

Ballot & Election-Office Seizures

THREAT LEVEL: 4 (HIGH)

What is meant by: Ballot & Election-Office Seizures

In 2026, federal and local law enforcement have, on two occasions, physically seized ballots and election records from county election offices using search warrants — rather than through the normal civil legal process (subpoenas, lawsuits, court-ordered production) that has historically governed disputes over election records.

Why is this important

A search warrant is a criminal-investigation tool. Using it against a county's own election records is highly unusual and raises chain-of-custody concerns — once ballots leave a bipartisan election office's custody, the normal safeguards (bipartisan observation, sealed storage, audit trails) are no longer guaranteed. It also sets a precedent: if federal or local law enforcement can seize the records of a past election on the basis of unproven fraud claims, the same tool could plausibly be used against a current, contested election.

Fulton County, Georgia — FBI

On January 28, 2026, the FBI executed a search warrant at Fulton County's election hub, seizing roughly 650 boxes of materials from the 2020 election: physical ballots, ballot images, tabulator tapes, and voter rolls. The warrant followed a referral from Kurt Olsen, Trump's newly appointed Director of Election Security and Integrity, and came after a separate DOJ civil lawsuit for the same records had stalled. A federal judge ruled in May 2026 that DOJ could keep the seized ballots. An NPR analysis later found the FBI's affidavit omitted findings from Georgia's own state investigators, which had already reviewed similar fraud claims and found they did not affect the county's certified results.

[NPR — FBI seizes thousands of 2020 ballots from Fulton County, Georgia](#)

[PBS News — Justice Department can keep 2020 ballots seized from Fulton County, judge rules](#)

[NPR — The FBI seizure of Georgia 2020 election ballots relies on debunked claims](#)

Riverside County, California — Sheriff

Beginning in February 2026, Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco — a Republican candidate for California governor — seized more than 650,000 ballots and nearly 1,000 boxes of materials from the county's November 2025 special election on Proposition 50 (a Democratic-favored congressional redistricting measure), citing a citizen group's disputed claim of a ~45,000-vote discrepancy. This was a state/local action, not federal. California's Attorney General called the seizure “unprecedented in both scope and scale” and unsupported by evidence; the Secretary of State said Bianco lacked authority to conduct a recount. The warrants were initially sealed; news organizations sued to unseal them. As of an August 2026 hearing, California Supreme Court justices appeared skeptical that Bianco had acted within his legal authority.

[CalMatters — A California sheriff seized 600,000 ballots with secret warrants](#)

[CalMatters — California justices seem skeptical of Sheriff Bianco's defense](#)

[Fox News — Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco seizes 650K ballots in CA probe](#)

How urgent is this?

THREAT LEVEL: 4 out of 5 (High).

Reasoning: unlike the ICE/troops document, these are not rumors — two real, documented seizures have already occurred, by two different types of law-enforcement actors, in two different states. Both involve records from a past election (2020 and a 2025 special election), not live vote-counting in a currently contested race, which is what keeps this at 4 rather than 5. This should be escalated to 5 immediately if a similar action targets 2026 midterm materials specifically.

What can be done

Voters should be encouraged to vote early, and if voting at a polling location, to arrange for groups to vote together — this both eases fear of intimidation and creates visible evidence that ballots are being cast and counted fairly. Activists could be present at polling places to observe the process and offer support if law enforcement or others attempt to discourage citizens from voting.

Efforts could be made to further publicize accounts like Paigelynn Gonyea's, both to raise awareness and to model how to respond if intimidation continues.

Even though there have been no public statements about further ballot seizures, activists could communicate concerns to elected officials now, and be prepared to act through lawful means — public records requests, litigation support, and legislative pressure — to help prevent seizure of 2026 election materials.