

# Community Resilience in the 2026 Elections

Supporting our neighbors in the face of threatened federal interference

JUNE 2026



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# Community Resilience to Federal Election Interference

**As the 2026 midterms approach, communities around the country are taking action to ensure that all eligible voters can cast their ballots in free, fair, and safe elections. This guide is for community members who want to do their part — whether you have 30 minutes, a few hours, or several days to give.**

Americans are making plans to peacefully participate in our elections — and to support their neighbors in doing the same — even amid concerns of federal interference in the election<sup>1</sup>. In this guide we focus on supporting communities navigating several forms of federal interference:

- Increased presence and visibility of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), federal agents or other militarized agents in the leadup to the election, including through unjustifiably invoking the Insurrection Act;
- Local or state law enforcement, particularly in jurisdictions with 287(g) agreements that mandate cooperation with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents, stationed at polling sites<sup>2</sup>;
- And least likely, immigration or other militarized federal agents deployed directly to polling sites.



**These efforts are designed to make us feel small and powerless. But they will not succeed when everyday Americans are committed to peacefully participating and showing up for their neighbors."**

It may only take a single viral incident in one jurisdiction to suppress turnout across the country. And whether or not ICE or other armed federal agents appear near polling locations, the threat alone is enough to chill participation.

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<sup>1</sup> See Protect Democracy's [Executive Override](#) Report for more information on other forms of federal interference.

<sup>2</sup> This is illegal in many states.

These and other forms of federal interference would be a deliberate show of force, designed to intimidate voters, particularly naturalized citizens and communities of color. Alongside the administration's repeated and baseless lie that there is pervasive "noncitizen voting" that threatens election integrity, this creates an environment of fear designed to deter eligible voters from participating in the midterms.

Voter suppression and violence toward targeted groups in our democracy are not new. They are a common thread running through our national story, rooted in slavery and Jim Crow, and spanning disenfranchisement, gerrymandering, intimidation, and outright violence designed to drive targeted communities from public life. The Supreme Court's recent gutting of the Voting Rights Act in *Louisiana vs. Callais*<sup>3</sup> and several southern states' rush<sup>4</sup> to redraw their voting maps in ways that dilute the voting power of communities of color make plain that these are not tactics of the past.

These efforts are designed to make us feel small and powerless. But they will not succeed when everyday Americans are committed to peacefully participating and showing up for their neighbors. Regardless of who you vote for, how much time you have, or where you stand in your community, there is a role for you in ensuring free and fair midterms: posting on social media; supporting neighbors in developing plans to vote early, vote together, or vote by mail; volunteering as a familiar face at polling locations; learning deescalation tactics; or joining a local election protection coalition will all make a difference.

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<sup>3</sup> ["What Louisiana v. Callais Means for the Voting Rights Act | Harvard Kennedy School."](#) What Louisiana v. Callais Means for the Voting Rights Act, April 30, 2026.

<sup>4</sup> Elliott, Debbie. ["Southern States Rush to Draw New Congressional Districts after Supreme Court Ruling."](#) NPR, May 12, 2026.

# Legal Background on the Threat

Amid real threats of federal voter intimidation, there are actions we can take as community members to ensure we and our neighbors can safely vote. Each of us has a unique role to play depending on our personal risk and identity. By planning ahead and forming relationships across communities, together we can peacefully prepare and push back on potential federal interference.

Over the last year, this administration has used armed federal agents to threaten demonstrators, journalists, and observers by using unlawful force to quash protests against the administration's actions. Under the guise of immigration enforcement, the administration has surged DHS agents across the country to intimidate neighbors who oppose their actions, including those who exercise their rights to lawfully speak out in dissent or to record the federal agents' hostilities. The government engaged in violent tactics against protesters in 2020, but the scale and reach of the aggression has intensified.

