TOOLKIT

POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

Protecting the 2026 General Election

October 2026

LOCAL PROGRESS IMPACT LAB

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 midterm elections are free and democratic.

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

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Mapping risks in your community

The first step is to map 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. To start, check out Voting Rights Lab's 2026 Election Risk Heat Map to assess risk in your community.

Strengthening Local Election Infrastructure

Public servants across agencies at the local and state levels administer elections and enforce election laws. 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—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 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. Implement separation ordinances and consider whether your body is positioned to increase funding for election officials to meet identified needs.
- 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, build goodwill, and raise 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, and 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.
- The Immigrant Justice Election Protection Plan, from our partners at the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) and other allies, is designed to support and prepare communities that face a higher likelihood of being targeted before, during, and after Election Day.

Building a broad coalition to show up for our democracy

Priming our communities—from individual voters to community groups and businesses—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 to build a broad front against authoritarian attacks and strengthen 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 memo - Defending First Amendment Protest Against Election Interference: Guidance for Local Policymakers.
- Build ongoing relationships with groups representing historically disenfranchised voters so issues surface early.

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 training on how police should respond to reports of voter intimidation and election interference so they are prepared to step in and enforce voting-rights protections, as officers did in San Antonio and Simi Valley.

Communications strategies to combat disinformation

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

Key Strategies

- Utilize your communication channels early: Don't wait until late 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: Amid rampant disinformation, you will need to respond to real crises. Make sure you, your staff, and/or your network are included in community chats so you can quickly verify rumors and determine whether something is a real crisis or just fake news.
- Don't argue or invalidate: Debating each point of disinformation just repeats 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 share other positive pro-democracy ideas to show people voting is easy and secure.

Name who and why attacks on Black voters and communities of color have happened
Even before the Trump administration took power, Black voters and communities of color have faced voter suppression for well over a century. In addition to battleground districts across the country, federal agents, state police, and third-party agitators have made it clear their intent to suppress votes in Black majority districts. Recent court cases, such as *Louisiana v. Callias,* have gutted federal protections, such as the Voting Rights Act, for Black voters and communities of color. When communicating externally about those impacted by voter suppression, center Black voters and communities of color as people who have endured decades of barriers to exercising their democratic rights. Organizations like the NAACP have led this fight for decades, and their resources can help you center those most impacted in your messaging.

- Deliver Black Dreams
- National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
- NAACP
- Fair Fight Georgia

Centering Racial Justice in Your Narrative

Original Language	***New Language***	***Why?***
Our opponents are racist against new immigrants, Black people, and Muslims	*Our opponents blame new immigrants, Black people, and people struggling to make ends meet for our hard times*	*Reframing racism as scapegoating helps draw the causal connection to economic concerns shared across races*
Certain politicians deliberately deprive schools in Black and brown communities, denying students the resources to thrive; a powerful few choose who will live and who will die through color-coded barriers to healthcare; corporations rig the rules to take from working people	*Education/achievement gap between Black and white students; most fatal for people of color; growing disparities between rich and poor*	*The language of "disparities" and "gaps" obscures how these differing outcomes came to be, suggesting that they exist naturally -- or worse, that the people harmed are the ones to blame (e.g. Black students aren't working hard enough).*

Additional Resources

- Hands Off Our Vote: Messaging guidance for protecting our vote in the 2026 midterm elections.
- Mayors for America, Mayoral Talking Points for Elections: talking points for specific situations, such as preparing voters to cast ballots and a variety of election threat scenarios, from ICE deployments to federal seizures of election materials.
- From our partners at America's Voice and IMVP, these Talking Points for Immigrant Communities During Election Season are designed for local officials representing immigrant majority communities to effectively communicate the risks of this upcoming election while affirming our shared values of democratic expression.

Messaging Guidance

The fight against disinformation is as much a campaign to organize our communities as it is a battle for attention online. Ensuring our communities know how to vote, that our vote will be protected, and that we push back against the rumor mill peddled by the Trump administration and its allies requires regular message dissemination across channels, including digital channels. The strategies and guidance below are meant to help you in your role to ensure the validity of our electoral process and debunk harmful myths that threaten to keep people from the polls.

Narrative Framework
Use the sample narrative framework below to guide your response to electoral interference. When in doubt, trust your instincts to respond with messaging that will resonate most with your community. The narrative framework below uses the Race Class Narrative messaging architecture.

