

The Gen Z Election Defense Toolkit

A Young Person's Guide to Protecting and Participating in U.S. Elections

Alexis Nwatu and Lara Hicks

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

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Generation Vote (GenVote) sparks an intersectional, youth-led movement that fights for our right to vote and a just democracy for all.



Rock The Vote is a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to building the political power of young people.



The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to secure equal justice for all through the rule of law.



The Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV) Coalition is the national hub & largest nonpartisan network in the country dedicated to increasing student voter participation.



New Voters, a Gen-Z led nonprofit, inspires civic action by mobilizing high school students to register 80000+ youth to vote across the U.S.

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Please direct inquiries to: press@protectdemocracy.org

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Introduction

Voting in free and fair elections is an essential way for young Americans to exercise power over the decisions that affect their lives. And Gen Z is often depicted as a decisive slice of the American electorate. We know that Gen Z can, and will continue to play, important roles in protecting, promoting, and participating in elections.

We also know that the challenges young people face are stark, and that their confidence in U.S. elections (and in democracy itself!) is at an all time low. Barriers to voting, limited understanding of civic engagement opportunities among young people, confusing election policies, and misinformation continue to define the Gen Z electoral experience. **The threats to Gen Z's participation and confidence in U.S. elections are intentional and part of a playbook this administration is using to undermine and control U.S. elections.**



Protecting democracy is a generational effort.
When young people believe our participation
matters, we don't just vote—we change the world.

MICHAEL SANDOVAL, PROTECT DEMOCRACY

Yet, even as efforts ramp up to restrict the youth vote and call the integrity of our nonpartisan election system into question, **we believe in the power of young people across the country to organize, turn out at the polls, and advocate for free and fair elections.**

This **by Gen Z, for Gen Z toolkit** is designed to support youth-focused organizations and groups taking action this election season to educate young voters and build youth power.

- **Resources at every stage of the Election Process:** The toolkit contains voter safety & education resources, information about key election integrity threats, and examples of actions young people can take to get involved in election protection efforts.
- **Fills gaps and pairs well with other Gen Z-focused democracy materials:** The toolkit complements ongoing research and messaging guides, and can serve as a companion piece for existing Get Out The Vote resources from Gen Z pro-democracy advocates across the ideological spectrum.

- **Choose your own adventure:** There is no one-size-fits-all approach for using the toolkit, but some ways you might approach using it include:
 - Reading, downloading, and / or distributing individual sections of the toolkit as if they were standalone hand outs.
 - Working through each section in chronological order, from pre- to post-Election Day.
 - Integrating recommended actions highlighted throughout the toolkit into your existing youth-focused strategies and resources.
 - Translating Protect Democracy's analysis of major election threats, and what Gen Z can do about them, for younger audiences (e.g., social media posts, infographics, presentations, advocacy materials).

Whether you're a youth organizer, student leader, part of a campus group, or working within a youth-serving organization ready to expand young people's participation in the electoral process, **this toolkit is for you.**

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? How to Use This Toolkit

Choose a pathway that fits your focus and start there:

- Direct Voter Education → Confidently Know & Exercise Your Rights
- Campus & Peer Organizing → Student & Campus Organizing, Community Support
- Election Day Support → Confidently Know & Exercise Your Rights, Community Support
- Post-Election Integrity → Post-Election Protection & Participation, Legal, Advocacy, & Rapid Response Resources

 **Tip:** Sections can be shared individually or combined to match your organizing goals.

What Threats Are Our Elections Up Against?

Threats to election integrity aren't just "politics as usual," they directly dilute young people's political power. When our elected officials and public servants target the U.S. election process, they fracture Gen Z's perceptions of election outcomes, and constrict young Americans' ability to influence policy and choose leaders that represent them.

Awareness of what's at stake is a meaningful first step toward overcoming these threats. This section gives you the TL;DR on the risks our elections face from 2026 onward. Use this breakdown for your campus, your group, or other Gen Z communities. For a deeper dive into the Trump administration's plan to interfere with the 2026 election and how to fight back, check out Protect Democracy's latest [Executive Override report](#). You can access a printable, standalone version of this section [here](#).

Free and Fair Elections: What Does It Mean?

Free and fair elections ensure that every eligible voter can participate without interference and that every vote is counted accurately. This means voters can cast their ballots safely, election systems are secure, clear rules are applied consistently, and results are respected and certified according to the law. When these conditions are met, people have real power to shape their government. When they are undermined, public trust and participation can break down.

Threat 1: Deceive, By Promoting Election Disinformation

The goal of this threat is simple: erode confidence in the 2026 midterms (and beyond) by flooding the zone with lies and disinformation. Here's how this plays out:

- **Manufacturing Fraud:** Federal agencies create the appearance of election fraud out of thin air. An example of this is a [January 2026 FBI raid on a Georgia election office](#) based on false conspiracy theories.
- **"Noncitizen" Voting:** Public officials share false claims that noncitizens are "stealing elections," even when audits indicate that [noncitizen voting is very rare](#).
- **Gutting Security:** The administration gets rid of election protection and security infrastructure, like the [FBI task force tracking foreign influence](#).

Why this hits Gen Z harder

Young people are chronically online, which makes us more susceptible to disinformation campaigns. AI-generated deepfakes and false information can lead to greater mistrust of institutions, political candidates, and public officials. Less trust in our elections = less voter turnout from Gen Z.

Threat 2: Disrupt, Through Manipulation and Intimidation

This threat aims to (1) scare people into not voting, and (2) change election rules to make it harder for Americans to vote. Some ways this administration is doing this:

- **Targeting Critics:** The federal government investigates and prosecutes political opponents, journalists, nonprofits, and nonpartisan election officials to silence them and create a “chilling” effect on free speech.
- **Voter Intimidation:** The administration threatens to put ICE agents or federal law enforcement at polling locations to scare and discourage immigrants and people of color from voting.
- **Rule Manipulation:** The Executive Branch forces the passage of proposed laws like the SAVE Act, or uses Executive Orders to create strict ID requirements that could block millions of eligible Americans from voting, including young people whose student IDs may not qualify.
- **Accessing Voter Rolls:** Authoritarian efforts have targeted state voter rolls to scrutinize and potentially restrict who can vote. The Department of Justice has requested sensitive voter registration data from states, and in some cases, shared it with federal agencies like the Department of Homeland Security to run citizenship checks through the SAVE system. Many states pushed back, raising concerns about voter privacy and state authority over elections. The SAVE system has also incorrectly flagged eligible voters, putting students, naturalized citizens, and young voters at risk of being wrongly targeted, removed from voter rolls, or discouraged from voting.

Why they're going after the youth vote

Youth and student organizing poses a real threat to authoritarians trying to concentrate power. Some of the most effective opposition and pro-democracy movements have been led by youth organizers.

Young voters are more likely to be students living on campus or frequent movers. Stricter ID laws and changes to residency requirements specifically target the flexibility young people need to vote. This is by design — introducing confusing, restrictive, and constantly changing policies discourages young people from voting. And efforts to detain, intimidate, and arrest Gen Z activists, students, and young migrants are part of the same playbook.

Polling Site Intimidation

On Election Day 2024, voters nationwide reported to Generation Vote that they faced long lines, polling place delays, machine malfunctions, and confusion fueled by misinformation. Some polling sites opened late, ran out of ballots, or experienced technical failures that disrupted voting. Reports also documented voter intimidation, aggressive electioneering, violent threats, and other forms of harassment that made it harder for people to vote safely and confidently.

These challenges were especially significant for student voters. At campuses including Florida State University, the University of Texas, Binghamton University, Arizona State University, and others, students faced multi-hour lines that caused many to leave without voting due to class or work. In some cases, students were wrongly challenged on residency, denied provisional ballots, or given incorrect voting information.

