



The 2020 Elections: Selected Resources for Members and Constituents

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The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and reports of potential election interference might raise questions for Members and constituents about the 2020 elections. Potential disinformation campaigns and [changes to election procedures in response to COVID-19](#) might make it more difficult for voters to determine how to register and vote. Voters might also be concerned about possible effects of COVID-19 or interference efforts on their safety or on the security of election workers or the electoral process itself.

This Insight shares selected resources Members and constituents might find helpful for navigating such questions. It links to information about (1) how to register and vote in 2020, and (2) how federal agencies are responding to potential election interference efforts and election effects of COVID-19. This product focuses on resources available from government officials and some of the organizations that support them, such as the [National Association of Secretaries of State \(NASS\)](#) and [National Conference of State Legislatures \(NCSL\)](#). Additional information may be available from media outlets or nonprofit groups.

Registering and Voting in 2020

States, territories, and localities have primary responsibility for administering elections in the United States, and their election officials [are generally the most authoritative sources of information about when, where, and how to register and vote](#). NASS, which represents the officials [who serve as the chief election official in most states and territories](#), and the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission \(EAC\)](#), which [was established after the 2000 elections to help improve the administration of federal elections](#), each maintain a website that links to official state, territorial, and local election information. [NASS's site](#) and the [EAC's site](#) both provide access to contact information for election officials and state-specific tools for performing common voter activities, such as registering to vote, confirming voter registration status, locating a polling place, and checking requirements for voting early or by mail. The U.S. Department of Defense's [Federal Voting Assistance Program](#), which is charged with carrying out certain responsibilities under the [Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986](#), maintains a [Voting Assistance Guide](#) that is directed primarily at overseas civilians and military personnel.

States have generally responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by adjusting some of their election procedures or timeframes, with many [temporarily changing their early or mail voting policies](#). NCSL,

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which supports [state legislators](#), and NASS are both tracking changes to mail or early voting policies and updating pages at regular intervals. [NCSL's page](#) provides information about voter eligibility for mail voting in each state in 2020, automatic mailing of mail ballots or mail ballot applications, and timeframes for processing mail ballots; and [NASS's page](#) offers updates about eligibility for mail or early voting, early voting periods, and mail ballot request and receipt deadlines.

Federal Responses to Interference Efforts and COVID-19

Federal agencies are charged with carrying out a number of activities that are intended to protect voters, election workers, or the electoral process, such as [enforcing federal protections for voting rights](#) and [prosecuting federal election offenses](#). Especially following investigations of election interference in the 2016 election cycle and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020 cycle, however, they also conduct activities that are directed specifically at addressing one or both of those challenges.

Federal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have focused on helping states, territories, and localities secure their election processes, election workers, and voters against effects of the disease. Congress has provided—and charged the EAC with administering—[dedicated COVID-19 elections grant funding](#) and other grant funds that states, territories, and DC [can choose to apply to COVID-19-related costs](#). The EAC and other entities, including the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and a [joint working group](#) led by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\)](#), have also provided resources to help election officials adapt to election effects of COVID-19.

Some of the federal response to attempted election interference is also aimed at helping states, territories, and localities secure their elections. DHS [designated election systems as critical infrastructure](#) in January 2017. The [designation](#) established an [Election Infrastructure Subsector](#) and led to creation of new mechanisms that federal, state, territorial, and local officials and private-sector election vendors can use to communicate and coordinate about elections issues, including a [Government Coordinating Council](#), a [Sector Coordinating Council](#), the [Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center \(ISAC\)](#), and an [Elections Industry Special Interest Group](#) at the [Information Technology ISAC](#).

CISA, through which DHS performs its role as [sector-specific agency](#) for the Election Infrastructure Subsector, also provides states, territories, localities, and vendors with [resources](#) and [services](#) to help secure their systems and has launched a number of election security initiatives, including [#Protect2020](#), the [Countering Foreign Influence Task Force](#), the [Crossfeed Pilot Program](#), and, in collaboration with the EAC, the [Election Risk Profile Tool](#). In addition to such collaborations, the EAC administers [grant funding](#) Congress provided for states, territories, and DC in response to election interference concerns and shares [election security resources](#) like a cybersecurity training it helps make available to election officials.

Attempts to interfere in elections differ from COVID-19 in at least one important respect: they are intentional human actions. That has prompted additional federal responses to interference efforts beyond helping states, territories, and localities secure their elections, including collecting intelligence about potential interference threats, investigating efforts to interfere in elections, and imposing penalties for attempted interference. The directors of the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#), the [National Security Agency](#), CISA, and the [National Counterintelligence and Security Center](#) released a [video](#) in October 2020 describing the roles each of their agencies play in responding to attempted election interference. More information about how those and other election security efforts are distributed and coordinated across federal agencies is also available in a [CRS report about campaign and election security policy](#).

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