

February 10, 2026

Democracy Integrity Briefing

Overview

The Algorithmic Transparency Institute, a project of the National Conference on Citizenship, partners with the League of Women Voters to inform LWV National and State Leagues about narratives circulating online related to elections, democracy, voting, and other key topics. These reports will cover:

- **Rumor-based narratives** that spread false/misleading information about democracy, voting, and other priority issue areas;
- **Rumors impacting policy**, illustrating how online rumors impact real-world public policy and democratic governance;
- **Education and deep dives on key topics**, which help us understand the greater context in which information about our democracy spreads;
- **Platform policies** and design decisions that impact how information spreads online

Covering Rumors Responsibly

The following narratives may describe rumors, mis-/disinformation, conspiracy theories, and hateful content. **Please be mindful of and responsible with how you communicate about these topics. Rather than restating or re-sharing rumors, instead share positive information that educates voters, building resiliency to rumors and misleading information.**

By popular request, we've provided guidance you can share and integrate into your internal and external communications.

Calls to Action!

- **Action Alert:** [Tell Congress That Federal Immigration Enforcement Has Gone Too Far](#)
- **Build Relationships:** [Questions for Local Elections Officials](#)
- **Unite & Rise with Power Playbook 4.** [Review it here](#)
- **Commit to Unite and Rise 8.5 in the fight for democracy:** [Sign the petition](#)

Summary of Narratives

- **National Narratives & News**
 - TikTok says data outage caused upload issues after users claim censorship
 - DOJ releases millions of documents related to Epstein investigation
 - Trump call for “nationalizing” elections, shifting power away from states
 - Trump administration will not rule out sending ICE to polling locations
 - Documentary proof of citizenship legislation revived in Congress
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- Keeping up with the news: trustworthy sources

National Narratives & News

TikTok says data outage caused upload issues after users claim censorship

Background: In late January, users on TikTok [reported difficulty posting videos](#) that referenced topics such as ICE enforcement or President Donald Trump. Some users said their uploads failed, were labeled “under review,” or appeared published but received zero views. TikTok—which recently separated from its Chinese parent company in a deal supported by the Trump administration — issued a statement attributing the disruptions to a data center power

outage. TikTok stated that the problems were technical in nature and not related to content moderation decisions.

Current Conversation

- Commentary online connects the incident to TikTok’s recent corporate restructuring and suggests potential political influence over platform governance.
- TikTok has separately indicated that changes are forthcoming to its trust and safety policies and recommendation systems, leading to speculation about whether algorithmic or moderation updates are underway.

Guidance for League Members

- All social media platforms rely on automated systems and moderation policies that influence what content is seen, prioritized, limited, or removed. Changes to those systems can affect visibility, even without explicit “censorship.”
- Technical outages—especially involving data centers—can plausibly disrupt uploads, review systems, and content distribution.
- Encourage communities not to rely on any single social media platform as a primary source of news or civic information. Diversifying information sources supports resilience and informed civic participation.

Trustworthy Sources

- [TikTok censorship claims spark California probe of app's handling of anti-Trump content](#), from NBC News
- [TikTok users say they are being censored after change to U.S. ownership](#), from PBS News Hour
- [Announcement from the new TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC](#), from TikTok

DOJ releases millions of documents related to Epstein investigation

Background: The U.S. Department of Justice has [released](#) millions of pages of documents related to its investigation of financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The materials include emails, correspondence, investigative records, and logs of unverified reports from FBI tip lines. Many of the documents are heavily redacted and span years of investigative activity.

Importantly, investigative files often contain unconfirmed tips, preliminary assessments, and incomplete information that may not reflect final findings.

Current Conversation

- Online commentators are highlighting specific names or excerpts from the files and drawing conclusions about wrongdoing, often without sufficient evidence.
- Some users argue that mainstream media coverage has been insufficient relative to the volume and sensitivity of the material — while others note that professional reporting takes time, especially when documents are disorganized, technical, or heavily redacted.
- There is confusion about what constitutes verified evidence versus unconfirmed allegations within investigative records.

Guidance for League Members

- Remind audiences that responsible journalism requires time to review, contextualize, and corroborate large document sets.
- Avoid amplifying specific claims drawn from unverified excerpts or heavily redacted materials. Encourage careful distinction between an individual being mentioned in a document and credible evidence of wrongdoing.
- Reinforce media literacy principles: not every document in a large investigative archive carries equal evidentiary weight, and context is essential for accurate understanding.

Trustworthy Sources

- [Latest Jeffrey Epstein file disclosures rock the rich and powerful: Top takeaways](#), from NBC News
- [Former federal prosecutor analyzes legal questions over the DOJ's Epstein files release](#), from PBS News Hour

Trump call for “nationalizing” elections, shifting power away from states

Background: In a recent podcast interview, Donald Trump said that the Republican Party should [“nationalize” elections](#) in the United States. The U.S. does not conduct a single national election. Rather, elections are intentionally decentralized and administered by the states under authority granted by the Constitution. While federal law sets certain requirements and guardrails, states

retain broad responsibility for implementing and managing election procedures. The precise meaning of his call to “nationalize” elections remains unclear.