Together, these incidents highlight real and ongoing barriers at the polls, and underscore the need for strong election protection efforts to ensure every eligible voter can cast a ballot freely and have it counted.

Threat 3: Deny, By Rejecting Election Results

This threat is all about what the administration could do to reject election results and overthrow them. Here's how this could go down:

- **Seizing Voting Machines:** Federal agents could take voting machines or ballots on election night, which stops the count and messes up the election certification process.
- **Encourage Refusal of Certification:** Since the 2020 election, a growing movement of election deniers has tried to get local officials to refuse or delay certifying election results, even though it's required. What started with false claims of a "stolen" presidential election has continued into certification disputes in the 2022 and 2024 election cycles. After the January 6th insurrection, some election deniers even ran for — and sometimes won — local election administration positions to gain more influence over how elections are run and certified.
- **Congressional Intervention:** The administration may turn to allies in Congress to manipulate election procedures through pressure, or even threats of violence. As a result, Congress ultimately refuses to seat legitimately elected members.

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Why Gen Z is in the crosshairs

Gen Z isn't opting out of the system yet, but young people have consistently felt deeply dissatisfied with the state of U.S. democracy. Our elections to date have all been free and fair, but that hasn't stopped Gen Z from [believing that democracy isn't working well for young Americans](#).

Election denialism could be the nail in the coffin, meaning "game over" for U.S. democracy as we know it. If the winners are chosen by the people in power instead of the voters, why should young people bother to vote? Why should anyone, for that matter?

So, What Can We Do?

Now that you're aware of the different kinds of threats our elections face, it's go-time. The table on the next page offers a visual summary of some ideas for concrete actions (with links!) your organization or group can take to help move the needle toward a more responsive democracy — and this toolkit is full of dozens more.

 **Tip:** Don't stop here. Check out the other sections of this toolkit for more links to take action way beyond just casting a ballot! Want even more? Get regularly updated suggestions for ways YOU can protect democracy [here](#).

Actions You Can Take



Educate & Activate

Send the [Voter Journey Map](#) to your friends, family, and community members!

Create a curated [reading list](#) of resources and books on democracy, authoritarian threats, and historical activism to share with young people for context and inspiration ahead of the midterms.

Work with others to organize a [voter registration drive](#) on campus, in your neighborhood, or online.



Show Up

Make sure your [voter registration](#) is up to date.

[Report voter intimidation or disinformation](#) when you see it.

Volunteer as a [nonpartisan election observer](#).



Advocate & Support

Use resources like the [EAC Voter Education Design Toolkit](#) to create effective communication materials.

Find and join [peaceful protests](#) near you.

Help your community navigate barriers to voting, ex. setting up a [rideshare schedule](#) for those without transportation.

Why Your Vote Matters

Voting is one of the most direct ways to participate in our democracy. For young voters, **showing up at the polls isn't just a box to check, it's a powerful exercise of collective power.** By casting your vote, you're expressing your values on the issues that matter most to you. As Gen Z continues to grow as a massive share of the electorate, their turnout sends a signal that cannot be easily ignored. When young people turn out to vote in large numbers, they influence who wins elections and help shift the conversation towards issues their generation cares about.

Voting plays an important role in protecting the integrity of American democracy. High turnout helps ensure that election results reflect the will of the people, and strengthens confidence that our elections remain fair, transparent, and legitimate. When you and your peers vote, you're strengthening the very framework that makes young voices heard. You can access a printable, standalone version of this section [here](#).



Systems don't change on their own — they change when people show up and demand it. Voting is a direct way to challenge what isn't working and shape what comes next. Your vote is power.

ALEXIS NWATU, PROTECT DEMOCRACY

Young Voters Are A Powerful Voting Bloc

Young people represent a large and growing share of eligible voters in the United States, and when young voters decide to participate, their votes carry real weight.

Research from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University estimates that approximately 47% of Americans ages 18-29 cast a ballot in the 2024 presidential election — that's millions of voices nationwide making themselves heard.

Youth voter participation has increased in recent election cycles, showing that more young people are taking part in the democratic process. Whether the race is for a local council seat or

a national office, when young people turn out, their collective participation can influence the outcome — shaping which leaders are elected and whose voices are represented. Even if they don't swing an election's result, by simply showing up to vote, young people help ensure that the priorities and perspectives of younger generations are more likely to be reflected in decision-making.

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Election administrators make every vote count

Election administrators are the public officials responsible for running our election systems, from Secretaries of State to local officials such as county clerks, boards of elections, and poll workers. They manage voter registration, ensure elections are conducted fairly, accurately count votes, and certify results in accordance with the law.

Since 2020, these officials have been on the frontlines of defending our democracy, often facing harassment, threats, and political pressure. Supporting and protecting these officials is critical to maintaining public trust and making sure every eligible voter's ballot is counted and reflected in the final outcome.

Close Elections Show How Every Vote Counts

While national elections tend to receive the most attention, many local races — such as school boards, city councils, and ballot initiatives — are decided by very small margins. Because turnout in local elections is often lower, even a relatively small group of young voters can tip competitive races in one direction or another.

Local elections are particularly important because they shape policies that affect everyday life. City councils, school boards, and county governments make decisions about issues like school funding, affordable housing, transportation, and public services. Although local elections receive less attention, the decisions made at the local level directly influence the communities where students live, study, and work. The data backs this up:

Research analyzing U.S. election results show that hundreds of state-level races have been decided by fewer than 500 votes, and dozens have come down to fewer than 100 votes.

Real-world examples:

- In 2026, the mayoral race in Boca Raton, Florida was decided by just 5 votes following a recount.

- In 2018, the Democratic primary for Baltimore County Executive was decided by just 17 votes.
- In 2016, a Vermont state House race was decided by a single vote out of more than 7,400 cast.

 **Think about that for a second:** 17 people is smaller than the average college seminar. *A single floor in a dorm or a handful of students on one campus can literally be the margin that decides an election.* When we say your vote matters, we mean it.

Gen Z Pre-Election Resource Directory

 **Picture this:** Young people you've mobilized and prepared for elections show up to the polls (in record numbers!) registered, feeling confident, and ready to exercise their right to vote. They know which candidates they're voting for, are clear-eyed about what else will show up on their ballots, and are aware of the kinds of identification and information they'll need to provide to the pollworkers on site. Or, maybe they've decided to vote-by-mail and are up to speed on relevant deadlines and where to drop off their ballots. Sounds nice, right?

YOU can make this vision a reality. This Gen Z pre-election resource directory is another tool you can add to your group's youth organizing and advocacy toolbox. The following list has links to resources and organizations we love 🍌 — from understanding voter ID requirements, to guidance for voting as a study abroad student, we've got you covered on all things election prep! You can access a printable, standalone version of this section [here](#).

Pre-Election Essentials

★ **Resource Spotlight:** This [Voter Journey Map](#) is an interactive, nonpartisan tool from the U.S. Vote Foundation to simplify the election process for voters. It walks users through a personalized "journey" that filters information based on specific state, location, and voting preferences. At the end of the process, voters receive a customized PDF "map" or checklist containing the specific links, deadlines, and requirements they need to successfully cast their ballot.

The [Voter Journey Map](#) also provides specialized guidance for overseas citizens, military voters, and those with circumstances like disability or residency issues.

