



OHIO ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AT THE CROSSROADS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Ohio enjoys the advantage of a resilient, adaptable election workforce which persists in excellence despite high turnover rates, continuing public skepticism toward election security, and flux across the legal and funding landscapes.
- Every serious effort to identify unlawful voting in Ohio has found it occurs at near-negligible rates. However, recent election law changes have been driven by unfounded allegations of noncitizen voting.
- Election officials welcome efforts to improve voter roll accuracy but worry that changes to mail-in ballot deadlines and other voting rules will restrict ballot access for vulnerable Ohioans, especially the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Given slow postal delivery times and the risk of inaccurate government data, new processes for challenging and cancelling voter registrations lack due process and should be more easily audited by third parties.
- Ohio has made great strides toward data standardization and transparency, but these achievements require public education to make sure users understand the data presented to them.
- Conversations about artificial intelligence and election administration have shifted from almost entirely threat-based to exploring opportunities, and Ohio's AI election administration assistant, EVA, has earned high marks from those who use it.
- Instability in the Election Assistance Commission and declining federal support for election security grants could represent the beginning of a longer trend which jeopardizes Ohio's election security achievements.
- Federal government drawdowns of other forms of election support, like cybersecurity assessments, intelligence sharing, and crisis management support, have partially been replaced by the secretary of state—but the loss of federal dollars means diverting resources away from other services in order to fully fund elections.

INTRODUCTION

In 2024, All Voting is Local published an Election Workforce Report under the title, “An Exhaustible Resource.”¹ And many election workers were exhausted: by the COVID-19 pandemic, two back-to-back August special elections, and relentless attacks—rhetorical, legal, and even physical—on their profession.

This report finds a resilient workforce which nonetheless faces challenges both new and continuing. It is the same workforce that attends the gears of democracy every election cycle. Their attention to detail, commitment to excellence, and dedication to public service makes our republic possible.

Since 2024, President Trump’s debunked conspiracy theories about the 2020 presidential election have led to extensive changes to election law from Ohio legislators in response. These changes have made the ballot less accessible for vulnerable Ohioans.

While officials welcome efforts to improve transparency and voter roll maintenance, they largely believe these changes are unnecessary and make voting less accessible and elections more difficult to administer. When election law changes, it falls on local officials to inform the public, a process which often requires a full presidential election cycle due to the large number of intermittent voters.

Election law changes which make voting more difficult compound with other challenges, like finding adequate numbers of polling places and recruits to work the polls on election day. Boards across the state have already begun work to consolidate down the number of polling locations and election workers needed each cycle, but proposed restrictions on early voting, mail-in voting, and ballot drop boxes risk reversing their efforts.

The drawdown in federal support for elections—measured in declining grant funds and terminated CISA employees—is another challenge. Many officials applaud the secretary of state (SOS) and their county governments for stepping into the breach to replace lost resources. But if these trends continue, the progress Ohio election officials have made on security issues may begin to erode. Further, every state and local dollar spent to replace lost federal support is a dollar lost for emergency responders, human services, and economic development.

1 Griffin-Green, Kayla and Jackson, Dean. October 15, 2024. “An Exhaustible Resource: Responding to Challenges Facing Ohio’s Election Workforce.” All Voting is Local. <https://allvotingislocal.org/press-releases/all-voting-is-local-and-public-circle-release-election-workforce-report-ahead-of-general-election/>.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose boasts that in Ohio elections, “it is easy to vote and hard to cheat.”² Is he right? The nearly non-existent rate of voter fraud in Ohio proves the second claim, but the 2024 Cost of Voting Index—which has measured access to the ballot in every state since 1996—put Ohio 45th in the nation for ease of voting.³

The numbers tell a clear story: The state’s priorities are out of balance. Election administration in Ohio is at a crossroads, and Columbus is steering it in the wrong direction.

METHODOLOGY

This report draws on 14 interviews conducted between June and August 2026. All Voting and Public Circle, LLC designed this process to assess the status of Ohio’s election administration workforce, their working conditions, and the implications for the public those officials serve.

To that end, All Voting and Public Circle wrote six interview questions to shape each interview. The questions were written based on All Voting’s work to identify the most pressing issues to affect Ohio’s election workforce since 2024; they are included in the appendix to this report. The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that while the research questions guided each conversation, the exact phrasing and specific follow-up questions differed according to the context of each interview participant.

These interviews represent a cross-section of Ohio: The BOE officials listed here come from counties with large, medium, and small populations in Ohio’s four corners, as well as its center. Public Circle contacted each of Ohio’s 88 counties for an interview multiple times at multiple addresses. Those who responded were interviewed for this report; none were turned away. Half of these interviews (7) were with the director or deputy director of their county BOE. Of these, one chose to submit written responses. Two interview participants were members of a county BOE rather than staff. The executive director of the Ohio Association of Election Officials also participated in an interview.

Five interviews were conducted under the condition of anonymity. One was with an employee of the SOS office, one was with a former employee of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), and three were with representatives of a county BOE.

2 Schladen, Matt. September 6, 2024. “Sec of State LaRose says it’s easy to vote in Ohio, but critics say he’s making it more difficult.” Ohio Capital Journal. <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/09/06/secretary-of-state-larose-says-its-easy-to-vote-in-ohio-but-he-keeps-making-it-more-difficult/>.

3 Cost of Voting Index. Accessed September 8, 2026. <https://costofvotingindex.com/>.

Public Circle then compiled detailed notes from the interviews into one document and analyzed them for key themes, points of commonality or divergence across responses, and useful details for inclusion in this report. Those insights were combined with desk research drawing on news articles, press releases, and publicly available data from the SOS to confirm and surface important facts and figures about the state of election administration in Ohio. Public Circle also filed one public record request with the SOS office to obtain county-by-county data on absentee ballot rejection rates.

This report's recommendations are informed by this analysis, but the recommendations are the product of All Voting and Public Circle; they should not be attributed to election officials themselves.

Interview Participants:

- **Lisa Boggs**, Director, Preble County BOE
- **Eric Corbin**, Deputy Director, Butler County Board of Elections
- **Chelsea Cline**, Director, Noble County BOE
- **Amber Lopez**, Deputy Director, Clark County BOE (Provided written responses)
- **Rhine McLin**, Member, Montgomery County BOE
- **Aaron Ockerman**, Executive Director, Ohio Association of Election Officials
- **Sherry Poland**, Director, Hamilton County BOE
- **Brian Sleeth**, Director, Warren County BOE
- **Tonya Wichman**, Director, Defiance County BOE
- Anonymous employee at Office of the Ohio Secretary of State
- Anonymous former employee of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency

Additionally, representatives from three other county Boards of Elections participated in interviews anonymously.

TRENDS IN ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

This report focuses on trends in Ohio election administration between 2024 and August 2026. Over that period, morale issues from 2020-2024 continued; while many officials reported a mellowing of public hostility, skepticism remains high. The opportunity to rest and take stock after a rescheduled 2020 primary and two back-to-back August special elections was welcome. Regardless, turnover within the profession remains a concern, necessitating new tools—including an AI election chatbot—for training and equipping new officials to perform a complicated job. Over this period, debunked election conspiracy theories have served as the basis for a series of election-related legislation, including the elimination of the four-day grace period for absentee ballots. While some election officials support these changes, these policies have continued the previous trends of creating obstacles to ballot access.

Finally, the drawdown of election support at the federal level since January 2025 has been met by surging resources from the SOS—but uncertainty about funding support is a burden on both state and local government.

Morale has stabilized, but election skepticism has become perennial.

2024 capped off a long four years for election administrators for reasons that are both national and unique to Ohio. First, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the last-minute postponement of the March 2020 primary after prolonged uncertainty stemming from legal disputes.⁴ Back-to-back August special elections prevented many officials from taking vacation or spending time with their families.⁵ And last, but not least, the aftermath of the 2020 election led to sustained attacks on the integrity of their profession, persistent harassment, public records requests which one official described as burdensome and “continuous,” and even physical threats against their safety.⁶

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- 4 Parks, Miles, Neely, Brett and Gringlas, Sam. March 16, 2020. “Ohio Primary Postponed At Last Minute Due To Coronavirus After Legal Struggle.” National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/16/816610353/ohio-officials-request-postponing-tuesdays-primary-over-coronavirus-concerns>.
- 5 See Griffin-Green and Jackson, p. 10.
- 6 Trau, Morgan. October 23, 2023. “As election workers face threats, Ohio lawmakers introduce bill to protect them.” Ohio Capital Journal. <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2023/10/23/as-election-workers-face-threats-ohio-lawmakers-introduce-bill-to-protect-them/>.

