



SHOPPING SAVINGS INSIDE

Colon cancer trends younger
Diagnosed at age 32, she's now speaking out so others will speak up. Health & Wellness, H-1

Sunday

PA. NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR
Winner of the Keystone Media Award in 2020, 2022 and 2023 for top performing newsroom among Pennsylvania's largest news organizations

KEYSTONE MEDIA AWARDS 1st PLACE

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

ONE OF AMERICA'S GREAT NEWSPAPERS

\$5.00 237 YEARS OF SERVICE SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2024 VOL. 97, NO. 215, 3/3/24 FINAL

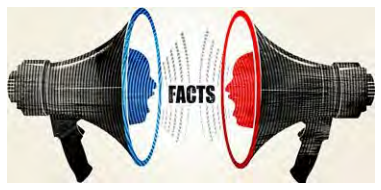
PA. TAKING AIM AT ELECTION SECURITY

U.S., state officials race to secure vote in 'new era' of unprecedented threats

By Mike Wereschagin, Michael Korsh and Sydney Carruth
In Georgia, the threatening message to a top election official's wife arrived with brutal clarity: People were "plan[ning] for the death of you and your family every day." Across the country, relentless threats against an election overseer in Maricopa County, Ariz. — including one saying his daughters

should be raped — became so pervasive that he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. In Philadelphia, the Republican election commissioner's defiance of former President Donald Trump's claims about the 2020 election sparked threats from his supporters that included pictures of the official's home and the names and ages of his family members. As the 2024 presidential race ramps up with some of those same

Election 2024



What are voters' concerns about the 2024 election?
Where do U.S. adults go for election information? See graphics that examine where they look, how they register and vote. Page A-6

Super Tuesday outcome lacks drama, but Biden, Trump still face obstacles

By Jonathan D. Salant
WASHINGTON — Every four years, Harrisburg-based political consultant Charlie Gerow spends Super Tuesday — the biggest day of the primary season — clicking among the various TV channels showing the election returns. This year, he'll also click on that night's televised college

basketball games as President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump are all but assured of winning their parties' presidential nominations. In other words, Super Tuesday is not going to be very super this year. "It's all over but the shouting," Mr. Gerow said. "I'll watch it with a jaundiced eye" SEE SUPER, PAGE A-7

WPIAL BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS



WINNING SMILES North Catholic girls basketball coach Molly Rottmann celebrates with her team after winning the WPIAL Class 4A championship by beating Blackhawk, 40-37, in overtime on Saturday at Petersen Events Center. Trojanettes guard Alayna Rocco scored a game-high 26 points as North Catholic won its third straight WPIAL title and 23rd overall. Expanded WPIAL coverage in Sports, Section B

As thousands drive on 'poor' bridges daily, funds fall short

By Neena Hagen
On the 28th Street Bridge that ferries 6,500 people between Polish Hill and the Strip District each day, chunks of concrete from the sweeping span have tumbled onto Sassafras Way below. A half-mile away, the Herron Avenue Bridge carries nearly 11,000 motorists into Lower Lawrenceville daily across its heavily corroded beams. And the highest-trafficked bridge in Shadyside — with 15,000 daily commuters along South Negley Avenue — has relied on wooden posts to hold up its deck since 2016. The spans are crucial arteries of travel for tens of thousands of Pittsburghers, but they've all been rated in poor condition for more than three years. They all need

SEE BRIDGES, PAGE A-4



Pittsburgh police officers' bicycles stand ready for patrolling outside the Public Safety Center at 439 Wood St. in Downtown on Thursday.

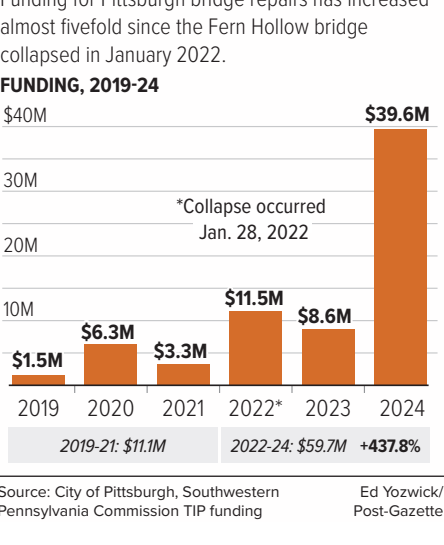
Police changes get mixed reviews

By Megan Guza and Laura Esposito
As the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police moved quickly and very publicly last week to reduce the number of officers on duty during certain overnight hours, the questions started. Council members, union officials, residents and businesses wondered what drove the decision and what it will mean for city safety and for the police force. Chief Larry Sciroto points directly to the numbers.

