

After The 2022 Midterms, Do Americans Trust Elections?

*Jennifer Gaudette, Seth Hill, Thad Kousser, and Mackenzie Lockhart, UC San Diego
Mindy Romero, USC Center for Inclusive Democracy*

The closely contested 2020 presidential race was followed by unsubstantiated allegations of vote fraud and a wide partisan divide over trust in elections. Democrats became significantly more confident than Republicans and independents that election results accurately reflected the vote, with Republicans especially voicing concerns over widespread fraud. Since then, election officials across the country have worked to explain to the public the protections that safeguard the integrity of elections in order to restore faith in democracy. Our academic team collaborated with nonpartisan election officials in Texas, Georgia, Colorado, and Los Angeles County to design this survey gauging voter confidence after the midterm elections and to test the impact of their public information efforts. We fielded a UC San Diego Yankelovich Center Survey from November 17-27th, 2022, asking a sample of 3,038 Americans drawn to reflect the eligible voter population about their confidence in elections and their view of the midterm contests. We also tested the effects of public information messages produced by election officials in two states. As the sections below explore in greater detail, our key findings are that:

- The 2022 midterms restored overall faith in elections, but not among Republicans. After the contests concluded, trust in the United States' election system rose sharply among both Democratic and independent American adults, but not among Republicans.
- There is a wide partisan gap in faith in the integrity of the 2022 midterm elections. Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to view the results of this November's election as accurate, while Republicans are more than five times as likely to suspect significant fraud. The counting of mail ballots and the worry that votes are cast illegally are sources of particular concern for Republicans and some independents.
- Regardless of partisanship, respondents have more faith in the integrity of elections in their own state than in other states and are confident that their own ballot will be counted accurately. And while trust in elections is correlated with voter turnout, a significant majority of those who do report distrust in our election system still participate in it.
- Respondents of all partisanship who watched a video that explains who election officials are or what steps they take to protect elections became more trusting in their accuracy and integrity and less likely to agree that specific types of fraud are common.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

This report details the key findings from the survey that we conducted on a diverse sample of American adults after the November 8, 2022, midterm elections. We fielded the survey from November 17-27th, beginning after the Associated Press projected party control of both the US Senate (for the Democrats) and the US House of Representatives (for Republicans) so that respondent changes could not be attributed to changes in party control. To craft the survey questions and identify the informational messages being used by election officials, we partnered with Texas Elections Director Keith Ingram, Colorado State Election Director Dr. Judd Choate, Georgia Elections Division Deputy Director Jesse A. Harris, PhD, and Los Angeles County Registrar Dean Logan.

Based on an online surveying technique that is now common and [well-vetted](#), our sample includes 3,038 respondents drawn to reflect the United States voting age population along the lines of race, ethnicity, age, and gender, using the online Cint platform (formerly Luc.Id). We used two attention-check questions to ensure that online respondents were reading the survey carefully, removing those who failed the attention check from our sample. Our sample was targeted based on the characteristics of the nation's citizen voting age population from the 2021 American Community Survey. We provided all respondents the option of taking the survey in English or Spanish. The margin of error on this survey is plus or minus 1.8 percentage points for respondents overall. For smaller subsets of voters, such as members of a particular party or demographic group, the margin of error is larger.

