

THE NEW CENTER

Policy Paper

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How to End the Voting Wars

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ABOUT THE NEW CENTER

American politics is broken, with the far left and far right making it increasingly impossible to govern. This will not change until a vibrant center emerges with an agenda that appeals to the vast majority of the American people. This is the mission of The New Center, which aims to establish the ideas and the community to create a powerful political center in today's America.

THE NEW CENTER

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NEW CENTER SOLUTIONS



Keep it Simple



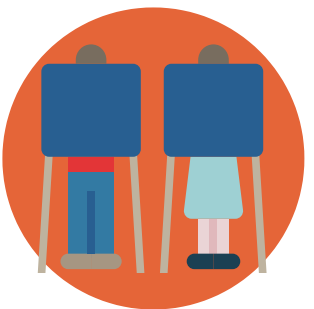
Let the States Take the Lead, with Federal Safeguards



Results by Midnight on Election Night Whenever Possible



Don't Make Early Voting Too Early



Make it Easier to Vote in Person



Mandate Voter ID... and Make it Easier to Get One



INTRODUCTION

For five years, much of the American public has been consumed by two beliefs about our election system that are based upon little to no evidence.

First, it was the belief that candidate and then President Trump was a Russian plant or in collusion with their government. The 22-month Mueller investigation found Russia was indeed trying to influence the 2016 election to favor Trump, but didn't find evidence that the president or his campaign was working with them to advance that goal. Nonetheless, in 2019, 48% of Americans continued to [believe](#) "Trump or someone from his campaign worked with Russia to influence the 2016 election."

Fast forward a few years, and today [29% of the public](#)—and 66% of Republicans—believe the 2020 election "was rigged and stolen from Trump" despite there being no credible evidence that this happened. After the election, the Trump campaign filed over [60 lawsuits](#) alleging various charges of election fraud, many evaluated by judges appointed by Trump himself. They were all thrown out.

If you want to understand why America in 2021 is mired in a voting war that seems to have no end, this is where you have to start. And for anyone who is really interested in ending this war, we need to change the conversation and focus on what it is really about.

In March 2020, COVID-19 arrived in the U.S. and ushered in the worst pandemic in 100 years.

With COVID-19 came extraordinary changes to how we registered, how we voted, how the votes were counted, and which officials held the power to set election procedures and litigate election disputes. Now Democrats and Republicans can't agree on the proper balance between election security and accessibility. Should the measures implemented during the pandemic be considered the new normal moving forward? Should we revert back to the pre-pandemic status quo? Or should we opt for something in between?

These are the questions that really need to be answered to finally bring peace to our voting wars, but America's collapsing trust in the foundations of our democracy and our government is making this especially difficult.

In January of 2021, [40% of voters](#) said they did not trust the U.S. election system. As if this wasn't alarming enough, it appears that Americans' faith in the system depends almost entirely on whether people liked the outcome of the most recent election.

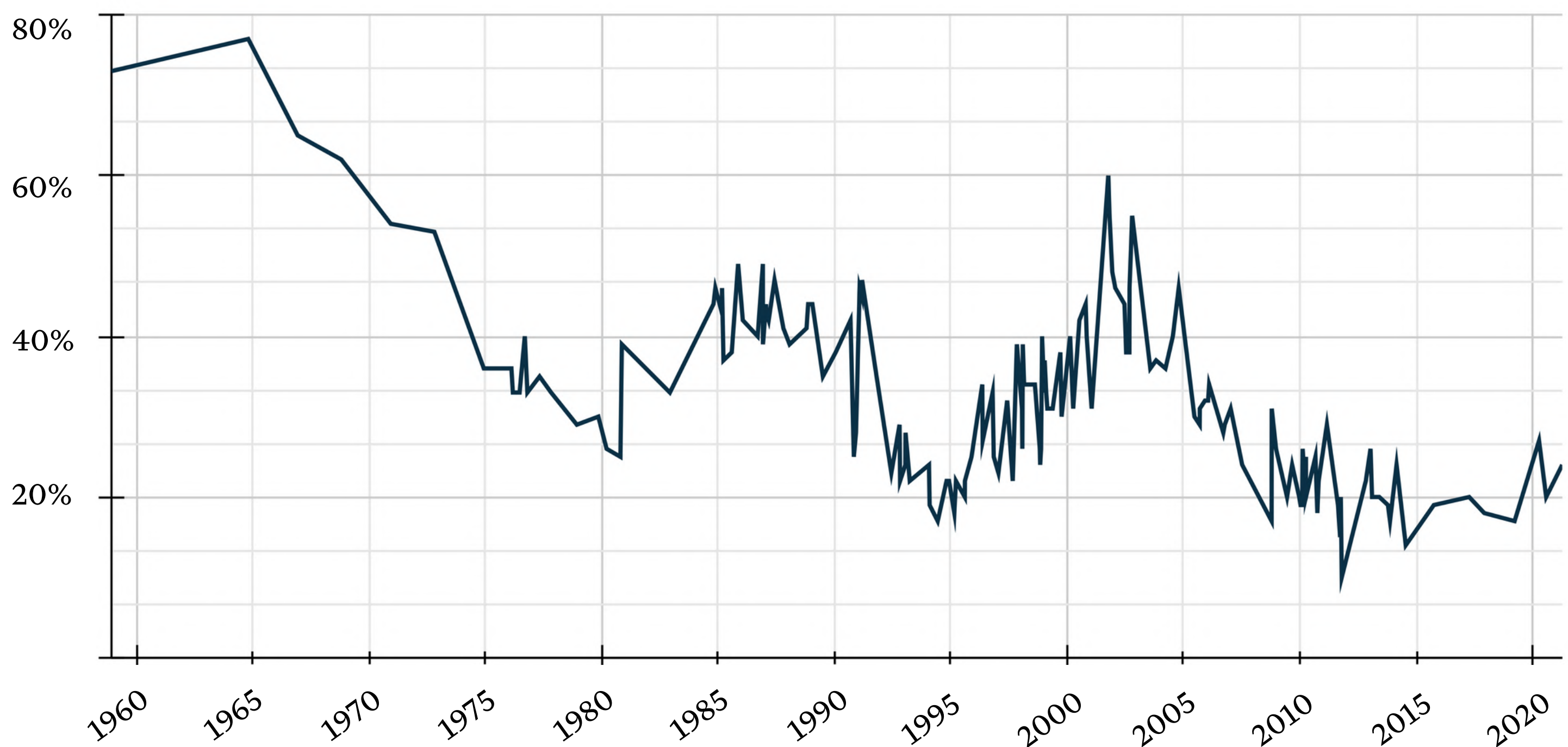
In an earlier version of the [same poll](#), taken just before the 2020 election, more Republicans (66%) than Democrats (63%) said they trusted the U.S. election system. After the election, on [November 9](#), these numbers flipped, with 34% of Republicans and 78% of Democrats indicating their trust.

