



September 16, 2026

RE: Working together for a free and fair election

The undersigned Black and Latino nonpartisan civil rights organizations represent two of the nation's largest racial and ethnic communities, with long, interconnected histories in the struggle for voting rights and racial justice. We have convened as a Joint Black Brown Summit to deepen trust, strengthen solidarity, and dispel narratives that seek to divide our communities. Collectively we represent or work on behalf of millions of Americans, with members, partners, or other stakeholders in your community. These residents rely on your leadership, which we understand is a tremendous responsibility.

To carry forward our experiment of multiracial democracy in the face of relentless attacks, the 2026 elections must be free, fair, and accessible to all eligible voters, and yet they are under dire threat. We believe you have a special, and perhaps underappreciated, role to play. Though you do not administer elections directly, you have the power to prepare, convene, and—perhaps most importantly—communicate effectively with your constituents. Recognizing your essential role, we offer our support.

We understand your challenge over the next seven weeks is to be prepared for the very real threats to a fair election in your community while ensuring voters are welcomed to the polls, and that fear does not undermine participation.

Appended to this letter, we outline key threats to monitor, suggest concrete ways to prepare, and offer targeted resources.

We encourage you to reach out directly to the 866-OUR-VOTE Election Protection Hotline and the organizations referenced in our attached memo for support. To reach our organizations directly, please email us at vote@naacpldf.org and we will have the most relevant organization reply.

Thank you for all that you do to keep our nation's cities and towns operating to meet your residents' and our stakeholders' needs. We recognize the special role that localities play as the government closest to the people; and we understand that planning for a safe and secure election adds a special obligation on top of your regular duties.

We thank you in advance for your leadership as we work collectively to protect voting rights for the communities of color we represent, to imbue confidence in the election

process, and to push our nation to achieve the truly inclusive multiracial democracy the U.S. can and must become.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Civil Rights Organizations

Advancement Project

Black Voters Matter

Hispanic Federation

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Leadership Conference

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Legal Defense Fund

Mi Familia Vota

NAACP

National Coalition for Black Civic Participation

National Council of Negro Women

NALEO Educational Fund

National Urban League

Poder Latinx

Unidos US

Voto Latino

To: U.S. Mayors
From: Black and Latino civil rights, advocacy, and civic engagement organizations
Date: September 16, 2026
RE: Working together for a free and fair election

Below we outline key threats to free and fair 2026 elections; suggest concrete ways to prepare; and offer targeted resources. This document does not constitute legal advice.¹ We encourage you to reach out directly to the 866-OUR-VOTE Election Protection Hotline and the organizations referenced in the Resources section below for support. To reach our organizations directly, please email us at vote@naacpldf.org and we will have the most relevant organization reply.

Current Threats to Free and Fair 2026 Elections

The following are not the only threats to full and equitable participation in the 2026 elections, but are critical concerns that we suggest you monitor and plan around. Sadly, while the federal government has historically been a bulwark against discrimination it is now a direct threat to voters of color and to fair elections more broadly. Potential federal election interference could take place while your constituents are voting early, voting on Election Day, or during the counting and certification process. Beyond this new threat, ongoing challenges to full and equal participation endure. Specific threats include:

Voter intimidation by federal officials through presence at or near the polls, including by the military or National Guard; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or other Department of Homeland Security (DHS) personnel; or the Department of Justice (DOJ). Voter intimidation is illegal under federal law, which also prohibits military personnel or other armed federal agents from deploying to polling locations as well as election interference by federal agency personnel.² While a top military official has disclaimed any current plans to deploy troops to the pools, President Trump has weaponized immigration enforcement to intimidate entire communities and DHS officials have left the door open to sending ICE personnel to polling locations.³ Activists have pushed President Trump to declare a national emergency to attempt to seize control of elections and potentially justify domestic military intervention in service of his disproven conspiracy theories around election security, and he recently declined to rule out the possibility.⁴ The Department of Justice has historically had a legitimate role in monitoring elections; but at President Trump's direction the DOJ's Civil Rights Division has been similarly weaponized against its original mission, so monitors should be treated with caution.⁵ Along with partners referenced below, we can help your city develop a plan for engaging with federal officials should they attempt to intimidate voters at or near local polling locations.⁶

Addressing attempts to weaponize the U.S. Postal Service by communicating that the Supreme Court has blocked the U.S.P.S. from refusing to deliver mail ballots. On September 14, the United States Supreme Court left in place a preliminary injunction that blocks the U.S. Postal Service from refusing to deliver mail ballots in the November 2026 election.⁷ Nonetheless, widespread news coverage of President Trump's attempt to use an Executive Order to interfere with vote-by-mail created uncertainty and risked undermining public confidence in mail voting.⁸ Resources and partners referenced below can help you deliver a clear communications plan to help voters navigate any uncertainty around mail voting.

