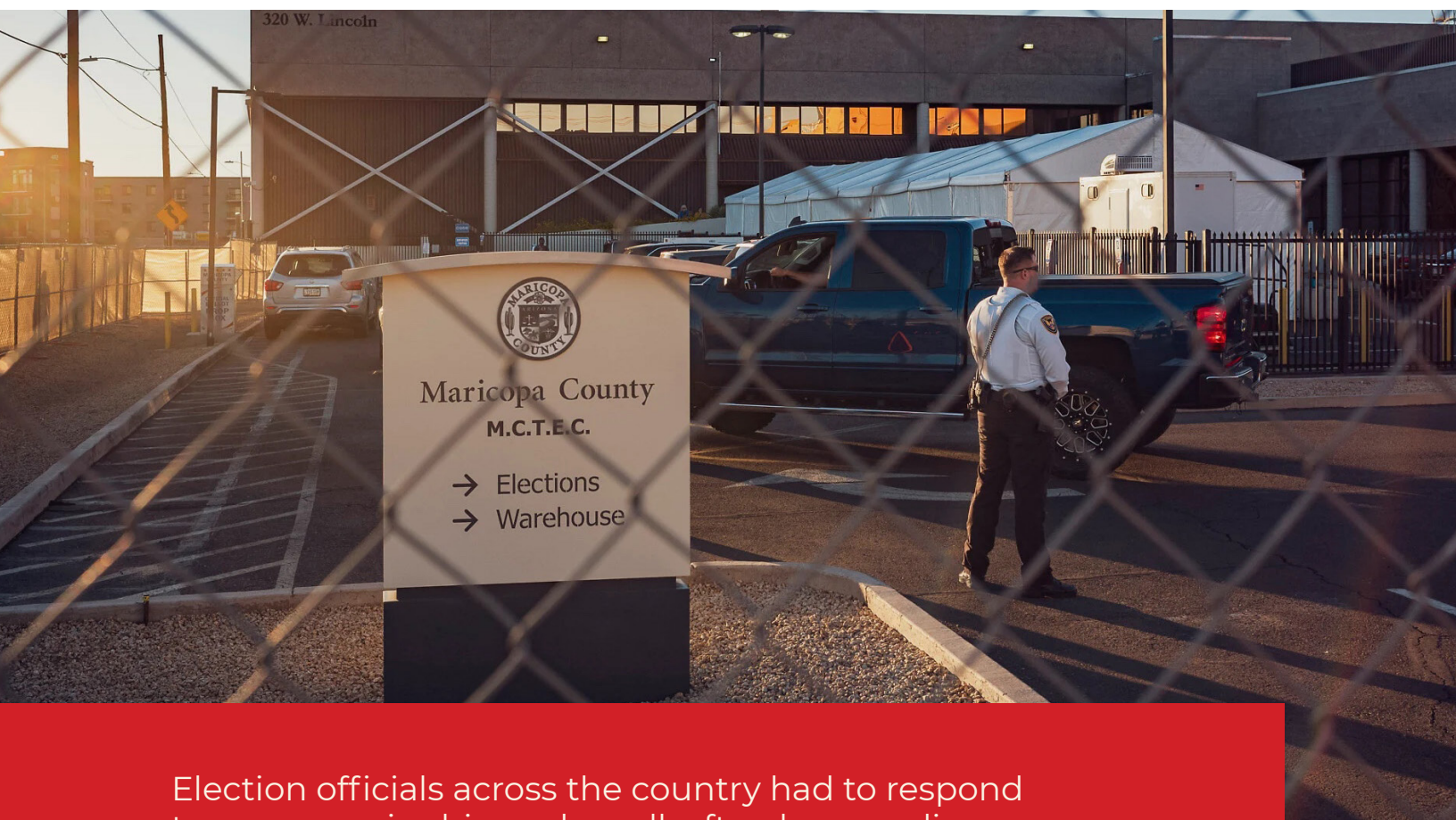


EMERGENCY COSTS IN THE 2024 ELECTION

LOCAL ELECTION DEPARTMENTS NEED FUNDING TO
PREPARE FOR THE PREDICTABLY UNPREDICTABLE
TO SECURE OUR ELECTIONS



Election officials across the country had to respond to emergencies big and small, often by spending unallocated funds.



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INTRODUCTION

The 2024 presidential election was, overall, an example of effective election administration. Voters turned out in high numbers, with more opting to cast their ballot early or by mail than any election before 2020. Improvements in ballot processing equipment and processes helped some states report their results earlier and brought more transparency to the election process than ever before. And while many voters had low confidence prior to November 5 that the election would be run well,¹ those numbers at least temporarily rebounded after Election Day.²

At the same time, there were concerning trends. Foreign adversaries including China, Iran and Russia engaged in malign influence campaigns, spreading propaganda and lies about our election process. Bomb threats were made against more than 100 elections offices and polling places across eight states on and after Election Day, many of which originated from Russian email domains.

But one of the biggest themes of 2024 for election officials was the need to respond to emergencies big and small, often by spending unallocated funds. Based on 105 news reports across 39 states, **we estimate that emergency spending reached \$33 million** in the period leading up and immediately following the presidential election.

This number is almost certainly an underestimate, as 105 reports come nowhere close to covering all of the 10,000 election jurisdictions across the country.³

We project another \$160 million in imminent costs that elections offices will need to take on for recovery and restoration from Hurricanes Helene and Milton, as well as upgrades needed to increase the security of ballot drop boxes.

Because local election budgets are so lean, election administrators have to prioritize planning for the most critical functions of their office and the most likely scenarios.

Type of Infrastructure Cost	Estimated Cost	States with Reported Costs
TOTAL COSTS	\$33,000,000	39
Ballot reprints	\$940,000	16
Staff & equipment capacity overload	\$1,700,000	12
Broken equipment	\$3,900,000	17
Communications	\$5,800,000	10
Law enforcement & security	\$7,000,000	9
Litigation and policy changes	\$4,700,000	8
Polling place changes	\$3,500,000	10
NC Hurricane Helene appropriations	\$5,000,000	1

1 [“Most voters are confident that elections will be run well, but more skepticism among Trump than Harris supporters,”](#) Pew Research Center; October 23, 2024.

2 [“Voters Broadly Positive About How Elections Were Conducted, in Sharp Contrast to 2020,”](#) Pew Research Center; December 4, 2024.

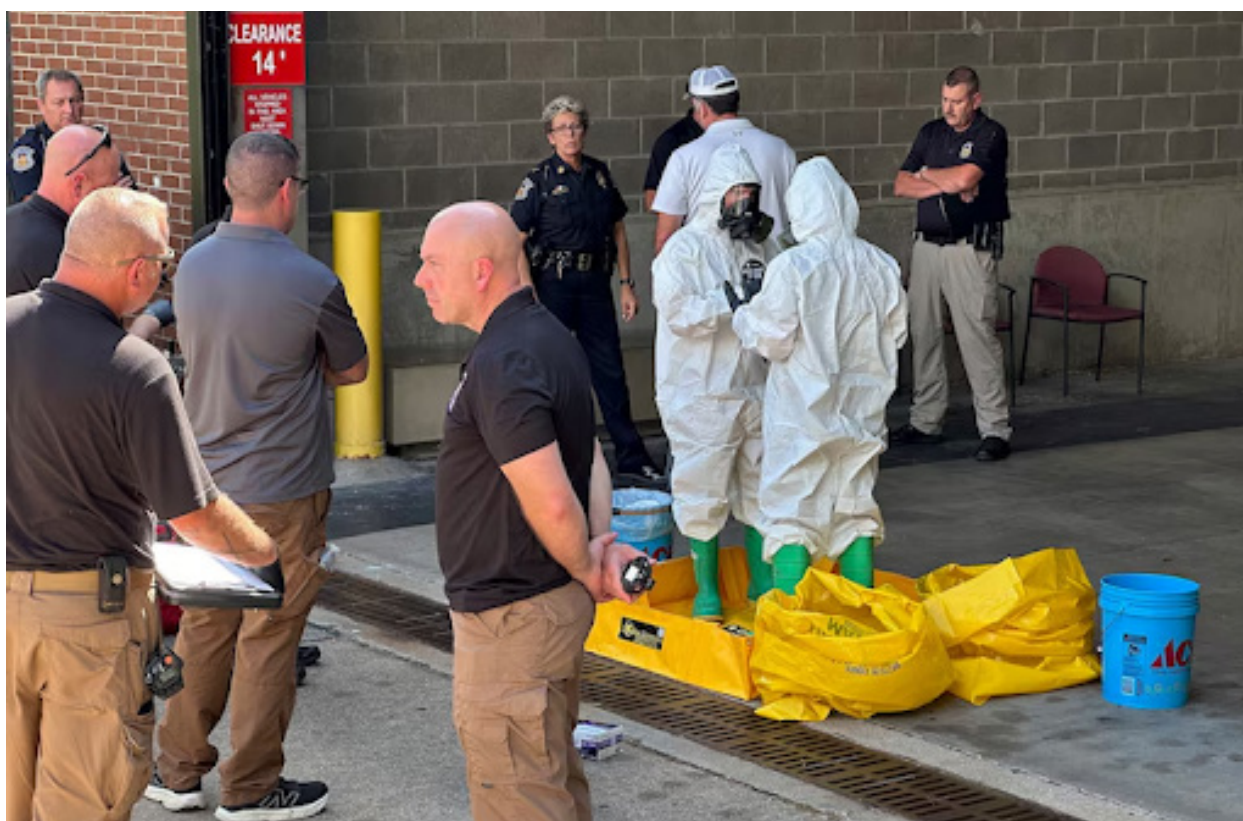
3 [“Who is in charge of elections in my state?,”](#) United States Election Assistance Commission. October 26, 2022.

