
ELECTORALLY SPEAKING

How to Talk about Threats to Elections in Ways that Won't Dampen People's Desire to Vote

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OVERVIEW

The following report offers evidence-based messaging strategies that journalists, elections administrators, and political advocates can use in light of experimental research conducted before the 2018 midterm election.

- **News audiences** respond more favorably to coverage mentioning threats surrounding election mechanics *paired with potential solutions to such threats* than to articles only disseminating information about threats.
 - Consumers of **social media** also react more positively to messages featuring threats *and solutions to such threats* than to messages only addressing threats.
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BACKGROUND

Elections are a hallmark of American Democracy. They are the method by which we choose our representatives. They have long been a source of national pride.

Recently, however, they have become highly contested.

- At the international level, United States intelligence agencies have confirmed foreign efforts to tamper with, and undermine faith in, American elections.
- At the national level, the recipients of the popular vote in the 2000 and 2016 presidential contests did not win the Electoral College.
- At the presidential level, Donald J. Trump routinely charges that elections are “rigged.”
- At the state level, gerrymandered districts, worries about potential illegal voting, concerns surrounding voter roll purges, and alarms about aging voting machines receive heightened attention from mainstream, partisan, and social media.

In the wake of these phenomena, journalists, elections administrators, and political advocates, face a heightened challenge: **how to talk about threats to elections in ways that won't dampen people's desire to vote**. This report, supported by the Democracy Fund, offers insights on ways to discuss threats to elections that won't depress attitudes towards voting.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Our research relied on a 4-wave online panel survey conducted between September – November 2018. The survey was fielded by Survey Sampling International (SSI). Pre-tests of all survey measures and experimental materials were conducted on MTurk. The dates and scope of the waves appear below.

- **Wave 1: October 11-15 (n=3,002)**
 - Wave 1 featured measures addressing confidence in elections, political attitudes, and demographic information on participants. Only people who completed this first wave were invited back for subsequent waves.

- **Wave 2: October 18-23 (n=1,787)**
 - Wave 2 began with an experiment comparing how people reacted to **news stories** focusing exclusively on threats to the mechanics of elections versus the same stories altered to include one paragraph addressing threats and efforts to safeguard elections. The articles discussed cyber security, voter purges, and aging voting machines (see Appendix A for the experimental stimuli). After participants read these articles, they responded to measures exploring political emotions and confidence in elections.

- **Wave 3: October 31-November 5 (n=1,447)**
 - Wave 3 began with an experiment comparing how people reacted to **tweets** focusing exclusively on threats to the ability to cast a ballot versus tweets addressing threats and what citizens can do to protect their votes (See Appendix B for examples of the experimental stimuli). After participants read the tweets, they responded to measures focusing on political efficacy and confidence in elections.

- **Wave 4: November 12-21 (n=1,729)**
 - Wave 4 featured measures examining confidence in elections and voting experiences.

