THE CARTER CENTER

RICE UNIVERSITY'S
BAKER INSTITUTE
FOR PUBLIC POLICY

CONFERENCE REPORT

THE CARTER-BAKER COMMISSION: 16 YEARS LATER

October 2021

"Conference Report — The Carter-Baker Commission: 16 Years Later"

Table of Contents

Letter from Jimmy Carter and James A. Baker, III

As co-chairs of the 2005 bipartisan Commission on Federal Election Reform, we wrote an introductory letter for its report that opened with this simple statement: "Elections are the heart of democracy." If the elections Americans use to select our leaders are defective, we continued, democracy is in danger.

At that time, many citizens were losing confidence in the fairness of elections, and we thought it was important that Democrats and Republicans come together to develop solutions to remedy key problems in our electoral system. Although there was inevitable disagreement about a few recommendations, the commission delivered a consensus report endorsed by all members. We all agreed that election reform could help transcend what we viewed as a sterile debate between integrity and ballot access.

Public confidence in our elections continues to wane, and the risk to our democracy is greater than ever. Losing candidates accuse their opponents of cheating rather than accepting results, congratulating their opponent, and acknowledging that perhaps they didn't campaign effectively enough to win. So-called electoral reforms too often aim to give political advantage to one side or the other rather than to fix problems. It is important to remember, however, that not everything Republicans propose is voter suppression and not everything Democrats propose makes fraud easier.

More worrisome is the lack of comity among elected leaders that prevents them from reaching agreements needed to move our country forward. Too many prefer blaming others for our national problems rather than working together to find solutions.

With that in mind, The Carter Center and Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy conducted a series of five webinars this spring that examined critical challenges facing the U.S. electoral system. The webinars brought together a range of election officials and experts who provided hands-on analysis about the problems confronting our elections and advice on how to solve them.

Genuine reform should put aside political hyperbole and focus on steps that can enable effective policymaking. We hope that the webinars and this report can be part of a new direction in our national debate where we shout less and listen more.

Jimmy Carter   **James A. Baker, III**

Preface

We have long admired the wisdom and sage approaches that President Jimmy Carter and Secretary James A. Baker, III, have exhibited throughout their careers in public service. Understanding that the delicate balance of our democracy pivots on a fulcrum of support for public projects and policy, they have consistently emphasized strategies designed to achieve key objectives and gain support from both sides of the political aisle.

In 2005, years after President Carter and Secretary Baker had left Washington, they again displayed their signature leadership approaches when they convened the bipartisan Commission on Federal Election Reform.

With the legacy of the 2005 commission in mind, The Carter Center and Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy organized a series of five panels during April, May, and June 2021 that brought together experts and practitioners to discuss electoral reform in a straightforward manner devoid of the political hyperbole that too often defines current discourse. We offer our sincerest thanks to the 20 people who participated in the virtual webinars.

We also would like to acknowledge the important contributions of several other colleagues whose input was critical to this project, including Paige Alexander, CEO of The Carter Center; Edward P. Djerejian, Director of the Baker Institute; Mark Jones, Co-director of the Baker Institute's Presidential Elections Program; Avery Davis-Roberts, Associate Director of The Carter Center's Democracy Program; Doug Chapin, Director of Election Research at Fors Marsh Group; Soyia Ellison, Associate Director of Communications for The Carter Center; and Grace Gerenday, Laura Hotze, Brooke Huger, Kevin Johnson, Lia Merivaki, Mathew Sperling and Kevin Young.

We hope that the insights of our expert panelists will provide meaningful and sober contributions to the passionate national debate about the way Americans participate in elections and cast ballots.

David Carroll
Director, Democracy Program
The Carter Center

John Williams
Co-director, Presidential Elections Program
Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy

Introduction

In 2005, the United States was in the fifth year of efforts to reform its election system. The hotly contested and controversial 2000 presidential election had identified flaws in the nation's registration and voting laws that were seen as contributing to a lack of confidence in election outcomes.

In 2002, Congress – with input from state and local election officials and experts from all sectors of American society – responded by enacting the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to address the wide range of issues identified in 2000.

By 2004, however, it was clear that HAVA had not settled all of the arguments about election reform. State laws requiring voters to provide photo identification were generating backlash amid claims of disenfranchisement. Concerns about new voting technology were leading to fears of counting errors. And growing numbers of absentee and mail ballots were raising concerns about the possibility of fraud.

In response to these concerns, former President Jimmy Carter and former Secretary of State James A. Baker, III, agreed to co-chair a bipartisan commission, housed at Washington D.C.'s American University, to examine these and other outstanding election reform issues. The final report, titled "Building Confidence in U.S. Elections," stressed the important role of elections in the nation's democracy and made a series of recommendations, including:

- A national system to connect state and local voter registration lists
- Voter identification based on a universally available REAL ID card
- Policies to improve voter access for all communities, as well as innovations like vote centers and voter information lookup sites
- Stronger efforts to combat fraud, especially in absentee voting
- Auditable paper backups for all voting technology

Sixteen years later, after another fiercely fought controversial presidential election in 2020, a host of the issues that Carter-Baker addressed in 2005 – many of which are now-familiar aspects of the American voting experience – were once again back in the news.

In this environment, The Carter Center and Baker Institute set out to convene election leaders and other experts to discuss the important challenges and opportunities facing the nation's election system and, like the original Carter-Baker Commission, seek out areas of consensus for building confidence in U.S. elections.

Summaries of the Five Webinar Sessions

Each session began with brief introductory remarks from The Carter Center's David Carroll and the Baker Institute's John Williams as well as a short introductory video covering key background on the 2005 Carter-Baker Commission and the main issues to be discussed during that panel. Doug Chapin, who served as Research Director of the 2005 Carter-Baker Commission and is now Director of Election Research at Fors Marsh Group, moderated all five sessions.

Session 1: Election Integrity and Ballot Access

The series kicked off on April 7, 2021, with a session titled "The Carter-Baker Commission, 16 Years Later: Election Integrity and Ballot Access," which featured four distinguished guests –two former members of the Carter-Baker Commission and two current Secretaries of State:

- Susan Molinari (R), Former Member of Congress and Carter-Baker Commission member
- Sharon Priest (D), Former Secretary of State, Arkansas, and Carter-Baker Commission member
- Brad Raffensperger (R), Secretary of State, Georgia
- Maggie Toulouse Oliver (D), Secretary of State, New Mexico, and current President of the National Association of Secretaries of State

Moderator Doug Chapin set the tone for the panel by emphasizing his hope that the sessions would help revive the lost art of exchanging ideas and finding solutions that work for everyone at every level of government and noting that this is happening less and less in the current environment.

Leading off the discussion, Molinari and Priest agreed that their experience on the Carter-Baker Commission demonstrated the power of bipartisan approaches to tough problems. Priest remembered the group's efforts to forgo "political points" and "find common ground to make elections accessible and to have the integrity that the people of this country deserve."

Molinari said she appreciated how commission members listened to opposing views and did not use them as weapons against each other. She said members shared a common belief that even if they didn't agree with every recommendation the commission made, they would work together and approve a final consensus report.

Speaking from the perspective current election officials, Raffensperger and Toulouse Oliver agreed about the importance of bipartisan efforts like Carter-Baker. Raffensperger said he'd like to think Americans can move forward with a clear, bipartisan discussion about how elections should be conducted. However, he noted, this is not happening, at least not in Georgia. With that in mind, he added, the 2005 Carter-Baker Commission deserves

applause: "Many of us lean into it as we're looking at . . . what have we done and what do we have left to do."

Toulouse Oliver stressed the importance of doing as much as possible to get everyone on the same page by focusing on common ground and agreement. It is important to start by discussing shared concerns because the type of dialogue fostered in this panel is more important than ever.

