





Faces of Democracy

How Our Elections Work and the Challenges Ahead



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Faces of Democracy: How Our Elections Work and the Challenges Ahead

Issue One is the leading crosspartisan political reform group in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit issueone.org.

Dedication

This report is dedicated to all the election workers who help uphold our democracy.

Acknowledgements

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Cause + Matter

Contents

2 Executive Summary

4 Introduction

- 4 Heroic work in 2020
- 4 The writing on the wall

6 How U.S. Elections Work

- 6 The role of chief state election officials
- 8 The role of local election officials
- 10 A multi-faceted, difficult job
- 11 Experienced, overworked, underpaid
- 12 Who becomes an election official?
- 12 The role of poll workers
- 15 Recruiting and training poll workers
- 17 Evolving voting methods

19 Ensuring Trust in Safe, Secure, and Fair Elections

- 19 Strong security procedures
- 21 Cybersecurity
- 22 “Total transparency”
- 24 Keeping mail voting secure and fair
- 26 A balance between human and machine power

30 Structural Underfunding of Elections

- 30 Necessary and regular funding
- 33 Private funding filling the void

36 Immediate Threats to U.S. Elections

- 36 Attacks on election workers
- 40 Threats made against election officials and poll workers
- 42 A mass exodus of workers
- 44 Election deniers taking power

50 Protecting Our Elections

51 Key Resources

52 Endnotes

Executive Summary

U.S. democracy is at an inflection point. A coordinated disinformation campaign targeting our elections and led by former President Donald Trump and his allies has stressed our system of government, and polling shows Americans' trust in their political system is diminishing.

To better understand how U.S. elections work and who runs them, Issue One interviewed dozens of current and former election officials from both parties, from secretaries of state to city commissioners, county clerks, and poll workers. They shared valuable insights into what makes our elections free and fair and the challenges facing election administrators.

For the most part, states set the rules for elections and provide support, but elections are primarily administered by cities, counties, municipalities, or townships. There are roughly 10,000 of these local jurisdictions, making our elections nearly impossible to hack. However, so many different sets of rules can also confuse voters.

Our various election systems across the country have many checks and balances and layers of security that ensure they are free and fair, but most voters never see these processes. More transparency in the way our elections work will give voters a better understanding of how their ballots make their way through the system in a secure manner, increasing public trust.

Local election officials have increasingly complex jobs that require many skills. They are often elected or selected by political parties, but administer elections and serve all voters in a non-partisan fashion. These officials are assisted during election season by hundreds of thousands of temporary poll workers, who serve as the public faces of elections for most voters. In

the wake of the 2020 election, disinformation targeting election workers has led to over a thousand reported cases of threats and violence against them. This has led many experienced officials to retire and to challenges in retaining and recruiting sufficient numbers of poll workers.

Elections have been declared critical infrastructure by the Department of Homeland Security, but they are not regularly funded at a level commensurate with their importance. Local jurisdictions largely pay for their own elections, with differing levels of support from states and infrequent and unpredictable help from the federal government. This makes running elections an even greater challenge for local officials.

Exacerbating the situation, state legislatures feeding off the “Big Lie” have introduced hundreds of pieces of legislation—and in some cases enacted bills—that politicize, criminalize, or interfere with elections. Some of these bills shift power over elections from local and state election officials to highly partisan actors, while others adopt more stringent voting laws that restrict access for eligible voters, or threaten election officials with criminal penalties for simple mistakes on the job. Worse, scores of election deniers have run for key local and state-level election administration roles, and some have already won primaries in key battleground states.

Congress should act urgently to protect election officials, defend the nonpartisan administration of elections, and strengthen access to the ballot. The will of the people alone is what should determine the outcomes of our elections, and measures should be taken to avert electoral subversion and a future constitutional crisis.

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Introduction

Heroic work in 2020

Election officials and workers are Americans from all walks of life.

They're Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Grandparents and parents. Veterans, school teachers, coaches, and Girl Scout leaders. They're our friends and neighbors, involved in our communities, and active in religious and civic groups. They make hot dogs for the neighborhood block party on the Fourth of July, help clean up the river in town, and volunteer at the local blood bank. And they do all of this while often working very long hours, under increasingly intense scrutiny and stress.

For many officials who work in the more than 10,000 election jurisdictions that make up the United States, running elections is their day job, one that takes immense dedication, precision, and passion. For others, such as poll workers, they work part time or volunteer throughout election season or just on Election Day.

In 2020, election workers showed our country just how essential they are. In the midst of immense challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as already limited resources, these unsung heroes of our democracy pulled off an election that was safe, free, and fair.

Thanks in large part to the ingenuity and flexibility of election officials, workers, and volunteers,¹ nearly 160 million Americans, or roughly two-thirds of all eligible voters, cast ballots—the highest rate in a century.² The 2020 election was dubbed “the most secure in American history” by President Donald Trump’s own Department of Homeland Security,³ an affirmation of the high quality of work done by U.S. election officials.

Yet despite their exemplary service to our country, local election officials from both parties, and at all levels, are facing an

In 2020, election workers showed our country just how essential they are. In the midst of immense challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as already limited resources, these unsung heroes of our democracy pulled off an election that was safe, free, and fair.

unprecedented onslaught of threats of violence and harassment due to a massive disinformation campaign about the 2020 election. This phenomenon is jeopardizing the lives of election officials and the future of our democratic process.

The writing on the wall

This disinformation campaign—commonly referred to as the “Big Lie”⁴—claims that a cabal of election officials and poll workers from both parties were complicit in a conspiracy to “rig” the 2020 election. Trump and his allies seeded this idea⁵ in the public imagination months before the elections⁶ even took place, claiming—with no evidence—that his loss would be proof that he was cheated.

“We were being told as early as 2019 that we were probably heading into the worst presidential election that we would have seen in our time, because there was already disinformation out there about not being able to trust us, not being able to trust the equipment,” Roxanna Moritz, former auditor and commissioner of elections for Scott County, Iowa, told Issue One. “So there was

already a foundation being laid heading into those elections.”

When Trump was defeated, he refused to accept the results and said that the presidential election was stolen. The former president doubled down on his disinformation campaign despite the fact that legal challenges were thrown out by the courts in more than 60 lawsuits⁷—because not a single one found any evidence of wrongdoing. Former Attorney General William Barr stated that his Department of Justice was unable to uncover fraud “on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election.”⁸

Leading up to the general election, pressures on election officials and workers were made worse by stark partisan divides over funding, mail ballots, and COVID-19 protocols. None of these factors affected the outcome, and myriad required audits⁹ and partisan investigations¹⁰ showed there were no irregularities. The results were therefore certified by Democratic and Republican officials across the country.

As Trump and his supporters have beat the drum about a “stolen election,” they have focused their sights squarely on election workers, resulting in nearly two years of harassment and violent threats against these public servants.

In August 2022, the Department of Justice’s Election Threats Task Force reported that it has reviewed over 1,000 contacts reported as hostile or harassing by election officials and election workers.¹¹ A recent Brennan Center for Justice poll found that 1 in 5 election officials plans to leave before the 2024 election, many citing stress or political demonization as primary reasons.¹² In the long term, 60% of officials expressed concern that threats, harassment, and intimidation against

local election officials would make it difficult to retain and recruit for these important positions.

At the same time, a steady diet of disinformation being fed to millions of Americans erodes public trust in our elections. A February 2022 CNN poll found that 56% of Americans have little to no confidence that U.S. elections reflect the will of the people, up from 40% who felt that way in January 2021.¹³ A July 2022 New York Times/Siena College poll found that 58% of voters think the American system of government needs to be completely replaced or needs major reforms.¹⁴ An August 2022 poll by NBC News found that a plurality of voters chose “threats to democracy” as the top issue facing the country, overtaking the previous top issue, the cost of living.¹⁵

“We are here because we decided to have this democracy,” said Lisa Deeley, one of three Philadelphia city commissioners who oversee elections. “We’re going to go back after all these years, nearly 250 years? For what? Because people are just consumed by disinformation, that there’s not one ounce of evidence, not one proven claim?”

But election workers have many responsibilities, and combating unprecedented amounts of disinformation has itself become almost a full-time job.

“The thing that I used to say and used to work really well was to invite people into the process. Come be an observer, come down to the office, see all the security measures that are in place to conduct every election,” said Cathy Darling Allen, clerk and registrar of voters for Shasta County, California. “Those kinds of conversations used to be very productive, and starting in 2020, that’s less true.”

How U.S. Elections Work

It is critical that we remember the election officials and volunteers who make our elections work. Over several months, Issue One interviewed dozens of current and former election officials, from secretaries of state to poll workers, to hear the challenges they face, learn what resources they need, and understand who they are as people.

Their words make clear that we are at an inflection point for U.S. democracy. Our elections are under-resourced, many Americans don't understand how their elections are run, and a massive and coordinated disinformation campaign is reducing trust in our system.

The U.S. system of elections is defined by its decentralized structure. Elections are not run at the federal level. States are typically the primary decision makers about the laws, rules, and administration of U.S. elections, and within each state, elections for all levels of office are usually run at the local level, except in Delaware and many elections in Alaska.¹⁶ There are approximately 10,000 county- or municipal-level jurisdictions across the nation.¹⁷

This structure effectively means that in the United States there are 10,000 different election *systems* in place. As a result, says the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), “The dispersed responsibility for running elections also makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to rig U.S. elections at the national level.”¹⁸

Article I of the U.S. Constitution grants states the power to set the “Times, Places and Manner” of congressional elections, commonly interpreted as “rules concerning public notices, voter

registration, voter protection, fraud prevention, vote counting, and determination of election results.”¹⁹ State legislatures and governors make election laws.

