



A DCI Deliberation Guide

Election Security

How should we improve confidence in the integrity of our elections?

Format for Deliberation

Before the Deliberation

- I. [Read this document \(Required\)](#)
- II. Read [Voter Fraud](#) by the Heritage Foundation and [Debunking the Voter Fraud Myth](#) by the Brennan Center for Justice (Optional)
- III. Read [Policy Proposals to Restore Faith and Trust in the U.S. Election System](#) by the Secure Elections Project and [9 Solutions to Secure America's Elections](#) by the Center for American Progress (Optional)

During the Deliberation

- I. Setting Expectations – 5 min.
- II. Getting to Know Each Other – 10 min.
- III. Understanding Concerns about Election Security – 15 min.
- IV. Voter Identification Requirements – 15 min.
- V. Ballot Processing Observations – 15 min.
- VI. Five Minute Break (Optional)
- VII. Mail-In Ballot Limits – 15 min.
- VIII. Voter Roll Purges – 15 min.
- IX. Election Infrastructure Updates – 15 min. (Optional)
- X. Other Ideas to Improve Confidence in Election Integrity – 15 min.
- XI. Reflections – 10 min.

Background

Americans' trust in our electoral system is waning. In early 2022, an ABC/Ipsos poll found that only 20% of Americans were very confident in the country's elections, down from 37% in 2021. These low levels of confidence spanned the ideological spectrum, with only 13% of Republicans, 20% of Independents, and 30% of Democrats indicating they were very confident in the integrity of the US electoral system.¹ Given these declining levels of trust, ***how do we improve the public's confidence in the integrity and security of our elections?***

¹ Shepherd, Brittany. "[Americans' Faith in Election Integrity Drops: Poll.](#)" CBS. Jan. 6, 2022.

Causes of Concern

Members of the public have a wide range of concerns about election integrity in the United States. In an Economist/YouGov 2021 poll about the 2020 election, large majorities of Republicans thought that mail-in ballots had been cast for people who had died or moved (86%), non-citizens were allowed to vote (79%), and election observers were prohibited from observing votes being counted (73%). A slim majority of Republicans believed that voting machines were programmed to change votes (57%) and ballots were shredded (56%).²

These are all examples of election crimes. Such fraud can be perpetrated by voters by giving false information when registering to vote, voting when ineligible to vote, or voting more than once or using someone else's name to vote. Election officials can also commit election fraud by, for example, changing a ballot tally or providing a voter with money or something of value in exchange for voting for a specific candidate or party.³

A wide range of organizations have investigated claims of fraud in the 2020 election and previous elections. For example, the Associated Press found less than 475 instances of potential voter fraud out of over 25 million votes, which would not have influenced the outcome of the 2020 presidential election.⁴ The Brennan Center found that "most reported incidents of voter fraud were actually the result of clerical mistakes or bad data matching practices." It found voter fraud incidents occurring between 0.0003% and 0.0025%, suggesting that an American is more likely to be hit by lightning than commit voter fraud.⁵ A 2022 Reuters report similarly concludes that "voter fraud in the US is not a widespread issue...but made exceedingly rare by existing safeguards." The report reviewed concerns about fraudulent ballots, voter registration discrepancies, misuse of drop boxes, destruction of ballots, electronic voting machines, and other issues, and found they were unfounded and unwarranted.⁶

However, the Heritage Foundation argues that voter fraud does occur, and that it can impact the results in tight races. For example, a 2015 city council election Perth Amboy, NJ was decided by 10 votes, and the outcome was overturned after evidence revealed 13 illegally cast absentee ballots. The Heritage Foundation cites a long history of voter fraud and various elections that have been impacted as a result. It claims its Election Fraud Database includes 1384 proven instances of voter fraud, 1191 criminal convictions, and 48 civil penalties.⁷ Using a different approach, the New York City Department of Investigation (DOI) reported that 61 of 63 people that it sent to polls in 2013 to attempt to vote under ineligible voters' names were able to do so. As the DOI report states, "the majority of those 63 ineligible individuals remained on the rolls nearly two years or longer since a death, felony conviction, or move outside of the City."⁸

² YouGov. "[What Americans think about January 6, election integrity, and voting rights.](#)" June 13, 2022.

