

# Covering Elections and Voting in 2024

A MEDIA GUIDE



# Covering Elections and Voting in 2024: A Media Guide

BY PAM FESSLER

You're a reporter and you've just been told you have to cover a story about recent allegations of fraud or "shenanigans" in a local election. You've never reported on elections and voting before, and people are throwing confusing numbers and contradictory information at you. Passions are high. To make matters worse, the controversy has gained national attention, fueling a broader debate about the fate of the country.

Or maybe you're an editor who wants to assign a new reporter to the election beat. If you learned anything in 2020, it's that even the smallest voting incident can quickly turn into a huge story. You know that public confidence in elections remains low. A new potential threat, artificial intelligence, has emerged. It's more crucial than ever that you get the most accurate information to your audience as soon as possible. Where do you begin?

Hopefully, this guide will help. We designed it to give journalists basic tools to inform the public about the voting process in 2024 and beyond. The guide is aimed at those who are new to the beat, but veteran reporters might find it a useful refresher. This is not about reporting on campaigns and party politics, but about the voting process

itself: how it's supposed to work, how it does work, how to know the difference and – most importantly – how it affects voters and the nation. We include top reporting tips with links to sources and experts, and ideas for stories you might want to pursue. We describe key steps in the voting process and issues you might want to keep an eye on as the election unfolds. We also share advice from several journalists with experience covering this beat.

To get you started, here are a few crucial things to know:

## Elections are run differently in every state, and sometimes in every county within a state.

The rules and laws governing how elections are run differ widely. What's illegal in one state or county might be allowed, even encouraged, in another. One place might provide 30 days of early voting; another has none at all. Some states accept mail-in ballots that arrive after Election Day, as long as they're postmarked by then. Other states have strict Election Day deadlines. Some states require a government-issued photo ID; others do not.

To further complicate matters, the laws frequently change and can be overturned by a court at the last minute. Keeping track of it all is challenging, but extremely important. Confusion over the rules makes voters vulnerable to disinformation.

The fastest way to find the latest election requirements for your area is to go to the official

Pam Fessler



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state or local election website. Almost every election office has one. Also, numerous nonpartisan organizations, such as the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#) and [Ballotpedia](#), list each state's voting laws and rules on their websites.

## **Elections are run by people. They're not perfect.**

Almost every election, a voter will cast their ballot with no problem and the ballot is counted accurately. But this is a complicated, human endeavor and there will always be some mistakes, mix-ups and snags.

Most problems are the result of an unintentional human or mechanical error that is detected and easily fixed. Sometimes, the problem is difficult to fix and can have an impact on voting. On rare occasions, it might involve fraud. Your challenge is to distinguish which it is.

Is it human error or an illegal effort to change the outcome of an election? Will it have a critical or minimal impact on voting? What, if anything, are election officials doing to fix the problem?

You might also need to disentangle legitimate concerns from those raised purely for political gain.

In today's environment, partisan groups are certain to exploit any problem or anomaly as evidence that the election is "rigged" or "unfair." This has led many voters to throw up their hands and conclude that the system is a mess and cannot be trusted. Explaining what is actually going on and why is the most important thing you can do.

## **There are many experts and resources available to help you.**

The good news about covering elections and voting is that you should have no trouble finding sources. Election officials work in more than 10,000 jurisdictions across the country. They know how the process works in their area and the challenges they face. Most want to help you get that information to the public.

Each state also has a chief election official — usually a secretary of state or state election director — who oversees voting. These officials belong to national, nonpartisan organizations that provide additional expertise and support, such as the [National Association of State Election Directors](#) or the [National Association of Secretaries of State](#).

There are also several federal agencies involved in elections, such as the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and the Department of Homeland Security's [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#) (CISA). Almost all of these can be useful sources.



Outside of government, many academics and nonprofit groups study how elections work. Numerous other parties involved in voting can provide perspectives and valuable information. They include voting equipment vendors, political parties, campaigns, legal organizations, advocacy groups and former election officials.

And don't forget voters. In 2020, more than 150,000,000 voters cast ballots – all possible sources to share their experiences and opinions.

The bottom line is this beat overflows with information. You just need to know what questions to ask and whom to trust. We provide links to some of the best sources at the end of this guide.

# TEN TIPS FOR COVERING VOTING

## 1. Get to know your local election officials. Now.

Call them up, introduce yourself and exchange contact information before a major controversy emerges. Go meet those who run elections in your area in person and find out how they do their jobs and what concerns they have about the upcoming elections.

Develop a relationship so election officials know they can trust you to report the news accurately and you can trust them to give you the information and access you need. The sooner you do this the better. Election offices get busier and busier as an election approaches.

Many election administrators are not used to working with the media. As confusing as the voting process might seem to you, the reporting process is confusing to them. Help them help you. Let them know what you need, and when and in what form you need it. Get the name of the person you should contact when you need immediate help in an emergency.

Remember, election offices come in many shapes and sizes. Some have huge teams with communications and IT departments. Others are run by one person, who might have other responsibilities such as handling licenses and land records. Many feel overworked and under-resourced. But most want voters to have accurate information – if for no other reason than it makes their jobs easier and increases the likelihood of a smooth election.

## 2. Learn the process. Get a tour.

Running a fair and accurate election involves many steps that are unlike anything else the government does. Voters need to be registered, voter rolls must be kept up to date and accurate, equipment needs to be purchased and programmed, voting sites have to be secured, ballots need to be printed, systems need to be protected against physical

attacks or cyberattacks, thousands of poll workers have to be hired and trained, votes need to be collected and accurately counted, and on and on. It's a complicated, year-round effort that can be difficult to explain.

Once you connect with your local election official, ask them to help you learn the process and see how an election is run. Many offices give tours to help educate the public and the media. Get inside – find out how the sausage is made. It will better prepare you to spot incorrect information and false allegations and explain what's actually going on.



Not only will learning the process help you better inform the public, it can lead to story ideas and a chance to build a relationship with sources. Maybe a story on who's running your elections and why they're doing this job? Or a story about the flood of calls they get from confused or misled voters? Or how do they keep the voter rolls up to date? There are reporting opportunities at almost every step of the process.

## 3. Know the rules.

As mentioned, the laws and rules governing elections differ across the country. You need to know what is and isn't allowed in the jurisdiction you're covering, including the rules for journalists reporting at the polls on Election Day. Where can you stand in a polling place? Who can you talk to? What can you record? Besides the local election office, there are many trusted sources for this information, including some of the nonpartisan groups and state or national authorities listed below.