It's easy to try to explain away this mistrust on the Republican side as just the consequence of Donald Trump's "Big Lie" about the 2020 election. If he'd stop lying about it, trust would be restored. And make no mistake: Former President Trump's unproven accusation that the 2020 election was stolen has been echoed by a troubling number of conservative voices and leaders.

But, in reality, the problem goes deeper. A defining feature of life in our new, freewheeling information age is that people just don't trust anyone or anything—especially leaders in government.

Since 1958, Pew Research Center has been asking Americans whether they trust the government to do what is right. Trust in government collapsed during the Watergate era, and while there have been spikes in the years since, trust today is near an all-time low.

Public Trust in Government, 1958-2021



Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

Now, voters in each party are inhabiting two separate realities when it comes to their views on voting. A recent [Quinnipiac poll](#) that asked voters to identify their biggest concerns about voting found 82% of Republicans most concerned about voter fraud and 84% of Democrats most concerned about voter suppression.

It's as if Democrats and Republicans don't just disagree on who they want to win the game... they don't even agree on what the rules should be, they believe the other team is cheating, and they also suspect the referees are pulling for the other side.

This voting battle is turning into a war, and neither side seems very interested in a negotiated peace. To take an initial step toward ending this war, we need a debate that moves beyond the grievances and resentments of the last two elections and focuses on which voting and election policies best balance the equally important imperatives of expanding voter access and enhancing the integrity of our electoral system.

This is a debate worth having—and one that needs to happen—to help America strengthen its election system in this age of mistrust. That’s why The New Center is taking on the challenge of forging a new consensus on an approach to voting reform that strikes the right balance between maximizing voter access and voting system integrity.

Securing democracy or stacking the deck?

Here are the core arguments and counter arguments from each side.

Democrats say Republicans have been hell-bent on making it harder for minorities and young people to vote.

The Republican counter? Minority and youth voting has been growing in every recent election, and overall turnout hit a [record high of 66.8%](#) in 2020. If Republicans are trying to suppress votes, they’re doing a terrible job of it.

Voter Turnout by Demographic Group, 2016 vs. 2020

		2016	2020	Percentage Point Increase
Gender	Men	59.3%	65%	+5.7%
	Women	63.3%	68.4%	+5.1%
Race	White	65.3%	70.9%	+5.6%
	Black	59.4%	62.6%	+3.2%
	Asian	49%	59.7%	+10.7%
	Hispanic	47.6%	53.7%	+6.1%
Age	18-40	51.7%	58.8%	+7.1%
	40+	68.3%	72.2%	+3.9%
Overall		61.4%	66.8%	+5.4%

Sources: [No Labels](#), [United States Census Bureau](#)

Republicans say voter fraud is rampant in America. [President Trump](#) says it's at a level you see in a “third world country.” But according to an analysis of the right-leaning Heritage Foundation’s election fraud database by researchers at MIT, only about [0.00006%](#) of all votes cast over the past 20 years have been fraudulent.

Here’s the thing: both of those stats—cited endlessly by Republican and Democratic commentators—are correct. And yet, they are clearly failing to convince partisans on the other side to abandon their deeply held beliefs.

In a world in which everyone mistrusts institutions and thinks the worst of partisans on the other side, facts or the particulars of voting reform proposals often don’t matter. What matters most is the widespread belief on each side that the other side has ulterior motives for what they are doing... that all the talk of “good government” and “integrity” and being “for the people” is just a cover for raw power grabs. Can you blame people for feeling this way?

Right now, Republican state legislatures across America are pushing voting and election reform measures with zero support from Democrats, who in some cases are going to great lengths to thwart their efforts. In July 2021, a group of at least 51 [Texas Democratic legislators](#) fled the state in order to block a vote on new voting restrictions.

Meanwhile, Democrats in the U.S. Congress are pushing their own voting reforms—like the federal For the People Act (H.R. 1)—without any Republican support.

Hyperpartisanship at the State and Federal Levels: Party-Line Votes on Both Sides

- [H.R. 1](#) passed with support of 220/221 Democrats, 0/209 Republicans in the House
- Georgia - [SB 202](#) passed with support of 100/100 Republicans, 0/75 Democrats in the House; 34/34 Republicans, 0/20 Democrats in the Senate
- Arizona - [SB 1003](#) passed with support of 31/31 Republicans, 0/29 Democrats in the House; 16/16 Republicans, 0/14 Democrats in the Senate
- Kansas - [HB 2332](#) passed with support of 83/83 Republicans, 0/38 Democrats in the House; 27/27 Republicans, 0/11 Democrats in the Senate
- Iowa - [SF 413](#) passed with support of 57/57 Republicans, 0/37 Democrats in the House; 30/30 Republicans, 0/18 Democrats in the Senate

Both sides are fanning the flames of distrust

Unfortunately, Trump’s ‘Big Lie’ campaign has fanned destructive impulses on both sides. Enhancing election integrity and promoting voter access are two equally important goals. However, several Republican measures at the state level ostensibly intended to enhance voter integrity might reduce voter access, while some of the measures outlined in H.R. 1 could expand access while harming the integrity of the election system and reducing the public’s trust in it. Below are some of the most egregious examples.