Interference with the vote tabulation or certification process to delay results and undermine confidence in election outcomes. In January, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) personnel

seized ballots in plurality-Black Fulton County, Georgia seeking to validate President Trump's fabrications about the 2020 election.⁹ The DOJ has since sought records in Arizona and Michigan, in addition to its ongoing attempt to extract private, unredacted voter rolls from dozens of states.¹⁰ President Trump has expressed regret about not seizing voting machines in 2020 and considered national emergency declarations to justify election material seizures.¹¹ Your local elections officials need a plan for if the FBI or others attempt to seize or otherwise tamper with election materials.

Voter intimidation by private actors. While the new threat of federal intimidation or interference has garnered national attention, modern voter intimidation has often been perpetrated by private actors.¹² President Trump's lies and conspiracy theories about stolen elections have encouraged rogue actors to engage in a range of harmful behaviors, and have increased the risk of voter intimidation in the coming weeks—especially targeted at immigrant communities and people of color more broadly.¹³ Local elections officials must be aware of federal and state-level protections against voter intimidation, and you can help communicate a zero-tolerance stance without stoking fear; resources below can help with both.

The rapid spread of purposeful disinformation or otherwise incorrect misinformation through social media and other channels that can foment fear and confusion, at times by design. There is a long history of bad actors seeking to undercut voting rights by providing incorrect information about where and how to vote or who is eligible, which can be supercharged by widespread use of artificial intelligence.¹⁴ With the new range of threats there is also increased risk of well-meaning misinformation sowing fear or confusion during early voting or on Election Day. We hope the resources referenced below can help with the critical role you play in correcting dis- or misinformation as a trusted voice for your constituents.

Continuation of ongoing, often discriminatory, burdens on the right to vote. Many voters who experience challenges casting their ballots in 2026 will likely face [the same or similar obstacles](#)¹⁵ voters have been confronting for decades, typically more prevalent in communities of color. These include challenges like last-minute polling site changes; lack of signage and accessibility at polling locations; technology breakdowns and ballot shortages leading to delays or long lines; and other “mundane” barriers to the ballot.¹⁶ As you know, we cannot afford to lose sight of these longstanding barriers even as we prepare for new threats; and the national Election Protection Hotline referenced below can help your constituents report and seek solutions to overcome these obstacles.

How You Can Prepare to Lead in this Moment

With just seven weeks to go before voting concludes on November 3 you have no doubt been thinking about the above issues already. Here are some concrete steps you can consider adding to your ongoing planning to be sure your team and those you partner with are ready for whatever comes your way.

Develop a Communications Plan to Preemptively Spread Truth

Becoming and remaining a vocal, affirmative, reality-based messenger to your constituents from now through the final election certification process is one of the best ways to lead in this moment. By curating in advance trusted sources of information to amplify, you can avoid inadvertently spreading fear or misinformation. We suggest identifying trusted state and local elections officials, pulling from social media toolkits like the 866-OUR-VOTE election protection [social toolkit](#)¹⁷, and

your local media outlets/elections reporters to keep up to date on the latest developments. Also, consider thinking in advance about how you will communicate in response to various potential threats. For messaging, these [talking points](#)¹⁸ from Mayors for America can serve as a starting point, and you can reach out to them (see resources below) or other trusted sources for more specific tailoring.

Consider the following key messages for your affirmative communications:

- Voting is a fundamental right, a civic duty and the best way to make your voice heard – and in the vast majority of cases it happens safely, securely, and without incident.
- Emphasize that Election Day is the deadline for voting, not the first opportunity. If your state has early, in-person voting encourage your constituents to use it.
- Make a plan to vote yourself (early if possible) and share it as an example. There is strength in community—encourage others to make voting plans with family, friends, and community members.
- Those who are planning to vote by mail should plan to return their ballots as early as possible and check with local elections officials to confirm it has been received.

It will be crucial to remain consistent, calm, and direct with your messaging throughout this election season. Establishing a communications plan weeks ahead of the election will allow you more flexibility to respond to unexpected developments while also ensuring your planned messaging reaches the audiences that need it.