Some officials interviewed for this report said that morale had improved with the disappearance of August special elections and a decline, or at least a plateauing, in harassment and threats. Some described continued strain but also improved “resilience” across the field as officials learn to cope with increased public skepticism. Tonya Wichman, director of the Defiance County BOE, said that morale is about the same but officials may be “wrapping their heads around it” better as they learn to manage election rumors and take questions about election administration less personally. She also said they have adopted a “zero tolerance” posture toward threats and harassment.

Aaron Ockerman, Executive Director of the Ohio Association of Election Officials (OAEo)—a position which gives him a statewide perspective—said in an interview that election denial and harassment are “very much still simmering.” However, interviews with local BOE officials suggest they vary significantly by county. While officials in less populous counties report they can often respond to skeptical citizens with a personal touch—especially if they can boast of a long tenure in the profession—midsize counties continue to report difficulties. This could be due in part to a resource differential with larger counties; it could also simply be a factor of the local electorate. Regardless, the issue has not been put to rest.

Amber Lopez, deputy director of the Clark County BOE, said that she expects harassment and election denial “to pick up again as the next presidential election approaches,” suggesting that there is also a seasonal element to these issues.

TURNOVER CONTINUES

In 2025, the Bipartisan Policy Center released a report finding that between 2020 and 2024, the “top election official” changed in 43 percent of Ohio jurisdictions.⁷ “There are a lot of new directors, deputies, and staff members ... I know a lot of people that have left,” said Brian Sleeth, director of the Warren County BOE.

⁷ Orey, Wren, Klinefelter, Grace, Ferrer, Joshua, and Thompson, Daniel. August 19, 2025. “Election Official Turnover Rates through the 2024 Election.” Bipartisan Policy Center. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/issue-brief/election-official-turnover-rates-through-the-2024-election/>.

Using a composite set of sources including BOE websites, snapshots of former websites through the Internet Archive, email contact lists from All Voting’s 2024 election workforce report, and media coverage, this report was able to confirm that at least 20 Ohio county elections directors and deputy directors across 17 counties left the BOE entirely between January 2024 and August 2026. (A further 24 officials are confirmed to have left their boards, but available sources do not establish whether they departed before or after January 2024.)⁸ Dividing 20 confirmed in-period departures over 176 deputies and directors produces a conservative estimate of Ohio’s election official turnover rate at just over 11 percent.

Some of these individuals have not left elections work entirely; administrators said in interviews that they knew individuals who had gone to work for the SOS or for software and hardware vendors which serve BOEs. Other individuals go on to work in other county departments, staying nearby.

The loss of experience is palpable, though. To make up the gap, the SOS and OAEO continue to offer peer-to-peer services, including a mentoring program and a robust set of group chats. Officials described visiting nearby counties to support BOEs where both the deputy and director were new to elections work.

UNSUBSTANTIATED CLAIMS DRIVE NEW LAWS

Election misinformation has been a driving force for new election laws and voting restrictions in Ohio since 2020. New rules limit the number of dropboxes to one per county, eliminate early voting on the Monday before the election, shorten deadlines for absentee ballot requests, reduce the number of document types voters can use to register, and tighten restrictions on curbside voting or the return of absentee ballots—among other changes.⁹

8 This count excludes individuals who left their position for another position within the BOE, such as becoming a board member or being promoted.

9 Signal Cleveland. June 17, 2026. “From drop boxes to voter ID: How Ohio voter rules have dramatically changed since 2020.” <https://signalcleveland.org/from-drop-boxes-to-voter-id-how-ohio-voter-rules-have-dramatically-changed-since-2020/>.

The most recent changes to Ohio election law come from SB293, which went into effect on March 20, 2026. The bill introduced several changes to Ohio election law, most notably:

- Requiring all absentee ballots to be delivered to the Board of Elections (BOE) by the close of polls on election day, whereas previously they could be received within a grace period extending up to four days after the election. Military and overseas absentee ballots are exempt from this change, meaning the grace period still applies.
- Requiring the SOS to review the Statewide Voter Registration Database for registered noncitizens on a monthly basis. The SOS is also required to consult the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) database for this purpose. Upon identifying a registered noncitizen, the SOS is required to promptly cancel their registration and initiate an investigation.
- Requiring the SOS to notify the relevant BOE when records from the BMV or Social Security Administration do not match a voter's registration information. The BOE is then required to notify the individual; if the individual does not correct the information before they next attempt to vote, they must cast a provisional ballot.
- Changing procedures for challenging voter eligibility based on proof of citizenship. Election officials are frontline implementers of voting law; in the words of Aaron Ockerman, executive director of the OAEO, they “do what the legislature tells us to do.” But speaking as a representative of the profession that implements these rules, he also said that “we do not see a compelling public policy reason to not allow ballots to come in after election day.”

According to the SOS's office, 5,999 mail-in ballots were returned within the four-day grace period during the previous federal primary election in 2024. Under current law, those ballots would have been rejected. In the May 2026 primary—the first statewide election conducted under SB293—Ohio BOEs received 1,571 absentee ballots after election day. Under previous law, these ballots would have been counted. In some small counties, this translates to just a few dozen ballots, but that can be enough to swing a local election. In fact, according to data provided by the SOS's office, small counties like Williams, Noble, Henry, Pike, Darke, and Jackson all had much higher than average proportions of mail-in ballots arrive late—more than 10 percent of mail-in ballots returned in those counties were not counted in the 2026 primary (though, due to their small populations, the number of returned absentee ballots is dozens, not hundreds or thousands).

Ohio absentee ballots arriving after Election Day, 2024 vs 2026 primaries

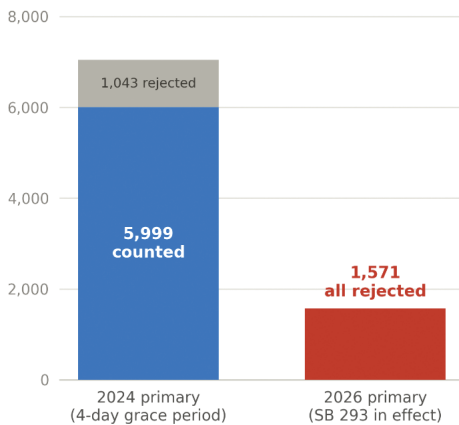
SB 293 eliminated the four-day grace period. In 2024, 5,999 late-arriving ballots were counted; in 2026, every late ballot was rejected.