Republicans

Since the conclusion of the last election, Republican state legislatures have proposed at least [400 bills](#) related to voting and the administration of elections.

A proposal introduced in Arizona would require mailed ballots to be [postmarked](#) no later than the Thursday before Election Day, even if they arrived at the election office on or before Election Day. A bill in Iowa would require ballots to be postmarked no later than [10 days](#) before the election. While arrival deadlines are more reasonable, long postmark deadlines can disenfranchise voters in a way that does not meaningfully address the issue of election integrity.

In Georgia, the recently passed [SB 202](#) allows for a transfer of power from bipartisan or nonpartisan county election boards to the State Elections Board composed mostly of individuals elected by the state legislature—which is controlled by Republicans. According to [the bill](#), “the State Election Board may suspend county or municipal superintendents and appoint an individual to serve as the temporary superintendent in a jurisdiction” in up to four counties at a time. Here’s why this could be such a big problem.

State and local election boards aren’t perfect. They can be staffed by very partisan officials and a few—like the New York City [Board of Elections](#), for example—have long and sordid records of seedy patronage and incompetence.

But many others are staffed by courageous people—Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger is one who comes to mind—who can at least provide some buffer between the sometimes baser instincts of completely partisan state legislatures. Georgia’s SB 202 could undo that buffer.



Make no mistake about it: transferring the final say on the certification of election results from secretaries of state and other competent authorities to partisan state legislatures could create a national crisis if legislatures overturned the valid results of their states' presidential elections with false charges of widespread fraud.

All 50 states have various laws and requirements regarding the conduct, rights, and responsibilities of partisan poll watchers. But the recently passed voting law in Texas makes it the only state to grant “[free movement](#)” to poll watchers within a polling place, raising concerns that they could interfere with or try to intimidate voters.

Democrats

H.R. 1, House Democrats' sweeping election reform bill, would prohibit any state law that limits ballot collection (often referred to as [ballot harvesting](#)). The absence of such laws would allow any person—even a political operative—to deliver a voter's absentee ballot to a drop box for them. In fact, they could deliver hundreds of voters' ballots so long as they weren't paid by the volume of ballots they delivered. These operatives could also theoretically influence voters' decisions or even destroy ballots altogether.

H.R.1 would also require all voting list maintenance and removals of newly ineligible voters to be completed [at least six months](#) before an election. While a list-maintenance deadline is necessary to allow for the opportunity to correct any errors prior to the election, a deadline six months prior to the election will all but ensure that ineligible voters remain on the list. According to the [Bipartisan Policy Center](#), “This change—pushed back from the current 90 days—would make it functionally impossible for some states to ever perform maintenance, due to their election schedules, leading to increasingly bloated rolls that become targets for misinformation campaigns.”

H.R. 1 would also prevent states from setting Election Day deadlines for the receipt of absentee ballots, requiring them to count ballots that arrive up to [10 days](#) after the election to account for postal service delays. But to many, the longer it takes to announce the results of an election, the less legitimate those results will seem.



Trump's Big Lie and the Democrats' bait and switch

Fights over fairness and mistrust of the system are not new. In 1960, some supporters of Richard Nixon believed that John F. Kennedy's victory was a result of irregularities in [Cook County, Illinois](#). In 2000, some supporters of Al Gore blamed his loss to George W. Bush on mishaps in the state of [Florida](#). But the difference between these losing candidates and Donald Trump is that Nixon and Gore ultimately backed down and accepted the results, prioritizing the health of the country over their own personal interests. "We are a nation of laws, and the presidential election of 2000 is over," Gore said in November 2001. "Right now our country faces a great challenge as we seek to successfully combat terrorism."

Following his loss in the 2020 election, however, Donald Trump and his campaign filed dozens of lawsuits contesting results over accusations of widespread voter fraud. The Trump campaign asserted that there were more votes than registered voters in some jurisdictions, that poll watchers weren't allowed inside polling sites, and that the voting machines were rigged, among other allegations. As noted earlier in this report, [over 60](#) of these lawsuits have been dismissed—in many cases by judges who were appointed by Trump himself.

Several judges have included in their rulings scathing criticisms of the former president's attempts to overturn the election. In his dismissal of a case filed in Wisconsin, Trump-appointed federal judge [Brett H. Ludwig](#) called the legal arguments set forth by the Trump team "contrary both to the plain meaning of the Constitutional text and common sense." [Stephanos Bibas](#), another Trump appointee, wrote in his ruling against efforts to overturn the Pennsylvania results, "Charges of unfairness are serious. But calling an election unfair does not make it so. Charges require specific allegations and then proof. We have neither here."

In recent months, many states have also completed audits of the November election and come up with nothing. Following the 2020 election, the [Michigan Senate Oversight Committee](#) compiled a panel tasked with conducting a comprehensive investigation into allegations of election fraud in the state. The final report states that, while there is room to improve the state's election procedures, "There is no evidence presented at this time to prove either significant acts of fraud or that an organized, wide-scale effort to commit fraudulent activity was perpetrated in order to subvert the will of Michigan voters."

Trump's claims of widespread election fraud simply don't hold up and don't deserve a serious hearing. But Trump and other Republicans have voiced a separate concern that very much does.