**“ Threats or displays of force designed to make voters fearful to participate in our elections are prohibited voter intimidation, whether it is from federal forces, local law enforcement, or private citizens.”**

These tactics have sought to instill fear and to disrupt daily life in the affected cities, particularly in targeted communities. If something similar happens in or near competitive electoral districts this fall, there is little doubt that the administration will be attempting voter intimidation and suppression. It is just as illegal for the administration to use a show of force to interfere in contested election districts as it would be for it to send ICE or other militarized agents directly to polling locations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [Sending ICE to Polling Places is Illegal](#), Brennan Center, March 31, 2026

Threats or displays of force designed to make voters fearful to participate in our elections are prohibited voter intimidation,<sup>6</sup> whether it is from federal forces, local law enforcement, or private citizens.<sup>7</sup> Specifically:

- It is illegal to deploy federal “troops or armed men at any place where a[n] ... election is held,” unless in the extreme circumstances of war or rebellion.<sup>8</sup> This includes the deployment of federal immigration agents or federalized National Guard in or around election locations.
- It is illegal to coerce or threaten election observers and organizers, threaten voters about their qualifications to vote, spread false voting information or eligibility requirements, and to target non-English speakers and voters of color, among other forms of unlawful voter intimidation.<sup>9</sup>

While this document primarily focuses on the potential surges and deployments of armed federal agents, it is important to mention the significant legal constraints on domestic deployment of the military via the Insurrection Act. The bar for invoking the Insurrection Act is very high. It requires a genuine crisis, and historically, it has been limited to severe instances of civil unrest and to defend the rights of marginalized groups<sup>10</sup>. Courts can review and curtail an invocation of the Insurrection Act. Critically, the Insurrection Act does not suspend the Constitution, impose martial law, or change how we can defend our constitutional rights and civil liberties.

Federal National Guard deployments are also tightly regulated, and can't legally be undertaken without appropriate justification and process. For example, the Supreme Court recently ruled that the Trump administration could not federalize National Guard troops during a DHS surge in Chicago and the Court emphasized the legal constraints on mobilized guardsmen conducting law enforcement.<sup>11</sup> It remains within each Governor's discretion whether they call up their state's National Guard. Even when troops are legally deployed, they can't legally interfere in elections.<sup>12</sup> State statutes and constitutions provide additional constraints to protect voters from federal forces.

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<sup>6</sup> [Fact Sheet: Protecting Against Voter Intimidation](#)

<sup>7</sup> The Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection has [state specific fact sheets](#) about the laws barring unauthorized private militia groups and what to do if groups of armed individuals are near a polling place or voter registration drive.

<sup>8</sup> 18 U.S. Code § 592

<sup>9</sup> [Sending ICE to Polling Places is Illegal](#), Brennan Center, March 31, 2026; [Fighting Against Voter Intimidation](#), Protect Democracy, October 2022

<sup>10</sup> [The Insurrection Act explained](#), Protect Democracy, November 26, 2025

<sup>11</sup> Goitein, Elizabeth. [“Trump v. Illinois: A Narrow Supreme Court Decision with Broad Implications.”](#) Brennan Center for Justice, May 26, 2026.

<sup>12</sup> 18 U.S. Code § 593 - bars any military interference with elections.

# Communicating Effectively and Responsibly About Election Interference

In the face of threatened federal interference, communities are looking to their leaders for how to respond. Local and influential leaders, both formal and informal, have the visibility and trust needed to prevent escalation, defuse tensions, and reaffirm a community's commitment to widespread and peaceful participation in elections.

But communicating about voter intimidation requires care. Leaders must respond promptly and clearly without inadvertently amplifying the very threats they're seeking to counter. The goal is naming what's happening without inadvertently reinforcing fear, and responding with urgency and defiance without suppressing the participation we are seeking to protect.

The guidance below is designed to support leaders in doing exactly that: speaking with honesty and clarity about the real threats while focusing on what communities can do — and are already doing — to ensure every eligible voter can participate. They are options meant as a potential starting point, to be adapted to the particular context and audience.<sup>13</sup>

## Overarching considerations

### Intent

What is the context and presumed intent of the violence or intimidation? If the goal is to generate fear and chill participation, a response that amplifies alarm without providing a clear path forward would play directly into that strategy. See the Dos and Don'ts below for additional guidance.

