

After the Vote: A Guide for Local Groups

Summary

Before November 3, the job is to vote early and build the margin. Every scheme to overturn a result gets harder as the gap widens. After November 3, the job is slow and procedural: see that every valid ballot is counted, that certification happens on time, and that the public stays calm while both are under way.

The courts have closed most of the routes to tampering before Election Day. The greatest risks now come after it, in the count, in county certification and in the seating of the new House on January 3. This guide sets out what to expect, five ways the next three months could go, and what each local group and local official should do from November 4 to January 3.

Whatever happens, don't stand down after a good result. A clean win invites everyone to go home, and that's where the breakthrough trap begins.

Why the risk has moved past Election Day

Courts have closed most of the routes for interfering before the vote:

- **Mail ballots.** On June 29, the Supreme Court ruled 5–4 that states may count mail ballots postmarked by Election Day that arrive afterward. On September 15, it blocked the administration's restrictions on mail ballots.
- **Voter rolls.** Federal courts have ruled against the Justice Department in every one of its suits for state voter files decided so far.
- **Troops and agents at the polls.** Federal law bars armed federal agents at polling places, and seven states passed their own bans this year.

That leaves the count, certification and the seating of the new House as the softer targets.

What to expect, most to least likely

1. **A fraud story built on slow counts.** Fourteen states count mail ballots that arrive after Election Day, so some results will take days. The president is already calling long counts proof of rigging, and the administration did not invite international observers for the first time in more than twenty years. Only about half of Americans expect the election to be free and fair.
2. **Fear that holds down turnout.** A new immigration enforcement surge in sanctuary jurisdictions began in Southern California on October 5, planned to run for 45 days, through the election. The administration hasn't said where else it will go.
3. **Recounts and lawsuits in close House races.** Mid-decade redistricting has changed the map, and control may come down to a handful of seats.
4. **County certification refusals.** Courts have forced certification every time since 2020, but each refusal buys delay and headlines.
5. **Seizure of ballots or machines.** Less likely, but the most damaging, because it breaks the chain of custody. The FBI seized Fulton County's 2020 ballots in January and took the Arizona Senate's 2020 audit servers in March.
6. **A seating fight on January 3.** The scenario is a House clerk leaving contested winners off the roll. Scholars call it far-fetched, and it only matters if the majority is a handful of seats.

The ranking is a judgment based on expert analysis, not a forecast.

Five scenarios and how to respond

These are the five outcomes that seem most likely, in rough order. Even the least likely deserves a plan. Each response has two jobs: secure this election, and build toward the future.

Scenario	How likely	To secure the election	To build toward the future
1. Clear result, slow count, loud fraud claims. The House changes hands by a comfortable margin, and the challenges go nowhere.	Most likely	Observe the count, help voters fix rejected ballots, and keep saying that slow counts are normal.	Treat it as the start. Bring winners a short list of commitments before they're sworn in, and move every volunteer into a standing local group.
2. A narrow result with contested seats. Control rests on a handful of recounts, lawsuits and a few county boards refusing to certify.	Likely	Pack canvass meetings, press officials to certify on time, back the lawyers, and use Republican and nonpartisan messengers.	The people who learn how certification works become a permanent county-level watch. Keep the relationships with clerks and commissioners.
3. Federal intervention in the count. Raids, subpoenas or seizures of ballots and machines in a few large counties.	Possible	Witness and film, alert the state attorney general and go to court the same day. Hold mass presence for this trigger, with strict nonviolence.	A state and movement table gets built under pressure. Afterward, press for state laws on who controls ballots.
4. A legitimate loss or a split result. Republicans hold the House, or the gains are smaller than polls suggest.	Possible	Accept what's real and contest only with evidence. Our credibility on fraud claims depends on it.	Shift to the states and cities where you won and to the 2027 legislative sessions. Study which local efforts moved turnout.
5. A seating fight on January 3. An attempt to keep winners off the House roll.	Unlikely, and only if the margin is tiny	National mobilization aimed at the few Republican members whose refusal would end it. Bring in business and veterans' voices.	The first real test of coordination across the whole network. What works becomes the model for 2028.

Retaliation can run alongside any of these. A losing administration has two months before the new Congress sits. Expect faster immigration enforcement and executive actions meant to lock things in. Rapid response networks need to stay active through January for that reason alone.