Significantly fewer major 911 calls — referred to as "priority calls" by the bureau — come during the 3 a.m. to 7 a.m. time frame, which is when the number of officers on duty in Pittsburgh has been reduced, data provided to the Post-Gazette shows. Those numbers drove Chief Sciroto to reconsider how his department's resources are allocated. Whether the decision is successful for the department and its officers, as well as the city and its

SEE POLICE, PAGE A-8

Bridge repair funding increase



post-gazette.com
Get the latest news and more online plus e-delivery of our daily newspaper at my.post-gazette.com/activate

Table with 4 columns: Category, Page Number, Category, Page Number. Includes Weather, Almanac, Editorials, Jobs, Sports, etc.

Barcode and ISSN information

Hiring Pittsburgh 2024 HIRING FAIR
FRIDAY, MARCH 8 | 1-4 P.M.
DOUBLETREE BY HILTON HOTEL PITTSBURGH GREEN TREE
To register, visit post-gazette.com/hiringfair



# Officials race to secure elections in 'a new era' of unprecedented threats

## SECURITY, FROM A-1

administrators still holding crucial positions across the country, the lessons of 2020 are adding a grim urgency to the task of securing the next presidential election.

A job that had been considered routine just a few years ago is now seen as a target for geopolitical foes, a battlefield for information warfare and a potential flashpoint for domestic violence targeted at the heart of the world's most powerful nation.

Just last week, Gov. Josh Shapiro announced the formation of an Election Threats Task Force that includes members of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, state and federal prosecutors, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard.

At the federal level, the Department of Justice created its own unit just months after the deadly Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection to target threats against election workers. And at nonprofits across the country, former election officials and law enforcement officers have banded together to help counties and states prepare for the perils of modern elections — and plead with the federal government for more resources.

"We truly entered a new era during 2020. All of these challenges would have been just unheard of a decade ago," said Derek Tisler, counsel in the Brennan Center for Justice's Democracy Program.

### Rife with disinformation

Fueled by cyberattacks from abroad and amplified by conspiracy theorists at home, the 2024 election will take place in an environment rife with disinformation that could spur some to threaten the peaceful conduct of a democratic election, officials and experts warn.

For Beth Gilbert, that threat came home shortly after the hotly contested 2022 midterms in Pennsylvania, after Republican candidates for governor and U.S. Senate lost to Democrats. The gubernatorial candidate, state Sen. Doug Mastriano, had for years played a key role in spreading false claims about election fraud, and both his race and that of Senate candidate Mehmet Oz drew multiple visits from Mr. Trump.

Soon after the election, Ms. Gilbert, a two-term Wilkes-Barre city councilwoman who had been in public life for a decade, began receiving death threats. On social media, they called for her execution. One day, she came home to find a threatening letter in her mailbox.

"Going into that election, I thought that I could handle anything anyone said about me," Ms. Gilbert said.

She resigned from the elections division the following June, part of an exodus of as many as 70 election workers across the commonwealth, according to Pennsylvania Secretary of State Al Schmidt, the former Philadelphia commissioner who was bombarded with threats to himself and his family after the 2020 election.

It's a pattern that has played out around the country, removing years of experience and expertise just as another presidential election draws near.

"These people who have been doing this job for 15, 20 years are kind of fed up," Mr. Tisler said. "This is not the job that they fell in love with. They can't take this level of lies and vitriol about the work that they do. They can't take themselves and their families receiving death threats. They can't take this anymore."

In response, a national network of nonprofits staffed by former election officials and law enforcement agents has grown over the last three years to help obscure bureaucrats learn about the nuances of cybersecurity, personal security, even psychological wellness as they face a barrage of once-unthinkable threats.