That leaves them without any cushion built into their budgets to respond to the unexpected. So when local election officials face any number of curveballs—including but not limited to unexpectedly high early turnout, aging machine breakdowns, natural disasters, interference from foreign entities, attacks on election infrastructure, litigation and last minute policy changes—they have to scramble. Those very real scenarios not only come with very real costs, but lead to delays and disruptions to voting.

What is worse is that these disruptions can provide further opportunities for foreign adversaries to spread falsities that undermine the integrity of our elections or introduce

vulnerabilities to physical attacks against voters and administrators alike.

While county governments were able to step in to solve emergencies in the 2024 election, many of the issues that occurred were avoidable with sufficient investment. Truly secure elections allow administrators to plan ahead and mitigate challenges, rather than needing to react and allocate emergency funds during the voting period. Reliable and sustainable public funding for elections can improve the voter experience, reduce security vulnerabilities, improve public access to information and transparency and ultimately restore public trust in our elections.



BACKGROUND

ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE IS CHRONICALLY UNDERFUNDED

Investing in secure, reliable elections is essential to preserving and protecting our democracy for all Americans. Recognizing the importance and vulnerability of our nation's election systems, the Department of Homeland Security designated election infrastructure as critical infrastructure in 2017.

Unfortunately, that designation has not come with sufficient financial support, leaving American election infrastructure woefully underfunded.

According to a study from MIT,⁴ public spending on election services ranks near the bottom of public services funding, about the same as what local governments spend on parking facilities. And the need is growing:

An analysis of election infrastructure needs across the nation revealed that more than \$50 billion is needed over the next decade to fully modernize our systems and protect against emerging threats.⁵

County and state budgets alone cannot fully meet growing election security expenditures, nor should they have to.⁶ That has led

local election officials to repeatedly call on Congress to provide robust and consistent funding to meet growing security and infrastructure expenses.^{7,8,9} Secretaries of state from across the political spectrum have also advocated for a federal investment in securing election processes to match the federal mandates election officials must fulfill.^{10,11}

Congress has long been aware of the inadequacy of federal investment in election security. After nearly a decade of essentially no federal funding, Congress stepped up in 2018 (\$380 million) and 2020 (\$425 million), with another \$400 million in 2020 distributed through the CARES Act.¹² Those grants helped election officials begin addressing years of delayed upgrades, make improvements in cybersecurity protections and adapt to voting changes during the peak of the COVID pandemic.

But as the threats and costs continued to increase, federal support slowed, and in some years stopped altogether.¹³ In 2019 and 2021, Congress zeroed out funding for election security operations. In both 2022 and 2023 Congress provided \$75 million. In 2024 that number dropped to just \$55 million.¹⁴

A 2022 report by the House Committee on Oversight and Reform concluded: "Congress

4 Claire DeSoi, "[Lessons learned from the 2020 election](#)," MIT Election Data and Science Lab and American Enterprise Institute; September 23, 2021.

5 "[50-States-Of-Need](#)," Election Infrastructure Initiative; accessed Fall 2024.

6 "[The State of Election Funding in 2024](#)," Institute for Responsive Government; August 13, 2024.

7 "[EII Sends Letter from 60+ Local Election Officials, 30+ Nonprofits, and Faith Leaders Calling for 400M in FY25 Election Infrastructure Funding](#)," Election Infrastructure Initiative; May 31, 2024.

8 Aaron Ockerman, "[I work with Ohio election workers. Free and fair elections are at risk without investment](#)," The Columbus Dispatch; July 31, 2024.

9 Silvan, Mellerio, "[NACo sends letter to House and Senate Appropriations Committee leadership urging continued election security grants funding for Fiscal Year 2024](#)," National Association of Counties; April 14, 2024.

10 John Thurston, "[Arkansas election integrity solid, but more federal funding needed for protection](#)," Talk Business & Politics; May 26, 2024.

11 Carol Aichele, "[Election security is national security — Congress should treat it that way](#)," Broad + Liberty; July 29, 2024.

12 Karen L. Shanton, "[Election Administration: Federal Grant Funding for States and Localities](#)," Congressional Research Service; May 8, 2023.

13 Karen L. Shanton, "[Election Administration: Overview of FY2024 Financial Services and General Government \(FSGG\) Appropriations](#)," Congressional Research Service; September 8, 2023.

14 [FY24 Congressional Budget Preserves Funding for Local Election Departments](#)," Election Infrastructure Initiative; March 21, 2024.

should pass legislation to address the funding gap for election jurisdictions across the country and to counter threats to election officials. Enacting regular, yearly appropriations for election funding will allow election officials to invest in physical and cyber security and modernize election equipment.”¹⁵ Professor Zachary Mohr, an expert in election funding, told Congress in early 2024: “The sad truth is that local financing underfunds election administration. What is needed is regular, equitable and meaningful funding for elections.”¹⁶

This chronic underfunding makes dealing with the emergencies that come up in the course of administering each election—from foreign interference and attacks on election infrastructure to natural disasters to printing and equipment problems—that much more difficult.

15 [“Exhausting and Dangerous”: The Dire Problem of Election Misinformation and Disinformation](#),” Committee on Oversight and Reform U.S. House of Representatives; August 11, 2022.

16 [“Statement of Zachary Mohr, Ph.D.”](#), Committee on House Administration; February 7, 2024.

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

One of the most concerning storylines of the 2024 election was the multiple, systematic attempts by foreign adversaries including China, Iran, and Russia to interfere with the democratic process.

In some cases, threats of violence interrupted the election process—at least 67 bomb threats¹⁷ to polling stations were made in dozens of counties¹⁸ across 7 states,¹⁹ many of which originated from Russian email domains.²⁰

In others, foreign adversaries turned to malign influence campaigns and cyber attacks against localities. Lies and propaganda targeting both the election process and candidate campaigns were allegedly disseminated by Chinese bots²¹ and Russian troll farms.²² Iran successfully hacked the Trump campaign, and reportedly targeted the Harris campaign as well. And while there is no evidence to show it was politically motivated, the Russia-based ransomware group Ransomhub reportedly extracted 47 gigabytes of data—which could include ballot data and voter records as far back as 2008—during a July hack of **Jefferson County, Kentucky**.²³

Election officials and law enforcement worked tirelessly to minimize the impact of each of these attacks. But that work—whether it took the shape of bomb sweeps and additional security or public messaging campaigns to address falsities—takes time

and money.

BOMB THREATS REQUIRE LAW ENFORCEMENT INTERVENTION, EXTENDED POLLING HOURS

Sometimes the mere threat of violence is enough to disrupt the elections process. Such was the case with the dozens of bomb threats levied against polling places in **at least 25 counties across Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin**.²⁴ Elections offices in more than half of Minnesota counties also received bomb



*The **Santa Clara County** Sheriff's office briefs reporters at the Registrar of Voters. Elections jurisdictions across the country have prioritized building relationships with law enforcement to prepare for potential interference or attacks. [Santa Clara County Office of the Sheriff](#).*

¹⁷ Collier, Kingkade, Winter, "[Election Day bomb threats overwhelmingly targeted Democrat-leaning counties](#)," NBC News; November 8, 2024.

¹⁸ Collier, Kingkade, Winter, "[Election Day bomb threats overwhelmingly targeted Democrat-leaning counties](#)," NBC News; November 8, 2024.

¹⁹ Fausset, Levenson, Vigdor, "[Bomb Threats Hit Several States, but None Are Found Credible](#)," New York Times; November 5, 2024.

²⁰ "[FBI Statement on Bomb Threats to Polling Locations](#)," Federal Bureau of Investigations; November 5, 2024.

²¹ Steven Lee Myers, "[Bots Linked to China Target Republican House and Senate Candidates, Microsoft Says](#)," New York Times; October 23, 2024.

²² "[Georgia's top election official warns of fake online video: 'Likely foreign interference'](#)," ABC News; October 31, 2024.

²³ Sophia Fox-Sowell, "[Data stolen in Jefferson County, Kentucky, cyberattack includes election info, employee reviews](#)," StateScoop; August 15, 2024.

²⁴ Meredith Moran, "[Counties overcome challenges on Election Day](#)," National Association of Counties; November 18, 2024.

threats after election day as they were tabulating the vote.²⁵

These threats—many of which appeared to originate from Russian email domains²⁶—represent a new way that foreign adversaries are attempting to interfere with our democratic process. Bomb threats are particularly pernicious because they require immediate response regardless of how credible they might be. In addition to interrupting the voting process, responding required intervention from local law enforcement and in some cases resulted in the need to extend polling hours.

Those responses cost money.

Fulton County, Georgia, a top target of this tactic, stationed a police officer at each of the county's 177 polling locations²⁷ at an estimated cost of \$73,000. The force handled 32 reports throughout the day with only five evacuations.

Law enforcement officers across the country were forced to take similar measures to address at least 67 election day bomb threats. Election offices in **Minnesota** were on watch even longer, with more than half of the state's 87 counties receiving the warnings in the week after the election. **We estimate that conducting the resulting bomb sweeps cost the affected counties at least \$13,000.**

Chilling as these events might be, collaboration between local law enforcement and election officials across the country minimized their impact on Americans' ability to exercise their right to vote. Ensuring that election officials have the resources they need to prepare for and respond to similar or novel threats in the future is necessary to keeping our elections safe and secure.