It is important to note, however, that the elections clause of the Constitution vests ultimate power over federal elections in Congress, and states that Congress “may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations,” passing federal laws that preempt state election laws.²⁰ Congress has exercised this authority before, such as when it passed the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act²¹ to help armed service members and citizens abroad vote. Voters are also sometimes able to influence election administration policies through ballot measures or referendums,²² such as an amendment to the Connecticut Constitution to provide for early voting in person on the ballot this November.²³

The role of chief state election officials

No two states run elections the same. Even within a state, how local jurisdictions conduct elections can vary widely.²⁴ But each state has some form of chief election official or authority.²⁵ Examples of chief state election officials are:

- An elected secretary of state (most common).
- A chief election official appointed by the state legislature or the governor.
- A board of elections or election commission (usually appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate).
- An elected lieutenant governor.
- A combination of a chief election official and a board or commission.

Natalie Adona

CLERK-RECORDER-ELECT,
NEVADA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



About Natalie

Has a cat, is a certified power yoga instructor and devoted Star Trek and kung fu movie fan.



In Their Words

Most election officials come to the field as a result of being a temporary election worker, but once you get into it, it's very hard to take yourself away from it.



Top state election officials have various responsibilities including:

- ✓ Training election officials.
- ✓ Maintaining a voter registration database.
- ✓ Ensuring election laws are followed by local election officials statewide.
- ✓ Testing and certifying voting equipment.

Sources: [Ballotpedia](#) and [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)

State governors and attorneys general also play key roles in important areas of election administration. For example, according to States United Democracy Center, governors can sign legislation expanding or preserving the freedom to vote or propose state budgets that invest in elections, and state attorneys general can investigate and prosecute illegal attempts to suppress the vote or ensure voters receive nonpartisan and accurate information about ballot measures.²⁶

All 50 states use a partisan process to select these top state officials by election or appointment. This dual partisan-nonpartisan structure makes the United States a rarity among democracies worldwide,²⁷ where election officials are not elected in partisan elections or appointed by party officials. Nevertheless, election officials are expected to carry out their duties in a nonpartisan fashion.

Due to a series of federal laws passed in the last few decades, such as the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, states have taken on a larger role in helping administer elections, and help with voting equipment or purchasing some election supplies.²⁸

The role of local election officials

Local election officials are charged with the “rubber-meets-the-road functions of running” elections, and their roles are “multifaceted managerial position[s] with a lot of moving parts,” according to NCSL²⁹. It is important to note that they do not write election laws; as noted before, state legislatures do.

Elections are run by a varying array of individuals and entities.³⁰ Jurisdictions in some states have a single, usually elected, individual responsible. Others—usually larger cities—use an election board that is typically bipartisan. Still other states divide duties between two or more offices, commonly between voter registration and election administration,³¹ though this too can vary greatly. In some states, even sheriffs and tax assessors play a role in election administration. They typically operate at

the county level, but also sometimes at the municipal or city level, especially in New England and some Midwestern states like Wisconsin.

Most local election officials are selected in an “inherently partisan” manner, either running with a party affiliation or appointed to a bipartisan board, with only a minority hired without party affiliation being considered or in nonpartisan races.³² One 2020 survey found that 44% of local election officials polled self-identified as Republicans, while 33% were Democrats, and 22% were independents.³³

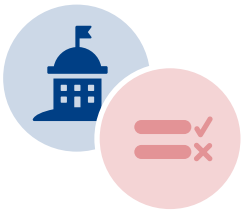
It is important to note that these officials are not elected to *serve* one party—they’re elected to serve all voters, regardless of party affiliation. According to Bill Gates, chairman of the board of supervisors of Maricopa County, Arizona, and a Republican, election administration—like most local issues—is a nonpartisan issue. “We’re serving in a nonpartisan function when we’re certifying elections, even though we’re elected by party.”

Additionally, local election officials do not have wide latitude to do whatever they want. “There are very few things in the life of an election official that are optional,” said Wesley Wilcox, supervisor of elections for Marion County, Florida. And the rules can change frequently, as much as every year in some states.

A common complaint from local election officials is that legislatures either don’t consult or altogether ignore them when making election laws, meaning that the people that best understand our elections are left out of the process. Such policy decisions often introduce financial burdens or interfere with existing elections operations.

Local election officials are “often caught in the middle of conflicts between legislators, courts, and local budget makers,” according to the Brennan Center.³⁴ “When one of these sides makes a decision, it’s often with little or no input from the local

The role of states vs. local jurisdictions



States

Make decisions about the rules of elections (policymaking)



Local Jurisdictions

Conduct elections in accordance with those rules (implementation)

Sources: [Congressional Research Service](#)

officials who then have to translate the policies into the forms, envelopes, and procedures necessary to actually administer an election.”

According to election expert and former director of elections in Denver, Colorado, Amber McReynolds, when it comes to problems with how elections are run, “90% of the time it’s not the fault of election officials, it’s the problem of state legislators who have been told repeatedly they need to do something and do not.” Put another way, Barb Byrum, clerk for Ingham County, Michigan, said that state legislators “rarely listen to the professionals.”

States can delegate some decisions to local administrators if they choose, especially if details are not specified³⁵ or a law does not touch on a specific issue, leading to “variation in interpretation” across jurisdictions.³⁶ For example, according to the Congressional Research Service, “states may set out general guidelines for voting technology and ballot design but leave decisions about exactly which machines to buy or how to lay out ballots to local officials.”³⁷

A multi-faceted, difficult job

Local election officials often have titles that seem slightly misleading, such as clerk, registrar, or recorder, titles which do not adequately reflect the responsibility these roles have for election administration. This is because many of the jobs at one time were largely clerical, but this is no longer the case.

Though elections are often a primary responsibility, local election officials can have a wide array of official duties,³⁸ many of which have nothing to do with elections: In some states and jurisdictions, they can be responsible for tasks as diverse as animal control, liquor licenses, weapons purchases, property value assessments, motor vehicles, and filing military discharge papers and marriage certificates. “Every single day, it’s a constant 3D chess game for me,” said Carly Koppes, clerk and recorder for

“There is no room for human error. As soon as an error of any kind is made public, the automatic assumption, the knee-jerk reaction, is that this is fraud. So it’s a really challenging environment now that five or 10 years ago wasn’t the case.”

—CATHY DARLING ALLEN, clerk and registrar of voters for Shasta County, California

Weld County, Colorado. “I have to always try to make sure I’m switching my brain from one conversation to the next. Now I’ve got to go to my elections brain. Now I’ve got to go to my recording brain, and now I’ve got to go to my motor vehicle brain.”

In their elections role, local officials are responsible for a mind-boggling array of tasks, down to the extremely granular, from picking the color of directional signs in vote centers to testing the pens to be used at polling centers. Fundamentally, though, election officials are there to conduct elections well. “Number one is that we get it right,” said Bill Gates, the chairman of the board of supervisors for Maricopa County, Arizona. “The count has to be right.”

“We err on the ‘it’s better to be accurate than fast’ mentality,” agrees Nick Custodio, deputy city commissioner for Philadelphia. For election officials, the stakes are high, and these days, even simple human error can be a source of lingering distrust in an election, creating enormous pressure on election officials.

“The problem that we’re facing today, of course, is that there’s no grace,” said Cathy Darling Allen, clerk and registrar of voters for Shasta County, California. “There is no room for human error. As soon as an error of any kind is made public, the automatic assumption, the knee-jerk reaction, is that this is fraud. So it’s a really challenging environment now that five or 10 years ago wasn’t the case.”

“I worry that some little thing could go wrong, which in years past would be just an administrative mistake—somebody forgot to do something, forgot to dot an i or cross a t—could now be catastrophic,” said Lisa Deeley, a Philadelphia city commissioner. “The pressure around that right now is pretty unbelievable.”

Experienced, overworked, underpaid

Election officials typically have a great wealth of job experience and institutional knowledge. Democracy Fund found that the median official has been working in elections for more than 12 years,³⁹ and as many officials make clear, such experience is necessary. “Usually, you can’t just walk in off the street and know how to operate an elections office, all the moving parts, the pieces that overlap, and the many various processes happening simultaneously,” said Wesley Wilcox, supervisor of elections for Marion County, Florida.

Election officials’ workloads have been called unsustainable,⁴⁰ and the job typically requires very long hours, especially around election time. “I’ve been an elected official for the past 10 years, and

Local officials have many diverse election duties, including but not limited to:

- ✓ Adding eligible voters to the voter rolls.
- ✓ Counting, canvassing, and reporting election results.
- ✓ Designing and printing ballots.
- ✓ Educating voters about the voting process.
- ✓ Coordinating absentee and mail-in ballot processes.
- ✓ Answering voter questions.
- ✓ Recruiting and training poll workers.
- ✓ Providing accurate public information.
- ✓ Preparing and selecting the number of polling locations.
- ✓ Protecting against cybersecurity threats.
- ✓ Testing, storing, and transporting voting equipment.
- ✓ Appointing precinct officials.
- ✓ Overseeing early voting.

Sources: [Congressional Research Service](#), [Yale Professor Quinn Yeagain in Bolts Magazine](#), and [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)

was used to working what felt like 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” said former Philadelphia City Commissioner Al Schmidt. “I’d frequently get the question, ‘What do you do the rest of the year other than the two days where you have elections?’ It’s not like that at all. Running citywide, in a city our size, there’s very little time for discretionary things.”