³ Federal Bureau of Investigation. "[Election Crimes and Security.](#)"

⁴ "Cassidy, Christina. "[Far Too Little Vote Fraud to Tip Election to Trump, AP Finds.](#)" Associated Press. Dec. 17, 2021.

⁵ "[Debunking the Voter Fraud Myth.](#)" Brennan Center for Justice. Nov. 9, 2007.

⁶ Reuters Fact Check. "[Fact Check-Re-examining how and why voter fraud is exceedingly rare in the U.S. ahead of the 2022 midterms.](#)" June 2, 2022.

⁷ "[Voter Fraud.](#)" The Heritage Foundation.

⁸ Ballotpedia. "[Electoral Fraud.](#)"

Voter Identification Requirements

Some contend that voter ID laws are necessary to protect the integrity of election by reducing fraud, while others contend that voter ID laws place an undue burden on many voters and are unnecessary because incidents of fraud are rare. Currently, 35 states have laws that request or require voters to show identification at the polls.⁹ 18 of these states require a photo ID, and 12 require voters without an ID to take steps after the election to confirm their identity for their provisional ballot to be counted. Most of these states have exceptions to these requirements.¹⁰

Hans Von Spakovsky of the Heritage Foundation argues that all states should require voter IDs to ensure election integrity rather than risking ballots being “stolen or diluted by fraudulent votes.” He further argues that requiring voter ID “can significantly defeat and deter impersonation fraud at the polls, voting under fictitious names or in the names of dead voters, double-voting by individuals registered in more than one state, and voting by individuals who are in the United States illegally.” Voter ID laws, he argues, can restore Americans’ confidence in elections, which is necessary for a healthy democracy.¹¹

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Brennan Center for Justice assert that 21 million Americans (11%) lack government-issued photo identification. For these individuals, obtaining an ID for the purpose of voting would come at a cost, even if the ID is free; travel costs, time away from work, and costs associated with obtaining documents needed for an ID are burdens that disproportionately impact low-income, disabled, and rural citizens. Finally, minority voters are more likely than whites to lack government-issued IDs, and they are more likely than whites to be asked to produce one when voting in states where it is required.¹²

Ballot Processing Observation

Some argue that in order to restore trust in America’s elections, members of both political parties should be allowed to observe the counting of absentee and mail-in ballots.¹³ These poll watchers serve as the “eyes and ears of the two major political parties who help ensure that the actual mechanics of voting are administered fairly and accurately.”¹⁴ State policies vary widely on who can observe ballot counting and exactly what observers can oversee.¹⁵ Election observers seek to prevent fraud by watching voting and ballot counting for any irregularities; they are able to publicly identify any problems quickly to ensure election laws are followed. Prior to election days, they observe and scrutinize voter registration to ensure compliance with relevant laws.¹⁶ An experiment conducted by the MIT Election Data and Science Lab found that

⁹ [“Voter ID Laws.”](#) National Conference of State Legislatures. July 18, 2022.

¹⁰ [“Voter ID Laws.”](#) National Conference of State Legislatures. July 18, 2022.

¹¹ [“Arguments For and Against Voter Identification Laws.”](#) Ballotpedia.

¹² [“Arguments For and Against Voter Identification Laws.”](#) Ballotpedia.

¹³ Forbes, Steve. [“How to Restore Trust in Our Election Process.”](#) Forbes. Jan. 1, 2020.

¹⁴ Schoenbaum, Hannah and Nicholas Riccardi. [“Election Officials Brace for Confrontational Poll Watchers.”](#) Newsweek, October 2, 2022.

¹⁵ [“Policies for Election Observers.”](#) National Conference of State Legislatures. Oct. 13, 2020.