Develop an Emergency Incident Response Plan

Consider taking time now to make a plan that includes a list of whom you will call and what specific actions you will take in an emergency. Verify that other relevant players within your jurisdiction have adequate response plans, and consider whether you should convene to collaborate on a shared plan. Ensure you are prepared to document any incidents of federal interference or other voter intimidation so you or others can take appropriate legal action as needed.

Consider your answers to the following questions as you outline a response plan and communication network: Is your city attorney familiar with the election landscape and prepared to advise you? Are there trustworthy county or state officials with whom you can connect in advance to collaborate on a response plan? Do the elections official within your jurisdiction have a plan to manage anticipated threats? Are you familiar with the local election protection infrastructure and the organizations managing the 866-OUR-VOTE hotline in your community? Are there simulated crisis preparation exercises happening in your community?

The organizations referenced in the resource guide below can help with advanced incident planning and connect you with planned preparation exercises as needed.

End Unnecessary or Harmful Cooperation with the Federal Government

You can act now to ensure your city is not providing fertile ground for federal interference through unnecessary cooperation. You can start by examining any data sharing practices and existing cooperation agreements. This [blueprint](#)¹⁹ from the Legal Defense Fund provides useful guidance. You can look up agencies participating in cooperation agreements with ICE [here](#).²⁰ As an example of one effort to curb complicity, Mayor Brett Smiley of Providence, Rhode Island has issued [an](#)

[Executive Order](#)²¹ restricting unnecessary information sharing in the voting context, which you may choose to explore replicating or building upon.

Connect With Vulnerable Members of Your Community

Each year the people most vulnerable to barriers to election participation include language minorities, people with disabilities, and people in low-income communities where access to transportation is a consistent challenge. Now, immigrant communities that include many eligible voters are at increased risk of targeting by federal officials and rogue private actors. Reach out to connect with leaders in these communities to assess how they are feeling about participating in the upcoming election and if they have specific needs. Though we anticipate you already have relevant relationships, our organizations are happy to put you in touch with local leaders if helpful.

Selected Resources

The nonpartisan, nonprofit election protection community is mobilized to ensure that voters can participate with confidence in spite of the threats outlined above. We highlight here a few resources that may be especially useful in the coming weeks:

- The 866-OUR-VOTE election protection hotline is staffed by trained volunteers who can answer questions directly or escalate situations for possible legal intervention.
- Public Rights Project has extensive experience working with and representing local officials on various matters, and is working this year to support mayors and other elected officials to lead on free and fair elections. You can reach out for help at elections@publicrightsproject.org.
- Mayors for America has collaborated with Public Rights Project on a [toolkit](#)²² to help local elected officials prepare for federal interference, has prepared relevant talking points, and can offer tailored briefings and communications support. You can reach out for help at info@mayorsforamerica.org.
- This Brennan Center [guide](#)²³ describes federal and state protections against voter intimidation; this [brief](#)²⁴ discusses preventing intimidation by federal agents; and this [chart](#)²⁵ describes state prohibitions on guns at polling locations.
- The Legal Defense Fund's [State Voting Rights Act landing page](#)²⁶ can help you determine if your state benefits from these protections.
- To reach our organizations directly, please email us at vote@naacpldf.org and we will have the most relevant organization reply.

¹ This document should not be construed as legal advice of any kind. Nor does it constitute an endorsement or other representation by LDF about the resources listed herein. The contents are intended for general informational purposes only, and should not be relied on as if it were advice about a particular fact situation. The distribution of this document is not intended to create, and receipt of it does not constitute, an attorney-client relationship. This document also contains links to information created and maintained by other entities as well as contact information for outside entities. There is no guarantee of the accuracy or completeness of this outside information.

² Section 11(b) of the Voting Rights Act, 52 USC 10307(b), prohibits voter intimidation by government or private actors, as does 18 USC 594. Federal law makes it illegal to deploy “troops or armed men” to the polls “unless such force be necessary to repel armed enemies of the United States,” 18 USC 592; prohibits any officer or member of the military from preventing any qualified voter from exercising the right to vote or interfering with the discharge of an election official’s duties, 18 USC 593; and prohibits any agency personnel from interfering in any federal election, 18 USC 595. For more information, see Eliza Sweren-Becker & Jasleen Singh, [Guide to Laws Against Intimidation of Voters and Election Workers](#), Brennan Center for Justice (June 18, 2024); Hayne Yoon, [Preventing Voter Intimidation by Federal Agents at the Polls](#), Brennan Center for Justice (July 28, 2026).