The average local election official salary is \$50,000,⁴¹ lower than their peers in other executive-level managerial positions. The difference in resources between large and small jurisdictions can be stark. Officials in larger jurisdictions normally work full time and have larger staffs and more resources. Yet in smaller jurisdictions, these local officials can be part-time workers. Half of local election officials nationwide have a “staff” consisting of only one person: themselves.⁴²

Who becomes an election official?

Eighty percent of election officials are women, 75% are over 50 years old, and over 90% are white.⁴³ They are professionals, have roots in their communities, value public service, and have a shared desire to do good work.

The officials who spoke to Issue One described a variety of reasons for getting into the job. Some had family members who were poll workers or were instilled with a sense of civic duty by going with their parents or grandparents to vote.

For others, it comes from a desire to see a democracy that works better for all Americans, especially people of color, young voters, and the elderly. For acting Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Leigh Chapman, it’s about dedicating her career to fighting structural barriers to the ballot box and advocating for “voters that wanted to have their voices heard, that wanted to cast their ballot but couldn’t because of restrictions.”

Some officials describe the field as one that they got into by accident, but got hooked on once they became involved, or “bit

Half of local election officials nationwide have a “staff” consisting of only one person: themselves.

—DEMOCRACY FUND

by the elections bug” as Carly Koppes, clerk and recorder for Weld County, Colorado, puts it.

“It becomes a passion. It becomes your life,” said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the North Carolina State Board of Elections. “There are those moments when you have an interaction with a voter, and you realize the significance of the work that you do, and even on the worst days, you think about that voter and that moment you shared with them, and it motivates you to continue to do that work.”

Very rarely is the desire to get into elections at the local level one that stems from personal ambition. “Election administrators are generally kind of heads-down folks,” said Justin Roebuck, clerk of Ottawa County, Michigan. “They like to get things done. They like to do a good job. But they’re data-driven people; they’re not necessarily PR people. And so I think most of us would rather not end up in the newspaper.”

The role of poll workers

Local election officials, however, are only part of the equation. During election season, the voting process is staffed by hundreds

of thousands of temporary poll workers who help run voting centers during early voting and on Election Day—nearly 800,000 workers at over 100,000 polling locations in 2020.⁴⁴ Without their work, elections in the United States would not function.

Poll workers are usually modestly paid, receiving a daily wage or a stipend for the election period. Depending on the state, they have various titles,⁴⁵ including election judge, moderator, ballot clerk, voting official, or polling place manager. All but two states mandate a specific political party makeup of poll workers to ensure representation and that no one party has control over the process.⁴⁶

“More than just glorified receptionists, these underpaid few are really the gatekeepers to democracy,” according to Pew Charitable Trusts, and “can be the difference between a smooth election and long lines, mass confusion and miscounted ballots.”⁴⁷

Spenser Mestel, a poll worker from Brooklyn, New York, attests to this critical role: “For most people, 95% of their impressions of our democracy come from that experience they have at the polls. And so when that doesn’t go well, it doesn’t instill confidence in them. There’s a lot going on behind the scenes that people aren’t necessarily aware of. And especially if voters have questions, it’s so important that poll workers be able to answer those questions and to keep the process running smoothly.”

Put another way, “we couldn’t run our elections without these folks,” said Omar Sabir, a Philadelphia city commissioner. “In many ways, they’re heroes.”

Poll workers, who, like election officials, help run elections in a nonpartisan manner regardless of their party, are not to be confused with poll watchers or challengers. Poll watchers operate in most states and are appointed by political parties, candidates, or ballot issue groups to observe voting, equipment testing, and counting processes, and are not permitted to participate in or interfere with the process outside of strict guidelines.⁴⁸ However,

Karen Brinson Bell

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTH CAROLINA
STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS



About Karen

Sports fan, loves hiking in the mountains of North Carolina and national parks, kayaking with her husband, working to see all 50 states by the time she’s 50, spoils her 13-year-old dog Patriot like crazy.



In Their Words

There are those moments when you have an interaction with a voter, and you realize the significance of the work that you do, and even on the worst days, you think about that voter and that moment you shared with them, and it motivates you to continue to do that work.





Barb Byrum

CLERK, INGHAM COUNTY,
MICHIGAN



About Barb

Has two children, drives to swim meets, loves running, Lake Michigan, and visiting the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.



In Their Words

Elections are people driven, and that's how it should be. Clerks are public servants. We're neighbors, coaches, the parents in line during school pickup.

in 2020, some partisan poll observers caused serious disruptions in the process, including in Michigan.⁴⁹

Recruiting and training poll workers

Each state has different rules about who can be a poll worker, taking into consideration age, residency, partisan affiliation, or voter registration status in the state. The requirements can be quite detailed.⁵⁰ In some states, statutes require the local political parties to nominate poll workers.⁵¹ One state, Nebraska, permits jurisdictions to recruit poll workers in much the same way as courts select jury members, randomly dipping into a pool of registered voters.⁵²



FURTHER READING

For a state-by-state breakdown of poll worker requirements, read the U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s [State Compendium of Election Worker Laws and Statutes](#).

A 2016 survey by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) found that two-thirds of jurisdictions had a difficult time recruiting enough poll workers.⁵³ It is often taken for granted that without enough poll workers there cannot be a sufficient number of polling places. This translates into long lines, disenfranchised voters, and a corrosive effect on people’s trust in the system.

“Recruiting was always a challenge,” said Neal Kelley, former registrar of voters for Orange County, California. “I can’t remember an election where I thought, boy, that was easy. I’m glad that went well on recruiting.”

Duties of poll workers

- ✓ Setting up and preparing polling locations.
- ✓ Welcoming voters.
- ✓ Verifying voter registrations and issuing ballots.
- ✓ Ensuring voters understand the voting process.
- ✓ Demonstrating how to use voting equipment.

Sources: [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#)

The reasons for a dearth of volunteers are obvious, according to election workers. “It’s a lot for people,” agrees Spenser Mestel, poll worker from Brooklyn. “It’s a long day with not super great pay, it requires training as well, and you’re often staffed nowhere near where you live. So that limits the pool of candidates very significantly.”

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated recruiting challenges. “It has typically, historically, been retired people, older people, that have taken on these roles as election board officials at the polls,” said Lisa Deeley, a Philadelphia city

commissioner. “During a pandemic, that happened to be the same group that was most at risk for COVID-19, so a lot of them, if not most of them, chose to stop being a poll worker because of health and safety concerns. Since we haven’t gotten those people back, there has been no group of adults that have stepped up to take on that role and fill those voids. That is why, nationwide, we are seeing this big decrease in poll worker activity.”

Even still, election officials are constantly innovating ways to recruit and maintain poll workers, including turning to radio or TV ads, running social media campaigns, engaging students, and canvassing the community directly—at “supermarkets, laundromats, places of worship, anywhere,” according to Omar Sabir, a Philadelphia city commissioner.

At least one academic study has found that greater diversity among poll workers can improve voter confidence.⁵⁴ Pulling workers from the communities they serve is critical, according to Virginia Chau, a Denver poll worker. “I have clearly seen when you have diverse election people, then you get actually more diverse voters,” said Chau. “When someone saw one Asian person and saw it’s okay not to speak fluent English, and they can come in with broken English, they felt more comfortable and they told all their friends, and now their friends are coming in.”

For its part, the EAC worked to establish the [National Poll Worker Recruitment Day](#) in 2020, as a “day of action with the goal of encouraging potential poll workers to sign up to Help America Vote.” Many nonpartisan nonprofits like [Power the Polls](#) and [We the Veterans](#) do similarly important work, while employers play a constructive role by providing benefits to employees willing to be poll workers.

Poll workers must be trained on the complex job. Although training varies widely even within states, the majority of states require poll worker training by law.⁵⁵ These training classes often involve hands-on experience with voting equipment, and they are taught

It is often taken for granted that without enough poll workers there cannot be a sufficient number of polling places. This translates into long lines, disenfranchised voters, and a corrosive effect on people’s trust in the system.

by experienced poll workers. Poll workers are also trained in data protection, privacy, and maintaining proper security protocols, and states may require poll workers to pass tests about equipment and protocols.

Many states and counties publicly share the exact detailed training programs they give to poll workers.⁵⁶ Such training is often paid, incentivizing it in jurisdictions where it is not required by state law.



FURTHER READING

See the National Conference of State Legislatures’ chart “[What Are State Poll Worker Training Requirements?](#)” for a detailed look at state-by-state training laws.

Evolving voting methods

Elections have become more complex in recent years, and when we talk about U.S. elections, we actually mean several different methods of voting, all with their own detailed procedures and considerations. As a result, election officials are managing multiple methods of voting in a single election simultaneously.

Depending on the state, voters may:

- Vote early in person.
- Vote early by mail.
- Put their mail-in ballot in a secure drop box before or on Election Day.
- Vote in person on Election Day.
- Drop off their mail-in ballot on Election Day at a voting center or at their town clerk's office.

As with most election laws, states have varying rules on how these systems work. All 50 states allow some form of early and absentee voting.⁵⁷ Some require voters to reach out in writing for a mail-in ballot, while others require one of a list of acceptable excuses to vote absentee. Eight states, including Republican-controlled Utah, conduct elections by sending a ballot to all eligible voters while offering in-person voting at vote centers. Others send all voters an absentee ballot *application*. Other states allow smaller elections to be conducted by mail, or for counties to choose to conduct an election by mail.⁵⁸

During the 2020 election, states worked to allow voters to safely vote during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many temporarily adapted or changed their absentee ballot rules. As a result, a historic number of voters cast ballots by mail—46% in 2020 compared with 21% in 2016, which was previously considered high.⁵⁹ In-person early voting also rose, and only half the number of people who voted in person on Election Day in 2016 did so in 2020.

