



ASTRONAUTS FOR AMERICA



Voting Access and Confidence in Election Integrity

Founding Value: Separation of Powers. Free and Fair Elections. Institutional Norms: Executive Constraint; Mutual Tolerance; Judicial Independence; Truth, Science and Evidence

BOTTOM LINE

A healthy democracy requires both broad access for eligible voters and trustworthy election administration. Election integrity and voting access should reinforce, not compete with, one another. For example, mail-in voting expands access and flexibility while reducing reliance on a single Election Day. A safeguard should not become a barrier, such as the proposed SAVE Act adding documentation requirements to a process where U.S. citizenship is already required for voting. A durable approach is to make voting accessible to every eligible citizen while applying transparent, evidence-based safeguards targeted to demonstrated risks. States can emphasize accurate voter rolls, reliable identity verification with workable alternatives for eligible voters, secure voting systems, transparent procedures, post-election audits, and clear public communication about how votes are verified and counted. Our Constitution gives states the power to regulate federal elections.

NARRATIVE

Maintaining both voting access and confidence in election integrity is vital for a healthy democracy. States face unique needs and challenges in providing eligible citizens with the opportunity to vote. These differences arise from variations in population size, demographic makeup, geography, infrastructure, and historical context. Ensuring broad and equitable voting must accommodate these differences. This means addressing several factors, including voter registration processes, the availability of early voting and mail-in ballots, polling place accessibility, number of polling places, voter ID requirements, and accommodations for disabled or marginalized populations. [States use different methods](#) to verify voter eligibility and citizenship. Extensive [investigations](#) and studies have found that voter fraud, including noncitizen voting, is rare and has not been found at a scale sufficient to affect overall election outcomes. However, the current administration’s claims that the 2020 presidential election was stolen have led to various attempts to exert federal control over state elections.

Voting by mail provides an important option for people who may have difficulty voting in person, and several states count on significant numbers of mail-in ballots, allowing for fewer polling places. Recent challenges to voting by mail include disputes over new federal verification requirements, postal delays and postmarking, deadlines for receiving mailed ballots, and concerns about changing election procedures shortly before an election. These changes may potentially increase the number of otherwise eligible voters whose ballots are not counted—particularly voters who depend heavily on mail voting.

Election security is very important, however safeguards should protect elections without preventing eligible citizens from voting. The [SAVE America Act](#) would require documentary proof of U.S. citizenship to register for federal elections and would establish additional identification requirements affecting both in-person and mail voting. Supporters argue these measures would strengthen election integrity and public confidence, while critics contend that documentation requirements could create barriers for eligible voters who lack ready access to the required documents. [Federal law](#) already prohibits noncitizens from voting in federal elections, with violations subject to fines, imprisonment for up to one year, and potentially additional consequences when false claims of citizenship are involved. Any additional verification requirements therefore involve balancing two objectives: strengthening confidence that only eligible citizens vote while ensuring that new requirements do not prevent eligible U.S. citizens from registering or casting a ballot.

The principle of preserving election transparency depends on a free press, voter access to candidates (public forums) and access to and understanding of election procedures and technology.

FINDINGS

PROXIMATE CAUSE	CONTRIBUTING CAUSE(S)	ROOT CAUSE(S)
- Election fraud claims by the current administration led to the March 2025 executive order, the March 2026 citizenship-verification order, and the SAVE Act, which mandates proof of citizenship to register for federal elections. Passage of this act would add an additional burden to a process which already requires proof of citizenship to vote. If enacted the SAVE Act is expected to stop many legal voters from casting ballots. - To prevent the risks of excessive central control over elections, the Constitution empowers the states to regulate the conduct	- Political polarization and divisions shape debates on voter fraud and election security, affecting policies that impact voting access. - Some media outlets promote unfounded fraud claims, creating mistrust among voters and policymakers. - The rise in cyber incidents and physical threats targeting election infrastructure creates operational challenges, limiting officials'	- The erosion of our institutional norms is a root cause, including erosion of executive constraint, mutual tolerance, and respect for truth, science, and evidence. - Erosion of norms leads to disrespect of state and congressional roles, threats to equal access to the ballot, not valuing nonpartisan election administrations, and the inability to accept the results of

of federal elections. If enacted, a new rule proposed by the current administration will [prohibit the United States Postal Service from delivering election mail](#) (ballots) in states that refuse to turn over their voting lists to the federal government, thus essentially bullying states into letting the federal executive branch become involved in the administration of elections.