Current Conversation

- Trump’s comments are being discussed in the context of existing efforts by Trump and allies to increase federal involvement in election processes.
- These efforts include calls for voter roll data from states, support for federal legislation altering election procedures, and attempts to use executive authority in election administration.
- Courts and state officials have, in multiple instances, pushed back on actions viewed as exceeding federal authority.

Guidance for League Members

- Clarify that no formal proposal to “nationalize” elections has been introduced, and the specific meaning of the statement remains undefined.
- Emphasize that U.S. elections are constitutionally decentralized, with states responsible for administering elections within federal guidelines.
- Reinforce that changes to election administration typically require legislation and are subject to judicial review.

Trustworthy Sources

- [What did Trump mean by ‘nationalize the voting’? No one is sure.](#), from Spotlight PA
- [Can Feds ‘Take Over’ Elections? Here’s What to Know](#), from US News and World Reports
- [Trump’s calls to ‘nationalize’ elections have state, local election officials bracing for tumult](#), from Stateline

Trump administration will not rule out sending ICE to polling locations

Background: Steve Bannon, a former advisor to Donald Trump and current podcaster, [claimed](#) on his podcast that the federal government will send ICE officers to patrol polling places during the 2026 midterm elections. Bannon is not a member of the current administration and does not hold a formal government role. He argued that ICE presence would be necessary to prevent elections from being “stolen.” The Trump administration has stated there are no formal plans to

deploy ICE to polling locations but has not categorically ruled it out. Historically, documented instances of non-citizen voting in federal elections are extremely rare.

Current Conversation

- Some commentators are framing the proposal as a necessary measure to ensure election integrity. Others view the idea as legally questionable and intimidating to voters.
- Concerns are being raised that a federal law enforcement presence at polling sites could have a chilling effect on turnout.
- Election officials in some states are reportedly preparing contingency plans for various forms of potential federal involvement in election administration.

Guidance for League Members

- Emphasize that non-citizen voting is documented to occur at extremely low rates and does not justify extraordinary federal intervention at polling locations.
- Clarify that there are currently no announced federal plans to deploy ICE officers to polling places.
- Reinforce that voter intimidation—whether intentional or perceived—can undermine confidence and participation in elections.

Trustworthy Sources

- [Democrats sound alarm about possible voter intimidation in midterms](#), from Politico
- [Trump has no 'formal plans' to deploy ICE at polling sites, White House says](#), from Reuters

Documentary proof of citizenship legislation revived in Congress

Background: The [Safeguard American Voter Eligibility \(SAVE\) Act](#), which passed the U.S. House last year but did not advance in the Senate, would require documentary proof of citizenship—such as a passport or birth certificate—when registering or re-registering to vote. The bill faced widespread opposition and stalled in the Senate. Recently, [two new proposals](#) have been introduced: the Make Elections Great Again Act (MEGA Act) in the House and the SAVE America Act in the Senate. These bills contain provisions similar to or more expansive than the original SAVE Act, including national voter ID requirements and additional documentation standards. At present, there is no indication that either proposal has secured the bipartisan support necessary to pass the Senate.

Current Conversation

- Supporters argue the bills are necessary to prevent non-citizen voting and strengthen election integrity. Opponents contend that documentary proof requirements could create barriers for eligible voters who lack easy access to specific documents.
- Commentators note that similar legislation previously failed to advance due to public and bipartisan resistance.
- The reintroduction of these bills is fueling renewed debate—and misinformation—about how voter registration and citizenship verification currently work.

Guidance for League Members

- Clarify that no new federal proof-of-citizenship requirement is currently law, and these proposals face significant procedural obstacles in the Senate, including the 60-vote threshold required to overcome a filibuster.
- Emphasize that states already maintain processes for verifying voter eligibility under existing federal and state law.
- Acknowledge that legislative proposals can shape public conversation even if they are unlikely to pass.

Trustworthy Sources

- [Tell Congress to oppose the SAVE Act Suite of bills](#), from LWVUS
- [House GOP pushes strict proof-of-citizenship requirement for voters ahead of midterm elections](#), from The AP
- [New SAVE Act Bills Would Still Block Millions of Americans From Voting](#), from The Brennan Center for Justice

Court filings say DOGE employee shared Social Security data

Background: A recent [court filing](#) from the U.S. Department of Justice states that an employee affiliated with DOGE at the Social Security Administration shared Social Security data without authorization and in violation of agency security protocols by uploading it to a cloud server. The filing says that an employee communicated with a voter advocacy group and signed an agreement to analyze voter rolls in an effort to identify alleged voter fraud. SSA has acknowledged that improper data handling occurred but reports that it does not yet know the scope of the breach—what data were uploaded, who may have accessed it, or whether it

remains stored externally. The filing also suggests discussions about matching Social Security data with voter rolls, though it is unclear whether any data were ultimately transferred to outside entities.