Understanding the laws and practices used in an election will help you better assess allegations of irregularities. For example, some states prohibit what is sometimes called “ballot harvesting,” or the process of an individual delivering other voters’ mail or absentee ballots. All states allow voters to do this to some extent, but some restrict it to family members or a limited number of ballots. Knowing what is permissible in your area makes a big difference when someone claims that those engaged in the process are “cheating” and an election is invalid.

It’s also important to recognize that political parties and outside interest groups often try to shape election laws and rules in an effort to influence the outcome. When you cover changes or challenges to the laws, try to find out who’s behind them and why. It could be an effort to fix a problem that emerged in the last election, or an effort to alter the outcome in the next one.

#### 4. Reach out to all the players.

As noted above, there are many parties involved in elections and voting. You need to know who they are, who you can trust and how they can help you do your job. Besides election officials, other government entities are involved in the voting process and can provide useful information and perspectives. It might be the city council, state attorney general or independent election commission. Find out who plays what role in your area, and who has credibility and knowledge when it comes to talking about elections.

Political parties and candidates also have a vested interest in how elections are run, as do groups running initiative campaigns. There are vendors who provide and service election equipment who are knowledgeable about the process and the many logistical challenges. Academic researchers and advocacy groups spend a great deal of time studying the voting process. Many of these sources are very close to election officials (some used to run elections themselves) and know what’s going on behind the scenes. Again, don’t forget the voters, who can provide another perspective as you try to round out your stories.

As always, vet your sources. Make sure they know what they’re talking about. Press everyone to back up their claims with evidence, and beware of partisan motivations, which are extremely pervasive when it comes to voting. If someone says a machine changed votes, where’s the proof? If someone claims that thousands of voters are disenfranchised by a new ID law, can they back that up? If an election official says a computer glitch didn’t affect the vote count, can they explain how and why?



**Get to know the local elections lawyers — those representing the two major parties, as well as those advising the increasingly influential outside voting organizations. The attorneys will be helpful well before votes are cast as they monitor local and national efforts to influence the process, such as recent campaigns to purge voter registration rolls. They can tell you how recently enacted election statutes may affect the upcoming vote. They will be go-to sources as voting begins, as they are often the first to get intel on problems at polling stations and vote-counting centers. They will be vital to post-election coverage. These are the folks who will initiate any challenges to election results — or respond to those challenges.**

*Tom Hamburger, Washington Post (retired)*



#### 5. Even those who promote conspiracy theories.

Don’t forget to talk to and report on the people behind claims of voting irregularities, even the most far-fetched ones. In some instances, they might be raising a complaint worth looking into. In cases where their concerns are clearly misguided or politically motivated, it’s important to know who these individuals and groups are and why they’re making such claims. This is part of the larger story about what is happening when it comes to voting and public confidence in elections.

Where do those attacking the system get their information and why do they believe what they believe? Are they part of a well financed national effort or a single concerned citizen? What do they

plan to do if they don't get what they want? Some of these individuals have been misled about what's going on, but believe they are fighting for fair and honest elections. Others are motivated by greed or a desire to gain power. If these parties are reluctant to talk to you directly, you can learn a lot from following their discussions on social media, on podcasts or at public gatherings. Some of this information can also be found in court documents filed in the many legal challenges to how elections are run.

It's useful to know what these groups are saying early on, because their words can suddenly turn into action at local polling sites and election offices.

## 6. Find out what keeps officials up at night.

Election administrators are constantly worried about the "what ifs." What if there's a major hurricane on Election Day? What if they run out of ballots? What if the power goes out? What if there's a cyberattack? What if AI-generated disinformation is sent to voters? What if there's violence at a polling site?

It helps to be aware of the many possibilities and what, if anything, is being done to prevent or prepare to respond to such problems. Ask election officials and experts you trust what they're most worried about. Having a basic understanding of some of the potential threats could help you spot controversies early on. It will also better equip you to know who to talk to, what questions to ask and how to explain what's happening to the public.

One piece of advice: Every major election seems to encounter a problem that few people expected. Be prepared for the unexpected.

In 2000, it was Florida's hanging chads. In 2004, there were problems with new voting machines. In 2012, voters confronted extraordinarily long lines.

Kentucky Secretary of State Michael Adams says election officials are often fighting "the last war." After 2016, protecting against foreign cyberattacks became the major focus. But the threats that emerged in 2020 — a pandemic and domestic attacks — "were totally different," he notes. "And this is the nature of anything, is learning from the

past but also understanding it's of limited value in anticipating the future."

It's a warning that journalists covering elections should heed as well.



**Don't be afraid to ask election officials about the rules of the road, even (or especially) if you think you know it from covering the last election or your personal experience as a voter. Election policies and procedures change almost every year, sometimes in very big ways. Especially now, there are lawsuits and court orders on everything from the correct placement of signatures to the location of drop boxes, and a lot of new legislation too. It is better to take the extra 10 minutes and confirm with election officials what the current policy is than inadvertently telling voters the wrong thing.**



*Zach Montellaro, Politico*

## 7. Beware of words and labels, and how they're used.

They're not always what they appear. Take the word "integrity." Some groups and people who say they want to improve "election integrity" are instead trying to limit voter access or undermine public confidence in voting. Others who claim to be fighting voter "suppression" might be more interested in boosting turnout among particular interest groups. What do people mean when they call something "fraud" or "intimidation"? Why do some people use the term "ballot harvesting" and is it appropriate for reporters to use it?

Are officials "purging" the voter rolls or conducting routine "list maintenance"? It depends. If aggressive action by a partisan official leads to the removal of a large number of legitimate voters from the rolls, "purging" is probably the right word. If an election office is removing the names of voters who have moved or died, following a routine procedure, they're probably doing "list maintenance".

Did an election office send a "ballot" to someone who no longer lives at an address? Or was it a "ballot application"? Or maybe a "voter guide" that someone mistook for a ballot? In the heat of a debate over whether mail ballots are secure, it makes a big difference.



If a jurisdiction eliminates a ballot drop box, are voters being “disenfranchised,” “suppressed” or “inconvenienced”?

The words used during such debates can add to public confusion about voting, and are often employed to advance a political agenda. Be careful how you use them. The sources listed below can help you sort it out.

## 8. Give voters news they can use.

A traditional role for the media when it comes to elections is providing practical information to voters — such as where, when and how to vote. It’s not only a public service, but a good way to clear up confusion and correct misinformation.

Some outlets publish FAQs about elections, fact checking articles and interviews of election officials to explain how the system works and to address controversies. It’s an easy way for a news outlet to develop a good working relationship with local election officials, while also becoming a trusted source for your audience when it comes to voting. You likely have far greater reach than any election office does when it comes to informing the public.