ADDRESSING FOREIGN DECEPTION CAMPAIGNS FALLS TO ELECTIONS OFFICIALS

The 2024 general election was rife with examples of foreign entities attempting to deceive American voters. Aided in part by artificial intelligence and the ability to spread lies and propaganda quickly through social media,²⁸ such efforts have become cheaper and increasingly ubiquitous.

The vital work of inoculating against and responding to falsities about the democratic process has become yet another responsibility for elections administrators to own. And while staff across the country in jurisdictions large and small stepped up to the plate, elections offices had to invest significant time and money in informing the public of the truth about the process.

No voter should be hearing about our election process from a foreign government before they are hearing from their own election administrator. That is why many officials ran public information campaigns explaining the process and attempting to inoculate against predictable false claims in the weeks and months leading up to November. The **Illinois State Board of Elections**, for example, used its social media channels to educate voters on the process²⁹ and ran ads on local news stations that urged voters to be wary of information spread by sources other than elections administrators themselves.³⁰

That kind of ad campaign likely cost ISBE \$96,000.

But preemption alone is not enough to maintain public trust in the face of viral election lies—rapid response is also crucial.

25 Riley Moser, "[Election offices in over half of Minnesota counties have received bomb threats since Friday, secretary of state's office says](#)," CBS News; November 14, 2024.

26 "[FBI Statement on Bomb Threats to Polling Locations](#)," Federal Bureau of Investigations; November 5, 2024.

27 "[Georgia Election Updates | Gov. Brian Kemp congratulates Donald Trump](#)," Fox 5 Atlanta; November 6, 2024.

28 Shannon Bond, "[U.S. says Russian bot farm used AI to impersonate Americans](#)," NPR, July 9, 2024

29 "[Illinois State Board of Elections](#)," X, Accessed Fall 2024

30 Arriyonna Allen, "[Illinois officials warn against election misinformation online](#)," Paducah Sun; October 2, 2024.

Election officials in **San Luis Obispo County, California**;³¹ **Troy City, Michigan**;³² **Houston, Texas**;³³ and **Montgomery County, Pennsylvania**³⁴ all had to respond to text campaigns that sent voters inaccurate or misleading information about their registration or voting status. **Contacting voters through robocalls and mailers to assert the facts, a best practice in such a situation, could cost an estimated \$4.5 million across the affected counties.**

The 2024 general election also saw a number of fake or false videos claiming to demonstrate widespread voter fraud or other election irregularities. One viral video, a hoax likely produced by Russian troll farms, showed two people claiming to be from Haiti illegally voting, and required a response from **Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger**.³⁵ Another false video claimed to have testimony from a former aide to **Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes** falsely explaining state leaders' plans to rig the election for Vice President Harris. That video came from a group founded by a Russian oligarch that has previously carried out malign influence operations, according to U.S. and European intelligence sources.³⁶

There were surely many more examples of similar activity which could have been spread by either foreign adversaries or other nefarious groups. Responding rapidly and comprehensively often includes holding press conferences, giving interviews, and notifying voters directly.

While a few jurisdictions have the resources to employ communications professionals to do this work, budget restrictions mean that many have to juggle it alongside their other responsibilities. Fully funding election

infrastructure would provide jurisdictions with the ability to bring on staff with the right skillset to handle these situations without taking away capacity from the fundamental work of conducting an election.

EQUIPMENT MALFUNCTIONS MAY PROVIDE FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

In its February 2024 annual threat assessment, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence presciently warned that China, Russia, and Iran might use their growing and increasingly sophisticated malign influence operations to impact U.S. elections.³⁷

That prediction proved accurate. We should prepare for our adversaries to continue to look for vulnerabilities through which they can attempt to undermine our democratic process.

Aging and broken equipment represent one such vulnerability. Simply put, any malfunction in technology or perceived hiccup in the election process can provide a hook that can be used to drive false claims and sow doubt in the legitimacy of the election results.

31 Ania Keenan, "[SLO County voters are getting mysterious texts about their registration. What's going on?](#)," The Tribune; August 5, 2024.

32 Jenna Prestininzi, "[Troy clerk's office urges residents to beware following spam ballot texts](#)," Detroit Free Press; October 8, 2024.

33 Jen Rice, "[Text Message Misleading](#)," Houston Chronicle; October 22, 2024.

34 Emily Neil, "[A phishing scam is targeting some Pa. voters. Here's what to know](#)," WHYY PBS; August 28, 2024.

35 Jason Morris, Paul P. Murphy, and Sean Lyngaas, "[Raffensperger says viral video of alleged voting fraud 'obviously fake' and likely foreign meddling in Georgia's elections](#)," CNN News; November 1, 2024.

36 Alexis Dominiguez, "[Arizona political officials address misinformation ahead of Election Day](#)," Arizona Family; November 4, 2024.

37 "[Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community](#)," Office of the Director of National Intelligence; February 5, 2024.

LOW PUBLIC TRUST IN ELECTIONS ADMINISTRATION PROVIDES FERTILE GROUND FOR MALIGN INFLUENCE

Leading up to the 2024 general election, confidence in election administration was concerningly low. According to the Pew Research Center, 27% of registered voters surveyed—including 42% of Pres. Trump’s supporters—believed that the election would be administered “not too well” or “not well at all.”³⁸

Local officials ran an effective election in 2024, and public trust at least temporarily rebounded in the weeks after the election was called.³⁹ But that was not before multiple cases in which issues with technology led to the rapid online spread of false claims about widespread voter fraud.^{40 41}

Regardless of how quick or effective an elections office is in responding to these claims, a viral post can reach thousands or millions of Americans that will never see the correction.

These examples could serve as a playbook for future efforts by foreign actors to disrupt our elections process and undermine trust in the results. Providing elections offices with the resources they need to properly equip their operation is an important step to mitigate that risk.

That is not to say that new equipment alone will completely solve the problem: there will inevitably be some malfunctions. But by ensuring that towns and counties have the resources to replace the most error-prone, older equipment, we can reduce the number of opportunities that malicious actors in other countries have to gain a foothold with false statements that undermine the will and trust of the American people.

FULLY FUNDING ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE IS CRUCIAL TO RESILIENCE AGAINST THREATS

In the face of cyber attacks, foreign propaganda, and bomb threats, characteristically enterprising officials ran a safe, secure, and relatively smooth election in 2024.

But chronic underfunding of elections infrastructure meant those officials had to triage their response to these attempts to undermine our democratic system. That includes finding skilled workers not on payroll because elections offices can’t afford them, pulling employees from other areas of government off of their critical functions, and paying overtime.

And responding to issues is almost always more costly than preventing them—many responses involve one-time costs that don’t strengthen our system’s resilience for the long term.

Ensuring that our elections are safe, secure, and reliable in the face of threats from foreign adversaries and anti-democratic actors is of the utmost importance. Doing so will require updating old equipment, hiring and training necessary staff, increasing transparency in the system, and proactively inoculating against potential vectors of foreign deception. Providing local jurisdictions with adequate and consistent funding can do just that, ensuring that they are ready for the next election and beyond.

38 [“Voters’ evaluations of the 2024 election process,”](#) Pew Research Center; December 4, 2024.

39 [“Voters’ evaluations of the 2024 election process,”](#) Pew Research Center; December 4, 2024.

40 Caleb McCullough, [“Ballot scanning errors caused voting delays in one Pennsylvania county, but no evidence of a ‘steal,’”](#) Politifact; November 5, 2024.

41 [“Viral video shows malfunctioning voting machine in Laurel County, Kentucky,”](#) WDRB; October 31, 2024.

ATTACKS ON ELECTION INFRASTRUCTURE

The 2024 general election also saw domestic attacks on election infrastructure and administration, namely fires set to mailboxes and ballot drop boxes in Arizona,⁴² Oregon,⁴³ and Washington.⁴⁴

ELECTIONS OFFICIALS IN OREGON, WASHINGTON RUSHED TO MINIMIZE IMPACT OF BALLOT BOX ATTACKS

Putting out metaphorical fires is just a part of the job for local elections officials across the country. But after an incendiary device damaged hundreds of ballots at a drop box in Vancouver, Washington, **County Auditor Greg Kimsey and the Clark County elections office** were left handling the fallout from an actual fire.⁴⁵

"I'm very saddened by this incident," Kimsey said in a statement. "This action is an attack on American democracy."⁴⁶

Kimsey didn't allow his disappointment to get in the way of taking action. **Clark County elections staff** immediately got to work drying the surviving ballots to identify affected voters so that they could contact them and ensure they had the opportunity to cast a replacement ballot. Within a day, the elections office was able to identify 488 damaged ballots. Most of the affected voters had already requested a replacement; the



*Ballots burned in **Vancouver, Washington** are laid out to dry so that election officials could identify the affected voters.*

[Greg Kimsey.](#)

office mailed ballots to the 143 voters who did not request one before the week was out.⁴⁷ They also planned to email, call or text these voters to notify them of the situation.⁴⁸ **The emergency communications and expedited shipping of ballots cost an estimated \$32,000.**

42 Timm, Mullen, "[Ballots damaged in USPS mailbox fire in Phoenix](#)," NBC News; October 24, 2024.

43 "[Update: Tips Sought in Ballot Box Fires, \\$2,500 Reward Available](#)," Portland Police Bureau; October 30, 2024.

