

Confidently Know and Exercise Your Right to Vote

As young people prepare to cast their ballots, they may turn to you or your organization with questions about community and personal safety. Political leaders looking to hold onto power, and their supporters, sometimes use tactics like harassment, threats, or misinformation to intimidate voters and silence their voices. They may engage in voter intimidation (a federal crime!) by aggressively questioning anyone voting by mail or in-person, preventing individuals access at polling sites, or by spreading misinformation.

Election Day can also bring unexpected situations: a voter's name may not appear on the roll, a polling place may be crowded, or machines may be temporarily down. While these moments can feel a bit stressful, it's important to remember that voters in the United States have legal rights that protect their ability to cast a ballot. Understanding these rights ahead of time can help you vote with confidence — and help your friends do the same.

Everyone is entitled to a safe voting environment. While many election rules vary by state, several protections apply nationwide to keep the voting process fair and accessible. Sharing the following tips directly with young people can equip Gen Z voters with more strategies to navigate voter intimidation efforts or other issues at the polls.


Use this guide as a reference you can share with others. Send it to friends before Election Day, keep it handy while voting, or pass along specific sections if someone runs into an issue at the polls. Even a quick text with the right information can help someone successfully cast their ballot.

Preparation and Safety

- **Make a Voting Plan:** You can create a voting plan by using the pre-election essentials checklist in the previous section, or by using other resources. Preparation can help prevent you and others from getting caught off guard by any intimidation or misinformation attempts.
- **Verify Official Information:** Some emails, texts, flyers, and / or mailed notices may have been designed to mislead or discourage voters. Be sure to verify that any election or voting-related communications you receive are official and from local election administrators. We recommend double-checking the information you receive in any election communications by going to your state or local election office's website.
- **Keep an Eye Out for Election Scams:** Have you ever received a fishy-looking text or email from Amazon, PayPal, or even USPS? Maybe it had a questionable attachment, download link, or sketchy instructions? Cybersecurity criminals will often use similar strategies during election seasons in the hopes that unsuspecting voters will fall prey to their election scams.

Here are some examples of election scams you might come across, and what to do if you see them:


- Remember, **you cannot register to vote by phone, email, or text**. If someone offers to register you via one of these mediums, immediately hang up or report the communication as phishing to your mobile carrier or email platform.
 - **Be skeptical of all election-related robocalls**, especially those claiming to be a politician or celebrity, asking for a donation, or trying to influence your vote. Hang up and verify any information you receive over the phone by visiting your [state or local election office's website](#).
 - **When filling out a political survey, never provide sensitive information** like your name, address, email address, credit card number, Social Security number, or other ID numbers. And avoid clicking on links to surveys from unsolicited texts or emails.
 - For more information and in-depth examples of election scams, check out [this AARP article](#).
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- **Practice Situational Awareness at Voter Registration Drives:** Sometimes the forms you fill out at voter registration drives can easily be seen by others nearby. For more privacy, you can take a registration form home to fill out and return by mail or in-person at an election office.
 - **Be or Bring a Support Person to the Polls:** Except for an employer or union agent, you are legally allowed to bring a friend, family member, or other support person of your choice to assist you at the polls. You can also serve as a support person to another voter.
 - **Don't Forget to Stay in Line:** We may sound like a broken record, but if the polls close while you are waiting in line, you are still legally permitted to vote. Remain in line, and don't be afraid to call an election protection hotline if you are being harassed, turned away, or discouraged to vote by anyone.

 **Tip:** If you live in a state with mail-in voting and have voter intimidation or other safety concerns, we recommend voting as early as possible, and then checking your state's online portal to confirm your ballot was processed.

Recognizing, Reporting, and Addressing Intimidation at Polling Sites

- **Know What Constitutes Intimidation, and What Is Illegal:** Voter intimidation is illegal. Someone may be experiencing voter intimidation if they're being followed, interrogated, and photographed without consent. Intimidation can also include the use of violent / threatening language and the stationing of official or unofficial security groups at polling locations.

- Check out this [toolkit from Legal Defense Fund](#) on community-based strategies for preventing voter intimidation.
- **Document What You're Seeing:** Note the time, location, and specific actions of the individuals involved without directly confronting them.
- **What To Do If Federal Agents or Other Armed Groups Are at the Polls:** We recommend reading these resources that provide more guidance on what to do and how to respond if federal agents or other armed groups are present at polling sites:
 - [Federal Agents at the Polls | American Civil Liberties Union](#)
 - [State Fact Sheets | Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection | Georgetown Law](#)
- **De-Escalation at the Polls:** These resources can orient you to de-escalation and intervention strategies you can use if you witness or encounter conflict at the polls:
 - [Active Bystander Intervention and De-Escalation | Bridging Divides Initiative](#)
 - [Peaceful Bystander Intervention Zine | Right To Be](#)
 - [Help Stop Political Violence | Issue One](#)
 - [Problem Solving At The Polls | Power the Polls](#)
- **Know How to Report:** Call 911 if you or anyone near you is facing physical danger. You can report any other non-life threatening issues at the polls by alerting your poll monitor and by contacting the following:
 - **Election Protection Hotlines:** Don't forget, you can text or call:
 - **English:** 1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683)
 - **Spanish:** 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA (1-888-839-8682)
 - **Asian Languages:** 1-888-API-VOTE (1-888-274-8683)
 - **Arabic:** 1-844-YALLA-US (1-844-925-5287)
 - **Federal Reporting:** You can report suspected election crimes to the FBI at 1-800-CALL-FBI or through the DOJ Civil Rights Division.
 - **Legal Defense Fund:** Report potential voter suppression issues by filling out a form [here](#).

