



A LITTLE BIRD

I spy with my little eye

TOOLKIT · TK-001 · PUBLIC DOMAIN USE

Freedom Riders

Voting Protection Toolkit

A field manual for protecting the vote in the era of the Election Integrity Army. Companion piece to "What They Take When They Take the Fourteenth." Designed for five-person cells, statewide networks, and any coalition that intends to get into good trouble for the 2026 midterms and beyond.

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BY A LITTLE BIRD

FOR ANYONE WILLING TO WALK IT

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Frame

The Fourteenth Amendment is being dismantled by reinterpretation while the constitutional language sits untouched. The Voting Rights Act has been gutted at the Supreme Court level. The Election Integrity Army is being deployed across every state for the 2026 midterms. The redistricting wars have already erased majority-Black districts in Louisiana, Virginia, and Alabama. Executive Order 14160 is being used to halt passport issuance to children of undocumented immigrants, which is the first stage of a cascade that will eventually create an unverifiable underclass of US-born Americans who cannot prove their citizenship.

If those Americans cannot vote, no electoral correction is possible. The federal courts are not going to save anyone. Congress is not going to save anyone. The remaining defense is local, county-level, state-level civic action sustained over years.

This toolkit exists because the response infrastructure has to be built from the bottom while the dismantling runs from the top. The Freedom Riders model worked in 1961. The methodology still works. Five people. One target. Document. Walk. Witness. Show up. Scale from cell to network to coalition.

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What you are up against

The voter suppression mechanism in 2026 is not one law. It is a stack of overlapping mechanisms designed so that the failure or repeal of any one of them does not break the system. Each mechanism creates friction. The cumulative friction produces the outcome. Know all of them.

Voter roll purges

States purge voter rolls between elections under cover of "list maintenance." The Interstate Voter Registration Crosscheck Program, Election Registration Information Center exits, and similar mechanisms have been used to remove millions of valid registrations in the last decade. Most affected voters do not know they are no longer registered until they show up to vote.

Voter ID requirements

Thirty-five-plus states now require some form of ID at the polls. Strict-ID states (no fallback, no provisional path) include Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and others. Required ID is not the same as available ID. Eleven percent of eligible voters do not have current government-issued photo ID. The percentage is higher among Black, Latino, elderly, low-income, and rural voters.

Polling place closures and relocations

Since the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision gutted the Voting Rights Act preclearance provision, more than 1,600 polling places have been closed in formerly covered jurisdictions. Closures concentrate in majority-Black and Latino districts. Last-minute relocations create confusion. A voter who shows up at the wrong location is offered a provisional ballot that may or may not be counted.

Redistricting and gerrymandering

Active redistricting fights as of 2026 include Louisiana, Virginia, Alabama, North Carolina, Texas, and Florida. The legal theory enabling racial gerrymandering through "race-neutral" partisan claims is the operative jurisprudence. *Allen v. Milligan* in 2023 provided a temporary reprieve in Alabama; the broader trajectory continues.

Mail-in ballot restrictions

Signature-match requirements, ballot drop-box bans, witness-signature mandates, postage-required ballots, and rejected-ballot cure deadlines all reduce mail-in ballot completion rates. Mail-in rejection rates run highest among first-time voters, voters of color, and voters whose signature has changed over time (elderly, disabled, recent injury).

Election Integrity Army intimidation

The Election Integrity Army is the explicit intimidation infrastructure being deployed for the 2026 midterms. Recruitment targets include partisan poll watchers, drop-box monitors, and self-styled "election observers." The tactic is presence: armed or visibly partisan observers at polling places and drop boxes in majority-minority districts. The legal status of such observers varies by state. The intimidation effect does not.

Provisional ballot traps

When a voter is challenged or ID-flagged at the polls, they are offered a provisional ballot. Provisional ballots are counted only if the voter takes specific follow-up steps within a deadline that varies by state. Most provisional voters do not complete the cure process. Most provisional ballots are not counted.

EO 14160 cascade effect

Executive Order 14160 directs federal agencies to stop issuing passports to children of undocumented immigrants. The cascade effect reaches beyond newborns: any voter required to produce federal documentation (Real ID, passport for ID purposes, naturalization papers) at any future point becomes vulnerable. The "but I have papers" assumption no longer holds when the bureaucracy is designed to make the right unprovable.

