

Can a Public Information Campaign Restore Trust in American Elections?

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In the wake of unsubstantiated fraud claims following the 2020 presidential contest, 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. After discussions with election officials in Texas, Georgia, Colorado, and Los Angeles County, our academic team designed a set of national, state, and county surveys testing the impact of their public information efforts. We showed survey respondents examples of the actual videos that election officials have produced during this election cycle. We fielded these surveys from November 17-27th, 2022, with a national sample of 3,038 Americans drawn to reflect the eligible voter population as well as survey samples in Texas (1,467 respondents), Georgia (1,224), Colorado (1,379), and Los Angeles County (1,230). A full report on the national survey is [available here](#). This report focuses on survey experiments that we conducted to test the effects of public information messages produced by election officials on trust in elections. We find:

- Respondents in our national survey who watched a video from Virginia or Arizona that explained who election officials are or what steps they take to protect elections became more trusting in the accuracy and integrity of elections in other states and less likely to agree that specific types of fraud are common.
- In each of our state and county surveys, we found that at least one of the two videos explaining elections in that state increased respondents' trust in their own state's elections.
- These effects did not vary by party, with Republicans and independents no less responsive to the public information messages than Democrats.

National Survey Results

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. After discussing these public information efforts 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 in their own states and in other states, as well as their beliefs about the prevalence of fraud. 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 measured the impact of the two videos below, tested on the full set of 8,338 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. Because each advertisement had similar effects, 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 2.5 percentage points) and who trust that election officials do not commit fraud (by 2.9 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 1.6 percentage points), this difference was not statistically significant.

	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	+2.5%*	+1.6%	+2.9%*

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

As the next section shows, we found at least one effective message in each of the states and counties in which we conducted additional survey experiments, with their impacts leading to four to thirteen percentage point increases in trust. Together, these findings provide rigorous evidence that public information campaigns can be effective at restoring trust in American elections. 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 make a strong impact. Importantly, we also found that these videos were no less effective at increasing trust among Republicans than they were among independents and Democrats, both in the national survey and in our state and county surveys. 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.

State and County Surveys Results

We conducted surveys with large samples reflective of eligible voter populations of Colorado, Texas, Georgia, and Los Angeles County, replicating the procedure described above by showing respondents videos produced by officials in the respondent’s state and then asking them about trust in their own state’s elections. At least one message in each of these surveys appeared to be effective – some to an impressive degree – and we present analyses of their impacts below.

Texas

In our sample of 1,467 respondents reflective of the eligible voter population of Texas, we tested the effectiveness of the two videos described below:

- Treatment 1: The first 90 seconds of “[SOS 101: Voting Systems in Texas](#),” in which Secretary of State John Scott explains how voting systems work in Texas.
- Treatment 2: This appearance by Secretary of State [John Scott on Fox News](#), in which he explains safeguards on elections.
- Control: An advertisement for the [Cadillac Blackwing](#) that is wholly unrelated to elections.

Watching the SOS 101 video of Sec. Scott explaining voting systems increased the percentage of Texas respondents who reported that they trusted their own state’s elections “some” or “a lot” by thirteen percentage points, the largest impact of any of the videos that we tested. Watching this video increased the percentage of respondents reporting that they believe that fraud by election officials “rarely” or “never” occurs by 6.3 percentage points. Both results were “statistically significant” (so large that they would not be produced by random chance alone in 95 out of 100 cases). While the impact of Sec. Scott’s appearance on Fox news fell short of statistical significance, each of its estimated effects was in the positive direction.

	Trust elections in your state “some” or “a lot”	Trust that illegal voting rarely or never occurs	Trust that fraud by election officials rarely or never occurs
Secretary of State information on how voting systems in Texas work	+13.0%*	+2.9%	+6.3%*
Secretary of State interview on Fox News explaining election safety measures	+2.5%	+3.4%	+1.3%

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

Georgia

In our sample of 1,224 respondents reflective of the eligible voter population of Georgia, we tested the effectiveness of the two videos described below:

- Treatment 1: The “[Secure the Vote: Voting System](#)” video, which explains how voting works in person in Georgia.

- Treatment 2: The [“Secure the Vote: Absentee Voting”](#) video, which explains how absentee ballot voting works in Georgia.
- Control: An advertisement for the [Cadillac Blackwing](#) that is wholly unrelated to elections.

