

Trust-Building Campaigns on Social Media: Best Practices

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Election Officials' Trust-Building Campaigns: Evidence from 2022

During the 2022 cycle, we tracked and monitored all communications shared by state and local election officials (EOs) on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter between September 10 and December 15, 2022. Using manual quantitative content analysis, posts were coded for the presence of terms that explicitly signal to voters EOs are trusted sources of information and / or that elections in the voter's state are safe and secure. This data collection resulted in a one-of-a-kind dataset that captures EOs' trust-building efforts on social media.

With this dataset, we tested the relationship of trust-building communications on individuals' confidence that votes in their state were counted accurately in 2022. We find a strong and positive relationship between usage of explicit trust-related messages - "our elections are *safe and secure*," *election results are accurate*," or "your election official is your *trusted source*." - and confidence among voters and non-voters, as well as individuals who reported voting for Trump in 2020.

In the Figure below, we present a list of best practices and recommendations for effective communications that can help increase voter confidence. We built this list based on evidence from empirical research³, direct observations from our monitoring project, as well as conversations with election officials and other democracy stakeholders who are invested in building a healthy election information ecosystem, and restoring trust in U.S. elections.

Fig. 1. Social Media Messaging: Best Practices & Recommendations

- **Concise, clear messages.**
 - "Trust the source | system | people."
 - "Here is how we do it."
- **Integrity in the context of the whole cycle.**
 - "Safeguards through every step of the process."
- **Continuity in messaging.**
 - NCSBE daily thematic posts (#MythbustingMonday - #SecureSaturday).
 - CA SOS "Vote Safe California" logo.
- **Cross-platform consistency.**
- **Information accessibility.**
 - Clickable links/QR codes; multi-lingual.
- **Coordination across/within states.**
 - "Elections in our state|the U.S. are secure."
- **Name/Office visibility.**
 - Logos/seal/image on comms.
- **Message amplification online and offline.**
- **Getting the message out; do voters know you are online?**
 - Recommendation: mailer with social media/newsletter info.
- **Applying best practices locally; do LEOs have the resources they need?**
 - Recommendation: CEO toolkits for LEOs.
- **Finding trusted surrogates for communities of interest (opinion leaders).**
 - Recommendation: Leverage partnerships with local civil society & media.
- **Relying too much on hashtags.**
 - Recommendation: hashtags are OK, but explicit messages may be more effective.
- **Minimizing election denial.**
 - Recommendation: candidate forums, local/state party trainings, media invitations.
- **Mixing campaigning with educating.**
 - Recommendation: election office account vs personal account.

³ Thessalia Merivaki, Mara Suttman-Lea, Mary Catherine McCreary and Daniel Tyler. Forthcoming. "The Trusted-Info dataset: States' trust-building social media campaigns during the 2022 election cycle." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*.