
Should public information campaigns use videos or posters to increase trust in elections?

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Executive Summary:

Information campaigns explaining safeguards protecting elections can build the public's trust in those elections. *Conveying such information in short videos is more effective than using visual images on posters.* Viewing the videos not only increases voters' trust that their own vote will be counted as they intend, but also increases their trust in elections in their county and state. A concise video that highlights a few core protections on elections (i.e., signature verification, voter eligibility checks) produces larger increases in trust than a video that mentions these same protections and then conveys a long list of other protections.

Methodology:

In July of 2024, in a collaboration with the Contra Costa County Clerk-Recorder's Office and the Coalition of Bay Area Election Officials facilitated by Tommy Gong, we fielded two online survey experiments in 12 counties in the San Francisco Bay Area. We obtained a sample of 1,515 respondents that reflects the demographic characteristics of eligible voters in these counties, with an oversample of voters from Contra Costa County. In the first experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to view one of three posters that use visual images (an iceberg, a cell phone, or ballots) to convey information about protections on elections in the Bay Area, or one of two visually similar control posters that convey information about topics unrelated to elections. In the second experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to watch one of two videos about election security in Contra Costa County or a Honda car commercial (the control). One election security video highlights core protective measures ("[We Checked it 4 Times](#)"), while the other mentions these measures and then conveys 46 other protections ("[48 Steps](#)"). At the end of each experiment, respondents expressed their level of trust (on a 1 – 4 scale) that their own vote would be counted as they intend, as well as the extent to which votes in Contra Costa County (for the videos), the Bay Area (for the posters), and California would be counted as voters intend.

Results:

The posters had no effect on trust in elections, but both videos significantly increased respondents' trust not only that their own vote would be counted as they intended, but spilled over to increase their trust in vote counting in their county and state. The concise "We Checked It 4 Times" video was more effective than the "48 Steps" video.

	Videos		Posters		
Confidence in...	Checked 4 Times	48 Steps	Ballots	Cell Phone	Iceberg
Own vote counted correctly	↑	↑	X	X	X
Contra Costa elections	↑	↑	-	-	-
Bay Area elections	-	-	X	X	X
California elections	↑	↑	X	X	X

We use (X) to indicate no evidence of effects and (-) to indicate that this outcome was not tested.

How can election officials act on these findings?

Election officials can increase the public's trust in elections with information campaigns that use short, video-based messages. Although posters with static visual images are logistically simpler and more cost effective to produce, they may not be as effective at building trust as videos that engage viewers with sound and moving images. Thus, election officials should consider allocating more of their limited resources to video-based communications over posters and other visual images. Further, the video content need not be extensive; a short video that conveys a few aspects of how a local elections office safeguards elections goes a long way in reassuring the public about the integrity of elections.

Learn more:

Support for this project was provided by the [UC San Diego Yankelovich Center](#) and by the [MIT Election Data and Science Lab](#). A peer reviewed, full length version in the journal *Politics and Governance* is "[How Research-Practice Partnerships Can Strengthen Experiments Designed to Build Trust in American Elections](#)." You can follow our team's research partnerships with election officials all across the country at elections.ucsd.edu.