



Americans Are Worried About The 2026 Midterm Election— These State Officials Have A Plan

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Elections are tested long before ballots are cast. By strengthening relationships, clarifying responsibilities, and preparing coordinated responses to emerging threats, state attorneys general and secretaries of state are working to ensure that elections remain free, fair, and secure.

Pro-Democracy State Leaders Hold the Line

Americans across the political spectrum are [worried](#) about the 2026 midterm elections. An [Ipsos/Reuters poll](#) found that voters are more concerned about efforts to overturn election results and block eligible citizens from casting ballots than they are about [voter fraud](#)—a crime study after study has found is “[extremely rare](#).”

Federal elections have become [increasingly contested](#) since 2020, when President Trump lost reelection and [refused to accept](#) the result. The [violent attack](#) his supporters launched on the Capitol in January 2021 represents the most serious assault on the peaceful transfer of power in [modern U.S. history](#).

President Trump is now calling for the federal government to “[take over](#)” voting operations in numerous jurisdictions while [amplifying claims](#) of voter fraud and “[rigged](#)” state elections. In his 2026 State of the Union address, he also declared that his political opponents are only capable of winning by [cheating](#).

Even as the President pushes to “[nationalize](#)” voting, the front line of election protection remains at the [state level](#). In most states, election matters fall under the authority of the Governor and two public officials with distinct, yet deeply interdependent roles: [secretaries of state](#) supervise elections, and [state attorneys general](#) defend the laws that govern them.

As [threats to election integrity](#) grow more serious, the state officials responsible for running and safeguarding elections must now confront [amplified and systematized tactics](#) to suppress lawful votes, undermine public trust, and overturn legitimate results.

To prepare for those risks, representatives from 22 state attorney general offices and 12 secretary of state offices recently participated in joint activities organized by civic partners to strengthen coordination ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. These state leaders are not waiting for the next crisis—they are preparing now to defend the vote before it comes under attack.

Why States Run Elections

Under the [Elections Clause](#) of the U.S. Constitution, states are primarily responsible for administering congressional elections. States have different [protections](#) in place to provide transparent, secure elections with accurate vote counts. Congress may set federal rules, but the day-to-day work of running elections remains largely in state hands.

State-run elections offer an [important advantage](#) for democracy. Local election officials understand how to best serve local needs, and the people staffing polling places often live in the same communities as the voters walking through the door. That proximity helps promote public trust and accountability.

Two Offices: A Shared Mission

The [National Voter Registration Act of 1993](#) requires every state to designate a chief election official. In [38 states](#), that role belongs exclusively to the secretary of state—an office that has [become highly visible](#) since the 2020 presidential election. Although their duties and powers vary, secretaries of state often have [substantial influence](#) over how elections are run—from maintaining voter rolls and training election officials to certifying results and making [key decisions](#) about ballot eligibility, ballot design, and voting equipment.

As chief legal officers, [state attorneys general](#) help ensure that elections are conducted lawfully, defended vigorously, and decided by the voters—not by those seeking to overturn the results. They [provide guidance](#) on election laws and duties, [educate voters](#) about their rights, and [represent the state](#) in court when outside actors challenge or try to disrupt lawful processes. In some states, attorneys general also have authority to [investigate and prosecute](#) election crimes, including voter intimidation, misinformation, and rare instances of fraud.

Secretaries of State keep elections running. State Attorneys General legally protect them. Together, they are America’s first line of defense for the right to vote.

That first line of defense has already been tested—many state officials have held firm despite facing [intense political pressure](#) and even [death threats](#). For example, in response to unsubstantiated [rumors](#) that the 2020 federal election was [fraudulent](#), secretaries of state from

around the country, including members of the President’s [own political party](#), directly contradicted the rhetoric coming from the White House.

A highly publicized [joint statement](#), signed by the President of the National Association of Secretaries of State and others, described the election as “the most secure in American history.” The statement further reinforced public confidence in the election by stressing:

“There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised.”

A coalition of [23 state attorneys general](#) also stepped forward when Texas sought to invalidate the results of the 2020 election in four battleground states. In an amicus brief before the U.S. Supreme Court, the coalition argued that states have a constitutional right to administer their own elections and that election officials in the contested states had repeatedly confirmed the absence of significant voter fraud or other tampering. The Supreme Court swiftly [rejected](#) the Texas lawsuit, allowing the certified results in favor of then-President-elect Joe Biden to stand.

Fortifying the Election Protection Partnership

As highly consequential midterm elections approach, state attorneys general are gearing up to fight again for what every voter needs and deserves: free, fair, and secure elections. President Trump’s threats to [restrict voting practices](#), place [immigration enforcement agents](#) near polling places, and cast doubt on lawful results could intimidate voters, disrupt election operations, and further erode public trust. That is why coordination between state attorneys general and secretaries of state is not a bureaucratic exercise—it is a democratic safeguard.