The topic then turned to the twin imperatives of access and integrity in the electoral process. Priest said that balancing the tension between accessibility and integrity may never be truly resolved. When you have a winner and a loser, the loser usually has a problem, she said. They then blame the election process for their loss. Given that, said Priest, access and integrity are always going to be somewhat at odds. At the same time, she stressed that democracy relies on trust and underscored her belief that most people are honest. "Accessibility and integrity are imperative to having free and fair elections to preserve our democratic republic," she said.

Molinari offered a complementary perspective, indicating that tension between access and integrity isn't always inevitable. She said that amid doubts about the 2020 election, it is important people understand that our system has robust checks and balances.

Raffensperger, who has been in the crosshairs of controversy as a referee in the 2020 presidential election, stressed that his office did not see voting fraud that would change the election results in Georgia. However, he said, some problems existed, particularly with absentee voting. He also said that the Carter-Baker report's finding that absentee ballots are a problematic area that could be shored up remains accurate.

Toulouse Oliver noted that the diverse geography of her state has led to a situation where some communities have unequal access to the ballot box. As a result, urban areas in her state often have more voting options than rural and tribal areas. She concluded: "Everything that we can do to try to expand access . . . comes down to a simple question of fundamental equity." The goal of equal access to voting is her "North Star" in New Mexico.

Chapin then asked panelists: "What is the threat that misinformation and disinformation pose to the American electoral process, and what can we, as an election community . . . do about that?"

Raffensperger stressed the important role of county officials who administer elections, noting that their integrity sustains the electoral system. "As long as we continue to make sure our counties are populated with high-integrity, high-quality individuals, which they are, then that's the strength of the system," he said. He observed that election officials and poll workers are also our neighbors who we spend time with at Kiwanis Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, and churches. "Those are good people," he said.
Toulouse Oliver also stressed the integrity of election officials and how they work to ensure transparency throughout the process. "The challenge," she said, "is to make sure folks know

what those transparent processes are and how they, too, may have access." On the flip side, she said, there is a need for "zero-tolerance" policies for those who lie or misrepresent what they are observing in the election process.

Devising such policies poses tough challenges, however. "How do you deal with those lies when the person in charge of the country is telling those lies, and keeps on telling those lies, and gets media coverage that keep on promoting those lies?" Priest asked. "How do you combat that?"

Molinari added that these challenges place hefty demands on election officials and poll workers, noting "the people who show up on Election Day, who are handing out their cards and just feel so excited to be a part of this . . . now find themselves in this maelstrom of hate and distrust." She stressed that election officials make the difference in delivering the elections: "It was the people who were on the ground who do this once a year or twice a year who said, 'No,' there was no fraud."

The discussion turned to steps that could be taken to address problems with disinformation. These included:

- The National Association of Secretaries of States' #TrustedInfo2020 effort, which enabled state officials like Toulouse Oliver and Raffensperger to label their election information as official on social media in order to vouch for its accuracy.
- The need for more civic education to help answer basic civic questions like, "How does government operate?" and "Why do we have elections?"
- Joint efforts between election officials and social media companies to address what Molinari described as the "whack-a-mole" nature of the disinformation problem and the challenge of correcting bad information online.

Chapin asked panelists for a success story from the Carter-Baker Commission since its report came out 16 years ago. Priest mentioned the commission's recommendation to make voter photo IDs mandatory, and she also acknowledged that supporting a mandatory voter ID was unusual for the Democrats who did that.

Molinari pointed to policies that facilitate voter registration, such as the national Voter Registration Act (known as "Motor Voter"), which has greatly expanded opportunities to register at state departments of motor vehicles and other public agencies.

Toulouse Oliver highlighted the increase in registration list-sharing and maintenance across states. Raffensperger cited both voter ID efforts and the introduction of provisional ballots.

Chapin closed the session by asking the panelists to look ahead and identify what they see as key challenges on election policy.

Toulouse Oliver discussed the importance of educating and informing the public about key aspects of elections. That means letting people know about the steps taken to preserve the

integrity of the election process and making sure votes are tallied and reported accurately, she said.

Raffensperger stressed the need for bipartisanship in the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), which has two Democrats and two Republicans. "If (the EAC) truly is 2:2, then they have to really work together and come up with bipartisan solutions, just like the Carter-Baker report did in 2005. Although we have a two-party system in America with two different world views," he said, "it's important to come together and agree on the big issues."

Molinari agreed with Raffensperger's emphasis on the importance of working in a bipartisan manner on the EAC. "In recent years, (the EAC) has not been given the authority or the resources that it needs to play a very vital role," she said. However, she added, the EAC can play an important "modeling" role by demonstrating how to develop bipartisan solutions. She also indicated that a new Carter-Baker style effort could help address challenges related to disinformation as a means of bolstering public confidence.

Priest stressed the importance of adequate funding for elections. "Elections have been underfunded for years and years and years," she said. "So, making sure that there are enough funds to truly make sure that elections are free and fair, that's what the people in this country want. And that's what they deserve."

In their concluding comments, the panelists agreed that there is a continued need for nonpartisanship in election administration but that structural changes to the nation's election system were not required, given the high level of professionalism and personal integrity among the people who run our nation's elections.

To watch the full recording of this session, please visit this link.

Session 2: Voting by Mail

The second session took place on April 28, 2021, and was titled "The Carter-Baker Commission, 16 Years Later: Voting by Mail." The discussion focused on enabling constructive bipartisan dialogue on election reforms. The panelists were:

- Judd Choate, Colorado State Election Director
- Alice Miller, Director, Board of Elections of Washington, D.C.
- Tammy Patrick, Senior Advisor to Elections Programs, Democracy Fund
- Kim Wyman, Secretary of State, Washington

Moderator Doug Chapin opened the discussion by asking Wyman about aspects of the voting system in her state that might be transferable or applicable to other states. Wyman said Washington's ramp-up to full-scale vote-by-mail in 2011 was unique because the state had 10 years to implement strategies. Prioritizing accountability and quickly building out capacities were transferable lessons, she said.

Chapin asked if the need to rapidly implement vote-by-mail during the 2020 electoral cycle presented challenges elsewhere. Miller focused on logistics, saying that "the one thing we needed to make sure of and build upon were the resources on the back end for processing those ballots."

Patrick spoke about how much vote-by-mail systems have evolved, particularly with the increased use of vote-by-mail and the significant changes in postal service operations. Patrick also observed that political context had played a significant role in the debate on voting by mail, adding that "the important piece of this is contextualizing the partisanship or the partisan angles and aspects that have been elevated in the last year." Prior to last year, she said, vote-by-mail and early voting were part of the Republican strategy. Last year, however, the Republican presidential candidate questioned the legitimacy of those voting options. "All of that created, really, an environment where false and misleading information was allowed to percolate and spread to such a degree that it was weaponized against many ways in which Americans vote," she said.

Patrick further said that during the primaries, about 75% of voters had planned to vote by mail in the November general election. But ultimately only about 50% of voters cast their ballots by mail. That decrease, she said, was probably due in large part to rhetoric and disinformation.

Chapin asked panelists if voting by mail increases turnout or improves access to the ballot. Each said that it increased turnout. Patrick attributed the gain to the proactive nature of vote by mail. Miller agreed, but also noted that increases in turnout were smaller during presidential elections.

Chapin, citing the Carter-Baker report's focus on election integrity, turned the conversation to the panelists' experiences with safeguards for the vote-by-mail processes. Patrick said that there are safeguards in place when citizens initially register to vote that

ensure they are a "true and live and accurate person" and that everyone who receives a ballot is authenticated against a list that has these safeguards in place.

