	0.70	0.55	0.49	0.31	0.35
SK	-0.23	-0.15	0.07	-0.17	-0.07
	0.76	0.55	0.51	0.32	0.38
AL	-0.00	0.51	0.09	0.03	0.12
	0.76	0.58	0.51	0.26	0.33
BC	0.31	0.08	0.36	0.17	0.15
	0.65	0.49	0.44	0.26	0.33
cut1	-3.45***	-3.54***	-4.70***	-1.59***	-0.28
	1.00	1.29	1.36	0.46	0.44
cut2	-1.82*	-1.60	-2.90**	-0.16	1.19***
	0.96	1.18	1.32	0.45	0.44
cut3	1.43	1.50	0.22	2.48***	3.65***
	0.96	1.18	1.30	0.46	0.44
N	860	805	990	3454	5920

Standard errors in second row, * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Models: Ordered Logistic Regression

Reference categories: Income – Under \$30k, Education – Less than High School, Province – NFLD (Respondents from the Territories are dropped from these analyses due to low response rates); Party – Other (including People’s Party).

Table 3: Satisfaction (Only Voters, With Party Voted for)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	2008	2011	2015	2019	2021
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02***	0.02***
Between \$30&\$60k	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Between \$60 &\$90k	-0.14	0.04	0.34*	0.17	0.14
More than \$90k	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.17	0.11
Completed High School	0.06	0.25	0.38**	0.23	0.15
Some or Completed College	0.19	0.20	0.19	0.17	0.11
Some or Completed University	0.31*	0.35*	0.57***	0.44***	0.24**
Female	0.18	0.20	0.17	0.16	0.10
Political Interest	-0.03	0.20	0.24	0.27	0.25
Voted Liberal	0.21	0.20	0.23	0.23	0.23
Voted Conservative	0.16	0.23	0.18	0.21	0.25
Voted NDP	0.20	0.21	0.22	0.21	0.22
Voted Bloc Quebecois	0.24	0.51**	0.35	0.55***	0.58***
Voted Green	0.20	0.20	0.22	0.21	0.22
PE	-0.20*	-0.21**	-0.16	-0.26***	-0.31***
NS	0.11	0.11	0.10	0.09	0.07
NB	0.01	0.09***	-0.01	0.09***	0.06***
QC	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.01
ON	-0.45	0.00	-0.02	0.99***	2.43***
MA	0.51	0.83	0.46	0.32	0.18
SK	-0.32	0.46	-0.23	-0.05	0.99***
	0.50	0.82	0.46	0.32	0.18
	-0.56	-0.24	-0.47	0.69**	1.80***
	0.52	0.81	0.47	0.33	0.19
	-0.80	-0.65	-0.39	0.03	1.54***
	0.52	0.84	0.54	0.36	0.20
	-0.96*	-0.14	-0.73	0.65*	1.70***
	0.55	0.84	0.51	0.35	0.26
	-0.14	-0.08	-0.13	0.81	-0.25
	0.39	0.34	0.31	0.92	0.62
	-0.13	-0.24	-0.09	0.36	-0.52
	0.35	0.36	0.29	0.30	0.45
	-0.07	0.02	0.02	0.23	-0.87*
	0.36	0.36	0.33	0.33	0.46
	0.14	0.06	-0.39	0.52**	-0.59
	0.28	0.26	0.25	0.26	0.41
	0.30	-0.09	-0.01	-0.14	-0.72*
	0.27	0.26	0.25	0.25	0.41
	0.35	0.06	-0.45	0.13	-0.41
	0.36	0.34	0.31	0.30	0.44
	0.26	-0.19	-0.16	-0.10	-0.36

	0.34	0.30	0.32	0.33	0.45
AL	-0.20	0.21	-0.39	-0.08	-0.55
	0.33	0.36	0.30	0.27	0.42
BC	0.25	-0.15	-0.52*	0.22	-0.49
	0.29	0.29	0.27	0.26	0.42
cut1	-3.36***	-2.24**	-3.40***	-0.69	-0.64
	0.66	0.90	0.63	0.50	0.52
cut2	-1.80***	-0.86	-1.80***	0.77	0.94*
	0.65	0.90	0.60	0.49	0.52
cut3	0.76	1.96**	1.05*	3.84***	3.88***
	0.66	0.90	0.60	0.50	0.53
N	1615	1784	2185	3526	6085

Standard errors in second row, * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Models: Ordered Logistic Regression

Reference categories: Income – Under \$30k, Education – Less than High School, Province – NFLD (Respondents from the Territories are dropped from these analyses due to low response rates); Party – Other (including People’s Party).

Response to Public Perceptions of Electoral Management in Canada

Natalie Adona, *Assistant County Clerk-Recorder/Registrar of Voters, County of Nevada, California*⁶

In this piece, Holly Ann Garnett and Edward Leibel examine public opinion of Elections Canada, the electoral management body (EMB) responsible for administering federal elections. Using five elections worth of public opinion surveys, Garnett and Leibel measure trust in Elections Canada in terms of public confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness. The authors successfully show that Canadians have high levels of trust in their EMB, with some differences based on age, gender, wealth, education, and political interest.

Unlike many American voter confidence surveys, which mostly center around confidence in national election outcomes, Garnett and Leibel's study focuses specifically on confidence, satisfaction, and perceptions of fairness of Elections Canada itself. While past surveys have offered a useful way to gauge the overall health of democracy and may offer some important insights into election administration, as a practitioner, I find that focusing on trust in a specific administrative body is potentially more helpful. Having public feedback on organizational performance may provide those who manage elections offices with a baseline on how their constituents experience services.

While Garnett and Leibel's paper makes an important contribution to voter confidence scholarship, I wanted more discussion around why Canadian respondents reported high levels of confidence, high satisfaction, and perceived Elections Canada as fair and how this EMB could help other election offices. What is it about the administrative process of elections that makes Elections Canada so highly trusted? Why were the reasons that 15-30 percent of respondents report low levels of trust in the organization? Why are women more skeptical of Elections Canada? Are Canadians susceptible to the same kinds of misinformation and disinformation that Americans are? While the authors may have been limited by the survey data, as someone who oversees elections in my office, those details matter.

I was also left wanting more discussion around the notion that public perceptions of Elections Canada in 2021 may have been influenced by "electoral fraud rhetoric from the United States after the contentious 2020 Presidential election." A slight drop in trust was reported in 2021, but there was no discussion about how closely the Canadian electorate was following American elections coverage or how misinformation in 2020 US Presidential election affected Elections Canada in 2021. I encourage the authors to elaborate on that point, and to also consider the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and any resulting changes in election conduct, on voter trust. Most, if not all, jurisdictions that administered elections during the pandemic had to make dramatic but necessary changes to the ways in which people voted. Some voters were resistant to change, and some might have associated changes resulting from the pandemic with the election outcome. While it is possible that some of the "electoral fraud rhetoric" referred to could include misinformation about COVID-19, I encourage further studies into the impact that the pandemic had on election administration in Canada and the Canadian voter experience.

⁶ In addition to her work in Nevada County, Natalie also serves as co-chair for the California Secretary of State's Ballot Design Advisory Committee, is an Advisory Board Member for the Election Official Legal Defense Network and is a member of the Bipartisan Policy Center Elections Task Force.

Response to Public Perceptions of Electoral Management in Canada

Brianna Lennon, *Boone County Clerk*⁷

Over the past two years it has become increasingly difficult for election administrators to accurately measure voters' perceptions of their offices and the overall public confidence in our elections. Threats, harassment, and political pressure in the elections space stemming from the 2020 Presidential election have captured national attention, but as election officials do the daily bureaucratic work of administering elections, it is hard to tell whether these narratives signal widespread public distrust of local offices. Historically, trust in local government⁸ has outpaced trust in state and federal government, in part because of officials' proximity to constituents as members of the same community. Over time, local election officials have internalized the idea that voters are more likely to trust them than state or national election offices, but the reality of threats and harassment⁹ against election administrators undermine that sense of confidence. We are at a crossroads as election officials plan for midterm elections this year—preparing to combat misinformation that we know is spreading through the country but having little empirical data to determine exactly how pervasive civic distrust has become in our own communities.