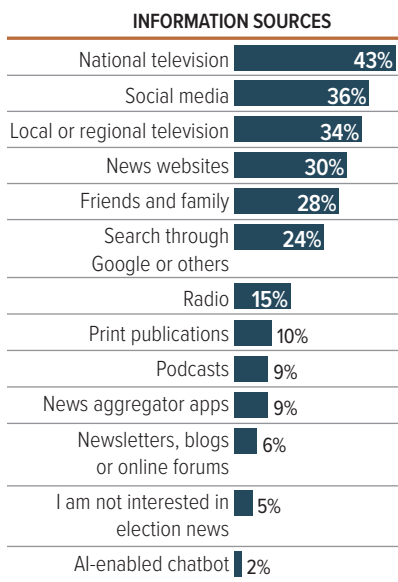


Matt Slocum/Associated Press

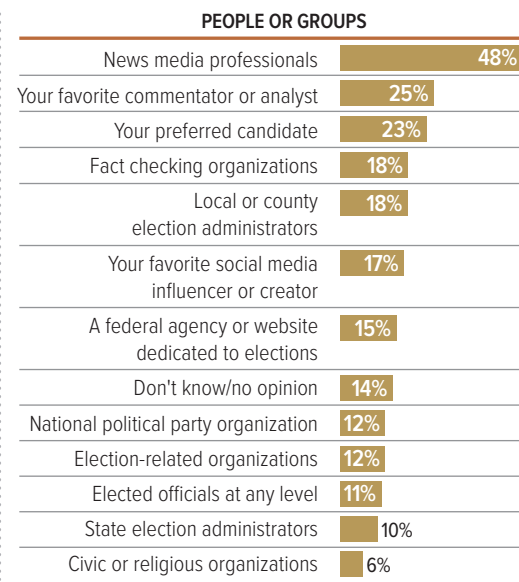
Gov. Josh Shapiro has set up a task force that includes the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, state and federal prosecutors, the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard to identify and fight election threats in the battleground state. The presidential election is just eight months away.

### Where U.S. adults go for election information

We asked what sources and what people or groups adults look to to learn about elections. Respondents could choose three in each category.



Source: Bipartisan Policy Center



James Hilston/Post-Gazette

One, run by David Becker, a former federal prosecutor, offers pro-bono legal representation to election officials who've been threatened or harassed. Kathy Boockvar, the former secretary of state who oversaw Pennsylvania's 2020 election, created the election security consulting firm Athena Strategies and has spent the last couple of years traveling the country with the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections to host training seminars for both elections officials and law enforcement.

"Election officials who are understaffed, under-resourced, and who are some of the best human beings on the planet — who would do everything in their power to make sure that each of us can exercise our fundamental right to vote — they already had too big of a job compared to the resources that they had. But now there's even more for them to do," said Ms. Boockvar, who faced a barrage of threats after Joe Biden's win in the state.

### A seismic shift

When Ms. Boockvar became Pennsylvania's top election official in January 2019, a seismic shift in the nation's voting infrastructure had just gotten underway.

The first signs that U.S. elections were headed into a new and more dangerous age came in 2016, inside computer servers housing the Illinois voter registration database. Russian hackers penetrated the network that year and sat idle for months — then suddenly announced their presence with a flurry of activity inside the network, setting off warnings that led state officials to shut down access to the database for more than a week. When state officials reported the intrusion, other states looked at their own networks, and more than 20 soon found similar penetrations.

"That was the watershed event, where we learned that multiple states were the target of cybersecurity attacks by a foreign adversary. Now, fortunately, the defense in almost every place held up very well. But that was really the wake-up call," said Steve Simon, Minnesota's secretary of state and president-elect of a national organization for the National As-



Tim Tai/Philadelphia Inquirer

Former Pennsylvania Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar travels the country with the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections to host election training seminars.

sociation of Secretaries of State.

The hackers' goal wasn't to change the outcome of any election, but to make Americans believe they could, said Mr. Becker, founder of the Center for Election Innovation and Research and a driving force behind the creation of a nationwide system that helps states keep their voter rolls up to date.