OFFER THREATS + SOLUTIONS IN NEWS COVERAGE

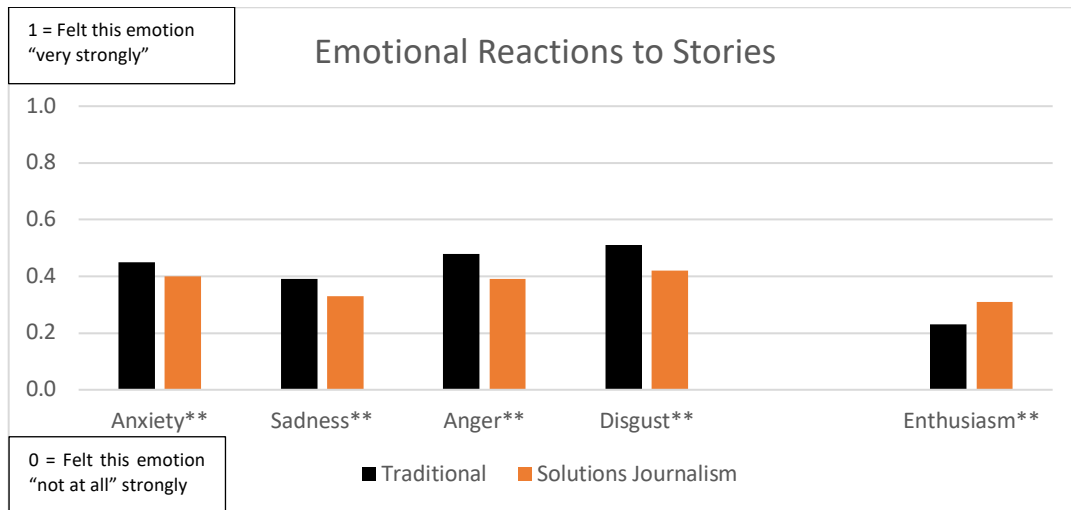
The press has a duty to alert the country to problems. Potential threats to the mechanics of elections are newsworthy due to their conflict, negativity, and implications to electoral outcomes. Soundbites from elections administrators and political advocates sounding alarms about potential problems, too, add drama to reporting. Yet, too much of a focus on such concerns could lead to misplaced fears held by potential voters and complicate journalists' ethical responsibilities to minimize harm (as prescribed by the Society for Professional Journalists).¹

In response to concerns about negativity as a news norm, many newsrooms and academics have started to experiment with “constructive journalism” also known as “solutions journalism.”² This approach embraces the journalistic duty to cover problems through rigorous reporting but does so by also addressing how people, institutions, and communities work to remedy these concerns.³ Conceptually, a solutions-oriented approach is supported by findings on the harmful effects of constant negative news.⁴ Practically, it is guided by journalistic commitments holding that objectivity is preserved by highlighting challenges, ideas, and methods rather than simply writing puff pieces on “do-gooders.”⁵

To test if audiences reacted differently to reporting that only featured threats versus coverage that addressed threats and efforts to safeguard elections, we conducted an online experiment of 1,775 adults in October 2018. Experimental stimuli were created by editing real articles that had appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today* and other print outlets (Appendix A). The topics of the articles included cyber security, voter purges, and aging voting machines. Participants in our study were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: 1) Traditional Reporting (Threat Condition): articles only addressing threats to elections; and 2) Solutions Journalism (Threat + Solution Condition): articles covering threats and efforts to address such threats.

Results show that solutions content in stories about threats to elections increases enthusiasm and optimism while decreasing anxiety, sadness, anger, and disgust (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
The Effect of Traditional Journalism (relative to Solutions Journalism) on Political Emotions



Note: This figure displays emotional reactions to stories. The statistical tests indicate that the different levels of emotion between the Traditional and the Solutions Journalism Conditions did not occur by chance — they demonstrate a truly different pattern. Negative emotions included anxiety (worried, anxious), 2 items, Cronbach’s alpha .81.; sadness (depressed, sad), 2 items, Cronbach’s alpha .82.; anger (mad, furious, angry), 3 items, Cronbach’s alpha .95.; and disgust (disgust). Positive emotion consisted of enthusiasm (hopeful, enthusiastic), 2 items, Cronbach’s alpha .83. The measures are rescaled to range from 0-1, and mean comparison statistics are based on two-tailed t-tests. Note: ** p<.05

These findings offer insights for journalists wanting to cover threats to American elections in a manner that does not negatively impact readers. Offering the public information about potential problems and mentioning what groups are doing to address them dampens public anxiety about threats to elections.

These results also advance a best practice for elections administrators and political advocates speaking about threats to elections with the press: craft messages, and quotable soundbites, that explain both threats to elections and what organizations and individuals are doing to address them.

PROVIDE THREATS + SOLUTIONS IN TWEETS

Voter suppression has been an ongoing concern in American elections. Recently, civil rights organizations, political advocates, and even celebrities have used Twitter to warn voters about potential problems at the polls. While many of these efforts may be well-intentioned, there is the potential that tweets addressing suppression could generate unintended consequences.