¹⁶ Collin, Katy. “Everything You Need to Know About Election Observers – and Why the U.S. Needs Them.” *Washington Post*. Oct. 28, 2016.

most types of poll watchers increase perceptions of electoral fairness, particularly if the observers are from both parties and have some form of identification.¹⁷

State laws vary, but in most states, if poll watchers suspect irregularities, they can challenge the legitimacy of the individual's right to legally vote.¹⁸ This practice has raised concerns about voter intimidation. For example, harassment and voter intimidation were reported in 2018 in Dallas County, Texas. Toni Pippins-Poole, the county's nonpartisan election director, stated, "I've been here for 30 years, and this harassment that's going on, I haven't ever seen the likes of this."¹⁹ The Texas Civil Rights Project reported receiving calls about intimidation by poll watchers, including looking over voters' shoulders as they were voting, taking notes on a clipboard, and asking who they were voting for. It also reports poll watchers targeting voters of color.²⁰ Some election officials are concerned that poll watchers will be even more confrontational in 2022, as the Republican National Committee (RNC) has recruited and trained 45,000 election observers in advance of the midterms.²¹ As the RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel stated, "The RNC has built an unprecedented election integrity ground game to ensure that November's midterm elections are free, fair, and transparent."²²

Mail-In Ballot Limits

Another tool some have recommended for increasing election integrity is to limit mail-in ballots to only those who request them. In 2020, a record 43% of voters cast their ballots via mail, but Republican-led states have begun to enact restrictions on these types of ballots, arguing they are necessary to ensure election integrity.²³ Currently 35 states and Washington, DC offer "no-excuse absentee voting," while 15 require voters to provide a reason for voting absentee. Eight states automatically mail a ballot to every eligible voter.

Some of the potential benefits of mail-in ballots include reduced in-person election costs and wait times, improved voter turnout and ease of voting for some voters, and better voter information and more flexibility to research the candidates before voting. There is some limited evidence of the effects of vote-by-mail on turnout. For example, Stanford University researchers who collected data from 1996-2018 found that vote-by-mail does not advantage either political

¹⁷ Sheagley, Geoffrey and Mollie Cohen. [Watchers at the Polls The Effect of Partisan Poll Watchers on Perceptions of Electoral Fairness](#). MIT Election Data and Science Lab, August 31, 2021.

¹⁸ Vladeck, Steve. "What Are Poll Watchers and What Are They Allowed to Do?" CNN. Oct. 29, 2016.

¹⁹ Paterson, Blake. "Tensions Are Running High in Texas, and People Are Reporting Cases of Voter Intimidation at Polling Places." Business Insider. Nov. 1, 2018.

²⁰ Eby, Emily and Joaquin Gonzalez. "Texas Civil Rights Project Poll Watcher Report." Texas Civil Rights Project.

²¹ Schoenbaum, Hannah and Nicholas Riccardi. "Election Officials Brace for Confrontational Poll Watchers." Associated Press, October 2, 2022; Dutton, Jack. "Republicans Recruit Army of 45,000 Poll Watchers Before Midterms." Newsweek. September 12, 2022.

²² Dutton, Jack. "Republicans Recruit Army of 45,000 Poll Watchers Before Midterms." Newsweek. September 12, 2022.

²³ Izaguirre, Anthony and Christina Cassidy. "After Voters Embraced Mail Ballots, GOP States Tighten Rules." AP News. Sept. 2, 2021.

party, and increased turnout by 2.1 to 2.9%.²⁴ Another study found that “counties that moved to send registered voters mail-in ballots ahead of Election Day experienced 2.6 percent higher turnout compared to counties that made no change.”²⁵

Some of the possible downsides of mail-in ballots include time delays in the return of completed ballots, increased risk of voter fraud and voter errors, confusion over voting deadlines, and mailing and processing costs. Some also cite the importance of the civic tradition of communal in-person voting, disparate effects on voters who do not have current postal addresses, and the potential for voter coercion in the home.²⁶ To the extent voters send in their mail-in ballots early, they may vote before important last-minute information about the candidates becomes available. Conversely, such early voting may reduce the impact of “October surprises” that cannot be verified before election day.²⁷

