

2022 Election Recap: Election Officials Leverage Lessons Learned and Prepare for a Successful 2024 Election Year

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Election Officials Made Significant Enhancements

During the 2022 midterm elections, election officials across the United States worked to leverage lessons from 2020 to improve operations and mitigate new and emerging risks. One of the most notable improvements was the expansion of early and absentee/mail-in voting.

In addition, officials implemented more robust security measures for voting systems to prevent unauthorized access and security risks. They also introduced new ways to track and report results to ensure transparency and accuracy. Additionally, officials increased voter education efforts to help voters understand voting procedures and address concerns or questions. Overall, these efforts helped to ensure that the 2022 elections were conducted fairly, securely, and with high levels of participation.

Let's look at the specific election trends and changes made in 2022.





Early and Absentee/Mail-in Voting Benefits Realized

One trend from the 2020 election that continued through 2022 was an increase in early and absentee/mail-in voting use.[1] Early and absentee/mail-in voting allowed people to securely and conveniently cast their ballots before Election Day, encouraging more people to participate in the electoral process and increasing voter turnout. This helped distribute the voting process and reduce the operational strain on Election Day. It also allowed people who had difficulty making it to the polls on Election Day due to work or other commitments to have their voices heard and their votes counted. Additionally, early voting helped reduce wait times for those who vote on Election Day since fewer people competed for a single day of voting, allowing more people to participate in the election.

From an election official's perspective, early and absentee/mail-in voting allow for more precise ordering of ballots and materials for Election Day. Election officials using more mail-in ballots realize cost efficiencies by reducing the need for physical poll sites, including staffing and security.[2] Early and absentee/mail-in voting allows election officials to identify and correct training or operational issues before Election Day. Election officials can also use the early and absentee/mail-in voting period to ensure operational and technical systems are working correctly. This can help prevent issues on Election Day and ensure that all votes are processed accurately.

[1] *https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/05/high-registration-and-early-voting-in-2022-midterm-elections.html*
[2] *https://voteathome.org/cost-savings/*

Security and Transparency Strengthened

In 2022, election officials nationwide implemented various technologies and processes to ensure a secure, accurate and reliable voting process. These included measures such as contingency systems, increased use of risk-limiting audits, and more stringent post-election audits. Organizations such as the Election Assistance Commission and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency collaborated with state and local election officials, as well as private sector partners, to strengthen election security, including:

01 **Making ballot paper records publicly available for inspection and testing before and after the election.**

02 **Establishing independent election monitoring bodies to ensure compliance with election rules and regulations.**

03 **Publishing detailed election results and data, including voter turnout figures, to ensure accuracy and fairness.**

04 **Ensuring access to reliable and secure voting systems to prevent fraud and manipulation.**

05 **Establishing clear rules for the media covering the election and ensuring accurate reporting.**

Additionally, many election officials took steps to improve transparency, such as providing more information on the voting process and publishing detailed results online. Measures were implemented to ensure that the public could observe the counting process, such as allowing observers from both political parties to watch the counting process.[3] One county election official in Texas went as far as to wear a mic and was live-streaming through the entire pre-during-post election process.

Other battleground jurisdictions altered how they ran elections. For example, in Nevada's Washoe County, the second-most populous in the state, election officials doubled the number of live-streaming cameras in the ballot-processing room to four, produced informational material on the vote-counting process, and installed a glass spectator booth for observers to watch votes being tallied.[4]

[3] *https://votingrightslab.org/the-transparency-trap-how-posting-ballot-images-online-may-sow-distrust/*
[4] *https://www.reuters.com/world/us/after-midterms-relieved-us-election-officials-look-2024-race-2022-11-18/*



Tracking and Reporting Innovated

Election officials used tracking and reporting tools to monitor the progress of the election, including the number of registered voters, voter turnout, and the number of ballots cast. Absentee/mail-in ballots were easier to track and less likely to be lost due to implementation of new technologies and procedures. Many states adopted ballot tracking systems that allowed voters to track their absentee/mail-in ballots from when they were mailed to when they were received. This helped ensure the accountability of ballots throughout the delivery process.

Another major focus of election officials in 2022 was public and voter education about participating safely and securely.



Voter Education Increased

Election officials enlisted the help of volunteers and other organizations to assist in providing resources to voters who needed help understanding the process or navigating any issues they encountered.

During the elections, officials spent time educating and informing voters about the voting process. They also increased outreach efforts by utilizing social media, email, and text to reach more potential voters. In addition, they used traditional methods such as direct mail and radio to spread the word about the upcoming elections. Finally, election officials worked with local organizations to ensure all eligible voters were registered in time for the upcoming elections.

Preventing Mistakes

Election administration is extraordinarily complex and varies by state. Election officials rely on many humans working part-time or as election judges infrequently. Thus, mistakes can happen because of the number of human beings involved. We must do what we can to mitigate errors in advance, recognize that they can occur, and find ways to address them immediately.

