Hearst Television Election 2020 Survey

This survey was conducted by the Hearst Television National Investigative Unit as part of its ongoing series into election security. The survey link was sent to more than 3,000 local and state election administrators in all 50 states between Dec. 21, 2020-Jan. 15, 2021. Respondents were asked 35 questions about the 2020 general election, including on its administration, security, funding, effect of mis/disinformation, and impact on future elections, among other election-related topics. Respondents were granted anonymity if they did not wish to disclose their identity; not all respondents answered all questions.

The charts below show a summary of responses to questions where options for answers were provided by Hearst Television. Other questions allowed open-ended answers and are not shown here.

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For questions about this survey, please contact: investigate@hearst.com.

• “We over prepared because of the pandemic, and as a result we had virtually no issues with the election. It was very smooth, almost unusually so.” -Election Administrator in Maine

• “I feel that it went well on Election Day. The weeks leading up to the election were busy with fielding questions and assuring voters that Idaho’s system is much different than other states. I was frequently updating our Facebook page to address questions and concerns.” -Election Administrator in Idaho

• “It went very well considering the over 69 new election laws added plus last-minute directives.” –Election Administrator in Virginia

• “It was one of the most challenging elections I’ve ever administered.” -Election Administrator in Michigan

• “The actual administration of the election was likely one of the most secure and transparent elections that we have conducted.” -Election Administrator in California
2. What was the hardest part of running the 2020 election?

- “Moving to essentially a vote by mail system in 6 weeks. Most states take years to develop those procedures.” - Election Administrator in New York

- “By far the hardest part of the November election was battling the constant jet of disinformation coming from candidates, campaigns, politicians, and political parties. They openly mislead voters, with the clear intent of sowing confusion and distrust. Not only did we have to carry on preparing the election itself, but we also had to divert enormous amounts of our scarce time, staff, and resources to fighting and correcting the disinformation spewed out by people trying to destroy trust in the integrity of the election.” - Election Administrator in Michigan

- “Getting totals out the night of the election.” - Election Administrator in Texas

- “The increase in Absentee Ballots (500% over previous Presidential Elections).” - Election Administrator in New Hampshire

- “The most difficult part of running the 2020 election was navigating the ever-changing COVID-19 guidelines. Protecting the health and well-being of Alabamians was of paramount importance, yet we still wanted to ensure every eligible voter had the opportunity to cast his or her ballot freely and without hindrance.” - Election Administrator in Alabama

3. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect how you administered the general election (if at all)?

- “COVID made it a challenge to get Voters at assisted living and nursing homes their rights to vote. We had to make adjustments for that. We also had to change some precinct locations due to COVID.” - Election Administrator in Indiana

- “We had little COVID in our county until about election day and then we had a spike. It did cause me problems in finding non quarantined workers”. - Election Administrator in Colorado

- “The pandemic actually spurred our local unit into action to improve our voter flow, hiring enough staff to help improve the efficiency of our election process and to create an absent voter counting board which was essential and will be key to success with future elections.” - Election Administrator in Michigan

- “It did not affect it.” - Election Administrator in South Dakota

- “I created an emergency precinct for people that were "exposed" to the virus and recruited volunteers from the EMS to go to homes where people were quarantined.” - Election Administrator in West Virginia
4. Thinking of the impacts from the pandemic on election administration, did you have enough resources (please pick one):
320 responses

- Yes: 83.4%
- No: 16.8%

5. Do you get enough support from your secretary of state’s office?
317 responses

- Yes: 78.9%
- No: 21.1%

6. Do you get enough support from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission?
295 responses

- Yes: 76.9%
- No: 23.1%
7. Did you apply for or receive private grants or funding to support the administration of the 2020 general election?
321 responses

- Yes: 57%
- No: 31%
- Not Sure: 6%
- Not directly, but state did and distributed the funds: 6%

8. Did you apply for or receive CARES Act grants or funding to support the administration of the 2020 general election?
312 responses

- Yes: 57%
- No: 31%
- Not Sure: 6%
- Not directly, but state did and distributed the funds: 6%

“No, never heard about it. Otherwise we would of.” - Election Administrator in Connecticut

“Yes, we were reimbursed for the increased postage that the absentee ballots created, as well as the extra hires we needed to bring in.” - Election Administrator in Wyoming

“Yes, we applied for hazard pay for the election inspectors who worked very hard and took a great risk to their own health.” - Election Administrator in Michigan

9. Compared to the 2020 primary or caucus in your area, did you have more or fewer poll workers/election workers for the general election?
302 responses

- More: 88.7%
- Fewer: 11.3%
10. Are you aware of any poll workers, election workers, or members of your staff who were diagnosed as positive with COVID-19 after working or volunteering on Nov. 3, 2020?
323 responses

- Yes: 87.6%
- No: 12.4%

11. How many polling places and early voting sites existed for the 2020 general election compared to the 2016 general election?
319 responses

- Same Amount: 78.1%
- More: 12.2%
- Fewer: 9.7%

12. Compared to the 2020 primary or caucus in your area, were wait times for voters to cast a ballot in person higher or lower for the general election?
318 responses

- Higher: 53.1%
- Lower: 36.5%
- About the same: 10.4%
13. Did your municipality use ballot drop-off boxes for the 2020 general election?
319 responses

- "We had just under 500 ballots in 2016 in 2020 we had 4265." - Election Administrator in New Hampshire
- "We went from receiving 2,000 to receiving almost 17,000. Vote by Mail applications were sent to every voter in the County. We had a 88% return on ballots." - Election Administrator in Maryland
- "Almost a 50% decrease." - Election Administrator in Texas
- "Over 100% but our at the poll numbers decreased." - Election Administrator in Vermont
- "Astronomical. Who knows if it was due to covid or early voting law." - Election Administrator in Virginia

14. If your municipality saw an increase in absentee voting/vote-by-mail, please provide the percentage increase in the 2020 general election compared to the 2016 general election.

