

Elections and Hurricanes Helene and Milton

October 11, 2024

Introduction

In September and October 2024, Hurricanes Helene and Milton disrupted voter registration, early voting activities, and preparations for the November 5 general election throughout parts of the southeastern United States. As [another CRS product](#) discusses, the United States has a long history of natural disasters and other emergencies affecting elections. This CRS Insight provides brief background information that might be relevant for Congress if it chooses to consider election-related appropriations, legislation or oversight, and responses to [casework inquiries](#) following these storms. Separately, CRS also has products related to several other aspects of disaster recovery, emergency management, and homeland security, such as this [guide to federal emergency management](#).

States, territories, and localities are primarily responsible for administering elections in the United States, both during emergencies and in general. Federal agencies and Congress typically play support roles for state and local election jurisdictions. Some federal funding provided for disaster relief or [in response to public health emergencies](#) has been used for elections.

Elections Information for Affected Constituents

[State and local election jurisdictions](#) are the most authoritative sources of information about voter eligibility, polling locations, and election administration. The next section provides links to selected information from some affected states. States are also the most authoritative sources for information about election [results](#).

The federal [vote.gov](#) website, operated by the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#) (EAC) and the [General Services Administration](#) (GSA), provides links to information about registration and voting in individual states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

Selected Developments in Affected States

Factors such as the extent of damage, ongoing threats, the number of displaced voters, and calendar proximity to an election typically affect how and whether states adjust elections and voting procedures in

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response to emergencies. Some [state statutes](#) or elections regulations also contemplate emergency provisions or specify what kinds of changes may be made.

As is typical following natural disasters, it appears that elections implications from Hurricanes Helene and Milton vary widely across affected states. CRS compiled the preliminary information below, which is current as of October 11 and not intended to be comprehensive, from Secretary of State or Board of Elections websites in [states](#) that have received Helene- or Milton-related [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\) disaster declarations](#). In some cases, there appear to have been no elections-specific changes, and those states are not listed below. Additional elections changes in affected states are possible as recovery operations continue and election administrators' and voters' needs become clearer.

Florida

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis issued [Executive Order \(E.O.\) 24-212](#) on October 3. The E.O. provides flexibilities in polling place locations and deadlines for notice regarding polling places. Among other provisions, the E.O. also provides greater flexibility for county election supervisors to send mail-in ballots to addresses other than the voter's registration address, waives certain poll worker training requirements, and extends administrative leave for state employees to serve as poll workers.

Georgia

[Media reports suggest](#) that Georgia election officials do not expect major elections disruptions from Hurricane Helene. The Secretary of State's office has [posted information for affected voters](#), including how to request that an absentee ballot be delivered to a different address than originally requested and how to replace identification required for voting. On October 2, 2024, the Georgia Secretary of State [announced](#) that physical infrastructure was expected to be available for early voting, [scheduled](#) to begin on October 15.

North Carolina

The [North Carolina State Board of Elections](#) (NCSBE) unanimously adopted a [resolution](#) on October 7 exercising certain emergency powers. The resolution authorizes election officials in 13 affected counties to make specified election administration and voting changes with bipartisan approval from county election boards. [Among other provisions](#), the resolution authorizes changes to early voting locations and hours, election day polling places, and poll worker recruitment and assignments. It also requires county election boards to process absentee ballot requests until the day before election day and to accept completed ballots through election day. The resolution authorizes [multipartisan assistance teams](#) (MATs) to assist voters in care facilities and to help with absentee ballot requests and ballot processing at shelters or other places providing disaster relief. On October 10, Governor Roy Cooper [signed](#) legislation that the North Carolina General Assembly passed the previous day. The [new law](#) incorporates many of the provisions in the NCSBE resolution. The statutory provisions cover 25 counties rather than the 13 originally specified in the resolution.

The NCSBE website provides [information for affected voters](#).

South Carolina

According to the [South Carolina Election Commission](#), several county voter registration offices were unable to operate in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. In response to [a lawsuit](#), on October 4, a court ordered the state voter registration deadline extended to October 14.

Tennessee

The Tennessee Secretary of State on October 9 [announced changes](#) to the operating status of some polling places or other elections operations in six counties affected by Hurricane Helene. The office also has [posted voting information](#) for individuals in affected counties.

Selected CRS Resources

The following CRS resources provide additional information regarding the elections-related topics discussed above. Congressional readers may contact the authors directly with questions or may submit requests via the CRS website.

CRS Report R46455, *COVID-19 and Other Election Emergencies: Frequently Asked Questions and Recent Policy Developments*, coordinated by R. Sam Garrett

CRS In Focus IF11477, *Early Voting and Mail Voting: Overview & Issues for Congress*, by Sarah J. Eckman and Karen L. Shanton

CRS Report R46646, *Election Administration: Federal Grant Funding for States and Localities*, by Karen L. Shanton

CRS Report R46565, *Federal Election Results: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Sarah J. Eckman, R. Sam Garrett, and Karen L. Shanton

CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10470, *Election 2020 and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Legal Issues in Absentee and All-Mail Voting*, by L. Paige Whitaker

CRS Report WPD00035, *Elections Podcast: Federal Role in Elections Funding*, by Karen L. Shanton

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