### Publicity

How widely known is this particular incident? Before issuing any statement, carefully consider the scope of public awareness. If the incident has not yet reached a broad audience, a high-profile public response may do more harm than good. In these instances, closed-door communications, direct outreach to targeted communities, or quiet coordination with trusted local officials and legal counsel may be the more strategic path. Conversely, if the incident is already circulating widely, silence or inaction can be equally damaging and leave a vacuum that misinformation or extremist actors might fill.

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<sup>13</sup> For additional more in-depth guidance on communicating in response to political violence, see Over Zero's [Dos and Don'ts for Communicating in Response to Violence](#).

## Affected communities

If a specific community has been targeted with voter intimidation, always check in with them to ensure your response addresses their priorities and needs, and centers their voices. Focusing on the targeted community's response also shifts the narrative to be one of defiance and empowerment, rather than one focused on the intimidation itself.

## Your sources

Always verify information before sharing it. Note that AI has made it easier than ever to create and amplify deep fakes that undermine trust, sow or deepen divisions, and manufacture urgency. This makes verifying sources all the more critical. If you are addressing rumors or misinformation, identify and share the correct information prior to (and ideally instead of) repeating any misinformation. [Follow best practices for correcting misinformation.](#)

## Timing

Rather than simply producing a fast response, ensure a timely response that balances speed with care and accuracy. Develop internal response protocols beforehand to get ahead of bureaucratic delays, including [key contacts](#) that you might wish to engage before releasing a response. It is equally important to know when to pause and wait for more information as it is to issue a response. If facts are still emerging, it is better to say “we are gathering information” than to issue a statement built on incomplete or false details. Vague, speculative, or inaccurate language erodes trust and fuels uncertainty and confusion.

## The messenger

Even the most perfectly crafted message can fall flat if it's delivered by the wrong person. Recruit and support credible individuals who can deliver and/or amplify the message to the affected community and others who might be impacted by the intimidation. Consider developing a multi-messenger strategy to ensure the message reaches and is reinforced across different segments of society.

## Your audience

Always consider your audience, their experiences and emotions, and the language and framing that will most resonate with them.

## Talking points for communicating about the threat of federal interference

- Across backgrounds, identities, and geographies, most Americans share a fundamental belief: every voter should be able to cast their ballot easily, safely, free from intimidation — and to know that their vote will count.
- That's why community members and leaders across the country are working to ensure the upcoming elections are free, fair, and safe. From faith leaders standing as familiar, trusted faces at polling locations to neighbors gathering over potluck dinners to make plans for peaceful participation, our communities are showing up for each other and for democracy.
- Even the threat to deploy federal agents can instill fear. Intimidation doesn't need to be carried out to be effective — it just needs to be threatened or felt.
- This threat falls hardest on Black communities, naturalized citizens, and Spanish-speaking Americans — communities whom federal officials have already tried to intimidate from participating in public life.
- We won't allow our voices to be silenced. Communities across the country are planning to vote together, vote early, and vote by mail ballot to make their voices heard. They are peacefully standing up, showing up, and taking action to defend every American's constitutional right to participate in elections. Remember voting by mail ballot can include dropping it off to a drop box, election official's office or through the mail.

## Talking points for communicating following an instance of federal interference

- Across backgrounds, identities, and geographies, most Americans share a fundamental belief: every voter should be able to cast their ballot easily, safely, free from intimidation — and to know that their vote will count.
- That's why community members and leaders across the country are working to ensure the upcoming elections are free, fair, and safe. From faith leaders standing as familiar, trusted faces at polling locations to neighbors gathering over potluck dinners to make plans for peaceful participation, our communities are showing up for each other and for democracy.
- [Describe the incident that occurred.] This is voter intimidation, plain and simple. Federal law is clear: Attempting to make voters fearful to participate in our elections is illegal, whether it is from federal forces, local law enforcement, or private citizens.
- [Describe the community response]: In response, [describe specific official actions that have been taken — including any response from local officials, efforts from community leaders working together to ensure that the community is able to vote safely, faith leaders mobilizing to the polls, people engaging in joyful action and refusing to be intimidated].