With that challenge in mind, *Public Perceptions of Electoral Management in Canada* offers insight for practitioners into how voters may be feeling about local election offices. Importantly, the authors also note that “voter turnout has a strong correlation with the administrative quality”¹⁰ of the election office. As we aim to build trust, confidence, and civic participation within our communities, voters must first believe that their election offices are run well and with integrity. *Public Perceptions* looks intentionally at that issue by digging into what impacts voters' confidence and satisfaction in the administration of the election.

The central tenet of *Public Perceptions* is that trust in election offices is necessary for a healthy democracy, which should not surprise any election administrator in the United States. However, there are limitations to the authors' work that will encourage American practitioners to look at specific results with a skeptical eye.

First, this research is exclusive to Elections Canada, which is highly centralized federal agency with a long and formalized bureaucratic history. Elections Canada performs many of the same electoral duties as local election authorities in the United States, but it does not have an equivalent counterpart in American federal government. The lack of decentralization means that voters are likely to have a consistent and similar voting experience across the country unlike in the United States. Second, the authors find that partisanship is not nearly as relevant in Canada than I suspect it is in the United States; in fact, the study reported a voter's supported party has no bearing on their confidence, perception of fairness, or satisfaction in Elections Canada. Finally, this study could not take voters' race into account, which is especially problematic.¹¹ Any study that would be appropriately extrapolated to the United States would need to take into account the history of racially-motivated

⁷ In addition to her work in the Boone County Clerk's Office, Brianna is also the co-host and co-founder of High Turnout Wide Margins.

⁸ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/243563/americans-trusting-local-state-government.aspx>

⁹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/10/election-officials-exhausted-under-threat-00015850>

¹⁰ *Perceptions*, page 2.

¹¹ *Public Perceptions*, Footnote 2.

voter suppression and the intersection between race and voting in any discussion about trust in election offices.

Ultimately, this work tells us that voters are generally satisfied and confident in Elections Canada, but it stops short of making recommendations for how to increase trust so that even more voters have a better experience. American elections are uniquely decentralized, partisan, and burdened with a long history of exclusion based on race. Anecdotally, these three elements play a large role in voter trust in elections so it is imperative that they are included in future research that could help us gain a more accurate and nuanced view of how voters feel about our offices. Finally, as we move farther from 2020, it would be helpful to revisit this survey as the authors note that confidence, satisfaction, and the perception of fairness in Elections Canada remains high but dipped in 2021.

Despite these critiques, *Public Perceptions* serves as an important reminder to practitioners that voter opinion is not homogenous: variables like age, gender, income, education level, and political interest all play a role whether voters see election offices as fair and trustworthy. Voters will interpret the messages and actions of local election offices differently, so we need a multi-faceted approach for building trust in our communities. This lesson is important for practitioners to keep in mind as they plan voter education campaigns, assign polling places, or recruit staff.

Examining the Relationship Between Election Administration and Citizen Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

The global pandemic led many states to expand the use of convenience voting in the 2020 elections. Following the election, then-president Trump alleged fraud, and many of his supporters expressed negative feelings towards the process. However, many experts argued that 2020 was possibly the most secure election in history. We therefore ask: What is the relationship between voting method and trust in the vote tabulation process? To answer this, we rely on original survey data collected immediately after the 2020 election. We find that citizen attitudes are more a function of the outcome of the election than the administration of it. Those who see their candidate lose have a harder time accepting the outcome and look for explanations beyond simply backing the less popular candidate. This is informative for states considering permanently expanding convenience voting—doing so does not appear to be related to more negative attitudes.

Keywords: vote-by-mail; elections; partisanship; trust; satisfaction

The COVID-19 global pandemic led many states to expand the use of early and absentee voting in order to combat the spread of the virus while still ensuring everyone who wanted to vote safely would be able to do so. However, not all states paired that expansion to voting with an expansion in the ability to process early votes and mail-in ballots. This led to some competitive, decisive states being slower than others to declare a winner. Moreover, some states even saw one candidate ahead on election night only for that lead to steadily “shrink” over the following days as all ballots were counted and the other candidate was declared the winner. Such was the case in Pennsylvania, where a winner was not declared until four days after Election Day, and as Lai (2020) points out, prohibiting pre-processing of ballots “was the major factor for the timing of Pennsylvania’s vote count.”

Following the election, then-President Trump and his legal team made numerous allegations of fraud, including in Pennsylvania, and many of his supporters expressed negative feelings towards the election process. However, at the same time, a large number of officials within government and industry definitively stated, “There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes or was in any way compromised” and described the 2020 election as “the most secure in American history.”²

Given this disconnect, we seek to answer the following question: What is the relationship between a citizen’s voting method and their trust in the vote tabulation process in the 2020 presidential election? Were the changes to the voting process responsible for some of the increase in negative

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² “Repudiating Trump, officials say election ‘most secure.’” Associated Press. 13 November 2020.

attitudes towards elections and government? Or was some other factor, such as partisanship or the outcome of the election itself, driving these changes in opinion? As Claassen (2020: 118) concludes, “public support does indeed help democracy survive.” Therefore, our work bears important implications for how election administration can impact citizen attitudes, which can influence the health and longevity of the system of government within the United States.

Citizen Attitudes Towards Elections

American citizens are notoriously ill-informed when it comes to matters of politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), and the nuances of election administration are so great and diverse across states that citizens are unlikely to possess much prior knowledge and understanding of how elections are administered. Therefore, citizens must rely on political elites and partisan cues when offering opinions on issues related to voting, elections, and potentially government as a whole (Bisgaard and Slothus 2018; Woessner 2005). Furthermore, even absent increased knowledge and attention to politics and elections, Zingher and Flynn (2019) demonstrate that even the politically inattentive are rapidly polarizing along partisan lines. Furthermore, Graham and Svulik (2020: 392) find “the U.S. public’s viability as a democratic check to be strikingly limited” as they do not prioritize democratic institutions and norms. More directly, Alberton and Guller (2020) conclude, “Americans exposed to a story claiming the election would be tampered with expressed less confidence in democratic institutions.”

This is especially important in light of Mason (2018), which chronicles how specific policy proposals are increasingly unimportant and partisan identity has become intimately tied to individual social identity. As such, moving policy in one’s preferred direction is less important than accumulating partisan wins over members of the opposition party. This idea of winning and losing is especially important in light of Anderson and Lo Tiempo’s (2002) work, which finds that “voters for the losers of the presidential contest show lower levels of trust” (p.335).³ Indeed, as Lodge and Taber (2013) argue, people rely on motivated reasoning to interpret political outcomes and choose between competing narratives. Taken together, these works present an electorate that increasingly cannot divorce its trust in the government as a whole from its preferred party’s success at the polls. In sum, individual attitudes towards elections, government, and democracy will be more dependent on partisanship and partisan messaging than on individual voter experiences during the 2020 election.

Data and Methods

In order to conduct our analysis, we rely on original survey data collected immediately after the 2020 presidential election (November 7, 2020). Our survey was conducted on Amazon’s mechanical turk (MTurk). MTurk is an online platform on which researchers can post small work assignments (such as completing surveys) which are then completed by “workers” in exchange for monetary compensation. MTurk has many advantages for research focused on political attitudes and beliefs. Most importantly, data can be collected quickly, and respondent pools (while not nationally representative) are demographically diverse. Not surprisingly, mturk has become a heavily-used data source in the social sciences. It is worth noting that our respondent pool is younger, more educated, and more liberal than the U.S. population as a whole, but it is nonetheless fairly representative on our key theoretical dimension of partisanship.

In our survey, we asked respondents a series of questions related to government and politics. The answers to these questions serve as the dependent variables in the empirical models that follow.

³ This is consistent with work by Banducci and Karp (2003) and Clarke and Acock (1989), among others.