In 2020, amid widespread fears that voting in person could expose people to COVID, many governors and state legislatures took extraordinary measures to expand access to mail and absentee voting, to change ballot deadlines, and to make changes to other election procedures. Now, many Democrats seem to be taking the position that these exceptional measures taken during the pandemic should be the new baseline for voting and conducting elections in the future, and that anything short of this baseline constitutes voter suppression.



In addition, many top Democrats have employed rhetorical excesses in their condemnation of Republican voting proposals—President [Joe Biden](#) has referred to Republican-backed state legislation as “Jim Crow on steroids.” Other have described them as “[Jim Crow 2.0](#),” which is to say they are suggesting the new Republican proposals are somehow worse than the original Jim Crow era, which entailed poll taxes and literacy tests, violent intimidation of Black voters by the KKK, and even outright prohibitions on Black voters participating in party primaries in southern states. To suggest that any voting measures being debated today in America are somehow worse than this is simply irresponsible demagoguery.

Further, in implementing certain measures of their own, some Democratic legislatures and governors arguably violated their own election laws or state constitutions. A few of these cases sparked lawsuits.

For example, the state of Pennsylvania—under Democratic governor Tom Wolf—controversially pushed back its deadline for the receipt of [absentee ballots](#), seemingly at odds with Pennsylvania state law, the day before the June 2, 2020 primary election. University of Virginia law professor Michael Gilbert, who specializes in elections, cited a [Pennsylvania case](#) in his criticism of the state Supreme Court for upholding this change: “As long as you’ve... mailed your ballot by Election Day, according to the [Pennsylvania] Supreme Court, they have to count that as long as that ballot also makes its way to the relevant government office by Friday. The state statute seems to say the opposite...‘Nope, everything needs to be here by Tuesday.’”

Prior to the 2020 election, Pennsylvania also made several late-breaking changes to their election procedures, including deadline extensions for the receipt of absentee ballots and for ballot curing, which arguably directly violated the state’s election code. Other potentially problematic measures usurped the authority of the state legislature or allowed for inconsistent election procedures from county to county.

In Michigan, the [state election code](#) very clearly lays out the methods by which a voter may apply to vote absentee. However, prior to the 2020 election, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson allowed her office to mail unsolicited absentee [ballot applications](#) to all registered voters.

In Texas, Governor Greg Abbott added six extra days of early voting in response to the pandemic, moving the start date from October 19 to October 13, three weeks before Election Day. However, the [Texas Election Code](#) states, “The period for early voting by personal appearance begins on the 17th day before election day and continues through the fourth day before election day.” If that day falls on a weekend, which it did in 2020, the early voting period begins on the next weekday. Several Republicans [filed suit](#) in response to the change, but the court rejected their request, arguing that a reversal of the Governor’s ruling so close to the election would confuse voters.

Harris County, Texas, where Houston is located, offered one day of 24-hour early voting—a rarity in Texas and nationwide—in the 2020 general election to increase voter access during the pandemic. Now, Texas Republicans are pushing for a return to normal voting hours, and critics—including [Isabel Longoria](#), the Elections Administrator of the heavily Democratic county—have decried these efforts as voter suppression.

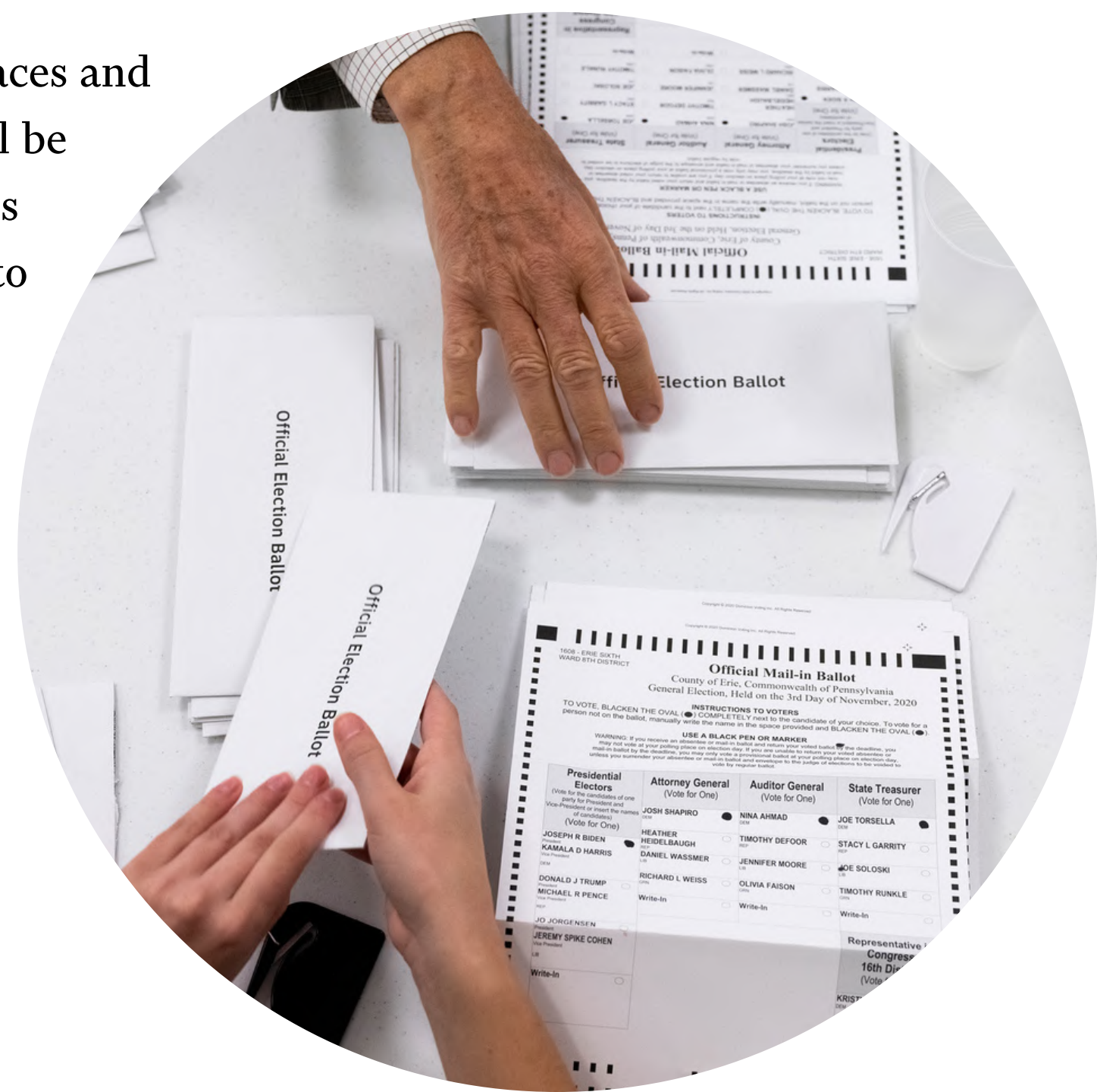
Going forward, should Houston continue to offer 24-hour voting? And should states like Michigan and Pennsylvania make permanent some of the steps they took during COVID to expand voting access? These are questions about which reasonable people can disagree.

