



# Trustworthy Elections Report

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*"We Trust US"*



*Written by the:*

Braver Angels Trustworthy  
Elections Leadership Team

February, 2024



Braver Angels is an organization founded in 2016, predicated on the principle that many of our most pressing problems are caused by our inability to see the humanity in people with opposing worldviews. We have succeeded as an organization in bringing thousands of people together across our political and cultural divides to listen and see one another face-to-face. In the process, we've discovered, to the surprise of some, that there are certain core values that we all have in common. These conversations have enabled us to create common ground solutions to some of our most pressing problems, including how to make our elections trustworthy to all.





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*Cover graphic by Nuthawut. Revised by Katelin Annes.*

*All the photographs in this Report are of Braver Angel members who attended the 2023 Convention in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Photos by Jason Minick and Jeff Sevier. The first photo on page 10 is from a panel on Trustworthy Elections. From the left: Reena Bernards, Larry Mayes and Walter McKee. Photo by Tom Smerling.*

# I. Executive Summary

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No issue is more polarized within our nation than how we conduct our elections. Conservatives and liberals distrust our electoral system for vastly different reasons, from voter fraud and election security to voter suppression and peaceful transfer of power. Leading up to the crucial 2024 elections, Braver Angels worked to rebuild this trust by seeking solutions supported by people across the political spectrum.

The “secret sauce” of this Braver Angels Trustworthy Election Campaign is that we gathered our input on how elections might be made more trustworthy via open dialogue and not by polls. We used the Braver Angels Common Ground workshop format to have moderated open discussions. We had 26 separate workshops over a 3-year span (from October 2020 to November 2023) hosted at locations across the country and held either in-person or online. Each workshop had a balanced number of Red (conservative-leaning) and Blue (liberal-leaning) participants, drawing people from 27 states in an open, moderated dialogue. The dialogue was “robust” across over 100 hours of total workshop time.

The 727 values, concerns and solutions that were adopted without objection collectively across 26 workshops with 194 evenly balanced Red and Blue participants are the informed basis for our report.

## **This report focuses on three principles:**

“Voting should be easy. Cheating should be hard.”

“Every citizen should have an equal say in who will govern them;  
this is done through free and fair elections.”

“The American government will fail if candidates refuse to accept  
any outcome other than victory.”

The U.S. democratic republic is vulnerable. It depends entirely on trust. Today, our system is facing an existential threat: many Americans no longer consider our elections trustworthy and as a consequence refuse to support the outcome.

Through hundreds of person-hours of discussion, debate and personal connection, our Braver Angels community reached a “Red/Blue” consensus: ***We must, as one people, take action to rebuild confidence in our election process. If we fail to act now, we run the risk of losing our republic, and devolving into violence, chaos and balkanization backed by force of arms. We will cease to be the “United” States.***

It is with this mandate that the Braver Angels Trustworthy Elections Campaign was formed: To craft a set of actionable solutions that Americans across the political and cultural divides can support.



This report is the culmination of work performed collectively by over 200 volunteers from 27 states, balanced evenly between those who identify as either “Red” or “Blue”. Using the unique Braver Angels method at 26 separate local workshops, the balanced teams arrived at 727 individual Points of Agreement (POA’s). To be counted as a POA, every word must have been agreed to by the unanimous consent of each participant at the workshop, Red and Blue alike. Guided by the POA’s, the Leadership Team, also equally balanced, arrived at the set of solutions in this report.

We believe that every one of the solutions recommended in this report can be implemented swiftly and successfully. It only requires the will of the people and their representatives.

The report consists of 23 specific solutions which address seven broad areas of concern:

**Fair and Equal Access to Voting:** Today, some citizens encounter significant barriers to voting, while other citizens find few, if any, impediments. Our election process should strive to remove barriers so that each citizen has an equal and reasonable opportunity to cast their vote.

**Verifiable Voter Identity and Eligibility:** There is some evidence, although rare, that some voters are misrepresenting their eligibility to vote. Voters should be required to identify themselves and prove their eligibility before casting a ballot.

**Transparency and Accountability:** Every citizen should be able to understand the election process. There must be reasonable opportunities to observe election activities. The processes related to training poll watchers and civics education should be based on best practices.

**Redistricting - Gerrymandering:** Voters should be able to decide who they want to govern them. Instead, today, politicians and special interest groups draw gerrymandered redistricting maps, through which they pick their preferred voters instead of the other way around. This practice must end.

**Confidence in Vote Counting:** Every legal vote should be counted as accurately as possible. Checks and backup documentation must be in place so that voters are assured that vote counts are complete, accurate and unbiased.

**Safety and Security in the Elections Process:** Everyone involved in administering elections must be able to do so safely and without fear of intimidation. Election processes must have robust defenses against fraud and interference.

**Peaceful Transfer of Power:** Americans will not trust the outcome of elections if their leaders sow the seeds of doubt. Candidates must ultimately accept the results of elections, provided there is a robust process to resolve disputes. Violence must never be used to decide an election in the United States.

The solutions offered in this report are by no means comprehensive, nor are they a panacea. They are a statement of solidarity after many intense hours of discussion across the political divide. They are a blueprint that we believe will rebuild Americans’ confidence in our elections.