Leigh Chapman

ACTING SECRETARY OF STATE, PENNSYLVANIA



About Leigh

Passionate about voting rights,
enjoys traveling.



In Their Words

It's important that we have a democracy and
an election system that is inclusive of any
eligible voter who wants to participate.





Virginia Chau

SUPERVISOR OF POLL WORKERS,
DENVER, COLORADO



About Virginia

First-generation American, loves to hike and ski, on the board of a local nonprofit that provides scholarships in the community.



In Their Words

You want your community and the people you know to be a part of the election system. This is a democracy built for the people by the people, and it ideally needs to reflect who we are.

Ensuring Trust in Safe, Secure, and Fair Elections

It is a testament to the integrity of our election officials and poll workers that credible instances of fraud are “exceedingly rare.”⁶⁰ As previously mentioned, the 2020 election was called the most secure on record by Trump’s own Department of Homeland Security,⁶¹ and according to William Barr, who served as attorney general under Trump, there was no credible proof of fraud that would have affected the outcome of the election.⁶²

Even those looking explicitly to find instances of fraud have had a hard time doing so.⁶³ Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick (R-TX) offered a \$25,000-plus reward to anyone across the country who tipped off law enforcement to voter fraud that led to a conviction. His first—and as of now only—\$25,000 bounty was paid out to a Democrat in Pennsylvania who turned in a Republican who illegally voted.⁶⁴

While rare, election officials are exceptionally vigilant about fraud. “There are some people who do try to stress test the system,” said Natalie Adona, who has served as the assistant clerk-recorder for Nevada County, California, since 2019, and recently won election to serve as the next clerk-recorder in 2023. “We catch them, and I bring that evidence over to the district attorney and to the secretary of state for them to follow up. I’m not naïve. I’m not saying it never happens, but it definitely doesn’t happen on a scale that would change any election outcome.”

“We want safe and secure elections, and we also want accessible elections to honor the sacrifices of all who have come before us and continue forward today to defend our right to vote,” said Shane Schoeller, clerk for Greene County, Missouri. “So how can you find that right balance for the voters so that they have

confidence at the end of the day that the election outcome is exactly how they and their fellow voters voted?”

To meet this delicate balance, local election officials utilize a combination of strong safety and security measures along with a dedication to an open, transparent, and accurate process.

Strong security procedures

Every single state and local jurisdiction has layers of security and safeguards to ensure that eligible voters’ ballots are secure and that ineligible voters cannot cast ballots. According to the Campaign Legal Center, “Election officials in every locality follow a defined set of steps designed to reach a complete and accurate vote count. These multi-step processes build in numerous checks and safeguards to ensure electoral integrity.”⁶⁵

This chain of custody serves as a paper trail that follows the transfer of ballots, voting equipment, and data from one person (or place) to the next, every step of the way. The process is scrutinized by outside observers, as well as officials and poll workers from different parties. The EAC calls this process “essential to a transparent and trustworthy election.”⁶⁶ According to the EAC, “Every election office should have written chain of custody procedures available for public inspection prior to every election.” This principle is important to both in-person voting and mail-in ballots.

In every state, there is an office charged with investigating fraud allegations and enforcing the laws.⁶⁷ Tools that they use to ensure the integrity of elections include:

Examples of security measures conducted before, during, and after Election Day

- ✓ Year-round voter file maintenance.
- ✓ Rigorous accuracy testing on all machines conducted by bipartisan teams.
- ✓ Checks that seals on machines have not been tampered with.
- ✓ Verification that machines begin the day with zero votes tabulated.
- ✓ Checks that the number of ballots at the beginning of the day matches the exact total at the end of day.
- ✓ Locked and sealed containers and rooms accessible only by keycard.
- ✓ Voting equipment and tabulation systems that cannot be connected to the internet.
- ✓ Flash drives straight from new packaging to prevent malware.
- ✓ Bipartisan sign-off on procedures.

- Voter list maintenance.
- Mail-in ballot signature requirements, witness requirements, and ballot collection laws.
- Voter identification laws.

Many of these security measures are not obvious to the untrained eye. That does not, however, mean they’re not there, and this is a challenge for officials. “We live in a world of soundbites,” said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the North Carolina State Board of Elections. “And so it’s hard for us to effectively educate the public about the processes and procedures when I can’t answer ‘how do you secure elections?’ with three or four words. It’s more robust than that.”



FURTHER READING

Consult the EAC’s [“Best Practices: Chain of Custody”](#) for greater detail.

Not every state uses every security method, and each state decides for itself what methods are right for its voters. For example, 34 states have some sort of voter ID law.⁶⁸ The fact is, election officials utilize a wide array of procedures and tools to secure elections and verify results, often with a lot of redundancy.

These and myriad other procedures are auditable. Nothing is on the honor system, and security measures can be extremely granular. “We make sure that every vote that was counted in the machine plus all the spoiled ballots equal all the ballots that we

had at the beginning of the day,” said Spenser Mestel, poll worker from Brooklyn. “So that’s another part of it, just making sure that we are keeping track of everything. They even tell us to keep the plastic wrap that covers the stack of new ballots. So it’s intense in that way. You’re never just doing something absentmindedly.”

The role of both parties in the process itself serves as an important check and balance as well. County and local parties actively monitor the process, election boards have bipartisan makeups, and poll workers must come from both parties. For example, in some states, when a ballot container is sealed at the end of the night, it must be done by two people of differing political parties. Such rules prevent election administrators from putting their thumbs on the scale to benefit one party or one candidate over another.

Like nearly everything about U.S. elections, exact procedures vary by states, and even sometimes within a state. In a national media and social media environment, these differing security standards can become a source of understandable voter confusion.

Former Auditor and Commissioner of Elections for Scott County, Iowa, Roxanna Moritz attested to this challenge. “People say, ‘Oh my gosh, you have to have your middle initial on an absentee ballot, or you won’t get a ballot.’ Well, that might be true in Pennsylvania, but that’s not true in Iowa. They might say, ‘Oh, you have to have your PIN number on the outside of your affidavit, or they won’t get it.’ Well, that might be true in California because it’s a mail ballot, but that’s not true in Iowa.”

Cybersecurity

Variable election procedures across the nation make systematic election cheating an impossibility. But even attempts at breaching election systems that cannot change the results can undermine public confidence, and as such, strong cybersecurity measures are critical.

Jim Condos

SECRETARY OF STATE, VERMONT



About Jim

Loves to garden, has a business background.



In Their Words

This is one job that I’ve enjoyed every day of my life that I’ve been here.



Nick Custodio

DEPUTY CITY COMMISSIONER,
PHILADELPHIA



About Nick

Enjoys sports, involved in groups promoting and supporting soccer.



In Their Words

We err on the “it’s better to be accurate than fast” mentality.



At the national level, the FBI plays a leading role in election security and integrity, describing itself as the “primary agency responsible for investigating malicious cyber activity against election infrastructure, malign foreign influence operations, and election-related crimes, like voter fraud and voter suppression or intimidation.”⁶⁹ The Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) also works with officials to manage election infrastructure risks.⁷⁰

Some states also partner with the cybersecurity units of the National Guard. Local election officials frequently attend conferences to keep their skills sharp and learn about emerging threats, and some even work with academics or so-called “white hat hackers” who test systems before hackers can identify vulnerabilities.⁷¹

“I am often heard saying that cybersecurity is a race without a finish line,” Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos told Issue One. “It’s ever-evolving. The bad actors, just because they couldn’t get in today, they’re not going to stop. They’re going to try again tomorrow. And the next day, they’ll try a different way. You have to continually upgrade and stay on top of it to stay ahead of it.”

With limited resources, however, this is a constant battle. “You can put things in place, but you don’t just turn on a switch and have everything monitored for cybersecurity attacks,” said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the North Carolina State Board of Elections. “It’s not as simple as buying a device or a piece of software. You have to have the personnel to monitor it. You must continually be in front of the technology and have those things put in place.”

“Total transparency”

A common refrain from election officials and poll workers, when faced with those who distrust U.S. elections, is: Come watch. The system is not closed off to observers. Skeptics are welcome to

volunteer as poll workers or be walked through security procedures. Press are routinely invited. This attitude is almost universal among election officials, and it's a far cry from the shadowy process alleged by many "election deniers" who won't accept the result of the last presidential election.

Amber McReynolds, the former Denver election official who is now a governor of the United States Postal Service and member of Issue One's [National Council on Election Integrity](#), has long been a leader in advocating for transparency to help demystify elections for American voters.

McReynolds' home state of Colorado conducts elections largely by mail, but empowers voters to decide when, where, and how to vote, also offering expansive early and in-person voting. As an election official, she led the nation in establishing a comprehensive ballot-tracking system for Denver that allowed voters to view the status of their ballot online, from delivery to acceptance, through processing and counting. It also notified voters if their ballot had a problem, such as a missing signature, and gave voters time to fix it, a process called "ballot curing" which has since been adopted by 24 states.⁷² This helped give the public greater insight into the process.