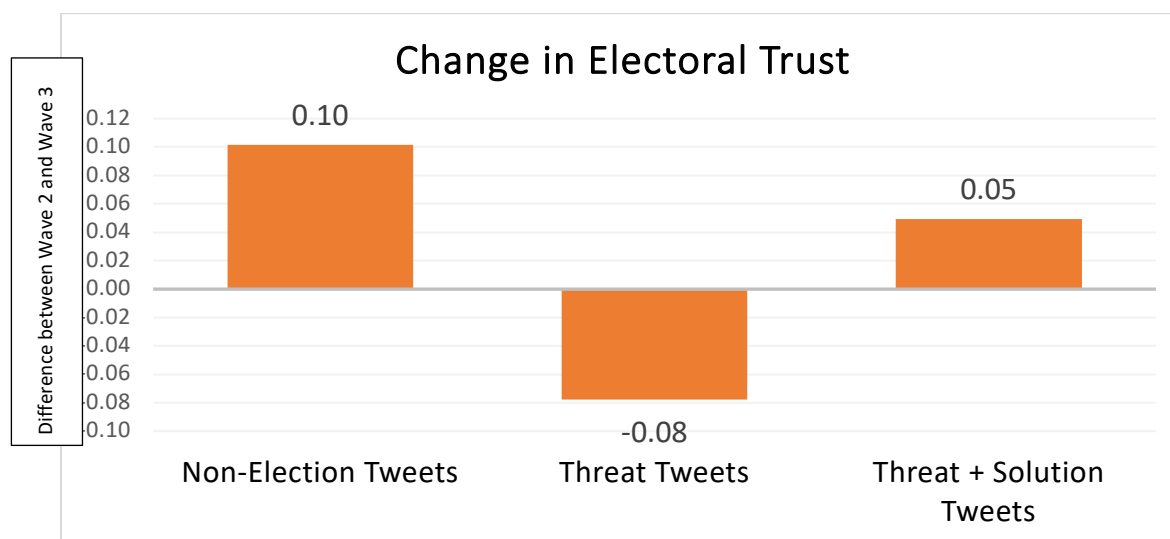
These unintended outcomes are labeled boomerang effects. They have been detected in many public campaign messages, including in

- environmental campaigns intended to curtail littering and promote conservation which have the opposite result,⁶
- public health campaigns designed to decrease smoking and drug and alcohol use that lead to increases in those two behaviors,⁷
- negative political advertising where attacks on an opponent may generate negative responses towards the ad's sponsor,⁸ and
- voter mobilization efforts which tell people that participation was low in the past or might be low in an upcoming election that can then depress future turnout.⁹

To test if tweets addressing voter suppression might have unintended effects, we conducted an online experiment of 1,447 adults in October 2018. Survey respondents were shown screenshots of 25 real tweets that had been posted between October 3-22, 2018 by non-profit organizations, elected officials, and other Twitter users with substantial followings. All of the tweets received at least 1,000 retweets, suggesting that the messages had considerable reach among Twitter users. Participants in our study were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: 1) Threat Condition: tweets mentioned potential voter suppression; 2) Threat + Solution Condition: tweets mentioned potential voter suppression and actions people can take, such as requesting a provisional ballot or providing a hotline number; and 3) Control Condition: tweets that made no mention of elections.¹⁰

When we compare the threat condition to the control condition, we find that tweets highlighting voter suppression (and not offering solutions) depress trust in elections. As Figure 2 illustrates, tweets written to increase awareness of voter suppression without offering individual-level solutions decrease trust in the election.

Figure 2:
Election Tweets and Change in Electoral Trust



Note: This figure displays change in electoral trust, before and after our experimental treatment. The Wave 2 measure of electoral trust was taken between October 18th and October 23rd, 2018. Then, during Wave 3 (in the field between October 31st to November 5th, 2018), participants were randomly assigned to 3 tweet conditions and electoral trust was measured after they saw tweets. The change in electoral trust figure above shows Wave 3 trust – Wave 2 trust. The statistical tests indicate that the groups demonstrate different shifts in trust level that did not occur based on chance. The Non-Election tweet group became more trusting of elections, the Threat tweet group became less trusting. The Threat + Solution tweet group showed a slight increase in electoral trust. $F=5.70$, $p<.01$.