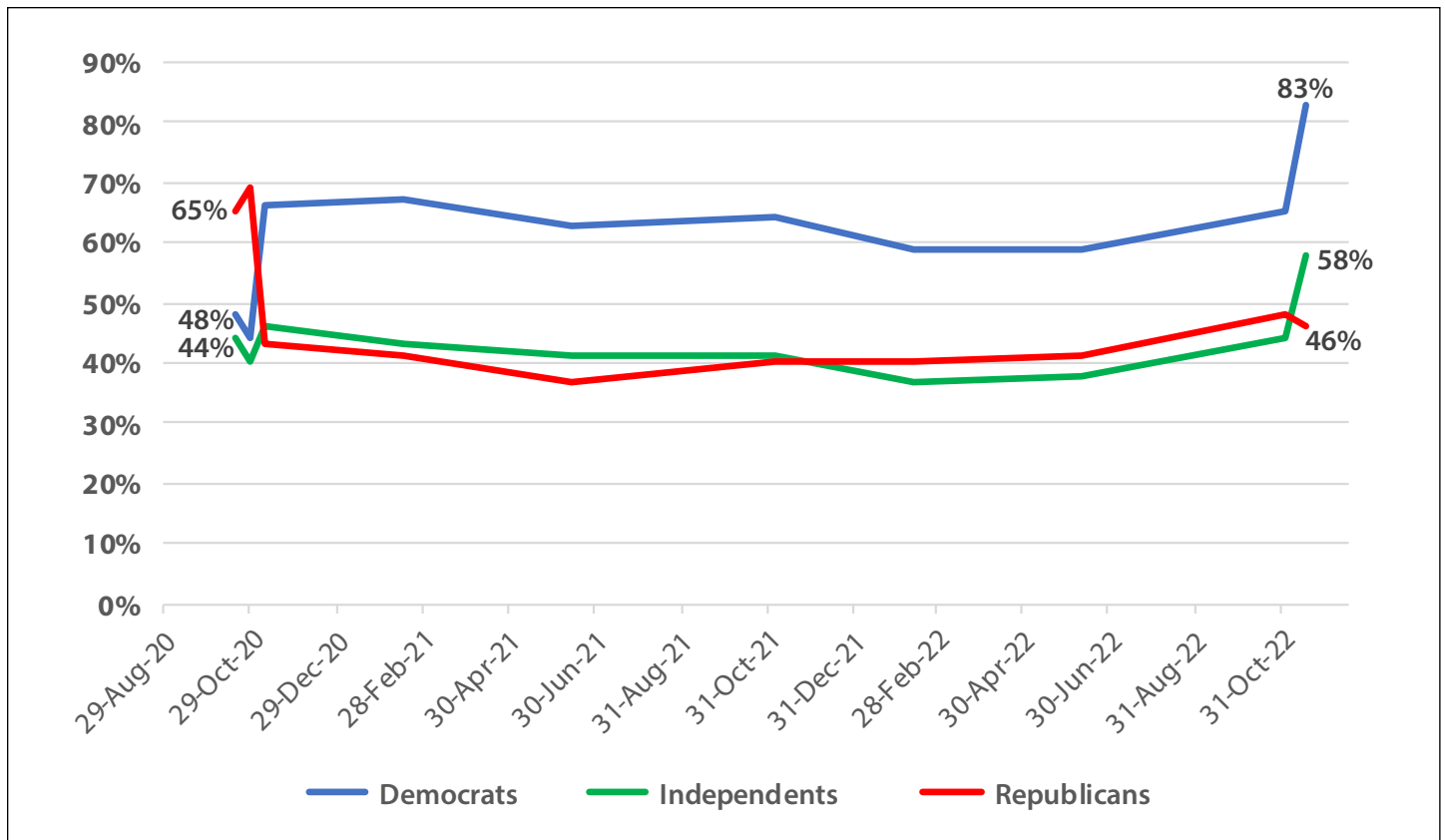
HOW HAS TRUST IN THE US ELECTION SYSTEM CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS?

To compare trust in the election system after the 2022 midterms to prior levels of trust for Americans overall and for members of each party, we first asked respondents a question that followed the precise wording of a question asked in a long-running series of surveys conducted by Morning Consult, [Tracking Trust in US Institutions](#). (A series of polls administered by the [Pew Research Center](#) reveal similar trends in trust by party over time.) Rather than focusing on any particular election, this question asks, “Generally speaking, how much do you trust the United States’ election system?” In Morning Consult’s final pre-election survey on November 4th, 2022, 54% of respondents answered that they trusted elections “some” or “a lot.” (The other options were “distrust some,” “distrust a lot,” or “don’t know/no opinion.”) In our survey conducted after the results of the House and Senate elections had become clear, the percentage trusting elections was higher at 61%.

