



COUNTY TECH  
XCHANGE

# Unity in Uncertainty: Partnership-Powered Resilience

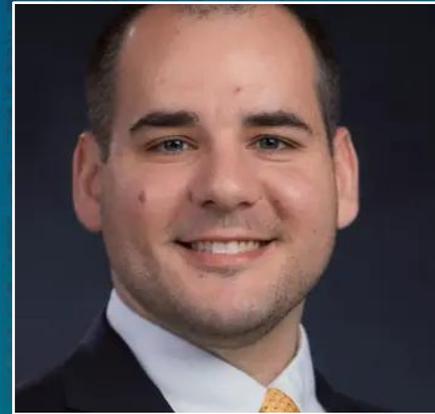
Thursday, Sept. 11, 2025

# Speakers



**Kathy Boockvar**

*President, Athena Strategies  
Senior Advisor, Institute for Responsive  
Government*



**Mike Moser**

*Senior Advisor of Cybersecurity and Elections  
Center for Tech and Civic Life*

# Unity in Uncertainty

Partnership-Powered Resilience

September 11, 2025



# Who We Are

- The Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) catalyzes excellent election administration across every jurisdiction in the U.S.
- We connect election officials, and other local officials, with tools, trainings, and resources so they can best serve their communities, and foster a more informed and engaged democracy

# Why We're Here

- The operating environment is rapidly changing
- Threats are not decreasing, they are growing and becoming increasingly sophisticated
- Exploring how partnerships can reduce gaps in support

# Warm Up

- Two poll questions to jumpstart today's session
  - What's your background in local government?
  - When preparing for elections, which of the following state or local agencies or departments do you coordinate with?

# Operating Environment



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# Birth of a Subsector

- Federal government recognized the vital importance elections play in U.S. national security
- Provided more federal support and resources for state and local government
- Created information-sharing pathways

## Statement by Secretary Jeh Johnson on the Designation of Election Infrastructure as a Critical Infrastructure Subsector

Release Date: January 6, 2017

For Immediate Release  
Office of the Press Secretary  
Contact: 202-282-8010

I have determined that election infrastructure in this country should be designated as a subsector of the existing Government Facilities critical infrastructure sector. Given the vital role elections play in this country, it is clear that certain systems and assets of election infrastructure meet the definition of critical infrastructure, in fact and in law.

I have reached this determination so that election infrastructure will, on a more formal and enduring basis, be a priority for cybersecurity assistance and protections that the Department of Homeland Security provides to a range of private and public sector entities. By "election infrastructure," we mean storage facilities, polling places, and centralized vote tabulations locations used to support the election process, and information and communications technology to include voter registration databases, voting machines, and other systems to manage the election process and report and display results on behalf of state and local governments.

Prior to reaching this determination, my staff and I consulted many state and local election officials; I am aware that many of them are opposed to this designation. It is important to stress what this designation does and does not mean. This designation does not mean a federal takeover, regulation, oversight or intrusion concerning elections in this country. This designation does nothing to change the role state and local governments have in administering and running elections.

The designation of election infrastructure as critical infrastructure subsector does mean that election infrastructure becomes a priority within the National Infrastructure Protection Plan. It also enables this Department to prioritize our cybersecurity assistance to state and local election officials, but only for those who request it. Further, the designation makes clear both domestically and internationally that election infrastructure enjoys all the benefits and protections of critical infrastructure that the U.S. government has to offer. Finally, a designation makes it easier for the federal government to have full and frank discussions with key stakeholders regarding sensitive vulnerability information.

Particularly in these times, this designation is simply the right and obvious thing to do.

At present, there are sixteen critical infrastructure sectors, including twenty subsectors that are eligible to receive prioritized cybersecurity assistance from the Department of Homeland Security. The existing critical infrastructure sectors are:

- Chemical
- Commercial Facilities
- Communications
- Critical Manufacturing
- Dams
- Defense Industrial Base
- Emergency Services
- Energy
- Financial Services
- Food and Agriculture
- Government Facilities
- Healthcare and Public Health
- Information Technology
- Nuclear Reactors, Material, and Waste
- Transportation Systems
- Water and Wastewater Systems

Entities within these sectors all benefit from this designation and work with us closely on cybersecurity. For example, we have developed joint