Miller agreed, adding there is more security built into the mail balloting process than in the in-person process. She also pointed out that the existing penalties for fraud are quite high.

Wyman discussed advances in technology intended to help secure the process and provide "tools in the toolbox" for elections officials seeking to guarantee transparency and accountability. Wyman stressed the need to strengthen security measures already in place and to address the roles of accountability and reconciliation.

Chapin turned to the ways that paper ballots contribute to effective audits of the election process. Wyman drew attention to existing efforts by elections officials nationwide to create audit trails. Miller focused on the dual priorities of security and transparency, discussing how officials typically provide opportunities for "anyone to come in and look at the [audit] process..." so they can see for themselves the measures taken to ensure that election materials are safe and secure. Patrick said she had serious concerns about a flawed post-election review process underway at the time in Maricopa County, Arizona, because it lacked transparency by hindering access for press or observers. That audit could also undermine the results of a previous official audit, Patrick said.

Wyman later responded: "What we're seeing in Arizona, in particular, should alarm every American because when you make a law . . . or a policy or procedure about elections, you do it before an election." The problem with what's happening in Arizona, she said, is that although the outcome is already known, misinformation is spreading. "I'm more worried about the long-term precedents that this action by the legislature is going to have nationally because guaranteed, this will not just be Republicans in one state doing it."

Choate said that "one of the things that is disturbing about what's happening in Arizona is that it's upending what is already a well-thought-out and legally binding process. They are effectively saying they don't believe in the audit they crafted in law."

Chapin asked Choate to describe the "Colorado model" and aspects of it that address voting by mail. Choate explained that they sometimes humorously call this "the Burger King model" or the "have-it-your-way model." Election officials mail ballots to all active voters and open one vote center for every 25,000 voters around the state. "We have expanded Election Day voting . . . to try to meet the consumer where they're at," he said.

Chapin next asked: "To what extent should legislators not just be listening but actively consulting elections administrators at the state and local level before, during, and after they make changes to election laws? In other words, should legislators be talking *to* elections officials and not just *about* them?"

Choate said that Colorado legislators have directly engaged with election administrators to develop sound policy in that state. Miller and Patrick concurred that such an approach can

be beneficial if all sides work together, although Patrick added that she had seen a shift in the past 10-15 years in the attitudes of election officials. In the past, election officials would prefer to apply rules given to them by the legislature, but lately they are increasingly getting "some really bad legislation." Now "state and local election officials feel that they should not weigh in for or against many bills . . . but instead weigh in on what are the impacts, how could it be implemented, how can it be more fiscally responsible, how can it be expanded to get more bang for the buck? . . . I think that we're on a good trajectory."

Wyman's experience diverged. In Washington, she said, local elections officials are reluctant to speak out on legislation, although auditors now want to advise legislators more actively in reaction to laws passed in 2020. Legislators don't want to talk about the wonky administrative side of election administration, but they need to, she said. "And they absolutely need to be talking to elections officials," she added. "And that's not just state legislators. That's Congress, as well."

Chapin turned to the topic to challenges related to the U.S. Postal Service, asking the panelists to weigh in on ways that people could act to protect the role of the postal service.

Patrick described the necessity of allowing voters to track the status of their mail ballots while en route and underscored that "capacity is not really a key issue" regarding delivering of ballots. Instead of simply increasing capacity, Patrick indicated that the USPS should focus on enforcing existing policies that prioritize ballots and ensuring ballots are properly postmarked. She underscored that a supportive postmaster general and board of governors were essential.

Miller and Wyman agreed, with the former stressing the need for positive changes at USPS. Wyman said that a long ramp-up to a vote-by-mail system allows local postmasters and election officials to build relationships that breed success. During the recent election, for example, the USPS in Colorado distributed bad information and failed to correct the error despite requests from state election officials, he said.

Chapin asked panelists to address a question from an audience member about the financial cost of voting by mail. Miller, Choate, and Wyman agreed that it has high initial costs. But over the long run, they said, cost savings will emerge because of lower personnel requirements and increasingly efficient techniques. "We anticipate that our jurisdictions save around a third of what it would cost them if they were running polling-place elections," Choate said of Colorado.

Chapin closed the session by asking panelists: "What do you think folks can do to help assure voters that vote by mail . . . is as useful as you all believe it is?" Choate emphasized the importance of auditing and public communication. "It goes back to auditing and then getting the word out," he said. "You have to have a good process, a process that's public, something that people can see and be a part of." Miller and Wyman offered similar statements, with Miller emphasizing the importance of one-on-one interactions and active outreach.

Patrick stressed the importance of increasing the use of ballot tracking. "Things like the Postal Service Informed Delivery . . . there are things like that that we can do that provide the information to the voter free and of absolutely no charge and really, of no additional effort on behalf of the voter."

To watch the full recording of this session, please visit this link.

Session 3: Voter Registration and Voter ID

The third session of the series took place on May 5, 2021, and was titled "The Carter-Baker Commission, 16 Years Later: Voter Registration and Voter ID." The panelists were:

- David Becker, Executive Director and Founder, Center for Election Innovation & Research
- Joshua A. Douglas, Ashland-Spears Distinguished Research Professor of Law, University of Kentucky J. David Rosenberg College of Law
- Toni Johnson, Chairwoman, Hinds County, Mississippi, Election Commission
- Kathleen Unger, Founder, President, and Chairman of the Board, VoteRiders

Moderator Doug Chapin opened the session with a general question about the effects that changes in voter registration and voter ID laws have had on the work of election officials.

Johnson said that these policies have been largely problematic, and they pose particular challenges for elderly and LGBT+ voters. Douglas agreed, adding that though the Carter-Baker report endorsed photo ID laws, it did so in a way that was "phased, in an appropriate time period with appropriate safeguards for voters to make sure people are not disenfranchised." It's important to note that increasingly restrictive voter ID laws today are not what the Carter-Baker Commission endorsed. She further added that the burden is often on local election officials to keep up with and enforce ever-changing voter ID laws.

The discussion then focused on advances in voter registration and how those advancements relate to recommendations made by the Carter-Baker report.

Becker noted that accurate voter registration is crucial to improving voter trust in the integrity of elections. He also stressed that voter registration is the single biggest point of failure or success in election systems. As a result, he said, it can be used as a tool to increase voter trust in elections. For this to happen, registration systems must ensure that there are as many eligible voters on the list as possible, while excluding ineligible voters. Once that is done, maintaining accurate voter information is critical. Along these lines, Becker highlighted the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) and its ability to securely share voter information between states, identify when a voter has moved states, and keep voter lists up to date. Becker said that partisan actors like to point out that the Carter-Baker Commission report seemingly endorsed voter ID laws, when it actually endorsed ID laws if they were tied to universal registration.

Chapin then asked Unger to explain how her work at VoteRiders helps voters navigate consistently changing policies.

Unger explained that helping voters navigate voter ID issues allows them to "vote with confidence." The organization ensured that "almost 1.5 million new voters in the 2020 cycle were prepared to cast a ballot that counted." VoteRiders combats confusion and lack of access by providing resources like state-specific voter ID information wallet cards, online information, and voter ID clinics. Because underserved communities are often

intimidated and confused by voter ID policies, she said, VoteRiders has helped enfranchise many new voters.

On the topic of accessibility, Chapin asked the panelists about the importance of the Carter-Baker recommendation that voter IDs be free and easily available.

Becker pointed out that many other countries use some form of voter ID with reasonable success. Yet these countries "have accepted the burden of giving every single citizen an ID that follows them for life and maintaining the database that goes along with that." In contrast, Becker said, the United States does not have such a nationwide system and even with ERIC and its data-sharing capabilities, states in this country are less prepared to carry the burden that comes with the logistics of requiring voter IDs.