Values: *Our vote is a critical part of taking charge of our lives, making our voices heard on everything from the cost of healthcare to the power of corporations in our everyday lives. Our vote shows our support or dissatisfaction with those in power and the decisions they're making. When people across the country and across races can participate in our democratic process and vote free from fear and intimidation, our country is made stronger.*
Problem: *Right now, those in power are attempting to silence our voices by interfering with our voting process. Supreme Court cases and state laws have exacerbated the erosion of important voter protections that Black and brown communities have been seeing for decades. Rhetoric from the current federal administration also threatens interference in local elections to sway results in their favor.*
Impact: *Across the country, people are growing fearful of casting their ballots. Beyond direct threats of interference and intimidation from the federal government, people fear harassment at a polling station, being prevented from voting, or having their vote ignored. All of this weakens our democracy and removes our ability to impact how our government acts.*

Action: *As local officials, our job is to protect the integrity of our electoral process. We must join together to make it clear that any interference, from the federal government or third-party agitators, is a direct attempt to take away our voices, our votes, and our rights.*
Vision: *When we stand up to electoral intimidation, we make it clear that voting is a safe and effective way for our neighbors to participate in our democracy. When we stand up for our right to vote, we equip our communities to speak out and vote for the change needed in order for neighborhoods and families across the country to thrive.*

Communications Actions to Take

Share messages on your own channel in support of election integrity

- Check out sample social media posts below for partner-developed messaging to help communicate the integrity of the electoral process and combat misinformation from the Trump administration.
    - *Please note: we have suggested character-specific posts for text-based platforms like Threads, X (formerly Twitter), or BlueSky, but we do not recommend focusing on X. The algorithm is specifically designed to suppress messages like this and can lead to targeting.*

BlueSky, X (formerly Twitter), and Threads	*Facebook and Instagram - Graphic Link*

• *They're trying to keep us from voting because they're scared we'll vote them out.*
• *They're not just trying to take away our vote; they're trying to take away our say in our lives.*
• *Hands off our Vote. Protect our Vote. Keep our Elections free.*
• *You might be hearing [context for disinformation affecting your community], but here's the truth - our elections are free, and the only ones who want to keep us from the polls are those afraid of the results.*
• **Share details on how to register to vote, submit an absentee ballot, or vote early if your state allows.**
	• *With the midterm elections fast approaching, we must act to ensure our elections remain free and democratic. The Trump administration has resorted to peddling lies and direct intimidation because they know they're bound to lose this November. But if we stay home, it's those in power who will select their votes, not the other way around.*
	  ○ **Add local context on how to push back against disinformation in your area.**
	  ○ ***Share details on how to register to vote, submit an absentee ballot, or vote early if your state allows.***

Create videos to push a pro-democracy message

Content creation is at the forefront of the fight against online hate and disinformation. Whether you've made videos before or are new to being on camera, the Local Progress Impact Lab has made it easy for local officials to create content on their own. Check out our **video support**

guidance for formatting tips and examples on creating content specific to your local conditions. If you need help getting started, contact our communications team.

Scenario Planning

Our partners at the Public Rights Project and Mayors for America compiled an extensive scenario planning guide to ensure you know the right actions to take if interference occurs in local election administration. The guide outlines the three scenarios below and suggests communication actions.

1. **Federal agents stationed in or around the polls**
    a. *First, determine whether the federal presence at the polls is intentional or accidental. If an ICE agent followed someone to a polling location, they should be asked to leave before alerting the community to ICE presence.*
    b. *If the federal presence is intentional, notify your pro-democracy coalition. If your coalition agrees, send partners to the site to record any federal presence on their phones and post videos widely across social media.*
    c. *Finally, notify local and national media (reach out to the Local Progress communications team if you need support here) with exact details of federal deployments to draw media attention to what's happening in your community.*
        i. *Keep your messaging focused on what's happening (the who, what, and where) and how these actions directly attempt to intimidate election administrators.*
2. **Seizure of election materials**
    a. *If federal agents seize election materials such as ballots, focus your communications on ensuring elections continue on Election Day and dispelling myths after Election Day.*
        i. *Election Day.*
            1. *Coordinate with local media, local political parties, and voting rights groups to amplify the message that polling places are open and voting continues.*
            2. *Communications coordination can help combat disinformation and encourage continued turnout, even if ballots are seized.*
        ii. *Post-election.*
            1. *Amplify messaging discussing the effects of the seizure on the election certification timeline. Make sure voters understand that the seizure may delay election results.*
            2. *Amplify messaging that dispels conspiracy theories and misinformation about the seizure and election administration before the seizure.*

3. *Amplify and reinforce messages from other trusted messengers, including the governor, secretary of state, and local elected officials.*

3. Third-party agitators in or around the polls

a. *First, notify your pro-democracy coalition, local law enforcement, and members of the media (reach out to the Local Progress communications team if you need support here). This could be a potentially dangerous situation, and ensuring more people are present and more eyes are watching can lessen the potential for violence.*

b. *Second, encourage constant recording of what's going on to ensure that everything third-party agitators do is documented. This includes any conversations agitators have with local law enforcement, election administrators, or federal agents if they are present.*

c. *Finally, keep your messaging focused on what's happening (the who, what, and where) and how these actions directly attempt to intimidate election administrators.*

For more support, contact our helpdesk.