■ 2024: counted under grace period

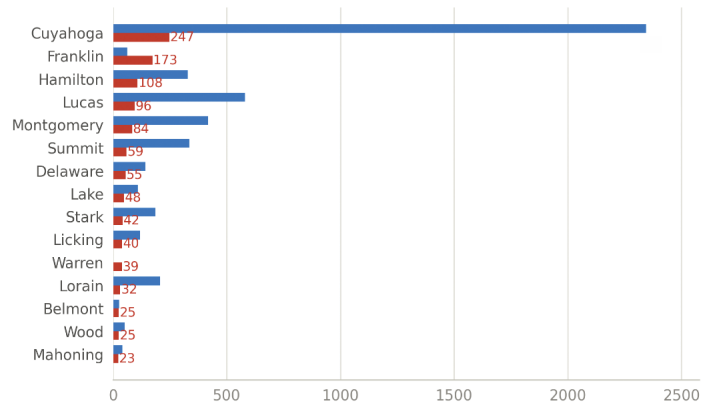
■ 2026: rejected under SB 293

■ 2024: already rejected

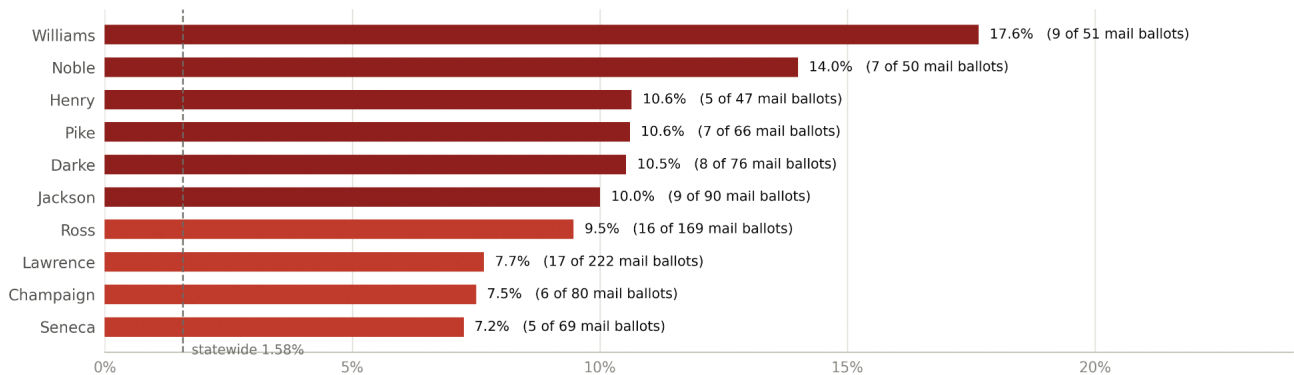
Statewide



Counties with the most 2026 late rejections



Highest rejection rates — share of returned mail ballots rejected as late, 2026



Source: Ohio Secretary of State, county Absentee and Provisional Workbooks, all 88 counties (public records request 26-411). The 2024 total of 7,042 ballots arriving after Election Day matches the Secretary of State's published figure. 2024 was a presidential primary and 2026 a gubernatorial primary, so absentee volumes differ. Rates are shares of mail ballots returned; the highest-rate counties are small, so a handful of ballots produces a large percentage. Raw counts are shown alongside each bar.

See footnote for more information.¹⁰

Because turnout in primary elections is almost certain to be much lower than the general midterm election, officials believe that the “true test” of the law’s impact will come in November during the 2026 midterm general election. “The gubernatorial election is expected to be contentious; we won’t have to wait until 2028 to see the impact of this,” predicted Montgomery County BOE Chair Rhine McLin.

¹⁰ Ohio mail ballots arriving in the four days after election day. Mail-in returns only; excludes drop box and in-person returns. The 2024 ballots were counted subject to a valid postmark; the 2026 ballots were rejected in full under SB 293. Data for the 2022 primary election was not available for comparison. This data was provided by the Ohio secretary of state in response to a public record request.

Not only has election misinformation spurred new limitations to voting, but the preoccupation with false allegations of widespread illegal voting has impacted the day-to-day requirements of Ohio's election officials in other ways. In February 2022, The Hill reported that the SOS referred just 27 cases of potentially illegal votes in the 2020 presidential election to prosecutors. That's 27 out of 5.9 million ballots cast by registered Ohio voters, or .00000456%.¹¹

Despite the low numbers, these were just the beginning of efforts to elevate false narratives about illegal voting. In October 2022, the SOS announced the formation of a "public integrity" unit charged with investigating election-related crimes.¹² In 2024, the Statehouse News Bureau reported that the SOS had referred 633 cases of unlawfully registered individuals to county prosecutors. Only 12 were charged; the reason, said the executive director of the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association, is that "these are referrals that often lack minimal evidence necessary to pursue charges or pursue an indictment, let alone obtain a conviction."¹³

Nevertheless, the SOS subsequently turned the remainder of those cases plus dozens of additional cases—for a total of 653 in August and September—over to Ohio's attorney general, who presented them to grand juries; only six were indicted, one of whom passed away in 2022.¹⁴ Then, in 2025, LaRose referred more than 1,200 criminal cases to the Department of Justice. Most of these were instances of illegal registration.¹⁵ Recently, investigations in Nevada and Arizona revealed that the number of actual instances of improper registration were significantly lower than the initial number named, and it is likely that the case is similar here, should the investigation be completed. However, in the process of producing this report, the authors did not find any public evidence of follow-up activity by the Department of Justice on those cases.

11 Wilson, Reid. February 1, 2022. "Ohio secretary of state finds 27 potentially illegal votes." *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/592342-ohio-secretary-of-state-finds-27-potentially-illegal-votes/>.

12 All Voting is Local Action. October 6, 2022. "All Voting is Local Action Statement on OH SoS Frank LaRose's So-Called 'Public Integrity' Unit." <https://allvotingislocal.org/avl-action/all-voting-is-local-action-statement-on-oh-sos-frank-laroses-so-called-public-integrity-unit/>.

13 Ingles, Jo. September 13, 2024. "LaRose wants action on possible voter fraud cases. Prosecutors say they haven't for a reason." Statehouse News Bureau. <https://www.statenews.org/government-politics/2024-09-13/larose-wants-action-on-possible-voter-fraud-cases-county-prosecutors-say-they-havent-for-a-reason>; Ohio Secretary of State. September 10, 2024. "Secretary LaRose Asks Attorney General to Investigate Hundreds of Election Fraud Cases." <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2024-09-10>.

14 Kasler, Karen. October 24, 2024. "One of six Ohioans just indicted for illegal voting as a non-citizen has been dead nearly two years." Statehouse News Bureau. <https://www.statenews.org/government-politics/2024-10-24/one-of-six-ohioans-just-indicted-for-illegal-voting-as-a-non-citizen-has-been-dead-nearly-two-years>; The figures for how many referrals were made to the Ohio AG shift slightly depending on what source is cited and when. The most complete count appears to include figures for both August and September, here: McEntee, Ken. October 22, 2024. "647 election violation referrals net six indictments." Substack. <https://kenmcintee.substack.com/p/647-election-violation-referrals>.

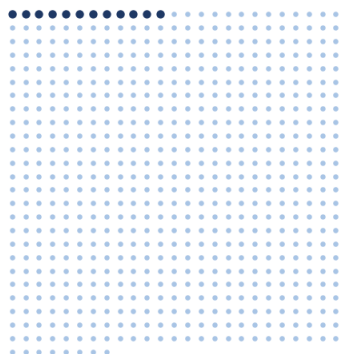
15 Ohio Secretary of State. October 28, 2025. "Secretary LaRose Refers More Than 1,200 Criminal Cases to DOJ." <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2025-10-28>. See also: Evans, Nick. November 6, 2025. "Ohio secretary of state sends voter fraud allegations to Trump Justice Department." Ohio Capital Journal. <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2025/11/06/ohio-secretary-of-state-sends-voter-fraud-allegations-to-trump-justice-department/>.

Every case Ohio’s Secretary of State referred for prosecution — and every case authorities pursued

Each dot is one referred case. Dark dots are cases prosecuting authorities acted on.

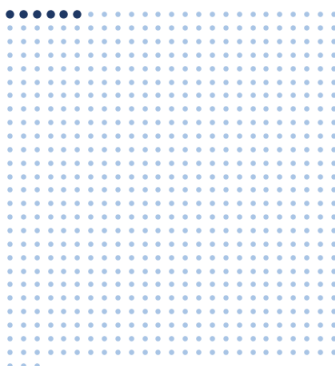
County prosecutors
2019–2024

633 referred
12 charged (1.9%)



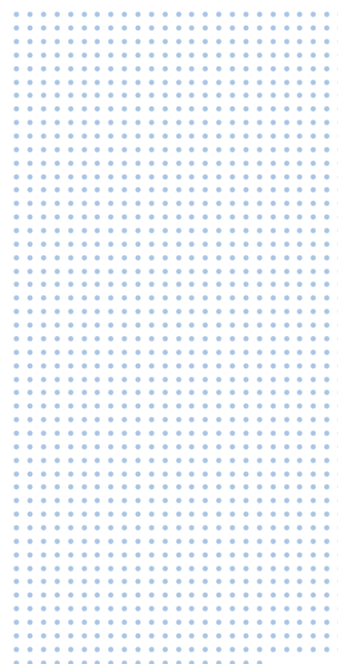
Ohio Attorney General
2024

653 referred
6 indicted (0.9%)



U.S. Dept. of Justice
Oct. 2025

1,219 referred
0 publicly known (as of Aug. 2026)



○ Case referred ● Case pursued

These figures taken from sources in footnotes 11–13.