There are many examples of outlets already doing such stories that might give you some ideas. One recent story described a [new system in Florida](#) that allows voters to receive text alerts about important voting deadlines. Another story explained [how early voting works in North Carolina](#), with links to sites voters could use to get additional information. This kind of reporting not only informs the public but provides more opportunities for you to learn how the process works.

## 9. Report on some of the good things about voting.

It doesn’t have to be all doom and gloom. You will likely find interesting personal stories when you start reporting on voting. You might want to profile some of the individuals involved in our elections — poll workers, civic activists, voters — and why they do what they do. Such stories can help illustrate some of the broader issues at stake. What

obstacles do election officials have to overcome? What lengths do some voters go to cast their ballot and why? [Why did a woman in New Jersey keep coming back](#) to work at the polls for 79 years?

Our voting system is extraordinary and represents the only time Americans collectively influence who their leaders will be. Reporting on some of the good aspects of voting and the process can be part of the story.

There is no better example than what happened in 2020 when a global pandemic hit just as the nation was preparing to vote in primaries. Election officials quickly revamped operations so voters could still cast ballots. Some of what they did was innovative and even heroic. What does this say about them and also about our country and communities? One of the best depictions of the many challenges faced by election administrators in 2020 is a documentary called [“No Time to Fail.”](#) It might give you some story ideas.

## 10. Finally, consider why the story matters.

Why do we care so much about voting and how it works? What is driving some of the passion surrounding voting controversies? Why are people so concerned about having unfettered access to the polls or the need to prevent fraudulent voting? What is truly at stake? It might help you frame your stories and coverage to keep these questions in mind, and to know how we got where we are today. What is the history behind the Voting Rights Act and the Help America Vote Act? People died fighting for the right to vote, and continue to fight today for those rights and to ensure our voting process is fair and secure.

It’s important to note when news developments involving voting reflect broader disagreements about the role of government, social norms and what it means to be a democracy. These themes are not new and can help explain why debate over something as simple as a drop box or the pen used to mark a ballot becomes such a big deal. We cite several sources below that might help you put your election coverage in a broader context.

# KEY STEPS IN THE VOTING PROCESS

Despite the differences, there are common steps taken in almost every election. Each one provides a potential opportunity for news coverage.



## Voter Registration

In every state except North Dakota, residents must register to vote. For state and federal elections, all voters must be U.S. citizens age 18 or older, though some states allow those under age 18 to pre-register.

**States have their own rules** for registering voters and different registration deadlines. In some states, voters must register up to 30 days before an election. Other states allow voters to register on Election Day. The registration process also varies. Some states allow voters to register online. Others automatically register eligible voters unless the voter opts out.

*News Angle: Registration rules are important because they help determine who does and doesn't get to vote. Some questions you might want to ask: Is it easy or hard to register in your area? Why is that the case and do the rules favor one group of voters over another? Are certain kinds of ID required? Are those with felony records allowed to vote? Some communities allow non-citizens to vote in local elections. What issues does that raise? What, if any, restrictions are imposed on third-party voter registration drives? What registration options do voters have? Almost all state and local election offices list registration requirements on their websites. Other sites provide **state-by-state** comparisons.*







## Maintaining Voter Rolls

Election officials constantly update the voter rolls. One reason is to add new voters. Another is to change entries for voters who have moved, changed their name, died or become ineligible. Each state's voter registration system is different, but they record similar information, including a voter's legal name, address, and sometimes their signature. Election officials use the voter's address to determine which ballot to issue. For example, only voters who live in the City of Jacksonville can vote in its city council race.

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) sets some national rules for voter rolls. NVRA applies to 44 states and the District of Columbia. The act requires states to keep voter registration lists accurate and current. This includes identifying voters who have become ineligible to vote due to death or a move. The Act also provides safeguards for voters. Election officials must meet certain requirements before removing voters from the rolls.

***News Angle:** How voter rolls are maintained has led to tensions between those who believe that eligible voters have been removed erroneously and those who believe that failure to keep lists updated undermines public confidence and enables fraud. Suspected voter roll inaccuracies have led private citizens to challenge the validity of individual voters, a sometimes contentious process. Debate has also emerged over a data-sharing system used by states to update their rolls, called the Electronic Registration Information Center, or ERIC. Unfounded allegations that the system is not secure and favors Democrats has caused a number of states to withdraw from ERIC. This is an evolving story worth watching in 2024. The National Conference of State Legislatures has produced a detailed report on maintaining accurate voter rolls.*



## Finding Polling Locations

Finding adequate polling locations is a challenge for election officials.

Each one should be within or close to the town, city or county it serves. Polling locations are supposed to provide parking for voters who arrive by car. They also need enough space to accommodate voters, election officials and observers. Election officials often use schools, churches and community centers as polling locations. These officials generally check to make sure the sites have adequate access to power for voting equipment and that non-voting equipment has an internet or cellular connection.

Every polling location is required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Before each election, officials are supposed to survey every polling location to ensure ADA compliance. If a location cannot comply, then it should not serve as a polling location.

***News Angle:** The selection of voting sites is a logistical challenge, but can also raise political questions. Do poor, minority communities have as much access as wealthier suburbs? Should universities have their own polling sites? What about remote areas such as rural Native American communities? Will the location of sites lead to long lines in some areas and no lines in others? Are there enough poll workers or resources to equip a particular location? Does the site meet ADA requirements? What kinds of challenges do unexpected developments—such as a pandemic or a hurricane—pose to operating these sites? Are the problems encountered due to poor planning or not enough funding? This is an area of election administration that gets little media attention during the year, but can lead to a huge story on or after Election Day. You might want to start asking questions now. Check in with jurisdictions that don't have problems with polling locations to find out what they do differently.*



## Designing Ballots

A great deal of work and planning goes into designing ballots. Election officials review candidate paperwork to gather important information. This includes each candidate's name, party affiliation and the office they are pursuing. Local rules dictate that candidates must appear on the ballot in a certain order. There are also rules for how to display a candidate's name, including nicknames. Ballots should be easy to understand and have clear instructions for voters. Election officials are supposed to provide accessible ballots, including audio ballots, for voters with disabilities. Many jurisdictions provide ballots in foreign languages. Election officials are not supposed to issue ballots until all candidate information is ready. They have to complete and confirm all content in time to print and mail them for the election. Any mistakes can be expensive to correct or even lead to litigation.

