

Institute *for* Responsive Government Action

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Sam Oliker-Friedland, Institute for Responsive Government Action

DATE: April 12, 2024

RE: Real Solutions for Election Security

Despite the hyperpartisan narrative spun today by former President Trump and Speaker Mike Johnson, there is no factual evidence that supports the fictitious claim that there is a wave of non-citizens voting, thus undermining the integrity of elections in the United States. For policymakers who are actually serious about addressing election integrity, there's good news: There are tried and true policies and solutions that allow for election officials to do their jobs well and for eligible voters to safely and securely participate in our democracy. **And the Institute for Responsive Government Action has a roadmap for ensuring our elections are secure and transparent.**

The roadmap begins with **adequately funding our elections**, a responsibility Congress has shirked for decades. This includes:

- **Providing proper support and resources for local election officials** (who face heightened levels of harassment and violence, largely due to misinformation about election integrity)
- Requires us to **adopt the policies proven to be most effective for engaging only eligible voters and effectively maintaining voter rolls** — like secure automatic voter registration (SAVR)

But first, let's look at what the data tells us about non-citizens voting in elections: According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, [even the Heritage Foundation](#) could identify only 24 instances over a 20 year period of non-citizens voting. A study from the [Brennan Center](#) found that across 42 jurisdictions representing more than 23.5 million votes cast in the 2016 election, 0.0001 percent of votes cast came from non-citizens (or approximately 30 votes out of 23.5 million.) **No state allows non-citizens to register or vote in statewide or federal elections.**

Here are the solutions for those who take election security seriously:

Adequately Fund Elections

Policymakers who are serious about election integrity should commit to sustainable, consistent, and adequate election funding. A study from the MIT Election Lab [estimated](#) that

it would cost \$53 billion over 10 years to fully modernize our election infrastructure — which the Department of Homeland Security in 2017 [identified](#) as “critical,” “vital to our national interests” and prone to cyber attacks — including from foreign adversaries.

Unfortunately, Congress’ funding in recent decades hasn’t matched DHS’ urgency. The most recent FY24 [funding package](#) from Congress dedicated \$55 million for [Help America Vote Act](#) (HAVA) grants — a critical investment, but one that barely scratches the surface of need for election officials nationwide. While there was originally bipartisan consensus this year for \$75 million in HAVA funding, Republican leadership at the last minute sought to zero out all funding — working against the election integrity that they continually call for. Only through a broad and bipartisan coalition push was \$55 million of the initial funding kept intact.

Congress [allocated](#) \$75 million for HAVA grants in 2022 and 2023, \$380 million in 2018 and \$425 million in 2020 — and prior to those investments, had allocated nothing since 2010. **This inconsistent underfunding impedes local election officials who need to be able to invest in the systems and technologies that allow them to conduct secure, efficient, and transparent elections; and it inhibits their ability to plan for the long-term.**

Unfortunately, the \$55 million in HAVA funding included in FY24 appropriations is nearly equivalent to the amount Los Angeles County alone [had to spend on administering](#) the 2021 gubernatorial recall election. In fact, government spending on elections infrastructure ranks [near the bottom](#) of spending for *all* public services — about the same as what local governments spend on parking facilities.

The bottom line is: It’s long past time for Congress to fully and adequately fund our national election infrastructure.

Support Election Officials

Election officials are facing heightened levels of [harassment and threats of violence](#) — in large part because of the misinformation that many willingly spread. A [recent report](#) from the Center for Tech and Civic Life and the Institute for Responsive Government explored the the factors behind a [high rate of turnover](#) amongst election officials in a number of states since 2019:

- Targeted harassment and threats: Many election officials have experienced threats just for doing their jobs. A 2023 [Brennan Center survey](#) found one in three local election officials experienced harassment, abuse, or threats, with one in five concerned for their physical safety.
- Lack of resources: Local election offices are severely under-funded. In [over one-third](#) of 2,000 local election offices surveyed by the [Elections Infrastructure Initiative](#), officials identified urgent needs — such as aging buildings and a lack of adequate heating and cooling — that must be met to ensure the safety and security of elections.

- COVID-19 pandemic: Workers across industries have left their jobs at record rates over the years following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. This “Great Resignation” has [hit local government particularly hard](#).

Policymakers who are serious about election integrity should pursue measures that support election workers. Election workers are [sounding the alarm](#) on inadequate funding and its impact on their ability to effectively manage secure elections. In addition to funding, there are multiple [state-level policies](#) that support election officials. These include enacting sharper penalties for those who harass or interfere with the work of election officials and approving measures that increase the efficiency of voter registration and election administration while reducing both taxpayer cost and administrative burden for election officials (these policies could include secure automatic voter registration; automatic restoration of voting rights to formerly incarcerated individuals; and early voting opportunities.)

Pursue Policies Proven to Make a Difference

We have proven policy solutions that address engaging only eligible voters in our democratic processes — and they are significantly more substantive than solutions in search of a non-citizen voting problem that doesn’t exist:

- [Secure automatic voter registration](#) (SAVR) is the gold standard in voter registration for many reasons — but perhaps the most relevant in this case is because SAVR significantly reduces the possibility that someone could unknowingly make an incorrect citizenship claim as they navigate heaps of government paperwork. The burden of establishing voter eligibility during the registration process is shifted from the individual onto the state agency, and the process relies on verified documents to establish citizenship and automatically filters out those ineligible to vote.
- Even for states without a SAVR system, implementation of citizenship filters at state-wide DMVs can be a critical tool in ensuring non-citizens remain off the voter rolls. The filter prohibits participating state agency systems from offering any voter registration opportunities to customers who present documents establishing non-citizenship (like a green card) as part of agency transactions. Citizenship filters are used in a number of states, including Alabama, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania.

The bottom line is: Policymakers who are serious about election integrity should back SAVR. SAVR engages eligible voters when they interact with a state agency, like the DMV. When eligible voters make a transaction at a participating state agency and show identification that verifies their citizenship, such as a U.S. Passport or U.S. birth certificate, their information is securely and automatically transferred to their local secretary of state’s office. Election officials then double-check an individual’s eligibility to vote. If eligible, the constituent is then added to the voter rolls and has the option to opt-out after the transaction.

[Ten states](#) — including Colorado, Alaska, Oregon, and Nevada — have all implemented SAVR. The results are promising not just for the security of our elections, but also for engaging more eligible voters to participate in our democratic processes. Colorado upgraded from a partial automatic voter registration system to SAVR in 2018 and achieved [stellar results](#), roughly doubling the rate at which eligible, unregistered DMV customers registered to vote.

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The Institute for Responsive Government Action has a number of voting rights experts available to speak about the policies that create a more secure, efficient, and effective elections infrastructure. If you'd like to speak with our Executive Director, Sam Oliker-Friedland, or other IRGA experts, please contact dan@responsivegovaction.org.