



Policies to Carry Us Beyond the Next Election

The 2022 midterm election showed resilience in election administration. Now, we must build it.

By Rachel Orey, Grace Gordon, Christopher Thomas,

Sarah Walker

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Election administrators were prepared for the worst going into the 2022 midterm election. With the reverberations of 2020 continuing to proliferate, this heightened concern was warranted: The months before the election were filled with stories of threats to and among election workers; the potential for ballot paper shortages; rampant certification challenges; candidates

for chief election official positions espousing election conspiracy theories; and armed “vigilantes” staking out secure ballot drop boxes.

When the polls closed on November 8, however, it was largely quiet. The strength of the 2022 midterm election is thanks to the tireless work of election administrators nationwide who shored up our democratic institutions in response to rising anti-democratic sentiment. Because of their hard work, most of the nightmare scenarios that dominated pre-election coverage never materialized. No widespread violence occurred and certification challenges, while present, were limited. Voters rejected candidates for chief election official positions who based their campaign on election conspiracies. Some experts and commentators have even gone so far as to declare that “democracy won,” believing that we can slow down on democracy-strengthening reform efforts.

In reality, the work to protect and preserve our democracy for future generations has just begun.

Although the 2022 election saw many high-profile election deniers defeated and just a few inconsequential glitches, the market for election-denial rhetoric remains strong. Looming practical challenges—exacerbated by election conspiracies and ongoing disinformation campaigns—threaten to increase the number and severity of glitches in 2024, with its higher turnout and more intense focus on the presidential election. Practical challenges could become a self-fulfilling cycle in which under-resourced election offices spread thin by baseless attacks become more likely to make mistakes that, in turn, fan the flames of conspiracist sentiment.¹ State and federal legislators must act to close the resource and policy gaps that put the critical infrastructure of our democracy at risk.

This report is a departure from the “sky is falling” tone that has become typical of debates about election administration. Protecting democracy is and always will be urgent. However, with 20 months before the next federal election, we have a rare opportunity to consider not just the next election but the next 100: to think long term about where we want our democracy to be for future generations, and what policy changes must be made now to get us there.

This report pairs long-term vision with concrete, interim reforms. We lay out six goals for the future of election administration and detail actionable policy recommendations that, if implemented soon, would help make those goals a reality. We strive to supersede partisan politics as a motivator and instead place voters and election administrators front and center.

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1225 Eye Street, NW Suite 1000
Washington, D.C. 20005

CONTACT

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