***News Angle:** Ballot design gets little attention, but is crucial because it can affect the outcome of a race. Who gets top billing? Is the ballot easy to understand? What languages are used? How is the ballot displayed on a voting machine? What happens if a name or party affiliation is wrong and it's too late to fix the error? Who makes these decisions? Bad ballot design can undermine public confidence in an election and even throw it into turmoil. Remember 2000, when "butterfly ballots" and "hanging chads" caused widespread confusion over the intentions of Florida voters and the resolution ended up in the Supreme Court?*



## Printing Ballots

Printing ballots comes next, and ink and paper weight are tremendously important. Election officials usually contract with a company to print ballots, though some large jurisdictions do their own printing and post their own mail ballots. For in-person voting during early voting and on Election Day, election officials use turnout data to estimate how many ballots to print, package and deliver in each ballot style to each voting location. Some polling sites may have special printers that can print ballots on Election Day.

The number of mail ballots needed is determined by the number of registered voters or mail ballot requests. But printing these ballots is tricky. Mail ballots need to have accurate fold marks and cover every ballot style in the jurisdiction, so they are usually printed by vendors with mail ballot expertise. Typically, these vendors also print outgoing envelopes, return envelopes, instructions and other mail ballot materials along with the ballots, and then send these mail ballot packets to voters.

***News Angle:** There are several angles that journalists might want to explore. Who are the vendors hired to print ballots? How are they chosen and monitored? What kind of ballots are they printing – the ones voters mark at the polling place or mail ballots that also require envelopes and delivery, a more complicated process? What challenges do they face getting the job done in a timely and accurate way? During the pandemic,*

*vendors were overwhelmed with orders for millions of mail ballots and envelopes at a time when paper supplies were limited.*

*What happens if a printer misses a deadline, makes a printing mistake or sends a voter the wrong mail ballot? What if election officials didn't order enough ballots? Is there a backup plan if a flood or fire destroys printed ballots right before or after Election Day?*



## Testing Voting Equipment

To ensure secure, accurate voting, it's important that voting equipment does what it's designed to do. Before each election, officials test the voting equipment during a process called **logic and accuracy testing**. This includes testing ballot scanners, vote tabulators, ballot-marking devices, election management systems, election night reporting systems and electronic pollbooks. The public is usually invited in to observe some of these tests.

Here's an example of how testing works for one piece of voting equipment: vote tabulators, which are used to count ballots. First, election officials create a test batch of ballots by marking them so they know the expected result. Next, the officials run the marked test ballots through the tabulator. Finally, the officials compare the tabulator's result to the expected result. If those results are the same, then the tabulator is working as intended. If the results are different, officials reprogram and retest the tabulators. During this process, election officials include ballots with errors such as blank ballots to ensure that the tabulator reads and responds to common ballot errors. Another example: Election officials test electronic poll books to ensure that the voter list is up-to-date. They also check that the poll books are working for voter check-in.

*News Angle: This step in the process can be obscure, but it provides an opportunity to explain how the system works, **to spot potential problems** and to find out what election officials plan to do to fix them. Press your local election office to allow you to attend, observe and report on as much of this testing as possible. Most election administrators will be happy to let you do so, because voters are much more likely to see your report on the tests than to come to the election office to observe them in person. Some election offices have started livestreaming this testing so voters can watch from home.*



**There's a lot of broad, nationalized discussion of election administration these days, but there's no substitute for really understanding how elections work in the place you're covering. Reporters should make sure they understand how it all works in their state or county, from mail voting deadlines to audits to certification, and get to know key people long before Election Day. It's the only way to avoid getting it wrong when suddenly an arcane process in your county becomes the center of the election universe.**



*Carrie Levine, Votebeat*



## Recruiting and Training Poll Workers

Election officials recruit and train hundreds of thousands of temporary workers before every election. Most serve as poll workers on Election Day. Poll workers open and close polling locations. They set up voting booths and lay out election materials. They also operate the polling location, including checking in voters. Poll workers assist voters with questions or issues to help ensure a safe and secure voting experience. Some jurisdictions use terms other than poll worker, such as election worker, election judge and officer of election. Election officials train poll workers for their Election Day duties. Training sessions vary by location and role. It may last an hour or a full day. Additionally, most election officials provide poll workers with manuals and quick reference materials that cover common Election Day issues.

***News Angle:** This is almost certainly the largest coordinated volunteer (although most poll workers receive a small stipend) effort in the country. Recruitment has become more difficult as the voting process has become increasingly complex and election threats have made some citizens reluctant to step up. Inadequately staffed sites or poorly trained poll workers can mean problems for voters and reduce public confidence. Among the questions to explore: How are poll workers recruited? Are there enough to staff every polling location? Have they been properly trained? Do poll workers understand the rules, like what types of voter identification are required? Do they know how to treat individuals with disabilities? Do they follow local electioneering laws and keep partisan observers from interfering with the process? Many jurisdictions allow members of the media to observe and report on poll worker training. It's a good way for journalists to learn the rules and inform the public about steps taken — or not taken — to ensure that voting is fair and accurate.*



## Early Voting

Early voting refers to the process of voting in person before Election Day. Almost all jurisdictions have some form of early voting. These voting periods vary by state, from three to 46 days. The average early voting period starts 20 days before Election Day.

In many jurisdictions, early voting works just like Election Day voting. Voters report to a designated early voting location that is similar to a polling place and check in. Poll workers find voters' names in the pollbook, check them in and issue them an in-person ballot. In some jurisdictions, voters must complete an absentee ballot application before voting early.

***News Angle:** Early voting has become increasingly popular, despite some opposition from partisans who believe all voting should be on Election Day. Many voters like the convenience and flexibility of voting when they want. Some worry about waiting until Election Day to cast their ballot in case an unforeseen event, such as an illness, prevents them from turning out. Political parties and campaigns also prefer that their supporters vote early, either in person or by mail, so they can focus Election Day get-out-the-vote efforts on those who have yet to vote. Some Black churches like the option of early voting on Sundays as part of "Souls to the Polls" programs. Early voting can provide a preview of overall turnout in an election and what, if any, problems might emerge. One question to explore is whether early voting locations and options have been fairly distributed, so one group of voters is not favored over another. Such decisions can be politically motivated or simply made for logistical reasons.*



## Processing Mail Ballots

### States handle mail ballots in different ways.

Some states send mail ballots to all active registered voters. Others require voters to complete a vote-by-mail application to receive a mail ballot — how often they must complete this application depends on state law. The application might ask the voter’s reason for voting by mail. Election officials then send each approved voter a mail ballot and instructions. They also send each voter a special envelope for returning the ballot. In some jurisdictions, the return envelope has prepaid postage.