 **Tip:** Save the above numbers in your phone before you head out to share or use if needed. And try to plan to vote in the morning so that way you can return and try again later if something feels unsafe.

Know Your Rights At Polling Stations

If You Are In Line When Polls Close, Stay In Line

Long lines can be intimidating, but here's the good news: if a voter is already physically in line at the polls when the polls officially close, [federal law protects their legal right to vote](#). Election

officials are required by law to allow every voter who is already in the queue to cast their ballot, even if the doors close and voting continues well past the original closing time.

✓ **Share this:** If someone is in line when polls close, they should stay in line — they still have the right to vote.

If Voting Machines Are Not Working

Technology isn't always perfect, and sometimes voting machines can fail. If the machines at the polling place are unavailable or malfunctioning, voters can request a paper ballot. Every polling place is required to have backup voting methods ready to go to ensure that every eligible voter can participate. **Voters should not let a technical glitch stand between them and the ballot box.**

✓ **Share this:** If machines aren't working, voters can ask for a paper ballot.

If Your Name Is Not On The Voter List, Ask For A Provisional Ballot

This situation happens more often than you might expect — your registration can't be found, or your name is spelled differently than it appears on your ID. Don't panic. Voters still have options to make sure their vote is counted.

Start by asking a poll worker to double-check the voter list for spelling variations or errors. If the name still can't be found, the voter has the right to request a provisional ballot. If a poll worker is unsure or initially says no, voters can calmly restate that they have the right to request a provisional ballot and ask for assistance from a supervisor if needed.

A provisional ballot acts as a "safety net," allowing someone to cast their vote while election officials verify their eligibility after Election Day. If they find that the voter is eligible, their ballot will be counted.

What to do:

- **Get the Instructions:** Ask for written guidance on any steps needed to take to ensure the ballot is counted.
- **Get the Tracking Information:** Voters have the right to know if their vote was counted. Ask how to follow-up on the status of their provisional ballot (e.g., a website or phone number).

✓ **Share this:** If someone's name isn't on the list, they can ask for a provisional ballot — don't head for the exit.

If You Make A Mistake On Your Ballot, Ask For A New One

Accidents happen — your pen might slip, or you might fill in the wrong bubble. If a voter makes a mistake while filling out their ballot, they can ask a poll worker for a new ballot before submitting it. **Voters have the right to correct errors and ensure their ballot accurately reflects their intended choices, whether voting in-person or by mail.**

✓ **Share this:** If someone makes a mistake on their ballot, they should not hesitate to ask for a new one.

You Have The Right To Vote Privately And Independently

Your vote is your voice — and it's something you can help remind others of before they head to the polls. Federal election laws guarantee that every voter has the right to cast their ballot without pressure, interference, or anyone seeing how they vote. These protections also cover protections against electioneering or intimidation, such as individuals trying to influence how someone votes, campaign inside restricted areas, or pressure voters at or near polling places.

Polling places are required to provide private voting spaces, such as booths or privacy screens, so voters can make their selections independently and confidently, without prying eyes.

✓ **Share this:** Your vote is private. No one has the right to see how you vote or influence your choices inside the polling place.

Voters With Disabilities Have The Right To Accessible Voting

Democracy only works when everyone can participate, which is why federal law requires polling places to provide fully accessible voting options to voters with disabilities. This includes:

- **Accessible Equipment:** Every polling place must offer voting systems (like ballot marking devices) that allow voters with disabilities to cast their ballots privately and independently.

- **The Right to Assistance:** Voters have the right to bring a person they trust into the booth with them if they need an extra hand navigating the polling place or the ballot itself.
- **Physical Access:** From the parking lot to the voting booth, the path must be clear and accessible.

✓ **Share this:** If someone needs support at the polls, they can request accessible voting equipment or bring assistance.

Language Assistance May Be Available

Democracy should never be “lost in translation.” Voting materials and support may be available in multiple languages depending on the [jurisdiction](#). Some polling places are required to provide translated ballots, interpreters, or on-site assistance to help voters understand the process and cast their ballot confidently.

✓ **Share this:** If someone needs language support, they should ask at their polling place — help may be available.

If You Encounter Problems While Voting

Most voting experiences go smoothly, but if someone runs into an issue, they don’t have to navigate it alone. Voters experiencing issues while voting, whether it’s a question about their rights or a complication with the process, can contact nonpartisan voter protection organizations that are standing by to help voters in real time.

The [Election Protection Hotline](#), administered by the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law on behalf of the national Election Protection coalition, connects voters with trained volunteers who can answer questions and help resolve problems on the spot.

✓ **Share this:** If someone runs into a problem while voting, they can call or text Election Protection for help in real time.

State Rules May Vary

While federal law sets baseline voter protections, many of the specific voting rules — including ID requirements, early voting schedules, or polling locations — are determined by each individual state. Voters should check trusted, up-to-date [voter information sources](#) before Election Day for state-specific rules so they know exactly what to expect.

✓ **Share this:** Voting rules can vary by state — always double-check local guidance before Election Day.

For More Information

The following sources are verified, nonpartisan resources you can share with friends, classmates, or family if they need help understanding their rights, finding their polling place, or navigating state-specific voting rules. Keep this list handy as a quick reference before and on Election Day.

Voter Rights and Election Protection:

- [Lawyers' Committee Election Protection](#)
- [Vote.gov - Know Your Voting Rights](#)
- [ACLU - Know Your Voting Rights](#)
- [Voto Latino - Know Your Voting Rights](#)
- [League of Women Voters - Your Election Bill of Rights](#)
- [United States Election Assistance Commission \(EAC\) - What Are My Voting Rights?](#)

State Voting Law Trackers:

- [Election Law Navigator](#)
- [Voting Rights Lab](#)
- [States | Election Protection Coalition](#)