We can learn from past mistakes to improve in the future. Election officials can learn and then innovate and do so often. As an example, ballot tracking technology has emerged and expanded nationwide and now more than 100 million Americans have access to track their ballots. It was first created in Denver, CO, in 2009 and is now the fastest-growing technology innovation in elections. Epollbooks are another example of election officials and partners working together to mitigate risk, provide better service, and design solutions based on lessons learned from the past. Finally, many election officials have worked with partners to improve the mail ballot packet production process and design user-friendly voter instructions. These were all implemented in response to lessons learned. We must keep pursuing continuous improvement in the election process and leverage mistakes to learn and improve.

Looking Ahead: Early and Absentee/Mail-in Voting Will Continue to Increase

Legislation Supports Expanding Voting

The trend of expanding voting options for eligible voters through absentee/mail-in voting is rising in the United States. While there has been a lot of attention around restrictive voting bills throughout the nation over the past few years, in 2023, we are seeing far more legislatures introducing expansion voting bills. So far this year, state legislators have introduced 150 restrictive voting bills, 27 election interference bills, and 274 expansive voting bills. In addition, including early voting options were expanded in 30 states, allowing citizens to cast their ballots in person or by mail at least two weeks before Election Day.[5]

At least 67 bills in 25 states would expand access to mail voting. Some of these bills expand the categories of who can vote by mail, including at least eight bills in Connecticut, Missouri, New York, and West Virginia that would establish no-excuse mail voting. Additionally, at least 12 bills in Alaska, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, Oklahoma, and West Virginia would create a permanent absentee voting list. Other bills would establish a notice and cure process for issues with mail ballots, provide online opportunities for applying for and tracking mail ballots, and provide prepaid postage for returning mail ballots.

[5] *https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/policy-solutions/securing-2024-election*



97.3%
of ballots were delivered to voters on time by the USPS in 2022

Opponents of Early and Absentee/Mail-in Voting are Reversing Course

Many absentee/mail-in and early voting opponents are beginning to see the advantages and are now questioning the restrictive voting laws that made it harder to vote by mail.

Some political leaders have publicly addressed the voting restrictions as a self-defeating strategy by putting all eggs in the Election Day basket rather than expanding the voting time to allow more voter turnout.[6] Acknowledging too much money is being spent on litigation and not enough on education, outreach, and mobilization.

Concerns Over United States Postal Service Reliability Have Been Remedied

In 2020, concerns were raised over the United States Postal Service's (USPS) ability to manage the increase in vote-by-mail ballots. However, USPS proved its capability in 2020 with record speed and has continued to improve. During the 2022 election, the USPS implemented several measures to improve the process for absentee/mail-in ballots.

In 2021, the USPS created an election mail and Government Services Team dedicated to overseeing absentee/mail-in voting, ensuring timely delivery of election mail, including ballots, and coordinating with election officials to address any issues that may arise. This team educated and trained postal staff and took extraordinary measures to accelerate ballot delivery, including improvements to their vast network of regional processing centers to process large volumes of ballots quickly.

These measures successfully prioritized the timely processing and delivery of election mail during the 2022 election cycle. As a result, the USPS delivered 97.3% of identifiable and measurable ballots sent to voters on time, an increase from the 2018 and 2020 elections.[7] The USPS continues to improve support for election officials and operational efficiency and is ready to handle the absentee/mail-in voting increase in upcoming election cycles.

[6] *https://time.com/6240015/republican-mail-in-voting-rethink-trump/*
[7] *chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://about.usps.com/what/government-services/election-mail/pdf/usps-2022-post-election-analysis.pdf*