³ In late August, Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent Senator Elissa Slotkin [a letter](#) stating that “[t]he Joint Force has no plans to send Federal military personnel or Federalized members of the National Guard to polling places during the 2026 elections.” DHS has been less clear on the subject. According [to NPR](#), on a call with state election officials in February, “a senior Department of Homeland Security official stated that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents would not be patrolling polling places during this year’s midterm elections.” And [NBC News reported](#) on September 1 that “ICE officers have not received guidance telling them they need to do anything in addition to their regular duties on the day of November’s midterm elections.” Yet, at a press conference earlier that day, DHS Secretary Markwayne Mullin [refused to rule out](#) sending ICE to the polls to conduct immigration enforcement.

⁴ According to [Washington Post reporting](#) in February, Trump allies drafted an Executive Order that “claims China interfered in the 2020 election as a basis to declare a national emergency that would unlock extraordinary presidential power over voting.” As recently as August, [CNN reported](#) that President Trump “declined to rule out declaring a national security emergency as a means to try to assert more control over the 2026 midterm elections.”

⁵ The Department of Justice has [two different programs](#) for ensuring compliance with federal election laws—observers who are specifically authorized by courts in certain jurisdictions and monitors who can be deployed across the country at the Department’s discretion. Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Harmeet Dhillon [has pledged](#) to send 1,000 DOJ monitors to polling locations across the country on November 3, 2026. This comes after Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon recently [requested an investigation](#) into “aggressive” and “irregular” activity associated with DOJ’s election monitoring in his state. See this Campaign Legal Center [fact sheet](#) for more information on the monitor program and what monitors can and cannot do at the polls.

The DOJ’s Civil Rights Division was founded in 1957 and historically played a key role in enforcing the Voting Rights Act, which [its own website](#) says “has been called the single most effective piece of civil rights legislation ever passed by Congress.” Yet the Trump Administration has reoriented the Division, including its Voting Section, away from its traditional role and towards harmful, politicized ends. In an April 2025 [email to Division staff](#), Ms. Dhillon directed career staff to prioritize enforcement of Trump Executive Orders and culture war issues such as the participation of transgender women in sports over the Division’s historic mission of ensuring equal protection and enforcing the nation’s core civil rights laws. She also issued new mission statements for the Civil Rights Division and several sections within it. The new Voting Section mission [reads in part](#): “The mission of the Voting Rights Section of the DOJ Civil Rights Division is to ensure free, fair, and honest elections unmarred by fraud, errors, or suspicion. The Section will work to ensure that only American citizens vote in US federal elections and do so securely. Other section priorities include preventing illegal voting, fraud, and other forms of malfeasance and error.” This statement shifts the focus of the Section from enforcing the Voting Rights Act and fighting voting discrimination more broadly to fighting the phantom problems of voter fraud and non-citizen voting; and the DOJ’s actions since then have borne out this shift in focus, including [dismissing all active cases](#) from the prior administration.

⁶ Mayors for America and Public Rights Project have [created a toolkit](#) for this exact purpose, which is also highlighted in the “Resources” section below. See also [this explainer](#) on preparing for federal interference

from the Brennan Center for Justice and Protect Democracy.

⁷ *U.S.P.S. v. California*, 609 U.S. __ (2026), https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/25pdf/26a305_4g15.pdf.

⁸ Exec. Order No. 14399, 91 Fed. Reg. 17125 (Mar. 31, 2026); Chris Cameron, [Whistle Blower Says Trump Officials Are Defying Court Orders on Voting by Mail](#), N.Y. Times, Sep. 1, 2026.

⁹ In January, the FBI secured a [warrant to seize](#) from the Fulton County court clerk ballots, tabulator tapes, electronic ballot images, and voter rolls. According to [the Associated Press](#), “[t]he search injects the FBI and Justice Department, institutions that historically have made investigative and prosecutorial decisions outside the whims of the White House, into the center of a long-running personal grievance of the president. It adds to concerns that the Trump administration is leveraging its law enforcement powers in pursuit of the president’s political foes, including by pursuing criminal investigations and even indictments against some of his perceived adversaries.” In May, a federal judge [allowed](#) the DOJ to retain possession of the seized materials.

¹⁰ The DOJ [has received](#) 2020 elections records from Maricopa County, Arizona and sought 2024 election ballots from Wayne County, Michigan. According to a [tracker](#) maintained by the Brennan Center for Justice, the DOJ has requested private voter rolls from 48 states and sued 30 states.