Unger agreed that the current system is inefficient, delving into the reasons that voter IDs are often not accessible to some voters. She explained that obtaining the correct documents to qualify for a voter ID can cost money, even if voter IDs are free. She also outlined the time-consuming and complicated process to obtain REAL IDs (IDs that meet federal standards for both identity and legal presence) in some states, which can require voters to travel to their local ID-issuing office with either a current passport or original certified copy of their birth certificate (and every name change since then), a document to prove their full Social Security number, and two documents to prove residency.

Douglas added that although voter IDs can improve ballot security, the level of disenfranchisement caused by IDs outweighs the need to prevent impersonation fraud. He recognized the need for implementing these laws in order to increase public trust. But such laws must not preclude eligible voters from voting, he said. A new photo ID law in Kentucky "achieves a lot of those goals," he said.

Panelists largely agreed that although laws requiring voter ID have merit, many states have hurdles to obtaining IDs that can impede easy access to them. Given the concerns about obtaining voter IDs, Chapin asked the panelists if states and localities could do more to ensure people get the ID they need to vote.

Both Johnson and Becker said there is often confusion about how to obtain the REAL ID. Becker, Douglas, and Unger also argued that eligible voters should not be turned away for not having an ID, but rather should be given the opportunity to sign an affidavit affirming their identity (which many states allow). Another potential remedy, Unger said, would be for states to provide required documents for free.

Chapin then turned the discussion to how the availability of voter IDs in the panelists' respective states has evolved over the years.

Johnson said there was a lot of pushback in Mississippi when the first voter ID law passed. After that, she said, a special voter ID card was created, although the state very rarely issues such cards. Most Mississippi voters either have a driver's license and can vote, or do not

have a driver's license and can't vote. Unfortunately, she said, there isn't much of a reform movement to change voter ID practices in her state.

Douglas said that Kentucky has had some success achieving compromise with its recently passed photo ID laws. Though Douglas does not support photo ID requirements, he noted that the law is very popular among voters who say they are concerned about election security. He also said that he worked with the state to find ways to make the law minimally restrictive on voters and to ensure that voters could still vote by using an affidavit if they did not have a photo ID.

Chapin then asked the panelist about states that don't have voter ID requirements: "How can officials communicate to voters that the voter registration process also helps ensure the integrity of elections?"

Becker said that the guiding principle is transparency. Election officials must show that they are maintaining accurate data on voters and give them access to information. They must diligently maintain voter rolls and publish online the names of those to be removed from the rolls so that voters can review them first. Johnson added that voters also have a responsibility to ensure that their information stays updated.

Douglas and Becker both advocated for automatic voter registration, a tool that increases access as well as secures integrity because it allows for voter registrations to be updated easily as voters' information changes over time.

Chapin asked panelists about the role election officials should play in helping to drive reform.

Johnson expressed support for election official-driven reform, mentioning that Mississippi has an organization of election officials that holds meetings to discuss the legislative agenda and propose additional reforms.

Becker stressed the importance of including election officials in reform discussions, noting that legislators, on their own, do not understand the complexity of elections and can make bad policy decisions if left to their own devices.

Closing out the session, Chapin asked if there is a good reason to impose proof of citizenship requirements to vote – and if so, what is an effective way to do that.

Unger pointed out that Arizona is the only state that has a proof of citizenship requirement for voter registration that is still in place. Both Unger and Becker stressed that it is very difficult to obtain an official birth certificate that is required for proof of citizenship. Becker and Douglas pointed out that such a requirement is not worth the effort or burden that it creates, especially since most noncitizens are not likely to risk going to vote, regardless of whether a proof of citizenship is required.

To watch the full recording of this session, please visit this link.

Session 4: Technology and Elections

The fourth session of the series was held on May 17, 2021. Titled "The Carter-Baker Commission, 16 Years Later: Technology and Elections," it featured the following panelists:

- Monica Childers, Product Manager for Risk-Limiting Audits, VotingWorks
- Veronica Degraffenreid, Acting Secretary of the Commonwealth and Special Adviser on Election Modernization, Pennsylvania Department of State
- Ryan Macias, Founder, RSM Election Solutions, and former Acting Director of Testing and Certification, U.S. Election Assistance Commission
- Dan Wallach, Professor of Computer Sciences and Electrical and Computer Engineering, Rice University; Baker Institute Rice Faculty Scholar; Adviser to the Carter-Baker Commission

Moderator Doug Chapin began by asking panelists for their general thoughts on the current state of voting and elections technology. Degraffenreid noted that although modernization is needed, policy change is a slow process. Fortunately, she added, many jurisdictions are now designating voting infrastructure as critical infrastructure.

Chapin then asked about strides made in standards and testing since the release of the 2005 Carter-Baker report.

Macias said there have been a number of developments in the last 16 years. First, elections are now considered critical infrastructure, which has changed how we view election technology. This has helped as more and more officials are recognizing the importance of improving the standards and protocols of election technology. Though these protocols have not reached required levels, he said, it is encouraging that some states are adopting proper protocols and best practices for election technology. He expressed hope that similar protocols will be adopted at the federal level. He also noted that there have been strides in improving the accessibility and usability of election technologies, an increased focus on interoperability so that voting systems can "talk to each other" across state lines, and more emphasis on technologies that facilitate audits.

Chapin turned to the topic of risk-limiting audits, asking how states are putting this type of audit into practice.

Childers explained that such an audit looks for errors in any place machines are used, including registration, e-poll books, ballot-marking devices, and tabulators, among others. Such audits look for the potential of both machine and human error. She emphasized that audits need to be a consistent part of the election process and not a tool to correct mistakes after the fact.

Childers said that risk-limiting audits (RLAs) can be used to verify that tabulators correctly identified the winner by using a random sample of ballots and statistically verifying the outcome. The required sample size depends on the margin of victory by the winning candidate. As a result, RLAs often save time and resources by requiring only a relatively

small sample. Childers stressed two values of audits: They boost public confidence and help election officials learn how to improve the election process.

Chapin then asked panelists how the security of voting technology has improved since 2005.

Wallach said an important development has been the increase of voter-verifiable paper ballots. In 2007 and 2008, research concluded that direct-recording electronic voting machines (DREs) had serious problems. This led most states to use hand-marked paper ballots or machine-marked paper ballots, which have improved security and made recounts easier. Wallach noted that the November 2020 Georgia recount would not have been possible if Georgia had kept its old paperless voting system.

Chapin then asked panelists about ways accessibility and integrity have improved over the last 16 years because of voting technology.

Macias said it is important to remember that voting technology is not just the voting equipment, it's every step of the process from registration to the reporting of election results. Macias said advocates for accessibility and integrity believe that the two are not mutually exclusive. For example, many states have started doing both security and accessibility testing, and then sharing their results, which gives less-resourced states the ability to adopt similar policies that benefit those states.

Degraffenreid focused on developments in accessibility, especially the increased efforts to guarantee that election reporting websites are detailed and easy for voters to understand.

Childers underscored that access to information and transparency in the process are important for both accessibility and integrity. In addition, she said that voting technology should be open-source so that anyone can see how it works.

Degraffenreid and Wallach agreed that although internet voting has the potential to vastly increase access, it cannot satisfy security concerns – at least, not yet. Degraffenreid also pointed out the irony in how much voting is done on paper today in our increasingly digital world.

Turning to a related topic, Chapin asked panelists if election officials can keep up with the rising costs of modernization and what strategies could be used to get funding from policymakers.