THE MECHANISM IS STACKED

None of these mechanisms alone produces the suppression outcome. Combined and deployed in parallel, they produce structural disenfranchisement at scale. Your defense has to be stacked too.

The five-person cell model

Civil rights organizing has always run on small disciplined cells, not mass mobilization. The Freedom Rides were thirteen people. The Greensboro Four were four. The Selma to Montgomery march started with hundreds, but the organizing structure underneath was a network of cells coordinating across county lines.

The model is replicable. You do not need a national org. You do not need a foundation grant. You need five people who see what you see and are willing to commit time. Pick one target. Document. Walk. Witness. Show up. Scale from cell to network to coalition as capacity allows.

Cell composition

- **Coordinator.** Owns the schedule, the contact list, the meeting calendar. The point of contact for other cells.
- **Researcher.** Owns the public records. OpenSecrets, FollowTheMoney, MapLight, FOIA, state filings. Knows who owns the target and why.
- **Documenter.** Owns the witnessing protocols. Video, photos, notes, chain of custody. Trained on legal observer standards.
- **Connector.** Owns the relationships. Other cells, statewide orgs, legal partners, journalists. The handshake function.
- **Frontline.** Owns the public-comment, poll-watching, or in-person presence role. The visible face of the cell at meetings and polling places.

The roles overlap. Cell members rotate. The structure exists so that no single person carries the entire burden and no single person becomes a single point of failure.

Target selection for voting protection cells

- One county elections office
- One specific suppression mechanism (a polling place closure, a voter purge, a mail-in ballot rejection pattern)
- One voter assistance gap (a population without documentation help, a precinct without poll watchers, a neighborhood with closed polling places)

One target. One cell. Document and witness. Build the record. Then connect to other cells working on parallel targets in adjacent counties. That is how the network forms.

Pre-election protocol (4 to 6 weeks out)

Personal preparation

- Verify your own voter registration at vote.org or your state's secretary of state site
- Confirm your polling place and verify it has not been relocated
- Confirm your ID meets your state's voter ID requirements
- If voting by mail, request your ballot and verify the deadline for return
- Identify your provisional ballot cure deadline (state-specific)
- Save the Election Protection hotline (866-OUR-VOTE) to your phone

Cell preparation

- Verify the registration of every member in your cell
- Help five additional voters verify theirs
- Identify voters at known risk: people with recent name changes, recent moves, suspended registrations, naturalized citizens
- Map polling place changes in your county or district (compare current to prior election)
- Recruit poll workers through your county elections office (paid positions, training provided)
- Recruit poll watchers through your state's certification process
- Connect with at least one statewide voting rights organization
- Connect with the local Election Protection coalition (typically run through ACLU or NAACP chapters)

Documentation drives

People without current ID need months of lead time, not days. Start documentation help six weeks out at minimum.

- Birth certificate replacement (state-by-state; vitalrec.com tracks current procedures)
- Social Security card replacement (ssa.gov)
- Real ID enrollment if your state has moved to Real ID
- State ID alternatives (non-driver ID cards available in every state at DMV)

- ❑ For naturalized citizens: certified copy of naturalization certificate if lost (USCIS Form N-565)
- ❑ For voters with name changes: certified copy of marriage certificate or court order

COST MATTERS

Birth certificate replacement costs \$15 to \$50 depending on state. ID cards cost \$5 to \$40. For voters at the margin, these are real barriers. Cells that include a documentation-cost fund unlock voters that nothing else will reach. \$200 in a documentation fund typically covers 8 to 15 voters depending on state.

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Election Day operations

Inside the polling place

Poll watching is a state-certified role. Requirements vary. In most states you must register in advance through your party, a candidate's campaign, or an issue-based committee. Some states allow nonpartisan certification through Election Protection or similar coalitions. Confirm your state's process at least three weeks before Election Day.