- In January 2026, the [U.S. Supreme Court ruled](#) that political candidates have legal standing to challenge state election laws concerning mail-in ballots.

capacity to maintain smooth, open voting processes.

- Insufficient funding for election administration raises vulnerability. [Brennan Center surveys](#) reveal officials worry about political interference, misinformation, safety, and less election-security support, resulting in staffing shortages and lower confidence, even for valid elections.

investigations into election integrity

- Election rules are treated as tools for advantage rather than shared guardrails and weakening public confidence. Voting rights become contingent on partisan control. The danger is the loss of faith that every eligible citizen can vote and have that vote counted fairly.

Norm Erosion: *Beyond the limits defined in our Constitution, our traditional norms are critical to our guardrails of democracy.*

Executive Constraint: Presidents must stay within their constitutional and legal powers, avoiding unilateral actions that exceed legal bounds or disrupt election procedures. *Mutual Tolerance:* Accepting that opponents have the right to compete for power and that political disagreement is normal and healthy. *Judicial Independence:* Protecting the judiciary’s independence, operating free from political pressure or influence is essential to guaranteeing that elections are conducted justly. *Respecting Truth, Science, and Evidence* means accepting the results of investigations into potential voter fraud

RECOMMENDATIONS

RELEGISLATORS AND JURISTS	GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVES	CITIZENS
• Enact fair voting laws that expand voter registration options (e.g., automatic voter registration, same-day registration) and increase early voting and mail-in ballot access. • Ensure voter ID laws are reasonable and prevent fraud but do not disenfranchise eligible voters lacking specific documents. • Protect judicial independence by safeguarding courts from political influence so they can fairly adjudicate election disputes and uphold election laws without bias. • Strike down laws or redistricting efforts that suppress votes or dilute minority representation. • Handle election cases quickly and transparently to build public trust. • Protect freedom of the press to report on voting and elections	• Election officials at all levels should build trust and combat misinformation by clearly communicating voting procedures, deadlines, and security measures. Voting procedures should be standard across state counties as much as possible. Develop plans and procedures to publicize corrective information. Improve processes for counting mail-in ballots. • Upgrade technology for voter registration, ballot processing, and cybersecurity to prevent fraud and errors. • Ensure knowledge of voter security upgrades is communicated to the public to increase voter confidence. • Ensure Accessibility: Make polling places and ballots accessible to people with disabilities, non-English speakers, and marginalized groups. • Communicate: ensure public has access to knowledge of election procedures and technology	• Register, vote, and encourage others to register and participate. • Attend candidate forums • Stay informed: Seek information from reliable sources about voting rights, election procedures, and candidates. • Report problems: Notify election officials or watchdog groups about irregularities or intimidation. • Respect election outcomes: Uphold the norm of accepting legitimate results and participating in democratic dialogue peacefully. • Combat misinformation: Challenge false claims about election fraud and spread accurate information within communities. • Challenge local school boards to enhance their civics courses at all levels. • Visit AstronautsForAmerica.org for the AFA Candidate Integrity Pledge.

***Key Sources:** *Stanford Law Review, May 2022 Vol 74, Election Law in an Age of Distrust, Richard H. Pildes; Northwestern Report on Rising Election Security Threats; Analysis on Voting Rights & Political Polarization; Brennan Center for Justice on Analysis of Voting Rights & Political Polarization, on Executive Orders and Elections; on Disinformation; Axios, Coverage on SAVE America Act; ABC News Fact-Check SAVE Act & Fraud Claims; Vote.org; Factcheck.org; National Association of Secretaries of State; Bipartisan Policy Center on USPS Proposed Rule on Ballot Mail for Federal Elections; SCOTUSblog; National Conference of State Legislatures; Harvard Kennedy School, Examining False Beliefs about Voter Fraud 2020 Election; American Academy of Arts and Science, Fifty Years of Declining Confidence & Increasing Polarization in Trust in American Institutions; American Bar Association, Independence of the Judiciary; US Government Accountability Office.*

Appeal to Our Crewmates: This “Failure is Not an Option” threat briefing is one of a series produced by Astronauts For America, distilling “America, We Have a Problem” series briefings into cause factors and actionable recommendations. Please use the “Contact Us” feature on our website to make comments and suggestions about what we can do to help our democracy strengthen its commitment to our American Ideals.