For All Young Voters

- Polling place locator and checking your voter registration status:
 - [TurboVote | Democracy Works](#)
 - [Voter registration deadlines and ID requirements in all 50 states | 866ourvote](#)
- "What's on my ballot?" tools:
 - [Personalized Ballot | VOTE411](#)
 - [Sample Ballot Lookup | Ballotpedia](#)

- Information about postmark, mailing, and USPS rules affecting mail-in ballots:
 - [Here's What the New USPS Rule Means for Voting by Mail | Campaign Legal Center](#)
 - [Postal Service Changes and Mail Voting | Fair Election Center](#)

For Student Voters

- [Student Voter | VoteRiders](#)
- [ALL IN Out of State College Student Voting Guide](#)
- [State Student Voting Guide | Campus Voter Project](#)

For Absentee and Overseas Young Voters

- [Absentee Ballot Deadlines | TurboVote | Democracy Works](#)
- [Register and request your absentee ballot with the Federal Post Card Application \(FPCA\)](#)
- [How to Vote While Studying Abroad | IES Abroad](#)
- [Step-by-Step Guide to Overseas Voting | Overseas Vote Foundation](#)
- [Voting from Abroad | Travel.State.gov](#)

Resources for Language Assistance, Accessibility Accommodations, Etc.

- [Voting with a disability | Vote.gov](#)
- [Multilingual Hotlines & Voter Info - Election Protection | Protect The Vote:](#)
 - If English isn't your primary language and you want to vote in a different language, you can contact your [state or local election office](#) to learn what support is available in your language:
 - Voting information and materials (such as ballots) in your language.
 - A poll worker who can communicate with you in your language (including American Sign Language).
 - A family member or friend who can help translate for you at your voting location.
- Youth voters navigating housing instability:
 - [Voting while unhoused | Vote.gov](#)
 - [National Coalition for the Homeless | "You Don't Need a Home to Vote"](#)
 - [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness | Step-by-Step Guide](#)
 - [Nonprofit VOTE | Voting and Homelessness](#)
- Know your rights and safety:
 - [Know Your Rights Hub | Democracy 2025](#)
 - [State and local election offices | USAGov](#)
 - To report a violation of voting rights, intimidation, or suppression; or voter fraud and voter registration fraud, you can contact your state or local election office.
- You can also find more resources in the ["Legal, Advocacy, & Rapid Response Resources"](#) section of this toolkit.

★ **Resource Spotlight:** [VoteRiders](#) is a nonprofit organization that has numerous tools to reduce voter ID barriers that make it harder for you and your peers to vote. Check them out, here:

[VoteRiders Homepage](#) and [State Rules Page](#): select your state and status in the Voting Info dropdown menus to learn more about voter ID and registration requirements.

[VoteRiders Helpline](#): call or text the helpline, fill out a form, or use the chatbot to access **free assistance** and support to obtain different kinds of ID. The VoteRiders team can help you:

- ✓ Set up appointments and cover costs
- ✓ Request and pay for those documents
- ✓ Figure out what documents you need to get your ID
- ✓ Make sure you are prepared to vote
- ✓ Receive your ID
- ✓ Obtain documents that show who you are (examples: birth certificate, name change records, naturalization certificate)
- ✓ Access a free ride to the DMV or Social Security office
- ✓ Get proof of where you live
- ✓ Get a copy of your Social Security card

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. For handouts, group presentations, or to supplement organizing and voter education materials you're already distributing this election season, you can access a printable, standalone version of this section [here](#).

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](#).
-
- **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](#)

Community Support

Use this section as a guide for how to support people in your community by sharing reliable information and connecting them to trusted resources. You can send individual sections to friends, use them in conversations when questions come up, or point others toward official programs when they need help navigating the voting process. You can access a printable, standalone version of this section [here](#).

Elections don't just happen at the polls — they happen in dorm rooms, dining halls, and in local communities. Young people who aren't in school are also organizing in workplaces, neighborhoods, and online spaces — expanding where and how civic engagement takes place. Every day, people across the country are helping to make sure elections run smoothly, voters know their rights, and that participation is accessible to everyone. Supporting your community during an election can take many different forms, from sharing trusted voting information and helping others understand what to expect on Election Day, to organizing carpools to the polls and volunteering as a nonpartisan poll observer.

In many cases, the difference between someone successfully voting or sitting out comes down to small moments — getting a reminder, finding a ride, having a quick question answered in time, or hearing from someone they trust.

No matter your experience level, there are meaningful ways to contribute to a healthy, functioning democracy. **You don't need to be a political expert to get started or make a massive impact, you just need to be willing to help.** Keep in mind that some states have restrictions on the assistance you can give to voters, so if you're thinking about providing community support, please check your local rules and regulations.

Ways to Support Your Community During Elections

Voter Transportation & Accessibility

Getting to the polls shouldn't be a struggle, but for many people it is. Not everyone has easy access to polling locations or reliable options for returning ballots. One of the most impactful things you can do is help bridge the gap between a voter and the voting process by ensuring people can vote safely and on time.

What you can do:

- **Organize the "Poll-Mobile":** Set up a ride-share schedule for peers, neighbors, or community members who lack transportation.

- **Share Mail-In Voting Information:** Help friends or family understand official options for returning their mail-in ballot, including designated drop boxes or election office locations in their area. Check your state's Secretary of State website for the most up-to-date information, as rules and deadlines can change.
- **Partner With the Pros:** Connect with local nonpartisan programs like [Rideshare2Vote](#) to help voters reach polling locations.
- **Provide Accessibility:** Reference the [ADA Voter Rights Guide](#) to ensure that voters with disabilities have the basic support they need to navigate the polling site.

Access barriers can prevent people from casting ballots. By helping overcome logistical challenges, you're enabling your community to fully participate in elections.

A DEMOCRACY FOR ALL GENERATIONS

In Practice: Expanding Access

Youth-led projects like [VR'ing Democracy](#) are experimenting with tools that offer multilingual, virtual polling experiences designed to help users — especially immigrants and first-time voters — practice navigating the voting process in a more familiar and accessible way.

Civic Education & Voter Workshops

Knowledge is power. Civic education workshops are one of the most effective ways to help people feel informed and confident about participating in elections. These can be simple, peer-led sessions that explain how voting works, what to expect at the polls, or how local elections shape everyday life. Often, it only takes a short conversation or a few minutes of clear information to turn uncertainty into action.

These workshops don't require prior expertise — they are about making reliable information more accessible within your community and creating space for people to ask questions and learn together.

What you can do:

- Use resources like the [EAC Voter Education Design Toolkit](#) to create clear and effective communication materials.
- Partner with local libraries, student clubs, or community centers to host informational sessions in familiar spaces.
- Focus on the local elections, ballot initiatives, and issues that directly affect students and your community.
- Lead 1:1 conversations with peers through relational organizing. Use this [guide](#) from Young Invincibles to connect directly with friends, classmates, or community members to share

accurate voting info, answer questions, and provide support. [Follow-up](#) afterward to make sure they feel ready and confident.

- Share materials in multiple languages or accessible formats whenever possible to ensure information reaches a wide audience so no one is left out of the conversation.

★ **Extra Credit:** Want to go the extra mile? Contact your [local election officials](#) to see if you can observe pre-election testing procedures! Logic and accuracy (L&A) tests are a standard, essential pre-election procedure required by law in many states to ensure voting equipment correctly records and tabulates votes before Election Day.

Many people, especially first-time or young voters, may feel unsure about the voting process. These workshops will help reduce confusion and make participation feel more approachable and meaningful.

Nonpartisan Election Observation (Poll Monitoring)

Supporting the integrity of elections can also involve more formal, structured participation. If you want to take your involvement to the next level, consider serving as a nonpartisan poll observer. Poll observers focus on transparency by helping document how voting procedures are conducted and ensuring established rules are followed.

Observers do not interact with voters, direct how people vote, or interfere with the voting process. Their role is to strictly observe what they see, and report information and any issues to election officials through official channels.