The first of these asks respondents how much they agree with the statement that their vote was counted fairly, with responses ranging from “Disagree” to “Neither Agree nor Disagree” to “Agree” and higher values denoting greater agreement. The next two questions ask if respondents are, on the whole, satisfied with the way democracy works in the United States as well as their home state. Respondents who are generally satisfied are coded 1 and respondents who are generally unsatisfied are coded 0. For our last two dependent variables, we asked respondents how many people working in the federal and state governments they believe are “crooked.” Response categories were “Hardly any,” “Not very many,” “Quite a few,” and “All.” Higher values denote more negative opinions about those working in either level of government.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables Employed

Variable	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Vote Counted Fairly	2.76	3	0.52	1	3
Satisfied with US	0.56	1	0.50	0	1
Satisfied with State	0.61	1	0.49	0	1
Feds Crooked	2.92	3	0.61	1	4
State Crooked	2.75	3	0.71	1	4
In-Person on Election Day	0.39	0	0.49	0	1
In-Person Early	0.22	0	0.42	0	1
Mail-in/Absentee	0.38	0	0.49	0	1
Democrats	0.45	0	0.50	0	1
Independents	0.24	0	0.43	0	1
Republicans	0.31	0	0.46	0	1
Ideology	3.63	3	1.91	1	7
White	0.76	1	0.43	0	1
Male	0.54	1	0.50	0	1
Education	4.31	5	1.31	1	6
Interest in Politics	3.63	4	0.98	1	5
News Consumption	5.03	5	2.06	0	7

Our primary explanatory variables are self-reported voting method and partisanship. The voting methods are binned into three categories: in-person on Election Day (39.2% of our sample), in-person before Election Day (22.5%), and mail-in/absentee (38.3%). We include indicator variables for each with in-person on Election Day serving as the baseline category. A significant coefficient for this variable would indicate a relationship between the electoral process and citizen attitudes. The partisanship variable is also binned into three categories: Democrats (44.9% of our sample), Independents (23.8%), and Republicans (31.4%). Again, we include indicator variables for each, and Democrats serve as the baseline category. A significant coefficient for this variable would illustrate that citizen attitudes are shaped by their partisanship.

We also include a number of control variables. The first is ideology, which is a seven-point scale ranging from “very liberal” to “moderate” to “very conservative.” Next, we include two indicator variables for white and male respondents. We also include a six-point scale of education attainment, with higher values denoting greater levels of formal education. Finally, we include measures of respondents’ general interest in politics as well as their news consumption. The former is a five-point scale ranging from no interest at all to very great interest. The latter is an eight-point scale ranging from zero to seven denoting the number of days per week that a respondent consumes non-sports news media. Table 1 displays the full descriptive statistics for each of the variables employed.

Results

We begin our empirical analysis with an ordered logistic regression predicting a respondent’s belief in whether or not their vote was counted fairly. Overall, approximately 80 percent of survey takers agreed that their vote was fairly counted. Furthermore, we find a discernible relationship between voting method and belief in a fair count in Table 2. Whether in-person on Election Day, before Election Day, or through mail balloting, no method of voting seems to have an effect on whether or not an individual felt their vote was fairly counted. However, we do see some partisan differences emerge from the results in Table 2. Compared to Democrats, both Independents and Republicans were less likely to believe that their vote was fairly counted. Similarly, our ideology variable, which ranges from “very liberal” to “very conservative,” produces a negative and significant coefficient. This leads us to conclude that more conservative respondents were less likely to believe their vote was counted fairly. We find no differences across race, gender, interest in politics, or news consumption. However, we do see that increased levels of formal educational attainment are positively associated with the belief that an individual’s vote was counted fairly.

In short, the voting method used does not seem to have impacted individual beliefs in a fairly counted vote. Given that the 2020 federal elections saw Democrats regain control of the White House and Senate while maintaining control of the House of Representatives, these results are consistent with the expectation that electoral winners will be more satisfied with the process, broadly speaking, and those who support the unsuccessful candidate or party will be less satisfied.

Table 2. Order Logistic Regression of Belief that Vote was Counted Fairly

Vote Counted Fairly	Coefficient (Standard Error)
In-Person before Election Day	0.294 (0.285)
Mail-in/Absentee	-0.078 (0.257)
Independents	-1.173 (0.331)
Republicans	-1.087 (0.354)
Ideology	-0.345 (0.079)
White	-0.350 (0.207)
Male	0.341 (0.215)
Education	0.284 (0.084)
Interest in Politics	0.129 (0.126)
News Consumption	0.045 (0.057)
Log likelihood	-355.993
N	889

Bolded entries significant at $p < 0.05$

Next, we estimate a logistic regression predicting satisfaction with democracy in Table 3. Here, a positive and significant coefficient denotes more positive attitudes. Unlike our measure of the belief in fairly counted votes, which was overwhelmingly positive, this measure is more mixed. In total, almost 56 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the way democracy works in the United States, whereas the remaining 44 percent expressed some level of dissatisfaction. Despite this, we still do not see any differences in attitudes based on the voting method employed by the individual. We also do not see inter-party differences emerge. Instead, Democrats and Republicans express comparable levels of democratic satisfaction while Independents express more negative feelings. This is consistent with the idea that Independents and members of minor parties feel alienated and unrepresented in the United States' system of government.

Table 3. Logistic Regression of Democratic Satisfaction

	US Satisfaction	State Satisfaction
	Coefficient	Coefficient
	(Standard Error)	(Standard Error)
In-Person before Election Day	-0.287 (0.199)	-0.209 (0.202)
Mail-in/Absentee	-0.265 (0.173)	-0.132 (0.179)
Independents	-0.437 (0.195)	-0.701 (0.201)
Republicans	0.145 (0.234)	-0.329 (0.242)
Ideology	0.151 (0.052)	0.151 (0.053)
White	-0.179 (0.185)	-0.236 (0.193)
Male	0.105 (0.146)	0.117 (0.151)
Education	0.154 (0.061)	0.178 (0.062)
Interest in Politics	0.036 (0.089)	-0.177* (0.092)
News Consumption	-0.063 (0.040)	-0.016 (0.042)
Constant	-0.287 (0.501)	0.582 (0.518)
Log likelihood	541.044	-518.684
N	840	840

Bolded entries significant at $p < 0.05$, *entries significant at $p < 0.10$

In the second model in Table 3, we estimate the same model as what was included in the first, but the dependent variable asks respondents about their satisfaction with democracy within their home state. We see higher levels of satisfaction within states compared to the US as a whole. Approximately 61.5 percent of individuals expressed satisfaction with the way democracy works in their state, whereas the remaining 38.5 percent expressed some level of dissatisfaction. Nonetheless, the results are similar in both models. Satisfaction with democracy is *not* a function of the different experience individuals may have based on the different voting methods available to them. Again, however, Independents are less satisfied with the process than are those who identify as a member of one of the two major political parties. We do not uncover any relation between race, gender, interest in politics, or news consumption and democratic satisfaction, but we do see that increased educational attainment is positively associated with democratic satisfaction, even after controlling for other factors.

Tables 3 leads us to conclude that voting methods were not associated with citizens' attitudes towards democracy as an institution. In Table 4, we employ ordered logistic regressions to estimate the relationship between voting methods and attitudes towards politicians. At the federal level, when asked "In your opinion, how many of the people running the federal government are crooked?" the most common response from survey takers was "quite a few are crooked" at 67.9 percent of our

sample. Nearly 13 percent believe “all are crooked” while that remaining 19 percent believe either “hardly any” or “not very many” are crooked. For this model, a positive and significant coefficient denotes more negative attitudes towards the federal government.

Unlike our previous models, we see slight differences in attitudes based on voting method. Those who voted through mail-in or absentee ballots are less likely to view those who work in the federal government as crooked, compared to those who voted in-person either on Election Day or before. Similar to our previous two models, though, we see similarities between Democrats and Republicans, while Independents are more likely to view the federal government as crooked.

