

Hands Off Our Vote: A Field Guide for Local Leaders

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Our message, start to finish: We demand our Freedom to Vote. Count every vote. Certify the results. Seat the winners. Election Day is November 3. The new Congress is sworn in January 3. Between those dates, the fight moves from turnout to the count, to state certification, to the House and Senate floors. Your chapter's job is to be ready for each handoff — and to move only on verified signals, never rumors.

Phase	Dates	Your chapter's job
1. Turn out, watch, act	Now – Nov 3	Get ballots in early, map your local election officials, build the rapid-response list
2. Protect the count	Nov 3 – state certification	Show up peacefully where votes are counted, pressure officials to certify on time
3. All In	Any trigger through Jan 3	Call for mass assemblies. Decide local and state spaces where people can assemble and hold the space. State Capitol, federal building, parks or town squares.

Five threats that trigger instant mobilization

Listed in the order they could unfold. If any of these happens in your state — and a trusted org below confirms it — move to All In.

1. **Armed federal agents or troops at polls or counting sites.** Federal law bans this. DHS says ICE won't be at polls, but Defense Secretary Hegseth has not ruled out troops. Any deployment is a red alert. ([Brennan Center](#), [NBC](#))
2. **An order or push to stop counting legally cast ballots** — especially mail ballots. The Supreme Court blocked Trump's mail-ballot order for 2026 on September 15, but expect a "fraud" declaration on election night aimed at halting the count. ([Votebeat](#))
3. **Federal seizure of ballots, voting machines or software before certification.** The precedent is set: the FBI took roughly 656 boxes of 2020 ballots from Fulton County, GA

in January, and DOJ has demanded ballots or equipment in Arizona, Michigan, Colorado and Missouri. A seizure after November 3 could stop a state from certifying. ([Just Security](#), [CAP](#))

4. **County or state officials refusing to certify.** Certification is a mandatory duty, and courts have forced it every time. But 30+ local officials in 8 states have refused since 2020, and a stall creates the "uncertainty" others will exploit. ([Protect Democracy](#) and <https://campaignlegal.org/state-election-certification-processes-and-guardrails>)
5. **Refusal to seat certified winners on January 3.** Neither the Speaker nor the Majority Leader certifies anything — states do. The real danger is a House Clerk or Senate majority refusing to accept a governor's certificate, or leadership declaring results "in doubt" to delay seating. Johnson already held Rep. Grijalva's swearing-in for seven weeks in 2025. ([Election Law Blog](#))

Who to watch for the RED ALERT

Two-source rule: mobilize when No Kings calls it *and* Election Security Response Network (ESRN) or your state coalition confirms the facts on the ground. Rumors are the opposition's best tool.

Who	Role	Watch for
No Kings coalition (Indivisible, MoveOn, 50501 and partners)	The national mobilization call	The RED ALERT: a coordinated call to assemble
ESRN (Election Security Response Network)	Nonpartisan national-state-local network tracking threats across litigation, communications and organizing	Confirmation that a threat is real and where resources are moving
Your state's All Voting is Local coalition (usually includes the ACLU affiliate and Election Protection partners)	The people closest to your county's count	Local calls to action; what election officials need

All Voting is Local has coalitions in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. **Every other state has its own in-state election protection table — find out now who convenes yours and get on their list.** Ask your state ACLU affiliate or League of Women Voters; they'll know. Don't wait until November to learn who's calling the alarm.

Phase 1: Now to November 3 — turn out and watch

Watch in your county and state:

- Who sits on your county canvassing or certification board — and has any of them questioned 2020 or 2024 results?
- Federal subpoenas, DOJ letters or FBI visits to your county election office
- **ICE, DHS or other armed federal agents at early voting sites, drop boxes or polls.** This is illegal and it's an All In trigger. Get it on video: phones out, film continuously, capture agents, badges, vehicles, plates, the time and the place, and say the location out loud. Film from a distance and never interfere with agents or block their path — recording in public is legal; keep recording if you're told to stop, and step back rather than argue. Upload to your chapter's video folder [ADD LINK], call 866-OUR-VOTE, alert your state coalition, and get people to that site peacefully to walk voters in.
- Voter roll purges, especially flags from DHS's SAVE database hitting naturalized citizens
- Post office slowdowns or missing postmarks on mail ballots
- Poll-watcher recruitment by right wing activist networks promising to "catch fraud"

Lead locally toward political targets:

- **County election officials and commissioners:** Ask each one, publicly, to commit to certifying on time. Get it on video or in writing. ([City & County Action Toolkit](#))
- **Secretary of State and Attorney General:** Ask: what is your plan to ensure every voter's freedom to vote and that every vote is counted? Follow up: including if federal agents demand ballots or voting machines? Back them loudly if they're protecting the count.
- **Members of Congress:** Ask: what is your plan to ensure every voter's freedom to vote and that every vote is counted? Then ask them to commit publicly to seating every certified winner on January 3 and to resisting any attempt to block certified winners of congressional elections from being seated.