## II. Campaign Leadership Team

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**David Blankenhorn**  
Braver Angels President

**Reena Bernards**  
Project Lead,  
Creator of the Common Ground Workshop

**Larry Mayes**  
Co-Chair

**Walt McKee**  
Co-Chair

**William Carberry**  
National Campaign Coordinator

Elizabeth Doll  
Riley Hart  
Don Krause  
Dan Messina  
Lenny Mirra  
Daniel Thomas  
Linda Jordan Willard

For detailed bios, list of workshops and other campaign information see:  
<https://braverangels.org/trustworthy-elections>

We would like to thank all the participants, organizers, moderators, Zoom managers and observers in our workshops. We'd also like to thank the Task Force members who gave extra time to help develop our collaborative consensus.

Special thanks to Bill Doherty, Dr. Peter Skerry, Dr. Samuel Bradley, Catherine Tumber, Sabrina Pedersen, Tom Smerling, Cheryl Clyburn Crawford, Lew Finfer, Rev. Jeffrey Brown, and the late David Iwinski for the time they devoted to the campaign. We also would like to thank our copy editor Katherine Copenhaver and our graphic artist Katelin Annes. We appreciate the contributions of all the organizations in the Braver Network, and particularly our collaboration with Team Democracy, the Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, and the New Pluralists.



# III. Campaign Methodology

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As a national, non-profit organization, Braver Angels is leading the nation's largest grassroots, cross-partisan, volunteer-led movement to change our politics for the better. Through community gatherings, moderated discussions, collaborative debates, and grassroots leaders working together, we're offering America what it needs to overcome the bitterness of our partisan divide. Our vision in this National Trustworthy Elections Campaign is an America in which growing majorities in both parties believe that U.S. elections are fair, reliable and worthy of the public's trust. The unique aspect of this Braver Angels Trustworthy Elections Campaign is that the input we gathered to address this vision was solely based on unanimous points of agreement from Red/Blue balanced groups of "everyday" American voters.

This Campaign was initiated by Braver Angels President David Blankenhorn, who appointed Red and Blue co-chairs, who then assembled an evenly balanced Red/Blue Leadership Team to lead the Campaign. To realize our vision, the process used the [Braver Angels Common Ground Workshop format](#). The Team organized workshops across the country to bring together conservatives concerned with issues like voter fraud and election security and progressives concerned with issues like voter suppression and the peaceful transfer of power to look for common ground ideas for reestablishing trust in elections.

In the Common Ground Workshops, we asked the participants to come up with values, concerns and solutions that Reds and Blues can support. We continue to use the word "solutions" throughout this report to reflect the work of our grassroots participants.

The Campaign conducted 26 separate workshops over a 3-year span (from October 2020 to November 2023) hosted at locations across the country and held either in-person or online. Each workshop had a balanced number of Red (conservative-leaning) and Blue (liberal-leaning) participants, drawing people from 27 states in an open, moderated dialogue.

There were right-leaning and left-leaning opinions in our workshop discussions, but the ground rules of the workshops required that points had to be worded in a way that reached unanimous agreement between Reds and Blues. Points that did not reach that threshold of unanimous acceptance were recorded, but not used. We gathered 727 values, concerns and solutions that were adopted without objection collectively across 26 workshops with 194 evenly balanced Red and Blue participants.

The Leadership Team met in Boston in early November 2023, moderated by Braver Angels Co-founder Bill Doherty, to consolidate these 727 Points of Agreement into 23 actionable solutions within the seven major topic areas listed in Section 4 below, using a collaborative consensus approach.

# IV. Summary of Solutions

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This report proposes 23 specific solutions grouped into seven Election Topics.

## 1. Fair and Equal Access to Voting

- a. Make Federal Election Day a National Holiday
- b. To remedy concerns about Election Day access to polls and ballot boxes, state and local governments should staff up and open additional polling stations (such as at post offices in rural places), among other remedies.
- c. In order to address the problem of long lines, provide Election Day remedies and swift responses to concerns at polling stations.
- d. All states should implement no-excuse-needed absentee ballots.

## 2. Verifiable Voter Identity and Eligibility

- a. States should join a shared database of voters, such as the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), to improve the accuracy of voter rolls and eliminate dual voters.
- b. States should require a person to show voter ID when voting. It should be an affirmative duty of state governments to provide an acceptable free voter ID (either photo or non-photo) to every eligible voter.
- c. Government-provided voter ID should be one, but not the only, acceptable ID. The alternate ID should be a photo-verifiable ID.

## 3. Transparency and Accountability

- a. Training for all poll watchers should be required. Engaging poll watchers from multiple parties should be encouraged but not required.
- b. All high schools should teach civics with the focus on constitutional rights and electoral processes.
- c. To promote transparency and accountability, we call on the National Governors Association to form a politically independent institution to recommend best practices for state and national elections (including setting standards for auditing, voter ID, ballot structuring, polling access, etc.)



#### **4. Redistricting - Gerrymandering**

- a. States should appoint independent commissions to form voting districts. The commissions should not include currently elected officials.
- b. Legislative districts should prioritize the “4 C’s”: compactness, competitiveness, contiguity, and compliance with the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

#### **5. Confidence in Vote Counting**

- a. Voting machines should be adequately tested before all elections.
- b. All votes that are cast using machines should also have a paper record.
- c. Once ballots have been received by governmental officials, standard statewide chain of custody procedures should be implemented and should encompass the entire process, starting at the polling place and continuing through the handling and counting of ballots.
- d. Statewide chain of custody procedures should be implemented to protect ballots before they enter the custody of government officials.

