



**Testimony of Mimi Marziani for
U.S. Senate Committee on Rules & Administration,
Ranking Member Senator Alex Padilla, on
Protecting the Future of American Democracy: State & Local Election Security**

Presented on June 16, 2026

I'm honored to be here before you, Senator Padilla, and your esteemed colleagues on the Rules Committee, alongside some of the nation's leading experts in state and local election security matters.¹

My remarks today have one central message: Do not take your eyes off of Texas in these months leading up to Election Day. In Texas, state leaders have proven that they will disregard democratic principles in furtherance of President Trump's political goals. Moreover, the two most powerful Texas state officials are themselves on the ballot this fall in hotly contested races, and are signaling their willingness to take extreme steps for their own electoral success.

Texas is unlike California (to state the obvious). In California, efforts by federal actors to interfere with normal election administration have been and will be loudly contested by state officials. But in Texas, attempts at manipulating election rules for political gain will be done *in cooperation* with President Trump and his loyalists, and it will largely happen behind closed doors.

Let me unpack each of these points.

First, Attorney General Ken Paxton and Governor Greg Abbott have both engaged in anti-democratic behavior to serve President Trump. Perhaps the most notorious example is from December 2020, when Paxton sued Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin in an unprecedented attempt to block their electoral college votes from being counted for President

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Biden.² Last summer, Abbott called a special legislative session to redraw Texas' congressional maps for Republican's advantage, responding to direct pressure from President Trump to do so.³ When Texas House Democrats broke quorum in protest, Abbott activated the Texas Rangers—claiming unfounded charges of felony bribery—and then petitioned the Texas Supreme Court to strip absent lawmakers of their offices,⁴ a move that even the deeply conservative court refused to take.⁵

Second, numerous observers are warning of an unusually competitive political climate in Texas this year, and Paxton and Abbott know the stakes are high. At the Texas Republican Party convention last week, Paxton himself proclaimed “[i]f we lose Texas . . . we lose America.”⁶ Abbott used his convention speech to promise to close Republican primary elections to only registered Republicans, parroting an unproven suspicion among right-wing activists that Independent and Democratic Party voters “cross-over” in Texas primaries to elect more moderate candidates who are less loyal to President Trump.⁷ Abbott's remarks are notable because they represent an about-face: His hand-picked Secretary of State (“SOS”) is currently

² See *Texas v. Pennsylvania*, 141 S. Ct. 1230 (2020) (mem.). Notably, just last week, a federal court in Massachusetts enjoined Paxton from continuing a lawsuit against ActBlue in Texas, explicitly relying upon Paxton's “well-known history of filing retaliatory lawsuits” for political reasons. *ActBlue LLC v. Paxton*, No. 26-11986-RGS, slip op. at 9 (D. Mass. June 11, 2026).

³ See, e.g., Owen Dahlkamp & Natalia Contreras, *Trump Aides Want Texas to Redraw Its Congressional Maps to Boost the GOP. What Would That Mean?*, Tex. Trib. (June 11, 2025), <https://www.texastribune.org/2025/06/11/texas-congress-midcycle-redistricting-trump-republicans/>; Owen Dahlkamp, *Texas Republicans, Including Gov. Abbott, Were Reluctant to Redraw the State's Congressional Maps. Then Trump Got Involved.*, Tex. Trib. (July 22, 2025), <https://www.texastribune.org/2025/07/22/texas-redistricting-abbott-republicans-resistant-trump/>.

⁴ Andrew Schneider, *Abbott, Paxton Will Seek Court Orders to Have Democrats Who Broke Quorum Thrown Out of Office*, KUT (Aug. 5, 2025), <https://www.kut.org/politics/2025-08-05/texas-tx-greg-abbott-ken-paxton-democrats-flee-arrest-legislature>.

⁵ *In re Abbott*, Nos. 25-0674 & 25-0687 (Tex. May 15, 2026).

⁶ John C. Moritz, *Ken Paxton Says He's No. 1 Target for National Democrats in the 2026 Midterms*, Austin Am.-Statesman (June 12, 2026), <https://www.statesman.com/news/politics/elections/article/ken-paxton-gop-convention-22299739.php>

⁷ Benjamin Wermund, *Greg Abbott Calls for Major Election Change in Speech at Texas GOP Convention*, Hous. Chron. (June 12, 2026), <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/texas/article/greg-abbott-closed-primaries-convention-22288408.php>.



defending Texas' primary laws in court against a challenge by the Texas Republican Party, after Paxton refused to do so.⁸

Third, given this track record and the obvious political motives, I am concerned about several recent developments. Some acts are clearly worrisome; others are warning signs whose significance depends on what comes next.

