

Proactive Communication Strategies for Local Election Officials

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Election Trust in Texas

- A February 2021 UT/Texas Tribune poll found that approximately 78% of Texas voters trusted the results of the 2020 General Election in Texas.
- In an October 15, 2022 Marist poll, 75% of Texas voters from both parties said they were confident that their local government *“will run a fair and accurate election this November.”*

 **THE TEXAS TRIBUNE**

**Voters think Texas election results are accurate
– but many question U.S. results, poll finds**

Caller Times

**Can we trust the 2022 midterm
elections to be fair? Three-quarters
of those polled say yes**

Election Trust in Texas

Marist
Poll™

CONFLCGVT1. Marist Poll Texas Tables: October 3rd through October 6th, 2022

| | | TX Adults | | | | |
|--|-------------|--|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | | How confident are you that your state or local government will run a fair and accurate election this November: | | | | |
| | | Very confident | Confident | Not very confident | Not confident at all | Not confident at all |
| | | Row % | Row % | Row % | Row % | Row % |
| TX Adults | | 28% | 45% | 20% | 6% | 1% |
| TX Registered Voters | | 31% | 44% | 19% | 5% | 1% |
| Definitely Voting in November's Election | | 33% | 44% | 18% | 4% | 1% |
| Party Identification | Democrat | 39% | 37% | 19% | 5% | 0% |
| | Republican | 32% | 44% | 18% | 5% | 1% |
| | Independent | 25% | 48% | 22% | 4% | 0% |

- **75%** of Registered Voters were 'Confident' or 'Very Confident' that state/local government will run a "fair and accurate" election.
- **24%** are 'Not very confident' or 'Not confident at all.'
- **1%** are 'Unsure.'



Caller Times

“Looking at the overall trust in Texas elections from the opposite view, it shows that 1 in 4 voters have doubts. Three or four election cycles ago, such a number might have been jaw-dropping. But given the current polarized climate viewed through the lens of the Jan. 6, 2021, unpleasantness, a 75% confidence level doesn't seem too bad.”

-Corpus Christi Caller-Times

October 15, 2022



What's the Headline?

- Texas voters generally trust how YOU, as local election officials, run elections in our state.
- *BUT* – voters also hear stories about fraud, irregularities, and problems with other states' elections, which can result in skepticism of Texas' election systems.
- *As a result*, YOU, as local election officials, have to **anticipate election misinformation** and **proactively address it in the public square.**



What's the Buried Lede?

- **1 out of 4 Texans don't trust the way elections are run – either locally, or at the state and national levels.**



...BUT YOU STILL NEED TO ADDRESS THEIR CONCERNS!



Types of Audiences

Super Informed – Regular voter, poll worker or poll watcher who has studied facets of the election process and knows Texas law and procedures.

Informed – Generally knowledgeable about the election process, regular voter who experiences the process when they go to vote.

Uninformed – Less knowledgeable about the election process, makes some incorrect assumptions about how elections work, but are open to learning more.

Misinformed – have been fed a steady diet of misinformation, unlikely to be swayed by additional transparency and explanation, claims to ‘know’ things that simply are not true.



How does Misinformation Spread?

Social Media

Traditional Media

Misleading statements from third parties, campaigns

Online forums

In-person forums

**Any mass communication platform can be used to confuse voters,
spread mis- and dis-information**



Best Response to Misinformation?

CORRECT INFORMATION



Worst Response to Misinformation?

OBFUSCATION, DISMISSIVENESS



Election Communication Strategies

- Anticipate skepticism of election process and respond with transparency.
- Communicate each step of the process to your voters, including:
 - Notice of election
 - Contracting with county/other political subdivision
 - Responsibilities for election administration
 - Public testing of voting equipment
 - Election Night Reconciliation
 - Canvass process
- Don't stay silent when election misinformation is circulating – correct the record publicly and vigorously. (and respectfully)



Election Communication Strategies (cont'd)

- Monitor social media chatter on local elections, flag misinformation, and discuss the best way to respond with your team.
- Build a strong public record emphasizing transparency, trust in elections from an authoritative voice in your office.
- Encourage trusted voices within the community to give an objective, third-party assessment of election security in your jurisdiction. (look to the 'super informed')
- Invite local media and members of public to tests of election equipment and/or administrative procedures before and after elections.
- If a mistake happens – be transparent about it – staying silent creates a void for misinformation to fill, spread, and take hold!