# State of Play: Cutbacks in 2025



# FEMA

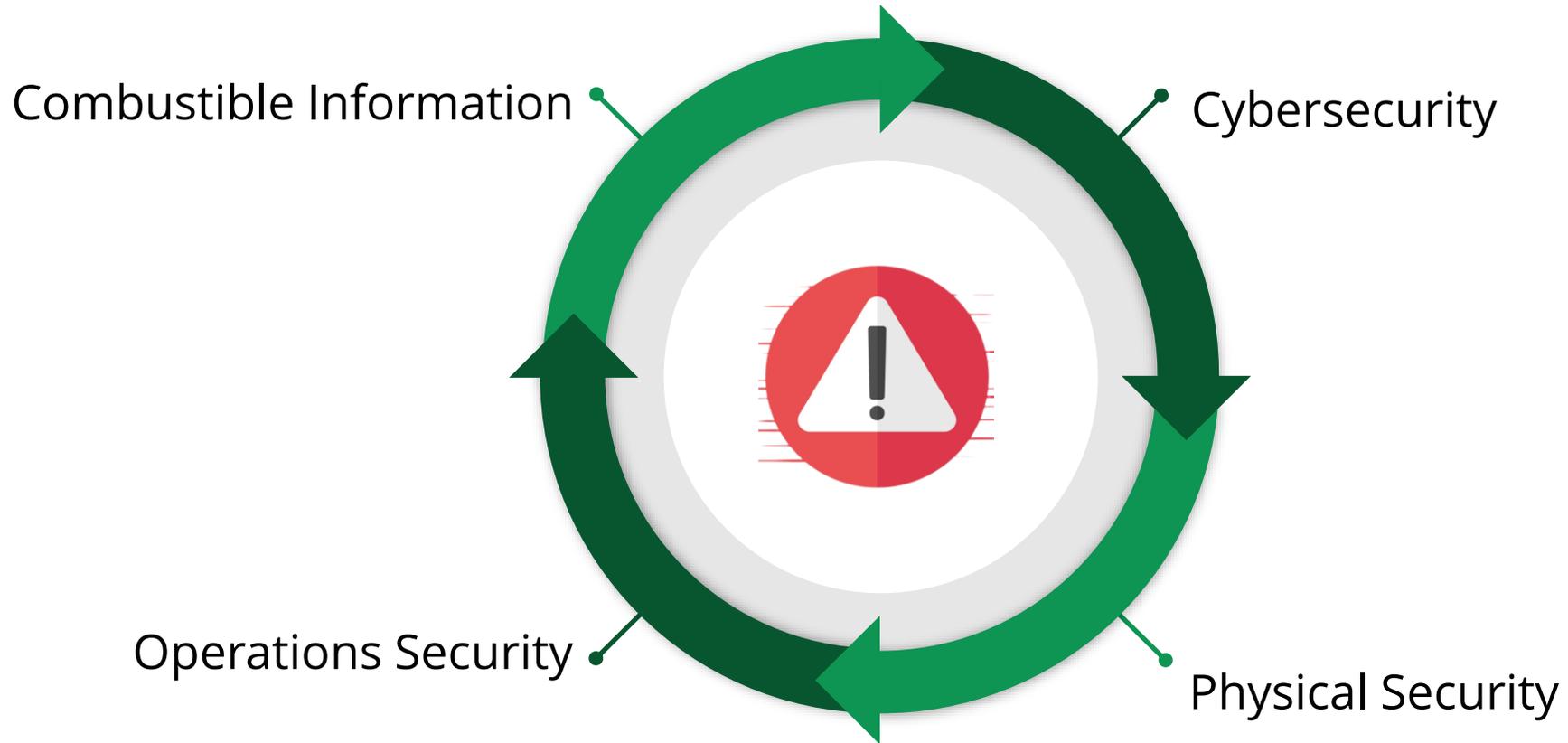


# Threat Environment



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# Cascading and Converging Impact



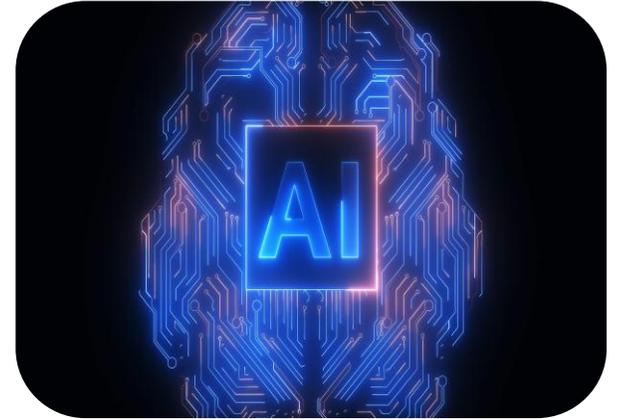
# Challenges Persist

- We experienced real issues in 2024 that carry forward today...and then some
  - Doxxing
  - Swatting
  - Bomb threats and incendiary devices
  - Mail threats
  - Mis/disinformation
  - Cyber attacks (DDoS, ransomware, phishing, network intrusion, supply chain attacks)
  - Physical threats and intimidation



# Looking ahead

- Rising political violence
- Increasing cyber attacks (frequency and sophistication)
  - Advancing and emerging tech
  - Ransomware on the rise
  - Persona-driven attacks
- Loss of institutional knowledge
- Understaffing and funding challenges



# Leveling the Playing Field Through Partnerships



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# An Opportunity...