- [Quote/elevate any statements from other community leaders, especially the community targeted]: We are proud to join with the many community leaders who are committed to ensuring all eligible voters in [community] can cast their ballot safely and free from intimidation. [List other organizations or leaders and share their statements.]
- Voters who experience or witness intimidation can report it immediately to the Election Protection Hotline: 1-866-OUR-VOTE (administered by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law on behalf of the Election Protection Coalition). If comfortable, you can also report the incident to your local election official.
- We won't allow our voices to be silenced. Communities across the country are peacefully standing up, showing up, and taking action to ensure voters choose their leaders.

## Communicating about voter intimidation

Adapted from Over Zero's [Messaging Guidance: Voter Intimidation](#)

### Communication goals

- Protecting people's right to vote safely and securely.
- Restoring feelings of voter safety.
- Setting clear norms that reject using violence and intimidation to impact elections.

### Communication risks

Amplifying instances or threats of voter intimidation can inadvertently play into the goals of bad actors, creating a sense of fear around showing up to vote. Even if an incident is addressed directly (e.g., someone with a gun is removed from a polling location), it can still have a chilling and intimidating impact.

### Dos and don'ts

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- ✓ **Do take stock** of the situation. Determine what is and is not known. Confirm that the situation is not being misrepresented with false or AI-generated content.
  - ✓ **Do consider** whether the situation merits a communications response via your platform or whether responding might inadvertently play into the goals of bad actors and further intimidate voters.
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✓ **Do unequivocally condemn** voter intimidation as an attempt to undermine a core American freedom to participate in elections.

✓ **Do build relationships** early with leaders from communities that have historically been targeted with voter intimidation and/or election violence so that if an incident arises, you are able to connect with and support them in real time.

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✓ **Do respect and connect.** Acknowledge the impact that voter intimidation has had on targeted communities, while remembering that voter intimidation can be frightening to people beyond the targeted group. Work closely with leaders from across communities to develop a response that will strengthen both real and perceived safety.

✓ **Do consider** whether you are in a position to serve as a liaison between government or law enforcement leaders and communities who may feel less safe engaging directly (e.g., for some communities law enforcement presence may create a sense of fear; they may prefer to have local faith leaders involved).

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✓ **Do elevate messages** from leaders in targeted communities and follow their lead in learning about what it will take to restore a sense of safety for their community.

✓ **Do work with communities**, rather than only addressing immediate tactical security threats, to understand how they are feeling and what needs to be done to ensure safety (including who they need to see and hear from). Ensure that your response is sensitive to these needs.

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✓ **Do describe everything** the community is doing to ensure eligible voters can freely and safely cast their vote, to avoid the chilling effect of voter intimidation. Emphasize voter agency, and why participation matters — not just for individuals but also for the community, the state, and the country.

✓ **Do be specific and precise** about incidents that have happened, to avoid any sense that threats or intimidation are more widespread, normalized, or inevitable than they are, while refraining from overly vivid or fear-inducing descriptions or imagery.

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✓ **Do consider**, if you are a leader of an impacted community, which local leaders you can engage, either directly or through trusted contacts, to coordinate a response that validates your community's experience, creates safety and security for community members, and reinforces democratic norms.

✓ **Do share updates** on actions underway to both ensure safety and to promote accountability for intimidation. Focus on the response as the main story, rather than the intimidation itself. As a proactive measure, familiarize yourself with the contingency plans that local election officials have to address any issues that arise.

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✓ **Do develop messages** showcasing that different groups and communities are supporting each other and standing together against intimidation.

✓ **Do work with other leaders** within and across sectors to ensure an effective, coordinated response, and consistent messaging.

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✓ **Do identify local media and influencer** voices early. Establish points of contact to have relationships with these outlets so they can uplift your messaging and/or so the messengers can be a known source of reputable information when an event occurs.