Yet this overall rebound in trust did not occur for members of both parties; in fact, only Democrats and independents became more trusting in U.S. elections after the midterms. Trust in elections among Democrats rose from 65% to 83% -- even higher than the level of trust Democrats reported shortly after the 2020 presidential contest. Independents also became more trusting, shifting from 44% saying that they trusted the United States’ election system some or a lot before the election to 58% trusting the system after the midterms. Again, this is the highest level that independents have reported over the past two years. But there was no concomitant rise among Republicans, who still have strong concerns about the accuracy of results. Only 46% reported trusting the US election system in our post-election survey, similar to Republican levels of trust (48%) reported before the election.

As shown in the graph below, which combines the time series collected by Morning Consult for the past two years with our post-election survey, these shifts have broadened the already sharp partisan divide in trust that emerged after the 2020 presidential contest. Before that election, Republicans (65%) were more likely than Democrats (48%) to trust the US election system. That shifted after President Biden’s victory over President Trump. Since November 2020, Democrats have been much more trusting of elections than Republicans, with independents registering levels of trust between the two parties but more closely resembling the Republicans’ level of mistrust.

On the eve of the 2022 midterms, the partisan divide over trust in US elections (trust among Democrats minus trust among Republicans) was 17 percentage points. In our post-election Yankelovich Survey, that gap was larger at 37 percentage points. Throughout their polling, independents and Republicans have had similar levels of trust in elections. However, in our survey post-midterms, a 12-point gap emerged between independents -- who became more trusting of the US electoral system after the midterms -- and Republicans.



Each data point represents the percentage of respondents who answer the question “Generally speaking, how much do you trust the United States’ election system?” with “trust some” or “trust a lot.” All data from before the 2022 midterm elections is taken from the Morning Consult [Tracking Trust in US Institutions](#) survey series, with the post-election data taken from our Nov. 17-27, 2022 Yankelovich Survey.

HOW BROAD ARE DIVIDES OVER TRUST IN 2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS?

These divergent partisan trends also displayed a historically wide partisan gap over faith in the integrity of the 2022 midterm elections specifically. Our next question focused specifically on that contest, asking respondents “Do you trust that the results from this year’s November election accurately reflect the vote, or do you think there is significant vote fraud in this election?” The table below shows how members of different groups answered that question, with the three possible responses being “I trust that the November election results accurately reflect the vote” (selected by 60% of the overall sample), “I think there is significant vote fraud in this election” (selected by 24%), and “Don’t know” (selected by the remaining 16%). We report the percentage who trusted the election or suspected fraud in the two columns of our table.

The clearest divide over trust in the results of this year's election is between the parties. Democrats are now more than twice as likely as Republicans (85% versus 39%) to view the results of November's election as accurate, while Republicans are more than five times as likely (43% versus 8%) to suspect significant fraud. Independents take a position between the two parties, but still voice concerns: only 48% had faith that the results were accurate and 25% believed there was significant fraud in the midterms.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND GENDER

Our post-election survey also revealed the continuing trend of educational polarization. Only 43% of those who do not hold a high school degree trust that the results accurately reflect the vote. Trust in the results rises steadily with educational attainment, with 54% of those holding a high school degree, 68% of college graduates, and 74% of those with advanced degrees trusting in the midterm results. These differences are not as pronounced among those who suspect significant fraud. Many Americans who finished their education in high school simply respond that they do not know if the results accurately reflect the vote, indicating that they may be open to persuasion in either direction. Interestingly, there is no significant gender gap (measured through self-reporting of gender) in trust in the outcome of the midterms, in stark contrast to the large difference in support by gender for the Republican or Democrat parties [in this election](#).

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Looking at racial and ethnic groups, there are large differences across groups in their trust of the midterm election results with Asian Americans (74%) and Black Americans (68%) registering higher levels of trust than either whites or Latinos (both at 59%).