Specifically, we recommend the following three reforms:

- States should report their receipt of mailed ballots in a way that enables voters to determine when and whether their ballots have been received.
  - In jurisdictions where ballots are permitted to be collected in exchange for compensation, such compensation should not be based on the number of ballots collected.
  - The voter and person delivering the ballot, if they are different people, must both sign a statement on the ballot envelope granting delivery permission to the person delivering their ballot to a government collection point.
- e. Handling and counting of ballots should be recorded on camera.

#### **6. Safety and Security in the Elections Process**

- a. States should conduct a systemic review and evaluation of the processes of unsolicited mail-in ballots to prevent fraud and irregularities.
- b. Establish cyber security industry infrastructure standards to prevent interference in elections.
- c. Laws protecting election workers and staff from harassment and threats should be

strengthened through tougher sentencing guidelines.

## 7. Peaceful Transfer of Power

- a. All candidates and citizens are encouraged to sign Team Democracy's Safe and Fair Elections Pledge:

*I respect the checks and balances defined in the United States Constitution and I support the electoral processes that protect the freedoms, liberties, and opportunities that are assured by our democratic institutions and norms.*

*Therefore, I commit to act according to the following:*

*I Elections are conducted according to the rule of law, without partisan bias.*

*II All citizens can easily exercise their right to participate in a transparent, safe and secure electoral process.*

*III All claims of election irregularities are submitted in good faith for judgment by the judicial system, in accordance with the law, and all participants accept and support the final results.*

*IV The election process, including the transfer of power, is conducted peacefully, absent intimidation, violence, or other unlawful means.*

- b. Political parties should include a plank in their platforms that asks their supporters to take and honor the pledge.
- c. No state legislature or elected or appointed (non-judicial) official should be able to overturn election results. In 2023, the Supreme Court affirmed this position, rejecting the "independent state legislature" theory (*Moore v. Harper*).





# V. Detailed Action Plan

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This section examines each of the 23 actionable solutions shown above. They have one thing in common; to satisfy public perception, they are designed to be implemented with the full participation of both major parties, and those who have no party affiliation. The twin goals must be:

- a. Addressing the very real deficiencies in our current electoral system, and
- b. Making improvements transparent, to allay the fears and suspicions of a great many Americans, and to rebuild their trust.

## 1. Fair and Equal Access to Voting

**Shared Value:** Every citizen should be assured the opportunity to cast a legal vote with “relative ease”. This means that the effort required should be roughly equivalent regardless of location, income, demographic or disability. (Solutions 1a, 1b and 1c)

**Shared Value:** Every legal vote should be counted accurately. The public needs to be satisfied that this is the case. (Solution 1c)

**Shared Value:** Every citizen should be able to cast their vote legally and reliably, even if they can’t get to their polling place on Election Day. (Solution 1d)

*Solutions:*

### 1a. Make Federal Election Day a National Holiday.

Voting in federal elections is a right enshrined in the 14th, 15th, 17th, 19th and 26th amendments to the Constitution. But until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed by Congress, millions of our fellow citizens were denied that right. We believe that in America, voting should be “easy to do and hard to cheat” for all its citizens. But today, it is far easier for some of us to vote than others. While many Americans are able to take time off from work to go vote, leaving work to vote isn’t an option for many, particularly those in low-wage jobs and essential services. While early voting is available in many areas, some jurisdictions have recently cut back the number of days and hours when early voting is available, either for fiscal or political reasons. Making Election Day a national holiday would give millions the time off to cast their vote.

In our workshops, there was a counter argument that we already have too many federal holidays;

adding another would reduce productivity, which would be detrimental to our country's economy. It was suggested that Election Day could be moved to Sunday or Saturday. Congress established the Tuesday date for reasons that no longer exist. Moving Election Day to the weekend while making it a national holiday would serve the purpose of a national holiday with much less disruption. One caveat: establishing Election Day on Sunday might make it more difficult to attract poll workers, as many potential poll workers attend church on Sunday. Saturday would likely be less burdensome.

**1b. To remedy concerns about Election Day access to polls and ballot boxes, state and local governments should staff up and open additional polling stations (for example, at post offices in rural locales), among other remedies.**

It is these same citizens, those with inflexible and long work hours, who cannot take an entire day off to vote. Many are paid by the hour, and time off to vote means less income, which they can ill afford. Yet they live in areas where it takes much longer to reach a polling place. This problem occurs in both Republican and Democrat areas of our country, rural as well as urban. No citizen should be required to travel more than one hour each way to cast their ballot. The solution to this problem can be split into two parts. One, there may be insufficient facilities available. Two, there is not enough trained staff for more polling places. Solving these two issues requires election officials and government leaders to be open to innovative solutions. For example, post offices might be good locations for polling places. If election day is made a national holiday (see recommendation above), the post offices would be closed, so the lobby facilities might be available.

The placement of polling sites can be a highly politicized process, with the party in power possessing the ability to abuse the system to give their candidates an unfair advantage. The creation of precinct maps should be assigned to an independent nonpartisan body, using available data and technology to facilitate access for every citizen, regardless of party.

Addressing the second part of the problem: Providing adequate staffing for polling places doesn't require innovation so much as it requires the will of governments to take simple, necessary actions. Fewer people are willing to volunteer for a job where they are under tremendous pressure; they get physically and verbally abused, and even receive death threats. Security for poll workers is addressed in another section. But it is clear that improving conditions for election workers, and providing adequate compensation and other incentives to attract new volunteers, should be a top priority for state and local governments.

Rural areas experience an additional challenge. It is difficult to recruit enough volunteers from a smaller population pool. Election officials should look across the country for best practices to address this need.

