

**Testimony of Lawrence Norden
Vice President for Elections and Government at the
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law¹**

**Spotlight Forum on “State and Local Election Security Efforts in the Face of the Trump
Administration Chaos”
Before the United States Senate Committee on Rules and Administration and
Task Force To Combat Threats To Democracy & Free And Fair Elections
June 16, 2026**

Ranking Member Padilla and members of the Committee and Task Force, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the state of election security and how states, election officials, and others who support them are preparing for the midterm elections and beyond. At the Brennan Center — an independent, nonpartisan institute, where I serve as the Vice President of the Elections and Government Program — we have been working closely with election officials, law enforcement, state leaders, and other supporting actors to ensure our elections remain safe and secure.

The Trump administration has launched a concerted effort to interfere with and undermine U.S. elections in 2026. The administration is doing so through five key strategies: (1) using presidential power to assert [unconstitutional influence](#) in election administration, (2) attempting to impose [restrictive policies](#) that block Americans from voting, (3) using the Department of Justice (DOJ) and other federal agencies in an improper effort to gain access to [sensitive elections systems and information](#), (4) [cutting resources](#) for election officials and election security support, and (5) [intimidating](#) election workers and voters. The entirety of this effort is supported by the promotion of falsehoods and conspiracy theories to undermine confidence in American elections, as we are seeing most recently in [the baseless claims](#) made by the President and his allies about the primary elections earlier this month in California.

So far, this has been a losing strategy. Federal judges blocked the sections of President Trump’s first executive order that purported to take over voting processes, and we expect the same to happen to his second executive order. Congress has failed to pass the draconian and unpopular SAVE Act several times. And most states are rejecting DOJ and other agency pressure, refusing to give them access to private voter information and sensitive systems; the courts have so far [consistently sided](#) with the states when DOJ sued them for their refusal to do so. These outcomes are cause for optimism. Still, there is much to do before the midterms to ensure that elections are secure, and that voters can cast their ballots freely and without fear.

The Trump administration’s withdrawal of the federal government’s support for election security remains a challenge. As a result of [these cuts](#), state and local election officials have been left with fewer resources to conduct their operations, less insight to anticipate threats, and diminished backup to respond to disruptions that may arise this year. Several federal entities that previously identified and analyzed foreign influence operations have been shut down, including the [Foreign Malign Influence Center](#), the [Cyber Threat Intelligence Information Center](#), and the FBI’s

¹ The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law is a nonpartisan law and policy institute that works to strengthen the systems of democracy and justice so they work for all. This statement does not purport to convey the views, if any, of New York University School of Law.

[Foreign Influence Task Force](#), leaving states blind to the actions of adversaries who wish to undermine American democracy. And the elimination of funding for nationwide information sharing networks has increased opacity between state lines, making it more difficult for states to proactively address vulnerabilities uncovered across the country.

Election officials have felt the immediate impact of these losses. Last year, in the Brennan Center’s annual survey of election officials, [60 percent](#) reported being concerned about federal cuts to election security services. This year, [75 percent](#) said that their state or local governments have not provided additional resources to address these cuts. Perhaps even more damaging than the loss of resources, these cuts have eroded the trust election officials held in federal agencies; even if funding is restored in the future, some officials have indicated that their relationship with the federal government may be [irreparably damaged](#).

Beyond navigating these lost resources, election officials will likely face an escalating campaign to spread false and misleading information about election security. The Trump administration continues to [push falsehoods](#) about the 2020 election that have been thoroughly debunked countless times, and has once again perpetuated baseless claims of rigged elections in the most recent California primary, [a likely preview](#) of a more intense effort to undermine elections and election officials this fall.

With [advances in artificial intelligence](#), even unsophisticated actors can create convincing [election-related disinformation](#) instantaneously. And between cuts to federal entities and attacks on independent research organizations, there is [less active social media monitoring](#) to track the spread of false claims. Election officials may have to work harder than ever to cut through the noise and ensure voters have the information they need to cast their ballot and understand how their vote will be accurately counted.

These challenges are daunting. But our elections, and the people who administer them, are resilient. Across all fifty states and party lines, election officials are professional stewards of democracy, who serve to keep our elections safe and secure. The election processes they oversee are transparent, bipartisan by design, and built with multiple layers of redundancy and verification. Developments over the last decade — near-universal adoption of paper records of each vote, hardened election infrastructure, increased professional assistance for election administrators, and an expanded civil society support system — will help absorb some of the shock of federal withdrawal and increased threats to security. All of this should instill confidence in the strength of our elections.

Many states have taken decisive action to further strengthen their systems. States like New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania are implementing [whole-of-government approaches](#) to election security, coordinating across state agencies to tap into existing expertise and resources that can help election officials protect their voters and infrastructure. Dozens of states have dedicated funding to continue participation in inter-state information-sharing networks that the federal government no longer supports. [New Mexico and Oregon](#) enacted laws that mirror existing federal restrictions on federal troops and law enforcement at polling places; [California](#) enacted one to prevent federal agents from accessing election technology and ballots without a

court order. We have strongly urged state lawmakers to take [similar steps](#) to reinforce protections for voters and election systems this year and ahead of 2028.

Civil society is also stepping up to help. To take one example, the [Committee for Safe and Secure Elections](#) (CSSE) — a collaboration between election administration and law enforcement leaders that formed to improve election safety after 2020 that is supported by the Brennan Center and other civil society groups — is conducting nearly 100 trainings across the country to help build relationships and strengthen coordinated response plans. CSSE has also developed pocket reference guides for law enforcement in all 50 states that help officers understand state laws that protect elections and voters. The [Election Official Legal Defense Network](#), also created in the wake of the 2020 election, connects election officials with pro bono attorneys to provide legal support to those facing intimidation and interference. Other organizations, like the [Election Security Exchange](#) and the [Center for Democracy & Technology](#), have brought on former federal election security experts to develop and share guidance on emerging security threats and best practices for responding.

As we move closer to the midterm elections, we know that voter intimidation will remain a possible threat, and we also know that voters themselves already have concerns about the obstacles they may face in casting their ballot this fall. Actions by the federal agencies meant to create chaos and instill fear in voters are a real concern; indeed, officials in the Trump administration have expressed [support](#) for and refused to rule out the possibility of [sending ICE to the polls](#). But here too there is reason for reassurance. [Federal criminal law](#) explicitly [prohibits armed federal agents](#) at polling places, and both [federal](#) and [state](#) laws prohibit anyone from intimidating voters. Voters, election workers, and state and local government attorneys, can go to court to enforce these prohibitions, and state leaders are preparing now to hold anyone who interferes in elections accountable using laws that are not subject to the possibility of Presidential pardon.

Of course, more must be done. Americans must [not be afraid](#) to vote and should participate in democracy [every way they can](#). As we saw in Minnesota, neighbors peacefully helping neighbors can protect communities and our rights even under immense federal pressure. A broad array of civic engagement organizations, voting and immigrant groups, faith groups, veterans' groups and others across the country are coming together now to ensure that happens this fall. Democracy fundamentally depends on people — showing up, mobilizing their communities, and believing in the right to vote, the importance of free and fair elections, and the principle of self-governance.