"That's a common misperception — that Russia wants to hack into Florida's voting systems to guarantee that Trump wins Florida, hypothetically. That is not happening," Mr. Becker said.

The United States won't hold one election on Nov. 5. It'll host about 10,000 of them simultaneously, as each county across the country administers its own election, under its own procedures, using its own computer systems. In Pennsylvania alone, malicious actors would have to deal with machines in about 10,000 voting locations operating under 67 different county elections systems.

Hacking election results in such a decentralized system without getting caught is "virtually impossible," Mr. Becker said. "What they want, though, is for people to believe that it happened. And that's easier."

### Critical infrastructure

After the 2016 election, when the scope of foreign interference became clear, the federal government designated the country's election apparatus as critical national infrastructure, a declaration that opened the gates for a host of federal assistance.

Intelligence agencies began briefing secretaries of state with classified information about potential threats. The Department of

Homeland Security offered to send cybersecurity experts into every county in the country to try to hack their networks and find the vulnerabilities others might exploit. Grant programs sent more than \$1 billion in aid to states to help buttress their systems from attack in the run-up to the 2020 election.

But that financial aid slowed dramatically in recent years.

"Since 2020, we've only seen \$150 million," said Mr. Tisler. "That is really the responsibility of the federal government. Are these [county] officials prepared to be national security officials? And if not, what support do they need to get there?"

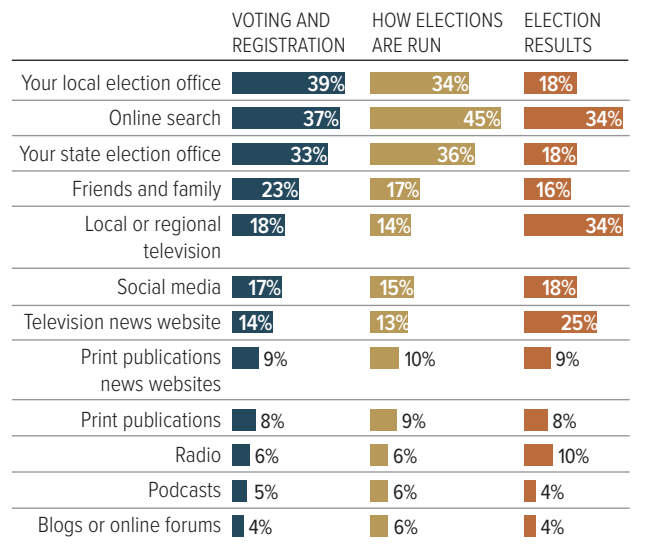
Currently, the budget for elections offices comes mostly through local tax dollars, a funding structure that fails to take into account the importance of their foundational role in state and federal governments, said Jeff Greenburg, a former elections director in Mercer County and current senior advisor of election administration at the Philadelphia-based nonprofit Committee of Seventy, a government watchdog group.

"We put state offices on our ballots. We put all the federal offices on our ballots. And it never made sense to me that the annual support wasn't there at some level," Mr. Greenburg said.

For larger departments, like Allegheny County's, officials have been able to shore up their computer systems with teams of IT professionals. But in smaller counties, hiring people with deep backgrounds in cybersecurity can be more difficult — and they're just as likely as larger counties to be targeted by foreign actors.

### 2022 Survey: U.S. voters' election information sources, by type of information

Respondents were asked where they would look for information on how to register and vote, how elections are run, and who wins an election. They were asked to select up to three options.