AGE GROUP, INCOME AND REGION

Older Americans were more likely to say that they trusted the accuracy of the midterm elections, with 64% of those aged over 65 trusting in them compared with 55% of those aged 18-24. There are also modest differences across income groups: 57% percent of those making under \$50,000 a year trusted the elections, compared with 66% of those who earn over \$150,000. Those living in the Northeast (65%) are ten percentage points more likely than Southerners (55%) to trust in the accuracy of the midterm contests.

Overall, our post-election survey shows that partisanship and education levels were the two strongest predictors of trust in the accuracy of the 2022 midterms and the prevalence of fraud.

	Trusts that 2022 midterm results accurately reflected the vote	Thinks there is significant fraud in the 2022 midterms
All Respondents	60%	24%
Partisan Affiliation		
Democrat	85%	8%
Republican	39%	43%
Independent	48%	25%
Gender		
Male	60%	24%
Female	59%	24%
Race/Ethnicity		
White (non-Hispanic)	59%	26%
Latino	59%	22%
Black Americans	68%	17%
Asian-American	74%	8%
Education		
No high school degree	43%	26%
High school degree	54%	27%
Some college	56%	27%
College graduate	68%	19%
Higher education degree	74%	18%
Age		
18-24	55%	26%
25-44	57%	24%
45-64	62%	23%
65+	64%	24%
Household Income		
Under \$25,000	57%	25%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	57%	28%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	63%	20%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	61%	26%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	66%	19%
Over \$150,000	66%	14%
Region		
Northeast	65%	20%
Midwest	61%	25%
South	55%	27%
West	63%	21%

WHAT ARE THE ELECTION INTEGRITY CONCERNS VOICED BY MEMBERS OF EACH PARTY?

While actual voter fraud and election fraud committed by officials is exceedingly rare, we are interested in uncovering which elements of the process partisans find concerning. To identify the major sources of concern for voters skeptical of American electoral integrity, we asked a series of questions about specific types of election fraud.

As with overall trust, we find significant gaps between partisans. Approximately 69% of Democrats believe that citizens illegally voting twice or non-citizens casting ballots happens “infrequently” or “almost never,” but only 31% of Republicans believe such fraud is rare. There was a similarly wide partisan gap, 71% versus 44%, in confidence that state or county election authorities did not engage in election fraud.

It is illegal to vote more than once in an election or to vote if not a U.S. citizen. How frequently do you think such vote fraud occurs? Please provide your best guess even if you are not sure.

Party	Almost never occurs / occurs infrequently
Republicans	31%
Democrats	69%
Independents	48%

Do you think that official state or county election authorities – such as your Secretary of State, registrar, or elections director – ever engage in any form of vote fraud?

Party	Almost never occurs / occurs infrequently
Republicans	44%
Democrats	71%
Independents	54%

Additionally, we asked voters about their trust in specific parts of the election process, ranging from the accessibility of the voting process to the different ways ballots are counted. We find that across the board, Republicans are much more likely to report distrust in the election system. A majority of Republicans are concerned about the counting of mail ballots (51%) and ineligible voters casting ballots (53%), while Democrats are five times less likely to have such concerns (10% and 9% respectively). Additionally, a near majority of Republicans are concerned about voters casting more than one ballot (49%) while Democrats are more than five times less likely to distrust this aspect of the election (9%).

Even in areas where we might expect Democrats to show higher levels of distrust, Republicans seem more willing to report that they are distrustful. When asked about whether they trust that eligible voters will not face obstacles when trying to vote, only 15% of Democrats report concerns, while 24% of Republicans are distrustful that eligible voters can vote without issue. In every category, Republicans report lower levels of trust in elections.