Multiple states around the nation have since adopted this tracking system, and election officials from both parties have embraced transparency measures as a tactic to combat dis- and misinformation and increase public trust.⁷³

It can be a significant time investment, but often a valuable one. "When [election skeptics] come in, they often get to talk to the bipartisan judges who are here," said George Stern, clerk and recorder of Jefferson County, Colorado. "I've got a lot of Republicans who are working alongside the Democrats, and they are some of our best advocates about these strong processes we have, about how they've been doing this for decades and nothing has changed recently. They've seen this system works to elect

In the United States there are 10,000 different election systems in place. As a result, says the National Conference of State Legislatures, "The dispersed responsibility for running elections also makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to rig U.S. elections at the national level."

Republicans alongside Democrats and to benefit all sides and more than anything benefit voters."

Even better than watching is getting involved, which is "a terrific way to inoculate people against these lies," according to former Philadelphia City Commissioner Al Schmidt and many other election officials Issue One spoke to.

The concept of total transparency isn't just for skeptics or deniers; it's about letting the general public in on the process as well. Audits are often done in public areas, publicized, and live-streamed. People can see that signatures are being verified, that marks on ballots are not being altered.

Paradoxically, though the "Big Lie" has done much to undermine faith in elections, the intense scrutiny it caused also

serves as a proof point for the integrity of the 2020 election. “I would argue that the 2020 election in Maricopa County, because of all the eyeballs that have been on this, and the extralegal audit that we had run by the cyber ninjas, was one of the most scrutinized elections in the history of the world,” said Bill Gates, the chairman of the board of supervisors for Maricopa County, Arizona.

Still, officials have work to do, and some people’s minds will never be changed if they firmly believe that U.S. elections are fraudulent. “I always told people that would call me, ‘If you have 10 minutes, I’ll walk you through the process, if you have an open mind,’” said Roxanna Moritz, former auditor and commissioner of elections for Scott County, Iowa. “If you’re just here to say I’m wrong, let’s not waste each other’s time.”

Keeping mail voting secure and fair

As the practice becomes more popular, mail-in voting has come under intense scrutiny. But voting by mail is not new, and each state has some form of it. Members of the U.S. military have voted absentee since the Civil War.⁷⁴ In some states, such as Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and the Republican stronghold Utah, elections have been heavily centered on mail-in voting for years.

Like all aspects of elections, there are many layers of security and strict procedures in place for voting by mail. All 50 states require mail-in ballots to have a valid signature or another validation requirement that is matched to existing documents on file.⁷⁵ If they don’t, they are not counted. States utilize this as both a means of identification and as an affidavit with legal significance.⁷⁶

Nearly all states allow someone besides the voter to return a mail-in ballot for them.⁷⁷ In some states, these proxies are limited to specific people, such as family members or caregivers. In others, a voter can choose anyone to deliver their ballot, including volunteers associated with a specific candidate or an ideological

“I always told people that would call me, ‘If you have 10 minutes, I’ll walk you through the process, if you have an open mind. If you’re just here to say I’m wrong, let’s not waste each other’s time.’”

—ROXANNA MORITZ, former auditor and commissioner of elections for Scott County, Iowa

organization. In some states, like Michigan, if anyone helped the voter fill out their ballot, they too must sign it.⁷⁸

Voters opting to vote by mail often choose to put their ballot in a secure drop box outside a government building or polling location. This ensures their vote can be counted without having to face mail delays, and, as the Brennan Center notes, “ballot drop-off locations help maintain a secure chain of custody as the ballot goes from the voter to the local election office.”⁷⁹ These boxes are also often under 24-hour video surveillance, and they can only be accessed by election officials.⁸⁰

Like much about our elections since 2020, the practice of voting by mail has become politicized. During his presidency, Trump sought to discredit vote by mail,⁸¹ creating widespread mistrust among his supporters.⁸² “The president says a couple of sentences on TV a couple of times... that, ‘Oh, we can’t trust the mail,’ and all of a sudden people who have literally voted by mail for decades are now not wanting to do that anymore,” said Cathy Darling Allen, clerk and registrar of voters for Shasta County,

Cathy Darling Allen

CLERK AND REGISTRAR OF VOTERS,
SHASTA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



About Cathy

Loves to paint and draw, comes from
a family of public servants.



In Their Words

It's so important to me that people
do believe that their votes count and
that our country is worth sustaining
and defending. Some of the things
that have happened over the last
couple of years have brought that
into sharp focus for me.



Lisa Deeley

CITY COMMISSIONER, PHILADELPHIA



About Lisa

Philadelphia Eagles and Sixers fan, enjoys taking walks, spending time with friends, and the theater.



In Their Words

We don't have any stake in the game other than to make sure that the election is administered in a fair, free way, and that the process is protected, and people at the end know who the winner is, and who the loser is, and they can trust that result.



California. “And not because the post office did anything wrong, not because we did anything wrong.”

Despite this rhetoric, Trump voted absentee in the 2020 primary election. According to Charles Stewart, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology election expert, “If absentee balloting had been associated with either party, it had been associated with the Republican Party. That’s because voting by mail stands to benefit three groups that traditionally lean more Republican: rural voters, older voters, and those who travel frequently.”⁸³

Dropboxes have become a similar partisan flash point, with some states moving to ban them,⁸⁴ but according to former Philadelphia City Commissioner Al Schmidt, such concerns run counter to actual security considerations. “The ballot is coming directly from the voter to the board of elections in the dropbox. Not put in a mailbox somewhere, not picked up by that mail carrier, not at a sorting center, not then delivered by a different mail carrier. It comes directly back to the board of elections.”

A balance between human and machine power

Human beings, advanced machines, and simple low-tech safeguards are all necessary pieces of the election puzzle. In recent years, states have overwhelmingly moved to adopt voting machines that utilize paper ballots,⁸⁵ reversing a previous shift to digital-only results.

Machines that don’t require paper ballots have been criticized because they lack a paper trail to audit vote results for errors or cyber attacks. The EAC issued updated guidelines in 2021 encouraging the adoption of paper ballot backups, and as of 2021, only 8.8% of Americans live in jurisdictions where the voting machines do not produce paper trails.⁸⁶ According to election officials, high-tech machines combined with old-fashioned paper make a secure system that voters can trust.

Members of the **U.S. military have voted absentee since the Civil War.** In some states, such as Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and the Republican stronghold Utah, elections have been **heavily centered on mail-in voting** for years.



Bill Gates

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS, MARICOPA COUNTY,
ARIZONA



About Bill

Has three children, loves hiking
with his two dogs, golfing, and the
Phoenix Suns.



In Their Words

I don't think I've ever done anything
more important than the work that
I'm doing right now, standing behind
the certification of the 2020 election
as it has been attacked from every
corner in every way.

Another common tool for ensuring accurate results are statutory hand recounts and audits, which have been required for years and involve taking a mandated percentage of random votes and making sure they match up with election night totals.

However, there have been calls for our elections to be counted entirely by hand, something election practitioners and academics have warned would be harmful in terms of speed and accuracy. According to Charles Stewart, a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, multiple studies have borne out this fact. “Counting votes is very tedious,” said Stewart. “Human beings are bad at doing tedious things, and computers are very good at doing tedious things.”⁸⁷

An election with only humans involved is never going to be fully secure. Though human beings play a crucial role in elections, “100% of the time, in my 18-year experience, it’s been a human that’s caused an issue,” said Clerk and Recorder for Weld County, Colorado, Carly Koppes.

“If absentee balloting had been associated with either party, it had been associated with the Republican Party. That’s because voting by mail stands to benefit three groups that traditionally lean more Republican: rural voters, older voters, and those who travel frequently.”

—CHARLES STEWART, Professor of political science at MIT

Structural Underfunding of Elections

A serious and long-standing challenge for local election officials is that our elections are critically under-resourced. Although local jurisdictions administer elections for federal and state offices, the federal government does not regularly provide funding to help them.⁸⁸ Local jurisdictions in most states bear most of the costs of elections, although a series of federal laws passed in recent decades have expanded the states' contributions to local election jurisdictions.⁸⁹ There are a few states, such as Alaska and Delaware, that pay the entire cost of elections,⁹⁰ and several other states pay for all elections under certain circumstances. Others have certain cost-sharing arrangements, such as Kentucky and Washington.⁹¹

The lack of consistent and sufficient funding for elections has long been cause for concern and a major challenge for election officials. Over half of local election officials agreed with the statement, “a lack of sufficient funding prevents me from doing my job well,” according to a 2020 survey of local officials conducted by Democracy Fund and Reed College.⁹²

According to a 2021 report by the American Enterprise Institute and the MIT Election Data + Science Lab (MEDSL), \$2 billion to \$3 billion is currently spent to administer presidential elections.⁹³ To put that in context, that puts elections “near the bottom of spending for public services, ranking at approximately the same levels as spending by local governments to maintain parking facilities.”

“Elections are categorized as critical infrastructure by the Department of Homeland Security and very justifiably so, and yet at the same time, I think we kind of have this antiquated idea

of how elections work,” said Justin Roebuck, clerk of Ottawa County, Michigan. “Our processes have changed; the scrutiny has changed dramatically. The technology has changed.” However, according to election officials, our current system of election funding is not commensurate with the resources needed to maintain this critical infrastructure.