There should be no illusions that the changes necessary to ensure ballot access to every citizen will be easy. Elections officials will need humility and the willingness to search for and implement the best practices in place, wherever they currently exist. Best practices are discussed in a separate section below.



Many counties currently allow citizens to vote at any polling station in the county. Besides improving convenience for voters, it facilitates a more equal distribution of citizens at each polling place. If a voter finds longer lines at one polling place, they could switch to another. Technology can help with this. Just as GPS apps are able to show the fastest routes and warn of traffic congestion, an app could indicate relative delays.

These are only some ideas to solve the problem of insufficient polling place availability. Election officials need to be innovative and not hamstrung by obsolete bureaucracy, with one priority in mind, as stated above, for every citizen, voting should be easy to do and hard to cheat.

### **1c. In order to address the problem of long lines, provide Election Day remedies and swift responses to concerns at polling stations.**

Just as in any system run by humans, there will be unexpected problems at polling places on Election Day. The keys to minimizing problems are:

- **Proper planning** - Gaming out scenarios and being open to innovative solutions.
- **Adopting best practices** - This will be addressed in more detail in another section, but the upshot is simply this: don't try to reinvent the wheel.
- **Rapid response teams** - Set up excellent communication systems and procedures for election day, and be ready to send trained experts wherever needed.

Above all, mitigating election day issues requires a sense of urgency among election workers and leaders to eliminate old bureaucratic methods of election administration.

Also, it should be universally acknowledged that, even with the best system and the best planning, problems will still occur. This is where reliance on the system of recounts and appeals by all parties is essential. The reliance standard is discussed in another section below.

### **1d. All states should implement no-excuse-needed absentee ballots**

Mail-in, or absentee, balloting does not need to be a partisan issue. Clearly, absentee balloting requires special security measures, but it has been working successfully in most places for decades. In some jurisdictions, such as in Colorado, there are no polling places on Election Day. 100% of votes cast in these areas are absentee. Colorado has been conducting their elections in this manner since 2013, and voters have been highly satisfied with the results. Making absentee balloting available with no excuse required would particularly benefit the elderly and others with mobility issues. In fact, wider use of absentee ballots could help alleviate the crowding problems referenced in the section above, resulting in shorter wait times for in-person voters on Election Day. With the safeguards described below put in place, absentee ballots can be made as safe if not safer than in-person ballots.

## 2. Verifiable Voter Identity and Eligibility

**Shared Value:** Only eligible citizens should be allowed to vote. No person should be able to vote more than once. (Solutions 2a and 2b)

**Shared Value:** Every voter should be required to show proof of identity. (Solutions 2b and 2c)

**Shared Value:** No citizen should be prevented from voting just because they don't have the standard ID. (Solution 2c)

*Solutions:*

### **2a. States should join a shared database of voters such as ERIC to improve the accuracy of voter rolls and eliminate dual voters.**

The risk of a person being registered to vote in two different jurisdictions at the same time is very real. Jurisdictions should share their voter registration data in one common database. In 2012, a non-profit organization, the Electronic Registration Information Center, or ERIC, was established to “help election officials maintain more accurate voter rolls and detect possible illegal voting.” It was founded by a coalition of Republican and Democratic led states. More information on ERIC can be found at <https://www.ericstates.org>.

ERIC is funded by states who have chosen to participate in it. In 2022, 31 states participated in ERIC. In that year, ERIC identified more than 12 million registered voters who had moved from one state to another. This is information that states can use to clean up their registration rolls. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, membership in ERIC had not been a partisan issue until the 2022 election.

In theory, ERIC should address the risk that a person will vote in two jurisdictions in a single election, and the ERIC system should address a problem that is a high priority for every state; to reduce fraud by making it more difficult to vote twice. Why has ERIC become so controversial?

At its height, 31 states participated in ERIC. Since 2022, nine states have withdrawn from the ERIC system. The states that have pulled out of ERIC agree that states need to share registration data. To that end, they have entered into bilateral data-sharing agreements. Critics of this approach say that these new data-sharing plans are simply reinventing the wheel.

So, the question is: Can ERIC be fixed and regain its reputation for fairness, or must it be replaced by a new system entirely? To answer this question, we must address the perceived/actual risks that have been identified.



- ERIC has a second stated mission in addition to identifying duplication of registrations across states. The other mission is “ERIC also helps states reach out to potentially eligible but not yet registered individuals with information on how best to register to vote.”
- ERIC uses information outside of registration rolls, such as driver’s license databases, and proactively contacts individuals who might be eligible to register to vote somewhere but have not registered. Critics argue that this approach can unintentionally encourage ineligible people to register. They argue further that unscrupulous partisan actors could exploit this information to commit fraud.
- Some states with very large populations, such as California and New York, have never participated in ERIC. The lack of data from these states reduces the effectiveness of the ERIC database.

#### Conclusion:

We believe that the perception of risk related to ERIC is worthy of consideration. However, we believe that the solution is more engagement, not less. More states should participate in ERIC, and the concerns should be considered and addressed in an independent manner. ERIC maintains a sophisticated database with technology that would be difficult to replicate in a reasonable timeframe. States might consider narrowing the organization’s mission and making its leadership more balanced and representative. It would be far easier to fix ERIC on a bipartisan basis than to recreate it.

Bottom line: Mend ERIC, don’t end it.