Proactive vs. Reactive Communication

- Be PROACTIVE so you don't have to be REACTIVE!
- Be mindful of the way you REACT to any problems or irregularities that may occur.
- GET ALL THE FACTS YOU CAN before making a statement to the media.
- Emphasize that assessment could change based on new information.



Case Study: El Paso County, October 2022

“About 6,000 El Paso County voters will be getting new mail ballots after the original ballots they requested were sent without one statewide race listed.”

“Human error led to the race for Texas agriculture commissioner being left off the ballots that were mailed out on or before Oct. 4, said Lisa Wise, El Paso County elections administrator. Ballots mailed after Oct. 4 are correct, she said, estimating that the county has received about 8,000 mail-in ballot requests so far.”

“Voters who were sent the ballot without the agriculture commissioner race will be sent a new ballot with a notation on the envelope saying ‘corrected ballot.’ If voters return both the original ballot and the corrected one, only the corrected ballot will be counted.”

“We’re going to be contacting each voter by phone if they put a number on their application, as well as sending a reminder notice once the corrected ballot has been sent out,” she said.

EL PASO MATTERS |

6,000 El Pasoans getting corrected mail ballots after error discovered



Case Study: El Paso County, October 2022

What did El Paso County do?

- **Discovered the problem:** statewide race missing from mail ballots
- **Determined cause of the problem:** human error (we are all humans!)
- **Determined extent of the problem:** 6,000 mail ballots impacted
- **Communicated the solution:** corrected ballots mailed out immediately
- **Communicated the county's response:** contacting each voter by phone, sending reminder notice.
- **Communicated rules on processing new ballots:** If voters return both, only corrected ballot will count.



Proactive Communication: SOS 101 Series

- Mini-series of educational videos featuring Secretary Scott, local election officials from Brazos, Hays, Parker and Tarrant counties.
- Released strategically in advance of key deadlines for voter registration, ABBM, early voting, to give time for viewers to absorb information.



SOS 101: Voter Registration

Key Points:

- **Voter registration applications go through the ‘Live Check’ process – compared to Texas DPS and U.S. SSA databases.**
- **Voters do not need to show their VR certificate to cast a ballot!**
- **Voter list maintenance is conducted on a regular basis by county voter registrars to maintain accuracy, and to remove:**
 - **Deceased people**
 - **Duplicate registrations (within and across county lines)**
 - **Convicted felons**
 - **Non-U.S. citizens**
 - **Mentally incapacitated people**



SOS 101: Voting Systems in Texas

Key Points:

- **Voting machines in Texas are never connected to the internet.**
 - To be certified in Texas, voting systems *cannot have the capability* of internet or wireless connection.
- **Only software certified by Texas SOS can be loaded on voting equipment.**
 - This also applies to e-pollbooks, which *are* connected to the internet, but are not connected to any systems that cast or tabulate ballots.
- **All voting machines are required to be tested for logic and accuracy three times:**
 - Twice before each election, and once immediately after.



SOS 101: Voting by Mail in Texas

Key Points:

- **Only certain Texas voters are eligible to vote by mail:**
 - 65+, disabled, expected to give birth, absent from county during in-person voting, confined in jail/civilly committed
- **Eligible voters must *request* a mail-in ballot – it is not automatically sent to the voter.**
- **Voters must provide an ID number on their ABBM and carrier envelope, and that number must match a number on the voter’s registration record.**
- **Voters can track where their application/mail ballot is in the process, and can certify their ID information online, if needed.**
- **Early Voting Ballot Board (EVBB), composed of appointees from all parties, adjudicates mail-in/provisional ballots before they’re counted.**



