

Bolstering Funding and Practices for Resilient Elections

Executive Summary

Throughout our nation's history, the American public's faith in our system of democracy and representative government has depended upon the integrity, credibility, and efficiency of our elections system. The infrastructure and methods that facilitate voting in federal, state, and local elections allow for the peaceful transfer of power within our national union. For good reason, the Department of Homeland Security has designated elections as a critical infrastructure.

Recent elections, however, have been subjected to stress tests resulting from any of a host of issues, including election administrators' lack of adequate fiscal and staff resources, outdated equipment, and intense public scrutiny fueled by wide political divides, accusations of impropriety, and strident media commentary. Inefficiencies are laid bare when there are very close races for high-profile offices and media reluctance to project a winner. In some cases, these factors have placed historic strains on American elections systems and, warranted or not, have impacted confidence in election results.

In our federal system of government, it is the state's responsibility for elections—most often conducted at the local government level. This decentralization is a benefit, connecting voters with their local democracy and limiting the possibility for widespread manipulation. Some states view that responsibility to extend to the funding of at least some elections, others do not. This variation is just one example of why it can be difficult to answer the question: "Who pays for our elections?"

**Greater investment into voting
infrastructure allows for more
efficient administration of elections
– and greater public trust.**

In February 2024, the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate and the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics invited administrators and policy experts to help examine how thousands of jurisdictions across our country fund their election systems. Their conclusions, which we are proud to share in "Bolstering Funding and Practices for Resilient Elections," show why this is a complicated issue that deserves our attention. Across areas of expertise, political backgrounds, and experience the authors share a common belief that sufficient investment into the voting infrastructure is necessary and allows for more efficient administration of elections — and, in turn, for greater public trust in the integrity of the systems by which we choose our political leaders.

In addition to the policy conclusions of our experts, the report makes clear one other point: the work of making election systems more resilient must be bipartisan. Just as concerns about election administration are held by voters in both major parties, so too must the solutions cross party lines. In the spirit of the two statesmen for whom our institutes are named — who demonstrated time and again how a Democrat and Republican could work together to tackle difficult issues and pass legislation that improved the lives of American citizens — we hope this initiative encourages political leaders to embrace the work of bettering our election systems, and helps provide a road map to do so.