Table 4. Ordered Logistic Regression of Belief Federal Government is “Crooked”

	“Crooked” Federal	“Crooked” State
	Coefficient	Coefficient
	(Standard Error)	(Standard Error)
In-Person before Election Day	0.018 (0.205)	0.140 (0.187)
Mail-in/Absentee	-0.336* (0.178)	-0.441 (0.162)
Independents	0.371* (0.206)	0.515 (0.190)
Republicans	-0.041 (0.241)	0.062 (0.226)
Ideology	0.051 (0.053)	0.038 (0.050)
White	0.272 (0.188)	0.016 (0.171)
Male	-0.530 (0.153)	-0.279 (0.137)
Education	-0.182 (0.064)	-0.118 (0.057)
Interest in Politics	0.261 (0.092)	0.050 (0.084)
News Consumption	-0.098 (0.042)	-0.041 (0.039)
Log likelihood	-705.957	-855.421
N	815	808

Bolded entries significant at $p < 0.05$, *entries significant at $p < 0.10$

The second model employs the same specification as the first in Table 4, but instead focuses on attitudes in respondents’ home states. In general, citizens have more positive attitudes towards their state government than the federal government. The modal response was still “quite a few” who work there are crooked, but that response comprised only 54.2 percent of our sample—almost 14 percentage points lower than the federal analog. Only 12.5 percent believe that “all are crooked,” and the remaining 33.3 percent believe “hardly any” or “not very many” individuals working in state government are crooked.

The results from this model are similar to those from the previous one. Those who utilized mail balloting in some form have generally more positive views of the state government. Conversely, Independents have more negative views when compared to both Democrats and Republicans. In both

models, there are no differences in attitudes based on race, but those who identify as male and those with higher levels of educational attainment have more positive attitudes towards those who work in both the federal and state government.

To summarize to this point, the voting method used by an individual—whether in-person on or before Election Day or through mail ballot of some form—does not seem to be associated with negative attitudes towards democracy as an institution or those who operate within that institution at the state or federal level. Instead, these negative attitudes are more closely related to partisanship and educational attainment. Those who feel left out of the political process, either through losing an election or through feeling unrepresented by the two major parties, and those with less formal education are most likely to hold negative opinions of government, broadly defined, after controlling for other factors.

Table 5. Logistic Regression of Democratic Satisfaction within the US, Before and After Election Day

Democratic Satisfaction (US)	Before Election	After Election
	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Independents	0.061 (0.279)	-0.429 (0.182)
Republicans	1.422 (0.331)	0.129 (0.221)
Ideology	0.215 (0.075)	0.185 (0.049)
White	0.045 (0.242)	-0.126 (0.173)
Male	-0.001 (0.212)	0.163 (0.139)
Education	0.176 (0.079)	0.117 (0.056)
Interest in Politics	0.148 (0.116)	0.118 (0.082)
News Consumption	-0.104* (0.054)	-0.042 (0.038)
Constant	-1.992 (0.589)	-0.937 (0.435)
Log likelihood	-270.391	-593.283
N	465	914

Bolded entries significant at $p < 0.05$, *entries significant at $p < 0.10$

Given these findings, we cannot conclude that different voting methods produce different attitudes towards elections and democracy. Therefore, we estimate a series of models from immediately before and immediately after the November general election in order to test the effect of the election outcome itself on citizen attitudes. To this end, we rely on additional survey data collected on mturk on November 2, 2020. We again employ the democratic satisfaction and belief in a crooked government at the federal and state levels as our dependent variables. Our models include the same independent variables as well, with the exception of voting method. We of course cannot include voting method from before the election was held, but, given that there was little to no relationship

between this variable and our variables of interest, we do not believe its exclusion biases our results in any way.

Table 5 depicts the results of democratic satisfaction immediately before and after the November general election. Our controls produce comparable effects in both models, again with education positively related to democratic satisfaction. However, we see noticeable shifts in satisfaction among different groups of partisans. Before the election, Republicans were significantly more likely to be satisfied with how democracy works in the United States compared to their Democratic counterparts. This is likely a result of Republicans controlling the White House at the time. However, after the election, there was no statistically significant difference in satisfaction between Democrats and Republicans. We attribute this shift to Joe Biden becoming the presumptive winner of the election.

A similar effect is depicted in Table 6. Before the election, Republicans were more satisfied with how democracy works in their home state than were Democrats, but that effect disappeared immediately after the election. It is important to note that the effect is much smaller in magnitude at the state level than at the federal level, but the effect persists nonetheless, which is to be expected with control of the White House at stake in conjunction with the increased levels of nationalization in recent years (Carson, Sievert, and Williamson 2020).

Table 6. Logistic Regression of Democratic Satisfaction within Respondent State, Before and After Election Day

Democratic Satisfaction (State)	Before Election	After Election
	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Independents	-0.015 (0.263)	-0.767 (0.187)
Republicans	0.708 (0.316)	-0.315 (0.228)
Ideology	0.031 (0.070)	0.173 (0.051)
White	0.070 (0.223)	-0.204 (0.179)
Male	0.002 (0.194)	0.169 (0.142)
Education	0.097 (0.071)	0.158 (0.057)
Interest in Politics	0.108 (0.105)	-0.046 (0.084)
News Consumption	-0.033 (0.050)	0.002 (0.038)
Constant	-0.727 (0.536)	-0.192 (0.444)
Log likelihood	-307.961	-572.856
N	465	914

Bolded entries significant at $p < 0.05$, *entries significant at $p < 0.10$

In our last two models, we predict belief in a crooked government at the federal and state levels. Before the election, partisanship did not seem to elicit any differences in opinions towards those who work in the federal government. However, immediately after the election, Independents were more likely to describe at least part of the federal government as crooked. The same relationship holds for Table 8, which predicts attitudes towards state government. In both tables, our controls do not produce any statistically significant results before the election, but increased education attainment leads respondents to holding more positive views of those who work in government at both the federal and state levels, all else equal.

Table 7. Logistic Regression of Belief Federal Government is “Crooked”, Before and After Election Day

Crooked (Federal)	Before Election	After Election
	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Independents	0.114 (0.277)	0.480 (0.194)
Republicans	-0.160 (0.342)	0.034 (0.228)
Ideology	0.013 (0.076)	0.052 (0.050)
White	-0.088 (0.236)	0.132 (0.177)
Male	-0.221 (0.200)	-0.507 (0.146)
Education	-0.064 (0.073)	-0.166 (0.059)
Interest in Politics	-0.073 (0.111)	0.189 (0.085)
News Consumption	-0.018 (0.051)	-0.094 (0.040)
Log likelihood	-416.556	-776.490
N	453	887

Bolded entries significant at $p < 0.05$, *entries significant at $p < 0.10$

To summarize, our results provide evidence in support of the idea that changes to voting procedures, namely providing for different voting methods, were not associated with any negative opinions towards government or government officials, at the state or federal level. Instead, citizen satisfaction with how democracy works, opinions towards those working in government, and the belief that voters participated in a fair process are more likely to be driven by individual partisanship. We also find that increased educational attainment consistently produces more positive attitudes towards government.

Table 8. Logistic Regression of Belief State Government is “Crooked”, Before and After Election Day

Crooked (State)	Before Election	After Election
	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Independents	0.175 (0.256)	0.631 (0.179)
Republicans	-0.510* (0.307)	0.169 (0.215)
Ideology	0.214 (0.069)	0.045 (0.048)
White	-0.100 (0.213)	-0.114 (0.161)
Male	-0.194 (0.186)	-0.241* (0.131)
Education	-0.018 (0.068)	-0.120 (0.054)
Interest in Politics	0.149 (0.104)	-0.004 (0.077)
News Consumption	-0.081* (0.049)	-0.039 (0.036)
Log likelihood	-466.310	-934.207
N	450	880

Bolded entries significant at $p < 0.05$, *entries significant at $p < 0.10$

Conclusion

Our results hold some important implications for scholars, election administrators, and policy advocates alike. It is important to note that our models cannot provide a causal explanation for the relationship between voting methods and attitudes towards government. For example, in Table 4, we see that mail voting is negatively associated with the belief that the government is “crooked” in some way. It may be the case that familiarity with the government apparatus through the process of voting by mail elicits more positive attitudes towards those who work in and represent that institution. However, it may also be the case that those who already believe that the government is generally not comprised of crooked officials are therefore more trusting of the government and subsequently more likely to opt into a vote by mail process. Future research should endeavor to test this relationship more rigorously. Regardless of the causal direction, a relationship exists between voting methods and citizen attitudes, and that relationship should be taken into consideration when considering reform efforts.