### **2b. States should require a person to show voter ID when voting. It should be an affirmative duty of state governments to provide an acceptable free voter ID (either photo or non-photo) to every eligible voter.**

Every citizen should have access to a government-issued voter ID, regardless of who they are, where they live, their abilities or how much they earn. The standard voter ID does not necessarily have to include a photo.

### **2c. Government provided voter ID should be one, but not the only, accepted ID. The alternate ID should be a photo verifiable ID.**

It is our consensus that requiring a photo for an alternate ID is a reasonable trade-off to protect against voter fraud. It should be noted that Americans are already required to present some type of valid ID (not necessarily photo ID) for many activities, such as: driving a car, using SNAP benefits (i.e., food stamps), enrolling in school, purchasing liquor, cigarettes and vaping cartridges.

Nevertheless, it is estimated that roughly 10% of eligible voters do not have proof of identity. The number is even higher among the elderly, people with disabilities and people of color. It should be an essential service of the government to ensure these citizens are able to exercise their rights. The obstacles can and already have been overcome with proven solutions in some jurisdictions.

One technological innovation that could be explored and is already available in some places for SNAP benefits is a debit-card-like instrument with a PIN code. This would not require a photo, but there would be some minimal cost to make PIN pads available at polling places (the same device that is found in every grocery and convenience store in the country.)

### 3. Transparency and Accountability

**Shared Value:** Adequate checks and balances should be in place to make sure elections are being conducted properly. Elections should be conducted with transparency and expert competence. (Solutions 3a and 3c)

**Shared Value:** Every citizen should understand how elections work and what rights they have as voters. (Solution 3b)

**Shared Value:** Federal elections can only be fair if the rules are reasonably consistent nationwide. (Solution 3c)

*Solutions:*

#### **3a. Training for all poll watchers should be required. Engaging poll watchers from multiple parties should be encouraged but not required.**

According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission website, “The role of a poll watcher is to observe and monitor the election, without violating voter privacy or disrupting the election.” Poll watchers play a critical role in assuring the public that election procedures are being executed fairly and accurately. Yet their presence can be counterproductive if they are not properly trained. Poll watchers cannot be reasonably trusted unless they know: (1) the appropriate methods of observation and (2) what constitutes an error or irregularity. Rules for poll watchers should be consistent across the country, along with other election rules and procedures (see section below).

#### **3b. All High Schools should teach Civics with the focus on Constitutional rights and Electoral Processes.**

The level of election skepticism among Americans is in part due to our failure to adequately



educate ourselves and our children on how elections work and how our democratic republic works. To remain one united people, there are certain historical facts and fundamental truths that should represent a common understanding, regardless of party.

A strong civics education would encompass several knowledge areas. A national course would ensure consistency while allowing local control over how the content is taught. We focus here on one knowledge area:

### **How does the electoral process work in the United States?**

Some of the questions that every citizen should be able to answer include:

- What is the Electoral College? How does it work? What was the founders' intent?
- What is the sitting Vice-President's role in certifying the electoral college results? What is Congress's role? State legislatures?
- How are votes counted? What is the process for resolving election disputes?
- What is the difference between the news media "projection" and a certified election result?
- How do voting machines work? Separate fact from fiction.
- What basic safeguards are already in place to prevent fraud and ensure a fair result?

There should be no illusions about how difficult it will be to create a civics course in which the answers are non-controversial; that is, that are identical regardless of political ideology. Therefore, any such course would need to be created by a bipartisan or multi-partisan committee, so that it can be embraced by most Americans. The obstacles will be enormous. Nevertheless, just as every mathematician needs to know the Pythagorean theorem, every voter needs to have standard, basic knowledge of their electoral processes.

Under our Constitution, no voter may be denied the right to vote based on the results of a test. However, many high school districts have required passing a Constitution Test as a prerequisite for graduation. This practice has been in place for decades. However, the traditional constitution tests have been weak and do not provide a sufficient indication of either the student's competency or the course's effectiveness. We can do better.

**3c. In order to promote transparency and accountability, we call on the National Governors Association to form a politically independent institution to recommend best practices for state and national elections (including setting standards for auditing, voter ID, ballot structuring, polling access, etc.)**

Today, there are as many election codes in America as there are voting districts. Election codes suffer from the same deficiency as legislation or agency regulations; they are not crafted for transparency. They are written by lawyers who specialize in using intentionally cryptic language to gain as much advantage for the majority party as possible.

What is the purpose in the 21st century of having different election codes from state to state? Today, with instantaneous worldwide communication, rapid transportation, highly mobile populations and sharp intrastate political divides, efforts to share best practices are more important than ever. State governments should be willing to adopt best practices and avoid a “not invented here” mentality.

Election systems in the U.S. should be built to achieve a single goal: Count all votes cast by eligible voters and accurately report the results. There should be a simple rule: Don’t reinvent the wheel. Find out what works, and stick to that.

Election codes, at least for federal offices, should be reasonably consistent from state to state. Consistency is an important feature of transparent elections. However, such consistency does not imply rigidity. Jurisdictions need to be able to innovate, to make elections more efficient, trustworthy and fair. This is all the more reason for states to collaborate on a common set of best practices; if an innovation works in one state, the use of best practices makes it easier for those improvements to be widely adopted.

Clearly, the quality of election systems is of supreme importance, no less important than consumer safety or the integrity of the banking system. States should use the best practices available.

A catalog of best practices should come from a source that is credible to Americans of all parties. An independent cross-partisan institution should be created to recommend best practices for state and national elections. Many Americans would be skeptical of an entity established by the federal government, but to be effective, the recommendations from such a unit would need to be perceived as authoritative, not just another think tank.