Degraffenreid agreed that modernization can be expensive, especially as rules get more specific and the need for communication with voters increases. She suggested that election grants can be a helpful way for local officials to afford new machines. She also noted that voting by mail increases costs at the outset. As a result, better-funded jurisdictions can provide more opportunities to vote, including through early voting centers and ballot drop boxes. This disparity between well-funded and poorly funded jurisdictions sparks concerns over differing levels of access to the ballot.

Childers echoed Degraffenreid's concerns about equitable access issues, saying that the nonprofit she works for, VotingWorks, is worried about the large equity gap in technology between wealthier and poorer jurisdictions.

Wallach focused the exorbitant cost of voting equipment and stressed that because very few companies make the required voting machines, they can overcharge for the equipment. He suggested that the best way to get around this is for election officials to look into independently building voting machines, as was done in Los Angeles County.

Macias noted that funding streams often do not meet the needs for and costs of replacing voting technology.

Chapin turned to the topic of accessibility for voters with disabilities. Degraffenreid said that there is strong interest in increasing accessibility for voters with disabilities and pointed to the use of curbside voting in North Carolina as an example. However, she said, more work needs to be done, including increasing access for voters who don't speak English.

Wallach agreed that access needs to be increased, and he gave examples of "new and bold" strategies that increased access in Harris County, Texas, such as car voting and overnight voting. Childers highlighted the complexity that comes with different state laws, saying that no single technology serves everyone. With that in mind, officials must embrace different ways of improving accessibility.

Chapin next sought explanations for the slow modernization of election technology.

Degraffenreid and Childers both emphasized the long time it takes for systems to get certified to new standards. Having constant cycles of elections also means that there are only very narrow time frames for changes. Macias suggested that some jurisdictions may lack the expertise needed to make progress.

Chapin concluded by asking panelists their thoughts on improving cybersecurity and protecting against outside threats to election systems.

Wallach said he would like to see the Elections Assistance Commission (EAC) certify e-poll books and other aspects of electronic voting other than voting machines. He reiterated his opposition to the use of internet voting for the time being. Degraffenreid and Macias both emphasized the importance of testing and evidence-based elections. Macias also stressed the need to combat disinformation through transparency. Childers concluded by underscoring the importance of building simplicity into election systems, because the more complex they get, the more room there is for human error.

To watch the full recording of this session, please visit this link.

Session 5: Opportunities and Challenges of Election Reform

The fifth and final session of the series took place on June 2, 2021, and was titled "The Carter-Baker Commission, 16 Years Later: Opportunities and Challenges of Election Reform." It featured the following panelists:

- Michael Adams, Secretary of State, Kentucky
- Jocelyn Kiley, Associate Director, Pew Research Center
- Charles Stewart III, Kenan Sahin Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Alejandro Tullio, Director of Legal Sciences, San Martin National University in Argentina

Moderator Doug Chapin opened the discussion by noting the current, intense partisan bickering in many states. Chapin then asked Adams about how Kentucky managed to pass a recent bipartisan election reform bill.

Adams said the new bill balanced the need for both access and security, making it "easier to vote and harder to cheat." He highlighted two main changes in the reform bill: no-excuse absentee voting and early in-person voting. The extra days of voting reduced irregularities, and absentee ballots could be tracked online to ensure they were not lost or stolen. Adams says these measures satisfied those demanding easier voter access and placated those concerned about election security.

Given this bipartisan success in Kentucky, Chapin asked if there is a widespread desire for bipartisan or nonpartisan election administration.

Kiley said there is bipartisan agreement on expanding early voting and increasing automatic voter registration. At least in theory, she said, the public supports nonpartisan or bipartisan election administration. In practice, however, she said that "people also like for the people that they support to be in power."

Stewart discussed the Survey of the Performance of American Elections that he has helped conduct for a dozen years. Started after the 2008 presidential election, the survey asks about voters' experience on voting day. The survey indicates that the best way for election administrators to increase faith in elections is to make the voting experience a good one, he said. That's true regardless of whether election administration in the state is partisan or not. When even a small number of people have a bad experience, Stewart said, their stories gain traction and can lead to discontent with elections.

Tullio drew on lessons from international experience to guide his thoughts about achieving nonpartisan election administration. The goal, Tullio said, should be to create nonpartisan electoral management boards (EMBs), and to appoint people with no political ties to these boards.

Continuing, Chapin asked the panelists how nonpartisan election administration could help both access and security in elections.

Adams gave an example of ballot curing in Kentucky as something that had bipartisan support and bolstered both security and access. (Ballot curing is the process of setting aside problematic mail ballots, such as those that appear to have signature mismatches, and giving voters a chance to fix or "cure" the problem. If they don't, that ballot does not count.) While Adams said he does not think that the process needs to be totally nonpartisan, he acknowledged that strictly partisan bills can create distrust.

Tullio agreed that the best way to approach changes to electoral laws is through bipartisan agreement and asserted that accessibility is a good way to avoid polarization.

One way to build bipartisan support, Stewart said, is to establish automatic voter registration through a department of motor vehicles. Doing that increases accessibility and security. He also mentioned the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), which allows states to share voter registration information and keep track of residents who have moved. He noted that the ability to update and maintain correct data is important to improving security.

Kiley emphasized the critical need to effectively explain to voters that accessibility and security don't have to be trade-offs. She also pointed to the importance of encouraging Democrats and Republicans to find areas of bipartisan agreement "outside the bright lights of politics." In other words, policymakers should find ways to move discussions on election administration away from the spotlight in order to reduce the pressures from political polarization on these issues.

Chapin then asked panelists for suggestions to overcome intense partisan debates.

Adams stressed the importance of paying attention to trends in voting numbers. For example, although voter turnout in Kentucky in 2020 was far higher than in the 2019 statewide races, the margins between the parties were the same, and counties voted largely in the same directions. In other words, the reforms adopted in 2020 did not inherently help Democrats. Instead, Adams said, they simply helped voters overall. This example underscored his point that politicians need to be shown evidence that reforms, whether they increase access or security, will not necessarily negatively impact them or unfairly benefit the other party. More importantly, they help the voter.

Stewart and Tullio agreed with Adams on this point, noting that academics and election officials need to dispel the myth that increased turnout and various reforms will always have a clear benefit for one party over the other. Tullio similarly emphasized that voter-centered approaches to electoral reform are key.

Chapin turned to the 2005 Carter-Baker report recommendation that the United States should move toward establishing independent election administrators, outside of political parties and government, and asked the panelists if they thought this was possible.

Kiley felt that it would be difficult to convince the public to agree to this, given the widespread distrust of elites and institutions. Further, she added, many believe that in practice, a partisan group would simply take over the commission.

Stewart agreed, noting that Wisconsin is a cautionary tale in this regard. He said Wisconsin had something akin to an independent election board that turned partisan. As an alternative, Stewart emphasized the role of the courts in adjudicating elections, pointing out that despite the constant challenges to the 2020 election results, the rule of law consistently prevailed in the courts. Stewart said that while election boards are not independent in the United States, it's possible that the country still has independent, facts-based institutions in the judiciary.

Chapin noted the increasing emphasis on the professionalism and impartiality of election officials and asked panelists how we should measure and set those standards. Stewart suggested that because election administration is increasingly seen as a profession, election officials should be encouraged to acquire professional certificates for skills needed for the job.

On the question of election official impartiality, Adams disagreed with the notion that partisan officials can't act in a nonpartisan manner and added that voters like the ability to elect their officials as a way to hold them accountable. He said that in his state, Kentucky, election officials strive to act impartially even though many are elected in partisan races. He added that political skills actually come in handy for election officials. As a former partisan political candidate himself, he honed communication skills that helped him reassure the public and effectively advocate for positive changes in the election system.