15. Did you provide absentee ballot tracking?
316 responses
16. Did you experience election mail-related delays with the U.S. Postal Service?
315 responses

- Yes: 71.4%
- No: 28.6%

17. Do you believe U.S. Postal Service personnel appropriately affixed the lime-green Tag 191 to prioritize election materials as required by USPS policy?
276 responses

- Yes: 83.3%
- No: 16.7%

18. Turning to election security, do you think the general election in your municipality was more secure than in prior elections?
310 responses

- Yes: 37.4%
- No: 62.6%
19 a. Are the election websites or web pages in your jurisdiction or municipality (those that convey information from your office) secured with https encryption?
289 responses

19 b. Are the election websites or web pages in your jurisdiction or municipality (those that convey information from your office) on a .gov domain?
292 responses

20. Do you get enough support from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security?
273 responses
21. Are you aware of any voter fraud and/or election fraud that occurred in the 2020 general election in your municipality?
316 responses

- Yes: 88%
- No: 12%

22. Did your office refer any allegations of voter fraud and/or election fraud to law enforcement authorities?
305 responses

- Yes: 86.2%
- No: 13.8%

23. Did allegations of voter and/or election fraud contribute to mis/disinformation surrounding the general election?
301 responses

- Yes: 57.5%
- No: 42.5%
24. Thinking of mis/disinformation broadly, did it hinder your administration of elections in any way?
306 responses

Yes: 65.7%
No: 34.3%

25. Did you or anyone in your office take steps to counter mis/disinformation?
298 responses

Yes: 76.2%
No: 23.8%

26. Did you want someone outside of your office in a position of authority (e.g. a lawmaker, elected leader, member of law enforcement, a state or federal... mis/disinformation in the 2020 general election?
301 responses

Yes: 60.1%
No: 39.9%
27. Did your office experience an increase in public or media scrutiny about the administration of the 2020 general election?
315 responses

- 47.6% Yes
- 52.4% No

28. What – if any – election-related items or information do you wish reputable local media in your area or national media communicated more to voters and your constituents?

- “Contact your state and local election officials for accurate information. Question everything you read on social media and if you don’t like what you read, contact your state or local election administrator to get the real and true story. Reiterate the hard work that election administrators are doing across the state and the country.” - Election Administrator in Wyoming

- “New Hampshire does NOT have early voting we only have absentee voting and people were very confused by the media saying early voting” - Election Administrator in New Hampshire

- “Stop sensationalizing election fraud” - Election Administrator in Vermont

- “That Election Officials have one goal and that is for everyone to have the opportunity to vote privately and securely and for every vote to count. We don’t care who you vote for - we just want you to be able to vote and to keep the election secure, correct and without question.” - Election Administrator in Maryland

- “The fact that all systems are federally certified at the state and local level and what we do to audit and prepare all elections.” - Election Administrator in Nevada

29. What steps do you plan to take to increase the public’s faith in election administration in future elections?

- “Increase in poll worker training, recruiting new younger workers.” - Election Administrator in Connecticut

- “We are creating step-by-step videos showing actual video footage of the life-cycle of a ballot. I believe that more people will gain/re-gain faith in the election administration as they gain understanding of what REALLY happens to a ballot.” - Election Administrator in Oregon

- “Repetition of the rights of the voters, transparency of what we do as administrators and speaking to at risk groups, like the young, the poor and the elderly about their right to vote and how they can access the ballot box.” - Election Administrator in New York
30. Have you or a member of your staff been threatened or intimidated in any way relating to the 2020 general election?
314 responses

31. Who or what is responsible for the current climate of mis/disinformation and documented threats toward some election workers/administrators across the country?

Number of responses per category:

- Media: 59
- Trump: 40
- Social media: 34
- National Media: 11
- Politics/Political Parties: 11
- Trump supporters: 8
- Republican Party: 8
- State Officials: 7
- Democratic Party: 6
- White House administration: 5
- Everyone/the public: 5
- Uneducated voters: 4
- Internet: 4
- Politicians: 3
- Foreign actors: 3
- Non-mainstream media: 2
- Fox News: 2
- Big tech companies: 2
- Police officers/law enforcement: 2

• “Get rid of social media.” -Election Administrator in Michigan
32. Do you feel your state legislature listens to you and respects your suggestions as an election expert?
273 responses

33. Should some of the pandemic-related, emergency election measures put in place by your state legislature, state or local lawmakers, or election officials be made permanent?
286 responses