Examples:

- Underwriters Laboratories
- Consumers Union
- The American Dental Association

Our recommendation would be to have the National Governors Association form this independent body, and otherwise refrain from interfering in its operations. The NGA has the requisite gravitas and diversity to be perceived as credible to most Americans. The resulting institution would research and recommend (not dictate) best practices for activities, such as voter ID, ballot structure, voting machine testing and many others. Such a commission might even be tasked to create the recommended civics course that was described in the previous section. While states would not be required to follow the best practice recommendations, you can be sure that the media and watchdog groups of all parties will ask for explanations if those recommendations are ignored.



## 4. Redistricting – Gerrymandering

**Shared Value:** Voters should be able to select their leaders, not the other way around. (Solutions 4a and 4b)

**Shared Value:** Every citizen’s vote should carry roughly equal weight. (Solutions 4a and 4b)

**Shared Value:** Gerrymandering has been around since the 19th century. But with the advent of AI and Big Data, politicians and special interests can slice and dice our cities and towns to suit their purposes. This practice has gotten out of hand and must end.

*Solutions:*

### **4a. States should appoint Independent Commissions to form Voting Districts. The Commissions should not include currently elected officials.**

Some states already have independent commissions that create maps for congressional districts. This practice should be adopted in every state. These independent commissions should exclude any currently elected officials.

### **4b. Legislative districts should prioritize the “4 C’s”: compactness, contiguity, competitiveness and compliance with the Voting Rights Act.**

- **Compactness:** As nearly as possible, a district’s borders should be equidistant from its center. Geographic barriers such as rivers and mountains make this effort more difficult, but certainly not impossible.
- **Contiguity:** There is no good reason why district boundaries do not use existing jurisdictional boundaries wherever possible. County lines, city limits or possibly major highways can be good candidates for district boundaries. It is so much easier for the typical voter to understand: inside the city, you’re in one district; outside, you’re in another.
- **Competitiveness:** The Supreme Court ruled that political gerrymandering is constitutional, but that doesn’t make it right. An independent commission could take affirmative notice of districts that seem politically skewed, and consider balance as one factor among the others described.
- **Compliance:** The Voting Rights Act requires that district maps take into consideration racial representation.

Mapmakers need to avoid two outcomes, which on today's politicized maps are actually intentional:

- Stacking: District lines that are drawn to concentrate Black or Hispanic people in as few districts as possible.
- Cracking: Splitting communities of color, diluting the percentage of Black or Hispanic people in each district.

Independent districting commissions have successfully Complied with Voting Rights Act requirements in a number of states, while still maintaining Compactness, Contiguity, and Competitiveness. The same advanced technology that helps politicians use a scalpel to design favorable districts can also be used to balance the 4C priorities.

## 5. Confidence in Vote Counting

**Shared Value:** Elections should be properly supervised, and the counting process should be transparent. (Solutions 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d and 5e)

**Shared Value:** A major source of election skepticism surrounds the processes to ensure vote counting is secure and accurate. In solution 3c described previously, we recommended the creation of an independent bipartisan or multi-partisan commission that would develop best practices for running elections.

### *Solutions:*

To increase trust in the tabulation process, we believe best practices should include:

**5a. Voting machines should be adequately tested before all elections.**

**5b. All votes that are cast using machines should also have a paper record.**

Standardized chain of custody rules similar to those used by police to protect evidence in criminal investigations should be established. Chain of custody has two parts:

- From the moment a ballot is completed and signed by a voter, that ballot ideally should be tracked up to the moment it is in the custody of an election or other government official.



- Once ballots have been received by an election or other governmental official, standardized statewide chain of custody procedures should encompass the end-to-end process.

**5c. Once ballots have been received by governmental officials, standard statewide chain of custody procedures should be implemented, and should encompass the entire process, starting at the polling place, and continuing through handling and counting of the ballots.**

With regard to ballots in the hands of government officials, the commission tasked with this work does not need to start from scratch. Many jurisdictions around the country already have effective chain of custody procedures that could be included in a set of best practices.

**5d. Statewide chain of custody procedures should be implemented to protect ballots before they enter the custody of government officials.**

Specifically, we recommend the following reforms:

- States should report their receipt of mailed ballots in a way that enables voters to determine when and whether their ballot has been received.
- In jurisdictions where ballots are permitted to be collected in exchange for compensation, such compensation should not be based on the number of ballots collected.
- The voter and person delivering the ballot, if they are different people, must both sign a statement on the ballot envelope granting delivery permission to the person delivering their ballot to a government collection point.

**5e. Handling and counting of ballots should be recorded on camera.**

It is important to note that such video evidence is not always reliable in the era of AI and deepfakes. The risks of fraudulent videos can be mitigated by maintaining custody of raw footage with timestamps and blockchain identification.

## **6. Safety and Integrity of the Elections Process**

**Shared Value:** Election officials have a duty to protect elections from attacks on cyber security infrastructure and other types of interference. (Solutions 6a and 6b)

**Shared Value:** Election workers should be able to do their jobs without fear of harassment or physical violence. (Solution 6c)

**Shared Value:** Foreign and domestic entities are attempting to frustrate our democratic elections.

The leadership team reviewed the points of agreed concerns developed through the local workshops, then came to a consensus on the following concerns with concrete solutions:

### *Concerns and Solutions:*

**6a. Concern: Blank mail-in ballots distributed by government entities can be intercepted illegally.**

**Solution:** States should conduct a systemic review and evaluation of the processes of unsolicited mail-in ballots to prevent fraud and irregularities.

