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2020 Election Frequently Asked Questions Document

1. How do I register to vote or find out if I'm currently registered?

In all states except North Dakota, you need to be registered to vote in order to participate in an upcoming election. Eligibility requirements vary by state, but generally you must be a U.S. citizen who will be at least 18 years old by Election Day and must meet state residency requirements. You can register to vote in person, by mail, and in many states online. If you are not already registered or you need to update your registration, make sure to do so by your state's [deadline](#). [Several states](#) also allow voters to register on Election Day.

If you are already registered to vote, please check to make sure your voter registration information is current and accurate, especially if you have recently moved or changed your name.

For information on the voter registration process in each state, and to find out if you are already registered visit canivote.org.

2. What impact will COVID-19 have on in-person voting?

State and local election officials are working hard to ensure the health and safety of voters and poll workers during in-person voting. While specific measures vary by jurisdiction, common precautions include providing poll workers with face coverings and gloves; regularly wiping down surfaces with disinfectant; offering hand sanitizer to voters; providing single use styluses or pens; and putting up signs and/or marking the floor to indicate proper social distancing.

Voting locations may change or may be combined into larger facilities in an effort to accommodate social distancing, and reduce lines. In a number of states, professional sports arenas and stadiums, convention centers and other large facilities have volunteered to serve as voting locations for the general election. Of course, there may still be lines during early voting and on Election Day, because of new social distancing and safety precautions. We urge voters to be patient and confident that if you are in line at the close of polls on Election Day, you will still be able to cast a ballot. Verify your polling location by visiting canivote.org before you go vote in case your site has changed.

3. What is early voting and how do I vote early?

Many states allow people to vote in-person, prior to Election Day without having to provide a reason or excuse. In some states early voting may involve casting a ballot at the local election office, while in others you may be voting at a library, community center, or other location in a manner similar to voting at the polling place on Election Day.

For information on how to vote early in each state, visit canivote.org.



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For an overview of early voting timeframes/deadlines in each state, see the NASS [early and absentee voting dates page](#).

For an overview of state laws on early voting, see the National Conference of State Legislatures' [early voting page](#).

4. What is the difference between absentee voting and mail voting?

Absentee voting provides an alternative to voting at the polling place on Election Day. Generally, there are two forms of absentee voting: absentee voting by mail and absentee voting in-person.

Some states require voters to designate a specific reason for voting absentee. Examples include a planned absence from the county on Election Day, an illness or disability, caregiver responsibilities, etc. Several states that require an excuse to vote absentee have announced concerns about COVID-19 will be considered a valid reason to vote absentee by mail in the upcoming general election.

Other states allow people to vote absentee (either by-mail or in-person) without having to provide an excuse.

In most states, a voter must submit a request in order to receive a ballot by mail. However, some states are sending mail ballot request forms to all voters for the 2020 general election due to COVID-19.

There are several states that automatically mail a ballot to all registered voters, including some that are doing so for the 2020 general election due to COVID-19.

For an overview of state absentee/mail voting dates and deadlines, see the NASS [early and absentee voting dates page](#).

For an overview of state laws on absentee/mail voting, see the [National Conference of State Legislatures voting outside the polling place page](#).

5. How do I vote by mail?

As noted in FAQ #4, most states require voters to request a mail ballot, while several states automatically send a ballot to all registered voters. Specific instructions will be included with the mail ballot. Each state has specific procedures for voting and returning mail ballots, along with verification methods before processing these ballots. Most states require mail ballots to be returned by the close of polls on Election Day, either by mail or in-person at a ballot drop-box, local election office or other designated location. However, some states allow additional time for mail absentee ballots to arrive, provided the ballot is postmarked by Election Day.



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Voters should request and return their mail ballot **as soon as possible** in order to ensure it arrives in time to be counted.

It is very important to follow the instructions for how to fill out the ballot and include any signature or identification requirements. If you make a mistake and need to request a new ballot, you will need to contact your local election office immediately to ensure you are able to receive and return the ballot in time for the ballot to be counted.

Voters in many states and localities can track the status of their mail ballot through an online tracking system. If your jurisdiction does not have a ballot tracking system, you should contact your local election official to find out if your ballot was received and what to do if it was not.

For information on how to vote by mail in each state visit canivote.org.

For information on U.S. Postal Service handling of mail ballots see the [USPS election mail page](#).

6. How do states process mail ballots?

Mail ballot processing methods and timelines vary by state, according to state laws. Some states allow election officials to begin some form of processing mail ballots prior to Election Day. This may include signature verification procedures, opening the envelopes to prepare the ballots for counting, or scanning the ballots, etc. One thing that is constant across the states is the results of mail ballot counting will not be released until after the polls close on Election Day.