44 Berry, Bell, "[Hundreds of ballots possibly burned after Vancouver ballot box arson: FBI investigating](#)," KATU2 ABC; October 29, 2024.

45 "[About 475 damaged ballots retrieved from burned drop box in Washington state, auditor says](#)," AP News; October 30, 2024.

46 [Updated: Clark County Auditor statement regarding ballots destroyed in ballot box](#)," Clark County Auditor, Washington; October 28, 2024.

47 [Updated: Clark County Auditor statement regarding ballots destroyed in ballot box](#)," Clark County Auditor, Washington; October 28, 2024.

48 Hubbard, Sganga, "[What to know after ballot box fires in Washington state and Oregon](#)," CBS News; October 30, 2024.

Six ballots were unidentifiable, and more could have been completely destroyed. “I don’t know how many exactly, but I suspect there were because there was a fair amount of ash at the bottom of the ballot drop box,” Kimsey told *CBS News*.⁴⁹

In addition to immediate response, **Clark County elections officials** worked to prevent any further attacks. They assigned staff to observe each of the county’s 22 drop boxes 24 hours a day alongside increased law enforcement presence,⁵⁰ **costing the county roughly \$134,000.**⁵¹ Similar treatment for Washington state’s remaining 523 drop boxes⁵² would cost approximately **\$3.2 million more.**

The **Clark County elections office** also announced plans to increase the number of pick ups per day,⁵³ including more in the evening to minimize the number of ballots in drop boxes overnight, when similar attacks are considered most likely to occur.⁵⁴ **Assuming the county added three pick ups per day over seven days leading up to the election, the change would cost Clark County an estimated \$9,000. Adding pick ups across the state given the at-large status of the attacker would cost an estimated \$220,000 statewide.**

Thanks to the work of the **Clark County election office**, the public was informed of the situation, no repeat attacks occurred, and voters were not disenfranchised. **The cost of responding to this emergency, not including overtime involved in recovering ballots, totaled an estimated \$180,000 for the County. Statewide precautions would have added an additional \$3.4 million.**

FIRE SUPPRESSION SYSTEMS CAN HELP MINIMIZE IMPACT OF SIMILAR ATTACKS

Just across the Columbia River and the state line from Vancouver, a similar, reportedly linked attack was carried out against a **Portland, Oregon** ballot drop box. Only three of more than 400 ballots were damaged thanks to the box’s fire suppression system.⁵⁵ That system significantly reduced the need for the **Multnomah County elections office** to invest the staff time and resources in salvaging ballots, contacting affected voters, and mailing out replacement ballots.

Ballot drop box fire suppressants are an important and worthwhile investment to ensure that Americans’ voices are heard, especially given increasing adoption of absentee voting. That remains true even though such systems occasionally fail, as was the case with the Vancouver box’s fire suppressant.

Connecticut recognized this fact and took action in response to news of the Portland and Vancouver ballot box attacks. The state sent all of its towns and cities fire suppression canisters, which burst open and drop a powder to extinguish flames when exposed to heat.⁵⁶ Installing the canisters in each of the state’s 200 drop boxes cost an estimated \$12,000 in materials and labor. **Based upon publicly available data and best practices on ballot drop boxes, replicating this effort across the country could cost \$490,000.**

49 Hubbard, Sganga, “[What to know after ballot box fires in Washington state and Oregon](#),” *CBS News*; October 30, 2024.

50 “[Updated: Clark County Auditor statement regarding ballots destroyed in ballot box](#),” *Clark County Auditor*, Washington; October 28, 2024.

51 Paul Gronke, “[Explainer & Lessons Learned From the Ballot Drop Box Fires in Multnomah County, Oregon and Clark County, Washington](#),” *EVIC News*; October 30, 2024.

52 “[Drop Box and Voting Center Locations](#),” *Washington Secretary of State*; Accessed Fall 2024.

53 Kaia Hubbard and Nicole Sganga, “[What to know after ballot box fires in Washington state and Oregon](#),” *CBS News*; October 30, 2024.

54 Dani Anguiano, “[Hundreds of damaged ballots saved following fire at drop box in Washington](#),” *The Guardian*; October 30, 2024.

55 Chris Boyette, “[Police are searching for the person who set ballot boxes on fire in Washington and Oregon. Here’s what we know](#),” *CNN News*; October 30, 2024.

56 Toni Aiello, “[Connecticut safeguards ballot drop boxes with fire suppression devices](#),” *CBS News*; November 1, 2024.

Connecticut's solution was an innovative and worthwhile stopgap with so little time before the election. But there is no guarantee that this approach would work for every drop box. Additionally, knowing that the individual is still at large and that similar attacks could destroy many ballots, voters deserve better than a bubblegum-and-paperclip solution. **To upgrade all eligible elections offices' drop boxes to the highest security would take an estimated investment of roughly \$48 million.**

BALLOT DELAYS & REPRINTS

Recent elections have seen an explosion in absentee and early in-person voting. That trend continued in 2024. At least 88.4 million⁵⁷ of the more than 155 million ballots⁵⁸ cast in the 2024 presidential election, or 56.9% of all votes, were submitted before election day, with strong participation across party affiliation.⁵⁹ While 56.9% is not as high as the rates during the pandemic-impacted 2020 election (69.2%), it represents a significant jump from 2016 (38.8%) and 2012 (31.8%).⁶⁰

The shift toward early and mail-in voting, though popular among Americans, has added additional pressures and costs for elections administrators.

Cobb County, Georgia, experienced this first-hand when it received a surge of requests for absentee ballots ahead of its state's October 25 deadline. That surge, combined with a broken ballot printer and an influx of calls from voters that pulled staff from their work processing applications, put **Cobb County's election office** behind the eight ball. They were not going to be able to get absentee ballots to all the last-minute requestees within the three days required by state law.⁶¹

Nonetheless, the **Cobb County election office** was committed to getting absentee ballots to the voters who legally requested them as soon as possible. That effort was all the more important given that Georgia law



Printed ballots are staged ahead of the 2020 election at Renbeck Election Services site in Phoenix, AZ. The company oversaw production of over 10 million ballots that year. [NPR](#)

57 [“Early Voting”](#), NBC News, Accessed Fall 2024

58 [“2024 National Popular Vote Tracker”](#), Cook Political Report, Access Fall 2024

59 [“Early Voting”](#), NBC News, Accessed Fall 2024

60 [“Early Voting”](#), NBC News, Accessed Fall 2024

61 Thad Moore, [“Cobb County spent more than \\$200,000 to deliver tardy absentee ballots to voters”](#), The Atlantic Journal-Constitution, November 27, 2024

also requires mail-in ballots to be received by 7 pm on Election Day to be tabulated. That meant expediting shipment of the ballot, both to and from voters.

Cobb County normally pays roughly \$0.97 to mail a voter an absentee ballot. But overnighting mail is significantly more expensive. **Due to the time-crunch, that cost skyrocketed to approximately \$63 per ballot,⁶² costing the county an estimated \$220,000 dollars.**

Jurisdictions will always need to spend money to abide by state and federal voting laws. That is what it takes to conduct reliable elections where all Americans can ensure their vote is counted and heard. However, when overwhelmed counties face situations similar to the one that played out in Cobb County, it is evident that spending resources on short-term patches fails to deliver the same impact as an investment that will make future elections secure, reliable and accessible for many cycles to come.

To make the switch to investments with long-term benefits, election offices need consistent, adequate funding that allows them to plan and execute strategic programs both in election and non-election years. That funding is what will allow them to update their processes and equipment, bring on necessary staff, and take other measures to ensure that they are prepared for a flood of last-minute requests or other unexpected situations.

Cobb County Election Director Tate Fall acknowledged this fact in taking responsibility for what happened in 2024. She told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that she aims to “completely rebuild our process to ensure this doesn’t happen again.” One element of that rebuild, she suggested, could involve assembling a call center for future elections to ensure that staff are not pulled away from their work to process absentee

ballot applications—particularly around the deadline.⁶³ **That could cost the county an estimated \$17,000. Replacing the broken printer would cost an estimated \$10,000 more.**

The approximately \$27,000 needed to make those changes represents a fraction of the estimated \$220,000 spent expediting printing and shipping absentee ballots. Investing ahead of time would have saved the county and its taxpayers a significant amount of money.

On top of the savings, such investments yield results that go far beyond the dollars and cents. They improve voters’ experience of the process by ensuring that they have their ballots on time and that they have trained help to turn to when they have questions. At a time when voters’ trust in the election process is low, working to ensure that they have a seamless experience casting their ballots is critical to restoring that trust and therefore maintaining integrity in our system.