- Administering and securing elections take tremendous resources
- With the cost share shifting downward due to federal cuts, take the opportunity to establish common ground and strengthen resource sharing
- By assembling broad collaboration, agencies can leverage their collective strengths, increase knowledge and information sharing, and optimize resources



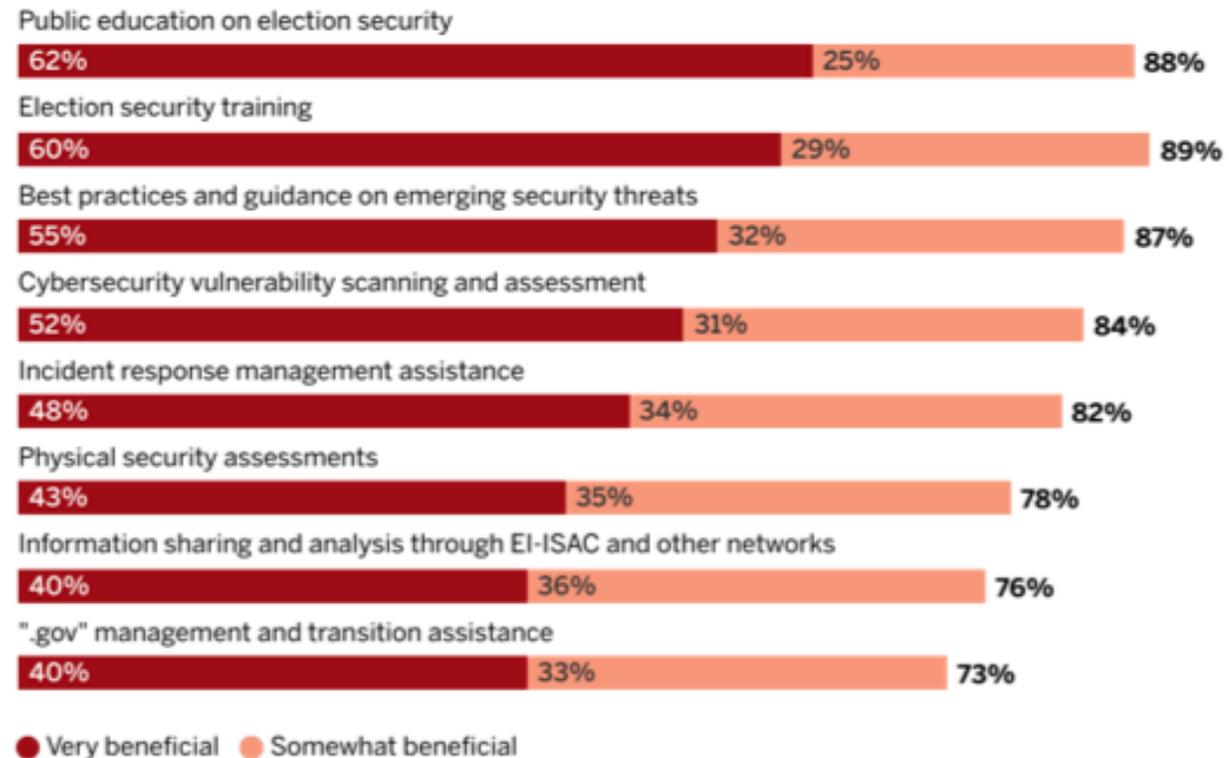
# Increased Capacity & Continuity

- Unified goals and alignment
- Extending impact of limited resources and services
- Improved rapid response
- Greater information sharing and collaboration
- Strengthening community resilience and continuity
- Cultivating employment pipelines
- Fostering a close-knit community

# Collaboration is Beneficial

Local election officials overwhelmingly approve of security services provided by the government

**How beneficial, if at all, is it for the government to provide the following services?  
Very beneficial/Somewhat beneficial total**



# Case Study Lite #1

State-level Workgroup



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# PA Election Security Workgroup

