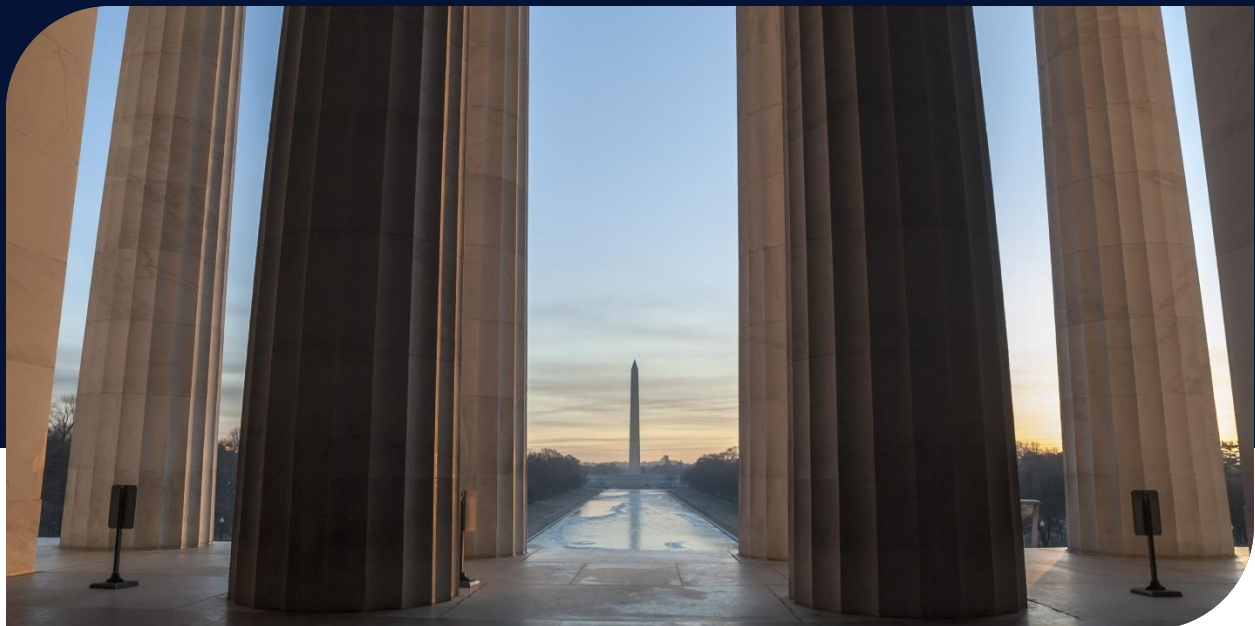


U.S. Presidential Election: Preparing for Uncertainty in the Final Stretch & Beyond

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As the U.S. election enters its final 13-day stretch, the political and security landscape continue to be shaped by a confluence of complex and potentially volatile factors, creating a highly charged and unpredictable environment for November 5th and the days and weeks following.

Given this environment, and as a follow up to our [earlier analysis](#) on the security environment related to the elections, this assessment outlines possible risks and provides recommendations for how corporations should prepare for potential disruptions.

Election day faces escalating risks from multiple fronts

A surge in election-related mis- and disinformation, driven by both foreign and domestic influence, poses a significant threat to the integrity of the electoral process and may drive chaos and unrest in the final countdown to election day and immediate post-election period.

Simultaneously, the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, now further involving Hezbollah, Lebanon and Iran, continues to send shockwaves through global and domestic politics, fueling heightened protest activity and increasing the risk of potential extremist violence. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of two assassination attempts on former President/current presidential candidate Donald J. Trump, the threat of political violence is ever-present.

On election day itself, several vulnerabilities may heighten tensions and disrupt the voting process. Overt voter intimidation, which could emerge from militia groups, election deniers or campaign workers and supporters, poses a serious concern, especially in “battleground” states where political contests are expected to be especially tight. Election officials and volunteers face the dual threat of managing this pressure while ensuring the integrity of the voting process. States like North Carolina and Florida that are critical to the presidential race are also facing unprecedented disruptions following Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which, in turn, may lead to delays in voting and counting votes.

Additionally, spontaneous protest activity, often motivated by a blend of ideologies, may escalate quickly. The convergence of opposing groups at locations such as polling stations on election day increases the risk of potential clashes, which could disrupt the voting process and create a potentially chaotic environment if results are disputed or if there are delays in counting votes. Some groups may intentionally exploit these protests to incite chaos and unrest, amplifying the already high risk of both planned and spontaneous violence.