These were not the secretary's only efforts. In 2024, the SOS announced a "comprehensive effort" to clean Ohio's voter rolls, including cross-checking addresses with the National Change of Address registry, reviewing records for past-due removals, and matching registration data with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles; the secretary also asked the legislature for the authority to require proof of citizenship on state-issued voter registration forms.¹⁶ The SOS announced another audit in July 2025.¹⁷ And in December 2025, the SOS settled a lawsuit with the Department of Homeland Security allowing the office to use the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements database to cross-verify voter registration information. The spirit (and in some cases the letter) of these efforts was later codified as Senate Bill 293 (SB293), which went into effect on March 20, 2026.

“

I don't know that I've had a referral I've sent that was someone trying to actively circumvent the system.”

— Eric Corbin,
Deputy Director,
Butler County BOE

For their part, local election officials are proud that figures for unlawful voter registrations are low—to say nothing of the even lower number of illegally cast votes. Most acknowledge that the problem is rare; while they say most cases of wrongly registered individuals are accidental, not malicious, they welcome efforts to keep rolls accurate and up to date. Brian Sleeth, the Warren County BOE director, says that there is a mix of ways an individual could be incorrectly and unlawfully registered. Most are innocuous: For instance, the Department of Health has registrations in their packets, and some people may not understand the registration card or what they are filling out. There are other groups and [National Voting Rights Act] agencies that also hand out voter registration cards. “I think sometimes ineligible voters may have language barriers and not quite understand the process,” Sleeth said. Even so, he continued, “the number of noncitizen voters his office has found is minimal, and to date none of them have ever cast a ballot. The SOS office regularly checks our data against other databases and will notify us if they have found a potential noncitizen match. Once a noncitizen has been identified as registered, they will be sent a letter and their registration canceled. The SOS office also recently created the Election Integrity Division and regularly investigates the voters identified on our noncitizen lists.”

16 Ohio Secretary of State. May 2, 2024. “LaRose Announces Comprehensive Effort to Ensure Accuracy of Statewide Voter Registration Database.” <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2024-05-02>; Ohio Secretary of State. August 29, 2024. “Secretary LaRose Calls for Legislative Authority to Require Proof of Citizenship for Voter Registration.” <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2024-08-29>.

17 Ohio Secretary of State. July 29, 2025. “Secretary LaRose Directs Election Officials to Begin New Round of Voter List Audits.” <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2025-07-29>.

Eric Corbin, deputy director of the Butler County BOE, said that he welcomes additional support from the SOS office, though like other counties, he says the number of cases is low. “We’ve had a handful, less than five,” he said, explaining that these are typically the result of human error rather than attempts at fraud.

Ultimately, the additional efforts and administrative burdens placed upon Ohio’s election workforce to implement new restrictive policies spurred on by election misinformation misses the larger gaps that the workforce faces, namely the need for more resources to better serve the voters in their communities.

Restrictions on ballot return affect the vulnerable and elderly

BOE officials were clear on who is most impacted by the new ballot return rules imposed by SB293. McLin believes that “Nursing home residents, seniors, voters with disabilities, those from lower economic classes—all of these are at risk, and it could impact college students too.” In the 2026 primary election, even SOS Frank LaRose faced obstacles returning an absentee ballot by election day.¹⁸ SOS LaRose had requested a mail-in ballot while deployed overseas with the Ohio Army National Guard; it did not arrive by election day, so the secretary cast a provisional ballot in person at his polling place. Had he still been deployed, he would have been unable to do so, and the fate of his vote would have been left to the US Postal Service.

SB293 was not the only change to mail-in voting considered by the Ohio legislature; another bill, HB472, was vetoed by Governor Mike DeWine on June 24, 2026. HB 472 would have required voters to send a copy of a photo ID when returning an absentee ballot. In his statement, DeWine said that “House Bill 472 would not discourage fraud, would not add any real security, and would create an additional and significant burden for Ohioans who vote by mail.”¹⁹ Election officials interviewed for this report agreed: In the words of Clark County BOE Deputy Director Amber Lopez, “If the provisions in 472 were to be passed, it would essentially make [mail-in] voting in Ohio ... no longer useful for those who need it most,” such as the elderly and voters with disabilities.

Recommendation 1: Restore the grace period for ballots postmarked by election day and preserve drop box access in order to avoid disenfranchising disabled or vulnerable voters.

18 Ingles, Jo. May 18, 2026. “LaRose cast provisional primary ballot when his overseas ballot didn’t get to Ohio in time.” Statehouse News Bureau. <https://www.statenews.org/government-politics/2026-05-18/larose-cast-provisional-primary-ballot-when-his-overseas-ballot-didnt-get-to-ohio-in-time>.

19 Office of the Governor, State of Ohio. June 24, 2026. “Governor DeWine Signs Bills Into Law, Issues Vetoes.” <https://governor.ohio.gov/media/news-and-media/governor-dewine-signs-bills-into-law-issues-vetoes-6-24-2026>.

Changes generate need for public education

Election rules may change quickly, but the public adapts slowly. Many voters, after all, show up only every four years to cast a ballot in the presidential election. This means that changes like new ID requirements or mail-in deadlines take a four-year cycle before the public is fully aware or the impact is fully felt.

Efforts to educate and prepare the public largely fall on the shoulders of local officials, who spend more time than they used to informing the public by presenting for public audiences, posting on social media, and speaking with the media. “There is a huge emphasis on voter education,” said OAEO Executive Director Aaron Ockerman. In Hamilton County, for instance, the BOE mailed a notice to every voter. In nearby Butler County, notices were included alongside absentee ballots sent to voters who requested one. Nonprofit organizations like the League of Women Voters, which Ockerman credited with pouring “blood, sweat, and tears into getting the word out about this new change,” have become an increasingly important resource for the public on nonpartisan election information.

“

I think the grace period is helpful, especially with delays in the mail. We're in Eaton, and we'll send a ballot to someone in Eaton, they fill it out, it gets routed to Indianapolis, and then comes back during the grace period. ... The way the mail is getting routed is creating issues for voters who are wanting to mail their ballot. Some have mobility issues, it's just easier for them to mail it in, or they could swing by the drop-box.”

— Lisa Boggs,
Director,
Preble County BOE

BOEs do receive some support, such as social media messaging kits, from the SOS office for these efforts, but Rhine McLin, chair of the Montgomery County BOE, believes the state could do more. “Whenever they do things like this, they don’t do the media blitz for people to know,” said McLin, referring to SB293. “I would think responsibility [to run voter education advertisements] should be on the SOS. But back in the past, when [Sen. Jon Husted] was there, they would claim they didn’t have the budget for it.”

Voters also become confused when receiving absentee ballot applications from advocacy organizations after they have already submitted one to the BOE. This can lead voters to believe their application has not been processed; voters also sometimes receive applications for departed

loved ones, which can be confusing and upsetting. A simple, if partial, solution would be to expand the SOS's practice of mailing absentee ballot applications to all voters in even-year general elections so that voters receive an application every year. This would serve the added benefit of encouraging a larger share of the public to build the habit of voting in non-presidential elections. Even better would be to mail such applications every year to voters in precincts where odd-year local elections are held.

Alternatively, moving to an online absentee ballot request form—as less-controversial aspects of HB472 would have required—would reduce the need for mailed applications, as well as the significant postage costs incurred by the state.²⁰

Recommendation 2: When changing voting rules, Ohio legislators should allocate resources to the SOS for public education.

Recommendation 3: Allow voters to request absentee ballots online OR expand the practice of mailing absentee ballot applications so that registered voters receive one each year, rather than only in even years.

Preparing for the future of voting

It is important to note that many proposals for election law reform in Ohio—such as the elimination of drop boxes and further restrictions on absentee voting or early voting—run contrary to financial and logistical pressures on election administration. That is to say: BOE officials are clear that the option to vote early or by mail makes the process run more smoothly for both administrators and the public.