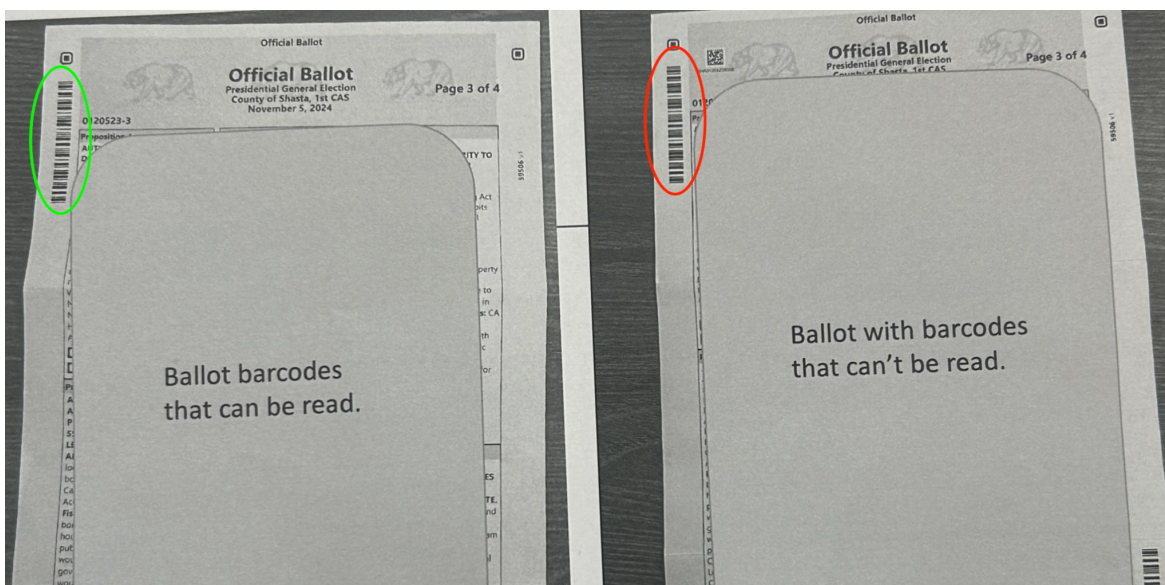
REPRINTING BALLOTS IS AN UNFORTUNATE AND EXPENSIVE REALITY OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

While not all counties can relate to Cobb County’s last-minute rush of absentee ballot requests, printing—and reprinting—issues are all too common. Those issues typically stem from three sources: vendor mistakes, last-minute candidate changes, and human error.

With many jurisdictions serving hundreds of thousands of voters, the most efficient way to print ballots is to contract with a vendor. Errors made by vendors can mean that those ballots are incorrect before election staff have a chance to see them.

62 “[Priority Mail Express Information](#)”, USPS, Accessed Fall 2024

63 Thad Moore, “[Cobb County spent more than \\$200,000 to deliver tardy absentee ballots to voters](#)”, The Atlantic Journal-Constitution, November 27, 2024



***Shasta County** officials provided a handout demonstrating how ink overspray affected some of their ballots. While difficult to see with the naked eye, the difference had a serious impact on ballot processing for the counties.*
[*Shasta Scout.*](#)

In **St. Clair County, Alabama**, a printing vendor mistakenly left proposed statewide and local amendments off of 28,800 ballots.⁶⁴ **Reprinting those ballots would cost an estimated \$55,000.**

An “ink overspray” issue made the bar codes on some ballots in **California’s Nevada⁶⁵ and Shasta⁶⁶ Counties** unreadable by tabulation machines, requiring staff to go through additional processing to count the vote.

Sometimes, election administration challenges can be traced back to human error. That was the case in **Carson City, Nevada**, where election officials mistakenly identified U.S. House candidate Lynn Chapman as a Democrat rather than a member of the Independent American Party on its original ballots.⁶⁷ **Reprinting and mailing ballots likely cost approximately \$140,000.**

Finally, changes entirely outside of the printing process can still create the need for ballot reprints. One high-profile example was the need for **North Carolina** jurisdictions to reprint ballots after the State Supreme Court ruled that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.’s name needed to be removed from ballots in the state following his exit from the presidential race. **Replacing the printed forms likely cost the state \$250,000.**

The need to reprint some ballots will likely plague future election cycles. There will always be human error, whether that occurs by elections officials or their vendors. We will continue to see candidates drop out of, or get disqualified from, contests after forms have been inked.

64 Riley Conlon, “[St Clair County voters deal with long lines, confusion over misprinted ballots](#)”, WVTM News, November 5, 2024

65 Kayla Moeller, “[Printing error affects Nevada County vote-by-mail ballots](#)”, CBS New, October 24, 2024

66 Annelise Pierce, “[‘Ink Overspray’ Issue Prompts Change to Ballot Processing Procedure, Shasta Elections Official Announces](#)”, Shasta Scout, October 30, 2024

67 Mark Robison, “[Carson City voters get ballots with mistake. Replacements to be sent next week.](#)”, Reno Gazette Journal, October 8, 2024

At the same time, fully funding elections departments can help to reduce the need for costly reprints and bring down overall printing costs.

Too often, paper-thin budgets require jurisdictions to choose the printing vendor that submits the lowest bid regardless of that vendor's track record. Staffing is also an important consideration; when someone is working too fast or multitasking, they are more likely to make mistakes.

Robust funding would allow elections offices to select high-quality vendors. It would also allow them to create an environment where staff can devote their full attention to the task at hand while working within a process that includes multiple built-in accuracy check points. **Such investments would yield efficiencies and additional benefits that the \$940,000 spent on ballot reprints in 2024 did not produce.**

NATURAL DISASTERS FORCE CHANGES ON ELECTIONS OFFICIALS, VOTERS

Just days before the 2012 presidential election, Superstorm Sandy struck the East Coast. The severity and unexpected nature of the disaster sent a message to election officials in New Jersey and beyond. In the immediate aftermath⁶⁸—and ever since—state and local election officials have worked to better coordinate preparations for and responses to natural disasters.

But no amount of preparation by county and municipal officials can turn the path of a hurricane, contain rainstorms, or extinguish wildfires. Nor does contingency planning alone provide election offices with the resources to defend against such disasters or

navigate wider destruction of life and property. Ensuring that American elections remain safe, secure, and accessible as the extent and cost of natural disasters continue to increase will require a robust and sustained investment of public dollars in the infrastructure of our democracy.

HURRICANES HELENE, MILTON CUT SWATHES OF DESTRUCTION IN FLORIDA

Natural disasters have predictably unpredictable effects on election administration. Most notably, **election officials in Florida** are well



*Victory Baptist Church, a temporary polling place in **Tampa, Florida** during the 2024 presidential election, had plastic covered windows due to damage from Hurricanes Helene & Milton. [Crist](#).*

68 “[State Laws & Practices for the Emergency Management of Elections](#)”, National Association of Secretaries of State, Accessed Fall 2024

aware that hurricanes will strike the state, but have no way of knowing when or where, and have limited capacities to guard against all the damage that a massive storm can cause.

Hurricane Helene interfered with **Florida's** final days of voter registration, while also damaging absentee ballots and mail boxes. Less than three weeks later, Hurricane Milton's record-breaking storm surge flooded polling locations, forcing polling place closures and consolidations during early voting and on election day.

In **Manatee County** alone, there were five polling locations shuttered by the storm.⁶⁹ Voters frequently struggled to find the correct voting location after their regular polling places were damaged or destroyed, sometimes necessitating costly detours or trips to multiple incorrect locations as incorrect information about where to vote filtered through communities.⁷⁰

Election officials did their best with limited resources to get the word out about changes forced by the storms. In **Sarasota County**, where seven polling places had to be moved, the supervisor of elections mailed out approximately 25,000 polling place change notices to voters.⁷¹ **Doing so cost an estimated \$25,000. If other hurricane-affected counties in Florida had followed suit, it would have cost those counties an additional \$160,000.**

NORTH CAROLINA BEARS THE BRUNT OF HURRICANE HELENE

The effects of Hurricane Helene on states farther up the eastern seaboard were less predictable and far more devastating. In North Carolina in particular, Helene caused unprecedented devastation far inland, washing out entire towns as well as roads,



The North Fork Voting House in Creston, North Carolina was destroyed by Hurricane Helene. "It was not a beautiful place. It was kind of one of those funny little places that you celebrate and love," Patricia Beaver, a nearby resident told ABC News. [Ashe County Board of Elections via ABC News](#).

69 Jesse Mendoza, "[More than 100,000 Manatee County voters have cast ballots in the general election](#)", Sarasota Herald-Tribune, October 28, 2024

70 Teirstein, Horn-Muller, Myers, "[What Election Day looked like for voters in hurricane-battered communities across Florida and North Carolina](#)", Crist, November 5, 2024

71 "[Sarasota County: Check to see if your Election Day polling location has changed](#)", ABC7, October 31, 2024

bridges, and electrical infrastructure. As local officials worked with federal and state partners to save lives and restore basic services, they were also scrambling to reestablish voting locations.

In many counties in the state's mountainous west, the buildings intended to house early voting sites had been entirely destroyed.⁷² In others, civic buildings like community centers and fire stations that were regularly used for early or election day voting were being used as crisis shelters or search and rescue staging areas.⁷³

"Some sites have been damaged. Some are being used as shelters. Some are completely isolated," **Henderson County Elections Specialist Aaron Troutman** told ABC News.⁷⁴

"There are some of them that don't even exist anymore," said Yancey County Election Director Mary Beth Tipton.⁷⁵

According to **Hillsborough County Elections Supervisor Craig Latimer**, "One of them had five feet of water in it."⁷⁶

Finding voting sites that were not too damaged, had sufficient space to set up voting equipment, and had adequate power to run



Voters cast their ballots on Election Day, 2024 in a **Black Mountain, North Carolina** temporary voting site. Hurricane Helene rendered many polling places unusable, requiring election officials to find other options. [Reuters](#).