What you can do:

- Get trained as a trained nonpartisan poll observer in your state. Resources to get started include:
 - [Election Protection Volunteer Opportunities](#)
 - [EAC Poll Watcher Guidance](#)
- Learn how to document observations and report problems through official reporting systems.
- Familiarize yourself with common Election Day [challenges](#) so you can address them calmly and effectively as they arise.
- Share Election Protection hotlines and resources with voters who may encounter difficulties and need support in real time.

Poll monitoring helps ensure elections are conducted fairly, transparently, and safely. Even a small number of trained observers can help protect voters' rights and strengthen public confidence in the election process.

Student and Campus Organizing

Students and young people play an important role in boosting civic participation on campuses and in their communities. High schools, colleges and universities are unique hubs that bring together large networks where students regularly communicate, exchange information, and influence how their peers engage with important issues.

Because of this, even small actions — like sharing reliable resources about upcoming elections or helping a friend understand what to expect at the polls — can make a significant impact on voter participation. This section is designed to help you support others by making voting information easier to access, clearer to understand, and more visible within your community. You can access a printable, standalone version of this section [here](#).

You don't need to run a huge campaign to make a difference. Many successful student-led engagement efforts start with simple actions: reminding classmates to check their voter registration, hosting informal voter education sessions, or making sure your friend group has a plan to vote. Students can also work with campus leaders, faculty, and administrators to create systems that make voting information more accessible and visible across campus.

Organizing Within Your Existing Circles

The most effective organizing doesn't happen on a stage, it happens in the groups you're already part of. Whether it's a sports team, Greek life chapter, study group, or just the people you grab coffee with, these are the spaces where student voices carry the most weight.

Peer-to-peer conversations are especially important when people are navigating something unfamiliar or confusing, as individuals often listen to those they already know and trust. Sharing clear, accurate information in these spaces can help others feel more prepared and confident.

Most people don't realize how much elections are shaped by everyday conversations. A group chat, a team, or a friend group can quietly become the difference between someone voting or sitting out — and on many campuses, that can be dozens or even hundreds of students making decisions based on what they see and hear from each other.

What you can do:

- **Share Reliable Voter Information:** Post reminders about deadlines, polling locations, or voting options in teams, clubs, or social media group chats, and connect with local community partners — like your [League of Women Voters chapter](#) — for trusted guidance. You can also access up-to-date information by signing up as a partner for [National Voter Education Week](#).

- **Create Space for Information-Sharing:** Take a few minutes at the start of a club meeting or group gathering to share resources and answer basic questions about the voting process.
- **Encourage Planning Ahead:** Prompt friends or teammates to think through when and how they plan to vote, including how they'll get to polling sites on Election Day.
- **Check in With Peers:** Remind friends to verify their voter registration and review key deadlines.
- **Peer Mentoring for First-Time Voters:** Pair experienced voters with first-timers to guide them through the process.

Check out these resources to support peer outreach:

- [Student Voting Advocate Toolkit](#): Templates, graphics, and organizing ideas for peer outreach.
- [How to Run a Voter Registration Drive](#): Step-by-step guidance for organizing registration efforts in student groups.
- [High School Specific Voter Registration Drives](#): Mentorship, state guides, and step-by-step guidance for organizing voter registration drives in high schools.

Campus Advocacy & Institutional Change

Beyond peer networks, campuses themselves play an important role in how accessible voting information is to students. Students can work with their institutions to expand access to reliable voting resources across campus. These efforts help create a campus environment where civic participation is supported and information is easy to find, ensuring students have what they need to make informed decisions. By integrating voter resources into orientation programs, student organizations, or class activities, campuses can foster a culture where civic participation becomes a more visible part of everyday student life.

What you can do:

- **Build Campus Coalitions:** Partner with clubs, organizations, or departments to organize larger campus-wide events such as voter registration drives or informational sessions.
 - Use the [Ask Every Student Coalition Building Curriculum](#) for tools and resources to start, grow, and strengthen a campus voting coalition and expand its partnerships.
- **Encourage Campuses to Share Voting Information Widely:** Work with administrators to promote deadlines, voting options, and key logistics through official channels.
- **Encourage Campuses to Provide Time for Voting:** Work with administration to allow time off for students to vote on Election Day or during early voting periods.
- **Host Voter Education Events With Campus Partners:** Invite local election officials or civic educators to explain voting procedures and answer questions, and encourage campus administrators to build ongoing relationships with local election officials.
 - Sign up for [Campus Takeover](#) and receive step-by-step guides to organizing different Civic Holiday events like National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, and Vote Early Day.

- **Collaborate With Campus Media:** Write in the school newsletter, share social media posts, or create short informational videos that share voting information.
- **Engage Student Government:** Propose initiatives that support voter registration efforts, civic education programming, or nonpartisan voter engagement activities.

Check out these resources for campus-level efforts:

- Ask Every Student Toolkit: This toolkit is a growing collection of strategies and tools to help campus leaders implement voter registration efforts that reach every student.
 - Conversation Guide: A guide to help campus voting organizations develop scripts and trainings for speaking to students about nonpartisan democratic engagement.
 - Template Training Slides: Customizable slides to train student leaders on speaking to peers about nonpartisan democratic engagement, with a focus on voter registration and participation.
 - Ask Every Student Academy: A free, self-paced online course for students on engaging peers in nonpartisan voter registration and civic action, including strategies for understanding the voting process and mobilizing students.
- ALL IN Campus Engagement Resources: Guides, research, and playbooks for institutional-level student voter engagement.
- Students Learn Students Vote Coalition: Campus Action Planning Hub: Templates and strategies for long-term campus voter engagement.
- Students Learn Students Vote Coalition: Scenario Planning & Rapid Response Guide: Use this resource to plan ahead for potential scenarios or guide rapid responses to issues as they arise, including Election Day challenges and misinformation.

Legal, Advocacy, and Rapid Response Resources

Building a democracy that works better for young people takes collective effort that goes beyond casting ballots on Election Day. Everyone can play a part in safeguarding our election processes, expanding voter access and turnout, and ensuring basic civil rights and freedoms are honored.

This section provides more information about legal organizations that support and advocate for communities who are often disproportionately targeted by voter suppression tactics, and **organizations you can contact if your group or others in your network need rapid response assistance**. You can access a printable, standalone version of this section [here](#).



Young people have always been at the forefront of the fight for free and democratic elections. Resources like the Election Protection Hotline, 866-OUR-VOTE, protect young people's voting rights and empower the next generation of organizers, advocates, and litigators across the nation.

NICHOLAS GOTHARD, LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW

Who To Go To For Legal Support

These organizations provide legal assistance and resources to those whose right to vote is coming under threat:

- [Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law](#)
- [Legal Defense Fund](#)
- [League of Women Voters](#)

Get Involved With Youth Advocacy Groups

These organizations, networks, and coalitions conduct advocacy around elections, ballot access, voter protections, and voter turnout with a focus on young people:

- [Campus Vote Project | Fair Elections Center](#)
- [Rock The Vote](#)
- [Generation Vote](#)
- [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#)
- [Students Learn Students Vote Coalition](#)
- [New Voters](#)
- [Voters of Tomorrow](#)

Election Protection Hotlines and Rapid Response Assistance

For support on or before Election Day, contact the [Lawyers' Committee's Election Protection Hotline](#). If you need more robust rapid response assistance, we recommend connecting with the following service providers who may be able to help you:

- **[Democracy Security Project \(DSP\)](#)**: DSP provides training and physical safety, cybersecurity / privacy, event and protest protocols, and emotional well-being services.
- **[Vision Change Win](#)**: Vision Change Win provides urgent and emergent incident response support around personal / home safety, organizational safety, action and event safety, digital security, and internal / external incidents or threats. Vision Change Win can help troubleshoot digital, organizational, electoral, protest, event, fiscal, hate-based, and / or state violence.
 - Check out this [Electoral Safety Toolkit](#) put together by the Vision Change Win team.
- **[Pirth.org](#)**: Pirth provides preventative and rapid-response support for people facing any type of threat or harm online — while also working to advance systemic solutions that protect everyone.