SOS 101: Casting & Counting Your Ballot

Key points on casting a ballot in Texas:

- **Voters must check in at the polls by showing 1 of 7 accepted forms of Photo ID, and have alternate ID options if they can't get one.**
- **ePollbooks communicate via the Internet to ensure that no voter can check in more than once.**
 - **There is no internet connection to the actual voting systems – either the ballot marking device or the scanner that tabulates ballots.**
- **No cellphones, cameras, video/audio recording devices allowed within 100 feet of voting stations (no ballot selfies).**
- **Electioneering for/against candidate/measure on ballot PROHIBITED within 100 feet of polling place entrance.**



SOS 101: Casting & Counting Your Ballot

Key points on counting ballots in Texas:

- **On Election Night, Early Voting results – including all early mail-in ballots – are reported first, shortly after polls close at 7:00 p.m. local time.**
- **Then, the results from in-person Election Day voting and mail ballots cast by Election Day are reported on a rolling basis as they come in.**
- **The results on Election Night, or the following Day, are always unofficial.**
- **Election authorities must complete a preliminary Reconciliation Form that shows any discrepancies between voters and ballots.**



Election Reconciliation Form

Preliminary Election Reconciliation - Unofficial Totals

Disclaimer: These numbers are subject to change as information is verified after election day

County Fort Bend Election Name Joint & Constitutional Amendment
 Registered Voters 508782 Election Date May 7, 2022

| 1. Voters <small>(from election rosters)</small> | | 2. Rejected or pending ballots <small>(pending review, pending voter action, or rejected)</small> | | 3. Counted ballots <small>(from tabulation software)</small> | |
|---|-------|--|----|---|-------|
| A. In person voters | 30009 | D. Provisional ballots rejected or pending | 15 | G. In person ballots counted | 30020 |
| B. By mail voters | 4299 | E. Mail ballots rejected or pending | 29 | H. Mail ballots counted | 4270 |
| C. Total voters (A+B) | 34308 | F. Total ballots rejected or pending (D+E) | 44 | I. Total ballots counted (G+H) | 34290 |

| 4. Comparison of voters and counted ballots | | | |
|--|--|---|--------|
| J. Difference between voters and ballots (C-F-I) | -26 | K. Difference as percentage of voters (J+(C-F)*100) | .075 % |
| L. Notes: | <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> | | |

| 5. Attestation | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------|
| M. "I certify that the information contained in this preliminary election reconciliation document accurately reflects the unofficial votes and voters as known to me on election night. The information will likely change based on provisional votes, mail ballots, and additional reconciliation efforts by election personnel." | | |
|  | Maria Rose Gonzalez | May 7, 2022 |
| <small>Presiding judge signature</small> | <small>Print name</small> | <small>Date</small> |

| 6. Ballots that could be added to the final count <small>Disclaimer: These numbers typically change as information is verified after election day</small> | | | |
|--|------|----------------------------------|----|
| N. Mail ballots not returned or pending voter action | 2450 | O. Estimated Provisional ballots | 15 |



Helpful Tactic: “What to Expect on Election Day” Press Release

- Consider a *pre-emptive* release to local media outlining the basics of what voters can expect on Election Day – both when casting a ballot and awaiting the results.
- Plan to release to media at least a day before Election Day, if not sooner.
- Cite Texas SOS information, VoteTexas.gov, and other resources to give the public a helpful overview about the election process in Texas.
- Elements should include:
 - Voting hours and locations
 - Voter ID requirements
 - Activities allowed/not allowed at the polls
 - How voting machines in your jurisdiction work
 - Process of reporting results once polls close
 - Contact information for election questions
- **Help manage expectations of the public and media!!**



Remember:

Being **proactive** and **deliberate** in communicating about election processes – no matter how mundane or uneventful they may seem – can help prevent a situation where you are having to **react** later.

What are common processes to **you** may not seem familiar to **your voters**, especially those that are being inundated with **misinformation**.

Don't assume that members of the media know how elections work – **educate them** on what you're doing so they can **amplify your voice** when it's most needed.



Thank You!

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