We do not believe tweets about voter suppression were sent with the intent to dampen trust in elections—they were likely sent in an effort to inform the public of potential problems and garner media attention on the issue. Tweets that emphasized the problem and lacked a solution, however, backfired by decreasing trust in elections.

These findings lead us to offer the following advice for people seeking to use Twitter to make the public aware of future problems at the polls: include individual-level solutions in messages about voter suppression (See Appendix A).

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to learn more about how journalists, elections administrators, and political advocates can communicate about threats to elections without discouraging voter enthusiasm. The online experiments conducted in October 2018 show the following:

- **Journalists** should know that coverage focusing exclusively on threats to elections has negative effects on the public whereas reporting featuring threats and efforts to defend elections leads to less negative effects.
- **Elections administrators and advocates** should be mindful when speaking to the press that quotable soundbites on election problems can decrease trust, whereas soundbites

that feature problems and solutions can inform readers without decreasing trust, and potentially further future political involvement.

- **Social media users**, such as those on **Twitter**, should not merely address threats to the ability to cast a ballot. They should also provide steps that people can take to protect their votes, including confirming registration, requesting a provisional ballot when denied the opportunity to vote, and reminding people what types of information to take to the polls.

Elections are central to American democracy. It is important for people to know about potential threats surrounding them. Our research documents ways to discuss such concerns without making them worse.

Appendix-A—News Articles

Cybersecurity

Traditional Journalism (Threat)	Solutions Journalism (Threat + Solution)
Voter Confidence is the Biggest Election Security Challenge	Voter Confidence is the Biggest Election Security Challenge
<p>A top official at the Department of Homeland Security says the biggest election security challenge going into the midterms isn't a technical one.</p> <p>It's convincing voters that their ballots are secure.</p> <p>"To me the No. 1 threat is around public confidence in the process," said Matt Masterson, a senior cybersecurity adviser at DHS.</p> <p>Now that voters know that nation-states such as Russia want to disrupt U.S. elections, it's going to take a continuous effort from DHS and other government agencies to make sure they keep turning out at the polls, Masterson said. That won't go away come November.</p> <p>Intelligence officials warn that Russia is seeking to disrupt the midterms. They could seek to interfere in many ways. Adam S. Hickey, deputy assistant attorney general, gave a broad outline in written testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday.</p> <p>Hackers could direct cyberattacks at election systems "to undermine the integrity or availability of election-related data," Hickey said.</p> <p>"They could steal information from campaigns to discredit or embarrass candidates," he stated.</p> <p>Hickey told how foreign actors could provide financial assistance to candidates in attempts to influence them. Such acts are illegal in the United States.</p> <p>They could conduct online campaigns to discourage people from voting or make them</p>	<p>A top official at the Department of Homeland Security says the biggest election security challenge going into the midterms isn't a technical one.</p> <p>It's convincing voters that their ballots are secure.</p> <p>"To me the No. 1 threat is around public confidence in the process," said Matt Masterson, a senior cybersecurity adviser at DHS.</p> <p>DHS is working with state election officials to share cyberthreat information and offering services to strengthen election security.</p> <p>So far, 17 states have requested DHS risk and vulnerability assessments, intensive two-week, on-site checks of their election systems. Ten have been completed, one is in progress and another six will be completed by November.</p> <p>"We can reach all 50 states when we need to, and they know that the services are available to them. But that needs to be ongoing," Masterson said. "This isn't something we're going to do and then have it go away."</p> <p>"Ours is just one of many services that they can take advantage of," Masterson said. He pointed to ongoing work by the National Guard to help states protect election systems.</p> <p>"As I've been talking with state and local officials, they are absolutely improving the overall resilience of the process and taking it seriously. And quite frankly we're in an environment now where more resources and more information is available to them than has ever been."</p>