Post-Election Protection and Participation

Imagine you've made it to the end of Election Day and the final voters on the West Coast have finished submitting their in-person ballots. For many, Election Day marks the end of a months- or years-long process to promote greater voter participation and to prepare for free, safe, and secure elections. However, **the post-election period is an especially vital time** for ensuring (1) every eligible voter's ballot is counted, (2) election outcomes are accurate, (3) the public, election, and elected officials respect election outcomes, and (4) election administrators do their job and follow through with certification processes. It's important to know that delays in reporting results are often part of a secure process, allowing election officials to count every vote accurately, rather than a sign of a problem.

This section shares more information about how young people can actively participate in efforts to support the post-election process. To accompany other voting or election-focused resources you're sharing with young people, and for individual handouts, group sessions, or presentations, you can access a printable, standalone version of this section [here](#).

 **Organizing Insight:** Our [recent research and polling](#) finds that an overwhelming(!) majority of young Americans (**90%**) value free and fair elections. However, **only 30%** of Gen Z respondents feel confident in U.S. elections and trust election outcomes. This confidence gap is pretty alarming. So, how can we begin overcoming Gen Z's widespread election mistrust?

Your group can play an important role in repairing trust in, and leveling up Gen Z's understanding of the election process! Getting an up-close, transparent look at the post-election process can help improve confidence in election outcomes, and the rigorous procedures employed to ensure the accuracy of election results. We recommend:

1. Sharing the information in this section with young people looking to get more involved in the election process AND with young people that are skeptical of how elections work;
2. Understanding what is required of election administrators and elected officials by law. This can help inform any advocacy and outreach activities, or election "myth-busting" conversations you anticipate having.

Getting Involved in the Post-Election Process

- **Informing Yourself of the Post-Election Process:** Step 1: familiarize yourself with the post-election processes for your local and state elections, as well as for national elections. We recommend these resources to help you study up on everything that happens in the period between Election Day and the beginning of newly elected officials' terms:
 - [Election Results, Canvass, and Certification | U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#)
 - [Election Certification | Rock the Vote](#)
- **Track Your Ballot, and Help Others Track Theirs:** Unsure what's happening with your ballot and whether it was successfully counted? For most states, you can check on the status of your ballot [here](#). You get bonus points if you share with others how they can track their ballots!
- **Ballot Curing Outreach:** Sometimes, a ballot may be rejected due to minor voter errors. Ballot curing is the process of correcting these minor errors, which typically come up in mail-in or absentee ballots. Currently, 32 states allow the correcting of minor discrepancies with ballots or signatures. This [tracker from Voting Rights Lab](#) has all kinds of information about ballot curing, including relevant deadlines for states that allow ballot curing.
 - Sometimes nonprofit organizations and state and local election offices look for volunteers to assist with outreach and ballot curing efforts to ensure every vote counts, and to resolve any issues with rejected ballots. **We recommend keeping an eye out for non-partisan ballot curing and voter protection volunteer opportunities** on [Mobilize.us](#) and with [Common Cause](#) or the [1-866-OUR-VOTE hotline website](#).
 - **Note:** past calls for volunteers have also mentioned that fluency in other languages, especially Spanish, is extremely useful when making ballot curing calls to voters that speak languages other than English.

 **Tip:** You can also volunteer during election recounts!

- **Post-Election Observation:** Did you know that [in most states, the public can view various parts of the post-election cycle](#)? If you're interested in observing or playing a more hands on role in ensuring transparency and the accuracy of election results, we recommend you look into the following opportunities:
 - **Attend canvass and certification meetings.** You can contact your [county elections office](#) about a schedule of public canvass meetings.
 - **Track post-election audits.** 49 of 50 states perform post-election audits to make sure voting machines correctly count votes. You can learn more information about your state's audit requirements and procedures, [here](#).

- **Become a trained, non-partisan observer.** Organizations like the League of Women Voters offer training and election protection [volunteer opportunities](#) for non-partisan observers from nonprofit groups. Inquire so you can be closer to the ballot processing action!
- **Serve as a poll worker.** That's right — poll workers' duties aren't limited to Election Day. Many poll workers assist with election reconciliation processes in the days immediately following an election. You can sign up for [paid poll worker positions here from Power the Polls](#). The more poll workers, the merrier!

A DEMOCRACY FOR ALL GENERATIONS

Misinformation vs. Disinformation

[Misinformation](#) is false or inaccurate information — getting the facts wrong.

[Disinformation](#) is false information which is deliberately intended to mislead — intentionally misstating the facts.

- **Combatting Election Misinformation and Disinformation:** Trust in election results and in the post-election process is crucial to preserving our democracy's tradition of peacefully transferring power. When the public doubts the validity of election outcomes and is uncertain about the accuracy or nonpartisanship of the election process, they are more susceptible to believing election conspiracy theories, misinformation, and disinformation campaigns. Additionally, government and political leaders may call the integrity of election processes and results into question, peddle conspiracy theories, and spread misinformation. **This is known as [election subversion](#)**; all of these actions sow distrust and can prevent true election winners from taking office.

We all have a responsibility when it comes to combatting misinformation and disinformation. Here are some ways you can do your part to stop the dissemination of false information:

- **Use official and non-partisan sources whenever you're sharing information about the status of elections and their outcomes.** We suggest relying on communications from your county election department's website and state's live election results portal. You can find your state or local election office [here](#).
- **Establish what is fact and what is fiction with digital rapid response.** Gen Z often encounters fast-moving misinformation, including AI-generated content like fake polling updates or deepfake videos. Verify information before sharing to protect your community.
 - **Fact-check rumors quickly:** [FactCheck.org](#), [PolitiFact](#), and [Snopes](#) are helpful websites that debunk rumors and investigate election-related claims.

- **Track misinformation:** The Brennan Center is working with other pro-democracy partners to track voting and election rumors, check out their work [here](#).
- **Join efforts to fight back against disinformation by reporting disinformation and volunteering for different organizations.**
 - **Report election misinformation online:** If you see content online that could mislead or suppress voters, use this [cheat sheet](#) from Asian Americans Advancing Justice to help you identify and report it across major platforms. The guide includes platform-specific instructions for flagging content and provides clear do's and don'ts for responding to misinformation.
 - **Report local election rumors to your county election department:** Local election offices can issue public corrections if they're made aware of election-related scams and rumors.
- **Support and participate in advocacy initiatives around passing anti-disinformation laws.**

Most states have enacted legislation that targets AI-generated media in elections. However, some states like [Massachusetts](#), [Michigan](#), and [New York](#) have introduced stricter legislation that would prohibit the dissemination of election-related disinformation. Encourage state legislators to pass these kinds of laws so that disinformation spreaders can be held accountable for their attempts to mislead voters.

Responding to Youth Voter Disenfranchisement

Not all threats to an election look like a stolen vote. Sometimes they show up as a lie designed to make you doubt what's true. Sometimes they show up as a policy that makes it harder to organize. Sometimes they show up as a person in a uniform standing nearby to intimidate you. These tactics follow a deliberate pattern that the current administration is using to undermine and control U.S. elections: Deceive voters with lies and disinformation, Disrupt the process through manipulation and intimidation, and if all else fails, Deny the results altogether.