Legal battles, disputed results and rising tensions will serve as the hallmarks of post-election uncertainty

The potential for election day to lead to “election week” or longer is increasingly likely, raising the prospect of a period marked by political and legal challenges across various states. The complexities of the election process, particularly in key battleground states, will likely fuel this uncertainty. A crucial milestone in this process is December 11th, the deadline by which each state's executive must issue a certificate of ascertainment. However, newer voting rules such as those in Georgia further complicate the election landscape and could prolong this uncertainty, as outlined below:

- **Increased foreign influence operations:** The FBI and CISA have already warned about a range of malicious actors spreading disinformation, claiming that voter registration databases have been compromised by cyberattacks, hence laying the groundwork to sow doubt about the integrity of the elections.¹ Should there be delays in counting votes, these efforts will likely ramp up and combine with other domestic-driven disinformation efforts, potentially creating an environment where false narratives run rampant.
- **Potential confrontations between individuals with opposing political views:** As noted above, protests and counter-protests involving groups with opposing political views have the potential to escalate violently. Variations of this could be potential spontaneous confrontations in every-day life interactions, including in the workplace.
- **Disinformation-fueled violence:** The potential for disinformation to escalate into violence is real. If the election results are contested or tight, the domestic threat environment could see a dangerous mix of online and offline calls for violence, possibly leading to actual violent incidents. Recent incidents in both the UK and Springfield, OH, offer insight into how false narratives sprouting online can serve as catalysts for physical violence, particularly when they turn viral due to amplification by officials, political candidates, high-profile individuals and extremist groups. In Southport, England, false claims about an asylum seeker perpetrating an attack that killed three children at a dance class led to protests, riots, looting and targeted violence against immigrants and Muslims across the UK.² In Springfield, false claims of Haitian migrants eating cats have resulted in the targeting of Haitian residents in the town, as well as more than 30 bomb threats targeting the town's schools, hospitals and government buildings.³ These two sets of incidents offer a grim warning of how quickly false narratives online, particularly those further elevated by high-profile individuals

¹ [Just So You Know: False Claims of Hacked Voter Information Likely Intended to Sow Distrust of U.S. Elections \(cisa.gov\)](https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/just-so-you-know-false-claims-of-hacked-voter-information-likely-intended-to-sow-distrust-of-u-s-elections)

² [Disinformation Fed Far-Right Riot in England After Deadly Stabbing - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/27/europe/southport-riots.html)

³ [Bomb threats, fear grip Haitian community in Springfield, Ohio : NPR](https://www.npr.org/2019/06/27/741111111/bomb-threats-fear-grip-haitian-community-in-springfield-ohio)

or extremist groups, can spiral into chaos “offline.”

- **Politically motivated attacks:** In an election season marked by not one, but two assassination attempts targeting a former president and current presidential candidate, further attempts at politically motivated attacks cannot be ruled out. Groups or individuals upset by a lack of a clear victory for their preferred candidate could be motivated to target the opposing candidate. In this vein, copycat attacks are also plausible. One of the individuals charged with attempting to assassinate former President Trump reportedly penned a letter asking for others to complete the job of assassinating Trump should he fail.
- **Attacks of opportunity:** The heightened state of tension may also present opportunities for attacks by individuals or groups seeking to exploit the chaos. This could include cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, physical attacks on high-profile targets by terrorist groups or coordinated efforts by political or militia groups to disrupt the electoral process.

Ultimately, the period following election day could be one of heightened uncertainty, posing significant risks to both the democratic process and public safety. As election officials work to certify results, the challenge will be to navigate not only the procedural hurdles, but also the social and political volatility that could define the aftermath of the 2024 U.S. presidential election.



Disputed outcomes could lead to a prolonged political crisis, heightening the risk for political violence and civil unrest

Most polls to-date predict a very tight race; therefore, a swift and decisive victory for either presidential candidate is highly unlikely. Even if there is wide-spread acknowledgement and reporting on mainstream news outlets of a clear victor, critical questions loom: Will the losing candidate(s) concede and call for a peaceful transition of power, or will they seek to overturn the outcomes(s), leveraging all means necessary to do so? Will various groups accept the election results if their preferred candidate(s) do not win, or will they be compelled to resort to political violence to either dispute the outcomes or disrupt the election certification process?