Tullio and Stewart both advocated for a politics-neutral approach to election administration, even while recognizing that the secretary of state is an important partisan position and may ultimately play a role in election reform debates.

Chapin then asked if election officials, rather than politicians, should play bigger roles in driving policy reform.

Adams stated that election officials should have a seat at the table. Because legislators sometimes lack independent knowledge of election systems, better policy is produced when election officials are involved in the discussions. And both sides will view policies as less political if experts are involved.

Stewart agreed that local election officials are undervalued in these discussions. However, he also noted that officials' involvement should depend on the specific issue, because in

many cases local election officials represent a very small number of voters and the policies they want may be only serve small sections of voters.

Chapin asked Tullio a question from the audience about the benefits of having a board, rather than an individual, manage elections. Tullio said that board members bring a variety of experiences and expertise, which can foster discussion that results in better outcomes.

In closing, Chapin asked about the best way to handle situations when secretaries of state preside over an election in which they are running for office.

Adams said that these situations have not caused any issues in Kentucky. Stewart said that there is no need to call for a secretary of state to resign in order to run for office. Kiley agreed that while it is possible for officials to oversee their own elections, such officials need to keep in mind how this might affect voters' perceptions about the integrity of the process.

To watch the full recording of this session, please visit this link.

Conclusions

Twenty of the nation's most experienced election administrators and election scholars came together over the five sessions of the "The Carter-Baker Commission, 16 Years Later" workshop series. Panelists were well-balanced politically, including three Republican Secretaries of State, two Democratic Secretaries of State, former elected officials from both parties, election administrators from diverse backgrounds, and scholars from a range of disciplines. Despite this diversity of backgrounds, panelists were unanimous about one thing: the importance of bipartisan cooperation to implement practical, specific election improvements to rebuild trust.

Former Republican member of Congress Susan Molinari, who had served on the original Carter-Baker Commission, perhaps captured this sentiment best: "The magic of the Carter-Baker Commission," she said, "was that we debated but stayed united. We understood that confidence in our election system, and always working to make it better, is the underpinning of our democracy. We knew that no politician or political party could be more important than having our citizens vote, and having them trust the outcome, no matter the outcome."

Panelists spoke of the importance of forgoing political points, finding common ground to make elections accessible, and having the integrity that the people of this country deserve. That means encouraging Democrats and Republicans to find areas of bipartisan agreement "outside the bright lights of politics." They also put forward a wide range of ideas for specific improvements to U.S. elections. Unlike the original commission, the workshop series was not designed to work toward consensus recommendations, but the individual recommendations make for a potential starting point for bipartisan dialogue for future reforms. These are summarized below.

The original Carter-Baker Commission provides an encouraging illustration of the value and viability of bipartisan election solutions. Despite the partisan tensions following the divisive presidential elections of 2000 and 2004, the diverse members of the commission arrived at consensus support for 87 recommendations in eight categories, ranging from voter registration to election voting technology to presidential primaries. The vast majority of the commission's recommendations have been implemented, and the bipartisan process embodied by the commission has been widely praised. Both The Carter Center and the Baker Institute believe that the work begun by the commission 16 years ago can continue to serve as a foundation for bipartisan engagement on election reform issues going forward.

Specific Reforms Recommended by Panelists

- **Provide for more input on election policy from administrators.** Panelists pointed out that state and federal legislative processes are not always as informed as they should be by the perspective of election administrators.
- **Increase transparency and support for voter awareness of the safeguards already in the system to help combat misinformation.** Several panelists expressed the view

that concerns about election security are a reflection of lack of awareness of the checks and balances in the system and encouraged increased transparency and voter education outreach to address that issue.

- **Include audits in all elections.** Panelists pointed to the value of legally defined, nonpartisan, post-election audits as a means of ensuring the integrity of the election process and providing increased transparency in the election process.
- **Support for the human infrastructure of elections.** Several panelists noted the role that election workers and election officials play in ensuring that elections run smoothly and are accessible and secure.
- **Enhance accessibility for voters with disabilities.** Several panelists noted the strides that have been made in increased accessibility to elections for voters with disabilities but said much more could be done.
- **Implement automatic voter registration through drivers' license registration and other government agency interactions.** Voter registration was described by one panelist as "the single biggest point of failure or success in election systems," and, in line with that importance, several panelists recommended the adoption of procedures to make registration happen automatically through eligible voter interaction with government agencies.
- **Encourage states to join the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC).** Several panelists praised the interstate coordination provided by ERIC as way to help states easily track voters on their lists who have moved to other states.
- **Increase election funding.** Panelists argued that more funding is required to meet the growing needs and complexities of administering elections and provide trusted information to voters. Panelists also pointed out that local funding leads to inequities between well-off and poorer localities.

Additional Thoughts from Panelists on Election Reform Issues

At the conclusion of our Carter-Baker panel discussion series, we invited panelists to send us some final thoughts on election reform. Their reflections are below, followed by some polling data from panelist Jocelyn Kiley of the Pew Research Center on which reforms might garner the most bipartisan support.

Judd Choate, State Election Director, Colorado

Universal automatic voter registration (AVR) would be the single-most-influential election reform to increase voter access to the ballot. Democracies around the world automatically register their citizens to vote without requiring action by the voter. These include Germany, Israel, South Korea, Canada, Switzerland, Taiwan, etc. In fact, over a third of the world's democracies remove the burden of voter registration so that each eligible citizen is ready to vote on Election Day. Interestingly, the United States passed a law to join this group, but the law has never been properly implemented or litigated.

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), commonly known as "Motor Voter," was passed by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton is 1993. Section Five of the NVRA explicitly states that there be a "simultaneous application for voter registration and application for motor vehicle driver's license." This means that when an eligible voter applies for a driver's license, that person also applies – simultaneously – to register to vote. Unfortunately, the Department of Justice has wavered in its interpretation of this section and, as a result, has only sued California for failure to provide simultaneous application. If the DOJ were to uniformly apply Section Five, the United States would have full, automatic voter registration.

States have attempted to fill the gap by implementing their own "Motor Voter" legislation. Currently, 19 states have already or are scheduled to implement the "simultaneous" reading of the NVRA through state law. These states are the top-performing election states, with the highest percentage of those eligible registered to vote. For instance, Colorado implemented full AVR in 2017. Since then, the percentage of eligible citizens registered to vote has risen to over 90%, with two-thirds of all applications arising from AVR. By extension, AVR is also the most secure way to register voters. In virtually every circumstance, the voter is standing in front of a government employee with two forms of identification. Without AVR, an alarmingly high percentage of citizens register to vote by providing their personal information to a stranger camped out in front of a grocery store. If security and integrity are true objectives, then all election advocates should support AVR.

Registration is the single-greatest barrier to voting in the United States. AVR is the single-easiest and safest way to overcome that barrier. The U.S. DOJ should enforce the NVRA to require AVR, or states should go around the recalcitrant DOJ and do it themselves.

Veronica Degraffenreid, Acting Secretary of the Commonwealth, Pennsylvania

Registering to vote shouldn't be an onerous task in our democracy. Easier, more convenient voter registration would go a long way in making our elections more accessible to eligible voters while also maintaining electoral security and integrity.

Pennsylvania has made great strides in reforming and modernizing its voter registration process in recent years. We have implemented improvements to the "motor voter law" process so that eligible Pennsylvanians may seamlessly register to vote or update their voter registration when they obtain or renew their driver's license. Pennsylvanians also can register to vote at state offices that provide public assistance and other services, some county offices, and armed forces recruitment centers. And, in 2015, Pennsylvania launched an online voter registration site, available in English and Spanish, which has proven to be immensely popular. At that time, nearly two dozen states offered online voter registration. Now 40 states and the District of Columbia have it.

