Communicating Legislative Changes: ID Requirements for Voting by Mail

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Voting by Mail in Texas

Only certain qualified voters are eligible to vote by mail:

- Ages 65+
- Disabled
- Out of county during Early Voting / Election Day
- Expected to give birth within 3 weeks of Election Day - new under SB 1 (2021)
- In jail or civilly committed, but otherwise eligible
SB 1 – 87th Legislature (2021)

• Requires voters who cast a ballot by mail to provide either:
  • Their Texas Driver License / State ID number; OR
  • The last 4 digits of their social security number

On their Application for Ballot by Mail (ABBM) AND their mail ballot carrier envelope.

• Number provided must **identify the voter**, match one of the numbers on the voter’s registration record.

• Voters can use online mail ballot tracker tool to certify ID number if they forgot to provide one.
Public Communication Challenges

- SB 1 went into effect on December 2, 2021, voters could begin requesting ballot by mail on January 1, 2022 ahead of March 1 Primaries
- Mail voters not accustomed to providing ID number(s) on mail ballot materials
- On carrier envelope, ID section had to be placed under the flap to ensure personal ID information was not exposed when mailed
- Misleading messages in the public sphere
  - False narrative repeated in media that number provided “had to match the number you originally registered with...” or that “…voters had to ‘guess’ which one to provide…”
  - 95% of all registered Texas voters had BOTH types of ID numbers on record
  - 4% had one or the other ID number (Last 4 numbers of SSN or DL/ID number)
March 1, 2022 Primary Elections

Total turnout: 1,954,172 (Republican) + 1,075,601 (Democratic) = 3,029,773 (17.6% turnout)

- Mail ballot rejections / rejection rate by party primary:
  - Republican Primary: 10,355 / 11.8%
  - Democratic Primary: 14,281 / 12.9%

  Total rejected / rejection rate: 24,636 / 12.35%

Almost 25,000 mail-in ballots were rejected in Texas for its March 1 primary election

Nearly 25,000 mail-in ballots were rejected in the Texas primary, state officials say
What Happened?

Many voters *missed* the new ID section on the carrier envelope, didn’t provide EITHER type of ID number, left section blank, and ballot was rejected.
Improvements to Mail Ballot Kit
(following March 1 Primaries)

Updated cosmetic design of ID section on carrier envelope:

Encouraged county election officials to include REMINDER slip:

Don't Forget Your ID Numbers!

Under the flap on your return envelope, where it says "Required Information," you must provide at least one of the required ID numbers. We recommend providing both.

‘We had a success story,’ Mail ballot rejections plummeted in May 7 election

Mail ballot rejection rate fell from 21.7% in Mar. 1 primary to 3% in May 7 joint election
May 7, 2022 Uniform Election

Total turnout: 1,310,081 (7.57% of registered voters)

• Uniform date in Texas for municipal / school board / local entity elections
• 2 statewide propositions – amendments to Texas constitution

Total rejected / rejection rate:
9,420 / 5.02%
May 24, 2022 Primary Runoff Elections

Total turnout: 931,800 (Republican) + 484,072 (Democratic) = 1,415,872 (8.1% of registered voters)

- Statewide primary runoffs for Republican / Democratic AG races
- Mail ballot rejections / rejection rate by party primary:
  - Republican Primary Runoff: 3,652 / 4.27%
  - Democratic Primary Runoff: 3,592 / 3.68%

Total rejected / rejection rate:
7,244 / 3.9%
Communication Challenges - General Election

- More voters
- More *new* and *first time* voters
- More *elderly* voters (65+ eligible to vote by mail)
- More ballots by mail
- Competing with political campaigns for air time / social media exposure
  - $3.5 million for ENTIRE 2022 campaign, ~$1 million spent during Primaries

*How do we get the message through?*
$1,519,000+ in paid media for General Election

- 30- and 15-second television ads in English and Spanish;
- 30- and 15-second radio ads in English and Spanish;
- Morning television segments featuring the Secretary aired on local TV stations in every market across Texas;
- Digital ad banners in English and Spanish;
- Print advertisements in English, Spanish and – where applicable – Vietnamese and Mandarin
- Out-of-home advertisements such as vinyl and digital billboards, gas pump toppers, and window clings
- Paid social media advertisements
Social Media Videos / Myth-Busters

FACT:
ONLY ONE OF THE NUMBERS YOU PROVIDE ON THE APPLICATION FOR BALLOT BY MAIL & CARRIER ENVELOPE MUST MATCH YOUR VOTER REGISTRATION RECORD.