Similar to voting in person, voters who return their ballots by mail must verify their identity. In all states, returned mail ballots go through a validation process to ensure the person voting the ballot is the same person the ballot was issued to. In addition to requiring the voter to sign an affidavit, election officials may compare the voter’s signature to the signature they have on file. They might also require the voter to provide the last four digits of their Social Security number or their driver’s license number. In some states a witness or notary signature is required.

Most voters return their completed ballots to the local election office by mail. Many jurisdictions also have drop boxes for returning ballots. States have processes and policies in place to address completed ballots that arrive damaged or ballot packets with missing information.

Many election offices process mail ballots as they are received, after the voter’s identity is verified and the voter’s record is updated to show a ballot was returned. To ensure secrecy, election officials separate ballots from return envelopes and other materials before running them through a ballot scanner to record the voter’s selections.

Officials do not report any results until the close of polls on Election Day. Some states prohibit election officials from processing mail ballots until Election Day or after polls close. Election officials generally store these ballots in secure, locked containers.

***News Angle:** How mail ballots are delivered and processed has become one of the most controversial aspects of elections, especially after the massive expansion of mail voting during the pandemic. The debate is usually between those who want stricter requirements to ensure security and efficiency and those who want more voter accessibility and convenience. The rules can make a huge difference in whose votes get counted. Voters’ failure to meet requirements – such as signing the ballot envelope – has led to the rejection of hundreds of thousands of mail ballots. Some states allow voters to fix these mistakes in a process called “curing,” but others do not and the ballot is rejected. Deadlines for receiving mail ballots are also controversial. Some jurisdictions require mail ballots to arrive before Election Day. Others count ballots received after Election Day as long as they are postmarked by that date, but this can extend the counting period for days, often frustrating voters, candidates and election officials alike. The use of drop boxes to return ballots has also been the target of much debate. The option was expanded greatly in 2020 amid concerns about slow mail delivery and in-person voting during a pandemic. Critics alleged, without evidence, that these drop boxes were the source of fraud, and several communities have since restricted their use. Mail voting will almost certainly be the subject of more debate and litigation in 2024.*

#### AFFIDAVIT OF VOTER

I affirm under penalty of perjury that I am a United States citizen and an eligible elector; I have been a Colorado resident for at least twenty-two days immediately before this election; I am registered to vote at my sole legal place of residence; I will be at least eighteen years of age on election day; I voted the ballot that was issued to me; and this is the only ballot I have voted in this election.

#### DECLARACIÓN JURADA DEL VOTANTE

Afirmo bajo pena de perjurio que soy ciudadano de los Estados Unidos y un elector elegible; he sido residente de Colorado durante al menos veintidós días inmediatamente antes de esta elección; Estoy registrado para votar en mi único lugar de residencia legal; cumpliré al menos dieciocho años de edad el día de las elecciones; vote la boleta que me fue entregada; y esta es la única boleta que he votado en esta elección.

Required Date: 10/25/22



## Election Day Voting

Any registered voter who has not already cast a ballot may vote on Election Day. Poll open and close times vary from state to state. In general, polls open between 6:00 and 8:00 a.m. and close between 6 and 8 p.m.

In most states, voters report to a designated precinct polling place. Poll workers then check those voters in. Each voter must confirm their identity. Some states require each voter to show a photo ID. Others ask each voter to confirm their address. If poll workers cannot find a voter in the pollbook at check-in, they issue the voter a provisional ballot. These ballots are kept separate and counted once the voter's registration is confirmed.

In places with electronic pollbooks, poll workers can see in real-time if someone has voted in person at another location or returned a completed mail ballot. This is possible because the electronic pollbooks are connected to the voter registration list over the internet.

Other pieces of voting equipment, such as ballot marking devices and ballot scanners, are never connected to the internet. The only other internet use is after polls close in some jurisdictions that permit the transmission of unofficial results while memory devices and ballots are being returned to a central office. This is done only to ensure that unofficial results are gathered quickly.

Once the voter has checked in at the polling place, they can mark their paper or digital ballot, depending on the voting system. After marking their paper ballot, the voter inserts it into a ballot scanner, and the scanner records the voter's selections. In the limited number of places that use direct recording electronic (DRE) voting machines, voters' selections are directly recorded to the machine and stored on a removable memory device.

Election officials spend Election Day trying to ensure a smooth voting process. They might have to respond to emergencies, such as ballot shortages or power outages. Many state and local election offices operate Election Day call centers. Voters can call to ask questions about where or how to vote. They can also report incidents at polling locations.

***News Angle:** Here's where all the work of the past months, even years, can determine whether voters have a positive experience. Does the equipment work? Are wait times minimal? Is everyone obeying the rules? In most cases, the answer will be yes – and that is a story worth telling. But there's always the possibility an issue will arise that causes public confusion, aggravation or worse. People will rely on the media to provide answers. What is the extent and nature of the problem, how are voters and the outcome of the election affected and what, if anything, is being done to address the issue? This is where your pre-election preparations will come in handy. You should know*

*by now how the system is supposed to work, who to ask for details and how to explain what's going on. Election Day legal challenges and protests at polling sites have become increasingly common, and you should be prepared to cover them too. Again, be aware of the rules and laws governing media coverage, which vary from place to place. Journalists are usually allowed inside polling sites and election offices, but with restrictions. In no case, can a reporter interfere with the voting process itself. Partisan and nonpartisan observers might also be present and there are rules governing what they're allowed to do as well.*



## Counting Ballots

Before any in-person ballots, memory devices or unofficial counts are returned to the election office during early voting or on Election Day, and before any local election office mail ballot tallies are provided to a central election office, election workers conduct the reconciliation process to verify that there are not more ballots cast than voters who were given credit for voting.

Once the number of voters and voted ballots are reconciled, election workers take next steps to securely transmit ballots, memory devices or unofficial counts to a central election office to begin tabulation. Most jurisdictions use vote tabulating machines within each precinct to read a voter's selections and create a record of the results. Sometimes vote tabulators are unable to read ballots with errors like stray marks. Teams of poll workers – often bipartisan – review these ballots and interpret unclear marks as votes or not before that contest is counted.



## Certifying Results

Election results are not official until they are certified. Local election officials certify results for their jurisdictions. State election officials certify results for the state and federal contests. This process sometimes includes other state officials as well.

There are several steps before certification, and the process can take weeks. Before certification, election officials review preliminary election results for discrepancies. They confirm that the number of voters who checked in matches the number of ballots cast. Election officials do research to try to resolve or explain any discrepancies.