72 Charlabous, Levine, Romero, "[After dual hurricanes, election officials confront damaged polling places, displaced voters.](#)" ABC News; October 16, 2024.

73 Makiya Seminera, "[A hurricane's historic destruction hasn't stopped North Carolina election workers and voters.](#)" AP News; October 23, 2024.

74 Charlabous, Levine, Romero, "[After dual hurricanes, election officials confront damaged polling places, displaced voters.](#)" ABC News; October 16, 2024.

75 Charlabous, Levine, Romero, "[After dual hurricanes, election officials confront damaged polling places, displaced voters.](#)" ABC News; October 16, 2024.

76 Charlabous, Levine, Romero, "[After dual hurricanes, election officials confront damaged polling places, displaced voters.](#)" ABC News; October 16, 2024.

that equipment was a difficult task. In addition, with bridges and roads out throughout the region, election officials struggled to access more rural populations, and election workers struggled to reach their work sites. Despite the devastation, only four of the 80 early voting sites in the affected region were unable to open, though 14 election day polling places in **Buncombe County**, one of the hardest hit areas, were moved to alternative locations.⁷⁷ **The cost of making those moves and notifying the public is estimated at \$83,000.**

In response to the damage caused by Hurricane Helene, the **North Carolina state legislature allocated \$5 million in emergency funding** to “hire temporary elections staff, deploy mobile voting units, equipment and supplies, train new poll workers or precinct officials, communicate with voters through mailed notices of election changes, re-print absentee ballots, buy emergency communications systems for counties and ensure access to technology and internet connectivity.”⁷⁸

While this allocation was a critical investment to get elections back online, the need likely far outstrips that figure. Simply setting up **three additional early voting sites in Henderson and McDowell counties, as was required by an additional hurricane response measure, could have cost upwards of \$2.1 million dollars.**⁷⁹

Relocating other polling places, activating emergency plans and allocating reserve equipment, increasing and replacing staff, reprinting and re-mailing lost absentee ballots, and providing power to emergency voting sites were all expensive undertakings for the **election officials of North Carolina**. And those costs don't begin to address

restoring damaged election infrastructure and increasing the resilience of that which survived.

Based on publicly available data sources and estimates derived from previous disasters, we estimate that the restoration and recovery of election services in counties affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton would cost approximately \$120 million.

ELECTION DAY STORMS IN MISSOURI TOOK LIVES, IMPACTED ADMINISTRATION

Natural disasters do not need to cause billions in damage to damage election infrastructure, threaten voter access, and cause unexpected financial costs to election officials.

A series of devastating storms just before and on election day disrupted voter access to the polls and the ability of election officials to open and operate polling places across the center of the country. The most damage was done in **Missouri**, where 6 to 10 inches of rainfall flooded polling places, washed out roads, and knocked out power.⁸⁰ Tragically, two poll workers in their 70s were killed trying to navigate rising waters early in the morning on election day as they made their way to staff the polls.⁸¹

Floodwaters separated voters from their polling places throughout the day, forcing election officials to scramble to move voting sites, shuffle staff, and activate backup equipment.⁸² In **St. Francois County**, some residents were even advised to evacuate just before election day when a levee threatened to fail.⁸³

77 Iris Seaton, “[What to know on 2024 election in Buncombe County post-Helene: absentee ballots, early voting](#),” Asheville Citizen Times; October 15, 2024.

78 Sarah Michels, “[NC legislators commit \\$5 million to emergency election measures](#),” Carolina Public Press; October 9, 2024.

79 Based on costs to set up mobile voter units in Maui County, HI following the 2023 wildfires in the state

80 Ruberg, Jiménez, “[Flooding in Missouri Kills at Least 5, Including 2 Poll Workers](#),” New York Times; November 5, 2024.

81 Tasset, Jackson, “[Married poll workers drown in flood on way to election site in Missouri](#),” Fox 2 Now; November 5, 2024.

82 Ruberg, Jiménez, “[Flooding in Missouri Kills at Least 5, Including 2 Poll Workers](#),” New York Times; November 5, 2024.

83 Dominic Genetti, “[Missouri voters face challenges heading to polling sites as floods close roads](#),” The Telegraph; November 5, 2024.

Election officials responded by activating emergency plans to deal with each element of the disaster. In north **St. Louis County**, a power outage at the community center hosting one polling place led to the board of elections running the site off of a generator while also directing voters to alternative polling sites.⁸⁴ Just miles away, a polling place in the southeast of the county flooded and was temporarily closed.⁸⁵ Even after voters made it into polling places, election officials faced disruptions as ballots were rendered unreadable for the machine drop boxes by moisture from voters' drenched jackets. Lines built up inside polling places in **St. Charles County** as voters who had already filled out their ballots waited for them to dry.⁸⁶

ELECTIONS OFFICES NEED MORE FUNDING TO RESPOND TO DISASTERS

While election offices had contingency plans in place to handle many of these and other scenarios, they often lacked the resources to construct an in-depth defense against all the varied threats they could face on election day. Moreover, the infrastructural and societal disruptions inherent in a natural disaster, coupled with the time and legal pressures of running an election, consistently left election officials spending money they did not have and leaning on overburdened staff to make things work.

Despite the considerable disruption caused by natural disasters in 2024, election officials rose to the occasion and put in place fixes to ensure voting could continue. Dedicated federal support would ensure future natural disasters do not endanger the security and integrity of elections and or lives of our election officials.

84 Dominic Genetti, "[Missouri voters face challenges heading to polling sites as floods close roads](#)," The Telegraph; November 5, 2024.

85 Smelser, Militzer, "[Flash floods in St. Louis area lead to polling place and road closures](#)," NewsNation; November 5, 2024.

86 Bassler, Krall, "[Wet ballots won't go through voting machines in St. Charles; What Now?](#)," KSDK; November 5, 2024.

POLICY CHANGES AND LEGAL CHALLENGES

LAST MINUTE POLICY CHANGES KEEP LEOS ON THEIR TOES

Talk to a local election official and they'll tell you that their job is, first and foremost, to execute each election according to the governing laws and policies. But policy changes made at the 11th hour—and litigation that delays or changes the implementation of those policies—can require a lot of extra work, and sometimes costs.

The back-and-forth legal rulings around the **North Carolina's State Board of Elections** policy to allow UNC students to use the school-issued mobile One digital identification cards to meet state voter ID laws provides one example.⁸⁷ That policy was put in place late in August 2024, less than two months before the start of early voting on October 17.⁸⁸ Preparing to implement this policy required election officials to educate themselves on the newly accepted digital documents and train their staff on how to comply with the policy.

That, however, was not the end of the story. The change was taken to court, and multiple rulings before Election Day held the policy in a state of limbo. On September 19, a **North Carolina** judge upheld the policy.⁸⁹ That ruling was appealed, and on September 27, overturned, meaning that the once-approved digital forms of identification could not be accepted.⁹⁰

Elections departments in **Wisconsin** also faced a late policy change that required them

to adjust their plans for the general election. A July 2024 ruling by the state Supreme Court reversed an early ruling handed down in 2022 that limited where ballot drop boxes could be placed. The change meant that ballot drop boxes could once again be placed throughout communities rather than only in local elections clerks' offices.⁹¹ Again, election officials in many jurisdictions across the state worked to update their plans and communications with the public, with just months to spare before Election Day.

The months leading up to any election are a busy time for all elections staff. They have to recruit and train poll workers, finalize ballots, prepare polling places, and so much more. The confusion spurred from changing policies and legal guidance only added to the work required of affected elections offices.

WYOMING TEST TRIAL DEMONSTRATES POTENTIAL COSTS OF POLICY CHANGES

Any given change to election policy—particularly those made shortly before voting starts—can be difficult to quantify. More often than not, the costs are disguised as increased workloads for elections staff or hidden among other materials costs.

An October 2024 test of hand counting procedures in **Campbell County, Wyoming** provided a rare opportunity to see how policy changes might impact county election budgets.

87 Sarah Michels, "[GOP may fight decision letting UNC students use digital ID to vote](#)," Carolina Public Press; August 27, 2024.

88 "[Early Voting Period 2024 General Election](#)," North Carolina State Board of Elections; Accessed Fall 2024.

89 Lynn Bonner, "[NC judge okays UNC-Chapel Hill's digital IDs as voter identification](#)," NC Newsline; September 20, 2024.

90 Gary D. Robertson, "[North Carolina appeals court blocks use of university's digital ID for voting](#)," AP News; September 27, 2024.

91 Todd Richmond, "[Wisconsin Supreme Court changes course, will allow expanded use of ballot drop boxes this fall](#)," AP News; July 5, 2024.

Campbell County Clerk Linda Lovelace

collaborated with an in-state political action committee that supports the switch from electronic tabulation to hand counting ballots to test the groups' preferred methods.

Forty volunteers assembled to conduct the test. The test involved two trials: one with four teams of four less-experienced counters, and another with a single team of four highly-experienced counters.⁹²

Lovelace used the results of the two trials to estimate the cost of each method assuming 19,735 ballots were cast—the same number the county saw in 2020—and meeting the PAC's suggested requirement that the counting be completed in 4 hours.

She estimated that using less-experienced counters, as was done in the first trial, would require 2,220 staff at a **cost ranging from over \$360,000 to nearly \$1.4 million**, depending on the amount of training the staff received.⁹³ Using a smaller team of highly-trained staff, as was tested in the second trial, would require 608 team members to fully count the vote, **costing anywhere from roughly \$99,000 to \$378,000**, again depending on the hours of training each staff member received.⁹⁴

Neither estimate included reporting or reconciling, as the trial teams did not get that far in the process. That also meant that Lovelace was unable to evaluate the accuracy of the tests.

