# 3 Pillars of Voter Confidence

SECURE TECHNOLOGY

RELIABLE INFORMATION

EXCELLENT VOTING EXPERIENCE

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# Nurturing voter trust at the local level

Voter confidence is built one jurisdiction at a time and can be destroyed quickly by unreliable voting systems, poorly managed elections, lack of information and outright lies.

This paper explores nurturing voter trust at the local level. While election officials work tirelessly to provide secure, transparent election processes and trustworthy results, they must also inform and assure voters every step of the way.

## 1. Choose updated, transparent security features

The Brennan Center for Justice[1]  and other experts have long recommended replacing outdated (and vulnerable) voting systems. Best in class election systems include a voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT).

In 2020, 95 percent of ballots cast had an associated paper record. The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) called it the most secure election ever. Not only is voting on a paper ballot popular, but voters appreciate confirming their choices and touching their ballot.

Officials like Christopher Davis, Administrator of Elections for Knox County, Tennessee, agree. "Overwhelmingly voters liked the idea of making their choices on paper and getting to hold that ballot in their hand prior to scanning it." Paper ballots give voters a feeling of security. They see and even feel their ballot as they cast it.

A major setback to voter confidence in paper trail voting has been the introduction of machine-read barcodes by some voting system providers. With barcodes, there is no way for people to confirm their ballot's accuracy. People read many languages, but "bar code" is not one of them.

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1 2020's Lessons for Election Security https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/2020s-lessons-election-security

Rice University Baker Institute scholar Dan S. Wallach[2] proposes a simple solution: "get rid of the barcodes and have the only record of the voter's intent be human-readable text. Any computer-printed text that's readable by a voter will also be readable by a computer scanner with exceptionally high accuracy."

> **Consider:** Has your jurisdiction chosen up-to-date hardware and software? Are your elections protected by paper-trail accountability? Can voters verify their choices?

**Rigorous auditing capabilities.**

Statistically sound audits, performed regularly and shared with the public, boost voter confidence. Public scrutiny should be expected and invited. Election systems must make auditing software easy to use and to understand. True audits can only be accomplished with voting systems that provide voter verified paper trail solutions.

Among the recommendations from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission are documenting chain-of-custody records, clearly communicating the parameters of the audit and training local election officials. [3]

Make sure that voters know about your audit's success. When Monroe County, Indiana, conducted its first risk limiting audit immediately after the November 2020 general election, the audit matched ballots cast 100%. The county issued a press release, which was published by local news outlets.

> "There is nothing more paramount than preserving and protecting every registered voter's ability to vote. I would like to thank everyone who participated in the audit process to reassure Monroe County voters that they can have the utmost confidence in their votes having been counted, as they were intended, on Election Day."

—Monroe County Clerk Nicole Browne, in press release [4]

> **Consider:** Are you conducting regular audits? Do you have on-site support for new equipment and processes? How does your jurisdiction keep voters informed? Do you provide exactly what your State requires for an audit, or do you go above and beyond?

> " … a full human readable paper ballot throughout the process, not a computer barcode. That's important to our voters and for the security of our vote. That's an absolute must for me."
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> —Neal Kelley
> Registrar of Voters
> Orange County, CA

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2  On the Security of Ballot Marking Devices. https://arxiv.org/pdf/1908.01897.pdf

3  Six Tips for Conducting Election Audits. https://www.eac.gov/documents/2017/08/03/six-tips-conducting-election-audits-eac

4 Monroe County Ballot Audit Reveals Accurate Results Reported on Election Day. https://www.idsnews.com/article/2020/11/monroe-county-ballot-audit-accurate-results

### Newest technology targets tampering

Testing is underway for an open-source end-to-end verifiable voting (E2EV) software [5] that gives voters and independent election security experts the ability to confirm that paper ballots were counted and not altered. There is only one major voting machine manufacturer planning a pilot program using software designed to help provide a tool to increase voter confidence.

**Built-in features to protect from human error.**

Recent news documented the vulnerability of an election system that skewed reports by allowing test ballots to be tabulated along with early votes. Human error can't be eradicated, but election managers can reduce the chances of such a fiasco by choosing a voting system that is designed so that test ballots will not read into the same data set (event) as live or official ballots, for example.

> **Consider:** How does your system count test ballots? Ask your voting system provider if test ballots can be read into an official election event. Is your system built to avoid disruptions that erode voter confidence?

