

FACT SHEET

Equitable Ballot Design and Voter Education Materials

Equitable Ballot Design Improves the Voting Process

Inequitable practices in the design of ballots and voter education materials are making it more difficult for people to vote. These practices especially affect Black, Brown, and Indigenous voters; voters with a disability; and voters with limited English proficiency (LEP).

Approximately half a million votes were not counted in 2020—and hundreds of thousands of votes cast every election do not count (see [here](#) and [here](#))—due to lack of access, difficulty of ballot use or confusion concerning ballot instructions, design errors, and failure to correct spoiled ballots or to complete the ballot for every contest.

Poor ballot design stifles widespread political participation and makes it difficult to count votes and certify elections accurately. Poor ballot design thus contributes to the erosion of a [democratic government](#).

While ballot design varies widely across states, all states can adopt scientifically tested design principles to make their ballots and voter education materials more accessible and user-friendly for everyone.

All eligible voters having equal ability and opportunity to vote results in a stronger democracy. The Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists has compiled a list of recommendations that rely on the most up-to-date election science.

Ballots should be accessible and user-friendly. Ballot designers should consider and include multiple features (see Figure 1) that allow voters to comprehend, vote, and submit a ballot that will not be rejected or need fixing (or “curing”).

Figure 1. Elements of a Ballot Designed with Equity in Mind

**Official General Election Ballot / Boleta Oficial de la Elección General
November 5, 2024 / 5 de noviembre 2024**

Instructions: To vote, fill in the oval completely ● next to your choice. Use black ballpoint pen. If you make a mistake, ask for a new ballot. Do not cross out or your vote may not count.
Do not vote for a candidate whose name is not printed on the ballot, fill in the oval and write in the candidate's name on the blank line provided for a write-in candidate.

Instrucciones: Para votar, rellene completamente ● el óvalo próximo a su selección. Use bolígrafo negro. Si comete un error, solicite una nueva boleta. No borre o realice otras marcas, o su voto puede no ser computado.
Para votar por un candidato cuyo nombre no está impreso en la boleta, rellene el óvalo, y escriba el nombre del candidato en la línea en blanco que se provee para un candidato agregado.

President and Vice-President (Vote for One) Presidente y Vicepresidente (Vote por Uno)	Representative in Congress District 1 (Vote for One) Representante en Congreso Distrito 1 (Vote por Uno)	State Senator District 3 (Vote for One) Senador Estatal Distrito 3 (Vote por Uno)
<input type="radio"/> Candidate 1 Running mate 1	<input type="radio"/> Candidate 1 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 2 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 3 Write-in/Por Escrito	<input type="radio"/> Candidate 1 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 2 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 3 Write-in/Por Escrito
<input type="radio"/> Candidate 2 Running mate 2	Governor (Vote for One) Gobernador (Vote por Uno)	State Representative District 67 (Vote for One) Representante Estatal Distrito 57 (Vote por Uno)
<input type="radio"/> Candidate 3 Running mate 3	<input type="radio"/> Candidate 1 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 2 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 3 Write-in/Por Escrito	<input type="radio"/> Candidate 1 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 2 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 3 Write-in/Por Escrito
<input type="radio"/> Candidate 4 Running mate 4	United States Senator (Vote for One) Senador de los Estados Unidos (Vote por Uno)	
<input type="radio"/> Candidate 5 Running mate 5 Write-in/Por Escrito	Lieutenant Governor (Vote for One) Vice-Gobernador (Vote por Uno)	
<input type="radio"/> Candidate 1 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 2 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 3 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 4 Write-in/Por Escrito	<input type="radio"/> Candidate 1 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 2 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 3 <input type="radio"/> Candidate 4 Write-in/Por Escrito	
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Above are examples of scientifically tested design elements that can increase the likelihood of voters comprehending, completing, and submitting a ballot that will not be rejected or need fixing.

Election Science Recommendations or Design and Materials

Ballot Design

Election officials and administrators should design ballots as follows:

- Provide horizontal instructions separate from vertical candidate lists.
- Place candidate lists for an office on a single page, in a single column, for paper and electronic election materials.
- Adhere to the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s election material guidelines](#).

Example guidelines include advice on these aspects of ballot design:

- Use of lowercase letters
- Best font and font size for optical scans and touchscreens

- Supportive comprehensive instructions and page numbering
 - How to provide accurate instructional illustrations to help voters
- Conduct a preelection usability test, designed to ensure that ballots are easily used by those with disabilities and LEP.

Disability Access and Voter Education Materials

Election officials and administrators should take the following actions:

- Permit application for and return of mail ballots in multiple ways (i.e., designated drop-box locations, etc.) and offer mail-in ballots in multiple formats.
- Include voters with disabilities in decisionmaking, testing, and implementation processes.
- Conduct a preelection usability test designed to ensure that ballots are easily used by those with disabilities and a postelection procedural audit to determine whether election procedures were implemented and followed.
- Make sure instructions, layout, format, and content of sample ballots shared with voters are identical to those on the official ballot.

Language Access and Voter Education Materials

If a jurisdiction includes more than 10,000 voting-age citizens, or 5 percent or more of the total voting-age citizen population, who share a primary language that is not English, the Voting Rights Act (VRA) requires election officials to provide election materials in that language. Election officials and administrators should lower this threshold to 7,000, or 3 percent or more. In addition, election officials should take the following actions:

- Expand the mandatory list of languages in VRA [Section 203](#).
- Include voters with LEP in decisionmaking, testing, and implementation processes.
- Conduct a preelection usability test designed to ensure that ballots are easily used by those with LEP and a postelection procedural audit to determine whether election procedures were implemented and followed.
- Make sure instructions, layout, format, and content of sample ballots shared with voters are identical to those on the official ballot.

For more information and further explanation of our recommendations on election data transparency, [click here](#) to read the Equitable Ballot Design and Voter Education Materials White Paper.

Authors

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