Some states have found ways to overcome these issues with signature verification, and other means.

**6b. Concern: We are currently fighting a cyber war with enemies both foreign and domestic. Sophisticated technology threatens to hack our systems and manipulate results. Two examples: (1) voting machines may be vulnerable to tampering and (2) the process of accumulating voting information and consolidating it into state election databases could be compromised.**

**Solution:** Establish cyber security industry infrastructure standards to prevent interference in elections.

Give the independent commission referenced previously the mandate to establish system infrastructure standards for the cyber security industry to follow, which will address both real and perceived risks in the counting process from start to finish.

**6c: Concern: Volunteer poll workers and election officials are facing increasing harassment and threats of violence, including death threats. Workers have been doxed, enabling bad actors easy access to the workers' homes and families.**

**Solution:** Laws protecting election workers and staff from harassment and threats should be strengthened through tougher sentencing guidelines.



## 7. Peaceful Transfer of Power

**Shared Value:** Democracy only works if all parties to an election abide by the rules and accept the final results. (Solutions 7a, 7b and 7c)

In an election, we debate passionately, we try to persuade, and then we vote. When the vote is completed and the results known, we stand up as one people and say, “This is our system, and these are our leaders, until the next election.” This is how we stay strong, united and peaceful. There can be no free elections if only two outcomes are allowed: “I win” or “You cheated”. No one would trust a contest in which there is no commitment to honor the result, win or lose. Children learn this universal truth at an early age, yet somehow we ignore it during the most important competitions in our civic life.

As part of our Braver Network initiative, we have partnered with Team Democracy to promote the acceptance of election outcomes. Team Democracy is a nonpartisan 501c(3) organization that is committed to meaningful consensus around the concept of good-faith competition in every election.

### *Solutions:*

#### **7a. All candidates and citizens are encouraged to sign Team Democracy’s Safe and Fair Elections Pledge.**

We encourage all candidates and their supporters to take this pledge, which follows:

*I respect the checks and balances defined in the United States Constitution and I support the electoral processes that protect the freedoms, liberties and opportunities that are assured by our democratic institutions and norms.*

*Therefore, I commit to act according to the following:*

- I Elections are conducted according to the rule of law, without partisan bias.*
- II All citizens can easily exercise their right to participate in a transparent, safe and secure electoral process.*
- III All claims of election irregularities are submitted in good faith for judgment by the judicial system, in accordance with the law, and all participants accept and support the final results.*
- IV The election process, including the transfer of power, is conducted peacefully, absent intimidation, violence or other unlawful means.*

## **7b. Political parties should include a plank in their platforms that asks their supporters to take and honor the pledge.**

Pledging support for elections should not be a one-off, it should be embedded throughout our political culture. Political parties should include a plank in their platforms that asks their supporters to take and honor the pledge.

## **7c. No state legislature or elected or appointed (non-judicial) official should be able to overturn election results. In 2023, the Supreme Court affirmed this position, rejecting the “independent state legislature” theory (*Moore v. Harper*).**

After the 2020 election, the security of our democracy was put in jeopardy by the novel idea that a state legislature could overturn the results of an election, even when all legal requirements for dispute resolution had been met. This was christened the “independent state legislature” theory.

In 2023, the theory was tested at the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Moore v. Harper*. In the decision, the court completely rejected this theory as unconstitutional. However, court precedents can be overturned.

Therefore, it needs to be stated that we concur with the court’s recent decision. No state legislature should ever have the authority to overturn the results of an election, particularly a presidential election. Election disputes should be settled by the judicial branch, which is at least nominally independent of the political branches.

Going further, no elected official (except the judiciary) should ever have the authority to overturn the results of an election. Election officials should rule on disputes in a good-faith, nonpartisan manner, and their decisions should be subject to judicial review.



# VI. Table of Solutions, Values & Concerns

This table summarizes the Trustworthy Elections Campaign Leadership Committee’s alignment of solutions with values and concerns from our 26 separate workshops. These alignments were informed by the 727 points of agreement that were adopted unanimously at each workshop and this table is the committee’s best representation for how to aggregate and align these points of agreement, and it is the informed basis in the writing of this report.

## 1. Fair and Equal Access to Voting

| Solution                                           | Values                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Concerns                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Election Day Holiday                               | Every citizen should be assured the opportunity to cast a legal vote with “relative ease”. Effort required should be roughly equivalent regardless of location, income, demographic, or different ability | Many citizens do not have flexible work schedules and are not allowed to take time off from work to vote.              |
| Open additional polling places                     | Every citizen should be assured the opportunity to cast a legal vote with “relative ease”. Effort required should be roughly equivalent regardless of location, income, demographic, or different ability | Some citizens travel longer distances and wait in longer lines to vote, depending on where they live and who they are. |
| Swift action to resolve concerns at polling places | Every legal vote should be counted accurately. The public needs to be satisfied that this is the case.                                                                                                    | Problems at polling stations could lead to inaccurate counts or other irregularities                                   |
|                                                    | Every citizen should be assured the opportunity to cast a legal vote with “relative ease”. Effort required should be roughly equivalent regardless of location, income, demographic, or different ability | Problems at polling stations could lead to long delays.                                                                |

