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## Hold the Line: A Guide to Defending Democracy

Hardy Merriman

Ankur Asthana

Marium Navid

Kifah Shah

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# **HOLD THE LINE** / a guide to defending democracy

*Each Of Us Can Play a Role*

Questions or comments about this guide? Email us at: [defend@holdthelineguide.org](mailto:defend@holdthelineguide.org). Or DM us on Instagram [@theredlineguide](https://www.instagram.com/theredlineguide) and Twitter [@TheRedLineGuide](https://twitter.com/TheRedLineGuide). And please help spread the word by sharing this guide! We need as many people as possible to join this effort! **#HoldTheLine2020**

## About this Guide

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On June 1, 2020, President Trump ordered members of the military to repress nonviolent demonstrators in Washington, DC. Seeing this as a severe abuse of power—and an indication of the lengths Trump might go to try to stay in office—the four of us got together and produced this guide over the course of several months. We are an interracial, intergenerational group with experience in U.S. activism, organizing, and training (in the U.S. and abroad), as well as expertise in pro-democracy movements around the world.

All of us contributed to this work, and all of us stand by the words in this guide. One note is that Hardy Merriman is credited for sole authoring Part IV. We are grateful for the feedback and encouragement we received from the reviewers we consulted.

Work on this guide was in our independent capacities. The views expressed here are solely personal to the authors and do not represent the views of any employer or other organization with which we may be affiliated.

This guide is meant to help individuals and groups organize based on the experience we have gained from doing the work on the ground and studying organizing movements, and our intention is to help build a more unified response. Any action taken upon the information provided in this guide is strictly at your own risk, none of the authors, contributors, or anyone else connected with this guide, can be responsible for your use of the information contained in this guide.

-- Hardy Merriman, Ankur Asthana, Marium Navid, Kifah Shah



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## OVERVIEW:

If you're reading this, you are likely concerned about how this year's election is taking place. This guide is designed to help people from all walks of life — political newcomers as well as experienced activists — take action to ensure that we have a successful election in November 2020. A successful election is one that is:

- **Free**, in which all eligible voters are able to vote without hindrance, interference, or intimidation.
- **Fair**, in which all votes are counted transparently, non-partisan rules and laws are followed, and any disputes are resolved without bias towards any particular candidate.
- **Respected**, by which the loser of the election accepts the results, concedes, and engages in a good faith transition process to the election's winner.
- **Safe**, in which risks of COVID-19 transmission and political violence are minimized.

The United States has hundreds of years of experience in election administration, so you would think we would have a robust process and institutions to ensure our elections are successful. However, we face a long list of real and potential challenges in the upcoming November election that demand a heightened level of civic awareness and engagement.

Some of these challenges come from the COVID-19 crisis, which is leading to a significant shortage of poll workers. Fewer poll workers means fewer polling places will be open. This shortage alone is an issue that would impact any election, but in 2020 our problems are exacerbated by other political and infrastructural challenges. These include cuts to the U.S. Postal Service that may delay delivery of mail-in ballots; malfunctioning voting equipment; deliberate voter suppression and misinformation; possible voter intimidation at the polls; possible violence among political supporters; and the President improperly using the powers of the executive branch and communicating that he may refuse to accept defeat.

You may have read about some of these problems already, or experienced or witnessed them firsthand at some point. They can seem overwhelming, and sometimes popular media focuses more on chaotic scenarios for the election than on possible solutions. Fortunately, there's **a lot** that each of us can do to help. Everyone has a role they can play to ensure that **voting is accessible and safe**; that **people turn out to vote**; that **the rules are applied fairly**; and that **the results are respected**.

We conceive of these efforts in two stages:

**Stage 1: From now until Election day (Nov. 3, 2020)**

**Stage 2: From Election day to Inauguration day (Jan. 20, 2021)**

This guide focuses primarily on Stage 2, covering the period of time starting from Election day and continuing through to Inauguration day. It attempts to answer the question of how to prepare and what to do in case attempts are made to subvert the election results. At the same time, we recognize that Stage 1 is critically important as well, and deeply related to Stage 2, so we begin by dedicating some attention to Stage 1, before diving more deeply into Stage 2.

We've divided the guide into the following four parts:

[Part I](#) focuses on critical actions people can take **from now until Election day (Nov. 3, 2020)** to ensure a successful election.

[Part II](#) gives background on potential scenarios that could play out between **Election day to Inauguration day (Jan. 20, 2021)**.

[Part III](#) provides a four-step process to **start an election protection group in your community**, and to begin planning actions to protect democracy in case they are needed.

[Part IV](#) offers an in-depth analysis and model of change drawn from the field of nonviolent civil resistance, which informs our thinking about how to respond if there are attempts to subvert the election results. We draw lessons about **how ordinary people have advanced democracy and won against authoritarian-style rulers in other parts of the world**, and **apply these lessons to the current situation in the United States**.

This guide is designed to be read in whatever order makes most sense to you. We recommend [Part I](#) as a good place for everyone to start, because the election protection efforts outlined in Parts II, III, and IV will be significantly more powerful if we use time now to ensure the November election is as successful as possible.

Then, if you want more background information about possible scenarios that could play out on Election day and beyond, read [Part II](#). If you are already familiar with potential post-election scenarios and want to jump straight into organizing a neighborhood election protection group, you can start with [Part III](#). If you want a deeper sense of a model of change for how other societies have won rights, freedom, and justice against unaccountable rulers, and how those lessons could apply to the United States, read [Part IV](#).

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Start by hosting a call or virtual meeting for a small, core group of committed people. This step will give you what you need to invite people to join you and commit to the team.

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The fight to protect democracy does not just happen at the federal level, but also at the state and local level with officials who could act to undermine the election. Learn how to identify who holds these important positions, monitor what is happening, and mobilize if needed.

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If President Trump or other government officials cross any of our Red Lines, we'll need to respond fast. This chapter will help you define clear roles so that everyone knows what they need to do.

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Learn how our model of change draws from the field of nonviolent civil resistance, how ordinary people have advanced democracy against authoritarian rule worldwide, and relevant lessons for the United States.

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Find additional resources to help you make change and dig deeper into the history and theory used to inform this guide.

## Part I

### HOW TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL ELECTION

Below are three things everyone can do right now to ensure we have a successful election:

- 1. Register to vote (if you're eligible) and commit to casting your ballot.**
- 2. Help others register to vote and make a plan for them to cast their ballot.**
- 3. Sign up to be a poll worker.**  
*There is currently a shortage. Without enough poll workers there will be fewer polling places, which can decrease voter turnout.*

#### **1. Register to vote (if you're eligible) and commit to casting your ballot.**

Check your voter registration status to ensure you are still registered—even if you have registered to vote before—as your status may have changed. If you need to register or re-register to vote, visit: [vote.org](https://vote.org).

Once you've registered, save or print a screenshot of the registration confirmation as proof in case you need it later. To cast your ballot you will need to either vote by mail or in person.

#### **Vote by mail:**

If you know who you want to vote for and you intend to vote by mail, consider completing your ballot and dropping it off early at an official drop-off location in your area if one is available. This way you can be sure your mail-in ballot is delivered on time. Note that state laws vary on who can drop off a mail-in ballot, so make sure you give yourself enough time to figure out your state laws and make a plan to ensure your ballot is counted.

Alternatively, if you are sending your ballot in through the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), consider mailing it in sooner rather than later, so that you can be sure your ballot will arrive on time and so that USPS mail capacity is available to people who will vote later by mail. **Many experts and organizations are considering Oct 20, 2020 the “new election day”** for people voting by mail to ensure ballots get in on time.

#### **Voting in person:**

If you plan to vote in person, see if early voting is available in your area. Also, check where your polling place is—because of the COVID-19 crisis, lack of poll workers, and possible voter suppression attempts, many former polling places from previous elections will close this cycle and consolidate into fewer locations. You can find your polling location, your location's COVID-19 regulations, and the hours they are open by going to

[vote.org/polling-place-locator/](https://vote.org/polling-place-locator/). You can also visit [vote.org/early-voting-calendar/](https://vote.org/early-voting-calendar/) to learn about potential early voting periods in your state.

If you are voting in person, plan out what time you will go to the polls and what transportation you'll take to get there. If you have a screenshot of your voter registration confirmation, a recent utility bill, and driver's license/ID (even if your state does not require ID), bring it with you in case there are issues with your registration. Plan for possible wait times and have a backup plan in case you must wait for longer than expected. Your plan could involve letting your employer know you'll need more time to cast your ballot or arranging for extra childcare. Also bring anything else you may need (i.e. water, snacks, umbrella, a fully charged phone) in case there is a long wait at the polls.

When checking in at the polls, request to vote with a hand marked paper ballot if you have the option—this may help mitigate the chances of any potential errors in how your vote is counted. If you must vote using a touchscreen device, your ballot may be printed out after you vote. Be sure to review your printed ballot to ensure it is correct, as there have been known instances of votes getting switched (especially for down-ballot races).

## **2. Help others register to vote and plan to cast their ballot.**

If you know people who are eligible to vote but not registered yet, help them get registered. You can help them navigate the voter registration process using a resource like [vote.org](https://vote.org).

After they are registered, make sure they have a plan to vote.

### **If they plan to vote by mail:**

Remind them to mail in their ballot as soon as possible or drop it off at an official location.

### **If they plan to vote in person:**

Make sure that they know where their voting place is and what the COVID-19 regulations are for their location. See if they have the option to vote early and make sure they have a plan for how to get there. Remind them to prepare for longer-than-usual lines, and to take the appropriate ID and documentation consistent with the guidance noted in point 1.

## **3. Sign up to be a poll worker.**

Despite more voters using mail-in ballots this election, it is estimated that [60 million votes](#) (which is 40% of the national projected vote total) will still be cast in person in the 2020 election. Poll workers are the people who make this possible. They help voters check in, understand their ballots, and cast their vote. In the COVID-19 era they also help voters maintain social distance and comply with other health precautions such as wiping down machines and equipment. With absentee and mail-in voting, poll workers can further help open and count mailed ballots (source: [powerthepolls.org](https://powerthepolls.org)).

To give a sense of how crucial these workers are, the 2016 election relied on [917,694 volunteer poll workers at 116,990 polling places](#) nationwide. However, the nation currently has a severe shortage of poll workers, in part because 56 percent of these workers in 2016

were age 61 or older. Due to health concerns, many of them are choosing not to work in the 2020 election.

The result of this is that polling places are closing (or “consolidating” as the term is sometimes used) in Red and Blue states across the country, especially in densely populated areas. Based on past experience, fewer polling places is likely to depress turnout, especially among communities of color, even if we account for an increase in absentee ballots.

As an example of just how extreme recent poll closures can be, on April 7, 2020, Wisconsin voters went to the polls to vote in the presidential primary. But unlike any past election in memory, the city of Milwaukee had reduced its polling places **from 182 in 2016 to just 5 polling places in 2020**, in large part due to lack of volunteer poll workers.

The results were enormously long lines, long wait times, challenges to social distancing, and confusion about where to vote. While statewide turnout in Wisconsin outside of Milwaukee dropped by just 4% compared to 2016, turnout in the city of Milwaukee dropped by 37%. Without enough in-person voting options, many people did not vote.