Necessary and regular funding

Running U.S. elections has become very complex, and with that, the resources required to ensure they remain safe and secure have also increased dramatically. A rough estimate by the Brennan Center puts the cost of the most critical election security measures at over \$2 billion over five years.⁹⁴ One report estimated that replacing outdated voting machines across the country over the next decade alone would cost \$1.8 billion.⁹⁵ The same report put the total price tag for state and local election infrastructure at more than \$50 billion over the next decade, a finding that is “broadly consistent with” other efforts to estimate election costs, according to MEDSL and the National Institute for Civil Discourse.⁹⁶

The general lack of adequate election funding is reflected in the amount jurisdictions invest in the people that run our elections. As previously mentioned, local election officials are paid less than they might be in other fields or similar parts of government, especially in smaller jurisdictions, and their staff also tend to earn less than they would in comparable jobs.⁹⁷ Though still underpaid, election officials in larger jurisdictions often have much higher salaries and larger staffs than their peers in smaller jurisdictions.⁹⁸

According to a 2021 report, **\$2 billion to \$3 billion** is currently spent to administer presidential elections. To put that in context, that puts **elections “near the bottom of spending for public services**, ranking at approximately the same levels as spending by local governments to maintain parking facilities.”

The needs are many. A few common costs of running elections include:

- ✓ Maintaining voter registration databases.
- ✓ Replacing outdated voting machines.
- ✓ Hiring and training election officials and poll workers with competitive salaries.
- ✓ Buying ballot printers, scanners, sorting and letter-opening machines, vote tabulators, and signature verification software.
- ✓ Updating critical cybersecurity infrastructure.
- ✓ Renting storage facilities.
- ✓ Paying for audit systems.
- ✓ Getting logistical support.
- ✓ Conducting public communications.
- ✓ Installing and securing dropboxes.
- ✓ Dealing with increased records requests.
- ✓ Implementing inclusive voting procedures and technology.

Sources: [Election Infrastructure Initiative](#) and [American Enterprise Institute and the MIT Election Data + Science Lab](#)

Such a system is unsustainable. “Election officials are expected to have expertise on such different areas, from social media, to cybersecurity, to logistics—all things that you would not really expect a single person to have,” said Brianna Lennon, clerk of Boone County, Missouri. “We also don’t have the resources to have dedicated personnel to do each one of those things.”

A lack of sufficient funding does not just make election workers’ jobs and lives unnecessarily difficult, it also creates a cascade of side effects, including making it harder to ensure voters have a positive election experience. “We want to make sure we have clean voter rolls,” said Shane Schoeller, clerk of Greene County, Missouri. “The best way to do that is to have a team the size necessary to handle the volume of voter registration, whether it’s a new registration for a voter or a change of address when they move.”

Such inconsistent funding also means election officials cannot properly plan for the future. “We don’t need a large sum of money every 10 years or every five years,” Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos told Issue One. “What we need is consistent, dedicated funding so that we can plan ahead and do the things that we need to do. Administering our elections securely is not cheap. For instance, tabulators cost about \$5,000 to \$6,000 each. We have close to 300 of those around the state of Vermont.”

Instead, election officials are all too frequently left with a system, as Boone County, Missouri’s Lennon describes it, “tied together with bailing wire,” cobbling together temporary, last-minute fixes to long-term problems.

Chris Krebs, director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency in the Department of Homeland Security under Trump, also attests to this, saying state and local officials need “something they can set their budget clocks to.”⁹⁹

For now, funding struggles are just a part of election officials’ jobs. As former Orange County, California Registrar of Voters

Neal Kelley described it, “you have to be a bulldog” when fighting for funding as an official. Ingham County, Michigan Clerk Barb Byrum describes one such funding struggle justifying security needs with the county board which took six years to resolve.

Private funding filling the void

To address this inconsistent, unequal, and insufficient funding, Congress recently provided \$825 million for elections for the first time in decades. Amid the twin threats of foreign meddling in our elections and the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress granted \$425 million in 2019 specifically for cybersecurity improvements¹⁰⁰ and another \$400 million in 2020 for election assistance during the pandemic.¹⁰¹

The money provided by Congress—and pushed for by advocates including Issue One—was a helpful downpayment, but far short of what was actually needed to run the 2020 election. One estimate put the true number to conduct elections during the pandemic at \$4 billion.¹⁰² As election workers scrambled to create a safe voting environment with limited resources,¹⁰³ Congress ignored subsequent bipartisan calls for more funding. The inadequacy of the current funding system was never starker than in 2020. “Whether you’re a small county or a larger county like Philadelphia, you’re really not set up to absorb those excess costs,” said Philadelphia City Commissioner Lisa Deeley.

To fill this leadership vacuum and prevent what could have been a disastrous election season, private philanthropy stepped in with more than \$400 million, much of it from Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan.¹⁰⁴

Several nonprofits helped disperse the funds in the form of grants to jurisdictions, including the Center for Election Innovation and Research and the Schwarzenegger Institute of the University of Southern California.¹⁰⁵ The Center for Tech and Civic Life, which was responsible for giving out the largest amount, granted funds to every eligible jurisdiction that applied—about 2,500

Ken Hamm

PART-TIME POLL WORKER AND TRAINER,
CLARK COUNTY, NEVADA



About Ken

Father of four, grandfather of two sets of twins, Army veteran, Nevada Spring Mountain State Park docent.



In Their Words

Poll workers have to get to the polls at 5:30am and sometimes they don’t leave until several hours after the polls close. But I find they come back, year after year, because they just enjoy it. They enjoy communicating with the voter.





Neal Kelley

FORMER REGISTRAR OF VOTERS,
ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



About Neal

Semi-retired to Maui, private pilot, photographer and painter, former board member of several nonprofit organizations and involved with the Toastmasters, former law enforcement.



In Their Words

I don't mind if skeptics have distrust in the system. Come in and volunteer, but don't disrupt the operation. I want you to see how it works.

applicants across 49 red, blue, and purple states.¹⁰⁶ Several major sports teams also made in-kind donations by opening up their stadiums for use as vote centers.

These grants helped to:

- Hire temporary staff and poll workers.
- Purchase personal protective equipment, mail/absentee ballot supplies, and election equipment.
- Rent polling places and keep them clean.
- Reopen polling stations closed due to a lack of funding.
- Provide official voting information to the public.¹⁰⁷

Speaking with election officials from across the political spectrum, the consensus has been that this private philanthropy in 2020 was a godsend that helped prevent a disastrous pandemic election. The equipment purchased with these funds didn't benefit Republican voters or Democratic voters, it helped all voters, and it was integral to the election's success.

At the same time, both Democratic and Republican officials agree that having to accept private philanthropy is suboptimal. Relying on private philanthropy to run elections is an indictment of government inaction that results in bad optics and puts election officials in an awkward position.

"That's not my ideal. I think the least palatable way to fund elections is through private funding. But in 2020 we had to make sure we could conduct an election fairly and safely and the best way to do that was to have private funding," said Greene County, Missouri Clerk Shane Schoeller, a Republican.

Relying on private philanthropy to run elections is an indictment of government inaction that results in bad optics and puts election officials in an awkward position.

Even still, Schoeller stands by accepting the private funding in 2020. "If I was in the same situation again, knowing what I know now, I would still encourage people to do that because there were no other options available," he said.

Acting Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Leigh Chapman, a Democrat, agreed. "Future elections shouldn't need to rely on private donors," she said. "The federal government must deliver the resources election officials need to safely and fairly administer our elections."

Carly Koppes, clerk and recorder for Weld County, Colorado, who did not apply for the funds but was thankful they were available, agrees. "If people want to cry and complain about private funding, then they also need to understand that we need to be funding appropriately through government channels," she said. Despite the bipartisan nature of the grants and the manifest necessity for properly funding the 2020 election, numerous state legislatures have moved to ban the practice¹⁰⁸—without stepping in to fill the necessary funding gap.

Immediate Threats to U.S. Elections

The 2020 election uniquely tested the U.S. election system. It did not break, thanks to many brave election officials from both parties who upheld their oaths of office. But damage was done. Trump's "Big Lie" has intentionally targeted election officials, many of whom have experienced unprecedented threats to their safety and the safety of their families—simply for doing their jobs.

Feeding off this atmosphere of confusion and mistrust, state legislatures have passed laws to penalize election workers for simple mistakes, increase partisan control of elections, and make it harder to vote. These new stressors are causing a mass exodus of election workers as well as difficulty recruiting new workers.

According to the Brookings Institution, the lies spread to disrupt elections have been a driver of decreasing confidence in the political system.¹⁰⁹ The power of social and broadcast media to reach far more people with election disinformation than election officials running elections on shoestring budgets can make the problem seem insurmountable.

Attacks on election workers

This disinformation has wreaked havoc on the lives of the people that make our democracy possible. Poll workers have faced racially charged insults, calls for their families to be killed or attacked, and sexist harassment. They have also been accused of treason and sent threats of prosecution,¹¹⁰ and sometimes, harassers have even come to election officials' homes.¹¹¹ A clerk in a Republican-leaning Oregon county was called "the enemy of my country and the enemy of my God" to his face. The workplace of one of his colleagues in another county had "VOTE DONT WORK. NEXT TIME BULLETS" painted outside it.¹¹² Former Philadelphia Commissioner Al Schmidt, a Republican, received death

The 2020 election uniquely tested the U.S. election system. It did not break, thanks to many brave election officials from both parties who upheld their oaths of office.

threats—emails demanding he "tell the truth, or your three kids ... will be fatally shot."¹¹³ It's also important to note that the vast majority of election workers are women, meaning women disproportionately bear the brunt of these attacks.¹¹⁴

These are just some of the over 1,000 reported threats and harassment that election workers from both parties have had to deal with just for carrying out their duties,¹¹⁵ spurred on by Trump's "Big Lie."¹¹⁶ In at least one case, the threat was reported to have come from Trump himself, who is alleged to have called for Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson to be "arrested for treason and executed" in a White House meeting.¹¹⁷

Ken Hamm, a part-time poll worker and trainer from Clark County, Nevada, describes a rapid shift during the 2020 election season where, for the first time, election workers became the enemy. "It's like good people were convinced to go after other good people," said Hamm.