¹¹ The military has disclaimed any current plans to seize election materials: in late August, Dan Caine, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent Senator Elissa Slotkin [a letter](#) stating that “[t]he Joint Force has no plans use [Federal military personnel or Federalized members of the National Guard] to seize ballots, voting machines, or other election-related material.” Yet in January of this year, President Trump [told the New York Times](#) that he regretted not ordering the National Guard to seize voting machines to search for evidence of fraud. As noted in Note 3 above, activists have pushed President Trump to declare a national emergency to attempt to invoke substantial power over elections and he has declined to rule it out.

¹² As just one example, the Republican National Committee and the New Jersey Republic State Committee [operated under a consent decree](#) between 1982 and 2018 due to accusations that their “ballot security” programs intimidated voters. For a rundown of how litigants have attempted to use existing federal laws to combat voter intimidation by private parties, see Ben Cady & Tom Glazer, Voters Strike Back: Litigation Against Modern Voter Intimidation, 39 N.Y.U. Rev. L. & Soc. Change 173 (2015).

¹³ The organization True the Vote, for example, has fomented or engaged in many activities that risk intimidating voters or interfering with election administration such as [working with sheriffs’ organizations](#) to “monitor” the 2022 midterm elections and [initiating questionable challenges](#) to voters’ eligibility. Extremist groups Proud Boys and Oath Keepers have also [engaged in election activity](#), including registering as poll workers or signing up to monitor ballot drop boxes.

Section 11(b) of the Voting Rights Act is a broad protection that does not require proof of intent to intimidate, and conduct need not include violence, explicit threats of violence, or an element of racial discrimination to qualify as prohibited intimidation. See Ben Cady & Tom Glazer, Voters Strike Back: Litigation Against Modern Voter Intimidation, 39 N.Y.U. Rev. L. & Soc. Change 173 (2015).

¹⁴ For a general history of modern voter deception tactics through 2010, see Gilda Daniels, [Voter Deception](#), 43 Ind. L. Rev. 343 (2010). In a more recent example demonstrating the challenges posed by modern technology, the New Hampshire Attorney General [investigated](#) a January 2024 incident in which “robocalls received by numerous New Hampshire residents ... played a message with what appeared to be an AI-generated voice clone of President Biden’s voice, and which encouraged recipients not to vote in the January 23, 2024, New Hampshire Presidential Primary Election.” Several modern State Voting Rights Acts build upon Section 11(b) of the federal VRA by including explicit protections against voter deception. See e.g. NYVRA, N.Y. Elec. L. §§ 17-200–222; CTVRA, Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 9-368i–q; NJVRA, P.L.2026, c.31; DEVRA, HB 444 (2026) (As of August

28, 2026, there is not a public law cite).

¹⁵ Legal Defense Fund, [Democracy Defended: Election 2024 Report](#) (2025).

¹⁶ The Legal Defense Fund's [Democracy Defended](#) series provides a detailed report of challenges faced by Black voters across seven Southern states with substantial Black populations: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. The 2024 report identified five key categories of voter suppression prevalent across these jurisdictions: legal and administrative barriers, frivolous legal challenges, intimidation and hostile environments, information warfare, and systemic inequalities in voting access.

¹⁷ Election Prot., [Social Media Toolkit](#)

¹⁸ Mayors For America, [Mayoral Talking Points for Elections](#)

¹⁹ Legal Defense Fund, [Ending Local Complicity in DHS Violence](#) (2026).

²⁰ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, [Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 2879g0 Immigration and Nationality Act](#)

²¹ Mayor Brett Smiley, [Mayor Smiley Signs Executive Order Strengthening Voter Protections and Safeguarding Election Integrity](#)

²² Mayors for America, [Preparing for Potential federal election interference](#) (Aug. 31, 2026)

²³ Eliza Sweren-Becker, Jasleen Singh, [Guide to Laws Against Intimidation of Voters and Election Workers](#), Brennan Center for Justice (Jun. 18, 2024)

²⁴ Jayne Yoon, [Preventing Voter Intimidation by Federal Agents at the Polls](#), Brennan Center for Justice (Jul. 28, 2026)

²⁵ Allison Anderman, Chart: [State Prohibitions on guns at Election Location](#), Brennan Center for Justice (Mar. 7 2025)

²⁶ Legal Defense Fund, [State Voting Rights Acts](#)