

Mapping the Movement:

ELECTION DENIALISTS RECRUIT VETERANS AND THREATEN 2024 ELECTION



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Executive Summary

➤ Since 2020, the election denial movement has been working to build a grassroots network to infiltrate local democratic institutions. Installing election deniers in positions of influence threatens the accuracy of the 2024 election and democracy in the United States.

The election denial movement's recruiting efforts center on disinformation that claims pervasive voter fraud has delegitimized the electoral system; their call to action is for "patriotic" citizens to stop it.

The movement specifically recruits veterans to exploit their social capital, legitimacy, and networks. Through these veterans, the movement mainstreams election denialism.



Election deniers target and infiltrate local election infrastructure

Since the 2020 elections, the election denial movement¹ has encouraged its supporters to infiltrate local election infrastructure to increase its control over electoral processes and outcomes. From poll watchers to campaign volunteers, they use targeted disinformation to recruit those they believe will be receptive to voter fraud myths.

Election deniers undercut our electoral institutions by recruiting poll workers and [poll watchers](#) to expose alleged voter fraud. They also encourage [vigilante-style](#) election monitors to [surveil](#) voting locations and to bully election workers into [culling voter rolls](#).

The movement has infiltrated electoral politics, recruiting local [candidates](#) to run for offices like election boards that are [responsible for vote certification](#). They also urge adherents to [join local political parties](#) and to [volunteer for election-denying](#) candidates.

In the policy arena, they urge their followers to support [election suppression policies](#), such as bans on mail-in voting, machine voting, and automatic voter registration.

Election deniers recruit veterans to grow their movement

The election denial movement has recruited thousands of new volunteers since 2020, including veterans who they target to exploit their social capital. To recruit veterans, they often obscure their extremist connections and agendas, evoke a sense of patriotic duty, and exploit mainstream veterans' networks.

Obscuring extremist connections

When appealing to veterans, some in the election denial movement obscure their associations with extremist organizations and the myths and conspiracy theories they promote.

[One More Mission](#) is a campaign funded by The America Project (TAP) — a nonprofit launched by [prominent election deniers](#) including retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn — to recruit veterans as poll workers and watchers. Their website initially included TAP's logo and resources, but this content has been removed. While some of One More Mission's [associates](#) promote election denial in separate forums, the website largely excludes this propaganda.

[Continue to Serve](#) was an initiative led by [True the Vote](#) (TTV) in the 2020 election cycle to recruit poll watchers from the veteran and law enforcement communities. The program's webpage and introductory video omitted the [election denial conspiracies](#) that drive TTV's agenda.

¹ In this report, election denial refers to the promotion of the idea that the 2020 elections were likely illegitimate due to widespread voter fraud, or that substantial voter fraud is likely to delegitimize upcoming U.S. elections.



LTG Flynn, Ret. encourages engagement in local politics. One election denial organization he founded specifically recruits veterans.

Evoking patriotic duty

Many election denial groups use military language and patriotism in their appeals to veterans. They play to veterans' sense of duty and contrast their efforts to imagined threats to democracy.

One More Mission describes democracy as under attack and encourages veterans and first responders to volunteer as poll watchers with messaging such as, "the sovereignty of our elections requires men and women of integrity to step up, again, and perform our civic duty."

A Continue to Serve video, which features former Navy Seal Ed Hiner, equates military service in support of elections in Iraq to monitoring elections in the United States. Hiner states, "we had... snipers across the city protecting polling booths. My brothers and I were willing to shed our blood on the battlefield to protect the beliefs of the Iraqi people so they could vote. So, I'm asking you as Americans to take involvement in this vote."

The Florida and Georgia chapters of Veterans for America First (VFAF) lean on veterans' sense of brotherhood when urging them to vote and volunteer for election-denying candidates. VFAF chapters urge veterans to "become politically involved and actively support the efforts of True America First Republican candidates running for office..." VFAF has endorsed over 50 candidates in the 2024 elections.



The fight for this country is at a crucial moment.
Our greatest patriots, you have
[#OneMoreMission](#).

Join the mission today at [REDACTED].



1:47 PM · 10/14/22 from Earth

Militarized language and imagery used to recruit veterans to join “the fight” as elections volunteers.

Exploiting mainstream veterans’ networks

Election deniers integrate themselves into mainstream veterans’ organizations, then spread disinformation and recruit there.