A survey by the Brennan Center and the Bipartisan Policy Center found that 1 in 3 officials said they felt unsafe in their jobs, and

Carly Koppes

CLERK AND RECORDER, WELD
COUNTY, COLORADO



About Carly

Former rodeo queen, second degree black belt in American Kenpo, enjoys fishing, gardening, and crafts.



In Their Words

Voting rights are the device we have to participate in our living and breathing government, and election officials are the gateway to that. That's why the role is so important, and why election officials must act with a high level of integrity all the time, in or out of an election cycle.



Brianna Lennon

CLERK, BOONE COUNTY, MISSOURI



About Brianna

Runs her own election podcast called “High Turnout Wide Margins,” enjoys spending time with her kids and husband.



In Their Words

Election administration is the behind-the-scenes detailed work that actually allows voters to get a ballot and allows polling places to be open and allows us to have legitimacy in our elections.



that 1 in 5 were concerned about death threats.¹¹⁸ In some instances, threats made election officials and their families feel so endangered that law enforcement had to be posted outside their homes¹¹⁹—or in some cases, they were forced to go into hiding.¹²⁰

Some election officials blame social media companies for failing to deal with rampant disinformation. Nearly 2 in 3 officials believe false information has made their jobs more dangerous,¹²¹ and 3 in 4 say social media companies have not done enough to curb disinformation. “Social media allows myths and disinformation to travel around the world before I even have my first sip of coffee in the morning,” said Ingham County, Michigan Clerk Barb Byrum.

As Decode Democracy has noted, “platforms generally waited to shift their policies until after online disinformation and hate speech resulted in significant real-world damage.”¹²² “It makes you kind of wonder when you’re walking out the front door of your building at the end of the night,” said Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos. “You kind of look around to see if there’s anybody hanging around. We’re having security measures put in place, and this is expensive stuff. And it’s money that we didn’t have budgeted to spend, but now we do.”

Republican proponents of the “Big Lie” often reserve special vitriol for members of their own party who refuse to go along with their fictions.¹²³ After the Nevada Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske, a Republican, dispelled myths about fraud in the 2020 election, she was censured by the state GOP. “My job is to carry out the duties of my office as enacted by the Nevada Legislature,” said Cegavske, “not carry water for the state GOP or put my thumb on the scale of democracy.”¹²⁴

Likewise, Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, also a Republican, resisted Trump’s pressure to “find 11,780 votes” that would have overturned the result of the state’s election.¹²⁵ As a result, he faced an unsuccessful Republican challenge in the May 2022 primary by Trump-backed candidate, Rep. Jody Hice.

For many officials, a certain amount of harassment unfortunately comes with the territory, but it frustrates them that their staff are targeted as well. “I’m elected by the people. I knew what I was getting into when I ran for this job,” said Jim Condos. “But my staff are just doing their jobs and they’re trying to do their jobs to the best of their ability, and they should not have to be on the receiving end of these death threats.”

Election officials cite various tactics to fight back: trusted messengers, disciplined and repeated messages, one-on-one conversations, an increased emphasis on civic education. “We commit to it every day,” said Philadelphia City Commissioner Omar Sabir. “We have to do weekly and daily radio commercials, build strategic partnerships with houses of worship—churches, masjids, and synagogues—because they play a huge part in the community. You’ve got to go to the places where people are talking about the things that are important in their lives.”

A startling 80% of election officials think the federal government is either doing nothing or not doing enough to help protect them.¹²⁶ “As much accountability as you’ve seen for what happened on January 6, which is appropriate, there has not been a commensurate level of accountability for those who threatened election officials across the country in an effort to also impede democracy from running its course,” said Al Schmidt, a former Philadelphia city commissioner.

In response to these concerns, the Department of Justice created a task force in July of 2021 to investigate and charge those who threaten election workers.¹²⁷ So far, the department has reviewed roughly “1,000 contacts reported as hostile or harassing by the election community,” and estimated 11% warrant criminal investigation.¹²⁸ The task force made its first arrests earlier this year, and has since made several more, including the arrest in July of a Massachusetts man for making a bomb threat against a member of the Arizona Secretary of State’s Office, and an August indictment of a Missouri man for

Spenser Mestel

POLL WORKER, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK



About Spenser

Coaches CrossFit, likes to read, surf, play tennis, and travel



In Their Words

For most people, 95% of their impressions of our democracy come from that experience they have at the polls. And especially if voters have questions, it’s so important that poll workers be able to answer those questions and to keep the process running smoothly.



THREATS MADE AGAINST ELECTION OFFICIALS AND POLL WORKERS

Michael Siegrist (Clerk of Canton Township, MI) received threats toward family.

Clint Hickman (County Supervisor in Maricopa County, AZ) received threats during the Maricopa County audit.

Janice Winfrey (City Clerk in Detroit, MI) was approached by a man who said, “I’ve been waiting for you, Ms. Winfrey. I want to know why you cheated during the election. I want to know why Donald Trump lost. It’s your fault.” And was sent photos of a dead body with a message to imagine that body as her daughter.

“One of the custodians walked up to one of the people that were outside... and was really intimidated, because [the person] had a firearm in his side pocket.”

—**Unnamed election worker**

“I probably got more than 25 death threats... I got a guy and, frankly, more than one... who left one on my voicemail and he said who he was and his phone number. I forwarded it to law enforcement... there was no discernable follow-up.”

—**Unnamed election worker**

Joseph Gloria (Registrar of Voters in Clark County, NV) said 50–150 armed individuals would appear outside of the Registrar of Voter’s office.

“[I received] voicemails that said, ‘You’re going to rot in hell,’ ‘Don’t ever send me one of those damn things [mail-in-ballots] again,’ and ‘You’re going to get yours.’”

—**Unnamed election worker**

Staci McElyea (SoS Office Employee in NV) was threatened and told she was “going to f----- die” for stealing the 2020 presidential election from Donald Trump.

Stephen Richer (Recorder in Maricopa County, AZ) received voicemails calling him “scum” and a “traitor,” “we hope you f---ing die,” threatening him with citizen’s arrests, telling him he would burn in hell, and if he gave the Maricopa County auditors any more trouble he would “never make it” to his “next little board meeting.”

Tina Barton (Former Clerk in Rochester Hills, MI) was told her throat would be slashed in public and received a voicemail filled with explicit language threatening her family.

Lisa Deeley (City Commissioner in Philadelphia, PA) was filmed by a partisan campaign manager who hurled insults and accusations at her. Comments on the video said, “We should find out where she lives,” “We should hang her for treason,” and “She should be shot.”

An unnamed election worker received Instagram messages saying: “Do you feel safe? You shouldn’t. Do you think Soros will/can protect you?” and “Your security detail is far too thin and incompetent to protect you. This world is unpredictable these days ... anything can happen to anyone.”

An unnamed election worker (Santa Fe County, NM) was followed by a partisan election observer while driving back to the clerk’s office with ballots and election materials. The observer was driving within inches of her car’s bumper.



Click the individual threat for original source.

Roxanna Moritz

FORMER AUDITOR & COMMISSIONER OF
ELECTIONS, SCOTT COUNTY, IOWA



About Roxanna

Has three children, two stepchildren, and 10 grandchildren, loves playing the piano, singing, writing, and reading.



In Their Words

The best way for someone to really understand how involved elections are is to be a poll worker. Come to a poll worker session and train with us or whoever. You find out how much work goes into it.



threatening an election official who worked in the Maricopa County Recorder’s Office.¹²⁹

Lawmakers in at least 10 states are considering legislation to bring stiffer penalties on those who threaten election officials,¹³⁰ and laws have already been passed or are set to be signed into law in Maine, Oregon, and Colorado.¹³¹ In the U.S. Congress, Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Roy Blunt (R-MO) have pushed the EAC to outline how it plans to support election workers,¹³² and in July, Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) introduced a bill with bipartisan support that would double the length of prison sentences for individuals convicted of threatening election officials, poll watchers, voters, or candidates.¹³³

“The human infrastructure is a lot more difficult to secure, and to look out for, which is why partnership with law enforcement is so important,” said Al Schmidt. “At the local level, for immediate security, and at the national level for investigating threats.” Still, much more needs to be done, and every level of law enforcement has a role to play.¹³⁴ These threats are not going away,¹³⁵ and the Brennan Center estimates that about \$300 million is needed over the next five years to keep election workers safe.¹³⁶

A mass exodus of workers

Given the ongoing harassment and threats, many election workers have chosen to retire or quit rather than face potential danger against them and their families. For others, an already stressful, hard job is no longer worth the increased strain.