Rate your level of trust in the... (Distrust some/Distrust a lot)

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Accuracy in the counting of paper ballots cast in person	6%	25%	19%
Accuracy in the counting of ballots cast through electronic voting machines	5%	29%	20%
Accuracy in the counting of ballots cast by mail	10%	51%	35%
Ensuring that ineligible voters are prevented from casting ballots	9%	53%	33%
Ensuring that voters are prevented from casting more than one ballot	9%	49%	31%
Ensuring that eligible voters do not face obstacles to registering and casting their ballots	15%	24%	22%
The length of time required to count ballots	8%	41%	29%

AMERICANS TRUST ELECTIONS IN THEIR STATES MUCH MORE THAN THEY TRUST OTHER STATES

Regardless of partisanship, respondents generally have significantly more faith in the accuracy and integrity of elections in their own state than in other states. Overall, 72% of those surveyed trust elections in their own states “some” or “a lot.” By contrast, 58% trust the accuracy and integrity of elections in other states. Members of each partisan group were more skeptical of elections in other states than in their own. Most striking given their general lack of trust in elections, 63% of Republicans trust their own states’ elections, while only 41% trust the accuracy and integrity of elections in other states. For independents, 49% trust other states and 61% trust their own states. Democrats are now strongly confident in the accuracy and integrity of elections across the nation, with 79% trusting other states and 86% trusting their own.

This pattern suggests that mistrust in elections stems perhaps more from what Americans read or hear about than what they experience directly. Faith in one’s own state or local system versus larger systems appears to be a trend in our findings. Survey respondents reported that they are much more confident that their own ballots will be counted accurately than they are that other people’s votes will be. Overall, 83% of respondents were confident and 9% skeptical about the counting of their own ballots, while only 67% were confident and 18% skeptical that other people’s ballots will be counted accurately.

How much do you trust the accuracy and integrity of elections...

in your state?
in other states?

	Trust Some / A Lot Elections in your state	Trust Some / A Lot Elections in other states
Overall	72%	58%
Republicans	63%	41%
Democrats	86%	79%
Independents	61%	49%

How confident are you that...

your vote will be counted accurately this election?
other people's votes will be counted accurately in this election?

	Your vote will be counted accurately	Other people's votes will be counted accurately
Very confident	55%	37%
Somewhat confident	27%	29%
Don't know/unsure	8%	15%
Somewhat skeptical	5%	12%
Very skeptical	4%	6%

DOES MISTRUST OF ELECTIONS PREVENT AMERICANS FROM PARTICIPATING IN THEM?

We found that trust in elections is correlated with voter turnout, but that a strong majority of those responding that they do not trust the US election system still choose to vote. In our sample of adult citizens, turnout in the midterm election was 81% among those who said they generally trusted the election system and 66% among those who said they distrusted it "some" or "a lot." This difference in turnout is significant no matter which question we asked to measure respondents' confidence in elections, with the participation gap between those who do and who do not trust elections ranging from eleven to fifteen percentage points. Of course, this correlation does not prove a causal link; many demographic characteristics such as education levels strongly influence turnout. Additionally, respondents may distrust election systems but choose not to vote because they believe that the government is more generally "rigged" or that their vote does not matter for reasons beyond election integrity. Many of these factors can be linked to trust in elections and could account for the turnout differences that we observe.

Another perspective on the patterns we find is that even though trust in elections predicts turnout, most Americans who report that they distrust elections still participate in them. The reported turnout rate was still relatively high even for the respondents who lack trust in the United States' election system (66%), those who suspect significant fraud (71%) and those who do not trust the integrity of elections in their state (65%) or in other states (69%). Faith in elections may impact turnout, but strong majorities of those who distrust elections still take part in them. This is likely related to the fact that respondents generally have higher faith in the electoral systems of their own state.

Generally speaking, how much do you trust the United States' election system?

	Turnout rate
Trust some / a lot	81%
Distrust some / a lot	66%

Do you trust that the results from this year's November election accurately reflect the vote, or do you think there is significant vote fraud in this election?

	Turnout rate
Results Accurate	82%
Significant Fraud	71%

How much do you trust the accuracy and integrity of elections **in your state**?

	Turnout rate
Trust some / a lot	80%
Distrust some / a lot	65%

How much do you trust the accuracy and integrity of elections **in other states**?

	Turnout rate
Trust some / a lot	81%
Distrust some / a lot	69%

CAN MESSAGES FROM ELECTIONS OFFICIALS INCREASE TRUST?