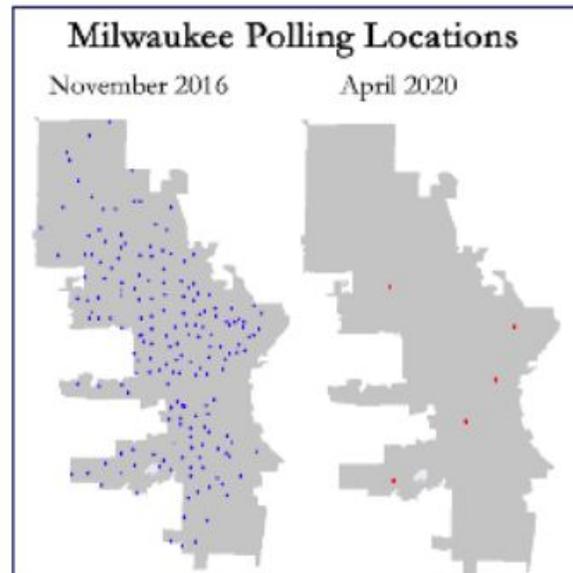


Image source: Mike Firestone, Jack Deschler, and Louie Goldsmith. “Keep the Polls Open: An action plan to protect in-person voting and voting rights in the era of COVID-19.” [Voter Protection Corps](#). June 2020. [Link to report](#).

The connection should be clear. Fewer poll workers mean fewer polling places, and/or polling places that run more slowly. To ensure adequate in-person polling stations can stay open on election day, you can **sign up to be a poll worker by visiting [www.powerthepolls.org](http://www.powerthepolls.org). Recruit others to join you as well.** Many of these positions are paid (volunteers can receive a daily stipend), and they help ensure people in your community can vote safely!

If you want to find a range of other ways to support voting rights and accessibility, you can also review the recommendations in Part VII of [the June 2020 “Keep the Polls Open” report](#) by the [Voter Protection Corps](#).

## Part II

### **PLANNING FOR ELECTION DAY ONWARD**

As we work hard now to ensure a successful election, we also need to consider what happens from Election day onward. That will be the focus of the rest of this guide.

Here are some examples of why. Running behind in the polls in numerous swing states, on July 19, 2020, President Trump was asked whether he would accept the 2020 election results if he lost to Joe Biden. He responded:

***"I have to see. I'm not just going to just say yes. I'm not going to say no...."***

In the [same interview](#) Trump suggested he might reject the election results if he loses, saying that he thinks that vote-by-mail will “rig the election.” He has repeated these baseless claims numerous times, and his Attorney General Bill Barr has [echoed them](#). This is despite the fact that mail-in ballots have been used nationwide for years (including by President Trump, his Attorney General, and [many other high-ranking administration officials](#)); members of the military have voted by mail for years; and states such as Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington vote almost entirely by mail. In the 2016 presidential election, [nearly a quarter of all votes cast were by mail](#), and there is [no evidence whatsoever](#) that widespread vote-by-mail would corrupt our elections.

But Trump has shown that he is more concerned with staying in power than having a fair election. His recently-appointed Postmaster General, Louis DeJoy, has presided over critical changes to the U.S. Postal Service (including [ending overtime pay, removing nearly 700 mail sorting machines, and other measures](#)) that have undermined its capacity to deliver mail-in ballots in time to be counted in the November election.

Trump himself has openly [admitted that he wants to prevent universal mail-in voting](#) at a time when the nation is amidst a pandemic, many polling places have closed, and [nearly half of Biden supporters have expressed that they intend to vote by mail, versus approximately 10 percent of Trump supporters](#). For voters who show up at the polls, Trump’s campaign has hired a [voter intimidation team, and lawyers to get voters’ ballots thrown out](#). And Trump continues to repeat groundless claims of voter fraud, saying he may not accept election results at a time when it appears that he will lose a fair vote.

**Enough. Trump does not get to slant the election or choose to stay in office if he loses. That’s the people’s choice. That’s how democracy works.**

Each of us has a role to play in defending our democracy and our votes. A first step in doing this from Election day onward is to more deeply examine potential scenarios that could result in the coming months.

## POSSIBLE SCENARIOS AND THE RED LINES

***How could President Trump lose the election and stay in power? What other problems could arise around the election and the presidential transition? And what lines do we need to protect?***

In June 2020, a group called the Transition Integrity Project (which is separate from the authors of this guide) gathered a bipartisan group of more than 100 experts to explore different election scenarios that could play out between Election day (Nov. 3, 2020) and Inauguration day (Jan. 20, 2021). A summary statement from [their report](#) was:

**“We assess with a high degree of likelihood that November’s elections will be marked by a chaotic legal and political landscape. We also assess that... President Trump is likely to contest the result by both legal and extra-legal means in an attempt to hold onto power.”**

In particular, the Transition Integrity Project issued several key findings:

- **“The concept of ‘election night,’ is no longer accurate and indeed is dangerous.”**  
Because of the large number of mail-in ballots this year, we may not know the winner of the election on election night, and it may take a week or weeks to count every ballot—especially when we consider possible court challenges. This provides a significant amount of time for Trump to cast doubt on the eventual election results, and/or declare himself the winner even before all the ballots are counted.
- **“A determined campaign has the opportunity to contest the election into January 2021.”**  
Regardless of whether a clear winner emerges on election night, the amount of lawsuits, misinformation, polarizing media, and disputes around ballot counting provide the opportunity for campaigns to refuse to concede and instead to continue contesting the election results all the way to Inauguration day. President Trump has already set the stage for this by shaping a narrative where he can claim a Biden victory is illegitimate because of his accusations of vote fraud. In addition, Trump has certain powers of the federal government that he could try to exercise to influence the election’s outcome significantly.
- **“The administrative transition process itself may be highly disrupted.”**  
Even if Biden is declared the winner of the election and Trump accepts defeat, the transition process until January 20, 2021 is likely to be very challenging. Trump will have opportunities to engage in financial corruption (i.e. profiting from deals; diverting government resources; bribing people) and other forms of abuse (i.e. seeking pardon of associates or Trump himself; declassifying records or intelligence for political gain). While this guide focuses more on protecting the election results

and democracy, the possible transition period is also likely to require vigilance and action.

In light of these risks, what are some possibilities that could occur? It is beyond the scope of this guide to cover all scenarios, but here are three that could unfold:

### **Three potential scenarios:**

- **SCENARIO 1: Election day results are unclear, and Trump declares victory anyway.**
- **SCENARIO 2: Election results show significant irregularities and/or signs of tampering, and Trump declares victory.**
- **SCENARIO 3: Trump loses the election but refuses to leave office.**

We are not including a scenario where Trump legitimately wins the November election because this is a guide dedicated to making sure this election is as fair as possible and that democracy is protected. If Trump legitimately wins the election, we would have grave concerns about the future of the country, but we would respect the results. *This guide should not be seen as providing guidance to “undo” fair election results that we don’t like.*

The three scenarios on which we do focus, and some of the possible challenges that they could bring, are outlined in further detail below. There’s no guarantee any of these three scenarios will happen, but the fact that any of them could happen points to the need for preparation.

Reading about these possible scenarios can make people feel anxious, overwhelmed, and confused. All of these emotions can lead to inaction. But in this guide, **we are going to move beyond anxiety and into action because clear and decisive action is what is going to make a difference** (see [Part III](#) for action steps). As you begin reading these scenarios remember that there are many things that people can do to prevent some of these tough possibilities from happening. In fact, we believe that the most important factor in ensuring that all votes are counted fairly is the involvement of millions of Americans like you coming together to hold local officials, election boards, state officials, and potentially your member of Congress accountable and to stand up for our democracy.

Here are more details about the three scenarios:

### **SCENARIO 1:**

#### **Election day results are unclear, and Trump declares victory anyway.**

The results on election day may not reveal a clear winner. Many mail-in ballots would still need to be counted and disputes about ballot counting could end up in legal proceedings.

President Trump could nonetheless declare himself the winner on election night, and allege various forms of voter fraud or illegal behavior by the Biden campaign. Certain media outlets could begin to echo Trump's claims. Foreign governments that [are trying to influence the 2020 election](#) could work hard to spread misinformation online and increase polarization further. As more mail-in ballots roll in, they are likely to trend more towards Biden (this is [anticipated to happen](#) based on past trends and voting behavior). As this starts to happen, Attorney General Bill Barr could then announce an investigation into the Biden campaign and Democratic Party and seek a court order to try to stop ballot counting in certain states because of the "suspicious" trend towards Biden. State Attorneys General or Governors could also seek court orders to impound vote counting machines and ballots from county election officials, [as was attempted in Florida in 2018](#).

Meanwhile, Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, who Trump appointed in May 2020 and who has taken steps that could [slow down the delivery of mail-in ballots](#), could manage to deliver them too late to be counted (as stated, Trump has also [expressed that he wants to deny funding to the Postal Service](#) so they cannot process large numbers of mail-in ballots). As large-scale protests spread in response to the Trump administration's actions, Trump may claim that those protesting him are the ones trying to subvert the election results and overthrow the government, calling on his supporters to "do their patriotic duty" to "defend the country." Trump supporters may begin to show up armed to confront protesters who oppose Trump's actions. Acts of violence could then cause Trump to invoke the Insurrection Act (as he did in June 2020 against nonviolent protesters) and call on the military to restore "law and order."

Meanwhile, Trump could put pressure on Republican-run state governments to **not** certify the election results in states that Biden won, creating bitter fights in the courts, state governments, and Congress. The situation could then become even more complicated. Under normal circumstances, after a US Presidential election, each state certifies their popular vote count, and then chooses a slate of individuals (called "electors") who *officially* vote for the winner of that state's presidential election. **Technically, those electors are the people who elect the President.** This year, all disputes about vote counts are supposed to be resolved by **December 8, 2020** so that electors can be determined and cast their votes by **December 14, 2020**. The governor of each state is then responsible under federal law for sending a certificate to Congress stating the result of electors' votes, and the U.S. Congress counts and certifies those vote tallies on **January 6, 2021**. However, technically state legislatures are not barred from sending their own certificates to Congress. If Trump is able to cast doubt on the results of states that Biden won, some of those states with Republican-controlled state legislatures or Republican governors [may consider trying to send their own election certificates to Congress](#), in defiance of their state's popular vote that they claim was "rigged." This wouldn't be easy for state legislatures or Governors to do, but if they did, on January 6, 2021, Congress would have competing sets of electoral results from multiple states. This happened in US history before in 1876, shortly after the U.S. Civil War and at a time of great national polarization, with [disastrous results for the country](#).

### **Red Lines to watch for in this scenario:**

In this scenario, Trump may declare victory even if the election day results are ambiguous, or he and his allies may attempt to prevent every vote from being counted. In your state or community, this could look like mail-in or other ballots being discarded or not being counted at all.

**The Line we must hold: all votes must be counted, without interference or intimidation. This is a position we can organize around proactively before, during, and after election day.**

## **SCENARIO 2:**

### **The election results show significant unexplained irregularities and/or signs of tampering, and Trump declares victory.**

There could be major irregularities in the election results that point towards manipulation of vote counting, possible vote hacking, or other complicating factors.

Here are some possibilities of what this could look like: in some counties, people may report that electronic voting machines [switched their votes](#), raising questions of how many other voters experienced this but did not notice. In counties that regularly vote evenly Democratic and Republican, there could be significant unexplained delays in reporting ballot counting, and when final results are released they could show a candidate winning by a completely abnormal historic margin. In one or more counties that a candidate supposedly “wins,” the results could show that the number of people who voted exceeded the number of registered voters in that county. We are not saying that these possibilities *will* happen, but we note that such incidents have happened in other countries where democratic processes are threatened, and we do not think the U.S. is immune from such incidents. A city could have an electrical failure or a cyberattack that causes several polling places to shut down. In other areas, violence, under-resourced polling locations, and intimidation may keep voters away from voting in person, or even shut down voting sites at key times, leaving people claiming that they were disenfranchised and demanding to be able to vote even after Election day has passed.