Election officials must also review all provisional ballots. Provisional ballots are for voters whose registration or qualifications are in question. Officials count them only if they can confirm the voter's registration and qualification. This process takes time and research to complete. Officials may also be required to accept mail ballots that were initially rejected if a voter "cures" – corrects any discrepancies – their ballot. Returned ballots from military and overseas voters, often referred to as UOCAVA (Uniformed

***News Angle:** What did voters decide? That's what it's all about. Most states allow the public and media to observe at least part of the vote-counting process. Be familiar with the rules in case busy poll workers don't know them and try to limit your access. The most important thing for you to know – and to convey to the public – is that results released on Election Night are preliminary. The official count comes later, after all the ballots have been tabulated, double checked and certified. Keeping the public accurately informed about the status of the vote count is crucial. Confusion about this process led to conspiracy theories and even violent protests and threats against election officials in 2020. This has also led some activists to demand that ballots be hand counted. They argue that this is more accurate than machine counting, although studies show the opposite. Expect this debate to continue in 2024.*

and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act) voters, are also provided additional time, as long as they are postmarked by Election Day.

Recounts can further delay certification for certain races. Some states have automatic recounts for very close races. Sometimes a candidate can request a recount. Each state has its own rules for when, how and if a candidate can start a recount or contest the outcome.

***News Angle:** Some questions you might ask in the event of a recount: Who will conduct it and how? How much is open to the public and media? Will there be a legal challenge? The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has a detailed description of canvassing and certification. You should be familiar with the laws and rules in your jurisdiction, in the event certification becomes a major focal point as it did in 2020. Are the proper procedures being followed?*



## Election Audits

Many states perform post-election audits, generally prior to certification, but sometimes after. Audits generally provide evidence that the election outcome was correct. They can also help election officials identify issues with the election.

Two common types are fixed-percentage audits and risk-limiting audits. Fixed-percentage audits look at a percentage of voting districts or voting machines. Election offices hand count the ballots for those districts or machines. They then compare the hand count to the results that the voting system reported. Matching results confirm that the machines worked as intended when tabulating votes.

Risk-limiting audits use statistical methods to determine how many ballots to audit. Generally, the closer the race, the higher the number of ballots counted. This type of audit also confirms

that the machines worked as intended and can provide statistical confidence that election officials certified or will certify the correct election outcome.

Many jurisdictions allow the public to observe election audits to increase voter confidence. Some jurisdictions publish audit reports, explaining the audit process and outcomes.

***News Angle:** This is one part of the process that receives very little attention, but is worth reporting on, if only to alleviate any voter concerns about the legitimacy of the election. What, if any, problems were revealed and how will those problems be addressed? Could they have had any impact on the results? Find out how much of the audit process is open to the media in your jurisdiction, who will conduct it and how.*

## STORY IDEAS



**The first cycle I covered voting, I thought of Election Day as my Super Bowl – the culmination of all the year’s work. Boy, was I wrong! I’ve come to realize that the weeks after voting is finished – as votes are being counted, lawsuits are being filed, candidates are claiming victory (sometimes falsely), and elections are being certified – are the busiest and most critical time on this beat. My first year, I spent an extraordinary amount of time beefing up on rules and deadlines regarding the voting process, but frankly, found myself underprepared when it came to understanding the recount, certification, and audit processes. These procedures are often less intuitive than the rules around how to vote, making the jobs of journalists even more important! I’d recommend spending a little time reading up on your local deadlines and rules for the time after voting ends.**

*Miles Parks, NPR News*



Here are a few additional ideas for stories you might want to pursue.

**How does your local election office keep voter rolls clean?** Ask officials to show you the steps they take to remove those who have died or moved. Is the state part of the list-maintenance collaboration called ERIC, and how is it working? If the state has left ERIC, what impact has that had on list maintenance efforts? How does the election office stop someone from illegally voting in the name of a voter who has died or moved but has not yet been removed from the rolls?

**What happens to my mail ballot?** Follow the process from beginning to end to help illustrate what steps are taken to make sure that the ballot gets where it’s supposed to go and is accurately counted. How do officials know that a legitimate voter has cast this ballot? Are there gaps in the chain of custody? Can voters track their ballot so they know it’s been received and counted?



**Why are drop boxes so controversial?** Despite claims to the contrary, there is little, if any, evidence that drop boxes invite fraud. Drop boxes are often monitored with security cameras and the ballots are usually collected by bipartisan teams of election workers. Why is there such a push in some communities to limit or eliminate drop boxes and what is the motivation of those behind such efforts?

**Voter ID rules.** What kinds of ID are required and what is the impact? Some requirements are much stricter than others. Who is hurt by these rules? Do otherwise eligible voters have some recourse if they don't have the ID they need? Do ID requirements instill more confidence in the legitimacy of an election?

**Homeless voters.** More than half a million people are currently homeless in the United States. Many are eligible voters but face obstacles registering because of their lack of a stable address or the required ID. What is being done in your area to help these voters navigate the process? Is it working?

**Voters with disabilities.** Federal law requires polling sites and equipment to be accessible for voters with disabilities, but that's not always the case. Check with local disability rights organizations to see if there are obstacles to voting in your area and what elections officials are doing to remove them.

**Election worker safety.** What kinds of threats do election workers face and what steps are being taken to protect against them? Has there been any shift in the volume of threats and tone since 2020?

**Election office turnover.** Has your local election office seen much turnover in staff and leadership in the past few years — something many offices are experiencing? Why is this happening and what impact has it had? What is being done about it?

**Poll worker recruitment.** Every year, communities launch programs to recruit some of the hundreds of thousands of workers needed to help run elections. These efforts often target groups such as veterans, young people, government workers or businesses. Are these campaigns working? Why or why not?

**Election vendors.** Check out who provides voting machines, services and supplies in your area. What kind of deal do they have with the election office



and how is it working? What obstacles do they face meeting demand? Like election officials, they, too, have been on the receiving end of threats and harassment. What is being done to protect them? Concerns have been raised about security gaps in elections. Has the vendor protected against foreign interference or other malevolent actors?

**Mis- and disinformation.** What, if any, election mis- and disinformation is circulating in your community, who is spreading it and what are election officials doing to counter it? How is it affecting voters and their confidence in the election? Is this part of a coordinated national campaign or the result of individual rumors and confusion?