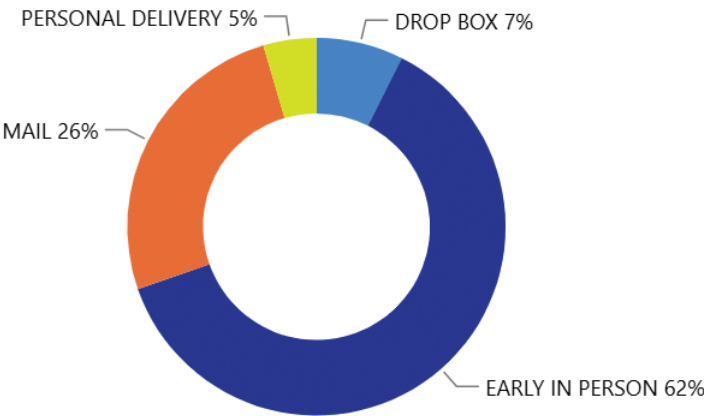
In recent years, BOEs have reported more difficulty recruiting pollworkers and identifying suitable polling places (which need to be large, secure, and ADA compliant), leading some to consolidate their precincts and polling places.²¹ In July 2026, the SOS office announced a \$1 million grant to support the recruitment and training of “nearly 40,000 precinct officials ahead of the November

20 See Tobias, Andrew. June 9, 2026. “Ohio will again send all voters absentee ballot applications as mail voting continues to plunge.” Signal Cleveland. <https://signalohio.org/ohio-absentee-ballot-applications-mail-voting-continues-to-plunge-november-election-2026/>; Tritex, “The Cost Factor: Making Vote-by-Mail Economically Viable.” Accessed August 10, 2026. <https://tritek.com/blog/the-cost-factor-making-vote-by-mail-economically-viable/>; Ohio Legislative Service Commission. July 27, 2026. “H.B. 472: Final Analysis.” <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/download?key=28792>.

21 Preble County Board of Elections. N.d. “Why We Are Consolidating Polling Locations to Schools?” <https://www.boe.ohio.gov/preble/c/upload/SchoolConsolidationandSecurityInformation.pdf>.

general election.”²² Polling officials also report that “more voters are benefitting from the various ways to vote other than on Election Day,” and they are right—in 2024, nearly one-third of voters (or 2.5 million Ohioans) cast early ballots either through the mail or early in person.²³ The use of technology such as electronic pollbooks has also reduced wait times at polling places—which is especially important if the number of polling locations is reduced through consolidation.

Ballot Return Method



Screenshot taken from SOS Ohio Absentee and Early Voting Data dashboard, showing the preferred early voting methods in the May 2026 primary election. 380,619 electors voted either by absentee ballot or early in person. See <https://data.ohiosos.gov/portal/election-dashboards>.

In other words, logistical factors, including the size of the modern electorate, increased difficulty in hiring temporary personnel, and the rising cost of maintaining adequate polling locations has driven voters toward options like mail-in voting and ballot drop boxes. Reductions in those options will contribute to longer lines and—likely—fewer voters.

Recommendation 4: Maintain voting options like mail-in voting and ballot drop boxes as part of a drive to modernize election administration. Expand the availability of drop boxes beyond just one per county.

22 Ohio Secretary of State. July 13, 2026. “Secretary LaRose Announces \$1 Million Grant to Strengthen Poll Worker Recruitment and Training Ahead of November General Election.” <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2026-07-13>.

23 Preble County. N.d; Henry, Megan. November 5, 2024. “Nearly a third of registered Ohio voters cast their ballots early in the 2024 election.” Ohio Capital Journal. <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/11/05/nearly-a-third-of-registered-ohio-voters-cast-their-ballots-early-in-the-2024-election/>.

The EleXa initiative has canceled few registrations, but due process is a concern

In March 2023, Ohio joined the ranks of Republican-led states which left the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a multi-state effort to share voter registration information between governments.²⁴ On December 15, 2025, SOS Frank LaRose's office announced his alternative: a new multistate initiative, "EleXa," focused on identifying individuals who are registered to vote in multiple states.²⁵ According to the SOS, the "X" in EleXa represents "the removal of illegal or ineligible voters identified through formal cross-state election data sharing agreements." These agreements include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia; talks to add Pennsylvania have stalled.²⁶

In principle, EleXa creates a process through which states can notify one another whenever an individual registered in one state registers in a second state. Under Ohio law, voters lose residency when they register in and vote out of state.²⁷

BOE officials now routinely receive lists of voters who meet these two criteria from the SOS through Sharepoint. They must then mail that voter a form²⁸ advising them that their Ohio voter registration will be canceled within thirty days if they do not confirm their Ohio residency for voting purposes.

According to officials interviewed for this report, the EleXa process has not resulted in droves of cancellations; they describe receiving a batch every month or two on average, with batches containing voters in the low dozens for mid-sized counties. But as with the shortened deadline for absentee ballot return, BOE officials worry that this process is reliant on the speed of the postal system. They also fear it may disproportionately affect older voters who move south for the winter (so-called "snowbirds"), college students, and other individuals who change addresses frequently.

²⁴ Parks, Miles. March 6, 2023. "3 more Republican states announce they're leaving a key voting data partnership." National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/06/1161374479/electronic-registration-information-center-eric-florida-missouri-west-virginia>.

²⁵ Ohio Secretary of State. December 15, 2025. "Secretary LaRose Launches Multi-State Election Integrity Network Called 'EleXa.'" <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2025-12-15>.

²⁶ Walker, Carter. January 8, 2026. "Pa. says it isn't in talks to enter 'election integrity network,' despite Ohio official's claim." Spotlight PA. <https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2026/01/pennsylvania-ohio-voter-data-sharing-elexa-eric-dispute-elections/>.

²⁷ See: Ohio Secretary of State. June 10, 2025. "Directive 2025-30." <https://www.ohiosos.gov/assets/directives/2025/dir2025-30.pdf>.

²⁸ Form 10-VOS: Voter Registration Cancellation Notice - Registered and Voted Out of State, available at <https://www.ohiosos.gov/assets/10-vos.pdf>.

It is also a difficult process to audit. The state does not publish the number of cancellations through EleXa. One could determine the total number of canceled registrations by comparing the voter registration snapshots provided by the SOS for each county, but the size of those files runs into the terabytes; even searching for a 7-day sample of 10 counties of various size results in a 1.3 gigabyte .zip file with dozens of spreadsheets.

The accuracy of the EleXa process is not an idle question. In 2024, Ohio canceled the registrations of 158,857 inactive voters as part of a regularly scheduled removal process; a Harvard study calculated the error rate of that process at 1 to 1.5 percent, or nearly 2,400 wrongly impacted electors.²⁹ Voter rolls, by their nature, are imperfect; so are voter purges.

Recommendation 5: Modernize the voter notification process by pairing electronic outreach (email and SMS messaging) with postal notifications when possible.

Recommendation 6: Publish data on cancellations due to the EleXa process, as well as the number of registrations reinstated after an incorrect notification.

TRANSPARENCY REQUIRES PUBLIC EDUCATION TO USE INFORMATION WELL

Ohio's DATA Act became law on July 4, 2023. Developed with input from the SOS's office, the law required Ohio to create a dashboard, updated daily, of voter registration information and election results. The portal, maintained by the SOS, receives this data from Ohio's 88 county BOEs. By necessity, this means the DATA Act also standardized definitions for fields like "registration date," "last activity date," "last activity type," and "type of ballot cast."³⁰

BOE officials have mixed feelings about the implementation of the DATA Act but, on average, believe it has been a positive change. Most of the criticisms focus on what Amber Lopez in Clark County called a "confusing" rollout; Aaron Ockerman from the OAEO said that implementation "was not always smooth, but that's not unexpected for a major IT upgrade."

29 See Sweeney, Latanya, and Visnaw, Josh. April 22, 2025. "Measuring Mistakes: A Data-Driven Assessment of Voter List Maintenance and Erroneous Deletions in Ohio's 2024 Election." Technology Science.
<https://techscience.org/a/2025041702/>.