✓ **Do speak out** about the consequences of voter intimidation and discrimination if a story about intimidation has spread. Those intimidating voters seek to use fear and violence to chill public engagement and shape the democratic process. Emphasizing voter agency in the face of intimidation undermines those goals.

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✓ **Do support the media** in reporting in ways that avoid inadvertently deepening the risks outlined above. For additional media-specific guidance for reporting on risks of violence, see [here](#).

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✗ **Don't dismiss or ignore the reality** of the situation for targeted communities. You can avoid making voter intimidation seem more widespread than it is without downplaying voter intimidation that has happened.

✗ **Don't talk about** voter intimidation without talking about how it's being addressed. When incidents are isolated and resolved quickly, say so.

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✘ **Don't use vague, speculative, defeatist, or sensationalist language** in describing voter intimidation, which can make instances seem more widespread or inevitable than they are and can further a sense of fear. Don't repeat direct quotes from anyone seeking to intimidate. Overall, communication should work to ensure instances of voter intimidation do not have their desired chilling effect.

✘ **Don't address** immediate security issues without acknowledging their larger impact. Harassment, threats, intimidation, or violence not only pose an immediate threat to those present, but can also create a chilling effect on voters across the community and country as stories spread.

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✘ **Don't make legal claims** without evidence and/or consultation with voting rights attorneys. Making legal claims that are later disputed can undercut efforts to address voter intimidation, as well as your credibility in flagging voter intimidation.

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# Actions to Take in Your Community

Together, our communities can take steps now to form new relationships, educate friends and neighbors, and strengthen existing bonds to be ready for potential federal election interference. Whether you are an individual concerned about ICE in your area, a community leader who is already bringing people together, or an experienced activist, there are actions to ensure that all eligible voters, no matter who they vote for, can cast their ballots in free, fair, and safe elections. Below are some options for you to consider.

## Pre-election actions

### Individual community member actions

- Make plans to go vote with your neighbor, friends, family members and provide support if they are unsure about their voting plans.
- Volunteer with [VoteRiders](#) to support other voters getting to the polls!
- If allowed by your state, vote early or by mail. Find more info at [TurboVote](#). Remember voting by mail ballot can include dropping it off to a drop box, election officials office or through the mail.
- Attend a know your rights training from partners like [ACLU](#), and share learnings with friends and family.
- Post positive messages about voting on social media and hang flyers in your neighborhood. The Election Protection Hotline has a [great toolkit](#).
- Host a community dinner and bring up voting plans.
- Join your local Election Observer Programs through trusted partners such as: [League of Women Voters](#) and [Election Protection Hotline](#).
- Join your local [Peacekeepers program](#).
- Familiarize yourself with [best practices](#) around identifying and countering misinformation and AI-generated content.
- Familiarize yourself with trusted resources on voting information such as through your State Election Board which you can find through the [Election Assistance Commission](#).

- Save the voter protection [hotline](#) to your phone. English: 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683). Spanish: 888-VE-Y-VOTA (888-839-8682). Asian Languages: 888-API-VOTE (888-274-8683). Arabic: 844-YALLA-US (844-925-5287).

## **Actions for community leaders who can pull people together (faith leaders, business owners, etc.)**

- Plan and host an event to accompany others to the polls such as a “Souls to the Polls” event with your faith community or a Project [HALO event](#) with veterans, faith leaders, business owners, and other community members, or a Party at the Polls.
- Host a voter education event at your business to share state specific voter information. Info can be found at [TurboVote](#).
- Allow your space to be used for voters to meet up before voting or find a community space to host a voting event.
- Share positive [social media content](#) about voting on your business or organization’s page.
- Speak to the press about the importance of wide participation in our elections.
- Canvas local business to ask if they will display [a sign supporting voters](#).
- Familiarize yourself with deescalation techniques or [attend a local training](#). Share what you learn with others!
- Engage your community wherever they are: Talk to [rotary](#), [book clubs](#), [local YMCAs](#), and other local clubs about the importance of voting and to share voting information.
- Host World Cup or sports watch parties with a democracy theme.
- Encourage community members to serve as [poll observers](#) and [poll workers](#).
- Promote the voter protection [hotline](#) to others:
  - English: 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683)
  - Spanish: 888-VE-Y-VOTA (888-839-8682)
  - Asian Languages: 888-API-VOTE (888-274-8683)
  - Arabic: 844-YALLA-US (844-925-5287)
- Familiarize yourself with laws around and best practices for filming interactions with [federal agents](#) and [near polling places](#) if you are comfortable. In addition to assessing your safety and what is legally allowed, use judgment about whether filming or photographing federal agents would escalate a situation and refrain from doing so in those circumstances.