## 2. Share reliable election information

It is crucial that voters and election managers have access to timely, reliable information from trusted sources. In 2017 the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) designated election systems "critical infrastructure," clearing the way for better collaboration between federal, state and local authorities.

Now, federal agencies like the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)  share best practices, support and resources to help election officials meet the challenges of cybersecurity. [6]  For the first time, there is a structure for rapid communication.

"It is now vital for our nation's election security to maintain open channels for regular communication and coordination about advanced threats," said Sam Derheimer, Chair of the Election Infrastructure Sector Coordinating Council (EI-SCC).

"Giving every jurisdiction, regardless of size or geography, access to real-time security alerts and best practices, along with dedicated channels to report suspicious activity up to federal authorities, has drastically increased the integrity of our election systems. Voters should feel confident that election officials have the right tools to keep their vote secure," said Derheimer.

In addition to federal and state resources, some jurisdictions find that their voting system partner provides webinars, personal contacts and user groups that are excellent channels for timely information.

> **Consider:** How is your jurisdiction plugged into critical communication channels regarding election security?

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5 Microsoft Wants to Make Voting More Trustworthy. This Partnership Will Help. https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/03/tech/microsoft-hart-intercivic-voting-security/index.html

6 Experts Tout Election Security Gains Since 2016. https://fcw.com/articles/2020/08/28/johnson-election-security-congress.aspx

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Does your voting system partner help facilitate that communication?

## 3. Train Workers to Assure an Excellent Voting Experience

Confidence in the integrity of the electoral process increases after a positive experience at the polling place. Voters who see problems at the polls are less confident in the entire process.[7]

Research conducted by the Election Lab at MIT finds that voter confidence increases when voters don't wait a long time, find competent polling place workers and vote in person. While some factors can be affected by politics, the study shows that resources at polling places and training for workers can boost voting confidence.

| Voter confidence in the 2020 general election | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Your vote** | **Before** | **After election** |
| Very confident | 38% | 61% |
| Somewhat confident | 40 | 22 |
| Not too confident | 15 | 9 |
| Not at all confident | 6 | 6 |
| Don't know | 2 | 1 |
| | | Source: MIT Election Lab |

**Consider:** Is your jurisdiction prepared for a well-managed election? Do you have access to on-site support and training? What would you learn by surveying your poll workers?

### A Case Study: Hamilton County, Ohio (Cincinnati)

Before debuting a new paper-based system in 2019, Hamilton County invested in voter education and on-site train-the-trainers process for poll workers, facilitated by a voting system partner representative.[8]  Poll workers surveyed after the first vote said:

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7 Voter Confidence. https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/voter-confidence

8 Hart InterCivic's Verity Has Smooth Debut in Ohio Elections, 2019. https://www.hartintercivic.com/veritydebuto-hiopr/

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"(Scanning) is easy to use. The green arrows help the users place their ballots. I had fewer inquiries about casting ballots."

"It is easier for voters to see if there is a problem with their ballot and for us to help them."

"Easy setup. Good instructions."

"More intuitive to operate."

"Happy poll workers mean happy voters," said Sally Krisel, former Deputy Director of Elections. "We had very few calls on Election Day."

Voter reactions remained positive through the 2020 election cycle:

"We received a tremendous amount of positive feedback from voters overall with the election. They thought the scanner was great. The access was great. Overall voters have confidence in the outcome of the election. We heard from hundreds."

—Sherry Poland, Director of Elections, after the November 2020 election

## A final word: Transparency

Voter confidence and trust must stay at the forefront of election planning and execution. Longtime NPR voting reporter Pam Fessler[9] urges election officials to get ahead of misinformation, fact-check lies, and take a proactive, positive approach to telling the story of what they do and how the election process works.

"Be as accessible and transparent as possible. Invite reporters and the public in to see what you do. And do it now, before the heat of the mid-term elections. How about more stories telling the public about some of the heroic things election workers did this past year to ensure that Americans could vote during a pandemic? Personal stories always resonate more than simple facts. Don't be shy. The people who are telling the lies aren't shy in the slightest."

—Pam Fessler, NPR, July 2021

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9 Exit interview: NPR's Pam Fessler Set to Retire.Electionline.https://electionline.org/electionline-weekly/

**About Hart**

Working side-by-side with election professionals for more than 100 years, Hart is committed to helping advance democracy one election at a time. Hart's mission fuels our passionate customer focus and a continuous drive for technological innovation. The result is Verity® – truly different election technology. Reimagined from the inside out, Verity Voting promises to provide jurisdictions with a future-proof investment in secure, transparent voting.

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