For an overview of state laws on mail ballot processing see the National Conference of State Legislatures' [voting outside the polling place page](#).

For information on when states begin processing absentee ballots, see the National Conference of State Legislatures' [page on when absentee/mail ballot processing and counting can begin](#).

7. How are election results compiled and when will they be available for the November 3, 2020 election?

Generally, local jurisdictions in each state report unofficial/preliminary election results to state election officials after the polls close on Election Day. Many states make these early unofficial results available through an Election Night Reporting (ENR) website. However, while those results can be a reliable indicator of the winner in a particular race, it is important to remember those results are unofficial and often incomplete.



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While most states will have unofficial reporting on election night for voters who cast a ballot in-person on Election Day, it is also important to remember states have different mail ballot deadlines; some require all ballots to be received by Election Day, others require they be postmarked by Election Day and arrive within a specified timeframe after the election. With the expected increase in mail voting for the November 3, 2020 election coupled with the number of states that cannot begin processing mail ballots until Election Day, it will likely take election officials longer than usual to process and count those ballots. This is a normal process and not indicative of malicious activity.

Election results are not official until they are canvassed (reviewed by state and local election officials) and certified by the relevant election officials. Generally, each local jurisdiction canvasses and certifies results from that jurisdiction on or by a certain date following the election. For statewide and federal races, the certified results from all of the local jurisdictions are then canvassed and certified by state officials (often a State Canvassing Board) on or by a certain date. This process is standard and occurs for every election.

For more information on the canvassing and certification process, see the NASS resource on [state election canvassing timeframes](#).

8. How do I find voting information I can trust?

Voters often receive election information through a variety of non-official, third-party sources, including websites, social media, emails, text messages, automated calls and mailings. Whether intentional or unintentional, sometimes information may be incorrect, incomplete or misleading. Voters should instead rely on their local and state election officials as their trusted sources for election information. You can easily go to canivote.org, which links directly to the official websites for state election officials and includes a roster of local election officials across the country. Also, follow the verified social media pages of your state and local election officials.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered some [changes to election processes](#) in certain states and jurisdictions. The unpredictable nature of the pandemic environment makes it all the more critical to go straight to the official source for your election information. Your state and local election officials are the most reliable source for timely and accurate election information.

9. What is #TrustedInfo2020?

In November 2019, NASS launched #TrustedInfo2020—an education effort to promote election officials as the trusted sources of election information. By driving voters directly to election officials' websites and social media pages, we ensure voters are getting accurate and up-to-date election information and cut down on the misinformation and disinformation



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that can surround elections. #TrustedInfo2020 aims to highlight state and local election officials as the credible, verified sources for election information.

The nation's Secretaries of State, 40 of whom serve as their state's chief election official, along with other state and local election officials are continuously working to inform Americans about the elections process, including voter registration, state election laws, voting and much more.

10. How are election officials protecting the integrity of the election and how can I help?

State and local election officials take seriously their role as guardians of democracy. Although election laws and practices vary greatly by state, one constant across the U.S. is that every voter has the right to cast their vote in each election for which they are eligible. Individuals are prohibited by law from casting more than one ballot in any election, no matter what method of voting the voter utilizes.

States and localities have also implemented a variety of measures to protect elections from cyber and physical security threats as well as other threats to their integrity. Examples include implementing cybersecurity measures such as multi-factor authentication, upgrading election equipment and software, establishing chain of custody protocols for ballot security, implementing signature verification, and instituting physical security measures such as surveillance of storage locations and ballot drop boxes.

Election officials regularly share information about the measures they are implementing to protect elections. Further, election officials provide transparency through practices such as allowing the public to observe pre-election testing of election technology and the canvass of election results. Visit the websites of your state and local election officials to learn more about security protocols specific to your location and its election processes and about opportunities for public observation.

Individual voters can help protect the integrity of elections by getting their election information from state and local election officials and carefully following instructions for registering to vote and voting. The most important thing voters can do is participate in the election. If you'd like to do more, [apply to serve as a poll worker](#) or temporary election worker – our elections rely on this temporary work force to run smoothly.

11. What does a poll worker do and how do I volunteer?

Poll workers help carry out the election by performing a variety of duties at the polling place. This may include setting up the polling place, welcoming and checking in voters, issuing



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ballots, monitoring voting equipment, closing the polling place and processing initial results to be sent to the local elections office.

In states where mail balloting is prevalent, temporary election workers are often hired to help to process mail ballots.

Poll and election workers are generally hired at the local level. Eligibility requirements, compensation, training requirements, and specific duties vary among jurisdictions.

For information on becoming a poll worker in your state visit canivote.org.