- Consult state laws to determine whether and under what conditions recording devices are permitted at the polls.

## Community-wide Actions

- Connect with community leaders across different parts of society (faith, business, veterans, government etc.) and develop plans to support community members, or join an existing coalition to share strategies and plans.
- Connect with your local election officials and make sure they are supported. The following organizations offer additional resources and support:
  - Election Official Legal Defense Network
  - Election Protection Hub (Public Rights Project)
  - Public Service Alliance
  - The Committee for Safe and Secure Elections
- Signal ahead of time that your community is prepared to push back peacefully on any voter intimidation.
- Connect with mobilization groups in your community to plan how to disseminate information during early voting or on Election Day.
- Make a plan with other community leaders and existing coalitions for any post-election needs, such as recruiting volunteers to observe recounts and cure ballots.

## Actions during voting

- Go vote with your friends, family and neighbors! Make it a community event to celebrate the joy of voting.
- Participate in a Project HALO event, Souls to the Polls, or any other event where your community is voting together.
- Participate as a poll observer or poll worker.
- Use the voter protection hotline if issues arise:
  - English: 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683)
  - Spanish: 888-VE-Y-VOTA (888-839-8682)
  - Asian Languages: 888-API-VOTE (888-274-8683)
  - Arabic: 844-YALLA-US (844-925-5287)

- Utilize your deescalation skills. Check out the Bridging Divides Initiative's [Deescalation Directory](#) for a repository of deescalation resources to support different community members, whether [elected government officials](#), [election and poll workers](#), [those engaging with law enforcement](#), or [everyday community members, volunteers, and bystanders](#).
- Film interactions with [federal agents](#) and report to the voter protection hotline, if you are comfortable and it is legally allowed. Use judgment about whether filming or photographing federal agents would escalate a situation and refrain from doing so in those circumstances.
  - Consult state laws to determine whether and under what conditions recording devices are permitted at the polls.
  - Make sure to follow [guidelines](#) and laws for recording near or at polling locations.
- [Be aware of potential threats](#) from individuals who use social media and streaming platforms to create content that promotes bigotry and undermines democracy.

# Additional Resources

Our democracy has always rested on the actions of everyday citizens, and today that means all of us. Please refer to these additional partner resources for useful guidance for how we can all do our part in ensuring that voters continue choosing their leaders and not the other way around.

## Background

- [Executive Override](#), Protect Democracy
- [Federal Agents at the Polls](#), ACLU

## Messaging

- [Messaging Guidance: Voter Intimidation](#), Over Zero
- [What's Breaking Through About Deploying Federal Agents to Polling Places](#), States United
- [Americans Oppose ICE at Polling Locations](#), States United
- [New UnidosUS Bipartisan Poll: Hispanic Voters Feeling Economically Strained, Concerned about their Safety and Ready to Vote — With a Clear Message for Candidates](#), Unidos US

## Actions

- [Vote Safe from ICE](#), Common Cause
- [Vote Free From Fear](#), Southern Poverty Law Center
- [Action Center for Protecting Free and Fair Elections](#), IssueOne



Protect Democracy is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing American democracy from declining into a more authoritarian form of government.

[protectdemocracy.org](https://protectdemocracy.org)

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Over Zero partners with leaders and civil society organizations to support communities in preventing, resisting, and rising above political and identity-based violence.

[projectoverzero.org](https://projectoverzero.org)