<p>question election results. They could use state-owned media as propaganda machines. They could attempt to remove eligible voters from the rolls or manipulate the results to undermine the integrity and legitimacy of our process.</p> <p>Congress in March sent \$380 million to beef up election systems.</p> <p>“Elections are critical to our operation as a democracy,” Masterston added. “That makes them naturally a target regardless of whatever activity happened in 2016.”</p>	<p>“Whether it’s 2018 or 2020,” Masterson said, “you prepare like everyone’s going to show up all the time.”</p> <p>Congress in March sent \$380 million to beef up election systems.</p> <p>“Elections are critical to our operation as a democracy,” Masterston added. “That makes them naturally a target regardless of whatever activity happened in 2016.”</p>
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Note: Both articles in this experimental condition were 275 words long. They both featured identical final paragraphs. **All content in both columns came from the same article:**
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-cybersecurity-202/2018/06/13/the-cybersecurity-202-voter-confidence-is-the-biggest-election-security-challenge-dhs-cybersecurity-official-says/5b1fece91b326b6391af09be/?utm_term=.c4bf95a96042

Voting Machines

Traditional Journalism (Threat)	Solutions Journalism (Threat + Solution)
Voting Machines that Can't Count	Voting Machines that Can't Count
<p>More than 4,500 votes were lost in one North Carolina county in 2004. Election officials believed a computer that stored ballots electronically could hold more data than it did.</p> <p>Officials said UniLect Corp., the maker of the county's electronic voting system, told them that each storage unit could handle 10,500 votes, but the limit was actually 3,005 votes.</p> <p>Expecting the greater capacity, the county used only one unit during early voting.</p> <p>"Had we known, we would have had the units to handle the votes," said Sue Verdon of the county election board.</p> <p>Officials said 3,005 early votes were stored, but 4,530 were lost.</p> <p>Jack Gerbel, president and owner of Dublin, Calif.-based UniLect, said Thursday that the county's elections board was given incorrect information. There is no way to retrieve the missing data, he said.</p> <p>"That is the situation and it's definitely terrible."</p> <p>In a letter, he blamed the mistake on confusion over which model of the voting machines was used in Carteret County. But he also noted that the machines flash a warning message when there is no more room for storing ballots.</p> <p>"Evidently, this message was either ignored or overlooked," he wrote.</p> <p>County election officials were meeting with State Board of Elections Executive Director Gary</p>	<p>More than 4,500 votes have been lost in one North Carolina county in 2004. Election officials believed a computer that stored ballots electronically could hold more data than it did.</p> <p>Officials said the maker of the county's electronic voting system, told them that each storage unit could handle 10,500 votes, but the limit was actually 3,005 votes.</p> <p>Expecting the greater capacity, the county used only one unit during early voting.</p> <p>"Had we known, we would have had the units to handle the votes," said Sue Verdon of the county election board.</p> <p>Officials said 3,005 early votes were stored, but 4,530 were lost.</p> <p>Complaints about electronic voting machines led county officials in Colorado and Texas to act.</p> <p>In Colorado, Denver county clerk Paul Huntsberger worked to address such problems.</p> <p>He led the state to invest in new machines that create separate paper trails of each ballot cast. The state has devised plans to detect possible malware planted in their voting machines weeks in advance of elections.</p> <p>The state held a disaster exercise for dozens of county officials to reinforce preparedness for November's midterm election.</p> <p>In Texas, Travis county clerk Dana DeBeauvoir created a new voting system called STAR-Vote</p>