- *State officials are quietly feeding Texans' voter data to the federal government.* Last year, the SOS ran Texas' 18 million registered voters through the Department of Homeland Security ("DHS") SAVE database, flagging 2,724 registered voters as "potential noncitizens," whom the state then referred to counties for investigation.⁹ But counties have confirmed that at least some flagged voters are in fact U.S. citizens, including some voters who had *already provided* proof of citizenship to the state.¹⁰ Texas subsequently turned over its complete voter roll to the Department of Justice ("DOJ"), and the DOJ has admitted that it plans to share voter roll information with DHS.¹¹ Seemingly, no one outside the Executive Branch can fully see how this data is being used. I'm deeply concerned that this Texas-federal data pipeline could be used to manufacture the predicate for mass voter purges later this summer.¹²

⁸ See generally *Hunt v. Texas*, No. 25-cv-00200 (N.D.Tex.).

⁹ Natalia Contreras, *As Texas Embraces Federal Immigration Database to Verify Voter Citizenship, Some Experts Are Worried*, Tex. Trib. (July 22, 2025), <https://www.texastribune.org/2025/07/22/texas-secretary-of-state-checks-save-database-voter-citizenship/>; Tex. Sec'y of State, *Texas Completes Citizenship Verifications in the SAVE Database* (Oct. 20, 2025), (press release), <https://www.sos.state.tx.us/about/newsreleases/2025/102025.shtml>.

¹⁰ Natalia Contreras, *Texas Counties Begin Looking Into 'Potential Noncitizens' on Voter Rolls. Here's what they're finding.*, Votebeat (Oct. 31, 2025), <https://www.votebeat.org/texas/2025/10/31/county-election-officials-investigate-potential-noncitizens-flagged-save-database/>; Natalia Contreras, *Texas flagged some voters as 'potential noncitizens' but they had already provided proof of citizenship*, Votebeat (Dec. 18, 2025), <https://www.votebeat.org/texas/2025/12/18/texas-voter-roll-citizens-investigation-save-database-travis-county/>.

¹¹ Jude Joffe-Block, *The Justice Department plans to share sensitive voter data with Homeland Security*, NPR (Mar. 27, 2026), <https://www.npr.org/2026/03/27/nx-s1-5764266/voter-data-trump-doj-dhs>.

¹² Cf. Natalia Contreras, *Voting rights groups sue Texas over removal of potential noncitizens from the voter roll*, Tex. Trib. (Mar. 27, 2026), <https://www.texastribune.org/2026/03/27/texas-save-database-voter-rolls-removal-dps-secretary-of-state/>.



- *Federal and state authorities appear to be building toward “voter fraud” announcements.* In April, at least three Texas counties received or were told to expect DHS administrative subpoenas seeking detailed records about voters—and a DHS representative told one county elections administrator that “all 254 counties will be contacted.”¹³ The initial subpoenas were open-ended and described by one expert as “very weird” because one would expect that any inquiry into potential noncitizens on the rolls would name those specific individuals.¹⁴ Now, there are new reports of Paxton’s office seeking detailed voter records from certain counties, possibly relying upon information from the SAVE database. My worry is that these actions are not driven by legitimate law enforcement concerns but by a desire to provide “proof” to support President Trump’s persistent misstatements about widespread fraud.
- *Texas’ SOS just announced her abrupt departure, creating an opening for more aggressive state action.* On June 2, 2026, SOS Jane Nelson announced she would resign effective July 17, with no public reason why.¹⁵ (One plausible explanation is the primary-law reversal I described above.) Abbott will now nominate her replacement, handing Abbott the unitary power to install a chief election officer of his choosing in the final stretch before a uniquely competitive election where Abbott himself will be on the ballot. Local election officials are openly worried. One local expert described the risk that a new SOS arriving with “a laundry list of demands that election administrators can’t meet” could “throw our elections into disarray.”¹⁶ The risk of inviting chaos is real, as is

¹³ Natalia Contreras, *Texas counties receive subpoenas for voters’ records from Department of Homeland Security*, Votebeat (Apr. 10, 2026), <https://www.votebeat.org/texas/2026/04/10/departments-homeland-security-subpoenas-texas-counties-voter-records/>.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Tex. Sec’y of State, *Texas Secretary of State Jane Nelson Stepping Down After Three and a Half Years as Head of the Agency* (June 2, 2026), (press release), <https://www.sos.state.tx.us/about/newsreleases/2026/060226.shtml>.

¹⁶ Natalia Contreras, *Local Texas election officials await appointment of new secretary of state as midterm preparations ramp up*, Tex. Trib. (June 8, 2026), <https://www.texastribune.org/2026/06/08/texas-2026-midterm-new-secretary-of-state-election-officials/>.



the risk that Abbott appoints someone less willing than Nelson to uphold current law and ready to manipulate election law and policy for Republican's political gain.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my insights and concerns about ensuring free and fair elections in my home state of Texas. I appreciate your commitment to protecting the future of American democracy and look forward to your questions.