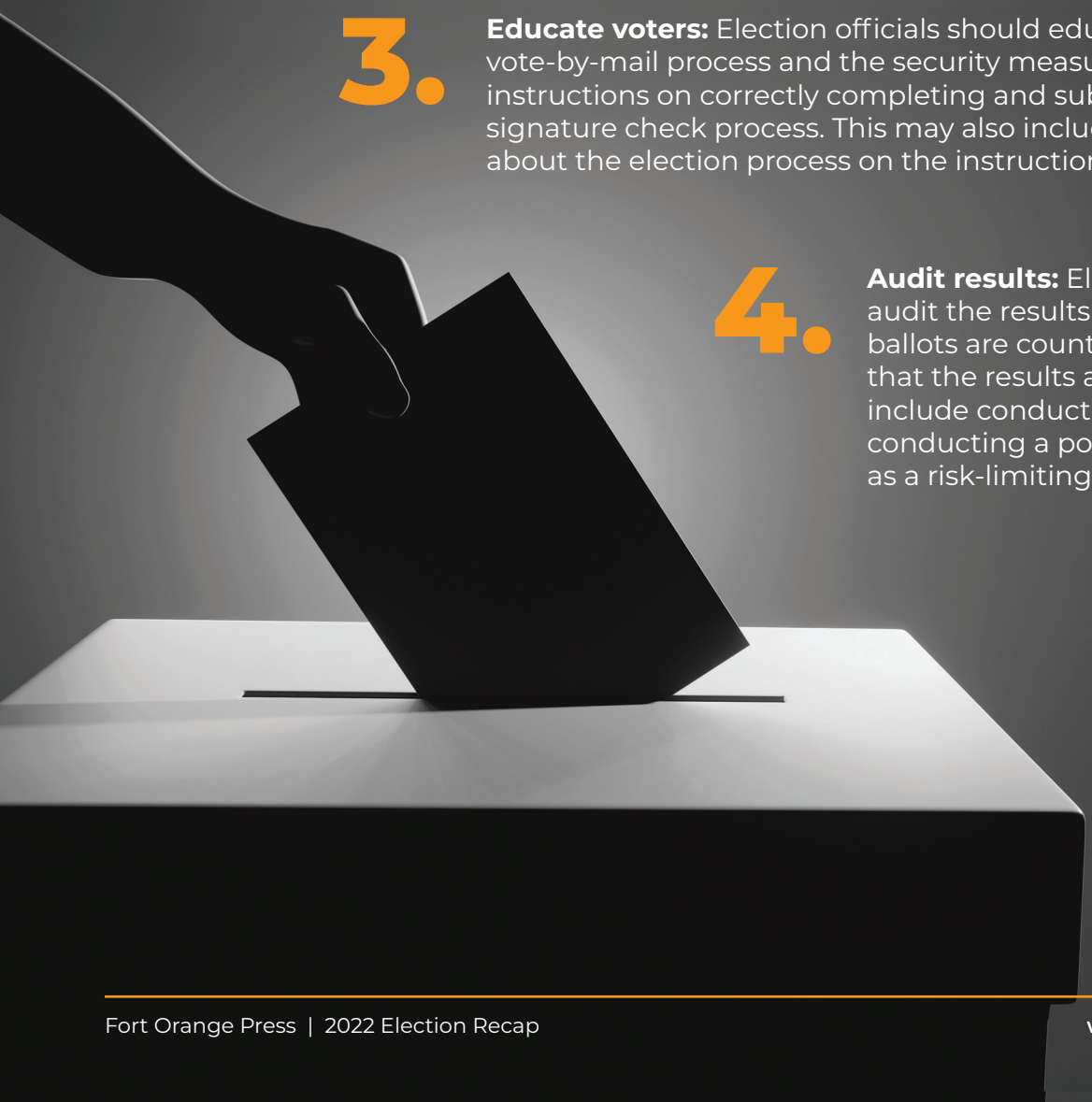
Vote-by-Mail Safeguards are in Place

Continuous improvement is critical to addressing emerging threats and issues and enhancing current systems. Thus, election officials must continuously evaluate the policies, processes, and technology and look for opportunities. Here are some examples of additional safeguards:

1. **Require signature verification or other validation measures:** States can require a signature verification process for each vote-by-mail ballot to ensure the registered voter casts the ballots. A few states also use other methods to validate the voter.

2. **Implement security measures:** Election officials should implement security measures to prevent unauthorized access to the absentee/mail-in system and any attempts at tampering. This could include using encryption, multi-factor authentication, and other security protocols. Security seals, time stamps on mail ballots, and utilizing intelligent mail barcodes will also enhance security.

3. **Educate voters:** Election officials should educate voters on the vote-by-mail process and the security measures. This could include instructions on correctly completing and submitting ballots and the signature check process. This may also include providing education about the election process on the instructions.



4. **Audit results:** Election officials should audit the results to ensure that all ballots are counted accurately and that the results are reliable. This could include conducting random audits or conducting a post-election audit such as a risk-limiting audit.



Preparing for the 2024 Elections

The 2022 election cycle went relatively smoothly. That does not guarantee the 2024 elections will follow the same path. There are things election officials can do now to best prepare for future elections.

1. Advocate for more funding for election infrastructure from the local, state and federal government (now) to ensure the necessary resources are available to maintain a secure and efficient election process.
2. Ensure that all election systems are updated with the latest security protocols and that potential security threats are addressed.
3. Develop comprehensive contingency plans for potential voting disruptions.
4. Train election officials on best practices for administering elections, including proper use of voting equipment and processes.
5. Invest in technology and infrastructure upgrades to ensure the voting process is efficient and secure.
6. Create an outreach program to educate the public on the election process and ensure all eligible voters know their rights and responsibilities.
7. Develop plans to ensure all eligible voters can access the polls through early voting and absentee/mail-in voting
8. Develop authentication methods that detect and prevent voter fraud.
9. Ensure that all voting systems are in proper working order.
10. Order all supplies far in advance and be sure all specifications and quality assurance are in place.
11. Ensure that all election materials are updated and properly stored.
12. Develop an effective communications plan to ensure that any information released to the public is accurate and timely.

Significant advancements in voting processes, security safeguards, voter education, and tracking and reporting transparency emerged in the elections of 2022. All helped to make the 2022 election run smoothly. Election officials seem ready to tackle the challenges ahead, even though 2024 is expected to bring new ones. By continuing the great work of 2022 and allocating the necessary resources now, election officials can have confidence in a successful 2024 election cycle.

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