<p>Bartlett on Thursday and did not immediately return a telephone call seeking comment.</p> <p>The loss of the votes didn't appear to change the outcome of county races, but that wasn't the issue for Alecia Williams, who voted on one of the final days of the early voting period.</p> <p>"The point is not whether the votes would have changed things, it's that they didn't get counted at all," Williams said.</p> <p>Nationwide, problems with electronic voting machines like in North Carolina were rare. Roughly 40 million people cast digital ballots, voting equipment company executives had said.</p>	<p>(STAR is short for "Secure, Transparent, Auditable, and Reliable").</p> <p>STAR allows elections administrators to publish anonymized, encrypted voting records online to enable reliable recounts and to allow activists and news organizations to verify election results for themselves.</p> <p>Jonathan Brater, an expert on elections at the Brennan Center for Justice was cautious about drawing conclusions from these county driven efforts. He did state they appear promising, though. "Based on the initial data, they definitely look like successes," he said.</p> <p>Nationwide, problems with electronic voting machines like in North Carolina were rare. Roughly 40 million people cast digital ballots, voting equipment company executives had said.</p>
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Note: Both articles were 301 words long. They both featured identical final paragraphs. **Most of both articles:** http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politicselections/vote2004/2004-11-04-votes-lost_x.htm. **Solutions content in right-hand column:** <https://splinternews.com/can-this-texas-county-fix-america-s-electronic-voting-p-1793861946>. **Both of the final paragraphs:** http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politicselections/vote2004/2004-11-04-votes-lost_x.htm

Voter Roll Purges

Traditional Journalism (Threat)

Solutions Journalism (Threat + Solution)

The Ohio Purge and the Future of Voting	The Ohio Purge and the Future of Voting
<p>Larry Harmon, a software engineer who lives near Akron, Ohio, says he is “a firm believer in the right to vote.” But sometimes he stays home on Election Day, on purpose.</p> <p>In 2012, for instance, he was unimpressed by the candidates. He did not vote, he said, because “there isn’t a box on the ballot that says ‘none of the above.’”</p> <p>Three years later, Mr. Harmon did want to vote, against a ballot initiative to legalize marijuana. But his name was not on the list at his usual polling place.</p> <p>It turned out that Mr. Harmon’s occasional decisions not to vote had led election officials to strike his name from the voting rolls.</p> <p>Failing to vote — or deciding not to vote — is not unusual. In 2016, more than 70 million registered voters did not cast ballots, according to the United States Election Assistance Commission. That was more than a third of all registered voters.</p> <p>Even in Ohio, a swing state where votes really matter, about 29 percent of registered voters did not cast ballots in 2016.</p> <p>Ohio is more aggressive than any other state in culling its voter rolls based on the failure to vote.</p> <p>After skipping a single federal election cycle, voters are sent a notice. If they fail to respond and do not vote in the next four years, their names are purged from the rolls.</p> <p>The idea behind the notices is that failing to vote suggests the voter may have moved. State officials say their approach protects the integrity of the voting rolls.</p>	<p>Larry Harmon, a software engineer who lives near Akron, Ohio, says he is “a firm believer in the right to vote.” But sometimes he stays home on Election Day, on purpose.</p> <p>In 2012, for instance, he was unimpressed by the candidates. He did not vote, he said, because “there isn’t a box on the ballot that says ‘none of the above.’”</p> <p>Three years later, Mr. Harmon did want to vote, against a ballot initiative to legalize marijuana. But his name was not on the list at his usual polling place.</p> <p>It turned out that Mr. Harmon’s occasional decisions not to vote had led election officials to strike his name from the voting rolls.</p> <p>Failing to vote — or deciding not to vote — is not unusual. In 2016, more than 70 million registered voters did not cast ballots, according to the United States Election Assistance Commission. That was more than a third of all registered voters.</p> <p>Even in Ohio, a swing state where votes really matter, about 29 percent of registered voters did not cast ballots in 2016.</p> <p>Ohio is more aggressive than any other state in culling its voter rolls based on the failure to vote.</p> <p>After skipping a single federal election cycle, voters are sent a notice. If they fail to respond and do not vote in the next four years, their names are purged from the rolls.</p> <p>The idea behind the notices is that failing to vote suggests the voter may have moved. State officials say their approach protects the integrity of the voting rolls.</p>