Furthermore, the results presented here are consistent with previous research demonstrating the negative effect of electoral defeat on those who voted for the losing candidate. For states considering permanently adopting any pandemic-related changes to their voting process, it is important to point out that negative reactions towards the administration of elections were a byproduct of individual partisanship and not the process itself.

Election administration has been politicized to such an extent that citizens have developed partisan opinions of the process. Successful attempts to improve, streamline, modernize, or change the voting process or experience in any way will likely need to be met with bipartisan—if not non-partisan—descriptions and support. And in the event that voters express negative attitudes towards

elections, government, or democracy, we must first address their underlying partisan motivations before we can grapple with the substance of election administration reform.

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Response to Examining the Relationship Between Election Administration and Citizen Attitudes

Mary Hall, *Auditor, Thurston County, Washington*¹

This focuses on the change in public faith in elections processes from immediately before and after the 2020 Presidential Election.

Prior to 2020, the feedback we received from party representatives was that we were viewed as “the good guys,” or unbiased arbiters of a non-partisan process. That impression changed when we saw across-the-board lack of faith in the election process during 2020. Prior to the election, the lack of faith seemed to be equally balanced between people on the left side of the political spectrum who were worried about whether their ballots would be delivered by the US Postal Service (USPS), and people on the right, who were skeptical about ballot processing generally, and the need to vote in person specifically.

We saw this reflected in ballot returns. The Thurston County Auditor’s Office sent ballots earlier than normal because of the uncertainty surrounding the USPS. We saw an unusually large return of ballots in the early part of the balloting period. We also saw an unusual “Red wave” in later results, implying voters on the right side of the spectrum were more likely to vote later, or as “in-person” as possible.

This paper’s conclusions will help my office focus our outreach efforts as we attempt to pre-bunk election misinformation in future elections. The paper backs up our assumption that Republican voters are more likely to lack faith in election processes.

We have seen this in the public’s response to our expanded ballot processing observer program. Republican partisan observers tend to show up regularly during partisan elections, but Democratic partisan observers have indicated that they only attend to observe Republican observers. Our primary concern is how to return levels of trust to where they were before the 2020 election cycle. We find this research useful in that endeavor. We are interested in any information that can help us better target outreach to specific groups or demographics that lack trust in elections.

In terms of future research, we would find valuable a more granular view of trust in elections and how different information sources feed into that. Obviously, there was a shift on Election Day 2020 in terms of trust in elections among various groups. It would be useful to know what factors contributed to that change (social media platforms and other specific information sources) for the groups where trust increased or decreased.

We would also find useful more targeted information on variations in national geography; specifically, if there is a change in approach that would work best in Western vote-by-mail states. Also, while we have seen information on income levels, we would appreciate an examination of income levels and geography (i.e., urban poor vs. rural poor).

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Response to Examining the Relationship Between Election Administration and Citizen Attitudes

Tim Tsujii, *Director of Elections, Forsyth County Board of Elections, North Carolina*¹

The article by Williamson, Justwan, and Williams examines the link between voting method and trust in the vote tabulation process. It addresses whether changes to the voting process, or other factors, such as partisanship or the outcome of the election, were responsible for some of the increase in negative attitudes after the 2020 presidential election. It is vital to acknowledge that the 2020 election took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, making it more unique than any other election in US history. There are a few questions and suggestions regarding the methods and analysis that need to be clarified and addressed. With regard to the data set, it may be helpful to know the respondents' place of residence because primary voting methods (e.g. all vote-by-mail vs. vote centers vs. traditional precinct voting) and oversight of elections administration (e.g. Secretary of State vs. Board of Elections) vary from state to state. I would also suggest conducting the survey again after a non-pandemic election to test the reliability of the authors' assertions. I would encourage the authors to take their analysis further to ensure that their conclusion is comprehensive with regards to the effects of the pandemic on the changes to the voting processes.

The article is intended to inform states that are considering permanent changes to expanding convenience voting, which is typically a matter of public policy and beyond the scope of election administrators unless they are elected. However, the record number of vote-by-mail ballots cast in the 2020 pandemic election should not justify the adoption of a permanent change for that voting method. In-person early voting still had a significant turnout percentage in 2020 as well. This could potentially shift attitudes if a state were to go all vote-by-mail or impose any limits to in-person early voting by diminishing the convenience that had been enjoyed by voters.

With the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the data could be beneficial for administrators in terms of election planning to project turnout by voting method and the logistical need for personal protective equipment (PPE), absentee by-mail envelopes, and/or ballot printing. Additionally, the work that goes into conducting elections is largely executed out of the view of the public, and the 2020 election also found a rise in the spread of misinformation, which continues to be one of the leading threats to the elections process across the United States. This study does not negate the need to strengthen public confidence in the elections process and help combat the spread of misinformation. This realization presents an opportunity for administrators to expand their voter outreach efforts through election academies, public forums, open houses, and enhanced social media engagement.

With regard to the survey data, the percentages of the three category samples (in-person on Election Day, in-person before Election Day, and absentee vote-by-mail) are not consistent with the total national percentage of turnout by voting method in the 2020 election. Would it be beneficial to the study for the percentages of the sample categories to reflect the national trend? Additionally, the use of the online platform, MTurk, for collecting the survey data raises questions about the validity of the measures; one could suggest that the motivation of the respondents was influenced more so by the monetary compensation rather than providing accurate responses. Also, the respondents are

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limited to only those individuals who are aware of the online platform and those with access to the internet and smart devices or computer. However, I understand that with any survey there will always be a certain margin of error.

With the unique nature of the election during a pandemic, it may be helpful to factor the attitudes associated with government handling of the disease, or the correlation between trust in government for mandating quarantine, vaccination, and/or masks versus the support/increased turnout in vote-by-mail from a state-by-state perspective.

BOOK REVIEW: *The Administration of Voter Registration: Expanding the Electorate Across and Within the States*, by Thessalia Merivaki. 2021. New York: Palgrave Macmillan (Elections, Voting and Technology Series). 170 pages.

Joseph Anthony, *Assistant Professor of Political Science, SUNY-Cortland*¹

“Despite the [policy] efforts toward convenient, accessible, and accurate voter registration, registering to vote is [still] procedurally complex.” (19)

The study of election administration has been on the rise in political science since the infamous 2000 election debacle. Since then, scholars have developed a greater understanding of the policies, systems, and the multiplicity of actors involved in election administration in the United States, as well as deeper knowledge around the complexities and dynamics of these hyper-decentralized administrative systems. Dr. Thessalia Merivaki of Mississippi State University makes important contributions to this field of scholarship in her book *The Administration of Voter Registration: Expanding the Electorate Across and Within the States (The Administration of Voter Registration)*. In this book, Merivaki navigates the gray space that exists between voter registration policies’ intentions and their true impacts, by looking at the various factors that influence the implementation of registration policies at the local level. As Merivaki stresses, it is important to understand voter registration policies and the variations in their implementation, because these elements are crucial to determining the makeup of the electorate—that is, which citizens are and are not eligible to vote on Election Day. A lack of clarity in federal voter registration policies—often by design—leaves room for a great deal of variation in policy interpretation and implementation at state and local levels. Merivaki uses a multitude of original, difficult-to-obtain, and under-utilized data sources to illuminate the ways voter registration systems differ across localities, as well as how this variance impacts both election officials and potential voters. To support her thesis, Merivaki develops a theoretical framework she calls the “voter registration gap” to quantify and explain how effectively policies and practices meet the need for voter registration in local communities. Merivaki calculates the voter registration gap “by estimating the non-registered electorate from the total of the eligible citizen population.” Merivaki further clarifies this gap by saying, “[i]f all American citizens of voting age were registered voters, then there would be no gaps in voter registration” (38).