With such irregularities, the election night may show a slight Trump lead, but rather than wait for the irregularities to be investigated or remedied, Trump may declare victory. From that point onward, the Trump administration could do many of the things from the first scenario, including having Attorney General Barr launch investigations into the Biden campaign and Democratic Party, seeking to halt vote counts through court order, fomenting violence by Trump supporters, attempting to invoke the Insurrection Act, and pressuring state governments to refuse to certify election results, and instead recognize alternative slates of electors.

**Red Lines to watch for in this scenario:**

In this scenario, Trump may attempt to prevent every vote from being counted as described in Scenario 1. He may also declare victory despite significant irregularities and/or signs of tampering. In your state or community, this could look like voting machine malfunctions, voter intimidation, highly abnormal vote margins, or decreased access to mail services.

**The Line we must hold: incidents of fraud, voter suppression, or other election irregularities must be investigated impartially and remedied as appropriate. This can be effectively done especially at a local level.**

**SCENARIO 3:**

**Trump loses the election but refuses to leave office.**

In contrast with the first two scenarios, the official results on election night or shortly thereafter could show Trump clearly losing the election. However, he could still refuse to concede, claiming widespread fraud with no evidence. From that point onward, the Trump administration could still do many of the things that he did under the first two scenarios. If the numbers showed that Trump lost the election, this would be a harder scenario for him to contest, but his power over the federal government gives him real advantages in any post-election situation. He would also have a strong incentive to try to sow chaos and provoke violence so that he could crack down. In this case, even against clear evidence, by pushing a narrative that the Biden campaign (or the Democratic Party, or the “deep state” that he often refers to) committed unlawful actions and vote fraud, he could still try to claim victory as described in Scenario 1.

**Red Lines to watch for in this scenario:**

In this scenario, Trump may refuse to concede or leave office. On a state or local level it could look like representatives or election administrators making claims of voter fraud despite Trump clearly losing.

**The Line we must hold: The true election results must be respected, regardless of who wins. Preserving democracy is more important than any individual candidate.**

We don't know exactly if or how any of these scenarios may unfold between now and Inauguration day. But we do know that—whether people think these scenarios are likely or unlikely—the fact that they are possible means we need to be prepared to take action to hold fast and hold the three Lines.

Each of us needs to be able to recognize if these Lines are being crossed in our states and communities so we can respond accordingly, and keep our democracy intact. A summary is below.

**Summary: Three Lines We Must Hold:**

- **Line 1:** All votes must be counted, without interference or intimidation. This is a position we can proactively organize around before, during, and after election day.
- **Line 2:** Incidents of fraud, voter suppression, or other election irregularities must be investigated impartially and remedied as appropriate.
- **Line 3:** The true election results must be respected, regardless of who wins. Preserving democracy is more important than any individual candidate.

## **STRATEGIES TO RESPOND**

How can we prevent the Red Lines from being crossed? To do that, we need a strategy that generates **power, discipline, and unity**.

### **Why our strategy to hold the Lines needs power, discipline, and unity:**

- **We need power because power matters enormously in determining whether and how ballots get counted.**
- **We need discipline to remain nonviolent because election and post-election violence is a real risk.**
- **We need unity because a strong narrative could shape the outcome.**

Let's look at each of these in more detail starting with power:

### **We need power because power matters enormously in determining whether and how ballots get counted.**

The law and bureaucratic regulations say how ballots are supposed to get counted, but the Trump campaign and state and local officials have power to influence whether the law and regulations are observed, how they're interpreted, and how they're executed. In the current national environment, we believe that legal efforts and oversight from the legislative branch are, by themselves, unlikely to be sufficient to stop Trump if he tries to subvert the election results.

This is a disturbing conclusion—if our institutions by themselves can't save us at that point, what will? We can look to U.S. history for guidance and the answer is: you, us, and many others like us. At other times in our country's past when government has not been accountable, ordinary people have engaged in nonviolent actions such as strikes, boycotts, mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, and many other small or large acts of noncooperation to win their rights and get weak or unaccountable institutions to work for the people again. When carried out with unity, discipline, a clear strategy, and widespread participation, these kinds of tactics have proven themselves again and again to deepen democracy. Looking beyond the U.S., there are also powerful examples of people using nonviolent civil resistance to defeat election fraud, coups, and violent autocrats in other parts of the world. We can learn from these experiences, and our own history, and [Part IV](#) of this guide draws on these lessons.

The impact of civil resistance can surprise people who think that power resides exclusively with those at the top. After all, isn't that what's communicated regularly through our entertainment and news media? Ordinary people like us are made to believe that we don't have much power, and when we accept the view that we are weak or powerless, that

benefits the people at the top a great deal. However, a deeper truth is that all power holders *depend* on the direct obedience and cooperation of a large number of people, and the acceptance of large parts of society, to carry out their orders. This is how it is with Trump or others who may seek to subvert the election: to implement any plans they **will rely on widespread obedience or passive acceptance of thousands or millions of people**. From people counting ballots, to people in the legal system, to state officials responsible for validating the results, to people working in a range of government bureaucracies, the cooperation or acquiescence of large numbers of people within various institutions is essential. And just as importantly, even *if* those people would be comfortable complying with actions that subvert the election, **they would not be able to carry out those actions if they were met with widespread nonviolent resistance by a society that refuses to accept them**.

That's the ultimate form of power that each of us has. We can choose to not cooperate, and this power can force change against even the toughest and most stubborn leaders. For example, when strikers refuse to work, businesses or the government cannot run. When people refuse to pay taxes, the government is starved for revenue. When consumers boycott products, businesses can no longer profit. When truckers, port workers, and rail workers stop, goods can no longer circulate. When large numbers of people protest and engage in other forms of noncooperation, the government does not have the capacity to continually control all those people and enact oppressive practices and policies.

We are a stronger country because millions of ordinary people mobilized time and again in our history and demanded that the nation live up to the principles enshrined in our Constitution. A century ago, the Woman's Suffrage movement engaged in sustained civil resistance to achieve the right to vote. The Labor Movement, Farmworkers Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement used nonviolent tactics such as strikes, picketing, boycotts, marches, and civil disobedience to win respect for their rights against violent opposition.

Recent movements have used nonviolent tactics to call attention to economic inequality, police brutality, discrimination, and the need for environmental sustainability. Trump has created a great deal of chaos since 2016, while **nonviolent civil resistance aims to keep him in check, to protect our country, and to move towards order and an accountable government that lives up to the best ideals**. When we resist Trump's efforts this way, we are striving towards a more just society, and to defend the Constitution and a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

## **We need discipline to remain nonviolent because election and post-election violence is a real risk.**

Just as we understand that mobilized people are powerful and can influence whether and how all votes are counted, so too Trump understands that mobilizing his supporters will be important. The number of armed groups that have shown up to confront nonviolent protests in recent years—combined with polarizing media, misinformation, foreign interference,

accusations of fraud, the stakes of the election, and Trump’s incentives to try to create chaos—lead us to believe the [risk of election day and post-election violence is high](#).

However, we also believe that if this violence is one-sided and consists of Trump’s supporters and state agents acting as aggressors towards nonviolent people, that the **violence will backfire badly against the side that uses it** (for more information on backfire, see the *Backfire Manual* in the [Additional Resources](#) section of this guide). For this to happen, **it is very important for us to maintain nonviolent discipline, even if provoked and attacked. Two-sided violence is enormously helpful to Trump (which is why he tries to provoke it), enabling him to justify a crackdown in the name of “restoring law and order.”** We already saw him abuse his power by ordering the military to [attack nonviolent protesters](#) in June 2020. The following month we saw him send [federal agents with no name identification](#) to repress demonstrators in Portland, Oregon over the objection of state and local officials. In the case of federal intervention in Portland, he used property destruction and some acts of violence by people as justification for a massive federal crackdown. It’s clear that Trump will look for any excuse to try to stifle mass protest or civil disobedience.

So election protection efforts must remain nonviolent, and we must be prepared for significant provocations from his side. Fortunately, we get to decide how we conduct ourselves. We also get to decide what tactics we choose, where, and when—for example, a boycott or a stay-at-home strike don’t create easy targets for repression. Trump can deploy federal agents to specific cities to try to hurt and scare people, but he can’t deploy them everywhere simultaneously. He cannot control everyone, everywhere, all the time, and if we maintain nonviolent discipline while mobilizing large numbers of people, we will hold the Lines and protect democracy. Strategies of civil resistance have been effective even in dictatorships in other countries around the world. You can read more about how this process works in [Part IV](#).

### **We need unity because a strong narrative could shape the outcome.**

The narrative of each campaign about whether they won or lost the election matters enormously. Based on President Trump’s past actions and current statements, we believe that he will declare victory on election night or shortly thereafter, **regardless of the election’s actual outcome**. This will likely be amplified by certain media outlets who are supportive of the Trump campaign.

**Any narrative that improperly attempts to claim victory for Trump must be challenged forcefully and immediately** by people who are united in their resolve. We must prevent a self-fulfilling cycle whereby people assume that Trump will be able to bully and cheat his way to remain in power. If people think he’ll “get away with it,” it can lead them to become passive and unmotivated to mobilize, and unwilling to defect from obeying orders. On the other hand, when people see active nonviolent resistance against subversion attempts, they can gain confidence to mobilize, and are more likely to defect in the face of unlawful orders.

To counter a false narrative that Trump has won, **we need to start now (even before the election happens) driving a message that the three Lines must be held and that we are**

**organized to protect them. There will need to be a show of unified support for a fair counting of the election results before election day (public officials can be called on proactively to make public statements of commitment), on election day itself, and immediately thereafter.** We've even created a [convenient campaign plan](#) to help people start doing this. These efforts may need to extend on for weeks into November and beyond. When Trump or other officials cross any Red Line, the response and counter mobilization must be swift so the public can see that he is being challenged, we have the power to hold him accountable, and he will not get away with it.

Generating this rapid mobilization depends on building capacity and infrastructure ahead of time. The next part of this guide focuses on how you can do this in your community.

## Part III

### OVERVIEW – HOW TO TAKE ACTION

In the following pages, we'll introduce **four steps** to establish an election protection group in your community and start taking action. Whether you're brand new to organizing, or have years of experience, that's all okay! We'll help you along the way.

Something to keep in mind is that between Election day and Inauguration day, we can expect two main phases of action:

**Phase 1: State Certification of Results (Nov. 3 - Dec. 14, 2020):**

In this phase, our focus would be on the local and state level. Popular vote counts in each state will be finalized during this time period so that members of the electoral college can cast their votes accordingly. The governor of each state is then supposed to send a certificate to Congress stating the result of electors' votes.

**Phase 2: Federal Certification of Results (Dec. 14, 2020 - Jan. 20, 2021):**

Once electors have voted and certificates have been sent to Congress, our focus would shift to the federal government. The U.S. Congress will count and certify the vote tallies by January 6, 2021. If there are competing results from states or unresolved irregularities in states' vote counts, Congress would potentially have to adjudicate the results, requiring us to take action to ensure members of Congress are respecting the election results.

Both of these phases are important and require forethought. However, in this part of the guide we will focus more on state and local officials and the roles they play, because the significance of these officials may not be as widely understood. Importantly, the same steps we outline in this part can be used to plan actions to pressure members of Congress and other federal officials as well.

Every state in the U.S. has their own election rules and laws and there can even be variations even at the county level. This means that circumstances and procedures can differ in important ways depending on where you live. In addition, the number of possibilities that could happen in any locality are numerous, and we don't know exactly what we will see. This variation and uncertainty can make planning challenging.