30 Ohio Secretary of State. February 6, 2024. "Advisory 2024-01."
<https://www.ohiosos.gov/assets/adv2024-01-data-act.pdf>.

External stakeholders have raised concerns that the DATA Act’s voter registration dashboard could lead to an exorbitant number of voter challenges from third-party vigilante groups, but interviewed BOE officials did not report experiencing this in practice.³¹ While All Voting has heard reports of this from at least three other BOEs, it appears the wave of voter challenges experienced across the state in 2024 has crested and begun to recede.³² When individuals do bring lists of voter registrations to challenge, BOE officials explain to them that there is a process for verifying registrations and that challenged voters have a right to respond within a certain period; no purge is automatic.

Now that the DATA Act has been implemented—putting some of the pain in the rear view—interviewed BOE officials typically compliment it for standardizing definitions and providing greater transparency while also potentially reducing burdensome public records requests. “How do you argue against transparency?” asked Hamilton County’s Sherry Poland. Of course, she acknowledged, “There is also an education component that comes with that ... how do you teach those who are using it what the data means?”

Transparency could be improved further. At present, the dashboard provided by the SOS could be improved to make it useful for spotting not just erroneous registrations but also erroneous removals.

Recommendation 7: Improve the Ohio Voter Data portal to allow citizens to more easily audit voter roll cancellations and their impetus.

REACTIONS TO THE DOJ REQUEST FOR VOTER DATA

Ohio voter data is top of mind for another reason: In February 2026, the SOS provided data on Ohio’s nearly 8 million voters to the DOJ. The requested data included publicly available information like name, address, and political affiliation; it also included personally identifiable information like driver’s license numbers and partial Social Security numbers.³³

31 Sweeney, and Visnaw, April 22, 2025.

32 Evans, Nick. October 4, 2024. “Ohio county elections officials are wrestling with mass voter registration challenges.” Ohio Capital Journal. <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/10/04/ohio-county-elections-officials-are-wrestling-with-mass-voter-registration-challenges/>.

33 Johanek, Marilou. March 11, 2026. “Secretary of State Frank LaRose gives info of 8 million Ohio voters to Trump Justice Department.” Ohio Capitol Journal. <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2026/03/11/secretary-of-state-frank-larose-gives-8-million-ohio-voters-information-to-trump-justice-department/>.

Despite resistance to these requests from other secretaries of state of both parties from across the country, LaRose handily complied, potentially exposing Ohio voters' sensitive data in the process. In an interview, LaRose said that "federal law is very clear that the US attorney general has the right to look at voter rolls"; however, in the interim, the federal government has lost lawsuits over this issue in 22 different federal courts.³⁴

For their part, BOE officials report having voters on "both sides" of this issue: Some are concerned about the Justice Department's ultimate intent for that data or its ability to safeguard it, while others hope to see wrongfully registered individuals removed from voter rolls.

PRAISE FOR OHIO'S ELECTIONS CHATBOT

Two years ago, during the last presidential election, concern about the impact of artificial intelligence on the conduct and outcome of elections was rife.³⁵ Conversely, ideas for using AI to improve election administration were nascent.³⁶

Today, the balance has shifted. Ohio's election chatbot, EVA, is a good example of how. EVA debuted in November 2025 as an "AI-powered election administration assistant with immediate, around-the-clock availability in all 88 counties."³⁷ EVA is designed to pull content directly from Ohio's 534-page Election Officials Manual (EOM) and the Ohio Revised Code.³⁸ It makes use of retrieval-augmented generation—a process in which large language models reduce their error rate by referencing user-provided source material—to improve accuracy and reduce the risk of hallucination.³⁹

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- 34 Kasler, Karen. April 20, 2026. "LaRose talks sending Ohio voter data to DOJ, paper ballots and ending mail-in voting." Statehouse News Bureau. <https://www.stateneews.org/government-politics/2026-04-20/larose-talks-sending-ohio-voter-data-to-doj-paper-ballots-and-ending-mail-in-voting>; Rivas, Yuniior. August 8, 2026. "22 courts have rejected Trump DOJ's voter roll crusade. DOJ says they're all just wrong." Democracy Docket. <https://www.democracymarket.com/news-alerts/courts-have-rejected-trump-doj-voter-roll-crusade-doj-says-theyre-wrong/>.
- 35 Consider Jackson, Dean and Conroy, Meghan. October 17, 2024. "Apocalypse Later? The Real Impact of AI on the 2024 Elections." Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/the-big-story/apocalypse-later/>.
- 36 Jackson, Dean, Orey, Wren, and Adler, William. March 10, 2025. "Generative AI Is a Multi-tool, Not a Magic Wand for Election Administration." Bipartisan Policy Center. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/issue-brief/generative-ai-is-a-multi-tool-not-a-magic-wand-for-election-administration/>.
- 37 Ohio Secretary of State. November 13, 2025. "Secretary LaRose Deploys Tech-Focused 'Eva' To Aid Election Officials." <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2025-11-13>.
- 38 The EOM is available at https://columbiana.boe.ohio.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/eom_fullversion_2023-12.pdf.
- 39 National Conference on State Legislatures. March 24, 2026. "Artificial Intelligence in Election Administration." <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/artificial-intelligence-in-election-administration>.

Not all of the election officials interviewed for this report used EVA; some cited their long tenure and preexisting familiarity with the EOM as reasons they did not need the tool, and one cited ideological opposition to artificial intelligence. But less-experienced administrators in smaller counties—where there are fewer sources of institutional knowledge and support—gave EVA high marks. “It can be a huge tool for people who don’t know what to look for, especially if they’re not well-versed in the EOM” said Chelsea Cline, director of the Noble County BOE, while reflecting on a county where a deputy BOE director was asked to step up with less than a year of experience.

“

The initial wave of [discourse about] AI in elections was completely negative... Only in the past two years have administrators come in and said ‘there is a role for AI’ in what they do.”

— Aaron Ockerman,
Executive Director, OAEO

But Cline also warned that AI tools in general cannot replace institutional memory, even if they can be useful resources for a field with high turnover rates. She explained that many procedural details are “buried” deep within the EOM and that AI responses tend to gloss over important information. For example, she said, an AI tool might direct administrators “to put out a proclamation ten days before the election, but of what? It’s a form you have to fill out. People won’t know the form number. There’s institutional knowledge of where to find that stuff.”

DECLINING FEDERAL SUPPORT JEOPARDIZES OHIO’S CYBERSECURITY PROGRESS

In 2019, SOS LaRose issued the first of four cybersecurity directives to Ohio BOEs. The result has been that the position of BOE director has become more of an IT role.⁴⁰ It promoted federal resources for BOEs, including membership in the Election Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC), a membership-based body which shares intelligence threats to election infrastructure across state borders. It also mandated that boards use DHS-provided tools like regular phishing assessments and vulnerability scanning for “internet-accessible systems,” required BOEs to use a .gov web domain, and instituted annual cybersecurity training for each board, among other changes. The fourth directive, issued in August of 2023, reiterated many of these requirements and noted that the SOS had deployed professional “cyber liaisons” to the northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest regions of the state.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ohio Secretary of State. June 11, 2019. “Directive 2019-08.” <https://assets.ohiosos.gov/q3i90m1u8zsl/2HdYGrBqMMMEFpwyP6sZp7/bbfc1d311f9d4921481fa597e7c4a3ac/dir2019-08.pdf>.

⁴¹ “LaRose Issues Fourth Directive Aimed at Cybersecurity to County Boards of Elections.” <https://www.ohiosos.gov/office/media-center/categories/press-releases/2023-08-31>.

Election administrators give the secretary high marks for improving the statewide cybersecurity of Ohio's elections infrastructure: "I have to give compliments to the secretary of state's office; they've been really high on cybersecurity," said McLin.

