

Bridging the knowledge gap:

Messaging Research Study Led by **Verified Voting**

*Support for this project was provided by the Election Trust Initiative. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Election Trust Initiative.

**How effective
communication
about election audits
can strengthen voter
confidence?**



EIGHT FOCUS GROUPS

of likely voters conducted
virtually in January 2024 in
AZ, GA, PA, & WI (two groups
per state by party ID)

Introduction

Disinformation about our elections remains a persistent threat to our democratic systems. As part of our collective work to reach voters with accurate information about our elections, Verified Voting led a comprehensive study in 2024 to inform strategies for communicating about secure and trustworthy elections in 2024 and beyond. The research is among the first to focus on election audits, exploring both public perceptions and the perspectives of election officials about a type of audit called a risk-limiting audit (RLA).

Methodology

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

19-minute survey among 800
likely 2024 general election voters
nationwide (March 4-7, 2024)



QUALITATIVE BOARD

25 local election officials
(including 16 who fully
completed the board) over
a two-week period in mid-
March

Key Findings

1

Voters are **confident** about the **election systems** in their own states, but have little to no knowledge about how they work

2

Election audits can be positioned as a **proven way** to affirm and ensure election outcomes—which **increases confidence**

3

Upon learning about risk-limiting audits (RLAs), **voters are broadly supportive across political ideologies**, with notable positive shifts for Republican and Independent voters

4

Voters respond affirmatively to simple, positive language about election processes

5

Election officials want voters to turn to them for information, and there is room for outside organizations to collaborate with—and provide resources for—election officials



Exploring Messaging Tactics

VIEW OUR EXPLAINER VIDEO AT [VERIFIEDVOTING.ORG/VIDEOS](https://verifiedvoting.org/videos)

Messaging Recommendations

- Keep it simple—avoid jargon
- Use clear, concise language
- Frame your message positively
- Stick to the facts and avoid speculation
- Consider your messenger
- Emphasize bipartisanship and transparency of processes
- Center election officials

Election officials feel a strong calling to continue the work they do, are passionate about free and fair elections, and are defiant against what they perceive to be attacks on elections by outsiders. **Their big wish: That the public knew anything about audits. They exist! They have a purpose—they validate the vote count. They are observable!**



Communications Director Corrie Emerson shared the messaging findings during a panel at March's Election Verification Network Conference.

Risk-Limiting Audit (RLA) Messaging Guide for Election Officials



While each jurisdiction is unique and there is no one-size-fits-all model for risk-limiting audits, Verified Voting developed these messaging recommendations informed by findings from a research study conducted by Lake Research Partners. The study included eight focus groups in key swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) and a survey of 800 likely 2024 general election voters nationwide in March 2024. The study also included a qualitative online board of local election officials nationwide to determine the needs of local election officials to effectively communicate to constituents about audits. More materials from the research study, including a recorded webinar, are available at <https://verifiedvoting.org/audits/whatisra/>.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Research shows that everyday voters have no knowledge about risk-limiting audits, but when they learn more using the following guidance, they are broadly supportive of audits. This guidance can be applied to many other election processes, including other types of post-election audits.

Guidance:

- > Use **simple, clear language** and avoid statistics, acronyms, or technical terms—audit and math terms are not generally understood and can confuse voters
- > Lead with a **simple description** or definition before introducing the name “risk-limiting audit” or other terminology
- > Use **positive words** when describing audits, like “checks” and “protections” on election results (avoid negative words like “hacks,” “errors,” and “wrong results”)
- > Highlight that risk-limiting audits are a **routine part** of the checks and balances that go into ensuring the vote count is accurate
- > Emphasize bipartisan aspects of the process, notably that bipartisan teams conduct the audit and/or that **bipartisan observers are present**
- > Center people conducting the audit as **folks who live and work in your community** and are dedicated to ensuring the vote count is accurate
- > Highlight **transparency** and **observability** of the audit process

The Verified Voting team shared the findings with partners and election officials throughout the election season via webinars and in-person opportunities