But states can do more to improve the accessibility of voter registration through such reforms as automatic voter registration – where eligible citizens are automatically registered to vote, unless they opt out, when they apply for a driver's license or other public service – and same-day voter registration during early voting periods and at polling places on Election Day.

States also can improve the accuracy, integrity, and accessibility of their voter rolls through membership in the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a national, nonprofit record-matching consortium owned and managed by state elections officials. Pennsylvania joined in 2016, and 30 states and the District of Columbia now belong to ERIC.

Member states submit their voter registration data and limited information from motor-vehicle records on a regular basis to the ERIC data center. All data is securely transferred and personally identifying information is anonymized. ERIC then compares these records with data from the U.S. Postal Service and Social Security Administration to produce reports for each member state showing voters who have moved within or out of the state, voters who have died, duplicate registrations, and individuals who are potentially eligible to vote but are not yet registered.

Such reforms and resources will increase participation in our democracy and ensure the security and integrity of our elections.

Ryan Macias, Founder, RSM Election Solutions, and former Acting Director, Testing and Certification, U.S. Election Assistance Commission

The Commission on Federal Election Reform that President Jimmy Carter and Secretary James A. Baker, III, co-chaired in 2005 had the goal of making our elections accessible to voters while maintaining election security and integrity. The recommendations set forth by the commission have been instrumental in making sure that every eligible voter has the

right to vote and ensuring that the votes are counted as cast. The implementation of these recommendations helped make the 2020 election "the most secure in American history," as identified by the experts within the election infrastructure community.

The commission recommended audits (3.2), software validation (3.3.2), as well as restricted access to critical systems (3.3.3). These three reforms have allowed election officials to provide the necessary evidence to show that the outcome of the election was correct while expanding the options for voters to make the process more accessible. To perform tabulation audits, there must be a software-independent auditable record (e.g., paper ballot), which more than 90% of votes cast in 2020 included. Many states expanded the types of audits being conducted, including risk-limiting audits (RLAs), which prove the outcome is correct. The election community required that there be readily available tools for election officials to be able to detect if the voting system software has been altered. All federally certified voting systems have this capability, and most state-certified systems require this as well. Some jurisdictions even go further by requiring the voting system software to be reinstalled with the trusted build (i.e., validated software) prior to each election. Further, the election community has put into practice strict access control procedures and chain-of-custody controls to ensure that critical systems, assets, and data have not been tampered with or accessed by unauthorized entities. In some instances, states require that if the chain of custody is broken or access control procedures are breached, the voting system be decommissioned.

These recommendations have been the most significant and impactful reforms to reaching the goals of the commission. While the commission focused these reforms and recommendations on voting systems, the same reforms and recommendations can be expanded to all election processes, systems, and technologies to continue to provide elections that are more accessible to voters while continuing to maintain security and integrity.

Susan Molinari, Former Member of Congress and Carter-Baker Commission member

There is no one change that can make the perception of our elections accessible and fair to all Americans, certainly in this political environment. The fact that seven months after our presidential election, in states where there is bipartisan acknowledgment that the election was fair, some are still asking for audits. Putting these people aside, however, we need to make registration and voting as easy as possible. The country supports a voter ID law in some form as well as early voting. We should strive to reduce lines in some neighborhoods, especially while others rarely have a line, regardless of turnout. The magic of the Carter-Baker Commission was that we debated but stayed united. We understood that confidence in our election system is the underpinning of our democracy and that we must always work to make the system better. We knew that no politician or political party could be more important than having our citizens vote, and having them trust the outcome, no matter the outcome.

Tammy Patrick, Senior Advisor to Elections Programs, Democracy Fund

Over the last two decades we have witnessed a trend in the expansion of options for voters; more options in where and when to register – with such innovations as online voter registration and automatic voter registration – and more options in when and where to cast their ballot – with the growth of no-excuse absentee/vote by mail, early voting, and the use of vote centers. Flexibility can be an administrative strain if not implemented properly. Ensuring that voters who like to vote by mail can get onto a list so that they receive a ballot for every election for which they are eligible, often called a permanent early voting list, is not only better customer service, but also a more efficient and cost-effective way to eliminate bureaucratic layers that are unnecessary to the integrity of the process. Voter authentication (via signature verification, as an example) along with other security measures like ballot tracking, effective list maintenance to keep addresses current via the United States Postal Service's national change of address service, and ballot curing when signatures are missing or do not match, all allow for voters to select their preferred method of receiving their ballot – from a USPS postal carrier rather than a poll worker – and still trust the integrity of the process.

Constructing our administrative procedures to provide voters this ability has many benefits:

1. The majority of ballots are mailed out to voters on the first day allowed by law, which enables uniform messaging to USPS and the voting public, bulk mail discounts for sound stewardship of tax dollars, and a reduction of the tsunami of applications that have to be processed for the same voters every election (which can conservatively cost about $1.00 on average for printing, postage, and processing).
2. Voters receive their ballots early in the election cycle and have sufficient time to vote and return them before the deadline. The reduction in mailing so many ballots out to voters close to Election Day increases the likelihood that voters will successfully cast their ballot and not have it rejected based on a technicality.

Voters should have return options, such as drop boxes and the use of postmarks and USPS tracking data, to demonstrate that the ballots were mailed on time, so that the citizenry are not disenfranchised based on arbitrary rules of engagement.

Sadly, in the last year some election administrative policies like absentee voting/voting by mail have been weaponized and used in political theater. This is a detriment to the American electorate, to the tens of millions of voters from both sides of the aisle who select to vote this way. It is incumbent upon us to strike the balance of access and security and ensure that all voters have options that are administered in the most efficient manner possible.

Sharon Priest, Former Secretary of State, Arkansas, and Carter-Baker Commission Member

There likely will always be tension between accessibility and integrity of elections because everyone wants to believe their candidate, or their side of an issue, is the best, and when our side does not win, we need to blame someone or something. Usually that is the election process. As we have seen, the security of the 2020 election has been called into question. More votes than ever were cast in the 2020 election and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some rules and regulations were changed to allow votes to be cast while protecting the public health – raising suspicions surrounding the security of the vote.

Access over the years has been made easier. Mail-in voting/absentee voting was used more extensively. Washington State has used mail-in voting successfully for 10 years. Texas did drive-through voting in 2020 to help keep voters safe. These measures, along with early voting, help prevent long lines and waits on Election Day. Election officials have always advocated for all eligible voters to vote. I have always said that every vote counts and every legitimate vote should be counted. Both are imperative for fair elections. There is no integrity without access.

While I believe that the 2020 election was fair, there is always room for improvement. We must remember that we are human, and humans make mistakes that call into question the security of the election. Most poll workers are retired, and while poll workers are required to undergo training, long hours and fatigue could cause some mistakes. The Carter-Baker Commission called for allowing young people to work the polls, and perhaps shifts would help cure this issue. Technology is changing daily, and science should play a role in the security of elections.

While it has been 16 years since the Carter-Baker Commission made its recommendations, they were well thought out and formed by a bipartisan group of committed individuals. As in a democracy, not everyone agreed, but opposing views were reflected.

Democracy depends on trust. Accessibility and integrity – or if you prefer, security – both are imperative for free and fair elections to preserve our democratic republic.

Brad Raffensperger, Secretary of State, Georgia

Securing our elections is work that is never really done. To have elections that are accepted, we need to continuously work to uphold the integrity of our elections while also maintaining Georgia's nation-leading access to the ballot. That is why I made securing our elections a priority even before I took office in 2019. Ensuring our voter rolls are clean and up to date is an important part of that work. Unfortunately, onerous federal restrictions make that extremely difficult.