The May 2026 convening hosted by the Leadership Center for Attorney General Studies provided a structured opportunity for representatives from 22 state attorney general offices and 12 secretary of state offices to deepen understanding of each office’s responsibilities and identify areas where collaboration can be strengthened.

The group focused on addressing three specific threats:

1. Interference with state voting systems
2. Interference with mail voting
3. Federal presence at polling sites

Their discussions focused on building a coordinated strategy that combines rapid legal action, proactive communications, strong operational contingency planning, and trusted state and local

partnerships. Participants also emphasized the importance of maintaining voter confidence, clarifying roles across offices, and developing emergency response tools.

This targeted, multifaceted approach reflects a growing recognition that protecting the vote requires preparation, partnership, and vigilance long before Election Day.

Six Lessons Learned

The convening made clear that protecting the 2026 midterm election will require more than isolated preparation by individual offices. Participants identified a set of shared lessons about how state leaders can respond swiftly, coordinate effectively, and preserve voter confidence when legal, operational, and information challenges arise at the same time.

1. **Legal action alone is not enough.** Participants made clear that litigation remains essential, but it cannot carry the full weight of an election crisis on its own. Emergency legal tools—temporary restraining orders, injunctions, motions to quash, and other rapid responses—must be paired with public communications, operational contingency planning, voter education, and real-time coordination with local officials. The lesson was straightforward: even a strong courtroom strategy may fall short if voters lose confidence before relief can be secured.
2. **Communications is a core response function, not a side task.** The convening also underscored that communications teams must be built into election response planning from the beginning. Participants emphasized the need to debunk false claims before they spread, respond quickly to misinformation and deepfakes, amplify trusted local voices such as election clerks and community leaders, and give voters clear instructions about ballot tracking, replacement ballots, polling-place changes, and voting rights. Protecting the vote is therefore not only a legal challenge—it also depends on voters knowing which sources they can turn to for accurate information.
3. **Attorney general and secretary of state coordination is essential.** Participants repeatedly returned to the importance of a tight partnership between state attorney general and secretary of state offices. State attorneys general are positioned to lead on litigation, enforcement, criminal referrals, and legal guidance, while secretaries of state are positioned to lead on election administration, voter education, local official communications, and operational continuity. Although many states have strong working relationships, the discussion underscored the need for clearer preassigned roles, division of labor, and escalation pathways before a fast-moving crisis begins.

4. **Local relationships matter.** Participants also stressed that resilience depends on trusted state and local networks, especially when federal support may be uncertain. County election officials, clerks' associations, sheriffs and local police, state police, governors' offices, community groups, courts, postal contacts, vendors, and other private-sector partners all may become essential to keeping voting operations stable. The strongest response plans are grounded in trusted state and local networks, rather than dependence on federal assistance.
5. **Major vulnerabilities are operational, not just legal.** The practical concerns raised at the convening were often operational: preparing for postal disruptions, addressing poll worker shortages, managing long lines or site disruptions, planning for hand counts or alternate voting options, navigating inconsistent local law-enforcement responses, and having to staff multiple crises at once. These issues highlight the risk of legal, operational, and information challenges colliding at the same time.
6. **The biggest threat is overload and loss of public confidence.** Confusion, conflicting messages, high volume, institutional overload, and declining trust in election administration can compound quickly, especially when several disruptions cascade at once. Participants recognized that the most dangerous risk is having to confront stacked, fast-moving, multi-front crises that undermine public confidence before any single issue is fully resolved.

In a period marked by unprecedented election-related threats, these state leaders are working together to ensure that when elections are tested, the individuals and institutions responsible for overseeing and defending them are ready.

Rather than problem-solving in real time under pressure, participating offices are positioning themselves to respond effectively to rapid legal developments, operational demands, and emerging challenges. They are fortifying their relationships, establishing clear lines of communication, and developing a shared plan of action.

Their goal is to ensure that voters can cast ballots with confidence that election rules will be followed, results will be respected, and outcomes will be decided by the voters themselves.

American democracy hinges on a simple promise: every eligible voter must be able to cast a ballot without fear of intimidation or interference and trust that it will be counted. State attorneys general and secretaries of state who support free, fair, and secure elections are using every available tool to safeguard that promise.

When the vote is tested, they will be ready to defend it.

The Leadership Center for Attorney General Studies is a non-partisan organization dedicated to educating the public about the important role state attorneys general play in addressing pressing issues, enforcing laws, and bringing about change.