

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104731](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Election officials faced unprecedented challenges in conducting the 2020 elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CARES Act provided \$400 million in grants for states to use to prevent, prepare for, and respond to issues related to the pandemic for the 2020 federal election cycle. The EAC was responsible for administering the grants. In addition, the EAC serves as a national clearinghouse and resource for the compilation of information and review of procedures with respect to the administration of federal elections.

The CARES Act includes a provision for GAO to report on its ongoing monitoring and oversight efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report describes (1) the steps states and local jurisdictions took to prepare for and conduct elections in 2020 during the pandemic and the challenges they reported facing, (2) how states and local jurisdictions reported using CARES Act grant funding, and the challenges they reported facing, and (3) what EAC resources and guidance states and local jurisdictions used and their perspectives on such assistance.

To address all three objectives, GAO conducted two web-based surveys of election officials. One survey was administered to election offices in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and achieved a response rate of 84 percent. The other survey was administered to a sample of 829 local election jurisdictions. The survey achieved a weighted response rate of 47 percent, and the design and analysis allows GAO to provide national estimates of the perspectives of local election officials.

View [GAO-22-104731](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

July 2022

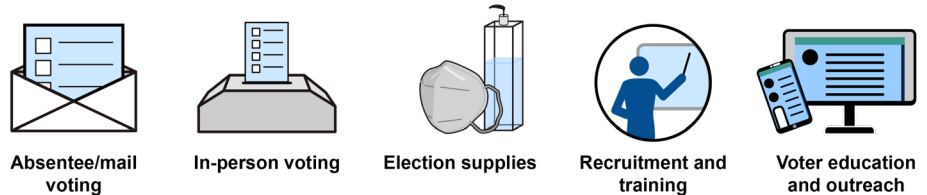
2020 ELECTIONS

State and Local Perspectives on Election Administration during the COVID-19 Pandemic

What GAO Found

GAO surveyed state election offices and local election jurisdictions about steps they took to prepare for and conduct the 2020 elections during the pandemic. The surveys asked questions on steps and challenges in five areas: absentee/mail voting, in-person voting, election supplies, election worker recruitment and training, and voter education and outreach. GAO received survey responses from 43 states and 407 local jurisdictions.

Election Administration Areas about which GAO Surveyed States and Local Jurisdictions



Source: GAO analysis based on information reported by state and local election officials. | GAO-22-104731

Within the area of in-person voting, for example, nearly all states reported taking steps to coordinate with public health agencies, and most coordinated with emergency management agencies, consulted with vendors and experts, and helped local election offices add new polling locations. Nearly all local jurisdictions reported taking steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as by providing protective equipment to election workers. States and local jurisdictions most commonly reported that various issues related to in-person voting—such as funding and understanding guidance—were not challenging. For voter education and outreach, all states reported that they provided information on their elections websites about voting policies and procedures. Nearly all local jurisdictions reported that they answered questions about voting policies and procedures. Additionally, nearly all states and most local jurisdictions reported that false or misleading information about absentee/mail voting was challenging.

Over half of states reported spending CARES Act grants on supplies and equipment, voter education, facilitating absentee/mail voting, and recruiting and training election workers. Most states reported that issues related to grant funding and reporting requirements were challenging, such as submitting required progress reports within 20 days of an election. More than half of local jurisdictions reported spending CARES Act grants on various in-person voting activities, including purchasing protective supplies and cleaning voting locations.

Nearly all states and some local jurisdictions reported that they used U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) information resources and guidance during the pandemic. Nearly all states used information about CARES Act grants; fewer used information on other election administration topics. Most states reported finding EAC's information helpful during the 2020 elections. Most local jurisdictions reported that they did not use EAC information on any of the topics GAO asked about, such as in-person voting. The most common reasons cited were that they were not aware of or did not need the information.