The writing is on the wall, and the statistics are sobering. A survey of election officials found that 30% know of one or more election workers who have left at least in part because of fear for their safety, increased threats, or intimidation. One in five plans to leave before the 2024 election, many citing stress or the political demonization as primary reasons.¹³⁷ The demographic realities of local election officials also present a challenge. Seventy-four

Election officials cite various tactics to fight back: trusted messengers, disciplined and repeated messages, one-on-one conversations, an increased emphasis on civic education.

percent are over 50 years old, and 1 in 4 is over 65. Many are eligible to retire, and plan on doing so in the near future.¹³⁸ In Pennsylvania, about a third of local election officials have left their jobs over the past two years.¹³⁹

“Over the long run, if this continues, it will be a lot harder to get folks to stick around,” Natalie Adona, the clerk-recorder-elect of Nevada County, California, told Politico earlier this year. “People will retire maybe because they’re just ready to retire because they’ve been doing this for so dang long—or maybe because they feel that the risk is not worth it. But there will be more retirements.”¹⁴⁰

David Becker, the executive director of the nonprofit Center for Election Innovation and Research, puts this development into context: “We may lose a generation of professionalism and expertise in election administration. It’s hard to measure the impact.”¹⁴¹

In the long term, 60% of officials expressed concern that threats, harassment, and intimidation against local election officials will make it difficult to retain and recruit election workers, especially the many thousands of poll workers who help Americans vote on Election Day and who have long been a challenge to recruit¹⁴² even before 2020. “People are really concerned, this time around, about what’s going to happen,” said Ken Hamm, part-time poll

Justin Roebuck

CLERK, OTTAWA COUNTY, MICHIGAN



About Justin

Has a wife and two kids, enjoys reading history, sailing, doing yard work, and the Lake Michigan summer.



In Their Words

Election administrators are generally heads-down folks. They like to get things done. They like to do a good job. But they’re data-driven people, they’re not necessarily PR people. And so I think most of us would rather not end up in the newspaper.



Omar Sabir

CITY COMMISSIONER, PHILADELPHIA



About Omar

Father of seven children, does community service work with the Muslim community, enjoys going to the beach with his family.



In Their Words

Encouraging voting is often about repetition, leveraging trusted messengers and pushing out compelling messaging over and over again. That's what erodes the distrust.



worker and trainer from Clark County, Nevada. “I’ve had workers go through the training and saying they’re a little cautious about being out there.”

Adding insult to injury are the new punitive laws introduced¹⁴³ and enacted¹⁴⁴ in some states—in many cases in response to the “Big Lie”—that threaten election officials with criminal penalties for simple mistakes on the job. “I could be charged with a felony. I could lose my voting rights. So I decided to leave,” said Roxanna Moritz, the former auditor and commissioner of elections for Scott County, Iowa.¹⁴⁵

It’s not surprising that many local election officials would prefer to step aside rather than deal with routine harassment, the possibility of being held criminally liable for small mistakes, and threats of violence.

Election deniers taking power

Over half of current election officials fear that incoming officials will be peddlers of the “Big Lie.”¹⁴⁶ Their fears are well-founded. A well-documented systematic campaign to place election deniers at the head of key posts is currently underway, including for local election administration positions.¹⁴⁷ Many of these candidates have been endorsed by Trump because of their explicit denial of the 2020 election and their promises to undermine the process if elected.

According to States United Action, more than 100 election deniers successfully or unsuccessfully ran primary campaigns for key state-level offices this election cycle. As of Aug. 5, 2022, more than half of secretary of state races include an election denier, and more than one-third of governor and attorney general races currently have an election denier candidate on the ballot.¹⁴⁸ Election deniers have secured the GOP nomination for secretary of state in several key battleground states, including Arizona, Michigan, and Nevada.¹⁴⁹ They join the nearly 400 sitting legislators in battleground states who have worked to

AI Schmidt

FORMER CITY COMMISSIONER,
PHILADELPHIA



About AI

Father of three children, music lover,
involved in Philadelphia civic life.



In Their Words

It's important that both parties be
represented when running elections.

The checks and balances help
maintain the integrity of the process,
and prevent election administrators
from putting their thumb on the
scale to benefit one party over
another, or one candidate
over another.



Shane Schoeller

CLERK, GREENE COUNTY, MISSOURI



About Shane

Football fan, enjoys taking family trips, learning about typewriters with his son, teaching young people in the youth ministry at his church, and taking a road trip down Route 66.



In Their Words

We want safe and secure elections and we also want accessible elections to honor the sacrifices of all who have come before us and continue forward today to defend our right to vote.



discredit or overturn the results of the 2020 election.¹⁵⁰ Some election deniers have already won office at the hyper-local level, including in Pennsylvania, where they won voting judge and inspector races.¹⁵¹

“I don’t think I’m being hyperbolic when I say our democracy hangs in the balance right now through these next two elections,” said Bill Gates, chairman of the board of supervisors for Maricopa County, Arizona. “If we continue to have people that are tearing at the foundations of our democracy, and if we have people who have openly said they’re ‘results oriented’ when it comes to elections. If they can get elected to secretaries of state and elections board positions, I don’t know if this experiment continues.”

In Texas, Republicans have recruited, in their words, an “army” of 10,000 poll workers and watchers—in areas where residents are largely people of color.¹⁵² “It’s about winning elections with the right people—MAGA people,” said former Trump strategist Steve Bannon. “We will have our people at every level.”¹⁵³

The concern is that such individuals will be in positions to hijack the management of elections for partisan gain and enact changes to fundamental election and voting practices that could lead to an outright reversal of the will of voters. “These conspiracy theorists are in it for the long haul,” said Ingham County, Michigan Clerk Barb Byrum.¹⁵⁴ “They’re in it to completely crumble our republic, and they’re looking at these election administrator positions.”

Legislatures have also introduced bills to shift power over elections from local and state election officials to highly partisan actors. This year alone, nearly 200 bills have been introduced that would shift the allocation of power in election administration—this includes bills that would grant legislatures power to overturn election results, alter the composition of election boards, or change those positions that were previously appointed to elected ones.¹⁵⁵

The writing is on the wall, and the statistics are sobering. A survey of election officials found that **30% know of one or more election workers** who have left at least in part because of **fear for their safety**, increased threats, or intimidation.

George Stern

CLERK AND RECORDER,
JEFFERSON COUNTY, COLORADO



About George

Father of two, volunteer firefighter, loves the outdoors, mountain biking, skiing, and backpacking.



In Their Words

Election workers are your neighbors, they're the people you used to go to school with, they're the people that your kids go to school with. They're not some deep state government actors who have cooked up this grand conspiracy where people of all parties and at all levels have somehow figured out how to steal elections down to the district level.



In perhaps the most dangerous threat against the democratic process, at least nine laws that could lead to tampering with how results are determined have been enacted in six states as of May 2022, including laws that permit partisan actors to interfere with elections operations or overturn election results.¹⁵⁶ The number of such bills continues to grow each month.

Legislatures have also used the distrust of elections fostered by these false claims to enact more stringent voting laws,¹⁵⁷ potentially threatening access for eligible voters. At least 32 states have enacted laws that make it harder to vote and easier for partisans to take over elections for political gain.^{158 159} Such laws often disproportionately target specific groups, such as people of color.¹⁶⁰ “Rather than going out and trying to persuade voters, we’re seeing legislators trying to shrink the electorate in order to ensure job security for themselves,” said the Brennan Center’s Eliza Sweren-Becker.¹⁶¹

Instead, lawmakers should be focused on improving voter access while ensuring transparency and security in the process. In Virginia, Democratic legislators enacted a host of bills making it easier to vote, including automatic voter registration, 45 days of early voting, relaxed absentee ballot rules, and making Election Day a holiday, which their Republican colleagues generally opposed. Ironically, in 2021, Republicans won a landslide victory in the state.¹⁶²

“Rather than going out and trying to persuade voters, we’re seeing legislators trying to shrink the electorate in order to ensure job security for themselves.”

—ELIZA SWEREN-BECKER, The Brennan Center for Justice

Protecting Our Elections

The rise of politically-motivated disinformation in the United States coupled with years of inadequate funding for election infrastructure requires urgent attention from federal lawmakers to safeguard democratic institutions, including free and fair elections. Congress should act to protect election officials, defend the nonpartisan administration of elections, and strengthen access to the ballot. The will of the people alone is what should determine the outcomes of elections, and measures should be taken to avert electoral subversion and a future constitutional crisis.

Specifically, Congress should:

- 1 Authorize significant and regular investment in election infrastructure to ensure our elections are adequately funded;
- 2 Provide new funding streams—through the Election Assistance Commission or the Department of Justice—that election administrators and their staffs can utilize specifically for threat monitoring, safety and doxxing training, privacy services, public education and communications, and home security;
- 3 Enhance information sharing and coordination about threats against election officials between federal, state, and local law enforcement entities;
- 4 Clarify and expand existing federal protections against threats and intimidation to include authorized election agents, contractors, vendors, and volunteers;
- 5 Increase privacy protections for election workers and their families to protect against doxxing and harassment; and
- 6 Pass a comprehensive update to the [Electoral Count Act of 1887](#) to ensure the will of the people is upheld.

Key Resources

- [3 Existential Threats to Our Elections, Issue One](#)
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- [Lessons Learned from the 2020 Election](#), American Enterprise Institute and the MIT Election Data + Science Lab
- [Election Administration at State and Local Levels](#), National Conference of State Legislatures
- [Elections are Run by the States: A Guide to Statewide Offices and Election Power](#), States United Democracy Center
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Issue One is the leading crosspartisan political reform group in Washington, D.C. We unite Republicans, Democrats, and independents in the movement to fix our broken political system and build an inclusive democracy that works for everyone. We educate the public and work to pass legislation on Capitol Hill to bolster U.S. elections, strengthen ethics and accountability, increase government transparency, and reduce the corrosive influence of big money in politics. Issue One's ReFormers Caucus of more than 200 former members of Congress, governors, and Cabinet officials is the largest coalition of its kind ever assembled to advocate for political reform. Our National Council on Election Integrity is the leading bipartisan voice on protecting elections and combating efforts to undermine our democratic process.

About Faces of Democracy

Issue One's Faces of Democracy campaign is lifting up the voices of election workers to press for necessary improvements including significant, predictable, and regular funding for state and local election administration by Congress and protections for election workers and facilities.



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