One More Mission’s materials list strategic partnerships with veterans’ service-oriented organizations, including [Warfighter Overwatch](#), which combats veteran suicide, [Alpha Elite Performance Outdoors](#), which supports special operations veterans, and [Florida 4 Warriors](#), which creates veteran community networks in Florida.

Continue to Serve’s spokesperson Ed Hiner claimed he used veterans’ organizations to access over [two million veterans](#) and promote his program.



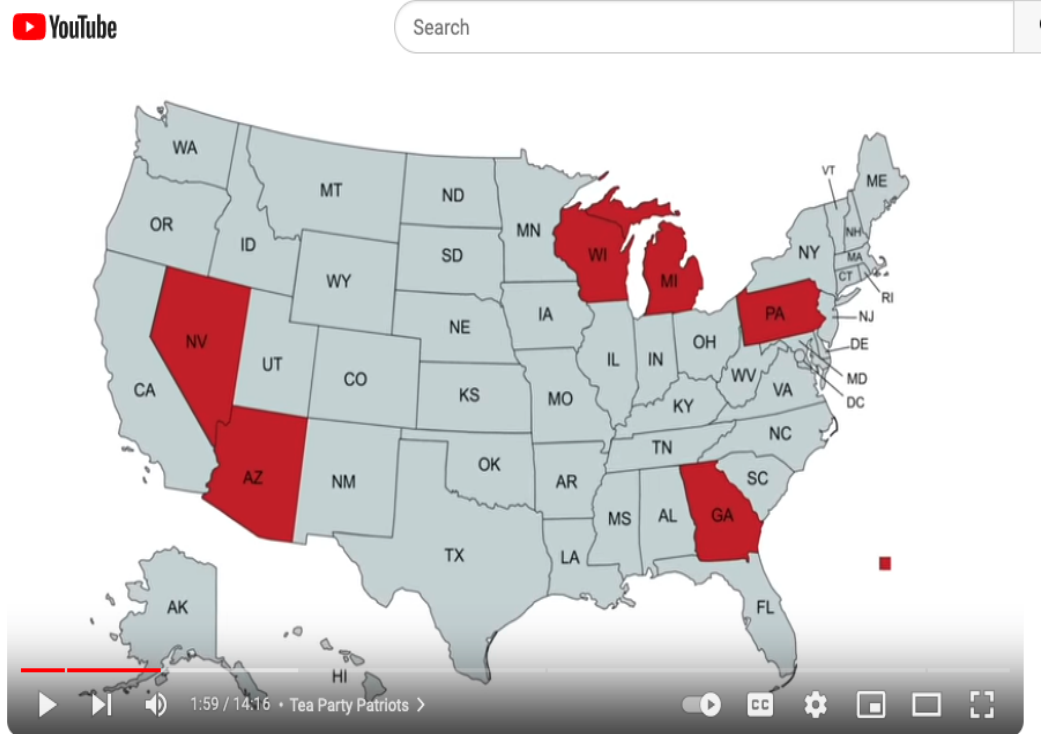
In 2022, election deniers hosted screenings of *2000 Mules*, a film that traffics in election denial conspiracies, at least fifteen times in American Legion halls or Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) posts in eight states.

Key actors and organizations furthering election denial

Members of the election denial movement have announced plans for broad-based campaigns in the 2024 elections. The most influential actors mobilizing sympathizers at the local level include:

- **Steve Bannon:** President Trump's chief strategist began promoting the "precinct strategy" in 2021, encouraging election deniers to serve as Republican Party precinct committee members. In late 2022, a far-right journalist on Bannon's podcast claimed half of the country's 200,000 GOP precinct committee members are likely allies.
- **Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, Retired:** After trying to overturn the 2020 election, Flynn built a network of extremist and election denial-focused organizations, including The America Project (TAP), where he emphasizes local-level engagement.
- **True the Vote (TTV):** The organization is featured in the widely-circulated election denial film *2000 Mules*. The film's claims of widespread voter fraud were repeatedly debunked by independent investigations and elections experts.
- **Election Integrity Network (EIN):** A project of the Conservative Partnership Institute, founded by former Trump Chief of Staff and election denier Mark Meadows and run by Cleta Mitchell. Mitchell was the attorney on then-President Trump's call with Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in which Trump demanded Raffensperger "find" enough votes to flip Georgia's 2020 results. EIN trains poll workers and watchers to implement election denial strategies across the country.
- **Tea Party Patriots Action (TPPA):** A political action organization working to establish "election integrity citizen task forces" in every U.S. county. By October 2022, they claimed to have trained over 8,000 people in "election integrity" – often code for election denial – including poll watchers and workers.