Current Conversation

- Prior rumors about improper sharing of Social Security data and DOGE actions are being revisited in light of the court filing.
- Legal analysts are discussing potential violations of federal law, including data security rules and restrictions on political activity by government employees.
- The lack of clarity about what information was accessed or shared is contributing to speculation online. Data deficits that are difficult to fill in are likely to result in further rumors.

Guidance for League Members

- Emphasize that SSA has confirmed improper data handling but that the full scope and impact are still under review.
- Distinguish between confirmed facts in the court filing and unresolved questions about what data were shared and with whom. Avoid amplifying speculative claims that go beyond what is documented in official filings.
- Reinforce that allegations of misconduct are subject to investigation and legal processes.
- Encourage patience while oversight and investigative mechanisms work to determine the facts.

Trustworthy Sources

- [DOGE shared Social Security data to unauthorized server, according to court filing](#), from CNN
- [Whistleblower responds after DOJ confirms DOGE mishandled Social Security data](#), from BPS News Hour

State Narratives

Georgia: Fulton County ballots seized by FBI

Background: In late January, officials in Fulton County, Georgia stated that the Federal Bureau of Investigation [seized](#) original 2020 general election voting records while executing a search

warrant at the county's election operations center. Materials reportedly taken included physical ballots, tabulator tapes from voting machines, and 2020 voter rolls, among other documents. The 2020 presidential election results in Georgia were audited and certified by state officials. Donald Trump has repeatedly disputed those results, and in 2021 he called then-Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger urging him to overturn the outcome. A prior court ruling had ordered that copies of Fulton County ballots be made available to the state election board, and members of the public would have been able to request records under applicable law.

Current Conversation

- County officials have expressed concern about the chain of custody and preservation of original ballots once they leave local control.
- Critics view the action as connected to ongoing disputes about the 2020 election.
- Online discussion is blending confirmed facts about the seizure with speculation about the purpose and potential consequences.
- Questions are circulating about ballot security, document integrity, and whether materials will be returned intact.

Guidance for League Members

- Emphasize that the 2020 election results in Georgia were audited and certified under established legal procedures.
- Distinguish between confirmed actions (the seizure itself) and speculation about motives or outcomes.
- Reinforce the importance of chain-of-custody procedures in maintaining election integrity and public confidence.

Trustworthy Sources

- [FBI seizes 2020 ballots in Georgia in apparently unprecedented action, alarming local officials](#), from ABC News
- [Georgia Ballot Inquiry Originated With Election Denier in Trump White House](#), from New York Times
- [The FBI seizure of Georgia 2020 election ballots relies on debunked claims](#), from NPR

Pennsylvania: November pollbook error caused by human error

Background: During the November election, independent and unaffiliated voters in Chester County, Pennsylvania were inadvertently excluded from electronic pollbooks and were required to cast provisional ballots. The issue was [traced](#) to a software setting used by election officials to generate pollbooks. An option that excludes independent voters—commonly used during primary elections—was accidentally selected. There is no indication that the exclusion was intentional. However, the error led to frustration among voters and prompted speculation about potential misconduct. Independent and unaffiliated voters were ultimately able to vote using established provisional ballot procedures.

Current Conversation

- Some community members initially alleged that election administrators intentionally excluded certain voters.
- The incident has reignited broader concerns about election administration capacity and staffing. Election officials nationwide report high levels of burnout, harassment, and turnover in recent years.

Guidance for League Members

- Emphasize that the issue was attributed to a software configuration error, not intentional voter suppression.
- Acknowledge that administrative errors can occur, particularly in complex election systems.
- Highlight the importance of supporting and retaining trained election officials to maintain smooth election operations — preserving their critical institutional knowledge and hands-on experience.
- Encourage conversations that distinguish between isolated administrative mistakes and systemic fraud claims, which are not supported by evidence in this case.

Trustworthy Sources

- [Tempers flare in Chester County as investigators detail causes of pollbook error](#), from Votebeat Pennsylvania
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Resources: Keeping up with the news

During our February briefing, League members requested news resources to help keep up with the rapid pace of election and democracy news. Here are some of our most-depended on, trustworthy sources:

Election News and Resources

- [Electionline.org](https://electionline.org)
- [Democracy Docket](https://democracydocket.org): Note: This site has a leftward partisan lean, but covers niche stories many outlets don't
- [Votebeat.org](https://votebeat.org): National and select local coverage
- [MIT Election Lab](https://electionlab.mit.edu)

General News/Podcasts

- [The Daily](https://www.nytimes.com), from the New York Times
- [Up First](https://www.npr.org), from NPR
- [Stateline.org](https://www.stateline.org)
- [New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com)

Fact-checking and Civic Education Resources

- [Politifact](https://www.politifact.com)
- [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org)
- [The Brennan Center for Justice](https://www.brennancenter.org)
- [National Conference of State Legislators](https://www.ncsl.org)
- [Bipartisan Policy Center](https://www.bipartisanpolicy.org)

Additional Links

- Sign up for our live Democracy Integrity briefings and written reports [here](#)
- Complete our survey to let us know how we're doing [here](#)