But some Democrats are being outrageous when they suggest that every exceptional provision adopted to deal with the pandemic in 2020 needs to become the new normal for every election in the future, and anything short of that constitutes voter suppression.

Who has the power to set election policy?

[Section 4 of Article 1](#) of the Constitution states that “The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of chusing [sic] Senators.”

This ambiguous language has created plenty of debate about where the right for states to run their own election ends, and Washington’s right to mandate certain laws and procedures begins. In cases of conflict about particular measures at either the state or federal level, it will be up to the courts to resolve boundary disputes.



But all constitutional concerns aside, H.R. 1 raises serious issues of practicality. Bill Gardner, New Hampshire’s Democratic Secretary of State, has argued that sweeping changes would be unnecessary and onerous for his state, which has seen the third-highest voter turnout among states in each of the last four presidential elections. As he explained in a [statement](#) published in response to H.R. 1, “This egregious over-reach of federal authority that flagrantly ignores or diminishes the provisions of our state constitution is wrong. The simplicity of New Hampshire elections will be gone... New Hampshire has a solid track record for running sound and trouble free elections that do not warrant this type of federal meddling.”

Following the bill’s initial introduction in 2019, a group of 16 Republican Secretaries of State [signed a letter](#) opposing H.R. 1. While some expressed their approval of certain individual provisions, the letter also emphasized the logistical, financial, and technological burdens it would place on state election administrators. While a separate group of Democratic Secretaries of State drafted their own [letter in support](#) of the bill earlier this year, it did not address any of the above concerns.

New Center Solutions

For any American or elected official who wants to embrace the cause of ending America’s voting wars, here are a few key principles to follow that can both increase American’s access to the vote and ensure the integrity of our election system.



KEEP IT SIMPLE

What makes a voter trust the outcome of an election? It turns out researchers have a good answer. According to the [Survey of Performance of American Elections](#) conducted annually by MIT’s Election Data + Science Lab, a voter will trust the system if it’s easy to find the polling place, the line is short, the equipment works, and the ballot instructions are clear—even if the voter’s preferred candidate doesn’t win. If the election is poorly run and the voting process is a headache, on the other hand, voter skepticism is more likely to arise. But luckily, measures to promote a smooth voting experience are generally uncontroversial. Adding polling places in densely populated areas, keeping equipment updated, avoiding complicated voting procedures, and erring on the side of overcommunication with voters prior to an election are all easy ways to instill trust in the system.

States would also be well advised to put in deadlines—at least 3-6 months out from an election—for when election procedures can be changed to prevent confusion among voters about the implications of late-breaking voting rules and to prevent voter suspicion that rules are being changed to favor one side.

Caucuses: Four states—Iowa, Nevada, North Dakota, and Wyoming—hold caucuses rather than primaries to select their nominees for the presidential election. Rather than casting a ballot privately, caucus participants gather in groups in support of their favorite candidate. Often, caucuses take place for only a few hours in a select few locations, making them less accessible to the average voter than primaries.

In February 2020, the Iowa Democratic party held its caucus, the first event on the presidential primary calendar. In an effort to modernize the caucus—the Democratic National Convention ordered states to either switch to primaries or make their caucuses more inclusive—Iowa used an app that would compile the results, but a coding error caused a several-day reporting delay. There were so many discrepancies in the final tally that [The Associated Press](#) decided not to declare a winner. Facing criticism of the disastrous event, Iowa Democratic Party chairman Troy Price [announced his resignation](#). “[T]here is no doubt that the process of reporting results did not work,” he wrote in his resignation letter. “It was simply unacceptable.”

In the 2020 presidential nomination contests, average turnout was about [five times higher](#) in the primaries than in the caucuses. Caucuses are a relic of the past, and the states that still use the caucus system could simplify the voting process significantly by switching to primaries.



LET THE STATES TAKE THE LEAD, WITH FEDERAL SAFEGUARDS

The original sin of H.R. 1 is that it simply tries to do too much. Besides its expansive voting and election reforms, it also contains provisions dealing with everything from campaign finance to ethics rules for members of Congress and the Supreme Court. Congress could instead look to a different federal bill—H.R. 4, the [John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#)—as a potential starting point. [Co-sponsored](#) in the Senate by 46 Democrats and Republican Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, the bill rests on the principle of state autonomy within limits. If passed, states would still have the power to set their own election policy, but states or jurisdictions with repeated voting rights violations in the past 25 years would be required to obtain “pre-clearance” from the U.S. Department of Justice or a judge before making changes to their election code. The bill defines qualifying practices as “violations of the 14th or 15th Amendment, violations of this Act, or violations of any Federal law that prohibits discrimination in voting on the basis of race, color, or membership in a language minority group.”