Voter Roll Purges

Some argue that voter rolls should be purged frequently to remove the names of those who have moved, died, or are incarcerated.²⁸ State officials are obligated by federal law to keep voter records updated so that they don’t become overwhelmed with outdated information.²⁹ Doing so helps inform planning for Election Day, minimize wait times at the polls, and simplify ballot counting by reducing the number of provisional ballots cast.³⁰ As part of this process, some states purge from the voter rolls those who have missed several consecutive elections and who have failed to respond to letters to confirm their residence. This practice, some argue, should be unconstitutional, as it prevents those who may be energized by a particular election from voting.³¹

Election Infrastructure Updates

Others have asserted that the focus of election integrity efforts should be on securing the nation’s election infrastructure. The Center for American Progress (CAP) has recommended voter verifiable paper ballots be required, old voting machines be replaced, election testing of all voting machines be performed, and voter registration systems be updated.³² While these solutions may be less controversial than the ones listed above, objections might center around their cost (CAP suggests the federal government pay for them) and the risks of one-size-fits-all standards that may be more vulnerable to hacking and fraud.

²⁴ Thompson, Daniel, Jennifer Wu, Jesse Yoder, and Andrew Hall. “[The Neutral Partisan Effects of Vote-by-Mail: Evidence from County-Level Roll-Outs.](#)” Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research. April 2020.

²⁵ Amlani, Sharif and Samuel Collitt. “[The Impact of Vote-By-Mail Policy on Turnout and Vote Share in the 2020 Election.](#)” *Election Law Journal*. June 6, 2022.

²⁶ National Conference of State Legislatures. “[Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options.](#)” July 12, 2022.

²⁷ ElectionBuddy. “[Pros and Cons of Voting By Mail.](#)” May 25, 2022.

²⁸ Forbes, Steve. “[How to Restore Trust in Our Election Process.](#)” Forbes. Jan. 1, 2020.

²⁹ Vasilogambros, Matt. “[The Messy Politics of Voter Purges.](#)” October 25, 2019.

³⁰ National Conference of State Legislatures. “[Voter Registration List Maintenance.](#)” October 7, 2021.

³¹ Smith, Paul. “[Use It or Lose It’: The Problem of Purges from the Registration Rolls of Voters Who Don’t Vote Regularly.](#)” American Bar Association. Feb. 9, 2020.

³² Center for American Progress. [9 Solutions to Secure America’s Elections.](#)” August 17, 2017.

Setting Expectations (5 min)

In this section, we will review the “Expected Outcomes,” Deliberative Dispositions,” and “Conversation Agreements” below.

Expected Outcomes of the Conversation

The purpose of this deliberation is to deepen our understanding of the arguments surrounding election security in the United States. Over the course of the deliberation, we will have the opportunity to listen to the perspectives of our fellow deliberators as well as share our own experiences and beliefs about election integrity. By the end of the conversation, we will have deliberated about the strongest and weakest arguments for how to improve confidence in the integrity of our elections in the United States. Finally, we will have reflected on our conversation, our areas of agreement and disagreement, and what we have learned from our time together.

Deliberative Dispositions

The DCI has identified several “deliberative dispositions” as critical to the success of deliberative enterprises. When participants adopt these dispositions, they are much more likely to feel their deliberations are meaningful, respectful, and productive. Several of the Conversation Agreements recommended below directly reflect and reinforce these dispositions, which include a commitment to egalitarianism, open mindedness, empathy, charity, attentiveness, and anticipation, among others. A full list and description of these dispositions is available at <https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/>.