As distrust in the integrity of American elections has grown and been echoed at the highest levels of American government, election officials across the country have responded with public information campaigns designed to demonstrate why the electoral system should be trusted. Through television advertisements and social media campaigns, secretaries of state and other officials have explained who administers elections and the steps that they have taken to deliver accurate vote counts and protect integrity. Collaborating with elections officials in four states, we designed survey experiments to test whether Americans now have solidified views on trust in elections or whether official informational messages can change their perspectives. These experiments randomly assign survey respondents to the “treatment” of watching one of these videos on election integrity or the “control” of viewing a commercial on an unrelated topic. Respondents are similar in demographic characteristics and political attitudes across groups. We then ask them about their trust in elections. If respondents randomly placed into the treatment groups report more trust in elections than those in the control group, we can confidently conclude that the videos influenced them.

In our Yankelovich Survey with a national sample, we tested the effectiveness of the two videos described below. One was produced by elections officials in Virginia, the other in Arizona. We then asked respondents about their trust in elections in other states as well as their beliefs about two specific types of fraud. We conducted additional surveys with at least 1,500 respondents each in Colorado, Texas, Georgia, and Los Angeles County, replicating the

procedure described above as well as showing respondents videos produced by officials in the respondent’s state and then asking them about trust in their own state’s elections. These messages also appeared to be effective – some to an impressive degree -- and we will analyze them more fully in future reports. For this report, we focus on the impact of the two videos below, tested on the full set of 9,077 respondents from our national, state, and county samples:

- Treatment 1: This “Democracy Defended” ad from [Virginia](#), which introduces elections clerks from all across the state in order to put a human face on those protecting the vote.
- Treatment 2: This video from Maricopa County in [Arizona](#), providing an in-depth description of the procedures and practices that safeguard election integrity there.
- Control: An advertisement for State Farm insurance that is wholly unrelated to elections.

As the table below shows, viewing a public information video about election integrity can cause some Americans to become more trusting of their elections and less likely to worry that officials are committing fraud. We combine the analysis of the two treatments here, showing how watching either video impacted trust compared with those in the control group. Watching a single message from election officials increases the percent of Americans who report that they trust how elections are run in other states (by 2.3 percentage points) and who trust that election officials do not commit fraud (by 2.8 percentage points). These results are “statistically significant” (so large that they would not be produced by random chance alone in 95 out of 100 cases). Although those who watched a video were also more likely to trust that illegal voting occurs only rarely (by 1.5 percentage points), this difference was not statistically significant.

These findings provide rigorous evidence that public information campaigns can be effective at restoring trust in American elections. Although the two to three percentage point shifts that we observe in our survey experiment are not in themselves large enough to overcome the deficits in trust evident for some groups in our survey, these are simply the results of viewing a single two-minute video. We find these effects despite prominent public debates over the past two years that might have solidified some views on election integrity, suggesting that a lengthy campaign addressing different types of election integrity concerns could be much more impactful. Importantly, we also found that these videos were no less effective at increasing trust among Republicans than they were among independents and Democrats. This demonstrates that Americans of all partisan stripes are open to learning more about election protections and that this can affect their levels of trust. As the 2024 presidential contest approaches, a robust public information campaign could play a significant role in restoring faith in American elections and potentially reducing the persistent partisan gap in trust that has only grown in the wake of the 2022 midterm.

	Trust elections in other states “some” or “a lot”	Trust that illegal voting rarely or never occurs	Trust that fraud by election officials rarely or never occurs
Impact of Viewing Video from Election Officials	+2.3%*	+1.5%	+2.8%*

*A * indicates that the finding is “statistically significant” at the 95% confidence level.*

ABOUT THE YANKELOVICH SURVEY

Since 2021, the [Yankelovich Center for Social Science Research](#) at UC San Diego has been conducting surveys with the goal of providing insights on issues that go beyond election prediction in order to yield rigorous evidence that informs public and policymaking debates. Our Yankelovich Surveys published in [September 2021](#) and in [June 2022](#) focused on California issues, with this being the first of many planned national surveys.