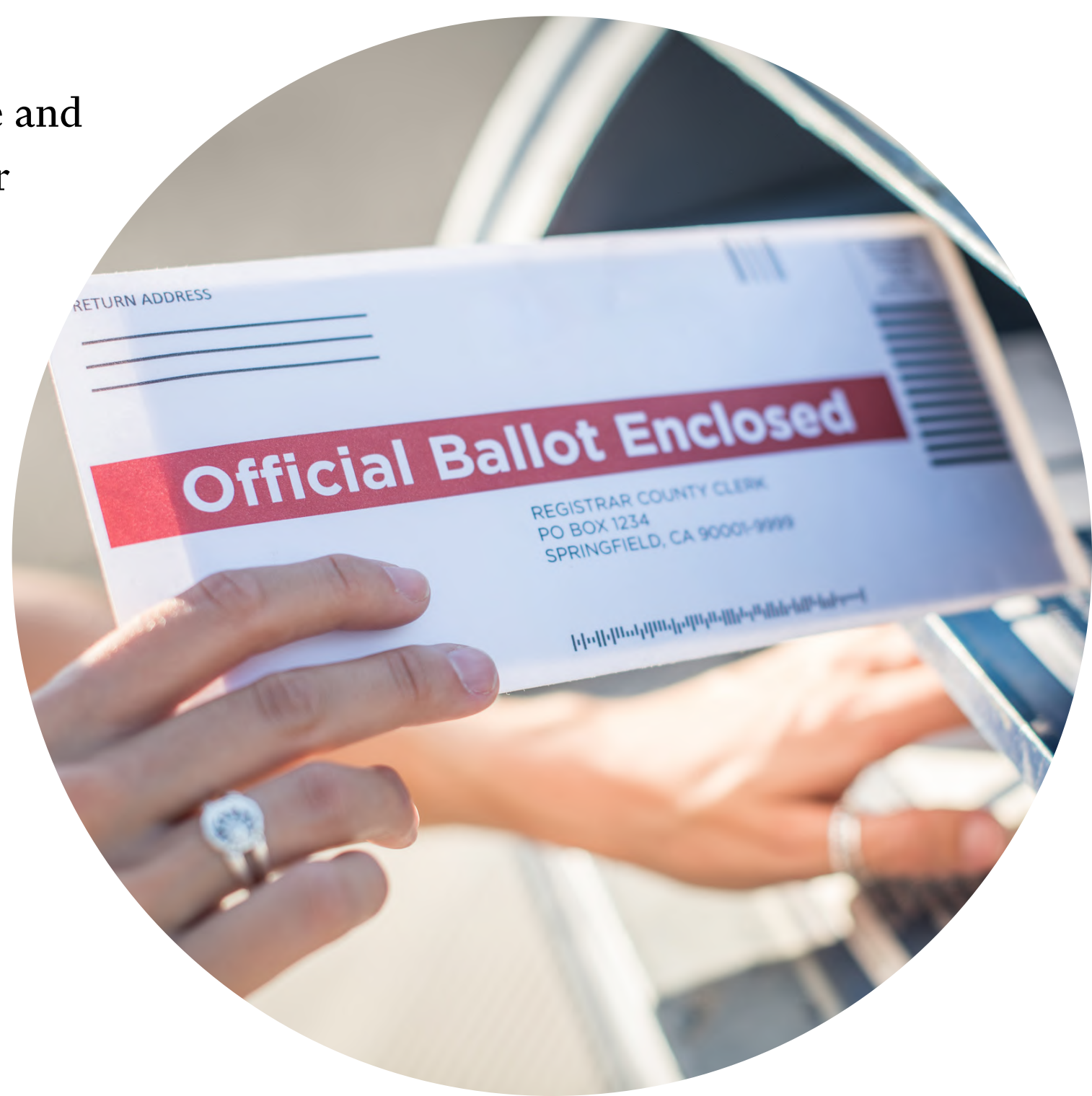
Pre-clearance was included in the original [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) (VRA), but it became virtually unenforceable as a result of the Supreme Court’s 5-4 decision in [Shelby County v. Holder](#) in 2013. In this decision, the Court ruled that an outdated formula was being used to determine which states would need to obtain pre-clearance. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would comply with the Shelby County v. Holder decision by introducing a new formula that would focus on current practices rather than historical discrimination.

Although H.R. 4 is grounded in an important principle—that the federal government needs to retain some ability to set guardrails on election processes—critics have pointed to several concerns about how it might be implemented in the real world. It may be too expansive, as it covers more than just preclearance, and it also would apply federal supervision to every state as opposed to just the southern states with segregationist histories. And if the language in the final bill were to give the Department of Justice too much power, it could also create the possibility for political mischief with whichever party controls the executive branch harassing political officials from the other party at the state level.

In August 2021, a group of 15 GOP representatives penned a letter to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi urging her to reconsider the contents of the bill before moving forward with a vote. H.R. 4, [they write](#), “would federalize our election system” and “give more power to unelected bureaucrats in Washington.” But there is a strong argument to be made that the federal government needs to reserve some process to prevent states from enacting egregious measures, and preclearance as outlined in the John Lewis Act could at least provide a set of principles as a starting point for debate.

In September 2021, a group of Senate Democrats including key moderate Joe Manchin introduced the [Freedom to Vote Act](#), a bill which supporters say aims to promote both voter access and election security. To expand voting access, it would make Election Day a national holiday, require states with voter ID to accept a wide range of identifying documents, require states to allow at least 15 days of early voting, and strengthen national standards for voting list maintenance, among other provisions.