Expanding the flexibility to update the voter rolls is both a ballot security and a ballot access issue. As long as ineligible voters remain on the rolls, it increases the likelihood that someone who shouldn't be able to vote does so anyway. Voters who may not know they

shouldn't vote can slip through the cracks. Even more concerning, voter rolls bloated with obsolete data breed conspiracy theories. If election officials are stopped from doing the basic work of securing elections by federal rules, how can we maintain voter confidence?

Federal restrictions on list maintenance mean our voter rolls are clogged with inaccurate information. County elections officials who rely on that data to plan elections end up misallocating resources, resulting in long lines. Voters whose information is outdated show up to the wrong polling location on Election Day. Hundreds of thousands of Georgians move throughout the course of an election year. Ensuring their ballot access also means making sure their registration information is up to date.

Updating the rolls has bipartisan support. The 1993 National Voter Registration Act that requires list maintenance was passed by a Democrat-controlled Congress and signed by Democratic President Bill Clinton.

However, that same federal law prohibits list maintenance for 90 days before Election Day. That precludes doing any list maintenance during a presidential election year even as tens of thousands move every month.

Bottom line, there is no reason to keep outdated or obsolete files on the voter rolls. It undermines ballot access and ballot integrity. Greater flexibility to clean Georgia's voter rolls would be a benefit to both.

Maggie Toulouse Oliver, Secretary of State, New Mexico

Making your voice heard at the ballot box is the cornerstone of our democracy and election administrators should always be looking for safe, secure ways to increase voter participation. Making voting accessible for all eligible voters is the best way to encourage participation. No single policy has more potential to do that than no-excuse mail-in voting. The policy provides for all eligible voters to request and return their ballot through the mail without providing a specific explanation to their election administrator. Providing the opportunity to research issues and candidates and then vote from the convenience of home has proven to be a secure and effective way to increase voter participation. The 2020 elections demonstrated that election administrators are prepared to process higher levels of absentee ballots and that voters are enthusiastic about voting by mail.

Alejandro Tullio, Director of Legal Sciences, San Martin National University in Argentina

Citizenship means equal political rights and requires broad voting access in the context of free and fair elections. The constitutional framework of the United States gives both the state legislatures and the federal Congress authority to make electoral laws, and these laws must ensure that every person entitled to vote may do it in a proper and open way.

1. The first goal is to encourage voter registration and the permanent updating of eligible voter rolls. To achieve this, the most suitable tool is universal and automatic registration. One way to accomplish this is to mandate that every time a citizen interacts with a governmental agency or applies for government services, their information is electronically transmitted to the voter registry.
2. Voter ID is still a problem in many parts of the country. Photo ID requirements are useful to prevent in-person voter impersonation but, at the same time, represent a barrier for certain minorities. To solve this contradiction, legislation must compel electoral registration officers to issue, by all possible means and with the broadest reach, a free physical or electronic document valid for voting at every polling station.
3. Early and/or remote voting, by protected means and in a controlled mode and secure environment, must be granted to all people who apply for it in an easy and accessible way.
4. Civic engagement and education must be promoted at the elementary and secondary school levels. Programs must teach young people about the organization of government, the powers of its different branches, and the responsibilities of elected officials. People must know the causal relation between voting and the actions of government.
5. Electoral management bodies at the state level must have a standardized format, preferably boards or commissions appointed on a bipartisan basis by state legislatures. Electoral officers in the counties must be appointed by the state board. Below the board or commission, both at the state and county levels, a professional permanent bureaucracy must manage the elections.

Security is an objective concept, and trust is a subjective one. Electoral management bodies must professionally and impartially run voter registration offices, logistics, election technology, tally systems, and civic education programs.

These measures may differ from state to state, but a minimum set of requirements must be enforced by a federal law that cannot be bypassed or distorted by state or local authorities.

Kim Wyman, Secretary of State, Washington

In May 2020 my office referred 142 cases of alleged improper voting in the 2018 general election to county election officials. Of the more than 3.1 million votes cast statewide, the 142 accounted for only 0.004% of the total – hardly indicative of the rampant voter fraud some proclaim.

Our commitment to combat voter fraud – whether the fraud is imperceptible or pervasive – is one reason why Washington and six other states founded the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC). ERIC is a nonprofit and nonpartisan interstate data-sharing consortium that helps states strengthen the accuracy of their voter rolls and register millions of eligible citizens.

ERIC's data center compares each member-state's voter data with information from other sources, including the U.S. Postal Service and Social Security Administration – all while protecting personal information and voter privacy. Since 2012, ERIC states have identified about 13.5 million outdated voter records and over 300,000 people who had died since they last voted.

Today, 30 states and Washington, D.C., are part of the ERIC consortium, and we encourage the remaining states to participate. It is incumbent upon all states to work together to not only improve our existing infrastructures but develop innovative, bipartisan solutions that ensure our elections are secure, accessible, and reliable for all Americans.

For example, REAL ID is a simple and cost-effective solution that is gaining traction as a potential form of voter identification. REAL ID enables U.S. citizens to present a valid and verifiable form of identification when they register to vote; for election officials and administrators it helps enhance election security and integrity. However, any voter ID legislation – REAL ID or otherwise – must strike a delicate balance between accessibility and cost. It should be easy for regulators and election officials to implement and for voters to understand. More importantly, it should not impose impeditive costs upon voters, which would amount to a "poll tax."

Legislation that falls short of these criteria will do little to eliminate or reduce voter fraud and may even disenfranchise millions of voters, particularly people in underserved communities. That is why lawmakers and election officials, regardless of state and party affiliation, must equally address voter fraud and voter suppression if we as a nation wish to inspire greater confidence and participation in our elections.

Jocelyn Kiley, Associate Director, Pew Research Center

Election reformers confront a highly politically polarized landscape – not just among elected officials but also the public. Still, there is some common ground in the public.

Most Americans – including clear majorities of those in both parties – place importance both on ensuring that qualified voters who want to cast ballots are able to do so and on ensuring that those who are not qualified to vote are prevented from doing so. To be sure, there are deep partisan divides in the degree to which people are confident that the current system does these things. In particular, most Republicans (69%) say they are not confident that unqualified voters are prevented from voting.

Overall, most Americans do not think there is a trade-off between access and security: In a March 2021 survey, 61% of Americans say that "it would not make elections any less secure if election rules were changed to make it easier to register and vote," while 36% say that making voting easier would compromise security. Still, these views are highly partisan – with 82% of Democrats saying that easing voting rules would not compromise security and 61% of Republicans saying that it would.

These partisan divides are reflected in views of many proposed reforms – for instance, an April 2021 survey found that while 61% of the public is in favor of automatic voter registration (AVR) for all eligible citizens, fully 82% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents support AVR, compared with just 38% of Republicans and Republican leaners. But there are some reforms that would expand access that garner majority support from both Republicans and Democrats: Felon re-enfranchisement, a guaranteed two weeks of in-person early voting, and making Election Day a national holiday are all supported by majorities in both partisan groups (though the strength of support for these reforms is substantially greater among Democrats than Republicans).

Voter identification requirements also have consistently been supported by majorities of both Republicans and Democrats – support for this policy is near universal (93%) among Republicans and is supported by a narrower majority (61%) of Democrats.

Underlying these debates about reforms are differing views about the right to the franchise itself: In a survey conducted in July 2021, 57% of Americans said voting is "a fundamental right for every adult U.S. citizen and should not be restricted in any way," while 42% said it is "a privilege that comes with responsibilities and can be limited if adult U.S. citizens don't meet some requirements." Democrats, younger Americans, and Black Americans are considerably more likely than Republicans, older Americans, and White Americans to view voting as a citizen's "fundamental right."