Certified poll watchers can:

- Be present inside the polling place during voting hours
- Observe (not interfere with) check-in, voting, and ballot handling
- Document irregularities
- Report to the Election Protection hotline in real time

Outside the polling place

Voter assistance, not voter intimidation. If you are not a certified poll watcher, you can still operate outside the polling place to:

- Help voters find their correct polling location if they have been redirected
- Connect voters with Election Protection if they are turned away
- Document Election Integrity Army intimidation activity (from a distance, on public property, while complying with state-specific buffer zones)
- Assist voters with transportation, child care, or accessibility

If a voter is challenged

- Every voter has the right to vote provisionally. This is federal law (Help America Vote Act, 52 USC § 21082)
- Document the challenge: time, name of poll worker, reason given
- Call 866-OUR-VOTE immediately
- The voter must sign the provisional ballot envelope before leaving
- The voter must complete their state's cure process before the deadline (typically 2 to 7 days after Election Day)
- Follow up with the voter inside 24 hours

Hotlines

ELECTION PROTECTION (ENGLISH)

866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683)

ELECTION PROTECTION (SPANISH)

888-VE-Y-VOTA (888-839-8682)

ELECTION PROTECTION (ASIAN LANGUAGES)

888-API-VOTE (888-274-8683)

ELECTION PROTECTION (ARABIC)

844-YALLA-US (844-925-5287)

DOJ VOTING RIGHTS HOTLINE

800-253-3931

Post-election protocol

Provisional ballot cure tracking

Every provisional ballot your cell documented gets followed up. Your state's cure deadline is the hard stop. Most cures require the voter to present additional ID or sign an affidavit at the county elections office. The cell should be running cure follow-up calls in the 48 hours after Election Day.

Results monitoring

- Track the official county canvass timeline
- Track the official certification timeline (state-specific, typically 7 to 30 days after Election Day)
- Document any certification delays, challenges, or refusals
- Report certification interference to DOJ Voting Section, state AG voting unit, and the relevant federal court if litigation is active

Recount and audit support

If recounts or audits are triggered, certified observers from the cell may be eligible to monitor the process. Process varies by state. Coordinate with the statewide voting rights organization that handled your Election Protection coalition.

Documentation deliverable

Every cell should produce a post-election documentation package within 30 days. The package contains:

- Total voters assisted (registration, documentation, transportation, provisional cure)
- Total irregularities documented
- Election Protection cases opened
- Election Integrity Army incidents documented
- Polling place closures or relocations documented
- Provisional ballot outcomes (counted, cured, rejected)
- Voter intimidation reports filed

The documentation package goes to: your statewide voting rights coalition, the DOJ Voting Section (if violations occurred), and the public record (your website, a shared cell directory, the Little Bird tracker submission inbox).

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Documentation help for vulnerable voters

Voters at highest risk under EO 14160 cascade

- US-born children of undocumented parents who turn 18 before the 2028 cycle
- Naturalized citizens whose certificates may be challenged on renewal
- Native Americans relying on the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 (statutory, not constitutional, citizenship)
- Tejanos and Hispanos with Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo claims requiring genealogical documentation
- Black Americans whose family records were destroyed or never created during slavery and Jim Crow
- Anyone whose family records were lost in courthouse fires, natural disasters, or simple municipal mishandling

What helps

If you live near someone in any of these categories, the most useful single thing you can do is help them build their documentation chain now, before they need it. Specifically:

- Certified copies of every birth, marriage, death record in their direct ancestry going back at least three generations
- Naturalization certificates and copies (USCIS Form N-565 to replace lost originals)
- Real ID-compliant state identification if their state has moved to Real ID
- Passport if at all possible (the strongest single proof of citizenship)
- For Tejano and Hispano families: copies of original Spanish land grants where available (state archives in CA, NM, TX, CO, AZ)
- For Native Americans: tribal enrollment cards and CDIB cards in good standing

Legal services that can help

Immigrant Legal Resource Center

ilrc.org

Citizenship documentation help for naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, and US-born children of immigrants.

National Immigration Law Center

nilc.org

Legal analysis and direct support on citizenship-stripping operations including EO 14160 challenges.

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

latinojustice.org

Civil rights and voting rights legal services with focus on Latino communities.