Summary

The Administration of Voter Registration systematically analyzes the so-called voter registration gap through both policy and administrative lenses; Merivaki asks, where do voter registration policies make improvements but also come up short? And how do administrative procedures in particular account for the variance in successfully expanding the electorate and closing the voter registration gap?

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Merivaki begins her analysis by unpacking the handful of federal voter registration laws that have been passed and their limited impacts on closing the registration gap. As Merivaki illuminates, traditional metrics of these policies' impacts often correlate voter registration reforms with increases in voter turnout (and show only modest and non-uniform impacts: 5). In this book, Merivaki goes beyond the historically blunt metric of voter turnout and contributes innovative and original analyses in examining whether these policy reforms have increased voter registration rates. Merivaki logically argues that “[i]f voter registration reforms do not have a uniform impact on turnout...then why would they have a uniform impact on voter registration?” (7)

Merivaki starts the voter registration policy journey with a discussion of the federal policies that have most impacted voter registration practices, namely the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), and the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). Each of these federal policies has improved voter registration practices in some ways, but they only go so far. One reason that federal laws do not completely meet the need for voter registration, as Merivaki notes, is that some states and localities are increasingly in noncompliance with these federal laws, in particular with the NVRA (9; 29; 44). Merivaki argues, however, that the biggest reason federal policies cannot fully meet the need for voter registration on their own is due to their “collaborative governance” framing; in other words, federal policies intentionally leave substantial discretion to states and other institutional partners, because the federal infrastructure cannot oversee implementation of every policy (8). Additionally, the compliance of states with federal policy often depends upon their ability to help craft their implementation. For these reasons, Merivaki cogently makes the case that there is often a disconnect between the *intent* of federal policies [expanding the electorate] and “the reality of the *implementation*” of these policies at the local level (10) (emphasis added). Additionally, these federal policies leave a great deal of room for interpretation related to the voter registration process; one example of this is how differently states define terms such as “...valid voter registrations, duplicate registrations, or complete registrations” (19).

To improve voter registration processes where federal policies leave off, states have passed additional reforms, such as Election or Same-Day Registration (EDR), Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), and Online Voter Registration (OVR). Some of these reforms were in place even before the passage of the federal voter registration laws. Merivaki thoroughly examines the impacts these additional state policies have on closing the registration gap. State voter registration policies have been passed in a patchwork way—what Merivaki calls a “dense infrastructure of voter registration”—and there is a great deal of variance as to whether states have passed *any* additional voter registration policies, as well as which ones they have prioritized (13). Importantly, Merivaki further finds that variation in registration practices not only exists across states, but across local jurisdictions within states: “[v]oter registration rates in fact fluctuate dramatically across states and across time, but most notably within states” (29). Merivaki again argues, however, that we should not expect “uniform compliance” with state laws at the local level (1). Instead, Merivaki’s interest is in understanding this implementation variation as a sort of natural experiment; whether or not there are practices or packages of policy reforms that better reach their goal of expanding the electorate more so than others.

Merivaki examines several important questions related to registration policies and their implementation; the first being “is variation in voter registration across and within states driven by institutional design, electoral factors, administrative factors, or a combination of all?” (7) Merivaki describes the institutional factors as the landscape of laws that determine who is eligible to register to voter and who is not, as well as what options are available for registration. While state laws can improve voter registration rates beyond those that federal policies impact, they also do not fully close voter registration gaps. Part of the reason, Merivaki explains, is that just because voter registration may be more available to citizens, it does not necessarily mean that there is an increased demand for these services. Additionally, Merivaki finds that electoral factors also matter to some extent in explaining

the voter registration gap, such as the fact that U.S. elections are “passive and voluntary” and require that citizens take most of the responsibility upon themselves to register and vote, without compulsory policies to do so. As a result, social and motivational barriers may exist that prevent would-be applicants from registering to vote, which in part may explain the voter registration gap even with the implementation of additional policies.

Merivaki finds that the most important set of factors influencing the variation in whether localities successfully expand the electorate were institutional and administrative factors. For instance, details such as the differing kinds of information election officials require on registration applications, the differing criteria used for validating signatures, and whether local election officials (LEOs) place applications “on hold” or “pending,” are all critical to determining the acceptance or rejection of registration applications; these decisions are all made at the local level. More technical administrative factors are also essential to successfully expanding the electorate, such as the amount and quality of data entry done by the LEO, as well as the localized procedures around voter list maintenance.

Merivaki also finds that the “[m]ethod and manner” of voter registration adds to the variance in administrative procedures, which in turn impact registration rates. Such factors as the timing of voter registration deadlines, whether voter registration is offered by paper or online, and whether applicants are given the chance to correct information before Election Day are all localized decisions that impact the size of the voter registration gap. Among other key results, Merivaki finds that some voter registration methods are more utilized by citizens and are also less error-prone; Online Voter Registration, for instance, is increasingly favored by applicants and is found to be the least error-prone (7;162). Additionally, even though a high rate of registration applications come from the Department of Motor Vehicles as mandated by the NVRA, these applications are rejected more often than applications through other methods (92). Using data from Florida, Merivaki also finds there are “seasonal dynamics” that partially account for the variation in successfully completed applications. These seasonal dynamics show that more registrations are received and successfully completed closer to voter registration deadlines, as well as in the weeks following an election. Therefore, in addition to administrative factors, Merivaki demonstrates that the “how” and “when” of voter registration practices also matter in measuring registration rates, as well as the jurisdiction’s ability to reach new voters (119).

To develop her innovative theoretical framework and test her hypotheses, Merivaki uses original and rarely-utilized data sources. For instance, Merivaki analyzes voter registration data from the Election Administration and Voting Survey (the EAVS, delivered every 2 years by the Election Assistance Commission), data from the Election Performance Index (EPI), and county-level data obtained by the Florida Division of Elections for all of the 67 counties in that state.

Additionally, Merivaki explores whether the registration gap disproportionately impacts voters in systematic ways by analyzing individual applications that were placed “on hold” or “denied” in Florida counties, as well as the reasons behind these actions. As Merivaki clearly illustrates, the answer to why applications are rejected is not as simple as the question. The reason for this is that different states, and even different localities, define key terms differently and take different actions. For instance, a voter who does not fully complete their application may or may not be contacted to correct the form depending upon the locality. Additionally, not all localities report the same information or require the same information to complete a voter registration application. With these data, Merivaki uncovers some important findings. Merivaki discovers that most applications that are rejected or put on hold in Florida counties are due to missing information or because the applicant is on a list of felons. Additionally, African American applicants were more likely to inaccurately be put on a felons list than white applicants, though this was not true for Hispanic applicants (150). These findings have important implications for the makeup of the electorate in a jurisdiction based upon seemingly minor administrative decisions. Merivaki argues that there is mutual intent with state and federal policies,

even if there are great differences in these policies and their implementation; the intentions of these policies are to expand the electorate. In this book, Merivaki explores to what extent these policies have met their “target,” or their intended impact. As such, Merivaki takes an important and deep dive into a critical yet often overlooked subsystem of election administration, one that greatly impacts the makeup of the electorate.

Merivaki uses a variety of data sources to support her theory of the existence of a voter registration gap, as well as the policies and practices that impact this gap. Merivaki also transparently and comprehensively covers the limitations of the findings in her book, most of which are outside the control of the author. The primary limitations of the findings are related to the inaccessibility, unavailability, inaccuracy, or lack of consistency in reported data around voter registration at the state and/or local levels (39; 60; 97). For instance, in reporting to the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), some states and localities report more registration data than others, and some do not report to the EAC at all. Election officials often report zeros in their data, but it is not always clear why—if it is because there are no data to report, or because the category does not apply, or for other, unidentified reasons (94). Election officials also do not consistently report on the methods of voter registration in their localities, so it is not always possible to know what proportion of new registrations come from in-person, online, paper, or registration drives. Additionally, and crucially as Merivaki points out, it is impossible to understand why individual applications are rejected, because LEOs often do not report which applications were rejected nor why—this means researchers cannot systematically track which voter registration methods are effective. Merivaki is clear about the limitations in the available data, and she openly invites opportunities for future research and data clarity.