But this success is jeopardized by changes at the federal level, where headlines since January 2025 have been alarming. In March 2025, a CISA representative told state officials that the agency had paused its election security activities and would no longer fund their membership in the EI-ISAC, which tracks cross-state threats to election systems.⁴²

A week before, the president had placed CISA employees responsible for monitoring election disinformation on administrative leave.⁴³

Across the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), within which CISA sits, more than 400 employees were terminated.⁴⁴ Previously, election officials received cyber-penetration testing from federal partners; it was unclear if this would continue.⁴⁵ In April 2026, Nextgov reported that election officials in at least two states said these moves had "strained relationships with state and local officials, raising concerns that jurisdictions may be far less prepared to counter threats to the November midterms."⁴⁶

“

Ohio is benefitting from the things they did in 2019, 2020, and 2021 [to make sure] boards are more resilient and more secure. ... That's a credit to Ohio's boards of elections and the secretary of state's office. These are dividends from long-term investment in good policy.”

— Anonymous former CISA employee

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- ⁴² Fifield, Jen. March 11, 2025. "U.S. agency has stopped supporting states on election security, official confirms." Votebeat. <https://www.votebeat.org/2025/03/11/cisa-ends-support-election-security-nass-nased/>.
- ⁴³ Sakellariadis, John and Miller, Maggie. February 7, 2025. "Trump continues federal purge, gutting cyber workers who combat disinformation." POLITICO. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/07/trump-guts-cyber-workers-00203087>.
- ⁴⁴ Sganga, Nicole and Montoya-Galvez, Camilo. February 16, 2025. "Trump administration fires over 400 DHS employees as mass firings continue" CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-administration-fires-over-400-dhs-employees/>.
- ⁴⁵ Wood, Colin. February 20, 2025. "Federal cuts to election security concern secretaries of state." Statescoop. <https://statescoop.com/federal-cuts-election-security-secretaries-state-2025/>.
- ⁴⁶ DiMolfetta, David. April 28, 2026. "Federal drawdown of election support 'destroyed' ongoing relationships, experts say." Nextgov. <https://www.nextgov.com/cybersecurity/2026/04/federal-drawdown-election-support-destroyed-ongoing-relationships-experts-say/413181/>.

A former CISA employee who preferred to remain anonymous said in an interview that CISA provided five categories of support for state officials:

1. Automated cyber hygiene services like vulnerability scanning;
2. Resource-intensive services like red-teaming or threat hunting, which might require an on-site team for 1-2 weeks;
3. Threat analysis and intelligence;
4. Specific guidance on election security, such as chain of custody for voting equipment or advice on denial-of-service attacks; and
5. Physical security assessments for their offices.

The employee said that DHS may be supplying some of these services, like red-teaming, albeit with reduced availability. Others, like threat monitoring, are no longer supplied by CISA.

What worried this employee most, they said, was “not that all counties are more vulnerable because of CISA’s retrenchment ... it’s that they are not all learning from each other. They’ve lost the ability to digest and analyze an incident in Hamilton County and then get that information out to Takoma, Washington, or Maricopa County (Arizona).”

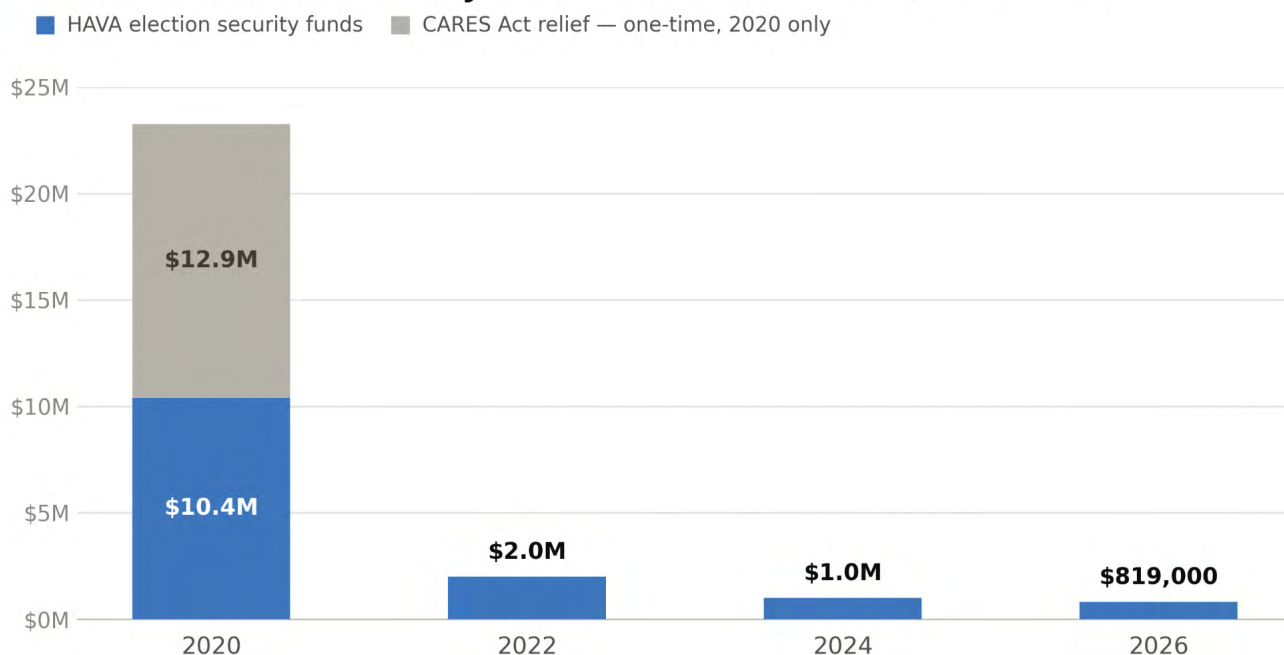
The result of cuts to CISA, then, represent a long, trailing decline in election security support—not a sudden collapse. In fact, many local BOE officials reported that their relationship with the federal government remains unchanged for now, likely due to the recency of the cuts to the federal agency. The 2026 midterms will be the first full election cycle for election officials following the 2025 cuts. One—Clark County’s Amber Lopez—reported a sense that federal partners were being “disrupted” but said she had not yet felt “a real deficit.”

Other officials described receiving advanced penetration testing from DHS; while wait times for that service have increased, recommendations coming out of one penetration test can still be of help to other counties in Ohio, making the practice valuable whenever BOEs can access it. Other BOEs said they continue to receive updates through the EI-ISAC—because the SOS is now covering the price of membership.

ELECTION OFFICIALS FACE HAVA HAVOC

Federal grant funding for election security has also fallen, from \$425 million for election security grants in 2020 to a low of \$15 million in 2025. In 2026, that figure rebounded somewhat to \$45 million.⁴⁷ That money is provided under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), as well as the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) act. Under HAVA, states are guaranteed money up to a minimum floor, after which remaining funds are distributed by population. The current pool of HAVA funds is so low that only four states—California, Texas, Florida, and New York—received more than the minimum amount. This left Ohio—the seventh-most-populous state and home to over 11.9 million people—with the same sum of money as Wyoming, home to fewer than 600,000.⁴⁸

Federal election security funds available to Ohio, 2020-2026



Figures are nominal dollars, not inflation-adjusted. CARES Act funds were one-time pandemic relief, not an election security grant, and are shown separately. Source: U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

⁴⁷ Bender-Thomas, Kaitlin. May 24, 2026. “Election Officials Warn of Rising Threats As Security Funding Declines Ahead of Midterms.” The Fulcrum. <https://thefulcrum.us/elections/election-security-funding-cuts-threats>.

⁴⁸ United States Election Assistance Commission, March 23, 2026. “Election Security Grant: State by State Allocation FY26.” https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/2026-03/FY26_Election_Security_Award_Allocation_March_2026_508.pdf.

Election officials interviewed for this report were grateful that the SOS chose to distribute HAVA election security grants directly to county BOEs, noting that the SOS office could have kept the money for itself. The amounts, however, were small; Ohio's \$819,000 comes to less than \$10,000 for each of its 88 counties and in many cases did not even cover the cost of the shatter-resistant glass they are now required to install for security purposes.

As described above, election officials continue to receive some of the same security support they previously received from CISA. "The caveat," said Sherry Poland, director of the Hamilton County BOE, "is that the SOS has picked up some of the cost." That cost, previously borne by federal taxpayers, is now the burden of Ohioans at the state and county level. "That money could have gone to roads or sheriff's deputies," said Aaron Ockerman of the OAEO.

