

Election Integrity

Since the tumultuous presidential elections in 2020, large numbers of Americans expressed a loss of confidence in election integrity in the country. According to an ABC/EPSON poll, only 20% of the public says it's very confident in the country's elections.¹

In an April 2024 article in the Christian Science Monitor, the author Peter Grier writes "...it is clear that millions of citizens no longer trust an essential element of American democracy."²

In this issue, Operation Wildfire attempts to inform you about 1) ethics in elections; 2) the differences between voter fraud and election fraud; and, 3) outline what you can do to help ensure free and fair elections.

Five Principles of Integrity in Elections³

According to the non-partisan website governing-com, there are five ethical principles applied to the conduct of free and fair elections. Let's take a brief look at each one:

- **Independence** – Some election administrators hold partisan positions. Independence involves avoidance of conflicts of interest, treating all parties fairly and strictly while adhering to the law.
- **Transparency** – Voting citizens and candidates have the right to know how the elections office conducts business. Transparency includes such things as ballot designs, voting system acquisition and an efficient, monitored counting process. Oversight boards must be subject to open meeting rules with bipartisan representatives.
- **Integrity** – A high level of integrity means there are strict limits for an administrator to exercise unchecked discretion. The limits include decisions regarding the locations and timing of voter registration, early voting and what pre-election information is given to a candidate or party. The administrator(s) should never express partisan views and should avoid expressing views on social media.
- **Competence** – Incompetence is displayed when there are insufficient ballots; impractical and inaccessible polling stations; poll workers not equipped to deal with Election Day challenges. Competence is displayed when these and other mistakes are absent.
- **Fairness** – Good communication is a key to reducing issues that result in unfairness both real and perceived. Election administrators are strongly advised to involve stakeholders before making decisions not mandated by law.

So how can election officials in your state and county apply these principles effectively?

- Avoid endorsing or contributing to candidates or organizations that support or oppose ballot issues.
- Maintain high standards in contracting including open, competitive training processes.
- Establish a written code of conduct and ethics for employees and volunteers.
- Maintain transparent and secure processes to prevent, detect and report voting fraud.
- Reach out to the harshest critic to deal effectively with their concerns.

Now that we know the principles of election integrity and how election officials can effectively apply these principles, what is the difference between voter fraud and election fraud?

¹ <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/americans-faith-election-integrity-drops-poll/story?id=82069876> January 6, 2022, Brittany Shepherd

² "How America Lost Trust in Elections – And Why It Matters," 4/12/2024, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2024/0412/trust-american-elections-voters-trump>

³ Five Principles of Election Integrity, 2/25/2016, Paul S. DeGregorio and Adam Ambrogio, <https://www.governing.com/gov-institute/voices/col-5-principles-integrity-election-administration.html>

Operation Wildfire: Good Things Happen When YOU Vote

Voter Fraud and Election Fraud – There is a Difference

First, understand that all voter fraud is election fraud; however, not all election fraud is voter fraud. Knowing the difference and separating the two can be key to detecting, addressing and preventing election fraud.

Voter Fraud

This is the list of actions that we think of most often:

- Dead people voting;
- Felons voting;
- Double voting; and
- Voting in multiple jurisdictions.

While many states have strict controls to minimize or eliminate voter fraud, out-of-date voter registration lists, ineffective voter ID procedures and complexity facilitate voter fraud. The broad adoption of mail-in voting has created challenges as well.

Usually, but not always, voter fraud is instigated and committed by individuals. For example, in a recent case in Iowa City, the spouse of a candidate for congress was convicted of 52 counts of absentee ballot fraud.⁴ Fraud involving mass absentee ballots and phony voter registration was identified in New Jersey, Massachusetts and New York.⁵

Election Fraud

In most cases, large-scale legislative and institutional conditions create opportunities for election fraud. We'll look at two rather large-scale efforts:

Ballot Harvesting

A typical harvesting scenario involves paid operatives who visit elderly persons in their homes or in elder care facilities. The harvester secures a signature on an absentee or mail-in ballot and "assists" the voter in completing the ballot. The harvester "assists" and collects several ballots in the same manner. According to Ballotpedia, only one state, Alabama, expressly prohibits ballot harvesting.