NAACP Legal Defense Fund

naacpldf.org

Voting rights litigation and direct legal services.

Native American Rights Fund (NARF)

narf.org

Voting rights and citizenship documentation support for Native voters, including Indian Citizenship Act issues.

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Key resources and hotlines

Voter protection coalitions

Election Protection • 866-OUR-VOTE

866ourvote.org

National voter assistance hotline, coordinated by Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Active in every state.

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

lawyerscommittee.org

Coordinates the Election Protection coalition. Direct legal services for voters and voter protection organizations.

Brennan Center for Justice

brennancenter.org

Research, policy analysis, and litigation on voter suppression, voter ID, redistricting, and election security.

ACLU Voting Rights Project

aclu.org/issues/voting-rights

Litigation and direct organizing on voting rights nationally. State affiliates handle most direct cases.

Common Cause

commoncause.org

Voter protection, election security, and good-government work across all 50 states.

League of Women Voters

lwv.org

Nonpartisan voter education and registration. Strong state and local chapter presence.

Black Voters Matter

blackvotersmatterfund.org

Voter registration, voter education, and voter protection focused on Black communities in the Southern states.

Mi Familia Vota

mifamiliavota.org

Latino voter registration, voter education, and voter protection.

Poll worker recruitment

Power the Polls

powerthepolls.org

National poll worker recruitment for paid Election Day positions. Connects volunteers to their local elections office.

Vet the Vote

vetthevote.org

Veterans and military families recruited as poll workers. Builds civic infrastructure across political lines.

ID help

VoteRiders

voteriders.org

Free ID assistance for voters who need to obtain ID for voting. Active in all strict-ID states.

Research tools (Harry Shannon investigative toolkit)

OpenSecrets

opensecrets.org

Federal political contribution database. Track who funded which candidate, PAC, or super PAC.

FollowTheMoney

followthemoney.org

State-level political contribution database. The state-equivalent of OpenSecrets.

MapLight

maplight.org

Connects donor money to legislative votes. The translation layer from money in to policy out.

Brennan Center voter suppression tracker

brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports

Active legislation tracker for voter suppression bills in every state. Updated continuously.

Federal protections that still apply

The Voting Rights Act has been gutted but not eliminated. Federal protections that remain enforceable:

Twenty-Fourth Amendment

No poll tax or other monetary requirement for voting in federal elections. This protection has been used to challenge ID cost requirements as a de facto poll tax. The argument has not always won but it remains live law.

Voter Intimidation Statutes

18 USC § 594. Whoever intimidates, threatens, coerces, or attempts to intimidate, threaten, or coerce any other person for the purpose of interfering with the right of such other person to vote is subject to fine, imprisonment up to one year, or both.

52 USC § 20511. Knowingly and willfully intimidating, threatening, or coercing any person for registering to vote or voting carries fines and imprisonment up to five years.

18 USC § 245. Federal hate crime statute applicable to voter intimidation motivated by race, color, religion, or national origin.

If you witness voter intimidation that fits these statutes, document it and report to:

DOJ CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION · VOTING SECTION

800-253-3931

FBI TIPS (FEDERAL VOTER INTIMIDATION)

tips.fbi.gov

Help America Vote Act (HAVA)

Every voter has the right to vote provisionally if their eligibility is questioned. The provisional ballot must be processed if the voter is found eligible during the cure period. This right is federal and applies in every state.

Americans with Disabilities Act

Polling places must be accessible. If a polling place is not accessible, the voter has the right to curbside voting or an alternative method. Document inaccessibility and report to the DOJ Disability Rights Section (800-514-0301).

Language access (Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act)

In covered jurisdictions, election materials and assistance must be available in covered minority languages. Section 203 coverage is determined every five years based on Census data. Check current coverage at the Census Bureau's voting rights determinations page.

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Sources and reference

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2. Voting Rights Act of 1965 (as amended), 52 USC § 10101 et seq.
3. National Voter Registration Act of 1993, 52 USC § 20501 et seq. (registration and list-maintenance rules)
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7. Brennan Center for Justice. *Voter Suppression Tracking Report*. Updated continuously.
8. Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. *Election Protection Coalition Annual Report*.
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