In general, if you are in a state where you already have confidence that the votes will be counted accurately and the results will be respected, it can still be a good idea to engage with your public officials, and even police and members of the military, and [seek commitments from them](#). There may also be corporations in your state that could exert pressure on Trump and his allies to respect the election results, and you can start pushing them in that direction. There may be ways you can help people in other states ensure the results in their states are respected. You can also look into other organizations' efforts on

election protection that you might connect to—we list several in the “[Additional Resources](#)” section of this guide. In any case, we recommend getting a group together to research how best to act, because even if you decide you’ll be supporting people in other locations, you’ll be more effective working together.

We also believe the three core attributes — **power**, **discipline**, and **unity** — and clarity about the Lines we must hold will be useful for everyone to incorporate into their local planning, regardless of the particular circumstances.

Here are the four action steps to creating an election protection group in your community.

**Steps to prepare in case any public officials cross the Red Lines:**

- **[STEP 1 – CREATE A ‘HOLD THE LINE’ TEAM](#)**  
Bring together a small, core group of committed people to work on holding the Lines with you.
- **[STEP 2 – DEVELOP A RESPONSE PLAN](#)**  
Create a plan to respond if the Red Lines are crossed.
- **[STEP 3 – IDENTIFY ROLES AND RECRUIT SUPPORT](#)**  
Identify who you need on your team to execute your plan(s).
- **[STEP 4 – REVIEW AND PREPARE TO EXECUTE YOUR PLAN](#)**  
Review your plan(s) one final time so everyone is ready to act. Then take action when the time comes.

## **STEP 1 — CREATE A ‘HOLD THE LINE’ TEAM**

**Top priority in this step:** Bring together a small, core group of committed people to work on holding the Lines with you.

Your first step is to host a call or socially distant meeting bringing together a small core group of committed people to work on this with you. Try to set a date for your first meeting in the next 7 days so you have a deadline to work towards. Remember, even getting one or two people to join you is enough to get started! To begin finding people for your team, ask yourself:

- Are there any people I know personally (friends, family, classmates, neighbors etc.) that I could ask to join?
- Are there people already working on election-related issues in my community that I (or we) can plug in with?
- Are there any email listservs, community groups (ex: your religious center or service group), social media groups (e.g. Facebook groups or Instagram chats), or group chats (WhatsApp, iMessage, FB Messenger) that I’m a part of that might have people who’d be interested?

To invite people to join you, tell them a bit about why you’re having this meeting, what the meeting will cover, and why you think they’d be a good fit to join the team. You can also send them the *Hold the Line* guide to give them the chance to process the scenarios and action steps ahead of time. If you are hosting your meeting with folks who aren’t quarantining with you, you can set up a video call using a tool like Zoom or Google Hangout.

Here is a sample meeting agenda you can use for your first call with your group:

### **SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA**

#### **Meeting #1: Welcome and Commitments (90 minutes)**

##### **Agenda:**

- **10 minutes: Introductions and Welcome**
  - Ask people to share their names and any other identifiers they feel are important to them.
  - Ask people a grounding question such as: What brings you here today? Do you feel a sense of urgency in the current moment?
    - *Tip: You can model this for the group by sharing a bit about yourself and who or what you are fighting for (e.g. “I’m here today because I’m*

*worried about my grandchildren's futures. I want to make sure that they grow up in a country where they can have their voices heard.”)*

- Ask if someone is willing to take notes and if someone else can keep time.

- **10 minutes: Pre-Election Day Check-In**

- Tell everyone that although most of the action this group will take will focus on what happens after the election, it is important that we do everything we can between now and election day to ensure a successful election — one that is free, fair, safe, and where the results are respected.
- Tell your group that you're going to do a quick check to make sure everyone has the information they need to do their part (see [Part I](#) for more details).

You can ask:

- *“First, does anyone (who is eligible) need help registering to vote or confirming your registration?”*
  - *“If so, you can go to [vote.org](https://www.vote.org) to get started.”*
- *“Second, does everyone have a plan to vote either by mail or in-person?”*
  - *“If you're voting by mail, the general recommendation is to try and get your ballot in as early as possible, ideally by Oct. 20.”*
  - *“If you're planning to vote in person, do you know where your polling location is and the hours it is open? Do you have a plan for transportation and accommodations if you have to wait longer than usual due to COVID? You may also want to check for early voting options. [Vote.org](https://www.vote.org) has this information available.”*
- *“Finally, does anyone have the ability to sign up to be a poll worker? These roles are especially important this year because many polling stations might have to close down because they don't have enough poll workers. That means longer lines and more difficulty voting for those who need to go in-person. These positions are usually paid, and are a way to help ensure our community can vote safely. Is anyone interested in learning more?”*
  - *“You can go to [powerthepolls.org](https://www.powerthepolls.org) to get more information and apply!”*

- **30 minutes: Review the Possible Scenarios and the Red Lines**

- Share with the group [the Possible Scenarios and the Red Lines](#) Trump and/or state and local officials might cross (from earlier in the guide).
  - *Tip: To help the material sink in, take turns reading it out loud if your group is willing.*

- **10 minutes: Temperature Check**

- Provide space for everyone to each share for 1-2 minutes how they are feeling after reading the scenarios.

- Remind the group that while the situation is concerning, it's also important to remember that we are powerful, and that ordinary people have often stood up together and changed history for the better in the U.S. and other parts of the world. There is a lot that people can do, and we can feel both concerned as well as empowered to act.
- Remind the group that convening in this way is already a step in the right direction towards protecting democracy.
- **10 minutes: Commitments**
  - Take turns reading the [Principles](#) (below) out loud. They provide a basis for unity, trust, decision making, and action in groups.
  - Make sure each person commits to the Principles. If someone is adamant they can't commit to the Principles, you don't have to spend time convincing one person for the sake of the group — you can simply thank them for their time and let them know that this group isn't for them.
- **10 minutes: Activity — Preparing for Step 2**
  - Preview the agenda for the next meeting (see [Step 2](#)), and split up the initial list of power holders from the first page of the [Power Map](#) (an important tool you'll be using to make your plan of action) for people to research before your next meeting!
- **10 minutes: Review Next Steps**
  - Exchange contact information and make a group chat with your core team using whatever means you are most comfortable with, i.e. SMS text messaging, or on a group messaging platform like [Signal](#) or [WhatsApp](#) so you can stay in touch.
  - Take a moment to discuss each group member's capacity to do the work (not everyone will have the same amount of time available). Collectively decide on how frequently you all should check in to progress the work (e.g. once a day via Signal or once a week via phone).
  - Set a date and time to meet the following week.

## Principles

These are the guidelines of our efforts, which we all commit to uphold. By committing to these principles, we ensure our efforts can be unified and disciplined, pushing towards a common goal while giving us the freedom to decide what is best for our own local groups:

1. **We commit to defend the people's right to vote without interference or intimidation, and to have their vote counted and respected in this election.**
2. **We work together and remain united.**

As a nation, we have many differences, diverse perspectives, lifestyles, and backgrounds. But when democracy itself is at stake, we come together. We don't need to agree on every other policy issue in order to support each other in defending the fundamental importance of free and fair elections. Time is short and our focus right now is on protecting democracy – knowing that without this, ALL of us will have a harder time advocating for the changes we want in the future.

**3. We treat others with respect.**

When disagreements arise in our teams, we treat each other with respect. When we encounter people in public who we disagree with or who oppose us, we will respect their basic human dignity and rights, even if they seek to deny us ours.

**4. We commit to nonviolent means of change.**

We believe nonviolent means are the most powerful choice for election protection efforts for four reasons:

**1)** Nonviolent means allow us to win the hearts of the public, and have proven effective before at critical points in US history.

**2)** Nonviolent means enable people from all walks of life to participate in a wide range of actions that exert powerful social, political, and economic pressure.

**3)** Violence of any kind, as well as property destruction, in the name of defending democracy will mobilize people who oppose us and increase the willingness of government agents to obey repressive orders. This makes them less likely to question the Constitutionality of the orders they receive.

**4)** Trump is likely going to try to use the excuse of "imposing law and order" to crack down and stay in power. Doing this against large numbers of nonviolent people with legitimate grievances and goals is likely to backfire against him, as well as lead to defections in his government and among his other allies.

We want to be clear that by committing to nonviolent means of change, we are not making a moral judgment about people who feel they have a right to be violent in certain circumstances. We are making a commitment to a strategic choice that will be most effective in defending democracy, and to preserving our country thereafter.

**5. We believe there is power in openly taking a stand.**

The Lines we want to hold are consistent with the words of the Constitution and core democratic principles. There is power in publicly taking a stand to protect them, which also invites others to do the same. As such, Hold the Line teams

believe in the power of openly taking a stand and we do not create an atmosphere of secrecy in order to function. At the same time, we also respect the rights of others who prefer to remain anonymous, or are more comfortable playing support roles that are not as public, and we value their contributions.

**6. We hold each other accountable to these principles.**

If people we are organizing with do not uphold these principles, we point that out to them in a clear but respectful way. If they continue to violate these principles, we stop organizing with them. We do not have time to spend to bring them around to these principles. Time is short, and our efforts need to be put towards protecting democracy with the many people who can commit to these principles.

## STEP 2 — DEVELOP A RESPONSE PLAN

**Top priority in this step:** Create a plan to respond if the Red Lines are crossed.

Hold a second meeting with your Hold the Line Team within one week after your first meeting. In this second meeting, your group will share the results of its research on various power holders from the [Power Map](#) exercise. Then your group will place these power holders on the power map and identify which ones you want to influence to protect the election results, as well as how and when you might influence them. This process may require more than one meeting to complete.

It is important to note that any plan you develop now is a starting point. It's okay if you don't have all the answers. As you get closer to Election day (Nov. 3), you can follow current events and do follow-up research. Then as events unfold in the coming weeks and months, your plan can evolve to meet the needs of the moment.

### SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

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#### Meeting #2: Make Your Plan (90 minutes)

##### Agenda:

- **5 minutes: Introductions and Icebreaker!**
  - Ask people to share their names and any other identifiers they feel are important to them.
  - Icebreaker: check in about how everyone is doing since you last met. Were folks inspired to do some “homework” or research after last week’s discussions?
  - Ask if someone is willing to take notes and if someone else can keep time.
- **5 minutes: Check in on Pre-Election Day Efforts (see [Part I](#) for more details)**
  - Ask everyone to go around and share updates on their own plans to vote, and any progress in getting people they know to register or make a plan to vote. Also check in and see if anyone has applied to be a poll worker!
  - Celebrate the small victories (such as getting one person registered or a positive conversation someone may have had in helping a friend create a voting plan).
- **5 minutes: Review the Purpose of the Meeting**
  - The purpose of the meeting is to identify key power holders to influence and to begin to create a response plan if the Red Lines are crossed. Your team may need to meet more than once to finish identifying the individuals or groups you’ll want to influence.

- Remember that there are two post-election phases (see the [Overview](#) for more details) for action:
  - Phase 1: State Certification of Results (Nov. 3 - Dec 14, 2020)
  - Phase 2: Federal Certification of Results (Dec. 14, 2020 - Jan. 20, 2021)

At this point the priority is to plan for Phase 1, and at subsequent meetings you can plan for Phase 2.

- **5 minutes: Define Your Group's Sphere of Influence**

- Spend 5 minutes going through the [Sphere of Influence](#) activity. Doing this activity as a group will help orient the team towards possible solutions and prepare you to review your Power Map and research on various power holders.

- **10 minutes: Review the Key Power Holders**

- Review the list of [key power holders](#) below (which are also included in the Power Map exercise) and the research your team came up with on each of them. You may want to take turns reading out the descriptions and sharing your research on each power holder to make sure everyone is on the same page.