### 1. Fair and Equal Access to Voting continued...

| Solution                          | Values                                                                                                                               | Concerns                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| No-excuse-needed absentee ballots | Every citizen should be able to cast their vote legally and reliably, even if they can't get to their polling place on Election Day. | The requirement to provide an excuse to the state results in some citizens being unable to cast their vote. |

## 2. Verifiable Voter Identity and Eligibility

| Solution                                                                                           | Values                                                                                             | Concerns                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Shared interstate database (ERIC)                                                                  | Only eligible citizens should be allowed to vote. No person should be able to vote more than once. | People who move often, such as out-of-state students, should not be able to vote in two different places. |
| States must provide a Voter ID (either photo or non-photo), Voter must present the ID when voting. | Only eligible citizens should be allowed to vote. No person should be able to vote more than once. | Fraudsters can use fake identities to vote multiple times, or cast otherwise illegitimate votes.          |
|                                                                                                    | No citizen should be prevented from legally voting just because they don't have the standard ID.   | Many people currently do not have a valid ID for whatever reason.                                         |
|                                                                                                    |                                                                                                    | ID checks have been used in some situations to discriminate based on race or other traits.                |
| Certain photo IDs acceptable in place of standard ID                                               | No citizen should be prevented from legally voting just because they don't have the standard ID.   | Some people are skeptical of government issued IDs                                                        |
|                                                                                                    |                                                                                                    | People can be prevented from voting if they misplace or forget their ID.                                  |



### 3. Transparency and Accountability

| Solution                                                                                         | Values                                                                                               | Concerns                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bipartisan or multi partisan poll watchers encouraged, but not required, for each polling place. | Adequate checks and balances should be in place to make sure elections are being conducted properly. | If a party does not have an observer at a polling place, there will be no one to make sure that there is no bias.                  |
| All High Schools should teach Civics (Constitutional rights and Electoral processes).            | Every citizen should understand how elections work and what rights they have as voters.              | Many schools do not teach civics. Comprehension of the democratic process is uneven across cultural, geographic, and wealth lines. |
| Independent (authoritative) body to recommend best practices; strive for consistency nationwide  | Federal elections can only be fair if the rules are reasonably consistent nationwide.                | Elections are difficult to understand because the rules vary widely from place to place.                                           |
|                                                                                                  | Elections should be conducted with transparency and expert competence.                               | There are no standards in place to judge whether an election is being conducted fairly and accurately.                             |

### 4. Redistricting – Gerrymandering

| Solution                                                                                         | Values                                                                   | Concerns                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Independent commission to create all federal legislative maps                                    | Voters should be able to select their leaders, not the other way around. | Politicians use big data models combined with gerrymandering to shield themselves from competition and accountability. |
| Districts should be 4C's: compact, competitive, contiguous, and compliant with Voting Rights Act | Every citizen's vote should carry roughly equal weight.                  | District gerrymandering results in some citizens' votes having more weight than others.                                |

## 5. Confidence in Vote Counting

| Solution                                                                                 | Values                                                                                   | Concerns                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Voting machines adequately tested                                                        | Elections should be properly supervised, and the counting process should be transparent. | Votes cast via machines could be manipulated unless safeguards are in place. |
| Votes on machines should have a paper backup record                                      | Elections should be properly supervised, and the counting process should be transparent. | Votes cast via machines could be manipulated unless safeguards are in place. |
| Statewide chain of custody procedures at all times while in government custody           | Elections should be properly supervised, and the counting process should be transparent. | Ballots can be mishandled unless adequate controls are in place.             |
| Statewide chain of custody for ballots from point of completion up to government custody | Elections should be properly supervised, and the counting process should be transparent. | Ballots can be mishandled unless adequate controls are in place.             |
| Ballot procedures should be captured on camera                                           | Elections should be properly supervised, and the counting process should be transparent. | Ballots can be mishandled unless adequate controls are in place.             |



## 6. Safety and Security in the Elections Process

| Solution                                                                                 | Values                                                                                                                               | Concerns                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Review and evaluate unsolicited mail-in ballot procedures                                | Every citizen should be able to cast their vote legally and reliably, even if they can't get to their polling place on Election Day. | Mail-in, or absentee ballots, may be mishandled or manipulated if not properly controlled. Ballots sent to people unsolicited could be cast illegally. |
| Establish cyber security infrastructure standards to prevent interference                | Election officials have a duty to protect elections from attacks on cyber security infrastructure and other types of interference.   | The technology to compromise cyber security infrastructure is improving all the time, and not enough is being done to meet the threat.                 |
| Strengthen laws to protect election workers/staff from intimidation and physical threats | Election workers should be able to do their jobs without fear of harassment or physical violence.                                    | Threats to election workers and officials have been increasing in every election.                                                                      |

## 7. Peaceful Transfer of Power

| Solution                                                                                                             | Values                                                                                              | Concerns                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Candidates and citizens should pledge to abide by the law, accept the appeals process, and abide by the final result | Democracy only works if all parties to an election abide by the rules and accept the final results. | The idea of "either I win, or you cheated" is growing in popularity among some politicians and their supporters.       |
| Parties should add the pledge to their party platforms                                                               | Democracy only works if all parties to an election abide by the rules and accept the final results. | Politicians are setting a bad example for their supporters by making bad-faith objections to outcomes they don't like. |
| No legislature or (non-judicial) official should be able to overturn the results of an election                      | Governments must respect the outcome of democratic elections.                                       | The U.S. is sliding toward autocracy when leaders can simply ignore the results of a free and fair election.           |