Over 6,000 Americans Attended 'Anti-Election Fraud' Training Programs: Here's What They Learned



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TPPA recruits and mobilizes in swing states by falsely suggesting election fraud occurred there in 2020.

Veteran recruitment mainstreams election denial and threatens election outcomes

In the 2024 election cycle, the election denial movement will continue to activate sympathizers to undercut our democratic system, including attempts to leverage veterans' credibility. Broad-based acceptance of voter fraud conspiracies, combined with the rise of election denialists in influential election roles suggests that voter suppression, disruptions, and violence will pose a serious threat to election outcomes.

Mainstreaming election denialism

In 2024, the election denial movement will continue to use the veteran community's reputation to legitimize election denial conspiracies and appeal to broader audiences.

Election denialists have already recruited a cadre of sympathetic former military officers. In 2021, 124 retired U.S. flag officers [signed a public letter endorsing election denial](#), claiming "irregularities" in the 2020 election were ignored. In 2022, the group authored "Citizen's Action Plan for America," which encouraged sympathizers to volunteer as poll workers and watchers.



The effect is clear. The election denial movement eroded public confidence in American elections after 2020; in 2022 confidence was [substantially lower than prior to that election](#). The impact of election denial on the 2024 elections will be significant.

Increasing voter suppression, harassment, intimidation, and violence

The movement's rhetoric and tactics will lead to increased harassment, intimidation, and violence toward election workers and the suppression of minority voters. These trends are heightened when election deniers recruit veterans as poll and dropbox monitors, and suggest they are soldiers on the front lines of a domestic battle.

In [every federal election](#) cycle since [2016](#), the Oath Keepers militia—a violent extremist group that recruits military veterans and former law enforcement—urges its members to surveil voters and patrol voting sites. In 2022, Arizona Oath Keepers enacted "[Operation Dropbox](#)" to harass voters by photographing their faces, cars, and license plates as they dropped off ballots.

In 2020, a private security company run by veterans in Tennessee recruited veterans of U.S. Special Forces to serve as poll "guards" in Minnesota. The company chairman claimed the guards would "[make sure the antifas don't try to destroy the election sites.](#)" a baseless rumor that was [popular in far-right networks](#) at the time.

Voter intimidation disproportionately [targets minority communities](#). For example, in the 2020 cycle in Texas, a voter tipline fielded over 3,000 calls, revealing that the majority of [reported incidents](#) of harassment and intimidation targeted minority voters.²

Since the 2020 election, harassment and threats of violence against election workers have [become commonplace](#). In Arizona, a Maricopa County official's [name and address](#) were listed in online posts that threatened to harm his children.

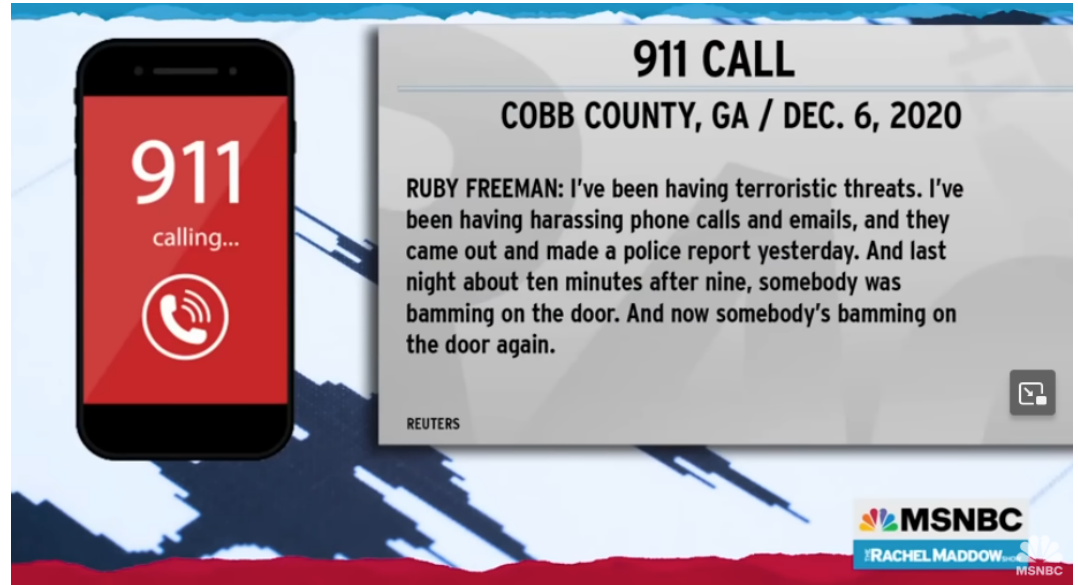
Increasing disruptions and delays in electoral outcomes

In 2020, election deniers contributed to delayed results, wasted public resources, and growing distrust in elections outcomes. The movement has dramatically increased its power and influence at local levels, threatening election processes and outcomes in 2024.