This guide walks through some of the most common pressures young and student voters may face that threaten their ability to cast a vote or exercise their right to organize, and how to push back this election season. Each section, organized by category so you can jump to what's relevant to you, covers what the threats can look like, how they can escalate, and what you, your peers, and your organization can do about it — whether that's in the weeks leading up to Election Day, the day itself, or in the aftermath.

Misinformation & Disinformation

You've probably seen it before: a video, a post, a screenshot that seems too wild to be real, and it turns out it wasn't. Spreading lies and confusion, whether by mistake (misinformation) or on purpose (disinformation), is one of the easiest ways to make people doubt whether their vote counts, whether elections are legitimate, or whether it's even worth showing up. It's the Deceive piece of the playbook — flooding the internet with lies until no one's sure what to trust anymore. Especially for young voters, a generation that gets most of its news from social media, that confusion can lead to missed deadlines, distrust of legitimate results, or disengagement altogether. The good news is that spotting it gets easier with practice, and knowing what to look for is often enough to stop it from working on you.

How This Could Play Out

Understanding how misinformation and disinformation can show up is key to spotting it fast and stopping it from spreading further. Potential scenarios include:

- **AI-Generated Fake Footage:** This can range from a false audio clip claiming out-of-state students aren't legal residents of their campus's state and can't vote there — most states actually do allow it, but the claim can spread fast enough to cause missed deadlines before it's corrected — to a deepfake video showing student volunteers destroying ballots at a polling site, leaving the workers depicted facing harassment, doxxing, and possibly government scrutiny. AI-generated clips that should set off alarm bells are those that make

viewers or listeners think an authority figure (like a governor, state attorney general, or secretary of state) is really speaking, even when that isn't the case.

- **Misinformation Spreading From Student Groups:** This can be as small as anonymous flyers circulating on campus, or a few campus chapters posting contradicting voting deadlines online, causing some students to miss their actual deadline while sorting out which one was right. It can also manifest larger, like a viral post falsely claiming out-of-state student votes “won't be counted this year” after a state changes its mail-in deadline — turning a rule change into a false alarm that spreads fast enough that some students decide not to bother voting absentee at all.

How Can I Help To Alleviate This Threat If I'm...

An Individual Student?

- **Pause before sharing anything that makes you feel shocked, angry, or panicked** — that reaction is often the whole point, since content designed to mislead usually works by triggering a fast, emotional response before you have time to think it through.
- **Before trusting a screenshot or a claim from social media, double-check voting deadlines and rules directly with your state or campus election office.** Information takes seconds to confirm. Check an official government website, or call or text the [Election Protection hotline](#) at 866-OUR-VOTE, so a rumor doesn't cost you a deadline!
- **Do not repeat false information** — even to debunk it. If you see viral content with false information — do not amplify. Posting or sharing accurate information with your community is a great response, but no need to give oxygen to the false info along the way. (Dig into the [nerdy psychology](#) on why this is important here).

A Young Organizer?

- **Verify anything before you post it, even if it's already been shared multiple times in your network.** A high share count doesn't mean it's true, and the more a claim spreads, the harder it becomes to correct once it's proven to be false. Check out [this resource on election misinformation](#) that gives examples on what to look out for.
- **If you spot misinformation spreading, report it directly on the platform where you saw it,** using this [cheat sheet](#) for platform-specific instructions. Then correct it for anyone who's already seen it, pointing them to a [trusted source](#) instead of just deleting or ignoring the post.

An Organization or Campus Chapter Leader?

- **Assign one person to post your organization's official voting information, so multiple people aren't posting conflicting messages.** The [EAC Voter Education Design Toolkit](#) has templates and best practices to help you build accurate materials from scratch. And the Center for Civic Design also has an awesome [messaging bank](#) with social graphics on how to respond to different scenarios.

- **Before any resources go out publicly, check dates and claims against other campus groups working on the same issue.** Posting conflicting information can make students wary of trusting election updates from your group going forward.

Additional Actions You Can Take

- **Get Election News You Can Trust:** Follow nonpartisan, election-specific outlets like [Votebeat](#) and [Bolts](#) so you're working with information from trusted sources.
- **Understand How AI Is Being Used To Mislead Voters:** The more you know about how deepfakes and AI-generated content spread, the faster you'll spot the next one.
- **Practice Media Literacy:** Slow down, check sources, and compare coverage across outlets. These habits get easier the more you use them.
 - [FactCheck.org](#), [PolitiFact](#), and [Snopes](#) are helpful fact-checking websites that can help debunk rumors and investigate election-related claims.
 - We also love this article from the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public that unpack [the 5 moves of misleading election rumors](#).

Campus Free Speech Around Electoral Organizing

Campuses have always been one of the most [important places for students to organize](#) and speak out. In recent years, many universities have made it harder for students and others to exercise their First Amendment rights, and pressure from this administration — including [threats to freeze federal funding](#) over campus activism — has accelerated the trend. Making it harder for real organizing to happen at all, as these restrictions do, is useful to the administration's Disrupt strategy. Facing new rules, extra hoops, or pushback from university admin can feel discouraging, but it's important to remember that student speech and organizing are protected activities, and [knowing your rights](#) is the first step to keeping your work moving forward.

How This Could Play Out

Understanding how these restrictions might show up is key to knowing your rights and responding quickly. Potential scenarios include:

- **Policy Restrictions on Your Organization:** Campus administrators have tightened (and may continue to tighten) rules around civic engagement activity — sometimes through blanket policy changes that force your group to scale back tabling, registration drives, chalking, putting up posters, or partner events, and in more serious cases, by revoking your registered student organization status entirely over your group's work. Losing that status cuts off funding, access to campus space, and your ability to recruit — right when students need that outreach most. Know that administrators generally can't deny your group recognition or funding at a public university just because they find your message controversial. And while a public university student leading organizing work has First

Amendment protection, a private school student is subject to their school's own code of conduct (more on this, below).

- **Retaliation Against Individual Organizers:** This can range from individual pressure — a fellow hosting a nonpartisan voter registration drive getting emails from campus leadership signaling they're being watched, despite following every policy — to formal dismissal after outside political pressure frames an organizer's work as biased. In the most serious cases, this escalates to campus protests over First Amendment rights, with government officials going so far as branding the organizer's civic engagement work as "hate speech" or "propaganda."

How Can I Help To Alleviate This Threat If I'm...

An Individual Student?

- **Know what protections you actually have.** These resources from FIRE help break down what admin can and can't do under your school's speech codes, event policies, and disciplinary procedures, which vary a lot from school to school.
 - [FIRE's Guides to Free Speech on Campus](#)
 - [FAQ for Political Speech on Campus | The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression](#)
- **Keep a written record of every warning, meeting, or policy citation from campus administration.** Dates, names, and exact wording matter if you need to reference it later.

A Young Organizer?

- **Check whether your school is public or private before assuming your rights apply the same way.** The [NYCLU's guide](#) and [this FAQ from FIRE](#) walk through the differences. Remember that private institutions promise students free speech in their official policies, and they have an obligation to live up to those commitments. No exception for the election season!
- **Document everything in writing, and avoid agreeing to informal terms on the spot.** A verbal "understanding" likely won't hold up later, since there's no record of what was actually agreed to.

An Organization or Campus Chapter Leader?

- **Review [PEN America's Campus Free Speech Guide](#) for tips and case studies drawn from real free speech incidents at colleges nationwide.** Seeing how other schools' disputes played out can help you anticipate what your own administration might do. We also find their [tip sheet for student voting organizers](#) especially useful!
- **Get support early.** [FIRE's Campus Rights Advocacy](#) supports student groups denied funding or recognition over their views, students facing punishment for unpopular speech, and students denied due process.