Finally, Merivaki offers evidence-based and pragmatic recommendations for mitigating the voter registration gap she identifies. One of these recommendations includes more consistent and frequent reporting on voter registration statistics. Additionally, Merivaki finds that electronic registration is increasingly in demand from voters, and is often the least error-prone method of registering to vote. Given these findings, Merivaki also pushes the reader and the discipline to think more critically about electronic registration methods and how to make them more widely available.

Conclusion

This book is an important read for anyone interested in understanding the complexities, nuances, and dynamics of election systems in the United States. This book is useful for scholars and students, and it will also be illuminating for election officials carrying out the crucial, daily work of registering voters and expanding the electorate. Merivaki makes important contributions to the study of election administration and policy arenas, as well as toward our broader understanding of the roles of and challenges faced by local election officials. To truly understand the makeup of the electorate, Merivaki convincingly makes the case that we must understand voter registration policies and practices, as well as where these policies and practices do not meet their intended goal of expanding the electorate. The recently revitalized narratives that question electoral integrity in American elections make the study and understanding of the detailed work of election officials even more important, and Merivaki rises to the occasion in this innovative book with her fastidious data collection and copious attention to the details of this often-overlooked system in election administration.

Philanthropy's Role in Elections: Supporting the Professionals on the Frontlines of Democracy

Lindsay Daniels, *Democracy Fund Elections & Voting Senior Program Director*

Tammy Patrick, *Democracy Fund Election & Voting Program Senior Advisor*¹

ABSTRACT

Local election officials are united by a shared investment in their responsibility to manage and care for voting and elections. Funding, however, has not kept pace for election officials to do the important work of serving an increasingly diverse electorate. The challenges are varied and unlikely to be resolved overnight unless election officials receive multifaceted and collaborative support and voters are well served. Given that election administrators still lack established and continual government revenue streams, civil society partners continue to step up to narrow and close the gaps between what the field needs and what is available. With the critical caveat that self-centered agendas and ulterior motives are unacceptable, philanthropy has the flexibility and resources to test and pilot improvements that can later be adopted by election administrators and government at scale. In this article, Democracy Fund – a 501(c)(3) private nonpartisan foundation – highlights some of the work civil society partners have done in support of election administration, and provides insight into the organization's efforts to build a trustworthy and defensible election system that centers the needs of a representative electorate.

It may seem odd for private philanthropy to work with election officials, but civil society partners have often stepped up to narrow and close the gaps between what the field needs and what is available. With the critical caveat that self-centered agendas and ulterior motives are unacceptable, philanthropy has the flexibility and resources to test and pilot improvements that can later be adopted by election administrators and government at scale.

In our decentralized elections system, election officials have an awesome responsibility: orchestrate a secure, efficient, and accessible voter experience for the local electorate in more than 8,000 voting jurisdictions nationwide. All Americans have the right to fully participate in the democratic process and freely vote for the candidates and issues that represent their communities. As the *de facto* face of democracy for many voters, election administrators play one of the most prominent roles in that process.

At [Democracy Fund](#) – a 501(c)(3) private nonpartisan foundation founded in 2013 by eBay founder and philanthropist Pierre Omidyar – we champion leaders and organizations working to reform and defend democracy, and challenge our political system to be more open and just. Our core

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Tammy Patrick has dedicated her career to the creation and sharing of sound election administrative practices to improve the American voting experience. She is an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Policy, and for 11 years, she was the Federal Compliance Officer for Maricopa County Elections Department. In 2013, she served as a commissioner on the Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA).

grantmaking programs aim to increase the quality of election planning and execution, mitigate risks to secure elections and credible outcomes, and reduce the structural barriers to voting for a higher and more representative turnout, particularly for historically underrepresented voters. To date, one area of our work has been driven by the belief that this can be done by helping local election officials get the data, tools, and connections needed to ensure voters' voices are heard.

The election ecosystem abounds with examples. Organizations like The Pew Charitable Trusts incubated efforts such as [electionline.org](#), [Electronic Registration Information Center](#) (ERIC), [Election Performance Index](#) (EPI) – now part of MIT Election Data and Science Lab – and [Voting Information Project](#) (VIP) – now part of Democracy Works. In 2020, philanthropy supported election administration with grants for voter education, poll worker recruitment assistance, and protective personal equipment to keep voters and election staff safe in the global COVID-19 pandemic. The heroic effort of election officials across the country, with the support of civil society partners, produced one of the most secure elections in recent history.

This partnership between election administrators and philanthropy has the potential to further improve the elections field in key areas and produce a more voter-centric system by:

1. Investing in tools and training to improve and secure the voting experience;
2. Networking and sharing best practices; and
3. Ensuring election officials have a seat at the table.

Investing in Tools and Training to Improve and Secure the Voting Experience

Philanthropy-supported efforts provide free and low-cost training and conference content from some of the country's best institutions and experts to elevate the skills of our election administrators—like those offered by Democracy Fund grantees Center for Civic Design, Bipartisan Policy Center, MIT Election Data Science Lab, and Center for Technology in Civic Life (CTCL). Democracy Fund has also supported tools to help inform election administration decisions and maximize existing resources including the University of Southern California's Center for Inclusive Democracy Polling Location & Dropbox [Siting Tool](#), CTCL's [electiontools.org](#), University of Rhode Island URI Votes' [Ballot Operations Output Tool & Help](#) (BOOTH) project, and Democracy Works' [electionmail.org](#) and [Ballot Scout](#) tracking for mail ballots.

Philanthropy is also equipped to help when unexpected challenges arise. When new threats took center stage in 2016, Democracy Fund pivoted to fill gaps in election security while state and federal government built the necessary infrastructure—including support for the Harvard University Belfer Center's [Defending Digital Democracy](#) cybersecurity tabletop exercises and a set of post-election audit guides, [Knowing It's Right](#), by Jennifer Morrell. Democracy Fund Voice, years ahead of the 2021 redistricting cycle, invested in the National State Geographic Information Council's [Geo-Enabled Elections Project](#).

Networking and Sharing Best Practices

Election administration is localized to better suit the eligible voters within each jurisdiction. However, there is still value in sharing lessons learned, best practices, and processes between officials. In fact, most local administrators get their information, training, and support from their state [colleagues](#). To support vibrant leaders in a space where funding is scarce for networking, Democracy Fund began biannual convenings for leadership from the state associations of election officials in 2018. State associations' role cannot be understated in strengthening and fostering opportunities for collaboration. We must champion and bolster these

associations at the state and national level and encourage members to support and participate in these convenings; voicing support to association leadership is a good first step.

Democracy Fund's holistic approach to network building inspired supplemental endeavors like re-launching an improved electionline.org in 2018, and hosting an annual Language Assistance for Voters Summit. Although tens of millions of Americans have been voting by mail for years, early investment in efforts such as working with the United States Postal Service for the establishment of a special Service Type ID (STID) for ballots in 2018 paid dividends during the COVID-19 global pandemic when more Americans than ever before had their ballot handed to them by a postal worker rather than a poll worker.

Ensuring Election Officials Have a Seat at the Table

A key tenet of Democracy Fund's work has been to amplify election officials' voices in policy and administrative decisions. As indispensable authorities on how elections work, election officials must have a seat at the table when policies, guidelines, or practices are under consideration. To avoid the perception of putting a finger on the election administration policy scale, many officials do not advocate for themselves. However, models piloted by groups such as the [Future of California Elections](#) demonstrate how election officials can work with advocacy organizations and other stakeholders to ensure their voices are heard when changes are being considered. Including implementors early and often in the policy process is a sound step towards a better system and decreases the likelihood of implementation roadblocks.

This is also the impetus behind the Democracy Fund's [Stewards of Democracy](#) survey of local election officials: to better understand their experiences and perspectives, amplify and elevate their voices, and contribute to election administration and reform conversations. In the United States, 51% of voters are served by only 2% of our election officials while, conversely, 3% of our voters are served by 57% of our election officials. The [survey series](#) partnership between Democracy Fund and the [Elections & Voting Information Center](#) (EVIC) at Reed College helps highlight variations like this across the field in what it means to be an "LEO."