On its face, ballot harvesting seems harmless. A family member, friend or volunteer from a community group offers to take your ballot to a drop box or county office, maybe because you don't have a car or have trouble getting around on your own.

But in most cases in Pennsylvania, "ballot harvesting" is illegal. Only a voter can mail their ballot or return it in person, unless they have a disability and officially designate someone to do it for them. A violation could land you a misdemeanor with up to a year in jail or as much as a \$1,000 fine.⁶

Registering Illegal Immigrants

A new, alleged large-scale fraud effort involves registering illegal immigrants to vote. The *New York Post* reported that illegal immigrants are provided with voter registration forms in 49 states through the Department of Motor Vehicles, state welfare offices and other agencies without providing proof of U.S. citizenship. According to the *New York Post*, Arizona is the only state that prohibits the practice.⁷

There are also more modest situations that are ripe for election fraud:

⁴ "Voter Fraud More Widespread Than Some Think." 1/11/2024, Fred Lucas. https://www.dailysignal.com//print?post_id=1055330

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Public Source, "What is 'ballot harvesting,' and who can and can't deliver your mail ballot in PA,

<https://www.publicsource.org/what-is-ballot-harvesting-and-who-can-and-cant-deliver-your-mail-ballot-in-pa/>

⁷ "Election 'Conspiracy Theory' Dems Said Wasn't Happening Is...In 49 States." The Daily Caller, 6/26/2024 by Mary Rooke.

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- Ballot Curing – This is the practice in which election officials selectively reach out to voters to correct a ballot signature, date or other deficiency. In Pennsylvania, this practice is illegal.
- Tampering with voting machine technology – Recently, some of the nation's best hackers found vulnerabilities in voting machines that will be used in this year's election, with an eye to helping officials identify and fix vulnerabilities. The problem? Their findings will likely come too late to make any fixes before November 5.⁸

A recent article from the Heritage Foundation made the following observation:

"Because of vulnerabilities in State election laws, election fraud is relatively easy to commit and difficult to detect after the fact. Moreover, some public officials appear to be unconcerned with election fraud and fail to pursue cases than are reported to them. It is a general truism that you don't find what you don't look for."⁹

What Can You Do?

At Operation Wildfire our motto is "Good things happen when you vote." Well, even better things happen when you get involved in the electoral process.

One of the best ways to ensure election integrity is to get involved. Here are just a few things you can do:

- Volunteer to serve on a county election board. Contact your county election office.
- Volunteer to be a poll watcher. This involves some training, but each precinct needs two or more certified poll watchers to cover polling places in shifts throughout the day. Contact your county political party.
- Volunteer to participate in counting absentee and mail-in ballots. Contact your county election office.
- Ensure your family, friends and neighbors who can't get to the polls apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot. Follow-up to ensure they complete and return the ballot.
- Join the first to combat misinformation and disinformation. Be sure to share Operation Wildfire's material with family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. Wildfire provides information from the left, right and center without political party spin.

Coming Soon!

The Political Party Platforms

The Pennsylvania Senate Race: U.S. Senator Bob Casey, Jr. v. Dave McCormick

We'll compare the candidates for President on issues that matter most to Americans:

- Economy/Inflation
- Immigration
- Crime
- Healthcare
- Education

⁸ The nation's best hackers found vulnerabilities in voting machines — but no time to fix them, Politico, 8/12/2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/08/12/hackers-vulnerabilities-voting-machines-elections-00173668>

⁹ "Voter Fraud More Widespread Than Some Think," 1/11/2024 by Fred Lucas, https://www.dailysignal.com//print?post_id-1055330