Below, we further elaborate on the potential scenarios [previously outlined](#):

- **Clear victory and swift concession:** A clear victory for either candidate, with the losing candidate conceding as swiftly as possible, will ensure not only the highest likelihood of a peaceful transition from the Biden administration to the new administration, but also lower the potential for prolonged uncertainty and unrest. Protests and disinformation may persist online, and certain groups may mobilize offline to cause disruptions. However, such actions are less likely if the losing presidential candidate concedes and encourages their supporters to accept the election outcome.
- **Multiple election challenges and prolonged political uncertainty:** Election-related developments in several states, particularly the battleground states of Georgia, North Carolina, Nevada, Arizona, Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, have already planted the seeds for potential challenges, denials and delays related to election outcomes. This uncertainty creates fertile ground for mis- and disinformation, which various actors could exploit to deepen confusion, foster division and potentially incite politically motivated violence. Foreign adversaries, as well as domestic political campaigns and their supporters, are likely to further seize this opportunity to amplify disinformation. False claims and calls to mobilize in response to perceived election fraud or related injustices may further inflame tensions between opposing political groups and could ignite civil unrest.
- **Refusal to concede:** A clear or determined victory for one of the candidates, with a refusal by the losing candidate to concede, presents the highest likelihood of continued uncertainty and unrest. In this scenario, widespread protests and civil unrest may ensue. As noted in prior analysis, there are reports of militia leaders – including those who participated in the January 6th riots at the U.S. Capitol in 2021 – already organizing and preparing for potential civil unrest related to the elections.⁴ Additionally, we foresee the potential for some domestic extremist groups to mobilize in an effort to pressure the losing candidate to concede as well as groups seeking to exploit the uncertainty to create chaos and disruption.

How should organizations prepare?

Given the highly dynamic and potentially volatile political and security landscape expected following November 5th, Teneo's Risk Advisory team recommends that organizations and executives develop a multi-faceted strategy to proactively address the potential implications of the scenarios outlined above.

In addition to deciding whether to make internal or public statements in response to these scenarios, organizations should consider implementing the below recommendations to actively prepare for potential disruptions to business operations and/or election-related violence.

⁴ [Far-Right Militias Are Back | WIRED](#)

- **Monitor critical information and engage in robust anticipatory intelligence analysis:** Organizations' intelligence functions should utilize a comprehensive toolkit to gather critical information on political and security developments in key domestic markets. This information should then be rigorously analyzed to anticipate potential risks and identify key signposts and indicators of escalation or new threats. Scenario planning that incorporates these signposts and maps out implications and steps to mitigate resulting risks is an important part of such tailored intelligence analysis.
- **Evaluate and update crisis management and incident response plans:** Organizations should update their emergency response plans to address scenarios such as civil unrest, violent protests and potential attacks on company property. Conducting simulation exercises is crucial to ensure that all key personnel are familiar with crisis and incident response protocols. Additionally, organizations should establish clear communication channels to quickly and effectively disseminate information to employees and relevant stakeholders during an incident or a prolonged period of crisis.
- **Prepare for business continuity challenges:** Organizations should assess the need for alternative suppliers or logistical routes to build redundancies and mitigate the impact of potential disruptions. This is particularly important in the event of a contested election where the losing candidate fails to concede.

Similarly, organizations should take stock of any critical materials and supplies to maintain operations in case of prolonged domestic disruptions at the local, state or national levels.

- **Prepare for potential internal disruptions:** Organizations should prepare for potential tensions between employees with differing political views that may disrupt the work environment. To mitigate these risks, organizations should have robust workplace violence prevention programs in place, including clear policies on acceptable behavior and a zero-tolerance policy for threats, aggression and violence. Regular training focused on conflict de-escalation and recognizing early warning signs of violence is also crucial.
- **Support employee safety and well-being:** Finally, organizations should provide resources that support employees' mental health and well-being, recognizing the stress and anxiety the election period may cause, particularly given recent events. Organizations should consider implementing or extending remote working policies to protect employees from potential disruptions or violence leading up to, during and immediately after November 5th. By implementing these recommendations, organizations and executives can better navigate the uncertainties of the post-election period, safeguard their operations and protect their employees and stakeholders from potential election-related disruptions and violence.



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Teneo Insights | Election 2024 *This article is part of Teneo's ongoing series of [conversations](#) around the business implications of the 2024 U.S. presidential election.*



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