<p>State officials say they sent Mr. Harmon a notice in 2011. He said he never saw it.</p> <p>“I don’t remember getting that, and I don’t know why they sent it in the mail,” he said. “I’m out in a rural area, and sometimes I get other people’s mail. Sometimes other people get my mail.”</p> <p>Mr. Harmon said he suspected something larger was afoot in some states’ efforts to restrict voting.</p> <p>“I really never had a problem with voter ID, because I’ve always had a driver’s license,” he said. “But now I really feel that they’re trying to get rid of voters.”</p> <p>Mr. Harmon said Ohio’s system for managing its voting rolls would never pass muster in the private sector.</p> <p>“As an engineer,” he said, “we have to collect data all the time from all over the world and manage information. It doesn’t seem like they’re even trying.”</p> <p>A few other states use variations on Ohio’s approach, but none of them move as fast. “Ohio is the only state that commences such a process based on the failure to vote in a single federal election cycle,” said a brief from the League of Women Voters and the Brennan Center for Justice.</p> <p>“In most other aspects of civil liberties, the government goes out of the way to make sure your rights are enforced,” Mr. Harmon said. “The right to vote is the most important right you have. If you can’t vote, you really don’t have a democratic system.”</p> <p>Harmon, a Navy veteran, said he had voted in 2004 and 2008 but skipped the next presidential election, along with the midterm elections in 2010 and 2014.</p> <p>When he tried to vote in 2015, he had lived in the same place for about 16 years.</p>	<p>State officials say they sent Mr. Harmon a notice in 2011. He said he never saw it.</p> <p>“The rolls should be accurate. Yet there are ways to protect voters from this kind of list maintenance,” said Jonathan Brater, an expert on voting rights and elections at the Brennan Center for Justice.</p> <p>Automatic voter registration is a reform Mr. Brater and others believe “minimizes errors, saves money, and increases registration of eligible citizens.”</p> <p>Currently, 12 states plus the District of Columbia have approved automatic voter registration.</p> <p>Oregon became the first “automatic voter registration” state in 2016.</p> <p>Rather than ask eligible residents to check a box to register to vote, residents in Oregon are automatically registered to vote. This happens when they apply for, renew, or replace a drivers’ license, ID card, or permit at the state Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division.</p> <p>Eligible voters receive a card in the mail informing them of their automatic registration. To affiliate with a political party or opt out of voter registration, residents return the card with the appropriate information filled out. Or they can simply do nothing.</p> <p>Mr. Brater was cautious about drawing conclusions from the Oregon case, citing the need for more data over several election cycles to fully understand the program’s impact. But he and other voting law specialists say the early data released last month by Oregon’s secretary of state, was promising. “Based on the initial data, it definitely looks like a success,” he said.</p> <p>Back in Ohio, Navy veteran Harmon said he had voted in 2004 and 2008 but skipped the next presidential election, along with the midterm elections in 2010 and 2014.</p>
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<p>“I’ve been living in Ohio my whole life,” he said. “I pay property taxes and income taxes. I register my car. They obviously had all the data to know that I was a resident. They could have looked it up, but they were too cheap.”</p>	<p>When he tried to vote in 2015, he had lived in the same place for about 16 years.</p> <p>“I’ve been living in Ohio my whole life,” he said. “I pay property taxes and income taxes. I register my car. They obviously had all the data to know that I was a resident. They could have looked it up, but they were too cheap.”</p>
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Note: Both articles were 593 words long. They both featured identical final paragraphs. **Most of both articles:** Liptak, A. (2017, October 23). He Didn’t Vote in a Few Elections. In the Next One, Ohio Said He Couldn’t. *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/23/us/politics/supreme-court-ohio-voter-purge.html>. **Solutions content in right-hand column:** Chokshi, N. (2016, December 2). Oregon claims success in an attempt to expand voting access. *New York Times*, NYTimes.com Feed

Appendix B—Sample Tweets

Threat Tweet


If your vote didn't matter, they wouldn't be trying so hard to keep you from voting.