Scenario 1 carries the greatest long-term risk. A clean win invites everyone to go home. That's the

breakthrough trap in miniature. Here the response that secures the win and the one that builds the future diverge most, so plan the second one now.

Before the results: get ready now

Cure windows and certification dates vary by state and county, so every group needs its own.

- Push early voting and ballot return. Margin is the best defense.
- Tell people in advance that slow counts are normal. Don't tell them the election will be stolen; that message suppresses turnout by itself.
- Call your county election office and fill in the dates below.
- Assign the five roles below.
- Save the nonpartisan Election Protection hotline: 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683).
- Ask your county commissioners, clerk and sheriff, in public, to commit to on-time certification and to protecting counting sites.
- Line up messengers from outside the usual ranks: a Republican, a veteran, a member of the clergy, a business owner.
- Agree, in writing, on what triggers a mobilization and who makes the call.

Our dates

Date	
Deadline to fix a rejected ballot	
Last day mail ballots can arrive	
County canvass meeting	
County certification	
State certification	

Our roles

Role	Name and phone
Ballot-fixing lead	
Observer lead	
Spokesperson	
Legal contact	
Who decides to mobilize	

Who sits on our county canvassing board

Name	Party or role	Public position on certifying

November 4 to January 3, phase by phase

When	Local groups	Ask of local officials
First 72 hours	Contact voters whose ballots were rejected and help them fix them before the deadline. Put trained observers at the counting center for every shift. Repeat one message everywhere: slow counts are normal and mean ballots are being checked. Report problems to the hotline and your legal contact, with time, place and photos.	Give a public update on the count every day. Keep counting open to observers from all sides. Secure ballots and machines, and release nothing without a court order.
First two weeks	Attend every canvass and certification meeting, with people and a note-taker. Thank election workers in public: at meetings, in letters to the editor, on social media. Send accurate local numbers to your newspaper and radio station. Ask candidates who lost to say so plainly.	Certify on time, and say in advance that you will. Have the county or city attorney ready to go to court the same day a board refuses to certify. Have the sheriff or police chief state that they will protect counting sites and lawful assembly.
Through January 3	Stay organized through recounts and lawsuits, and keep meeting on a regular schedule. Hold large mobilizations in reserve for a real trigger: a refusal to certify, a seizure of ballots, or a refusal to seat winners. Invite every November volunteer into a standing local group before December 1.	Issue a joint statement across party lines affirming the local result. Call the state attorney general at once about any federal demand for ballots, machines or voter data.

Losers conceding matters as much as winners winning. A local candidate who loses and says so plainly does more for public trust than any press release.

Sheriffs and police chiefs have a specific role. They can say publicly that they will protect counting sites and lawful assembly, and that they answer to state law on election materials.

Unusual messengers reach people we can't. Republicans, veterans, clergy and business owners vouching for the local count will be heard by people who tune out advocacy groups.

Ground rules

- **Witness, don't obstruct.** If agents try to take ballots or equipment, film it, call your legal contact and alert officials. Don't physically block them. That hands over the pretext for a wider crackdown.
- **Stay nonviolent.** Disorder is the pretext for emergency claims. Train marshals for anything public.
- **Don't say the election is being stolen unless there is evidence.** Say what you saw, where and when.
- **Don't stand down after a good result.** The work of holding winners to their promises starts the day they're certified.

What every response should leave behind

Whichever scenario comes, each response should leave three things in place when it's over:

1. A relationship with a local official.
2. A trained group that keeps meeting.
3. A public commitment someone can be held to.

Those three things are the difference between surviving an election and building the power to hold what we win.

Sources

- [Supreme Court upholds grace periods for mail ballots, 5-4 \(AP via WTOP, June 29, 2026\)](#)
- [The Trump administration is interfering in the 2026 midterm elections \(Center for American Progress, updated August 2026\)](#), for the voter-roll suits, the Fulton County and Arizona seizures, and troops at polls
- [ICE at the polls \(PolitiFact, September 28, 2026\)](#)
- [ICE arrests surge across LA as feds target sanctuary cities \(LA Public Press, October 2026\)](#)
- [Trump is already preparing an excuse for a midterm loss \(Newsweek, October 6, 2026\)](#)
- [Shaheen condemns move to block international observers \(Senate Foreign Relations, October 6, 2026\)](#)
- [Fewer than half of Americans expect free and fair midterms \(UC San Diego, via Newswise, September 2026\)](#)