LOCAL PROGRESS IMPACT LAB

Policy Bulletin 📌

Protecting the 2026 General Election

August 2026

Attacks on our fundamental rights to vote, protest, and organize with others for change are increasing across the country. The Supreme Court killed the Voting Rights Act through its opinion in *Louisiana v. Callais*. Federal agents are intimidating election officials and voters from Fulton County, GA to Milwaukee, WI to San Antonio, TX. And President Trump continues to spread lies and demand legislation that would erect huge barriers and sow chaos in the 2026 elections.

As trusted communicators and elected representatives closest to their communities, local elected leaders play a critical role in ensuring that the 2026 elections are free and democratic.

The Local Progress Impact Lab has compiled key steps local officials should take and resources from trusted partners regarding building intergovernmental relationships, communications and narrative, protections against election interference and voter intimidation, and coalition building.

Mapping risks in your community

The first step is to map the level of risk in your community. Various factors—including competitive federal races, whether key players, such as candidates and election officials, are election deniers, and, particularly, a state's election certification processes and guardrails—can influence a jurisdiction's level of risk. As a starting point, check out Voting Rights Lab's 2026 Election Risk Heat Map to assess the level of risk in your community.

Messaging to advance election integrity and combat disinformation

As trusted communicators, local electeds' most important role in the 2026 elections is to serve as a source of accurate information that reinforces trust in the electoral process and combats disinformation. Below are strategies to help you build your communications skills in advance of the midterm elections, along with resources from our partners that include essential messaging guidance and information on voting rights.

Key Strategies

- Utilize your communication channels early: Don't wait until October to start sending messages via email, social media, or physical mail about the upcoming election. The earlier you begin communicating to your community about the electoral process, the more trust you can build.

- Build a network of validators: Among rampant disinformation, there will be actual crises you will need to respond to. Ensure you, your staff, and/or your network are included in community chats so you can quickly verify rumors and determine whether something is a true crisis or just fake news.
- Don't argue, inviolate: Debating each point of disinformation just serves to repeat oppositional talking points. Instead of arguing with strangers online, build trust in our electoral process by showing people what it looks like. Interview poll workers, break down local laws to expand ballot access, and other positive pro-democracy ideas to show people voting is easy and secure.

Resources

- Hands Off Our Vote: Messaging guidance for protecting our vote in the 2026 midterm elections.
- Election Safeguards Response Network (ESRN), Responding to President Trump's Ongoing Threats To Voting: messaging guidance, a social media toolkit, and an FAQ on Trump's persistent attacks on the right to vote.

Building a broad coalition to show up for our democracy

Priming our communities—from individual voters to community groups and businesses—to be ready to take action in support of our right to vote and our democracy will be essential to deter and beat back attacks on our elections. Below are calls to action from trusted partners that aim to build a broad front against authoritarian attacks and build our mobilization muscles.

Key strategies

- Push larger local employers to sign the Business for Democracy Pledge.
- Join the Freedom Summer 2026 mobilization, with events from now through Election Day.
- Protect your community members' First Amendment rights to assembly and speech, particularly in the context of potential demonstrations in response to election interference. Check out the Impact Lab's policy bulletin on Protecting First Amendment Rights Under a Hostile Federal Administration.
- Create an expedited permitting process for election-related demonstrations with clear, objective, and viewpoint-neutral standards.
- Pre-designate public assembly areas near civic buildings and polling locations and publish them clearly in advance.

- Build ongoing relationships with groups representing historically disenfranchised voters so issues surface early.

Strengthening Local Election Infrastructure

The work of administering elections and enforcing election laws is done by public servants across agencies at the local and state levels. Since 2016, election administrators–many of whom are local officials–have come under unprecedented attack due to unfounded conspiracy theories pushed by President Trump and his anti-democratic allies. Those same conspiracy theories have sown doubt about how elections work in localities and states across the country. It's therefore essential to strengthen our local election infrastructure—to support local election administrators, ensure they have the resources they need to run smooth and inclusive elections, and build strong relationships with local and state officials across various offices to ensure effective preparation and problem-solving.

Key strategies

- Meet with local stakeholders to map election systems and assets in your jurisdiction and prepare plans for different issue scenarios. This means meeting with the mayor's office, police chief, local prosecutor, election officials and administrators, school superintendents, and community leaders to map election assets–like government facilities to be used as backup polling places, and volunteers to serve as poll workers–and conduct tabletop exercises.
- Pass a resolution affirming your jurisdiction's commitment to election integrity, support for election workers, and opposition to the intimidation of election officials and voters. Example: Milwaukee County, WI resolution.
- Use your public platform to support election officials to build goodwill and community awareness, including through social media and events.
- Increase voter access and participation by encouraging employers to give time off to vote, directing public transit to offer free or expanded service to polling locations on election days, using government communication channels to publicize key election information.

Resources

- VoteRiders Partner Toolkit: free resources & assistance for states with voter ID laws.
- The Democracy Protection Network offers preventative assistance and crisis response support through their assistance request form.
- Find pro-democracy allies in your state.

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Protecting elections from interference and intimidation

Over the last decade, election conspiracy theories and disinformation from Trump-aligned forces have laid the foundation for attempts from state actors and private individuals to interfere with the fundamental right to vote. We're seeing the fruition of that now with federal agents intimidating local election officials and seizing election materials and regular incidents of violent threats.

But federal and state law is clear: voter intimidation and election interference are illegal and subject to civil and criminal prosecution. Below are resources that provide essential information on legal protections and how to respond to different threat vectors.

Key Strategies

- Plan with key stakeholders, document potential abuses, and educate government staff and the public on what to do across a range of federal election interference scenarios, such as demands from the Department of Justice for voter roll information, seizures of election equipment, and the deployment of the military or law enforcement to intimidate voters. Review Protect Democracy and the Brennan Center's brief on how to Plan, Document, and Educate in these scenarios.
- Prepare yourself and your jurisdiction's staff for how to respond if law enforcement requests or compels election-related information, records, or equipment, as has occurred around the country, including in Wayne County, MI. Check out this memo from Lowell & Associates, PLLC for detailed guidance.
- Familiarize yourself with federal and state civil and criminal laws that prohibit voter intimidation and election interference, whether by government agents or private individuals, and share accurate information to educate the public about their rights and deter bad actors.
- Establish clear written policies and trainings on how police should respond to reports of voter intimidation and election interference so they are prepared to step in to enforce voting rights protections, as officers did in San Antonio and Simi Valley.

For support, reach out to helpdesk@localprogress.org.