

Vote Safely in 2026

Know What to Do If ICE or Federal Agents Come to the Polls

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The Trump administration has repeatedly refused to rule out sending federal agents to polling locations this fall. Voters may be worried about this unlawful threat. The fear is understandable. The threat is meant to discourage eligible Americans from exercising their right to vote. This administration knows that voters have the power and will to exercise their rights. Voters should know that the law is on their side.

Federal law prohibits federal officers from interfering in elections. Deploying troops or armed federal agents to anywhere an election is held is illegal under federal law. And federal and state laws bar everyone, including federal agents, from intimidating voters.

If the Trump administration carries out this unlawful threat, however, voters, community organizations, and election officials can go to court to protect voters' rights. Courts have processes for responding quickly to prevent election disruptions, including voter intimidation.

Additionally, voters can prepare by knowing their rights and making a plan to vote. Here is what you can do to protect your vote and your community's voice if federal agents show up at your polling place.

Before Voting

Know your rights.

It is illegal for the government to send armed federal agents to the polls. Voters have the right to vote free from fear and intimidation. State and federal laws prohibit sending ICE or other armed federal agents to the polls. Voter intimidation — including by federal, state, and local officials — is illegal under federal laws such as:

- 18 U.S.C. § 592, prohibiting federal officials from deploying “armed men at any place where a general or special election is held”;
- 18 U.S.C. § 593, prohibiting the armed forces from using “force, threat, intimidation, advice, or otherwise” to prevent someone from voting, and from interfering “in any manner with an election officer’s discharge of his duties”;
- 18 U.S.C. § 594, prohibiting intimidation, threats, or coercion of any person “for the purpose of interfering with the right . . . to vote”; and
- 18 U.S.C. § 595, prohibiting government employees from using official authority in connection with federally financed activity to interfere with a federal election.

You are not required to know how to speak, read, or write English to vote. The Voting Rights Act guarantees you the right to bring an assister or translator of your choice when voting, as long as they are not your employer or a labor union representative. Some locations must also provide language assistance for certain language-minority groups. Some locations provide additional language assistance beyond what is federally required. Contact your local election office for more information.

You may need to present identification to vote, depending on where you live.

Make a plan to vote.

Check your voter registration status now. Call the Election Protection hotline below or visit vote.org for help.

Make a plan to vote ahead of time. Voters can take advantage of alternative ways to vote:

- **Early voting.** 47 states allow any voter to cast a ballot in person before Election Day. There may be less activity at the polls at the beginning of the early voting period.
- **Voting by mail ballot.** 36 states permit any voter to vote by mail ballot, and the remaining states allow certain voters, such as those who have disabilities or will be outside the county on Election Day, to do so. Mail ballots can be returned in secure ballot drop boxes if provided in your area, at an election official's office, or by mail. Contact your local election office or call the Election Protection hotline for help requesting a mail ballot.

Vote with others. Consider going to the polls with a trusted person or a group of loved ones or neighbors. A person does not need to be a registered voter or a U.S. citizen to accompany voters, though noncitizens may choose not to make the trip. Remember to check state law limitations on transportation to the polls; photography and video at polls; and compensation for voting, such as food or prizes.

During Voting

If you witness federal agents at your polling place . . .

Report it. Call the Election Protection hotline to report any type of voter intimidation.

Consider additional steps. Voters can alert election workers to the presence of federal agents or contact their local election official. Find contact information at usvotefoundation.org.

Voters may want to document federal agent activity at the polls. Some states don't allow filming at or near polling locations. Voters should be mindful that filming law enforcement may escalate the situation, and they should consider keeping distance while taking photos or videos. If in doubt about the legality or safety of filming an interaction, voters can consider recording only audio, taking written notes, or recording a voice memo with your observations. The following information is of use to the Election Protection hotline and election workers:

- ▶ **Size:** How many agents/officers were present?
- ▶ **Activity:** What were the agents doing? Were there voters present?
- ▶ **Location:** Where in or around the polling place were the agents?
- ▶ **Uniform:** What letters, details, or patches were

visible on the agents' clothing?

- ▶ **Time:** When precisely did you witness the agents?
- ▶ **Equipment:** What did the agents have with them? Were they armed?

Use caution before sharing information about agents' presence more broadly, including on social media. You may not be able to identify whether officials are federal agents, immigration agents, or local law enforcement. Some jurisdictions require local law enforcement to be at the polls or allow their presence if requested by election officials or in response to an emergency. False reports of federal agents or ICE at a polling place can cause undue panic and discourage people from voting.

If you are stopped or questioned by federal agents or law enforcement while voting . . .

Ask whether you are free to go. If agents say "yes," voters can walk away. Officials generally cannot detain voters without reasonable suspicion that they are committing a crime or, in the case of federal immigration agents, have violated immigration law. Walking away calmly instead of running can help avoid giving officials a reason to stop a voter.

Know what information you are required to give.

Voters can exercise their right to remain silent and ask for a lawyer, even if they are detained. Voters can clearly say, "I want to remain silent" or "I want a lawyer." Voters are not required to answer law enforcement or federal agents' questions. They may only be required to state their name and show ID when stopped for traffic, pedestrian, and certain other state offenses.

Voters do not have to unlock their cell phones for law enforcement without a warrant. Voters have the right to object to a search of their belongings by clearly saying, "I do not consent to a search," while not obstructing access. Officials may have legal authority to conduct the search regardless.

Contact the Election Protection hotline, available in multiple languages, using the following phone numbers:

- **English:** 1-866-OUR-VOTE
- **Spanish or English:** 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA
- **Asian languages or English:** 1-888-API-VOTE including Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali/Bangla, and Punjabi
- **Arabic or English:** 1-844-YALLA-US