Threat + Solution Tweet


If you are turned away at the polls because your name is not on the register, don't walk away. Say this: I REQUEST A PROVISIONAL BALLOT AS REQUIRED BY LAW.

Don't let them steal your vote.

Note: Our experiment featured several examples of threat tweets versus threat and solution tweets. For this appendix, we are offering one of the clearest examples from each condition. Across all of the tweets, however, offering solutions (or ways that voters can protect their votes) did not dampen trust in elections.

¹ McIntyre, K., & Gyldensted, C. (2017). Constructive journalism: Applying positive psychology techniques to news production. *The Journal of Media Innovation*, 4 (2), 20-34.

² For more information about "Solutions Journalism," see <https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/>.

³ Benesch, S. (1998). The rise of solutions journalism. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 36-39.

McIntyre, K. (2017). Solutions journalism: The effects of including solution information in news stories about social problems. *Journalism Practice*, 1-19.

⁴ McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017.

⁵ Lough, K., & McIntyre, K. (2018). Journalists' perceptions of solutions journalism and its place in the field. Research presented to the International Symposium for Online Journalism.

Retrieved from <http://isoj.org/research/journalists-perceptions-of-solutions-journalism-and-its-place-in-the-field/>.

⁶ Cialdini, R. B., Demaine, L. J., Sagarin, B. J., Barrett, D. W., Rhoads, K., & Winter, P. L. (2006). Managing social norms for persuasive impact. *Social Influence*, 1(1), 3-15.

Cialdini, R. B., Reno, R. R., & Kallgren, C. A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(6), 1015-1026.

Schultz, P. W., Nolan, J. M., Cialdini, R. B., Goldstein, N. J., & Griskevicius, V. (2007). The constructive, destructive, and reconstructive power of social norms. *Psychological Science*, 18(5), 429-434.

⁷ Campo, S., & Cameron, K. A. (2006). Differential effects of exposure to social norms campaigns: A cause for concern. *Health Communication*, 19(3), 209-219.

Fishbein, M., Hall-Jamieson, K., Zimmer, E., Von Haften, I., & Nabi, R. (2002). Avoiding the boomerang: Testing the relative effectiveness of antidrug public service announcements before a national campaign. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92(2), 238-245.

⁸ Garramone, G. M. (1984). Voter responses to negative political ads. *Journalism Quarterly*, 61(2), 250-259.

Lau, R. R., Sigelman, L., & Rovner, I. B. (2007). The effects of negative political campaigns: a meta-analytic reassessment. *Journal of Politics*, 69(4), 1176-1209.

⁹ Gerber, A. S., & Rogers, T. (2009). Descriptive social norms and motivation to vote: Everybody's voting and so should you. *Journal of Politics*, 71(1), 178-191. Keane, L. D., & Nickerson, D. W. (2015). When reports depress rather than inspire: A field experiment using age cohorts as reference groups. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 14(4), 381-390.

¹⁰ Each participant in the experiment viewed a screen representing a Twitter feed with 8 tweets; tweets were randomly drawn from a pool of election and control (placebo) tweets. In the placebo condition, subjects saw a random draw of eight celebrity, entertainment, sports, and trivia tweets from a pool of 12. None of the placebo tweets contained information relating to voting, the upcoming election, or politics. The "threat" and "threat+solution" tweets were chosen based on a pre-test conducted on MTurk (Amazon Mechanical Turk). Participants in the pre-test evaluated a series of "threat" and "threat + solution" tweets in order to match tweets on credibility and trust. In the "threat" condition, subjects saw a random draw of four "threat" tweets, and a random draw of four placebo tweets. In the "threat + solution" condition, subjects saw a random draw of four "threat + solution" tweets, and a random draw of four placebo tweets. Subjects in the "threat" and "threat+solutions" conditions saw the tweets in the following order: treatment, placebo, treatment, placebo, placebo, treatment, treatment, placebo.