To promote security, it would provide grants for states to update and improve their voting systems, require the use of paper ballots for verification, require states to conduct post-election audits, and implement measures that bill supporters say would protect nonpartisan election officials from undue partisan interference. Notably, the bill does not include any of the measures outlined in the John Lewis Act, and it also does not yet have any Republican support, meaning it faces a steep 60-vote hurdle to bypass a Senate filibuster.





RESULTS BY MIDNIGHT ON ELECTION NIGHT WHENEVER POSSIBLE —AND THE MORNING AFTER THE ELECTION AT THE LATEST— IN ALL BUT EXCEPTIONAL CASES

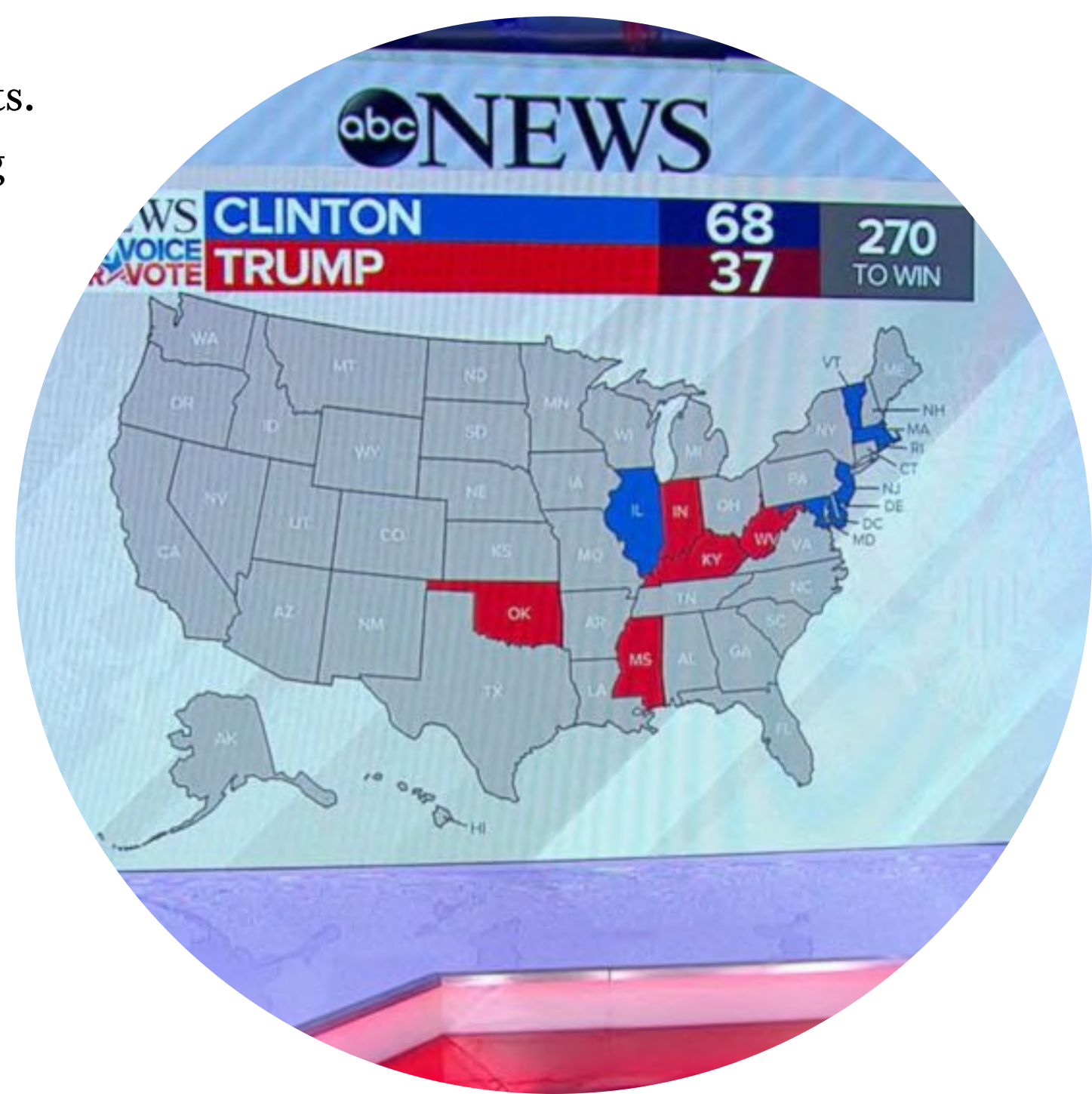
Results reporting delays can open the door to conspiracy theories and misinformation. Just prior to the 2020 election, Lisa Schaefer, executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, [expressed fears](#) about the consequences of a reporting delay: “The longer it takes for the election results to be known, the greater the risk that they’re going to be questioned and second-guessed, and that we’re going to be that national news story that we really don’t want to be.”

Due in part to the flood of absentee ballots cast in the 2020 Election, Joe Biden was not declared the winner until Saturday, November 7—four days after Election Day. During this four-day limbo period, misinformation ran rampant online, providing further evidence that delays in reporting election results can easily feed paranoia and conspiracy theories.

Aside from the delay itself, the patterns that inevitably arise when results are reported several days after Election Day can lend themselves to mistrust. Because Republicans were more inclined than Democrats to vote in person in 2020, initial results showed a “red mirage,” or a disproportionate number of [Republican votes](#) in initial tallies. After the polls closed, late-night absentee ballot counts that skewed heavily in favor of Joe Biden appeared suspicious, but this phenomenon was entirely predictable given that many states did not begin processing absentee ballots until Election Day and accepted absentee ballots that arrived up to several days later.

To reduce the understandable widespread skepticism, legislatures and voting officials should do everything they can to declare winners on election night—and by the morning after the election at the latest. Of course, this might not be possible in particularly close races, but there are plenty of common-sense measures officials could implement to make the count quicker.