Fact or Myth: When voting by mail, you have to ‘guess’ which ID number you originally registered to vote with when filling out your ballot by mail materials. Find out in this week’s Monday Myth-Busters & click the link in our bio for more information. #VoteReady
Grassroots Tour of Texas

Community events, Senior Expos, county fairs, music/cultural festivals

Distributed educational pamphlets on voting by mail ID requirements

Digital truck with rotating messages in English/Spanish

Interactive game to learn types of acceptable IDs
Educational Partnership Toolkits

- Made free educational resources available to:
  - Community organizations
  - Local libraries
  - Nonprofit organizations
  - Chambers of commerce
  - Private sector partners
  - Local government officials
  - Members of legislature

- Distributed 250+ kits to community partners and elected officials
SOS 101: Voting by Mail in Texas

Key Messages:

• Eligible voters must request a mail-in ballot – it is not automatically sent to the voter.

• Voters must provide an ID number on their ABBM and carrier envelope, and that number must match a number on the voter’s registration record.

• “When in doubt, fill both out!”

• Track status of mail-in ballot/correct ID information through online portal
November 8, 2022 General Election

Total turnout: 8,102,908 (45.8% of all registered voters)

- Higher turnout, far lower rejection rate for mail-in ballots
- Statewide rejection rate decreased from ~12.4% in Primaries to 2.7% in General Election

Total rejected / rejection rate:

9,348 / 2.7%
Enhancing Voter Confidence
SOS 101 Video Series

Mini-series of educational videos featuring Secretary Scott, local election officials from 4 Texas counties

Topics covered:
• Voter registration/list maintenance;
• Voting system certification & testing;
• Voting by mail;
• Casting & counting ballots
SOS 101: Voting Systems in Texas

Key Points:

• Voting machines in Texas are never connected to the internet.
  • To be certified in Texas, voting systems cannot have the capability of internet or wireless connection.

• Only software certified by Texas SOS can be loaded on voting equipment.
  • This also applies to e-pollbooks, which are connected to the internet, but are not connected to any systems that cast or tabulate ballots.

• All voting machines are required to be tested for logic and accuracy three times:
  • Twice before each election, and once immediately after.
Did It Enhance Voter Confidence?

- **UCSD Case Study**: 90 seconds of ‘SOS 101’ vs. Fox News appearance by Secretary Scott
- Sample of 1,512 respondents reflective of the population of Texas

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trust elections in your state “some” or “a lot”</th>
<th>Trust that illegal voting rarely or never occurs</th>
<th>Trust that fraud by election officials rarely or never occurs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of State information on how voting systems in Texas work</td>
<td>+12.5%*</td>
<td>+1.7%</td>
<td>+4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of State interview on Fox News explaining election safety measures</td>
<td>+2.6%</td>
<td>+2.7%</td>
<td>+1.0%</td>
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*A* indicates that the finding is “statistically significant” at the 95% confidence level.
Did It Enhance Voter Confidence?

“Watching the SOS 101 video of Sec. Scott explaining voting systems increased the percentage of Texas respondents who reported that they trusted their own state’s elections ‘some’ or ‘a lot’ by 12.5 percentage points, the largest impact of any of the videos that we tested.

...This result was ‘statistically significant’ (so large that it would not be produced by random chance alone in 95 out of 100 cases)....

...While the impact of his appearance on Fox news on this metric fell short of statistical significance, as did the shift in views of the prevalence of fraud, each of these estimated effects was in the positive direction.”*

*Jennifer Gaudette, Seth Hill, Thad Kousser, and Mackenzie Lockhart, UC San Diego; Mindy Romero, USC Center for Inclusive Democracy, “Can a Public Information Campaign Restore Trust in American Elections?”
Thank You!

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