- **20 minutes: Create a Power Map**

- You can follow the instructions in the [Power Map](#) worksheet for this part of your meeting.
- A Power Map is a plot you can graph to determine who the key power holders are in the problem you're trying to fix. It helps you understand how you can influence these power holders to meet your demands, and clarifies which steps you will take so that they meet your demands.
- You may want to revisit this exercise together again in future weeks as events unfold.

- **30 minutes: Plan Tactics for if The Red Lines are Crossed**

- Once you've developed your Power Map, use the [Tactics Brainstorming Worksheet](#) to begin planning out potential actions you might take to influence key people and groups
- Determine when and under what circumstances you will start taking these actions.

- **10 minutes: Review Next Steps**

- Don't forget to set your next meeting time!

## Key Power Holders to Know

Below are some key power holders you should become familiar with. Figuring out who these people are in your local and state context sooner rather than later will prepare you in the event that you need to move quickly before, on, or after November 3, 2020.

### Power Holders in your State:

#### 1. **State Governor:**

Each state's governor—along with the state's Board of Electors—is responsible for sending certificates to Congress stating the result of electors' votes. Beyond that, the State Governor is not directly involved in administering elections as closely as the chief election official, although they do hold the power to issue Executive Orders during statewide emergencies. In the event that mass protests unfold you want to make sure the Governor does *not* use their power to try to curtail acts of nonviolent civil resistance, many of which are protected under the [First Amendment of the Constitution](#). Depending on the state, the Governor also has the power to appoint election officials at the state level. The Governor may also have the power to remove an appointed election official who's failed to uphold the integrity of the election.

#### 2. **State Legislature:**

The state legislature technically has broad powers to set the process for how electors are appointed in their state. However, in practice, electors are selected by each state's political parties ahead of the election, and then the popular vote in each state determines who the electors will cast their votes for. The state legislature is also responsible for determining where the meeting of electors will take place to cast their votes. Beyond that the state legislature plays an indirect role, through shaping state budgets and policies, that affect the administration of elections.

#### 3. **State Attorney General:**

Each state's Attorney General is responsible for upholding the law on behalf of the people in that state. If there are irregularities in election results—such as more votes than registered voters in a county, highly abnormal vote percentages, or if there is evidence of illegal voter intimidation at the polls—then it is the Attorney General's job to oversee investigations into these cases.

#### 4. **Secretary of State:**

Your state's Secretary of State is responsible for administering elections and is oftentimes the state's chief election official. The role may vary from state to state, but most Secretaries of State are responsible for coordinating the vote count from each county and for posting results. In the event that there are incidents of voter intimidation or irregularities, this office is also one you can pressure to investigate

and uphold fair election results. *However, practices by state can vary, and not all states appoint the Secretary of State as the chief election official. The chief election official can also be the Lieutenant Governor; an individual selected by the state legislature; an individual appointed by the Governor; or even a separate election board tasked with administering elections. You're going to need to do some investigating here to identify the power holder whose role it is to administer elections in your state.*

**5. Congressional Representatives:**

Your members of Congress are technically responsible for certifying the election of the President and Vice President on January 6, 2021 after receiving results from the states. In practice, Congress has typically accepted election results received from states as is. You should know who your House representative is as you may need to advocate to them to ensure the results are respected.

**Power Holders in your County:**

Much of the U.S. election system is administered by approximately 3,100 counties nationwide. Engage with your county election officials to ensure they are maintaining their role as neutral arbitrators and are doing their part to count all votes and administer the election honestly.

Because US elections are administered through a decentralized system, the individuals who are responsible for maintaining elections will vary from county to county. These individuals hold the most responsibility in ensuring the elections are accessible and fair. Below is a starting point of potential power holders you can begin to identify.

*Note: You can usually find this information online, but we know county websites can be confusing and sometimes may not have all the information you're looking for, so it may even be worth it to start making calls to various county departments to collect your research on each of these players.*

**1. County Election Official:**

Each county has an individual who is tasked with overseeing the election. The person holding this role can vary from county to county. Sometimes this individual is also the county clerk or the county auditor. In other cases they may be the "commissioner of elections". *We suggest calling your county's election office and asking them who is in charge of administering elections in your county.*

**2. County Board of Elections:**

The Board of Elections in your county is often responsible for counting and certifying election results. This is the group of people who are responsible for overseeing the actual counting of the votes from each precinct and then approving results before they reach the Secretary of State. *Oftentimes, the Board will have a*

website or webpage on the county website dedicated to providing information on your county's election processes. You can go [here](#) to find your state's election office website and search for your county Board of Elections Members.

**3. State and local media:**

Make sure the state and local media are watching the power holders that you want to influence. Media attention can add pressure to the individuals you're holding accountable and affect their ability and willingness to cross the Red Lines. Journalists must honestly report on what's happening locally, especially because there could be widespread misinformation that attempts to support election subversion. It also should be communicated to journalists that they should abstain from rushing to call the election results for one candidate or another until they are *absolutely certain* that the predicted result will hold. Lastly, if any of the Red Lines are crossed, creating a counter-narrative is going to be very important (as we outlined in [Part II](#)) and you may want journalists to cover your group's public actions.

**4. Election observers and watchers:**

Each state chooses election observers and poll watchers differently. Some observers will be appointed by the county and some by the political parties. Some states will allow the public to act as an observer, leaving election processes (including ballot counting) open to the public. The role of election observers and poll watchers is simply to watch for anything that may compromise a fair election. When observers see any possible discrepancies, it's important that they report these incidents to the county immediately since most election officials will be preoccupied with handling the logistics of Election Day. However, it should be noted that observers have also been used to intimidate voters in the past and have not necessarily always been neutral watchers.

**5. Poll workers:**

Almost anyone can apply to be a poll worker, and as we mentioned in [Part I](#) of this guide, becoming a poll worker is a great way to get involved in ensuring a successful election. There are multiple roles poll workers play. In some counties poll workers are physically with the ballots from the moment they are cast in a precinct to when they reach the destination where they will be certified by the county Board of Elections. You can learn more about poll workers or sign up to become one [here](#).

**6. Local police:**

If there are public protests or other forms of nonviolent action to protect the elections, the choices and actions of police will be a factor in how events evolve. Given the encouragement by some police officers of armed individuals against protestors [in places like Kenosha, Wisconsin](#), pressuring the police publicly may be one way to help reduce the likelihood of this kind of interaction in the future. You

and your team can best decide if or how to engage with or pressure the Chief of Police, sheriff, police department, or police officers when creating your power map and response plans. For example, you may, or may not, decide to obtain a permit for protest demonstrations; call publicly on police to protect protesters against civilian-based armed or violent groups that may show up to public actions; or monitor potential police interaction with these kinds of armed groups.

Hold the Line has worked with others to create several commitments that you can demand from the police and military, as well as a [campaign plan](#) to do this. You can also find a fact sheet on [laws barring unauthorized private militia groups](#) in your state, which can be a useful reference in making these demands.

If you choose to interact with the police, you should keep in mind that members of your team can experience risks unequally (for example: based on immigration status, race, past legal history). Therefore any decision to communicate with the police should be done with full consent from all members of your group since any action you take will make it easier for group members to be identified individually.

Any or all of the above officials and groups may play a role on your Power Map and be part of your plan for holding the Lines. With planning and research, and keeping a keen eye on local developments, your Hold the Line team will know who to pressure and when. We also encourage you to look at other local organizations and institutions in your planning and consider how they might influence these key power holders.

## STEP 3 — IDENTIFY ROLES AND RECRUIT SUPPORT

**Top priority in this step:** Identify who you need on your team to execute your plan(s).

We recommend holding a third meeting with your team before Election day, if possible. During this meeting you will create a list of specific roles needed to carry out your plan and who will fill them.

It is *critical* to prepare ahead because if any Red Lines are crossed it will require a swift and organized response. Your team may not have time or the ability to reconvene and figure out who is doing what at that point so planning ahead will enable everyone to act when needed.

### SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

#### Meeting #3: Identify Team Roles & Recruit Support (60 minutes)

##### Agenda:

- **5 minutes: Introductions and icebreaker!**
  - Ask people to share their names and any other identifiers they feel are important to them.
  - Icebreaker: How are folks feeling after doing a significant amount of work to defend free and fair elections?
  - Ask if someone is willing to take notes and if someone else can keep time.
- **5 minutes: Review Pre-Election Day Efforts (see [Part I](#) for more details)**
  - Ask everyone to go around and share updates on their progress getting friends registered to vote, their plan to vote and how they're helping others create plans, and if anyone has volunteered to be a poll worker and/or asked others to volunteer.
  - Celebrate the small victories (such as getting one person registered or a positive conversation someone may have had in helping a friend create a voting plan)
- **5 minutes: Review purpose of the meeting.**
  - The purpose of the meeting is to define roles needed, see which ones you can fill, which ones you need to recruit for, and prepare an outreach list.
- **20-30 minutes: Fill out [the roles worksheet](#).**
  - Note: The specific roles needed will depend on your plan but we have listed out a few roles in the worksheet that you'll likely need.
- **10 minutes: Make a recruitment list.**

- Determine which roles you still need to fill and make a list of names of people who you could potentially ask to fill them.
  - Decide who will reach out to each individual and pitch them on joining the effort and taking on the role.
- 
- **10 minutes: Review Next Steps**
    - Don't forget to set your next meeting time!

## STEP 4 — REVIEW AND PREPARE TO EXECUTE YOUR PLAN

**Top priority in this step:** Review your plan(s) one final time so everyone is ready to act. Then take action when the time comes.

Before election day, review your plan with your full team to make sure everyone knows exactly what they need to do and when. This will help you make sure you and your group are ready to go if you need to move quickly in any of the scenarios.

### SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

#### Meeting #4: Rehearse Your Plan (60 minutes)

##### Agenda:

- **10 minutes: Introductions and icebreaker!**
  - Ask if someone would be willing to take notes.
- **5 minutes: Review of [Principles](#)**
  - Since new people may have joined or it may have been a while since you last reviewed the [Principles](#), take turns reading through the Principles to reaffirm that everyone is on the same page.
- **5 minutes: Review purpose of the meeting.**
  - The purpose of the meeting is to review the plan and ensure everyone is prepared to carry out their role if needed.
- **15 minutes: Review your plan.**
  - Present the finalized plan(s).
  - Discuss any clarifying questions.
  - Review any communication systems or tools people need to know to ensure everyone is connected with whomever they need to be connected.
  - If you decide you want to post about your actions or group online, consider using the hashtag **#HoldTheLine2020** so other Hold the Line teams can more easily find you, and promote and learn from your actions.
- **20 minutes: Review the roles.**
  - Go down the list of roles and responsibilities and who owns each.
  - Provide space for the owner of each role to be able to ask questions.
- **5 minutes: Closing & Appreciations**
  - Ask people to share something positive like appreciations for an individual or the group in your closing.

Congratulations! By the end of your fourth meeting, you should have a group that you trust, and a plan. This is a big step to defending democracy. In an ideal world, the election would go smoothly, but you're ready if it doesn't.

In the meantime, as we mentioned in [Part I](#), there are also many democracy support and protection roles needed pre-election as well. Your support for pre-election activities to protect the election can also be a big help. In the [Additional Resources](#) section we have also included a list of other efforts on election protection as a starting point that you and your group may also want to consider.

## Part IV

### MODEL OF CHANGE

The model of change in this guide draws from a combination of civic engagement and nonviolent civil resistance.

Civic engagement refers to understanding how democratic institutions and processes work, and ensuring that citizens are organized and fully participating in them. Even if our institutions are weak or corrupted, it's important to continue to try to engage with and strengthen them so they live up to their democratic purpose.