- **Learn more about permissible political campaign-related activities and student rights.** This [issue brief from the American Council on Education](#) has valuable information about voting and college political campaign-related activities this year. We recommend reading from page 8 onward so you can get smart, quickly!

 **Pop Quiz:** But don't worry — everything is open book! Many campuses have time, place, and manner restrictions for civic engagement activities. Organizations, chapter leaders, and organizers should familiarize themselves with their campus policies. If you're a part of a campus organization overseeing young organizers, it's important to help students understand campuses' individual policies before they potentially violate them. And if you disagree with some of the rules? Organize and dialogue to see if they can be changed!

Additional Actions You Can Take

- **Build Relationships Now:** Connect with a legal aid organization so you have support lined up if something happens, and build relationships with campus administrators who can be helpful partners!
- **Start a Student Defenders Group:** [FIRE's Student Defenders program](#) helps you build a peer-support network on your campus focused on due process and fair treatment, and may offer financial support to help get one started.
- **Stay Looped In With Other Campus Organizations:** Share what you learn with other student groups doing similar work — coordinated response is stronger than any one organization acting alone.
- **Explore Whether Your Campus Has a Nonpartisan Voting Coalition:** Many campuses have nonpartisan voting coalitions or student groups. Partnering with these entities can help young organizers attain greater access across campus and better understand the campus landscape.

Voter Intimidation by Local, State, or Federal Agents

You have every right to cast your ballot safely and freely. The presence of law enforcement near election spaces itself is not voter intimidation. However, it is crucial to remember that voter intimidation by any government agent is strictly illegal under federal and state law, and actual incidents remain rare. Being prepared by knowing the legal limits on government authority at the polls, and having resources on hand can help you understand your rights, support your peers, and ensure your community can vote with confidence.

How This Could Play Out

Understanding how voter intimidation by government actors might manifest is key to identifying and resisting it. Although we hope this does not happen, potential scenarios include:

- **Local Law Enforcement and Campus Police:** An overbearing presence of local law enforcement or campus police may be intimidation designed to create a "chilling effect" around student polling places. Officers might set up conspicuous surveillance, conduct high-visibility vehicle stops along main voting access routes, or station themselves directly within prohibited perimeter zones. Keep in mind that some states require law enforcement at polling locations.
- **National Guard Deployment:** A high-visibility presence of militarized forces near polling sites or transportation hubs serving young and diverse communities can serve as an aggressive visual deterrent. Even if guardsmen are around for "traffic control" or "public safety," their presence near ballot drop boxes or polling lines can intentionally or unintentionally create a hostile atmosphere that makes voters feel unsafe or hesitant.
- **Federal Agents (ICE, DOJ, and DHS):** Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or Department of Homeland Security (DHS) vehicles could hover near campus polling places, stage visible law enforcement actions nearby, or spread rumors of citizenship checks to induce panic among naturalized, mixed-status, or minority student communities. Department of Justice (DOJ) personnel or unbadged federal officers acting outside standard legal observer protocols might aggressively monitor voter lines or demand to inspect documentation, exploiting authority to intimidate first-time and young voters.

 **Remember:** Federal law strictly limits the presence of armed federal forces or military at polling places. Voter intimidation by any actor is illegal. **In all three of the above scenarios you should report any such presence to the election protection hotline and local election officials.**

- Whether you're a student, organizer, or campus chapter leader, you can report instances of intimidation directly to the nonpartisan [Election Protection Coalition](#) at **1-866-OUR-VOTE**.
- For state-specific rules on law enforcement boundaries at polling locations, consult your state election authority through [USAGov State & Local Election Offices](#).

How Can I Help to Alleviate This Threat If I'm...

An Individual Student?

- **Vote early!** Make a plan to vote during the early vote window or early on election day — that way if the situation at your polling place makes you uncomfortable, you have options to return at another point.
- **Join your local election observer programs.** You can join by turning to trusted partners like the [League of Women Voters](#) and the [Election Protection Hotline](#).

- **Know what is legal, what is not, and what your rights are.** [Protect Democracy's Community Resilience in the 2026 Election report](#) has useful resources and summarizes what local, state, and federal agents are legally allowed to do.
- **Participate in voter accompaniment programs and buddy systems:** "Do you have your exit buddy?" – 🐠 *Finding Nemo*, 2003. In all seriousness, voting in groups or pairs makes it harder for anyone to be singled out, ensures concerned voters have support, and makes exercising your civic duty more fun!

👉 A Young Organizer?

- **Volunteer as (and recruit) poll monitors.** Join nonpartisan voter protection programs like the [Election Protection Coalition](#) to serve as trained poll monitors who help identify and report intimidation tactics on the ground (bonus points if you can organize your peers to join you!)
- **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.
- **If you're organizing actions, advocacy, and / or public communications on potential voter intimidation incidents in your community, read [OverZero's Messaging Guide on Voter Intimidation](#):** The [guide](#) has helpful recommendations and tips for organizers to consider when publicly communicating about voter intimidation.

🏠 An Organization or Campus Chapter Leader?

- **Understand university and campus police practices around nearby polling locations, and community dynamics:** Every campus is different, understanding the relationships between campus police, school administrators, election officials, and local police can help with assessing and pre-bunking potential concerns students may have about voting in person in advance. ***Some questions that may be helpful to run down answers to:***
 - Does ICE have a presence in my community?
 - Would local law enforcement cooperate with federal agents in my community?
 - Are university, college, and campus leaders aware of student concerns about voter intimidation from government and non-government actors? Do they have policies in place around how they would (or would not) support students facing voter intimidation at campus precincts or other polling locations?
- **If affiliated with a state or national organization with a presence on multiple campuses, reach out to headquarters with questions and for resources:** This establishes closer lines of communication, and you can get more support and encouragement when reporting incidents of voter intimidation via the [866-OUR-VOTE Hotline](#) or otherwise. Additionally, getting in contact can be helpful should there be a need to coordinate legal or other kinds of support for students facing voter intimidation, violence, deportations, etc.

- With organizations like [Donuts + Democracy](#), [ALL In Campus Democracy Challenge](#), host trainings, panels, campus conversations, or other kinds of events to educate students on their rights and how they can vote safely: Helpful trainings could center on de-escalation, Know Your Rights, and election volunteering opportunities. *Some ideas you can consider for potential speakers:*
 - Election officials
 - Previous poll workers (bonus points if they are or were a fellow student!)
 - Staff from nonpartisan pro-democracy and student vote organizations
 - If you are affiliated with a state or national organization, someone from headquarters
 - Campus administrators well-versed in student voting

 **Tip:** Make sure your student government shares accurate information and resources with the student body. Your chapter or organization can be especially helpful to student government as they work to communicate across campus. You get a gold star if you ask your student newspaper to run an issue focused on safe student voting, amplifying training opportunities, and the [866-OUR-VOTE Hotline](#) — and more extra credit if you ask your college radio station to do the same!

Additional Actions You Can Take

- 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.
- Participate in a [Project HALO](#) event, [Souls to the Polls](#), or any other event where your community is voting together.
- Make plans to go vote with your neighbor, friends, family members and provide support if they are unsure about their voting plans.

Other Potential Scenarios (and What You Can Do)

Beyond campus free speech, voter intimidation, and mis- and disinformation incidents, there may be other kinds of situations you and your peers find themselves in this election season. Below, you'll find some more examples of scenarios that may apply to you, and what you can do in response.

On or Leading Up to Election Day, What Do I Do If...

➡ My Campus Precinct Is Relocated To An Area Far Away?

