



## Six Principles to Guide Us through the 2020 Election

*The 2020 election is being held in unusually challenging circumstances, and many Americans are feeling high levels of uncertainty about the process. Drawing on our long experience observing elections around the world, we've developed six key principles to help guide and provide reassurance to citizens, elected officials, and the media.*

- 1. The alternatives to voting in person on Election Day that are being used this year – absentee voting and early voting – have been used safely across the U.S. for many years.** This year, significantly more voters will use these alternatives because of concerns about the coronavirus. These forms of voting are not new; they are tested, secure, and well-regulated by law. The American military has safely used absentee ballots for more than 150 years. Nothing is fundamentally different this year other than the possibility that with so many more absentee ballots, election results may take longer. And if it does take longer, that's not a source of concern. In fact, states have regularly needed one or more weeks to complete the certified state results (rather than the projections we see on election night), and it will likely be the same again this year.
- 2. Key elements of our voting and vote counting processes are transparent and provide important safeguards.** Laws in most states provide a [specified role](#) for observers and party poll watchers to witness voting in the polling station and post-election canvassing and tabulation processes. Strict rules about ballot printing and ballot chains of custody are in place in all states. In several states, county officials have developed innovative methods for livestreaming some processes. In many states, preelection testing of voting equipment also is open to the public. All of these elements should help dispel concerns about the security of the voting process.

A recent survey found that nearly 80 percent of local election officials believe voting has gotten easier since they began working in the election field. Ninety-five percent are confident the vote will be counted as intended in their states. These findings reflect changes adopted over the last 20 years in states across the country to increase both the security of election systems and the options available for voters.

- 3. Everyone should consume and share credible information.** Unfortunately, we know that there will be a great deal of disinformation, many false statements, and efforts to undermine voters' confidence in the results. Some of this – but not all – will come from foreign actors. When sharing information, it is important to rely on [trusted election information sources](#) and to be careful what information you send to others. It is generally advisable to seek out different perspectives when forming opinions.
- 4. No election is perfect.** Voters should not be surprised if there are reports of problems in some places. We know that no election is perfect, and that problems and irregularities are a common occurrence in elections around the world in part because of the logistical complexity of the process. When problems occur, the key principle to remember is that the validity of election results should only be called into question if problems are so numerous that they potentially impact a greater number of votes than the margin of victory.
- 5. There are laws and processes in place to address legitimate concerns.** Political parties and candidates that have evidence of problems should use established legal processes to address any concerns and should refrain from making unsubstantiated claims. A [recent report](#) by the National Task Force on Election Crises concluded, “post-election disputes and related litigation have become an expected – if not relatively normal – part of elections in this country. It is important for voters and the general American public to understand that anyone with actual evidence of fraud, misconduct, or other irregularities in an election has a forum (maybe even more than one) for making and proving such allegations.”
- 6. Acceptance of the will of the people is perhaps America's greatest innovation.** All Americans should cherish our heritage as the first country in the modern world with an elected head of state, and the first country where both challengers and incumbents accepted that the will of the people is the determining factor in deciding the leader of the country. All political leaders and citizens should honor this legacy by respecting this great American tradition and preparing in advance of the election to accept whatever result is rendered by the people.