The **Campbell County Clerk's Office had just under \$393,000 budgeted** for staffing and materials over the course of both the 2024 primary and general elections.⁹⁵ Even if

the county managed to meet the Lovelace's lowest estimate, switching to a hand counting process would eat up a quarter of the county's budget, before accounting for the logistical challenge of recruiting upwards of 600 vote counters, identifying a qualified and effective trainer, and figuring out how many additional election staff would be needed to oversee the process.

"Those are things that would have to be considered if this was to be implemented," Lovelace told the *Gillette News Record*.⁹⁶ "I think it's important for our legislators to know the facts when they're looking at decisions like these that would impact the electoral process," she added in the *Cowboy State Daily*.⁹⁷

To the credit of local elections officials like Lovelace, they carry out their work regardless of their personal opinions about any given policy change. But funding is needed to implement and execute those changes. All too often, such changes end up being unfunded mandates.

ELECTION LITIGATION IS A COSTLY NEW NORM

As was the case with the policy changes in both North Carolina and Wisconsin, litigation led some elections departments to need to adjust the way that they operated. Lawsuits can also require changes before they are ever filed, and can use up precious resources long afterwards.

As the 2024 general election was the most litigated election in history⁹⁸—and the 2020 General was the most litigated election

92 Nicky Ouellet, "[What Campbell County learned from a test trial hand counting ballots](#)," Wyoming Public Radio; November 4, 2024.

93 "[Hand Count Testing Outcome](#)," Campbell County Clerk, Wyoming; October 8, 2024.

94 "[Hand Count Testing Outcome](#)," Campbell County Clerk, Wyoming; October 8, 2024.

95 Jonathan Gallardo, "[Counting the cost: Clerk's office estimates hand counting ballots would add \\$99K to \\$1.38 million in election costs](#)," Gillette News Record; October 12, 2024.

96 Jonathan Gallardo, "[Counting the cost: Clerk's office estimates hand counting ballots would add \\$99K to \\$1.38 million in election costs](#)," Gillette News Record; October 12, 2024.

97 Leo Wolfson, "[Gillette Hand-Count Ballot Test Shows It Would Take Hundreds Of Counters, Cost Up To \\$1.3M](#)," Cowboy State Daily; October 9, 2024.

98 "[2023-2024 Litigation Report: The Most Litigated Election in History](#)," Democracy Docket; December 11, 2024.

before that⁹⁹—it seems that we should expect high numbers of election-related lawsuits to continue to be the norm.

That is not necessarily a bad thing. Providing voters, candidates, and other interested parties with a venue to raise concerns if they believe the election has been administered in an unlawful way is essential to maintaining the integrity of the process, as well as the public's trust in it.

While defending against such lawsuits is not the job of the federal government, it is important to note that these lawsuits put strains on jurisdictional budgets and the capacity of election officials.

South Dakota counties, for example, were dealing with a wave of lawsuits in the weeks leading up to the election. Those included six different legal actions brought against Lawrence County election officials by a candidate for state Senate that lost the June primary by 18 points.

The winning candidate, **state Sen. Rand Deibert (R-Spearfish)** told *South Dakota Searchlight*, “We’re taking property tax dollars. These frivolous lawsuits are part of the problem.”¹⁰⁰

In **Pennsylvania**, the biggest swing state in the country, election and county officials braced for a surge of lawsuits as election day approached. For **Chester County Solicitor Colleen Frens**, that meant holding regular meetings with nearby counties to share information and legal resources. Because election issues were consuming nearly all of the county's legal resources, she also spent time building relationships with outside lawyers.

“We’re sort of always waiting for the next shoe to drop,” Frens told *ABC News*. “It’s a tremendous use of financial and human resources.”

99 Jacob Kovacs-Goodman, “[Post-Election Litigation Analysis and Summaries](#),” Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project; March 10, 2021.

100 Huber, Haiar, “[Counties fending off a storm of election-related lawsuits](#),” *South Dakota Searchlight*; October 18, 2024.

EMERGENCIES DELAY VOTING & ELECTION RESULTS

This report highlights just some of the many ways that unexpected circumstances, ranging from minor snafus to major attacks on election infrastructure, can require additional and often unplanned spending to address. Almost every one of these situations also carries non-financial implications on election administration, particularly long wait times for voters and delays to reporting results.

Staff time is a major contributor to these outcomes, according to feedback received from election officials across the country. At any given time, an election worker can either service voters, communicate with the public or law enforcement, troubleshoot a broken machine, transport ballots, or tabulate votes. Regardless of the amount of experience or training any staff member has, they cannot do multiple things at once.

Previously referenced examples are full of staff time trade-offs. The additional ballot pick ups and drop box monitoring following the ballot box fires in **Clark County, Washington**, took staff away from other duties. An increased number of calls from voters ahead of the absentee ballot request deadline pulled **Cobb County, Georgia**, capacity away from processing applications, contributing to the need to overnight the ballots to voters. The ink overspray issue in **Nevada and Shasta Counties, California**, meant more election workers—and roughly 90 additional county staff¹⁰¹—had to spend more time counting ballots.

On top of these issues, problems with the technology required to conduct elections at scale inevitably emerge. Equipment used throughout the election process broke down in jurisdictions across the country, leading to long lines and delays to results reporting.

PROBLEMS WITH VOTER CHECK-IN TECH CAN CAUSE BIG DELAYS

When voters arrive to vote in person, their first interaction with election staff is often checking in with a poll worker. An increasing number of jurisdictions use electronic poll books, also known as e-poll books, to speed up the process, reduce data entry errors, notify poll workers if a voter has already voted, and produce data on turnout and who voted.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, that equipment occasionally malfunctions. Several problems with e-poll books in 2024 led to delays and long lines of voters. In **Hamilton County, Indiana**, for example, new code led to technical issues that led to wait times of 30 minutes or more.¹⁰³ Further issues with e-poll books also emerged in **Illinois**¹⁰⁴ and **Apache County, Arizona**.¹⁰⁵

One of the most problematic cases of e-poll book issues occurred in **Jefferson County, Kentucky's largest jurisdiction**. When election staff showed up before polls opened at 6 a.m. on November 5 and turned on their devices, the devices locked up and froze. Poll workers had trouble scanning voters' drivers

101 Nevada County Elections Office, "[Elections Office Adds Extra Staff to Address Printer's Error on Ballots](#)," YubaNet.com; October 30, 2024.

102 "[Electronic Poll Books](#)," National Council of State Legislatures; June 17, 2024.

103 Joe Schroeder, "[Complaint filed after polling locations open late in Hamilton County](#)," Fox59 Indianapolis; November 5, 2024.

104 "[At least 2 Illinois polling places report voting system issues, including 1 in Chicago](#)," NBC 5 Chicago; November 5, 2024.

105 Jessica Johnson, "[Navajo Nation sues to extend polling hours on Election Day following Apache County tech issues](#)," Fox 10 Phoenix; November 5, 2024.



At Jeffersontown High School in **Louisville, Kentucky**, hundreds of voters waited over two hours to cast their ballots due to slowdowns from the e-poll book system. [*Courier Journal*](#).

licenses, and even when they could complete that step, the tablets stalled while pulling up other information such as the voter's address and proof of registration.¹⁰⁶ The problems meant that staff often had to reboot their machines after checking in only five or six people, turning what should have been a 45-second process into one that took three to six minutes.¹⁰⁷ That led to extremely long lines and wait times for voters, some of which reportedly got out of line because they could not wait any longer.¹⁰⁸

The problem appears to have been related to the state's surge in early voting. When poll workers booted up their tablets, the

machines tried to download all the early voting data and overwhelmed the system's Wi-Fi bandwidth.¹⁰⁹ One poll worker remembered minor problems with the equipment during the 2023 gubernatorial primary election, but nothing to the extent that occurred in the 2024 presidential election.¹¹⁰

Following the fiasco, **Jefferson County Clerk Bobbie Holsclaw** planned to meet with her entire staff to figure out a way to avoid a repeat. She told the *Louisville Courier Journal* that changing vendors is "very, very costly," but that she was open to the change if the necessary funds were allocated.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Rachel Smith, "[What caused voting issues in Louisville on Election Day? And will it happen again?](#)," Louisville Courier Journal; November 11, 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Rachel Smith, "[What caused voting issues in Louisville on Election Day? And will it happen again?](#)," Louisville Courier Journal; November 11, 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Rachel Smith, "[What caused voting issues in Louisville on Election Day? And will it happen again?](#)," Louisville Courier Journal; November 11, 2024.

¹⁰⁹ Marina Johnson, "[Election 2024: Early voting is over in Kentucky. Here's how many ballots were cast](#)," Louisville Courier Journal; November 4, 2024.

¹¹⁰ Marina Johnson, "[Election 2024: Early voting is over in Kentucky. Here's how many ballots were cast](#)," Louisville Courier Journal; November 4, 2024.

¹¹¹ Marina Johnson, "[Election 2024: Early voting is over in Kentucky. Here's how many ballots were cast](#)," Louisville Courier Journal; November 4, 2024.