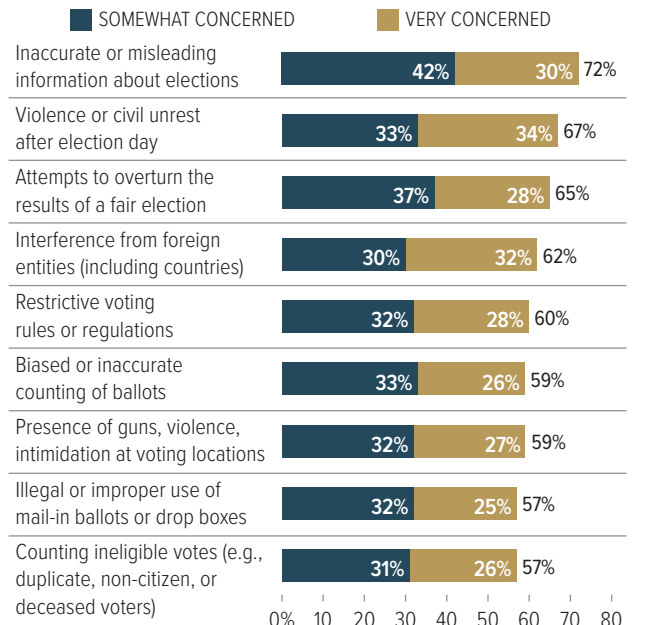


Source: Bipartisan Policy Center

James Hilston/Post-Gazette

### Concerns about the 2024 election

Respondents were asked "How concerned are you, if at all, about the following when it comes to the 2024 presidential election?" The percent who answered "Very Concerned" or "Somewhat Concerned":



Source: Bipartisan Policy Center

James Hilston/Post-Gazette

"Size is not a consideration for an adversary — particularly a foreign adversary — looking to penetrate a system like an election system," said Mr. Simon, of the National Association of Secretaries of State. "They're looking for wherever they can get in, regardless of size."

Despite election systems being designated as critical national infrastructure seven years ago, they weren't included in the massive federal infrastructure spending bill that passed in 2021.

Without crucial assistance from federal and state agencies, counties are left operating with limited resources while operating under constraints imposed upon them by those same authorities. Mr. Simon's association last month issued a plea to the federal government for "stable federal funding." In Pennsylvania, the County Commissioners Association has for years asked the General Assembly to allow counties to start processing mail-in ballots in the days leading up to the election so they can free up more of their staff to be in the field on election day.

"Administering an election is one of the most complex logistical undertakings that you can possibly do," Mr. Tisler said. He said one election official compared it to "planning 1,000 different weddings at the same time. You're working with temporary spaces, temporary workers, and all sorts of equipment. Something's going to go wrong somewhere on Election Day."

When it does, that's the moment when doubts about election security — sown by foreign actors with the 2016 hacks and spread by a sitting president and his supporters after the 2020 election — become most dangerous.

"Our outcomes are more secure than they've ever been. That's an objective truth. Its objective truth in Pennsylvania. It's objective truth nationwide," Mr. Becker said. "We've never had systems with as much resilience and fail-safes and protections as we do now."

But the election-denial movement that sprung up after Mr. Trump's 2020 loss has clung to conspiracy theories and outright lies about it be-

ing rigged, he said.

"For tens of millions Americans, actual security doesn't matter. Processes don't matter. Only outcome matters. They've gotten to the point where they believe the only election with integrity is one where their candidate wins. That's an untenable place for democracy to be, especially in the nation as closely divided as we are," Mr. Becker said.

Most Americans are attuned to the threats that disinformation and cyber attacks pose to their democratic system, according to a recent survey by the Bipartisan Policy Center. But the same survey found a sharp drop in recent years in the number of people who turn to their own election officials for information about the elections they run.

Two years ago, the survey found that more than a third of the public looked to local elections offices for answers about voting, registration and how elections are run. In the more recent survey, just 18% said they seek out election information from that official source.

Counties have struggled to present themselves as key sources of reliable information — Chester County, for instance, posted a series of short videos trying to explain the complicated elections process. But the flood of conspiracy theories that flourish online can easily overwhelm them, said Lisa Schaefer, executive director of the state's county commissioners association.

Pennsylvania's prominent role as the one of the country's largest swing states magnifies the challenge, making it a prime target for disinformation campaigns and efforts to undermine faith in the results.

"Everybody knows Pennsylvania is a swing state. The eyes of the nation are going to be on Pennsylvania because they know it is going to be a close election," Mr. Tisler said. "Because of this attention, Pennsylvania is just absolutely going to be a concern in 2024."

Mike Werschagin: mwerschagin@post-gazette.com; Michael Korsh: mkorsh@post-gazette.com; Sydney Carruth: scar-ruth@post-gazette.com