- **Purpose:** Working together to share information and coordinate risk management plans
- **Key Partners:** federal, state, and local partners
- **Successful Outcomes:**
  - Election operations planning and statewide HSIN dashboard
  - Filling resource gaps and coordinating shared projects
  - More effective COVID response
- This is a repeatable model that can be applied at the local level with local equivalents

# Case Study Lite #2

Leveraging Educational Institutions



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# Virginia Cyber Navigator Program

- **Purpose:** Building a coalition of universities and colleges partnering with the VA Dept. of Elections and industry
- **Key Partners:** VA Department of Elections, education institutions, and local officials
- **Successful Outcomes:**
  - Strengthens election security
  - Provides student internships
  - Educates and prepares

# Formulating Strategy



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# Focus on the Fundamentals

- Are there opportunities for cross-training?
- Can partners add capacity during an incident or more significant event?
- Can partners amplify helpful messaging and services?
- Are there any resources that can be shared to improve cybersecurity or physical security defenses?
- Do any partners have access to threat intelligence that can be shared to improve operations and planning?
- How can our organizations foster trust in the community?

# Signs of Success and Pitfalls

- ✓ Cohesive Leadership
- ✓ Clear Goals
- ✓ Open Communication
- ✓ Openness to Change
- ✓ Emphasize the Wins
- ✓ Documentation
- ✓ Start small
- ✗ Lack of clarity or purpose
- ✗ Undefined roles and responsibilities
- ✗ Misaligned objectives
- ✗ Duplication of efforts
- ✗ Not allocating enough time

# Initiating Next Steps

- As you identify opportunities to strengthen and build partnerships, consider the following:
  - Identify current risks to your vital operations and areas where improvements could be useful
  - Document your needs and resource gaps
  - Inventory your relationships
    - Who do I know that is performing potentially relevant operations and/or strategy ?
    - How are they aligned with my goals?
    - What can they bring to the table?

# Call to Action

## Within 60 days

- Define needs
- Partnership mapping
- Say hello!

## Within 90 days

- Foster relationships
- Initiate stakeholder meeting

## Within 120 days

- Exercise!
- Establish joint operations
- Map dependencies and resources

## Ongoing

- Open communications
- Routine exercises
- Cross-training
- Exchange expertise
- Resource sharing
- Cost-sharing

# Case Study Lite #3

Cooperative purchasing



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# PA COSTARS Program

- **Purpose:** Encourages best value by leveraging state negotiated contracts for supplies and services
- **Key Partners:** County government and smaller political units (municipalities, townships, etc.)
- **Successful Outcomes:**
  - Voting systems
  - Paper supplies
  - Other IT equipment, etc.

# Monmouth County, NJ

- **Purpose:** To become more fiscally responsible while improving service
- **Key Partners:**
  - Municipalities and school districts
- **Successful Outcomes:**
  - Competitive pricing with economies of scale
  - Reducing redundant services
  - Cost savings

# Case Study Lite #4

Less formal relationships



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# Bay Area Coalition

- **Purpose:** Combining time and funding to purchase more prominent advertisements and shared messaging.
- **Partners:** Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Benito, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, and Sonoma counties in CA
- **Successful Outcomes:**
  - Shared mission and purpose
  - Memorable messaging and branding
  - Improving trust
  - Division of labor

# Wrap Up



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# Peer Resources

- [Public Sector Primer to Partnership Mapping](#)
  - Center for Tech and Civic Life
- [Pay-for Cybersecurity Services for Election Officials](#)
  - Joint resource between the Center for Tech and Civic Life, Partnership for Large Election Jurisdictions, and the Elections Group
- [Election Security Navigator Guidebook](#)
  - CISA
- [Association Maturation Guidebook](#)
  - Coalition of Election Association Leaders (CEAL)
- [Law Enforcement Quick Reference Guides](#)
  - Committee for Safe and Secure Elections
- [DIY Guide - Building an Election Training and Certification Program](#)
  - The Elections Group
- [Election Tools and Resources](#)
  - U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence
- [Five Steps to Safer Elections](#)
  - Committee for Safe and Secure Elections
- [Security Assessment Checklist](#)
  - Committee for Safe and Secure Elections
- [Essential Guide to Election Security](#)
  - Center for Internet Security



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# Upcoming Webinars

- [Oct. 7 - Rise of the Machine: Risk and Governance in the Age of Algorithms](#)
- [Nov 12 - Checks, Balances, and Firewalls: Navigating Governance](#)

# Thanks!

Email:

MikeM@TechAndCiviclife.org

Kathy@responsivegov.org

Website: [www.techandciviclife.org](http://www.techandciviclife.org)



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*Scan the QR code to learn more.*



**Thank you for attending**