Make the ask concrete: bring the one-page pledge and ask every official to sign it on the record: see the Pledge to Protect Our Freedom to Vote (separate document)

Days of action:

- **No Kings early vote day, October 17** — turn your chapter out to vote early, together. ([The Contrarian](#))
- **Idea for local and state groups — post office day of action.** Not a national event: organize one if USPS appears to be delaying or failing to deliver ballots, or interfering in any way. Gather at post offices with ballots in hand under the banner *Hands Off Our Vote*. Push people to mail at least a week early or use a drop box, since postal consolidation means ballots may not get same-day postmarks.

- **Day of action at in-district congressional offices.** Bring 20–50 people to your Representative's and Senators' local offices on the same day, pledge in hand. Ask staff to have the member sign it, and take photos either way. Send a media advisory 2–3 days out and a press release with photos right after — a member who won't sign is the story.

Get press for every action: use the [Community Press Action Toolkit](#). Its media advisory and press release templates, planned timeline and 0–72 hour rapid-response timeline adapt to any day of action above, a rapid-response gathering in Phase 2, or an All In assembly in Phase 3 — swap in your location, date, speakers and demand.

Phase 2: November 3 to certification — protect the count

Counting takes days, and a slow count is a normal count. Say that early and often. Mobilize when the count is *interfered with*, not when it's slow.

If officials stall, a crowd pushes to stop counting, or federal agents interfere:

1. **Verify in real time through your own people.** Run an activist Signal thread and assign one leader to verify every report of interference with the count, formal or informal. That leader stays connected to your in-state infrastructure — the state coalition, ESRN members, your county election office — because those are the people who know what's actually happening. The hotline takes voter complaints; it won't tell you whether a report is true.
2. **Show up outside the counting or certification site within hours.** Peaceful, visible, disciplined: signs, marshals, a legal observer. Assign people to film — any federal agents, any officials, any confrontation — and upload it to your video folder [ADD LINK] the same day. Stay outside and never block workers — credentialed observers go inside by state rules. The contrast with a "stop the count" mob is the point.
3. **Call, all at once, with one message — "Count every vote. Certify the results. Seat the winners."**
 - County board members who are stalling: certify on time, it's the law
 - Your Secretary of State and Attorney General: enforce certification, publicly
 - Your members of Congress: condemn federal interference today
4. **Pack the certification meeting.** Most county boards take public comment. Fill the room with voters who say: do your job.
5. **Escalate to All In** if a seizure happens, troops appear, or certification stalls past the legal deadline.

Phase 3: All In — November through January 3

When the RED ALERT comes, assemble within 24 hours at a place that matches who has the power to fix it. Pick your sites now so no one debates it that night.

If this happens	Assemble at	Demand
Federal seizure of ballots or machines	Local federal building or U.S. Attorney's office	Return the ballots; let the state certify
Certification refused or stalled	County building, then the State Capitol	Certify now; Governor and AG enforce the law
Troops or armed agents at count sites	State Capitol	Governor protects the count and the voters
Winners not seated on January 3	State Capitol and your members' district offices	Seat the winners the voters chose

Escalation choices — decide as a chapter now:

- **Day 1: Mass assembly.** One site, one message, as big as possible. Faith leaders, union members and local elected officials up front.
- **Days 2+: Sustained presence.** Daily vigils in shifts until the demand is met. Endurance beats one big day.
- **Bring in the pillars.** Ask sheriffs, mayors, clergy, business owners and county officials to say publicly: certify and seat the winners.
- **Non-cooperation,** only if the crisis deepens and coalition partners call for it together.

Non-negotiables: nonviolent discipline, trained marshals, legal observers, a de-escalation plan, and cameras rolling on every federal agent who shows up — footage uploaded, not left on phones. The other side needs chaos. We win by being calm, huge and unmovable.

Get ready this month

Name your chapter's rapid-response lead and a backup, and name who verifies reports in real time

Set up your chapter's Signal thread — use Signal, not text or email — and get it big enough to turn people out in 3 hours

Set up a video upload folder your whole chapter can reach, post the link in the Signal thread, and confirm where your state coalition wants footage sent

List your county certification board members, their contact info and the certification deadline

Choose your All In sites: federal building, county building, State Capitol

Connect with your state civic table or state power organization on who calls the alarm locally

Train 2+ marshals and line up a legal observer (National Lawyers Guild or ACLU affiliate)

Sign people up for Election Protection training and poll-worker shifts

Draft your call script and sign templates now: *Count every vote. Certify the results. Seat the winners.*

Sources

- [Votebeat: Supreme Court blocks Trump mail ballot restrictions \(Sept 15, 2026\)](#)
- [Courthouse News: Democrats sue DOJ over midterm ballot seizure plans](#)
- [Just Security: Magistrate judges and federal seizures of election records](#)
- [Center for American Progress: Administration interference in the 2026 midterms](#)
- [Election Law Blog: Seating Congress on January 3, 2027](#)
- [Protect Democracy: Election certification, explained](#)
- [Brennan Center: Sending ICE to polling places is illegal](#)
- [NBC News: DHS says no plans for ICE at polls](#)
- [Indivisible: Hands Off Our Vote](#)
- [The Contrarian: No Kings early vote day, October 17](#)
- [Lawyers' Committee: Election Protection 2026 campaign](#)