Episodic funding after a crisis is often insufficient and provided too late in the cycle to be effective. Election administration needs an established, continual revenue stream to afford officials the time and resources needed for proper planning and proactive implementation. In tandem with the entreaty to sufficiently fund state and local election offices, Democracy Fund invests in organizations—like League of Women Voters Education Fund and Common Cause Education Fund—working to modernize our election system, and champion online voter registration, the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), and other expansions of voter options. All Americans should be able to access a modern voting system that is easy and secure and expect that their vote will be faithfully counted.

Conclusion

The underlying structure of [local election officials' opinions](#) and duties is complex—impacted by jurisdiction size, partisanship, practical experience, and many other factors. Local election officials are united, however, by a shared investment in their responsibility to manage and care for voting and elections. Since 2016, efforts have increased to undermine democratic norms, threaten and target election officials, and challenge the outcome of secure and fair elections. Funding has not kept pace for election officials to do the important work of serving an increasingly diverse electorate. In fact, state legislatures – even in the face of COVID-19 – recently moved to restrict the ability for civil society to bolster election infrastructure yet refused to provide state and local funding to fill the gap.

The challenges are varied and unlikely to be resolved overnight unless election officials receive multifaceted and collaborative support and voters are well served. Democracy Fund is ready to help build a trustworthy and defensible election system that centers on the needs of a representative electorate.

The Election Official Legal Defense Network: A Project of The Center for Election Innovation & Research

David Becker, *Executive Director, Center for Election Innovation & Research*¹

Election Officials are Under Attack

Election officials in the U.S. are under unprecedented attack for doing their jobs. They face an increasing wave of state laws subjecting them to criminal penalties for performing their professional duties. Some officials have been the target of [threats of violence](#) to themselves and their families, and [law enforcement is failing them](#). This escalation comes in the wake of the 2020 election and its aftermath, despite that election being the [most secure and transparent election in American history](#), with record turnout, during a global pandemic.

Since early June 2021, several states, including Arizona, [Florida](#), Georgia, Iowa, and [Texas](#), have passed legislation imposing criminal penalties, including fines and jail time, on election officials and volunteer poll workers for simply doing their jobs. States like Texas have enabled and encouraged the ability of highly partisan poll watchers to interfere in polling places, which can greatly increase tension and the burden on election officials to provide a safe and efficient voting experience. In addition, the [ramped-up efforts to initiate partisan reviews](#) of the 2020 election in several states are being used to bully election officials into relinquishing the control and chain of custody of official records and equipment (in likely violation of their legal duties), [or even resign](#). Many experienced election officials—regardless of their political affiliation—find they are being forced to choose between doing their jobs, or facing endless harassment, which is leading to an unprecedented exodus of election professionals.² This would be bad enough, if we weren't also faced with the threat of that experience and professionalism being [replaced by hyper-partisan hackery](#).

Attacks on election officials, the referees in democracy, must be fought and election officials need to know they are not alone. Unfortunately, these officials often lack the legal resources to oppose efforts to intimidate them into violating their duties to voters and the law.

Election Officials Legal Defense Network

The Election Officials Legal Defense Network (EOLDN) is the brainchild of former Presidential Commission on Election Administration co-chairs Bob Bauer (former White House Counsel during

¹ David works with election officials of both parties to ensure accessible, secure elections. He is one of the foremost election experts in the nation, having worked in elections for a quarter-century, and previously litigating major cases as a trial attorney in the Voting Section of the United States Department of Justice under both Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush

² Even those in heavily Republican areas are unsafe. Michelle Carew, a 14-year veteran elections administrator, was recently run out of her position in deep red Hood County, Texas, amid sustained harassment. See <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/10/12/hood-county-elections-administrator-trump/>. Al Schmidt, the long-time city commissioner and lone Republican on Philadelphia's election board, also resigned recently following sustained attacks and threats from former President Trump and his follower. See <https://www.inquirer.com/politics/philadelphia/city-commissioner-al-schmidt-resigning-president-committee-70-20211130.html>.

the Obama Administration) and Ben Ginsberg (counsel to the George W. Bush and Mitt Romney campaigns).³ Bauer and Ginsberg serve as EOLDN's co-chairs and, along with EOLDN's bipartisan advisory board⁴ of experts, attorneys, and election officials, help guide this effort, recruit volunteer lawyers, and educate election officials about the services available.

EOLDN is a project of the nonpartisan, nonprofit Center for Election Innovation & Research (CEIR), which manages the project's day-to-day operations and fosters its development. EOLDN is part of CEIR's larger effort to restore trust in the American election system and promote election procedures that encourage participation while ensuring election integrity and security. CEIR is led by David Becker, a well-known expert in the election community with over 23 years of experience protecting democracy. Before founding CEIR in 2016, Becker was Director of the Elections Initiatives portfolio at The Pew Charitable Trusts.⁵ He also served seven years as a senior trial attorney in the Voting Section of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, under former Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

What EOLDN Does

EOLDN matches licensed and qualified *pro bono* attorneys with election administrators who need advice or assistance. This service is available regardless of the election official's political affiliation, or whether they work in a blue or red state or county. We strive to make this process as efficient as possible and ensure election officials receive prompt, responsive, and competent legal representation.

EOLDN screens every attorney that signs up to confirm they are licensed and in good standing. We also require lawyers to carry professional liability insurance and adhere to EOLDN's rules.⁶ Once screened, attorneys are ready to respond to election official requests. These requests can be submitted via an easy-to-use web form or by calling EOLDN's toll-free number. Requests are checked for completeness and then matched to available EOLDN attorneys.

Timeliness and responsiveness are paramount at EOLDN. When EOLDN receives a request, we make every effort to respond within 24 hours, and we strive to match each request to an attorney within 3-5 days (sooner in many cases).

Heading into 2022

Despite launching in September 2021 during what would ordinarily be a quiet year following a presidential election, EOLDN has already responded to several requests from election officials. Unfortunately, we expect demand for EOLDN's services only to grow throughout 2022, as partisan tensions increase. To meet that demand and protect election administrators, we are expanding EOLDN to include more lawyers and support staff in the lead-up to the first primary elections, to provide timely legal support and assistance to election officials, whenever and wherever it is needed.

³ Read more about EOLDN's launch at [The Washington Post](#), [The New York Times](#), and [NPR](#).

⁴ Visit <https://eoldn.org/about/leadership/> for a list of the current EOLDN Advisory Board members.

⁵ While at Pew, Becker spearheaded development of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a sophisticated data center that allows its member states to keep their voter list most accurate while also reaching out to unregistered citizens.

⁶ Visit <https://eoldn.org/rules-for-participating-lawyers/> to learn more about EOLDN's rules for Network attorneys.

Are You an Election Official Who Needs Help?

Election officials in need of legal assistance should complete EOLDN's short [Request Form](#). The form asks for some information about you and the nature of your request, which helps us match you with an EOLDN lawyer. No special information is required, and the form should only take about 5-10 minutes to complete. If you would like to speak with someone, please email Help@EOLDN.org or call (877) 313-5210. A member of our team will be happy to help.

Are You a Licensed Attorney Who Wants to Volunteer?

Qualified attorneys interested in volunteering should complete EOLDN's [Attorney Sign Up Form](#). Please note that only licensed attorneys in good standing are allowed to join EOLDN. EOLDN lawyers also must carry professional liability insurance and commit to providing all legal services pro bono.⁷ To learn more about EOLDN's requirements for lawyers, read our [Rules for Participating Lawyers](#).

Learn More

Visit EOLDN.org to learn more. In the coming months, we will be introducing additional resources for election officials, EOLDN attorneys, and the public. We also welcome you to contact us with any questions or helpful feedback you may have about any aspect of EOLDN's work. You can email EOLDN at Help@EOLDN.org or call (877) 313-5210.

⁷ EOLDN may be able to help cover certain expenses incidental to representation. Contact Help@EOLDN.org for more information.