Watching the video explaining how voting in person on Election Day works increased the percentage of Georgia respondents who reported that they trusted their own state’s elections “some” or “a lot” by 7.7 percentage points. Watching this video increased the percentage of Georgia respondents who reported that they believe that fraud by election officials “rarely” or “never” occurs by 5.2 percentage points. Watching the video explaining how absentee voting works increased this faith in election officials by 4.4 percentage points. Each of these results was “statistically significant” (so large that it would not be produced by random chance alone in 95 out of 100 cases).

	Trust elections in your state “some” or “a lot”	Trust that illegal voting rarely or never occurs	Trust that fraud by election officials rarely or never occurs
Information on how to vote on Election Day	+7.7%*	+3.6%	+5.2%*
Information on how to vote by absentee ballot	+2.1%	+2.1%	+4.4%*

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

Colorado

In our sample of 1,379 respondents reflective of the eligible voter population of Colorado, we tested the effectiveness of the two videos described below:

- Treatment 1: A [bipartisan video](#) with Secretary of State Jena Griswold (D) and former Secretary of State Wayne Williams (R) agreeing that Colorado elections are safe and secure.
- Treatment 2: A [fact-based video](#) from the Denver Elections Division providing information on how risk-limiting audits work.
- Control: An advertisement for the [Cadillac Blackwing](#) that is wholly unrelated to elections.

Watching the video explaining how risk-limiting audits work increased the percentage of Colorado respondents who reported that they trusted their own state’s elections “some” or “a lot” by 4.6 percentage points. This result was “statistically significant” (so large that it would not be produced by random chance alone in 95 out of 100 cases). Watching the video with the two Secretaries of State agreeing that elections are safe and secure did not have a significant impact on trust.

	Trust elections in your state “some” or “a lot”	Trust that illegal voting rarely or never occurs	Trust that fraud by election officials rarely or never occurs
Bipartisan message from two Secretaries of State	+0.9%	0.0%	1.3%
Information on Risk Limiting Audit in Denver	+4.6*	+1.7%	+1.7%

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

Los Angeles County

In our sample of 1,230 respondents reflective of the eligible voter population of Los Angeles County, we tested the effectiveness of the two videos described below:

- Treatment 1: A video produced by the [office of Registrar Dean Logan](#) explaining that his office is the official source for factual and unbiased information about the election.
- Treatment 2: A video produced by our research team based on [Instagram posts from the Registrar’s office](#) about how to cast your vote.
- Control: An advertisement for the [Cadillac Blackwing](#) that is wholly unrelated to elections.

Watching the video from Registrar Logan increased the percentage of Los Angeles County respondents who reported that they trusted their own state’s elections “some” or “a lot” by 7.5 percentage points. This result was “statistically significant” (so large that it would not be produced by random chance alone in 95 out of 100 cases). Watching the video that our team created from the Registrar’s Instagram posts (which simply rotated them with music in the background) did not have a significant impact on trust.

	Trust elections in your state “some” or “a lot”	Trust that illegal voting rarely or never occurs	Trust that fraud by election officials rarely or never occurs
Message from Dean Logan about official election information sources	+7.5*	+1.1%	+3.2%
Get-Out-The-Vote graphics with overlaid music	-0.6%	+3.2%	4.7%

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

About this Survey

This report details the experimental findings from the surveys that we conducted on diverse samples of American adults and those in four states and counties after the November 8, 2022, midterm elections. We fielded the surveys 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. We discussed these surveys 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 national sample includes 3,038 respondents drawn to reflect the United States voting age population along the lines of race, ethnicity, age, and gender (based on the 2021 American Community Survey), using the online Cint platform (formerly Luc.Id). Each of our state and county samples includes was drawn to reflect the voting age populations in each state or county. 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. We also removed observations that generated identical or nonsensical responses to our

open-ended questions, using survey weights to ensure that the remaining observations reflected the demographic characteristics of our target populations. (This slightly changed the estimated effect sizes contained in the February, 2023 version of this report, but none of the effects lost their statistical significance.) We provided all respondents the option of taking the survey in English or Spanish.

Below is the exact wording of the four questions that we asked respondents after watching the videos:

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

- Trust a lot
- Trust some
- Distrust some
- Distrust a lot
- Don't know/no opinion

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

- Trust a lot
- Trust some
- Distrust some
- Distrust a lot
- Don't know/no opinion

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.

- Vote fraud happens all of the time
- Vote fraud is very common
- Vote fraud occurs about half of the time
- Vote fraud occurs infrequently
- Vote fraud almost never occurs

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?

- Fraud by official state or county election authorities happens all of the time
- Fraud by official state or county election authorities is very common
- Fraud by official state or county election authorities occurs about half of the time
- Fraud by official state or county election authorities occurs infrequently
- Fraud by official state or county election authorities almost never occurs

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