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**This year every reporter — every voter, really — should know about the liar's dividend. As we get closer to AI-generated video and audio that's indistinguishable from the real thing, some people will claim that things they said or did are fake to escape accountability. It's a self-serving, short-term ploy and leads to a further erosion of the public's trust in what they see and hear. Sometimes it's hard to determine if something is real or AI-generated, and software that purports to check for you is often wrong, but talking to experts and searching for context can usually give you a clear answer. Be sure not to needlessly equivocate if a candidate or political operative says something is fake but your reporting shows it's real.**

*Kevin Collier, NBC News*

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**Citizen activists.** The number of groups and individuals who say they want to help make elections more secure has grown rapidly in recent years. Many falsely believe that voter fraud is widespread and belong to a national network of groups pushing for new voting restrictions. Are there such groups in your area? What are they doing, why are they doing it and what impact do they have?

**Third-party voter registration efforts.** A number of communities have restricted voter registration drives by partisan and nonpartisan groups,

such as the League of Women Voters. This has traditionally been an important way to sign up new voters, although sloppy registration drives have sometimes caused logistical or administrative headaches for election administrators. Today, there are more convenient ways to register — such as online voter registration. Are in-person voter registration drives a thing of the past? Has this led to a shift in the electorate? What amount of data is available to tell the story? Many places track how voters get registered.

## RESOURCES

Below are some of the major sources for information related to elections and voting. It is by no means a comprehensive list, but a sampling of relevant agencies, news sites, experts and researchers.

### Government agencies and associations

**Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.** [www.cisa.gov](http://www.cisa.gov)

CISA provides cybersecurity assistance to election officials and, with the rest of the intelligence community, monitors potential threats against U.S. elections.

**DOJ Civil Rights Division.** [www.justice.gov/crt/voting-section](http://www.justice.gov/crt/voting-section)

The Voting Section enforces federal voting laws. DOJ has also established an Election Threats Task Force to track and prosecute threats against election officials.

**EI-ISAC.** [www.cisecurity.org/ei-isac](http://www.cisecurity.org/ei-isac)

Organization run by the nonprofit Center for Internet Security, in partnership with CISA. It brings together election officials and security experts to share information about, and help protect against, cyberthreats.

**Election Assistance Commission.** [www.eac.gov](http://www.eac.gov)

Federal agency that oversees grants to states, sets guidelines for election systems and provides nationwide election data and research.

**The Election Center.** [www.electioncenter.org](http://www.electioncenter.org)

Also known as the National Association of Election Officials, the Election Center trains and certifies state and local election administrators, conducts research, and shares information about voting and election laws and procedures. Many of its members are local election officials.

**Federal Voting Assistance Program.** [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov)

This Defense Department program provides assistance to military and overseas voters, to help ensure they can receive and cast ballots on time.

**National Association of Secretaries of State.** [www.nass.org](http://www.nass.org)

The nonpartisan professional organization for the nation's secretaries of state, who oversee elections and voting in most states. NASS holds two major conferences a year where secretaries gather to discuss the latest voting topics. Many sessions are open to the media. NASS also provides useful nationwide voting information and provides a good way to get in touch with top state officials.

**National Association of State Election Directors.** [www.nased.org](http://www.nased.org)

NASED represents election directors who implement state voting laws, maintain statewide voter registration databases and coordinate with local election officials. This group works closely with NASS and is another important source for state and national voting information.

**National Conference of State Legislatures.** [www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns](http://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns)

NCSL provides training and research for all state legislatures and is one of the best depositories of information about state election and voting laws.

**State associations.** [electionline.org/states](http://electionline.org/states)

Local election officials in many states have formed statewide associations. Contact information for state-specific groups and agencies can be found at the comprehensive election news site, [electionline.org](http://electionline.org).

## Nonprofits and other organizations

These groups are sources for data, expertise and perspectives about the voting process and the latest challenges faced by election administrators, campaigns, lawmakers and voters. Both nonpartisan and partisan organizations are included.

**Alliance for Securing Democracy.** [securingdemocracy.gmfus.org](http://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org)

This project of the German Marshall Fund produces research and analysis on election threats, cybersecurity and misinformation, including a [new guide](#) on the potential threat of artificial intelligence.

**Ballotpedia.** [ballotpedia.org](http://ballotpedia.org)

Source for election-related data and analysis for jurisdictions around the country. It tracks state election laws, candidates and ballot measures, among other issues.

**The Bipartisan Policy Center.** [bipartisanpolicy.org/policy-area/elections](http://bipartisanpolicy.org/policy-area/elections)

Provides detailed research and analysis of top challenges in election administration, with recommended solutions. A good source for election experts.

**Brennan Center.** [www.brennancenter.org](http://www.brennancenter.org)

Besides litigating and advocating for voting rights and expanded voter access, the center conducts extensive research and analysis on key voting issues and is a good source for experts on issues facing election administrators.

**Bridging Divides Initiative.** [bridgingdivides.princeton.edu](http://bridgingdivides.princeton.edu)

This nonpartisan research program tracks political violence and works with communities to mitigate such threats.

**The Carter Center.** [www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org)

The center provides expertise and guides to help improve the U.S. election process and increase public trust.

**The Center for Election Innovation and Research.** [electioninnovation.org](http://electioninnovation.org)

CEIR does research on key voting topics and provides support and training for election administrators to help improve the process.

**Center for Tech and Civic Life.** [www.techandciviclelife.org](http://www.techandciviclelife.org)

CTCL provides training and resources for election administrators, with a focus on improving performance through technology. It also provides information to help voters navigate the process.

**Committee for Safe and Secure Elections.** [safeelections.org](http://safeelections.org)

Group of election and law enforcement officials formed after the 2020 election to help secure elections and protect election workers from threats and intimidation.

**Democracy Docket.** [www.democracydocket.com](http://www.democracydocket.com)

This online site is run by Democratic attorney Marc Elias, who has launched countless legal challenges to voting restrictions around the country. The site includes the latest on the status of these cases and other voting issues, with a progressive slant.

**The Elections Group.** [electionsgroup.com](http://electionsgroup.com)

Run by former election officials, TEG provides resources and training for administrators around the country to help improve the elections process. A good source for experts in election administration.

**Election Integrity Network.** [whoscounting.us](http://whoscounting.us)

A project of the Conservative Partnership Institute, run by a former Trump attorney. The network includes groups of state and local activists who question the legitimacy of US elections. Although many of their claims about elections are misleading, EIN can be a good source for information about what those challenging elections are most concerned about and their upcoming plans.

**Election Reformers Network.** [www.electionreformers.org](http://www.electionreformers.org)

Promotes changes to increase nonpartisanship in election administration.

**The Heritage Foundation.** [www.heritage.org/election-integrity](http://www.heritage.org/election-integrity)

A conservative think tank with an interest in the field of election law and policy, it works closely with conservative lawmakers to change election laws and keeps a database of [election fraud cases](#).