In the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election, election denialists drew on poll watcher testimony from states including [Pennsylvania](#), [Georgia](#), [Michigan](#), and [Arizona](#) to question the legitimacy of elections there. Numerous [investigations](#) determined there was no [evidence of substantial fraud](#).

² Harassment and intimidation of minority voters has a long history in the U.S. in the post-Civil Rights era. In 1981 the Republican Party was sued and banned from poll watching or other 'ballot security' programs without court approval until [2018](#). This was in response to the creation of a Republican National Committee New Jersey squad that used retired and off-duty law enforcement officers to conduct armed patrols of polling sites in Black and Latino neighborhoods to [harass and intimidate voters](#).





Poll worker Ruby Freeman [faced harassment, death threats](#), and was forced to flee her home when a [false accusation](#) of election fraud went viral.

In [Pennsylvania](#) and [Arizona](#), several counties [delayed voter certification](#) after election deniers, including local actors, demanded recounts or further investigation. Delaware County in Pennsylvania spent [\\$250,000 fighting 15 false claims of election fraud](#), winning all cases in court.

On January 6th 2021, [147 members of Congress objected to certifying presidential election results](#) based on false claims of election fraud or [spurious](#) allegations of election law violations. Current House Speaker Mike Johnson [had a leading role](#) in justifying their specious claims.

Recommendations for building resilience to election denial and supporting pro-democracy efforts

Protecting our democracy requires making the public and veteran communities aware of the tactics and rhetoric deployed by the election denial movement and building resilience to them. It also requires greater civic engagement at local and national levels and public support for election protection and voting rights. Our specific recommendations:

Increase awareness of extremist disinformation and recruitment tactics

- ✦ Learn to recognize the language of election denialism, like commands to [“restore” election integrity](#) or [“catch the cheaters in real time,”](#) which falsely imply that poll watchers or drop box monitors often encounter fraud.
- ✦ Improve veterans’ and servicemembers’ access to digital literacy resources through legislation like the [Veterans Online Information and Cybersecurity Empowerment \(VOICE\) Act](#), which provides tools and trainings to spot mis- and disinformation campaigns.



Seek opportunities to support elections

- Learn the roles of [poll workers and poll watchers](#) (also called “election monitors,” “election observers,” “poll observers,” or others), and become one.
- Do [your own research](#) on non-governmental organizations leading volunteer efforts, their leaders, and their sources of funding, to avoid those with hidden objectives.

Support election protection and voting rights

- Support legislation that protects democracy including [automatic voter ID; expanded polling locations; increased protections for election workers and volunteers](#); and the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, [H.R. 14](#), which updates the Voting Rights Act and strengthens protections against restrictive voting laws.
- Learn about voter suppression efforts, which further racial inequity. These include [stricter ID requirements](#); allowing [baseless voter registration challenges](#); restricting [mail-in voting](#) or [ballot drop boxes](#); requiring [partisan election administrators](#); extending [allowances on poll challengers](#); and the American Confidence in Elections Act, [H.R. 4563](#), a bill introduced this year that would impose unnecessary requirements on voters.
- Counter restrictive and discriminatory legislation by [contacting your local elected officials](#), [attending townhalls](#) and hearings, and organizing your community against these harms.

Veterans should be local pro-democracy leaders

- Veterans should leverage their credibility as defenders of democracy to counter false narratives and conspiracies about democratic processes.
- Veterans should support pro-democracy work in their communities and educate the public about election administration. To [curb the spread of misinformation](#), veterans should always cite objective or [government-produced](#) documents on election administration.
- Veterans should encourage their communities to become engaged in the work of democracy. Education is typically a first step toward voting, working as a poll worker, or serving as an election official.



Mission Statement

Human Rights First works to create a just world in which every person's intrinsic human rights are respected and protected, to build societies that value and invest in all their people. To reach that goal demands assisting victims of injustice, bringing perpetrators of abuse to justice, and building institutions that ensure universal rights.

Human Rights First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan international human rights organization based in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D.C.

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