A great example is pre-canvassing requirements for absentee ballots. Pre-canvassing involves sorting, verifying, and otherwise preparing absentee ballots for tabulation prior to election day. In the 2020 election, [seven states](#) did not permit poll workers to begin this process until Election Day, all but guaranteeing that it would take several days to report results. These states could reduce administrative burdens and speed up the counting process by requiring election officials to canvass ballots as soon as they receive them. Further, states should require ballots to be postmarked 5 days ahead OR to arrive by Election Day in order to be counted.





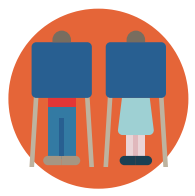
DON'T MAKE EARLY VOTING TOO EARLY

Allowing early voting is an important way to promote voter access and convenience. But while a presidential campaign is a marathon, the last few weeks leading up to election day can certainly be classified as a sprint. The month before a presidential election is packed with ad spending, presidential debates, and campaign stops as each candidate makes their final push to win support and turn out voters. This period was particularly important during the 2016 election. Just weeks before Election Day, over 20% of voters were either [undecided](#) or planning to vote for a third-party candidate.

However, in some states, early voters can miss out on these developments entirely, with early voting periods beginning [up to 46 days](#) before Election Day. In 2016, this meant that voters in at least seven states began casting their ballots before any of the three [presidential debates](#) occurred. Further, both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton [spent more](#) on advertising and in-person appearances in the two-week period leading up to the 2016 election than they did in any previous month of their campaigns.

When early voting begins too far in advance of Election Day, campaigns become more about parties rallying their base than it does candidates trying to persuade voters. States should balance these priorities by allowing for an early voting period that begins no more than two weeks prior to the election.





MAKE IT EASIER TO VOTE IN PERSON

In today's digital age, our lives are more publicized than ever. Even so, one aspect of our lives that is still private is our vote. According to a [2016 report](#) from the Electronic Privacy Information Center, the Verified Voting Foundation, and Common Cause, "The right to cast a secret ballot in a public election is a core value in the United States' system of self-governance. Secrecy and privacy in elections guard against coercion and are essential to integrity in the electoral process."

In a [survey](#) of individuals who voted in the 2010 midterm elections, those who voted absentee were 10 percentage points more likely than in-person voters to say that their vote was not private. Over 23% of the absentee voters also said at least one other person was in the room with them when they filled out their ballots.

Further, a [Harvard-Harris Poll](#) conducted in April 2021 asked respondents about their concerns of fraud in any aspect of the voting process. Of the 68% who said they were worried about fraud, 33% said they were mostly worried about mail-in voter fraud and only 18.5% said they were mostly worried about in-person voter fraud (49% were equally worried about both).

Absentee and mail ballots have historically been safe and secure ways for people to vote, and there is nothing wrong with states making this option easily accessible provided they have the proper safeguards to verify identity. But Americans also tend to trust in-person voting more, and that's an important fact in this new age of mistrust. Here are a few ways to nudge more people to the polls and to make mail voting more secure:

- **Make Election Day a National Holiday.** This way, anyone who might have otherwise preferred the convenience of absentee voting would have the day off from work to go to the polls.
- **Voters Need to Request Mail or Absentee Ballots.** Let's put an end to the mass, indiscriminate mailings to every voter that some states embraced amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **No Ballot Harvesting.** To limit undue influence on voters' private decisions, ballot canvassing (or harvesting) should be limited to family members or caretakers of elderly or disabled voters.





MANDATE VOTER ID... AND MAKE IT EASIER TO GET ONE

A supermajority of Americans across the political spectrum think people should have to prove their identity as a condition of voting.

A [June 2021 poll](#) from Monmouth University found that 80% of Americans support photo ID requirements and only 18% oppose them.

But here's the problem: Some states only accept government-issued photo IDs and some voters—the elderly, low-income people, people of color, or those living in rural areas—might not be able to travel or pay the fees necessary to get this ID.

States can promote access and integrity by making voter ID laws universal, but also making it much easier for people to meet ID requirements. This can involve accepting a wider range of photo IDs or simplifying the process of obtaining a government-issued photo ID.

Voting list maintenance, when done properly, is also crucial to ensuring that voter rolls are up to date and that individuals who have moved or passed away are removed. It's a big problem when list maintenance technology is error-prone and affected voters do not receive sufficient notice of their removal. One valuable resource to help prevent errors in the first place is [Electronic Registration Information Center \(ERIC\)](#), a nonprofit that allows states to share data such as voter registration lists with each other to help identify who should be removed and who should not. Thirty states and Washington, D.C. are currently members.

As with any technology, mistakes will always be inevitable, but there are ways in which states can prepare for them and rectify them quickly. Currently, each state has a deadline by which all list maintenance must be completed. If the deadline is too far in advance of the election, voter rolls will be outdated and inaccurate on Election Day. But if it is too close to Election Day, it is less likely that there will be enough time to notify voters and allow them to rectify mistakes. States should set list maintenance deadlines around one month before Election Day.

There are also easy ways to speed up the process of notifying voters who are removed from voter rolls. Rather than sending mail notifications, which can be slow to arrive and easily mistaken for junk mail, voters should be notified via several communication channels, including phone and email, to ensure that they are aware of their removal and given plenty of time to correct any mistakes.



CONCLUSION

Over the past several months, “[easy to vote](#), [hard to cheat](#)” has become a widespread mantra among legislators attempting to reform election policy. But their actions have not aligned with their words.

Both election access and integrity are integral parts of a functioning democracy, and contrary to the belief that they are mutually exclusive, the two priorities go hand in hand. Both Republicans and Democrats have valuable election reform ideas to offer, but blatantly partisan voting legislation passed with no input from the other side will only set us back further. It’s time to start treating voter access and election integrity as the co-equal priorities they are.