**League of Women Voters.** [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

Provides information about voting and election laws and advocates for greater access for voters.

**The National Task Force on Election Crises.** [www.electiontaskforce.org](http://www.electiontaskforce.org)

This group of more than 50 of the nation's top election and security experts monitors and recommends ways to mitigate election threats.

**Protect Democracy.** [protectdemocracy.org/our-work/protecting-elections](http://protectdemocracy.org/our-work/protecting-elections)

Produces research and analysis on voting and disinformation, advocates for secure and fair elections, and pursues litigation in support of democratic institutions.

**R Street Institute.** [www.rstreet.org](http://www.rstreet.org)

A think tank focused on limited government, free markets and individual liberty, R Street does research and reports on voting and electoral reform.

**Restoring Integrity and Trust in Elections.** [riteusa.org](http://riteusa.org)

RITE was formed by former Republican officials to counter some of the litigation and legislative efforts promoted by Democrats.

**States United Democracy Center.** [statesuniteddemocracy.org](http://statesuniteddemocracy.org)

This nonpartisan group provides legal, research and other assistance to help secure elections and election workers.

**US Vote Foundation.** [www.usvotefoundation.org](http://www.usvotefoundation.org)

Provides information and assistance to military and other U.S. voters living overseas and at home. It focuses on voter registration and voting by mail.

**The Voting Rights Lab.** [votingrightslab.org](http://votingrightslab.org)

Tracks voting and election legislation in every state.

## Academia

There are far too many relevant academic programs and experts to list, but here are a few key ones that can lead to other sources.

### **Auburn University.** [cla.auburn.edu](http://cla.auburn.edu)

The Institute for Election Administration Research and Practice at Auburn provides training and research for election administrators, in partnership with The Election Center (see above). It also publishes the [Journal of Election Administration, Research and Practice](#).

### **The Election Lab, University of Florida.** [election.lab.ufl.edu](http://election.lab.ufl.edu)

The lab provides up-to-date and historical voter turnout data and analyses. Affiliated faculty members are experts on numerous election-related topics.

### **The Elections and Voting Information Center.** [evic.reed.edu](http://evic.reed.edu)

Program at Reed College and Portland State University that conducts research on challenges in election administration with the aim of finding solutions.

### **Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.** [www.hhh.umn.edu](http://www.hhh.umn.edu)

The school offers a certificate in election administration for election officials and those considering careers in the field. The program produces regular webinars on election-related issues that are free and open to the public.

### **MIT Election and Data Sciences Lab.** [electionlab.mit.edu](http://electionlab.mit.edu)

MEDSL does extensive research on voting and elections, including technology and voting behavior, and is a great source for national data. It has a list of the [top election science experts](#) in the country, with their contact information.

### **UCLA Law School's Safeguarding Democracy Project.** [law.ucla.edu](http://law.ucla.edu)

Run by election law expert Rick Hasen, this project hosts regular webinars on voting and election topics and produces related reports and research. Its advisory board includes many of the top election experts in the country.

### **William & Mary Law School.** [law.wm.edu](http://law.wm.edu)

Established in collaboration with the National Center for State Courts, the school's Election Law Program seeks to provide assistance to judges called upon to resolve election law disputes. Students participating in this program also create resources for judges on the electoral process.



## Media

### The American Press Institute. [americanpressinstitute.org](https://americanpressinstitute.org)

API provides [resources and free training](#) to journalists, with a special focus in 2024 on elections and voting. Its programs are aimed primarily at local media outlets.

### The Election Law blog. [electionlawblog.org](https://electionlawblog.org)

A daily source for news and developments involving election law, run by Rick Hasen of UCLA Law School. Hasen also produces a [monthly podcast on election law issues](#).

### Electionline. [electionline.org](https://electionline.org)

If you have time to go to only one news site for election news, this is the one. Run by The Election Center, Electionline compiles a daily list (with links) of news stories from around the country related to voting and election administration. It can help you keep up with developments in your state while spotting national trends in the field. The site also produces weekly reports on voting topics and provides information on sources and upcoming events.

### Election SOS. [electionsos.com](https://electionsos.com)

This program provides resources, guides, experts, and training for those covering elections and voting. It's a partnership between several nonprofits and Hearken consultancy.

### High Turnout, Wide Margins. [podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/high-turnout-wide-margins](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/high-turnout-wide-margins)

This bi-weekly podcast is produced by two Missouri county election officials and addresses the latest issues of concern for election administrators across the country. The podcast is a good way to find sources and story ideas.

### The Journalist's Resource. [journalistsresource.org/politics-and-government](https://journalistsresource.org/politics-and-government)

This site, run by the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard, provides in-depth articles and research on topics you might encounter covering elections and voting.

### The National Press Club Journalism Institute. [www.pressclubinstitute.org](https://www.pressclubinstitute.org)

The institute also provides support and training for journalists, including programs focused on election coverage.

### PEN America. [pen.org/issue/disinformation](https://pen.org/issue/disinformation)

This free speech organization provides tools to help journalists identify and report on disinformation.

### The Poynter Institute. [www.poynter.org](https://www.poynter.org)

Provides online workshops and other training for journalists on a range of topics, including voting and elections. Poynter also runs [Politifact](#) which fact-checks some of the latest political and policy claims, including those related to elections.

### Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. [www.rcfp.org/resources/election-legal-guide](https://www.rcfp.org/resources/election-legal-guide)

Has produced an extensive guide on legal issues reporters face while covering elections, including what is allowed when reporting near or in polling sites, and what election-related records are accessible. The guide is available in English and Spanish.

### VoteBeat. [www.votebeat.org](https://www.votebeat.org)

This nonprofit news organization is devoted solely to reporting on voting and the administration of elections. It produces a wide range of smart, in-depth feature stories about the process, and can provide ideas or background for local coverage.

## Books

There are many good books about voting in America. Here are a few examples that can provide background and perspective for current reporting.

**Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States.** Eleanor Flexner

**The Future of Election Administration.** Mitchell Brown, Kathleen Hale and Bridgett King

**How We Vote: Innovation in American Elections.** Mitchell Brown and Kathleen Hale.

**The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States.** Alexander Keyssar

**Stolen Justice: The Struggle for African American Voting Rights.** Lawrence Goldstone

**Thank You for Voting: The Maddening, Enlightening, Inspiring Truth About Voting in America.** Erin Geiger Smith

**Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All.** Martha S. Jones

**The Voting Wars: From Florida 2000 to the Next Election Meltdown.** Rick Hasen

**What You Need to Know About Voting and Why.** Kim Wehle



[electionsgroup.com](http://electionsgroup.com)