In this vein, as we've mentioned, efforts to defend democracy include **registering and turning out to vote, helping others register and vote, and volunteering to be a poll worker if you can**. Voting itself in large numbers is essential. It also impacts any Stage II actions (actions we'll take between Election day and Inauguration day), because it is a big boost to election protection efforts if the vote count leads to a clear outcome in which a rightful winner can easily be determined.

While participating in the election, we also recognize that there has been a breakdown of government institutions in the U.S. in recent years. Bribes, corruption, threats and intimidation, extreme dishonesty, attacks on whistleblowers, ongoing violations of norms and democratic processes, demonizing opponents, statements that can incite violence, and hiring decisions that appear to be based on patronage and personal loyalty have all done real damage to our democracy.

That's why if the Trump administration and its allies don't allow all votes to be counted, won't impartially investigate or remedy irregularities, or refuse to respect the election results, we may need to activate another form of power to correct the balance. That power is large numbers of people engaging in civil resistance, refusing cooperation in strategic and organized ways (for example through strikes, boycotts, protests, and other nonviolent actions that exert social, economic, and political power) until democratic and accountable government is restored.

Civil resistance is far more impactful than most assume. Worldwide, it is documented that nonviolent movements have [succeeded far more often against oppressive governments than opposition violence](#). Research shows it is one of the most powerful forces to end dictatorship and advance democracy. It is no wonder, then, that authoritarians are scared of it. They try to distract people and keep it a secret that they fear mass noncooperation by the populations they rule and exploit.

If we come to the point of civil resistance to fight election subversion, then looking at the polls and asking "how many people support or oppose a candidate" may no longer be the

most relevant question in determining the outcome. Instead the question may become: “**how many people are actively mobilizing to protect democracy, and what is their strategy?**”

This section will go into more depth on specifics about how exactly civil resistance works. Here are some questions you may have:

1. [Ok, I get the general concept of civil resistance, but can I get a little more information about how it works?](#)
2. [What about legal challenges to the election? How do we think about that component of election protection and how it relates to civil resistance?](#)
3. [What kind of tactics should I choose?](#)
4. [What kind of messaging should I use when I engage in public actions?](#)
5. [What happens if people show up to our actions and start being violent, saying that civil resistance and acts of violence can be used together?](#)
6. [What about property destruction?](#)
7. [How do we anticipate the other side will respond if we use civil resistance to protect the election? What happens if the other side orders violent repression or their supporters engage in violence?](#)

## **1. Ok, I get the general concept of civil resistance, but can I get a little more information about how it works?**

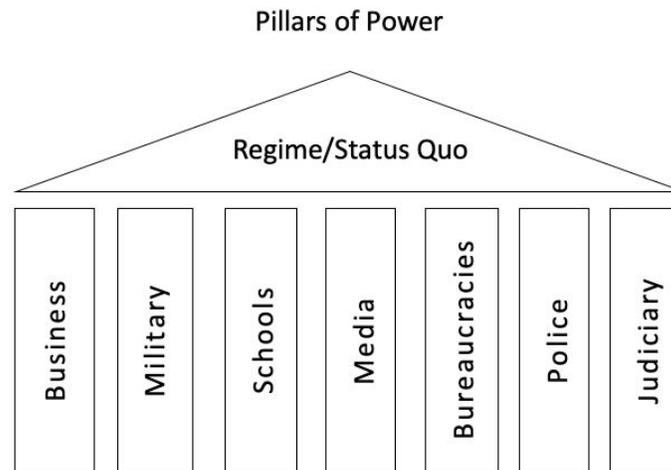
Yes! The easiest way to address this is to discuss three key principles that make civil resistance powerful. These principles are:

1. Shifting Pillars of Power and Gaining Defections
2. Imposing Costs
3. Enabling Widespread Participation

### **Principle 1: Shifting Pillars of Power and Gaining Defections**

A core concept of civil resistance is that all leaders rely on the consent and obedience of large numbers of people to stay in power. One way to envision this is that all leaders depend on pillars of power—key institutions that provide them with skills, resources, people, legitimacy, and other capacities to carry out their will.

Every government has its own unique characteristics and variations, but here's a generic sample of some pillars (there are more than we can list on a small diagram) that exist for most governments:



From a distance, some of these pillars can look totally unified. But a closer examination often reveals that the people in the pillars of power are not all equally loyal or willing to carry out or passively accept certain behaviors by the government. There is tension in the pillars, but most of this tension is hidden from public view. When we see a judge or a bureaucrat, a police officer or a businessperson, they look like a person who is part of a big institution that behaves a certain way. But we don't actually know what's going on inside their mind until they're forced to act.

For example, a corporation may seem like a single entity, but entry-level workers may have different attitudes, interests, and loyalties than people in management, or people in other branches of the corporation. We see differences even among groups such as police. For example when confronted with Black Lives Matters protests, individual police responded in different ways that to some extent reflect different orientations to the movement's grievances and demands. Some police took a knee or engaged in dialogue with demonstrators, saying they support the rights of people to demonstrate nonviolently. Others were hostile and aggressive, either because they personally felt that way or because they were ordered to use repression and did not resist those orders. The point here is that each pillar of support is made up of thousands or millions of people, and while a pillar may appear solid, it is actually not uniform or monolithic. This provides an opportunity for a movement to take actions and communicate in ways that lead at least some people within that pillar to move towards defection (we'll come back to exactly what defection means and looks like soon).

In addition, pillars as a whole behave the way they do for different reasons. For example, members of the business community may accept the actions of a government if it helps them make money. But if people who have grievances with the government cause businesses to start losing money because of a boycott or strike, then those businesses may

start putting pressure on the government or particular elected officials to accept the movement's demands.

Another example of potential fault lines in and among pillars is the fact that those who serve in government institutions swear an oath to uphold the Constitution. They don't swear allegiance to the president himself. When people in those institutions are consistently challenged to see that obeying certain orders contributes, even in small ways, to subverting the elections and violating their oath, they can become increasingly likely to defect. On that note, if you know you'll be interacting with a government official, we encourage you to look up beforehand the specific oath of office that that official takes as part of their job.

Defections may sound unlikely to happen, but history and cases from around the world show that civil resistance often causes them to occur. What do they look like when they happen? They can occur subtly, for example when people start to call in sick, or work slowly and inefficiently because they no longer want to carry out orders. Or people may take actions that make work more bureaucratic, for example asking that all orders be written rather than verbal, that all orders be clearly signed by their superiors to ensure accountability, or that questionable orders undergo legal review before they're executed. In some cases, people within these pillars may simply ignore orders, for example, by not attacking nonviolent protesters, giving them time to escape, or choosing not to prosecute them. In other cases, government officials may choose to document and provide information to the media on abusive behavior they're witnessing, naming names of the individuals who are engaging in corruption or enforcing unlawful orders. And sometimes people in the pillars of power may directly and publicly defy orders.

Normally, it's hard to generate more overt forms of refusal and defections within institutions because for most people, refusal to obey orders can result in job loss, and possibly legal consequences. Under that kind of pressure, most people will conform and try to quietly make change within their own institution if they're unhappy. But attempts to subvert an election present a rare circumstance, both because the issues at stake are so directly related to our Constitution, and also because there is a possibility that upholding one's oath to the Constitution and disobeying unlawful orders may not result in job loss, but rather a transfer of power. In fact, if a person is given unlawful orders by the Trump administration and suspects that the Biden campaign will win the election anyway, that person has another reason to hesitate because obedience to unlawful orders could mean facing the risk of accountability soon under the new administration.

Therefore, one way civil resistance works is by putting targeted pressure on pillars of power so that people within those pillars start to shift their behavior. This can happen on a large scale, for example, as when businesses decide it's financially advantageous to accept a movement's demands. But shifts can also happen at a very personal scale as well. For example, over time some people may find they start to sympathize with a movement. Or they may start to defect when members of their families stop supporting their actions, or when they experience regular social pressure from friends or colleagues, or when someone they know joins the movement. Others may make a self-interested decision that they want

to be perceived as being “on the right side of history.” These people may not like the civil resistance movement at all, but as they lose confidence in the sustainability of an authoritarian’s rule, they start to position themselves for a new future.

Often all of the above reasons interact with each other—as some people start to defect from a pillar, others find the courage to defect themselves, and eventually others begin to doubt the sustainability of the authoritarian and then defect out of their own self-interest. Defections can cascade and accelerate rapidly, which is why some authoritarians can quickly lose power.

One last point bears mention: For a movement to pull members of the pillars away from their center and towards defection, **it is critical for activists to remain nonviolent**. Generally, **people serving in government or business will not defect if they feel threatened with violence or disorder and chaos by the activists that are pressuring them**. In fact, such threats tend to reinforce their existing loyalties and make them more likely to obey an authoritarian’s orders. This is one reason why authoritarians try to provoke violence from those who oppose them.

## Principle 2: Imposing Costs

A second key concept in civil resistance is the idea of imposing costs. Every government has limited resources—there are a limited number of organized and trained people available, and finite money, equipment, time, and skills. It’s expensive for government to function regularly, and **very** resource intensive when government has to try to force people in the population to obey unpopular laws and decisions. This is why most governments aim to *deter* unwanted behavior: by making a show of force in one place, they hope that many others elsewhere will see what happened and then voluntarily behave the way that the government wants. But when large numbers of people are not deterred—refusing to let fear or confusion govern their behavior—and instead remain focused, unified, and nonviolent in their disobedience, governments rapidly run out of capacity to coerce them.

As one piece of evidence about this, research shows us that when a nonviolent movement generates widespread participation, it dramatically increases the movement’s chances for victory. A [2011 groundbreaking study](#) examined 106 nonviolent movements around the world and found that when 3.5% of a population visibly participated in the movement, the movement always won ([subsequent research](#) expanded this finding to 167 cases, finding only 2 exceptions between 1945-2014). Furthermore, most nonviolent movements won with under 3.5% of popular participation, even when confronting dictatorships that did not hesitate to use violence. Clearly, large numbers of people who are united and engaging in strategic acts of civil resistance are far more powerful than most people commonly assume.

This is so for several reasons. The more people that participate in a movement:

- The greater the costs they can impose on the movement’s opponent (note that the term “opponent” means an adversary in a contest, not an enemy. There is potential to reconcile with opponents if they change their behavior. People can change).

- The greater the range of actions they can perform (i.e. strikes that start at one factory can spread to multiple factories as more people join) to create multiple forms of pressure.
- The more skills and resources they make available to the movement.
- The more likely it becomes that repression against the movement will backfire on the perpetrators.
- The more points of contact the movement has with people in each pillar of support, and each personal contact there, whether formal or informal, creates a point of leverage. This makes defections more likely.

### **Principle 3: Enabling Widespread Participation**

Emerging directly from Principle 2 on the importance of imposing costs comes the importance of widespread participation. Research shows that a high level of public participation is the single most important factor in the success of civil resistance movements.

Fortunately, a real advantage of civil resistance is that it's highly inclusive: people of all ages, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds can participate. This is so because there are [hundreds of ways](#) that people can engage in nonviolent action, depending on where they want to target their pressure, and the particular circumstances they find themselves in. Civil resistance is *not* just about protest. Someone who is incredibly busy can still participate by joining a consumer boycott and simply not buying certain targeted products. Or they may stop watching certain shows, or stop engaging in certain behaviors online, or decide to actively engage in new behaviors. Someone who has lots of time and risk tolerance can do frontline actions like blockades and civil disobedience. Someone who wants to help but is concerned about being on the front line can engage in important research for a movement, or conduct outreach in their community, engage in low-risk forms of protest, coordinate planning meetings, or donate their skills and contacts to help the movement.