The body responsible for distributing HAVA's election security grants is the Election Assistance Commission (EAC). To receive this money, the EAC requires BOE equipment to adhere to standards that it sets, or at least to demonstrate that it has a plan to prioritize working toward those standards, which include the use of voting equipment certified by the EAC.

“

Consistent federal funding is important for boards of elections because in this heightened threat environment, the federal government has a role to play. You would expect a federal response to a physical threat; why not a cyber threat? It doesn't need to be \$2-3 billion, but it needs to be consistent.”

— Aaron Ockerman,
Executive Director,
OAEO

In July 2026, President Trump fired the three sitting members of the EAC just days after a Supreme Court ruling that it was in his authority to do so.⁴⁹ The move prevents the agency from updating those standards or approving new equipment for BOEs across the nation. “There’s no immediate repercussion from the president firing the EAC members; they have staff in place,” explained Sherry Poland from Hamilton County. “But if they remain vacant over the long term, it would be a problem.” EAC funding is important to states; Poland recalled that previous federal funds allowed Hamilton County to replace the punch card voting system with a new vote counting system in 2006, and additional funding in 2018 and 2020 allowed the county to modernize its equipment and strengthen cyber defenses. These funds, too, may now need to come from state and local sources.

Tonya Wichman, the Defiance County BOE director, knows exactly how she would spend federal money if more became available. “We would buy high-speed ballot scanners,” she said, as well as possibly “a ballot sorting device, replace touch screens, and (get) new polling location scanners. ... You don’t want lines,” she said. “People get frustrated and leave. We make elections accessible through pieces of technology.”

Recommendation 8: Advocate for increased HAVA funds for FY2028 and 2030 and begin contingency planning for sustained increases to the SOS budget to account for the risk of continued federal retrenchment.

⁴⁹ Huseman, Jessica. July 9, 2026. “Trump fires all Election Assistance Commission members, leaving agency unable to act.” Votebeat. <https://www.votebeat.org/national/2026/07/09/trump-fires-election-assistance-commission-members-hicks-hovland-mccormick/>.

CONCLUSION

The future is uncertain by nature. Nonetheless, this report foresees two possible paths for Ohio election administration.

Down the first path, Ohio maintains its position as a leader in election administration. Federal funds are restored and provided more consistently, or, barring that, a sustainable consistent replacement is identified. The state modernizes both its attitudes and processes for voter registration, early and absentee voting, and other aspects of ballot access—reducing strain on administrators and promoting public participation.

Down the other path, inconsistent support for elections, challenges to morale, high turnover, and unpredictable—yet ever more restrictive—election law degrades Ohio’s advantages.

To avoid that poorer road, this report makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Restore the grace period for ballots postmarked by election day and preserve drop box access in order to avoid disenfranchising voters with disabilities or voters who face additional barriers due to location, health issues, or other life constraints. In an era of unreliable postal delivery times, a strict close-of-business-on-election-day deadline does more to limit the franchise than fight alleged fraud. Likewise, trends toward fewer polling places mean drop boxes and early voting are an essential feature of modern elections—restricting them will cause longer lines and more problems than it will solve.

Recommendation 2: When changing voting rules, Ohio legislators should allocate resources to the SOS for public education. Right now, raising public awareness of voting law changes is largely an unfunded mandate for the SOS, county BOEs, and nonprofits. If the legislature plans to change laws frequently it should also fund that mandate.

Recommendation 3: Allow voters to request absentee ballots online OR expand the practice of mailing absentee ballot applications so that registered voters receive one each year, rather than only in even years. An online portal would make the practice of mailing request forms largely obsolete, though the state can and should still send reminders to voters that they can do so. In lieu of that, regular delivery of absentee ballot request forms would reduce the incentive for third-party groups to send confusing applications to voters who have already requested ballots.

Recommendation 4: Maintain voting options like mail-in voting and ballot drop boxes as part of a drive to modernize election administration. As noted in Recommendation 1, current trends in election administration are toward early voting and absentee voting to eliminate long lines and processing times on election day. Fighting trends like declining numbers of available poll workers and polling places—which is the end result of limiting other ballot options—will strain the system unnecessarily.

Recommendation 5: Modernize the voter notification process by pairing electronic outreach (email and SMS messaging) with postal notifications when possible. Several sources of friction mentioned in this report orbit around reliance on the postal service, which is less well-resourced and less reliable than in past decades. Moving to electronic delivery makes sense, though a total phase-out of snail mail is inadvisable considering the large number of elderly electors and electors without reliable internet access.

Recommendation 6: Publish data on cancellations due to the EleXa process as well as the number of registrations reinstated after an incorrect notification. It is not possible to independently audit the EleXa process using currently provided voter registration snapshots, which do not list a reason for removal. The SOS should make this data more easily accessible by publishing its own results and the underlying data necessary to audit them.

Recommendation 7: Improve the Ohio Voter Data portal to allow citizens to more easily audit voter roll cancellations and their impetus. Ohio’s current transparency regime is skewed toward identifying potentially incorrect registrations and against identifying incorrect removals. The SOS should make the data necessary to audit voter roll maintenance more available and accessible.

Recommendation 8: Advocate for increased HAVA funds for FY2028 and 2030, and begin contingency planning for sustained increases to the SOS budget to account for the risk of continued federal retrenchment. This is a task for Ohio politicians at the county, state, and federal level, as well as nonprofit advocates and BOEs themselves. Federal legislators need to hear a loud, clear message about the risk of inconsistent, unpredictable, and ultimately declining federal support for elections. If that call is not heard, the state will need to develop a back-up plan to make sure the SOS is fully able to fill the gap for county boards, which should not have to divert resources from essential services to meet election needs on their own.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR BOE OFFICIALS

This report used a semi-structured interview process, meaning that the interviewer drew from the same list of questions as a basis for each interview but did not adhere to that list rigidly. Rather, new questions were introduced iteratively, and the order differed depending on which topic seemed most likely to yield useful information during each interview.

The list of questions is below. Some interview participants received this list in advance, upon request.

1. How will SB 293 (as well as, more hypothetically, the recently vetoed HB 472) impact rejection of mail-in ballots, voter registration rates, and other aspects of voter access?
2. How has the implementation of the DATA Act affected election workers, both as a new mandatory responsibility and as a potential source of public allegations about election integrity?
3. How have trends like turnover, harassment, and election denialism evolved in Ohio since the November 2024 election?
4. How are election offices experiencing new demands for access to Ohio voter data, including through the SOS's multi-state EleXa initiative and from the federal government?
5. How do election officials grade the rollout and usefulness of EVA, the state of Ohio's new AI-powered training and assistance tool for election officials?
6. How have election officials experienced the collapse of federal support for election administration, including cybersecurity support, communications and crisis response support?

ABOUT

About All Voting is Local

All Voting is Local (All Voting) is a 501(c)(3), nonpartisan, multi-state organization that fights against state and local voting policies that silence Americans' voices, particularly for Black, Brown, Native American, and other historically marginalized communities—not just in election years, but every year. We were founded on the principle that the problems people face when trying to vote are solvable if state and local decision-makers are accountable to the communities they serve. All Voting is committed to working with our partners to advance fair, inclusive rules on voter registration, remove barriers that make it more difficult for people to vote, and ensure every vote counts. All Voting is on the ground in eight states: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Within these states, we are active in more than 60 counties that are home to over 21 million people of color. During the 2022 cycle, All Voting programs expanded access for more than 635,000 voters.

Learn more at www.AllVotingisLocal.org.

About the Author

Dean Jackson is a writer and researcher focused on how media and technology shape democratic accountability. As an investigative analyst for the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol, he led inquiries into the roles played by Meta, Twitter, and Google in the lead-up to the insurrection. He is currently a senior fellow at the University of Pittsburgh's Communication Research Technology Lab (CTRL) and a contributing editor at Tech Policy Press.

Before his work with the Select Committee, Dean spent a decade at leading policy research institutions, including eight years with the National Endowment for Democracy and two at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he focused on international affairs, information ecosystems, and technological governance. His writing has appeared in the *Journal of Democracy*, the *Guardian*, *Lawfare*, and other outlets.

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OHIO ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AT THE CROSSROADS

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