- **Vote Early or by Mail:** If traveling to a distant location on Election Day poses a challenge, students can explore early voting or absentee ballot options depending on state eligibility guidelines.
- **Coordinate Rideshares:** Student organizations can establish carpools, shuttle routes, or group transit trips to get voters to off-campus polling locations safely. Raise the issue with your student government and ask for support with coordination or funding rides to the polls. Also, check out [Rideshare2vote](#) for an example of an established program in your state!
- **Organize Voting Groups:** Utilizing a "buddy system" helps students navigate new or unfamiliar polling sites together. If you are in a club or on a sports team, coordinate a time to vote together after a meeting or practice.
- **Report Site Access Issues:** If a sudden relocation creates barriers to voting, students can contact trained volunteers via the nonpartisan [Election Protection Hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE](#).

➡ I Am (or a Friend Is) Experiencing Delays With Receiving Absentee Ballots?

- **Track Your Ballot:** Did you know that there are several vote-by-mail trackers you can use to keep tabs on your ballot? Treat your ballot like a package you're returning and regularly check a ballot tracker for status updates to make sure it'll arrive on time. We've linked several trackers below:
 - [Rock The Vote | Make Sure Your Vote Gets Counted](#)
 - [BallotTrax](#)
 - [Ballot Tracker Tools | Vote.org](#)
 - [Was My Ballot Counted? | U.S. Vote Foundation](#)
- **Vote In Person:** In many jurisdictions, voters who requested an absentee ballot but did not receive it can vote in person. Local procedures vary — some locations issue standard ballots after the voter signs an affidavit or cancels the unreturned ballot, while others provide provisional ballots to ensure no duplicate vote occurs. If you are concerned about your absentee ballot call your local election office or voter protection hotline to make a plan.
 - **For those studying abroad, in the military, etc.** who face severe mail delays, emergency tools like the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) may be available as outlined via the [U.S. Federal Voting Assistance Program](#).
- **Organize Rides to or Communications With Local Offices:** Arrange transportation for peers who need to go to a local county election office or early voting center to resolve ballot issues or cast in-person replacement ballots, or support peers in contacting local offices about issues with their absentee ballots.

- **Share What You Have Learned:** If structural issues are causing delay in the return of your ballot, others in your community are likely impacted as well. Use your voice to share the information you have learned and ensure that others are able to have their vote counted too.

➡ Registrations Are Getting Canceled Without Me or Other Voters Finding Out?

Note: While extremely unlikely and highly illegal, the following guidance walks you through how to respond to this unique scenario in case it ever comes up, not because we expect it to happen. The good news is, as of September 2026, we're NOT seeing any evidence or data indicating that voter registrations are getting canceled, and we're already inside the 90-day window before the election, when federal law prohibits systematic voter list purges. There's no need for you or your community to let this keep you up at night.

- **Check Status Frequently:** Encourage students to routinely verify their voter profile weeks ahead of deadlines using official lookup tools available through the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#) or state voter portals.
- **Watch for Mail Notices:** Federal law under the [National Voter Registration Act \(NVRA\)](#) generally requires election officials to send confirmation notices before removing anyone from the rolls. Students should monitor both their campus mailboxes and permanent home addresses for official election mail.
- **Re-Register Immediately:** If a registration shows as inactive or canceled, re-registering before the state's registration cutoff is the fastest fix. State-by-state registration portals can be accessed via [TurboVote](#).
- **Utilize Same-Day Registration:** In states that permit Same-Day Voter Registration or Election Day Registration, students whose names do not appear on the voter roll can register and cast a ballot on the spot at designated polling locations or early voting sites.
- **Cast a Provisional Ballot:** If a registration error cannot be resolved at the polling place on Election Day, voters have the right to request a provisional ballot. Election officials will verify eligibility post-election before counting the vote, however, provisional ballots often require follow up steps to be counted. Ask carefully what steps you must take to ensure your provisional ballot is actually counted and make a plan.
- **Run Campus Verification Drives:** Student groups can set up "Check Your Status" tables in high-traffic campus areas to help peers catch cancellations well before registration deadlines.
- **Report Unlawful Purges:** If you hear of any registered voter whose registration is canceled during the 90-day window, report the issue immediately to nonpartisan volunteers at [1-866-OUR-VOTE](#).

➡ I'm Experiencing Hostility From Election Workers or Volunteers?

Note: This is another extremely unlikely scenario. Not all heroes wear capes — election workers truly are heroes doing a very hard job in especially difficult circumstances this year and will be super excited to help you vote and answer any questions. The following guidance will help you

in the rare event you encounter a volunteer or someone at your polling site that's giving you or others around an extra hard time.

- **De-escalate and Stay Calm:** Avoid aggressive arguments. Hostility often aims to provoke a reaction or discourage voters from staying in line. Reiterate calmly that you are an eligible voter seeking to cast your ballot.
- **Ask to Speak with a Lead Inspector or Chief Judge:** Every polling site has a designated lead election official or chief judge responsible for managing site operations and resolving disputes. Ask the poll worker to escalate your issue directly to the precinct supervisor.
- **Demand a Provisional Ballot as a Last Resort:** If an election worker refuses to issue a standard ballot, federal law grants you the right to request a provisional ballot.
- **Request Written Instructions:** Poll workers are required to provide written documentation explaining how to follow up and verify if your provisional ballot was counted.
- **Call Nonpartisan Legal Hotlines Immediately:** If an election worker or volunteer is acting inappropriately, refusing access, or making hostile demands, step out of line (or remain in line while calling) to report the behavior to trained nonpartisan volunteers using the [Election Protection Hotline](#).
- **Document the Incident:** Note the time, poll worker name or badge number, specific statements or actions made, and the exact precinct location. Share these details with hotline advocates so they can escalate the complaint to local election administrators or county clerks.
- **Send Student or Youth Observers:** Youth or student groups can assign volunteers to stand outside the legal perimeter zone to observe polling line conditions, guide peers to legal resources, and assist anyone who runs into challenges inside.

➡ I Notice a Longer Term Need For a Campus Polling Location?

- **Socialize the Idea and Work With Supporters:** Partner with student government associations, campus organizations, and school administrators to garner support for new campus polling locations.
- **Petition Local Election Officials:** Identify the county board of elections or local clerk responsible for designating polling locations. You can then schedule meetings to present data on student population size, registration density, and transit barriers to demonstrate the necessity of an on-campus site.
- **Look for Suitable Locations:** Work early in the semester to identify accessible spaces (such as student unions or recreation centers) that meet official space, parking, and security requirements, and present those options to local election authorities.
- **Report Access Barriers:** If distance or lack of access prevents eligible students from voting, consult trained volunteers through the Election Protection Hotline at [1-866-OUR-VOTE](#) to explore emergency remedies or legal support.

Preparation doesn't have to = paranoia

Preparing for election threats can easily feel overwhelming, and it is completely normal to feel a spike in anxiety when discussing barriers to the vote. However, taking proactive steps isn't about bracing for catastrophe—it's about building quiet confidence and community resilience. Preparation can transform uncertainty into clear, actionable power so you and your peers can navigate Election Day safely.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alexis Nwatu, *Program Specialist*

Alexis supports Protect Democracy's efforts to expand the reach and power of the pro-democracy coalition by engaging new constituencies, with a focus on youth and Gen Z. Her work includes coalition-building, outreach, and organizing collective action to advance pro-democracy efforts and strengthen democratic resilience.

Lara Hicks, *Policy Advocate*

Lara works to equip pro-democracy civil society actors with the resources they need to remain resilient in the face of autocratic attacks, and supports Protect Democracy's constituency engagement projects with a focus on youth and Gen Z.



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

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