Protecting Elections and Enhancing Participation: An Agenda for 2021

Academy Election 2020 Project

Working Group: Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter Participation

Background

Voting at the federal, state, and local levels is fundamental to American democracy, and citizens must have confidence in electoral systems, processes, and results. Electoral integrity and voter participation are enhanced by (1) ensuring that everyone with a legal right to vote is able to do so; (2) protecting such critical election infrastructure as storage facilities, polling places, and centralized vote tabulation locations; and (3) safeguarding such information and communications technology as voter registration databases, voting machines, and other electoral management systems. The emergence of the Covid-19 crisis, concerns about cybersecurity, and the complex and decentralized nature of our electoral system present challenges to our election system. The next administration will be called upon to address these concerns and ensure public confidence in the election results.

The Challenge: Protect Electoral Integrity and Enhance Voter Participation

The U.S. election system is highly decentralized. Public agencies and administrators have critical roles to play in ensuring fair and safe elections. In most cases, the nation's counties are responsible for actually running our elections. Decentralization and lack of standardization create a number of challenges, but this structure can be a strength from a security perspective.

Recommendations for 2021

1. Strengthen the resources and support to the federal cyber security infrastructure and highlight the importance of this effort.

2. Ensure that adequate funding is provided in order for all federal election duties to be performed well.

3. Ensure that all key election-related positions are filled in a timely manner, with qualified individuals.

4. Seek various legislative requirements that states must meet in regard to future elections of federal officials (various bills have been introduced in pervious congressional sessions).

5. Seek to improve the capacity of states by providing needed financial and technical assistance resources. This could include: increasing federal funding to address deficiencies in state and local election systems; expanding the capacity of the EAC to provide technical assistance to state and local election officials; identifying additional steps to better equip states and localities to address cyber security threats identified by the federal government.

6. Develop an action strategy to include state and local governments. This might be accomplished by: convening an intergovernmental working group; and/or creation of a bipartisan commission.

Additional Resources

These resources provide additional information and recommendations in the line with the Election 2020 paper, Protecting Elections and Enhancing Participation: An Agenda for 2021.

The Academy: Election 2020: Protecting the Right to Vote

CDC: Considerations for Election Polling Locations and Voters

GAO: Election Security: DHS Plans are Urgently Needed to Address Identified Challenges Before the 2020 Election

CISA: Protect 2020

Election Assistance Committee: Coronavirus (Covid-19) Resources

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