
Can election facility tours increase trust in elections?

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Executive Summary:

Tours of election facilities can increase election trust among tour participants---particularly among those who come into the tour more skeptical. Our study was located in Maricopa County, Arizona, where the Maricopa County Recorder's Office offers guided tours. The standard tour in Maricopa County lasts about two hours. Stops along the tour include the main work room for election officials called "the command center," the ballot vault, the tabulation center, and the warehouse. Election officials act as the tour guides and answer questions about elections along the way, with a focus on explaining the protections on the accuracy and integrity of elections.

Methodology:

We partnered with the office of Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer to field surveys of tour participants starting in February 2024 and continuing today, with over 200 participants completing our surveys. Tour participants took very brief surveys at the start of the tour and again at the end of the tour, using their smartphones and accessing surveys via a QR code. In both surveys, we ask participants the same questions about their trust in elections in Maricopa County, in Arizona, and in the United States overall. To understand the effect of the tours on trust in elections, we compare participants' post-tour responses to their pre-tour responses to these questions.



*Maricopa County
Registrar-Recorder
Stephen Richer delivers a
tour of the county's vote
counting facility in 2024*

Results:

Trust in elections in...	Pre-tour Avg	Post-tour Avg	Difference	Number of participants
Maricopa County	3.57	3.82	.25*	201
Arizona	3.46	3.67	.21*	202
United States	3.22	3.37	.15*	197
Democrats				
Maricopa County	3.95	4.00	.05*	91
Arizona	3.76	3.86	.10*	91
United States	3.67	3.70	.03	88
Republicans				
Maricopa County	3.09	3.53	.44*	57
Arizona	3.05	3.38	.33*	58
United States	2.64	2.98	.34*	58

* indicates a statistically significant difference, large enough that it would not be produced by random chance alone in 95 out of 100 cases

How can election officials act on these findings?

Offering tours of election facilities is an intensive, but effective, way to increase trust in elections. Depending on capacity, implementing tours can improve trust in elections locally as well as at the state and national level. We are exploring additional ways in which officials can offer tours such as virtual guided tours that officials can post [online](#) including on social media. Moreover, officials may be able to produce digital self-guided tours that voters can experience online. We also note that many comments in our surveys referenced participants' appreciation of the opportunity to speak with election officials. Thus, some of the increase in trust we find from the tours may be due to speaking with officials in addition to viewing the facilities. Election officials who do outreach to voters outside of the tour context may also improve trust.

What we don't know yet:

Whether election officials need to implement the full tour experience to get the results reported above or if some of the other options outlined can produce similar effects? How long do increases in trust last? We are conducting additional research studies during this election to answer these questions.

Learn more:

Support for this project was provided by the [UC San Diego Yankelovich Center](#) and by the [MIT Election Data and Science Lab](#). You can follow our team's research partnerships with election officials all across the country at elections.ucsd.edu.