Therefore, whether a person wants to be in the center of the action, or to play a side and supporting role, there is a place for many different efforts, skills, and kinds of people in a civil resistance movement. Many contributions are needed.

Importantly, high participation rates are also tied to remaining nonviolent. If people start to be violent at public actions, there is a documented decline in the number of people who will participate in that movement. Most people don't want to engage in actions where opposition violence is present (this is especially true for children, elders, people with disabilities, and sometimes women and members of other population groups), either because they don't agree with the violence, or feel vulnerable to the repression that opposition violence brings. Civil resistance can be met with repression, but it tends to be met with far less repression

than opposition violence, and repression against nonviolent people is also far more likely to [backfire](#) against power holders who order it.

## **2. What about legal challenges to the election? How do we think about that component of election protection and how it relates to civil resistance?**

We anticipate there will be many legal challenges to try to ensure that all votes are counted and to ensure that the election results are respected. These challenges are what we refer to as a “top-down” approach, where people with specialized knowledge (lawyers and judges) engage in a process that largely excludes ordinary people. Top-down strategies have their place and are important, but by themselves they depend on the integrity of institutions in order to work. As we’ve discussed, the Trump administration has tools it can use to try to directly impact top-down strategies and institutional integrity. Therefore, while legal strategies are important, and should be watched, and could yield valuable information (such as evidence of fraud, or critical information about election laws that could form the basis for civil resistance), they are not the focus of this guide.

They can, however, work well alongside civil resistance, because civil resistance has a history of revitalizing institutions and institutional processes. There is a history of movements revealing facts on the ground that helped legal proceedings by showing the depth of an injustice. A perfect example of both of these points is the outcome of the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycotts, which resulted in a [U.S. Supreme Court ruling](#) that sided with the boycotters. With no civil resistance, the case may not have made it to the Supreme Court, and if it did, the outcome may have been different.

## **3. What kind of tactics should I choose?**

There are a wide range of civil resistance tactics from which you can choose. They fall into two categories. The first category is called “acts of commission.” This refers to when you do things (commission = commit acts) that you are not supposed to do, not expected to do, or are forbidden from doing. These include tactics such as starting your own election protection group; displaying certain symbols of protest; or engaging in demonstrations, marches, or nonviolent blockades. The second category is called “acts of omission,” which are when you *don’t* do things (omission = omit acts) that you’re supposed to do, expected to do, or are required to do. There are many different acts of omission, including strikes of all kinds; deliberate work slowdowns; boycotts of all kinds; divestment; refusing to pay certain fees, bills, taxes, or other costs; or refusal to observe certain expected social norms or behaviors.

The above are just a few examples of tactics that create social, economic, and political pressure. Throughout history, in response to local circumstances and local needs, people

have been remarkably creative at finding ways to engage in civil resistance. We know you can be too.

There are numerous factors that contribute to a tactic's success. These include being organized; having clear roles for people (many tactics depend on good logistics, and people who are responsible for taking care of them); creating effective communications with your intended audience(s); potentially having a plan to engage media; maintaining nonviolent discipline; having a clear and specific demand or goal; choosing a suitable target for your tactic (who do you want to push against, or possibly recruit to support you—advance research helps with this); and developing different contingency plans (what happens if a, b, or c, happens?).

This seems like a long list, but it doesn't require special expertise to answer these questions. It requires a thoughtful approach, common sense, some advance planning and research, and a good group process. It often takes work to put on good tactics, but it's worth it! You will generally get out of them what you put into them. And depending on the specific tactic you plan, there could be other important factors. For example, sometimes the weather is really important for the success or failure of a tactic. Sometimes timing is important (does your tactic have a clear start *and* end time? Do you want it to happen during rush hour, or during a special holiday?). Location choice can also be critical for public actions (or it may not be important at all, for example in a consumer boycott, divestment, or a stay-at-home strike, which don't bring people together in a central location). Again, lots of variation, depending on what you want to do and your local context.

To help you, we've created a [tactic planning sheet](#). Dive in. It's interesting and fun!

Advance planning is great when you can do it, but what about circumstances when you don't have time to plan? For example, when the Trump administration's ban on travelers from several predominantly Muslim countries was announced in 2017, people rapidly mobilized to airports to protest it. They didn't have time to plan in advance. But they were able to mobilize quickly because they *had* developed good networks and teams in advance, so they were ready to spring into action for the demands. Part of what you're doing in creating a Hold the Line team is investing in building capacity so that you can be proactive in initiating tactics that you plan, as well as reactive if you need to move into action and respond quickly. Both capacities are needed.

Here are two other general factors to keep in mind, no matter what tactic(s) you choose: the importance of *tactical innovation* and *tactical sequencing*.

Tactical innovation refers to developing new tactics, or doing existing tactics (i.e. demonstrations) in a new or creative time, place or manner. This is important because new tactics attract more attention (among the public, potential supporters, and media), they generate enthusiasm, they can create new points of pressure, and they allow your group to initiate events (referred to as "maintaining the initiative"). They cause your opponent/target to be reactive (and note again our definition of "opponent" in this guide means an adversary

in a contest, not an enemy. There is potential to reconcile with opponents if they change their behavior. People can change).

In contrast, doing the same tactic in the same way predictably for days in a row can cause a loss of enthusiasm and participation (people become tired); a loss of public attention; and it gives your opponent time to gather itself, strategize a response, and then engage in counter tactics (as the opponent attempts to “re-take the initiative”). As an example, we can all probably think of a case where people got stuck in cycles of doing the same kind of protest, which didn’t enable tactical innovation to happen, and consequently people got frustrated and demoralized.

Now, there are no hard and fast rules about when a tactic becomes “old” and needs to be replaced. Some demonstrations keep growing over the course of weeks! Some decline after a day. Sometimes doing the same tactic each week can show real discipline and commitment. Other times it can show lack of unity or strategy (everyone realizes something is no longer working, but no one can decide what else the group should do). There is no specific formula that determines this. But if your team works well together, you will know best how to navigate your local context—when to push, pull back, stay the course, or change. What won’t change is your commitment to Hold the Lines and defend democracy, and there are many ways to do this through civil resistance.

A last point is about the importance of tactical sequencing. Tactical sequencing refers to developing a set of tactics that build pressure towards a key goal. Tactics by themselves can be powerful, but when they’re even more powerful when they work together as part of a sequence and strategy.

For example, if you wanted people to participate in a consumer boycott, you may put out a call and people in your community may not really respond. Perhaps they’re not paying attention, or never see your call, or lack confidence that you can pull it off so they wonder if it’s worth it to participate?

But what if you first organize a two hour planning, training, or information session that attracts 25 people. Then those 25 people (who you now know) have accepted your organizing principles, contributed their ideas, and each then go out and recruit five friends who will all engage in an act of visible public protest. Now over 100 of you will be protesting together, drawing attention to your issue, articulating a goal, and demanding a community boycott. You have a clear objective and clear statements for the media and as a result of your protest, you now also have some good videos and pictures for social media. Then your call for a boycott is more likely to be heard and to elicit a response. People in the community will see how committed you are. They will also have learned something about you and the issue you care about from seeing you in person, or catching media coverage of your protest. They are also more likely now to know someone personally who was involved in your protest. Progressing to a boycott now seems much more possible, and powerful.

Therefore, when you do a tactic, it's important to see it in the context of what came before, and what you plan to afterwards.

These two concepts—tactical innovation and tactical sequencing—help explain the mystery of why sometimes a particular tactic is highly effective at a certain place and time, but that same tactic is not highly effective at a different place and time. It could be because the tactic is no longer innovative, or the tactic is not properly sequenced (or not sequenced at all). Fortunately, these two concepts will also help you ensure that your tactics are fresh, successful, and make an impact.

#### **4. What kind of messaging should I use when I engage in public actions?**

The kind of messaging you use in your tactics depends on your audience. If you're speaking to public officials, you will want to try to understand their interests and values, and the symbols and words that hold special meaning to them, so that you can communicate in ways that will be heard.

If you are trying to speak to members of the general public, it's important to prioritize and think through which particular groups of people in the general public you want to reach. This is because there are so many different groups in the general public that it can be hard to develop messaging that will reach all of them at the same time. So for example, if you're doing a protest demonstration, maybe you want to tailor your message to reach people in the general public who you think are sympathetic to you but have not yet taken the step to join you. You could do a little research or talk to some of these people in advance to try to figure out why this is. Then when you do your public action, part of your communication goal is to bring those people from passive support for your efforts to active participation in your efforts. You also make sure to set up a recruiting table when you protest.

When developing messaging, local context matters a great deal as well. Among the people who live and work in different communities, states, and regions, there are histories, words, and references that matter to them. Knowing what those are can be really helpful in developing communications that make an impact.

There are also some general *themes* of communication around election protection that are important. One of these is that our cause is about the good of the country as a whole, not any one party or faction. If votes aren't fully counted, if irregularities are not impartially investigated and remedied, and/or if election results are not respected, that is not a partisan issue. That is an issue for our country. It is a Constitutional issue. That is why we come together in one voice on this issue.

We can anticipate that those who seek to subvert the election will attempt to distract from their actions and mobilize others against us by accusing us of trying to push a partisan agenda. That is another reason for us to state proactively this core theme: that we are

defending democracy, accountable government, and the Constitution. As we stated earlier in this guide, if President Trump wins re-election legitimately, we will respect those results as the will of the people. But by that same principle, if Joe Biden wins the election legitimately, those results must be respected, and if there are irregularities, they must be impartially investigated and remedied. In all cases, determining the will of the people, as expressed through the vote, is our highest value.

We can also anticipate criticism for engaging in any form of civil resistance or dissent. This is one reason why it's important to communicate and remind people that we are exercising our rights and acting in the highest traditions of others who came before us and organized and made this country better. When the government has been unaccountable or corrupt in the past, ordinary people engaging in civil resistance have helped restore the balance. We can call on people who share this value to join us.

We can also call on government employees to respect their oath of office (our [Commitment to Uphold Democracy](#) campaign plan includes several demands along this line). We can tell people that if they start to join us, they will be embraced. We are not against the millions of people who work in government. We are against the actions of people who actively attempt to subvert the election, and we would like those who serve under them to stop cooperating with them. If people change behavior, there is a path open for them to join us.

Lastly, a favored line by many authoritarians is that protesters are creating chaos. If they can find one incident across the country to reflect this, they will encourage news coverage on it and ignore everyone else who mobilized and participated. We can't control this entirely, and with misinformation today we also recognize that some incidents that circulate on social media may be fabricated or deeply misleading. Nonetheless, we want to be careful not to play into claims that nonviolent action leads to chaos, and so in our tone, we can show courage and passion, as well as organization and discipline. **We want an orderly process. Trump is the one who is sowing chaos.**

The above are some considerations on messaging. We also plan to develop a Hold the Line messaging guide subsequently that will share more specific examples for the scenarios we outlined.

## **5. What happens if people show up at our actions and start being violent, saying that civil resistance and acts of violence can be used together?**

We have stated many important strategic advantages of civil resistance versus violence at various points in this guide. To summarize, compared to violence, civil resistance is:

1. More participatory, and can get greater numbers engaged.

2. Empirically proven to be far more effective at confronting unaccountable governments than opposition violence.
3. More likely to lead to defections among an opponent's supporters.
4. Likely to decrease the intensity of repression used against a movement.
5. More likely to cause repression against a movement to backfire.
6. More likely to lead to a democratic outcome after a conflict is over.
7. More likely to keep the focus on the movement's issues, rather than allowing the opponent to change the subject to "law and order."