Conversation Agreements

In entering this discussion, to the best of our ability, we each agree to:

1. Be authentic and respectful
2. Be an attentive and active listener
3. Be a purposeful and concise speaker
4. Approach fellow deliberators’ stories, experiences, and arguments with curiosity, not hostility
5. Assume the best - and not the worst - about the intentions and values of others, and avoid snap judgements
6. Demonstrate intellectual humility, recognizing that no one has all the answers, by asking questions and making space for others to do the same
7. Critique the idea we disagree with, not the person expressing it, and remember to practice empathy
8. Note areas of both agreement and disagreement
9. Respect the confidentiality of the discussion
10. Avoid speaking in absolutes (e.g., “All people think this,” or “No educated people hold that view”)

Getting to Know Each Other (10 min)

In this section, we will take less than a minute to share our names and answer one of the questions below.

1. What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or country?
2. What would your best friend say about who you are?
3. What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

Understanding Concerns about Election Security (15 min)

In this section, we will examine current concerns about election security. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer each of the questions below, without interruption or crosstalk.

- What are the ***strongest arguments for being concerned about the integrity of US elections?***
- What are the ***strongest arguments for NOT concerned about the integrity of US elections*** mentioned above?
- Which of these arguments do you find to be ***the most persuasive?*** Why?

After everyone has answered these questions, the group is welcome to take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions and responses. Continue exploring the topic as time allows.

Throughout your deliberations, if there is strong disagreement in the group, try to explore the underlying reasons for the disagreement – are they based on different factual interpretations, different value emphases, or different life experiences? Perhaps you can agree on where precisely you disagree, which can be helpful. Alternatively, if there is widespread agreement in the group, try to dig deeper and examine the nuances of these policies – are there particular contexts, for example, where your agreement breaks down? Or perhaps your reasons for supporting particular policies are different? Exploring this complexity can be helpful as well.

Voter Identification Requirements (15 min)

We will now evaluate specific measures to take related to election security, starting with voter identification requirements. We will each address the question below, and then together we'll explore our areas of agreement and disagreement.

- What are the ***strongest arguments FOR and AGAINST requiring voters to provide some form of identification when they vote?***
- Which of these arguments do you find to be ***the most persuasive?*** Why?

As time allows, we should engage with one another on our answers to these questions and the specifics of voter ID requirements. Should they be required or only requested? Should they require photos? How can IDs be made more accessible?

For further background on these issues, check out the National Conference of State Legislatures' resource on [Voter ID Laws](#).

Ballot Processing Observations (15 min)

We will now evaluate policies related to allowing representatives from political parties to observe and challenge the process of counting ballots. We will each address the question below, and then together we'll explore our areas of agreement and disagreement.

- What are the **strongest arguments FOR and AGAINST allowing poll watchers to observe and challenge the ballot counting process?**
- Which of these arguments do you find to be *the most persuasive?* Why?

As time allows, we should engage with one another on our answers to these questions and the specifics of poll watching. For example, should poll watchers be required to wear some form of identification, be subject to a code of conduct, or participate in any special training?

For further background on these issues, check out the National Conference of State Legislatures' resource on [Policies for Election Observers](#).

Brief Break (5 min – *Optional*)

Use this time as a chance to stretch your legs, go to the bathroom, get a drink of water, and re-charge for the second half of the deliberation.

Mail-In Ballot Limits (15 min)

We will now evaluate specific policies related to mail-in ballots. We will each address the question below, and then together we'll explore our areas of agreement and disagreement.

- What are the **strongest arguments FOR and AGAINST allowing voters to vote by mail?**
- Which of these arguments do you find to be *the most persuasive?* Why?

As time allows, we should engage with one another on our answers to these questions. When should deadlines be set for mail-in ballots to be postmarked or received? Should voters be required to provide a reason for requesting a mail-in ballot? Should affidavits or witness signatures be required for absentee/mail ballot requests? Should drop boxes be used to reduce postage costs? Should ballots be counted before election day? Should elections only

be conducted by mail?

For further background on these issues, check out the National Conference of State Legislatures' resource on [Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options](#).

Voter List Maintenance (15 min)

We will now evaluate specific policies related to voter list maintenance (also known as “purges”). We will each address the question below, and then together we’ll explore our areas of agreement and disagreement.