AGING EQUIPMENT BREAKS DOWN, LEADING TO LONG LINES

While technology such as voting machines and tabulators has helped to speed up the election process, some of it will inevitably break. That is particularly true for older equipment. Research done by Brennan Center for Justice and Verified Voting found that nearly 44.6 million registered voters live in jurisdictions with voting equipment that is more than 10 years old. **Replacing that equipment could cost an estimated \$203 million.**¹¹²

Problems with old voting machines led to long lines for voters on Election Day in **Tulsa County, Oklahoma**. That was the case despite the best-laid plans of local election

officials. “We have a room full of techs, a room full of replacement machines so we either can fix them or we send out a replacement machine,” **Tulsa County Election Board Secretary Gwen Freeman** told *FOX23 News*.¹¹³ While she said that, “small elections, big elections—these things happen all the time,” she also said that the fact that the machines are getting older makes them even more problematic.¹¹⁴ According to Verified Voting, the election day equipment used in Oklahoma in November 2024 was first fielded in 2012.¹¹⁵

Equipment used to scan ballots after they are filled out led to problems for 12 polling places in Story County, Iowa. “We don’t know why,” **Story County Auditor Lucy Martin** told the *Ames Tribune*. “The ballots were tested. The machines were tested.” Whatever the reason, election officials had to hand count those



Voted mail-in ballots are securely stored in the Allegheny County, Pennsylvania Elections Division warehouse in October 2024. [WESA](#).

¹¹² Edlin, Maier, Stewart, “Costs for Replacing Voting Equipment in 2024,” Brennan Center; February 7, 2024.

¹¹³ [Video: FOX23 Investigates: Voters complain of problems at south Tulsa polling place on Election Day \(Part 2\) | News](#),” Fox23 News; November 5, 2024.

¹¹⁴ “[Video: FOX23 Investigates: Voters complain of problems at south Tulsa polling place on Election Day \(Part 2\) | News](#),” Fox23 News; November 5, 2024.

¹¹⁵ “[Verifier Project](#) - Oklahoma,” Verified Voting; Accessed Fall 2024.

ballots after the polls closed.¹¹⁶ The county released its Election Summary Report nine days after Election Day,¹¹⁷ two days later than it had in 2020.¹¹⁸

Clackamas County, Oregon ran into mechanical issues with their mail-in ballot sorting machine. That machine serves two purposes: verifying that the envelope in which the ballot was sent is valid by scanning a barcode, and taking a picture of the voter's signature, which staff later review to confirm that it matches the signature on file.¹¹⁹

That required sworn election staff to use hand scanners to sort the ballots, pulling those staff from other work. It also delayed voters' ability to look up the status of their voted ballots,¹²⁰ which likely led to more voters calling into the office to confirm receipt, again causing more work for the office. The ballot sorting issues were, unfortunately, a repeat of a problem that the county faced in 2022.¹²¹

As mentioned, it is hard to quantify all of the trade-offs that come emerge when voting equipment breaks down. **But the 19 reports of broken equipment for which we could estimate a cost tallied up to more than \$3.9 million in expenses for the affected jurisdictions.**

LONG LINES CREATE CROWDS. CROWDS CREATE VULNERABILITY TO ATTACK.

On top of long lines' potential dampening effects on voter turnout, the crowds of waiting voters that develop outside of polling

places can represent a potential vector for attack. The Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency notes that, "Public gatherings are increasingly vulnerable to violent attacks and criminal activity because of their relative accessibility and large number of potential targets."¹²²

One particularly horrific plot was thankfully deterred by law enforcement in **Oklahoma** this cycle. An Afghan national in contact with ISIS was plotting an attack before being thwarted by the FBI in October. The Oklahoma resident was accused of plans to purchase two AK-47s and ammunition to conduct a mass shooting attack on Election Day.¹²³ While never successful, this planned act of terrorism demonstrates the importance of both robust coordination with local law enforcement, and ensuring secure voting locations.

Guaranteeing the safety of voters and election administrators is critical to conducting free and fair elections. In addition to continued collaboration with federal and local law enforcement, election officials need to be able fortify election facilities from in-person attacks and conduct crowd control during early voting and on Election Day.

Preventing long lines from forming, thereby reducing the size of crowds inside and outside of polling places, is also an important way to mitigate risk. That requires a sufficient number of polling places that have enough staff and the right equipment to minimize the amount of time it takes to cast a ballot.

A heartening example of how investment can enhance threat mitigation came in the

116 Tyler Jett, "[Story County hand-counts ballots at about a dozen polling places after machine failure](#)," Des Moines Register; November 7, 2024.

117 "[Election Summary Report](#)," Story County, Iowa; November 13, 2024.

118 "[Election Summary Report](#)," Story County, Iowa; November 9, 2020.

119 "[Persistent mail ballot sorter mechanical issues cause delay in ballot processing at Clackamas County Elections](#)," Clackamas County; October 31, 2024.

120 "[Persistent mail ballot sorter mechanical issues cause delay in ballot processing at Clackamas County Elections](#)," Clackamas County; October 31, 2024.

121 Lynne Terry, "[Clackamas County faces ballot processing backlog following machine breakdowns](#)," Oregon Capital Chronicle; November 1, 2024.

122 "[Securing Public Gatherings | Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#)," CISA; Accessed Fall 2024.

123 Hannah Rabinowitz, "[Afghan national charged with Election Day terrorist plot in US](#)," CNN; October 8, 2024.

response to bomb threats made against several **Maryland Board of Elections offices**. Thanks to proper funding, these offices were located in secure locations with limited ingress and egress. They also were equipped with security cameras, footage from which they were able to quickly share with local law enforcement. While evacuations were still necessary, law enforcement was able to rapidly assess the threat and guarantee elections workers safety, allowing them to get back to work.¹²⁴

REDUCING VOTING LINES, REPORTING WAIT TIMES, AND VULNERABILITY TO ATTACK REQUIRES INVESTMENT

Ideally, every voter would be able to quickly and securely cast their ballot and jurisdictions would speedily report their results. In addition to improving voters' experience, this would make elections safer by minimizing vulnerability to attacks. Providing local election offices with sufficient, sustained funding so that they can staff and equip their operations as required would help to achieve this goal.



*A line of cars builds up outside of the **Oklahoma County Election Board office** on the first day of early voting in 2024. The line reportedly stretched about a mile long. [Oklahoma Voice](#).*

¹²⁴ Andrew Adeolu, "[Several Maryland Board of Election sites evacuated due to bomb threats, police say](#)," CBS News; November 9, 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Election administrators faced a wide range of emergencies in 2024 that required them to pivot, problem-solve, and pay for things that, more often than not, were not planned in their lean budgets.

While we cannot know exactly what emergencies will arise in future cycles, we can and should plan for the predictably unpredictable nature of election administration. Election departments are already doing their best to do so—what is holding them back is a lack of funding.

There are many benefits to providing local election departments with sufficient and sustained funding. Such investment would enable them to:

- Invest in infrastructure and processes that increase resilience against cyber and physical attacks
- Hire staff with the right skillset to inoculate against and respond to lies about the election process, particularly those spread by foreign adversaries
- Continue to increase transparency in the election process
- Update outdated equipment that serves as a vulnerability to foreign malign influence campaigns, can delay the reporting of results, and can lead to long lines, which create additional vulnerabilities to physical attacks
- Choose better, more accurate vendors for printing, equipment, and more, decreasing the need to pay expensive expediting costs and increasing voter trust in the system
- Have backup equipment and materials on hand, reducing the impact of any given breakdown or surge of voting interest
- Hire additional staff to address emerging issues, increase voter support, and add accuracy check points to the process to minimize errors
- Update or move to facilities that are resilient against both natural disasters and physical attack

Each of these efforts would help to increase the integrity, security, safety, and accessibility of our elections system for many cycles to come. And while it would require increased up-front investment, examples examined in this report demonstrate that increased up-front spending is more efficient and more effective long-term than the current model of emergency spending.

State and local governments cannot do this alone. Robust federal funding is critical to provide election jurisdictions across the country with sufficient and sustained investment¹²⁵.

125 Gordon, Thorning, Weil, “[Reimagining Federal Election Funding](#),” Bipartisan Policy Council; April 18, 2022.

METHODOLOGY

This report estimates emergency spending in the months leading up to and weeks immediately following the 2024 presidential election. The situations in which emergency spending occurred were collected from concurrent news reports from that time period.

Specific costs referenced in news reports were used in our calculation. If those numbers were clearly rounded, overly approximated, or we could find more accurate information, we updated our calculations accordingly.

When specific costs were not cited, we used information provided by the report to do further research. That often included referencing RFPs or invoices to election departments that are public record, public information on county staff salaries, reported voter registration numbers, first-hand accounts reported by election officials, or information from election administration experts. In many cases, we approximated costs based on industry best practices whether or not the report stated that a jurisdiction engaged in a particular response.

Some jurisdiction-level costs were extrapolated to give statewide estimates. Those statewide numbers were only included in the total sums if it was reasonable to assume that the state did or should engage in such a response.

The imminent expenses cost stated in the Introduction consists of two main costs. The first is an estimate of the total cost of recovery and restoration for election departments following Hurricanes Helene and Milton. This amount was a conservative calculation based upon per voter estimates that were derived from comparable events across four categories: facility damage, voting equipment replacement, temporary facilities and expenses, and staffing.

The other estimate included in imminent expenses is the cost to update outdated and unsafe ballot drop boxes across the country.

All estimates that were not directly stated in original reports were rounded to two significant figures.