Violence tends to set the opposite dynamics in play to the seven points we've listed above. This is so even if the violence by a government and its supporters is far greater than the violence by those attending a protest. So for example, even as the police have riot gear, or supporters of a movement's opponent have guns, if people throw projectiles at them and are armed with hand weapons, the fact that people are threatening and doing this at all still creates dynamics that play into an authoritarian ruler's hands. Research shows that when a movement is perceived as engaging in acts of violence and significant property destruction, its core supporters may continue to support it, but people who were passively supportive or neutral move away from the movement in significant numbers. Meanwhile the movement's opponents become more mobilized. So violence and property destruction can prevent a movement from growing beyond its current base of support, and can isolate it among the rest of the population. This in turn prevents a civil resistance movement from fully exercising its strength and potential.

Some comment that the above dynamic is unfair, or that it's morally justifiable for people to use counter violence if attacked. Our point is not about whether this is fair or not, nor do we seek to engage in a discussion about the moral permissibility of violence. Our point is that choosing civil resistance is simply about strategic impact and engaging in a way of making change that has consistently proven to be more effective.

Authoritarians often understand this point. That's why one of their favored tactics is to have people pretend to be demonstrators and start to engage in violence or significant acts of property destruction. There's even a term for people who do this, which is the French expression *agents provocateurs* ("provocative factor"). Some reasons authoritarians and other movement opponents use *agents provocateurs* is to try to discredit movements, to change the subject away from the movement's grievances, and to give an excuse to the authoritarian to crack down violently (here's a suspected [case](#) of an alleged *provocateur* amidst Black Lives Matter protests last June). Sometimes *agents provocateurs* also show up at meetings and try to encourage activists to engage in violence, and become hostile to people who disagree with them. Having clear principles (such as [the ones noted earlier in](#)

[this guide](#)) that commit to nonviolent means and a way of treating and respecting each other can help to prevent that from happening.

In saying this, we do not mean to imply that all or even most people who may engage in violence at public actions are *agents provocateurs*. Some people use violence because they believe it's justified, or because they are angry, or because they think it will make them safer, or for reasons unrelated to the movement's goals. In addition, if someone is disruptive at your meetings or at a public action, that person may simply have a different communication style or opinion than you do. There is no need to label a person as an *agent provocateur* unless of course you have clear proof (notably, such accusations *without proof* can cause real damage to groups). Instead, you can just focus on whether a person's behavior is consistent with your group's organizing principles. If their behavior is not consistent with your group's organizing principles, then your group is not the group for them. That keeps matters simple and assumes genuine intent for everyone.

You will be the best judge of whether there is a risk of violence happening in any actions you may take. Some may find the risk of violence to be quite low, while others will be more concerned. If you are concerned, here are some things you can do to protect yourself and your movement from the impact of people engaging in violent acts at public actions:

1. Ahead of time, create a code of conduct for public actions that you organize, and make sure that code of conduct is publicized and clear ahead of time.
2. Assert in public statements that by definition, your group is committed to nonviolent means. This way people will know that if violence is perpetrated, your group was not responsible.
3. Wear certain clothes that distinguish your group, so that if people show up to public actions and are violent, it will be clear that they are not part of your group.
4. Consider working with other groups to develop peace teams, which are teams of people who work together at public actions to help de-escalate situations that may arise.
5. If you know of groups that do not have a commitment to nonviolent discipline but that may show up to a public action you are organizing, you may want to reach out to them and inform them that your group organized the action and are asking all people who participate to agree to a set of shared commitments for that action. That is a fair demand to make if your group is organizing the action.
6. In some cases people may choose to proactively inform police of their planned actions, meeting with police ahead of time to tell them what their group plans to do. The purpose of these meetings may be to deescalate the possible risk of confrontation with law enforcement during your tactics.

None of the above are perfect solutions. But they are options that you may consider. Opposition violence can help an authoritarian subvert the election results. Avoid giving them what they want, and instead focus on their vulnerability to civil resistance.

## **6. What about property destruction?**

As stated earlier, many acts of property destruction create similar dynamics to opposition violence. They allow authoritarians to change the subject to law and order; to depict the movement as dangerous, chaotic, and a threat to the public; and to enable the authoritarian to crack down. Some acts of property destruction also have the potential to increase the loyalty that people in the pillars of power have to an authoritarian and to push them away from defecting towards the movement. As stated, most people will not defect if they feel the alternative is chaos or disorder.

As with violence, some point out that this dynamic is not fair—that an authoritarian that is taking actions that hurt or kill many people gets judged by a different standard than a movement that is destroying property. Aside from the fact that certain forms of property destruction such as arson can damage people’s lives and also hurt or kill people, we agree that it is not fair that movements are judged by a different standard than authoritarian opponents. We can’t fix that problem, but we can affirm that there is no viable strategy based on the use of property destruction that can defend democracy by protecting the 2020 election.

## **7. How do we anticipate the other side will respond if we use civil resistance to protect the election? What happens if the other side orders violent repression or their supporters engage in violence ?**

If Trump behaves like other authoritarians, here are some things he might do when confronted with civil resistance:

1. Spread misinformation about the movement, claiming it is “dangerous” and represents a coup attempt, which of course would be what he is actually trying to do if he aims to subvert the election results.
2. Try to incite his supporters to mobilize to confront the movement that he has labeled a “threat,” telling them that they should do their patriotic duty to “protect the country.”
3. Arrest activists. Have his Attorney General launch investigations into them.
4. Order government forces to engage in violent repression, both in an attempt to deter others from engaging in civil resistance and to try to provoke a violent response.

5. In extreme cases, attempt to declare a “state of emergency” or invoke the [Insurrection Act](#) (enabling him to deploy military forces domestically).

While these actions are scary and intimidating, we want to bring you back to a few truths:

1. Authoritarians do not have the capacity to control everyone, everywhere, all the time. Repression is also expensive, and resources are limited, so repression in one place is often meant to scare and intimidate people in others. One solution to this is to refuse to be intimidated because the authoritarian does not have a strategy or resources to confront people in numerous places who refuse to be afraid.
2. In some places and for some tactics, the risk of violence may be low. You will best be able to judge the risks based on your local context. And if you are concerned about repression and wish to avoid it, consider the option of shifting to lower risk tactics, such as boycotts. They are still powerful, but do not create much personal exposure.
3. Violence against nonviolent people with legitimate grievances tends to backfire against the perpetrators and lead to defections (see the *Backfire Manual* in the [Additional Resources](#) section for more information about how this happens). Public support tends to shift towards the movement.

Also, not all state agents will be enthusiastic about engaging in violent repression against nonviolent demonstrators with legitimate grievances. Some agents will, while others within those same institutions may be opposed. Sometimes defections and divisions within institutions can start at the same time that repressive orders are given.

In addition, one of the best deterrents against future repression is if previous repression backfired. This is one reason why remaining nonviolent tends to lead to less severe repression, because after repression backfires once, authorities are hesitant to use it again in the future.

4. Remember that repression against nonviolent resisters with legitimate grievances represents desperation by the authoritarian. It is not a sign of strength, it is a sign of weakness. Authoritarians often order repression when they are close to losing power and control.
5. Remember the stakes of the conflict. If an election is subverted, the future of the country is in deep peril. That is worth nonviolently fighting for.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Messaging Resources:

Please help spread the word:

- [Social Media Graphics](#) – Use these to spread the word about the guide online (be sure to include a link to the website — [holdthelineguide.com/](http://holdthelineguide.com/) — when you post)!
- [Hold the Line Logo](#) – You can use the logo on banners, signs, and other materials.

### Campaign Plan:

- [Commitment to Uphold Democracy](#) – This campaign plan aims to get public commitments from elected officials and police and military that will help to protect the integrity and results of the 2020 election. It was created by Hold the Line and several partners and contributors.

### Articles:

The first two articles below provide insights on how civil resistance can defeat coup attempts. The second two articles offer a synopsis of key research findings in the field of civil resistance:

- [“10 things you need to know to stop a coup”](#)  
by Daniel Hunter, *WagingNonviolence.org* Sept. 18, 2020
- [“What will it take to defend the election? Here’s one winning strategy”](#)  
by George Lakey, *WagingNonviolence.org* Sept. 10, 2020
- [People are in the streets protesting Donald Trump, but when do protests actually work?](#) by Erica Chenoweth, *Washington Post*, Nov. 21, 2016
- [“How the world is proving Martin Luther King right about nonviolence”](#) by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Washington Post*, January 18, 2016

### Guides and Action Resources:

- [State Fact Sheets: Laws barring unauthorized private militia groups](#) – Georgetown law school has created fact sheets for all 50 states explaining the laws barring unauthorized private militia groups and what to do if groups of armed individuals show up near a polling place or voter registration drive.
- [A Civic Refresher with the National Guard: Discussion Guide on Community Safeguarding](#) – This guide will help you: 1) Create and moderate an educational event; 2) Invite elected officials in Congress, your community, your state + the state National Guard; 3) Educate the public about US law, command authority and the use

of force; 4) Frame security as safeguarding.

- [Nonviolent Direct Action Training Resources](#) – A list of organizations and groups offering trainings and educational resources on nonviolent action.
- [Backfire Manual: Tactics Against Injustice](#) – Offers a powerful, five-step process by which repression against nonviolent activists can be made to backfire. Freely downloadable manual available in English, Spanish, and 8 other languages.
- [Keeping Your Phones and Communication Secure](#) – Use these tips to protect yourself and your group as you create and execute your plan of action.
- [Civil Resistance Against Coups: A Comparative and Historical Perspective](#) – Offers numerous case studies and creates a typology of different kinds of coups and resistance against them. Key takeaways for civil society groups starting on page 93.
- [The Anti-Coup](#) – An overview of how to deter and defend against coups d'état through popular nonviolent action. Contains three short cases studies (pgs. 9-15) and an Appendix II that has some guidelines for civil society organizations to prepare ahead of time. Freely downloadable manual in English and 4 other languages.

### **Free Documentary Films:**

- [Orange Revolution](#) (Ukraine, 2004)
- [Bringing Down a Dictator](#) (Serbia, 2000)
- **A Force More Powerful**
  - [Part I](#) (India, U.S., South Africa)
  - [Part II](#) (Denmark, Poland, Chile)

### **Other Efforts on Election Protection:**

*Note: This is a partial list. There are many other organizations and efforts, local and national, that you can find, so do your own research. Also, inclusion on this list does not mean endorsement or partnership with Hold the Line.*

- [Protect the Results](#) is a joint project of [Indivisible](#) and [Stand Up America](#) to protect the valid results of the 2020 election. It is building a coalition of voters ready to mobilize if Donald Trump refuses to accept the results of the 2020 presidential election.
- [Choose Democracy](#) holds trainings on nonviolent action to protect democracy, has a pledge of resistance if attempts are made to subvert the Nov. 2020 election, and has resources on defending against coups.

- [\*\*Power the Polls\*\*](#) is an online source of information on how to volunteer to be a poll worker in your state or district. Notably, many poll workers also get paid a stipend.
- [\*\*Arm in Arm\*\*](#) hubs around the US have regional coaches and are taking action on the election.
- [\*\*Speak Up Now campaign\*\*](#) is an Oregon-based campaign focusing on the vulnerability of local, state and national elections; as well as the systemic racism that continues to go unaddressed, and drive inequality across the nation.
- [\*\*Protect Our Election\*\*](#) has information related to election protection, especially related to swing states, and a variety of pledges that people can support.

## **#HoldTheLine2020**

Questions or comments about this guide? Email us at: [defend@holdthelineguide.org](mailto:defend@holdthelineguide.org). Or DM us on Instagram [@theredlineguide](#) and Twitter [@TheRedLineGuide](#). And please help spread the word by sharing this guide! We need as many people as possible to join this effort! **#HoldTheLine2020**