- What are the **strongest arguments FOR and AGAINST removing people from voter lists who have died, moved out of state, committed felonies, fail to respond to address confirmation mailings, or not voted in several recent elections?**
- Which of these arguments do you find to be *the most persuasive?* Why?

As time allows, we should engage with one another on our answers to these questions. We can assess the specific reasons for removing people from voter lists mentioned above and how frequently such maintenance should be done.

For further background on these issues, check out the National Conference of State Legislatures' resource on [Voter Registration List Maintenance](#).

Election Infrastructure Updates (15 min - *Optional*)

Given that it is likely less controversial, we have made this last section optional. But if we have time and interest, we can now evaluate specific policies related to voter list maintenance (also known as “purges”). We will each address the question below, and then together we’ll explore our areas of agreement and disagreement.

- What are the **strongest arguments FOR and AGAINST improving the nation’s election infrastructure as described by the Center for American Progress?**
- Which of these arguments do you find to be *the most persuasive?* Why?

As time allows, we should engage with one another on our answers to these questions. We can assess the specific reasons for removing people from voter lists mentioned above and how frequently such maintenance should be done.

Other Ideas to Improve Confidence in Election Integrity (20 min)

We can now step back and generate additional ideas that may transcend and elicit more support than the policies we just discussed. Are there other creative ways to address concerns about election fraud that may be more effective while also raising fewer concerns about reducing election accessibility? How can we best improve confidence in the integrity of election in the United States and also reduce concerns about voter suppression? We will all first take about one minute to offer any ideas we have, and then we can engage each other about our different suggestions.

Reflections (10 min)

While today's conversation is an important step in the journey, effectively managing the trade-offs associated with election security will take time and commitment. Please reflect on the insights from your discussion with your fellow participants today, and then answer one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group is welcome to continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

1. What was most meaningful or valuable to you during this deliberation?
2. Where are the areas of both agreement and disagreement in your group?
3. Have any new ways to think about this issue occurred to you as we have talked today? Any new ideas that might transcend our current way of conceiving of the problem and its potential solutions?
4. Was there anything that was said or not said that you think should be addressed with the group? Are there any perspectives missing from this conversation that you feel would be important to hear?
5. What did you hear that gives you hope for the future of conversations on issues related to election integrity?
6. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the deliberation you just had?

About This Guide

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The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI) is dedicated to the creation of opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The DCI regularly hosts facilitated deliberations on a wide range of topics and organizes training workshops for deliberation facilitators. To learn more about these opportunities, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org.

DCI Deliberation Guides

The DCI has launched this series of Deliberation Guides as a foundation for such conversations. They provide both important background information on the topics in question and a specific framework for engaging with these topics. The Guides are designed to be informative without being overwhelming and structured without being inflexible. They cover a range of topics and come in a variety of formats but share several common elements, including opportunities to commit to a shared set of Conversation Agreements, learn about diverse perspectives, and reflect together on the conversation and its yield. The DCI encourages conversations based on these guides to be moderated by a trained facilitator. After each conversation, the DCI also suggests that its associated Pathways Guide be distributed to the conversation's participants.

DCI Pathways Guides

For every Deliberation Guide, the DCI has also developed an associated Pathways Guide, which outlines opportunities for action that participants can consider that are related to the covered topic. These Pathways Guides reinforce the DCI's commitment to an action orientation, a key deliberative disposition. While dialogue and deliberation are themselves important contributors to a healthy democracy, they become even more valuable when they lead to individual or collective action on the key issues facing society. Such action can come in a range of forms and should be broadly understood. It might involve developing a better understanding of a topic, connecting with relevant local or national organizations, generating new approaches to an issue, or deciding to support a particular policy.

If you make use of this guide in a deliberation, please provide attribution to the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative and email dc@deliberativecitizenship.org to tell us about your event. To access more of our growing library of Deliberation Guides, Pathways Guides and other resources, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources.