

Act Free to Be Free: A State and Local Pro-Democracy Framework

A Civil Society Framework for Election Defense in 2026

Executive Summary

Democracy is not something you have. It is something you practice. The Constitution does not protect itself; civil society protects it, by acting as if it applies, out loud, in public, under pressure.

Anyone paying attention knows that Donald Trump is not preparing to lose the 2026 midterms. He is preparing to disrupt and sabotage them, and his administration has been laying the groundwork for months.

The harder problem is this: most of us (organizers, elected officials, legal advocates, pro-democracy funders) are still preparing for a normal election. We are running election programs. We are testing messages. We are mobilizing voters. These are not wrong things to do. They are profoundly insufficient for the threat we are actually facing.

There is also something harder to name, a kind of collective avoidance. An unwillingness to fully believe our own eyes. Many Americans have internalized a story about ourselves that says we are immune from this kind of thing. We are not. And the next six months will matter enormously for how far down the abyss we go.

In 2020, Trump tried to overturn the results of the election and was stopped by Pence, by Republican secretaries of state, by a Congress that (barely) played its constitutional role, and by localized grassroots formations that could intervene in real time on the ground. Those guardrails held. They are gone now. His administration is loyal to him alone. Congress has abdicated. J.D. Vance will not save us.

The only authentic bulwark against an authoritarian consolidating power is a multi-sector, constitutionally grounded, multi-racial, broad-based mobilization of civil society, ready for the best and prepared for the worst. We know this works because we did it in Minnesota. When ICE and CBP occupied our communities for two and a half months, we acted free to be free. Tens of thousands of trained constitutional legal observers documented every encounter. Mutual aid networks sustained people through the crisis. Small businesses invoked their Fourth Amendment rights and refused warrantless entry. Local law enforcement mostly stood aside rather than collaborate. And when called, 50 to 70 percent of the general population showed up, not because they were activists, but because they understood what was being taken from them and chose to act.

That mobilization repelled 3,500 ICE/CBP agents, gave our Governor room to fight, gave our AG's lawsuits political standing, and won the national media narrative, not because any single actor or sector was powerful enough alone, but because all of it together created a reality the Trump Administration could not overcome.

This framework to prepare and unleash a civil society response to election sabotage is not a program. It is a strategic analysis, a way of understanding the threat and the architecture of response, designed to support operational playbooks driven by in-state organizing and pro-democracy infrastructure. The question is whether we will build it before the crisis hits, rather than scrambling to respond when it inevitably will.

What Is the Evidence of Their Strategy?

A Unified Strategy, Not Disconnected Actions

The first mistake we cannot afford to make is treating what the Trump administration is doing as a series of independent provocations. It is a coordinated, multi-front campaign, documented, spoken out loud, and partially published, with a single operational logic.

These strategies have been rehearsed. They already rehearsed a portfolio of local-federal strategies to “Stop the Count” in 2020 during the ballot counting period through January 6th. And in 2022 and 2024, we saw localized rehearsals across the country to *refuse recognition* of duly elected leaders: Pennsylvania MAGA Republicans setting a pretext for “fraud” and attempting to not seat state senators. North Carolina GOP attempting to suspend the election of a State Supreme Court judge for months to keep their partisan map. Minnesota’s tied legislature attempting to elect a GOP Speaker ahead of a recount. The strategy has a pattern: manufacturing a “pretext” through smears and propaganda, using legal maneuvers to suspend seating an unwanted elected official, grabbing and holding power in the vacuum created by the suspension of certainty.

The blueprint is a 17-page draft executive order: *“Establishing Security, Integrity, and Transparency for United States Elections with Protections Against Foreign Interference.”* Circulating among Trump allies since at least April 2025, the order would invoke presidential emergency powers, grounded in debunked claims of Chinese interference in the 2020 election, to override the Constitution’s clear assignment of election administration to the states. If signed: no mail-in ballots. All 211 million registered voters are required to re-register in person with proof of citizenship before November 2026. All ballots hand-counted. The DOJ, DHS, and USCIS are authorized to determine voter eligibility. Legal experts across the political spectrum have called it blatantly unconstitutional. That has not stopped this administration before.

The Documented Tactics and What They’re Actually For

Trump has a problem: the Constitution clearly assigns elections to the states. He cannot federalize or cancel them outright. This can give us false comfort. **The point is not to cancel the elections. The point is to generate enough chaos, legal uncertainty, and manufactured doubt to suspend certification, and in that void, consolidate power around the people already holding it.**

Here is how the pieces fit together.

Ballot seizures: manufacturing the evidence base. In January 2026, the FBI raided the Fulton County election facility and seized 656 boxes of 2020 ballots, with the Director of National Intelligence personally present. The warrant was based on claims from a documented Stop the Steal election denier, repeatedly debunked by Georgia's own Republican Secretary of State. In March 2026, a California sheriff seized 650,000 ballots over a discrepancy of 103 votes. These are not investigations in the sense of authentic, legally sound, independent investigations to seek the truth. They are political performances: physical, visual, headline-ready "evidence" being assembled to support a predetermined narrative of foreign interference.

Voter roll demands: seizing control of who gets to vote. The Justice Department has sued 29 states and DC demanding unredacted voter registration databases: names, birthdates, driver's license numbers, partial Social Security numbers. Even Republican-led states have refused: Utah, Oklahoma, Kentucky, West Virginia. Three federal courts have dismissed the DOJ's legal theory. The voter rolls serve multiple purposes: manufacturing "evidence" of ineligible voters to feed the fraud propaganda, building a national database that can be used to purge voter rolls at scale (targeting dense, diverse urban counties and critical political geographies), and creating the legal and administrative tools to challenge and intimidate voters. This is about consolidating control over who votes and using that control to rig the playing field before a single ballot is cast.

Loyalists and deniers installed in key positions. Top election security roles at the White House and DHS are now held by 2020 election deniers, including people who spread conspiracy theories in Pennsylvania and attempted to overturn results in court. In Trump's first term, AG Bill Barr refused to seize voting machines. His current appointees are unlikely to hold that line. And beyond the federal level, MAGA-aligned operatives have executed a long-term strategy to train and place election deniers as local election judges and election commission members throughout state administration infrastructure.

The Maduro play: cultivating a foreign witness. In January 2026, the Trump administration captured Venezuelan President Maduro. Within days, a parallel narrative emerged: that Venezuela controlled U.S. voting machines through Dominion and Smartmatic, and that Maduro has evidence of 2020 fraud. The Venezuela/Dominion theory was ruled false in a Delaware court in 2023, and Fox News, Newsmax, and OAN paid hundreds of millions in defamation settlements acknowledging they had no proof. The point is not to win in court. The point is to have a live witness in federal custody who can corroborate a narrative already seeded in millions of people's heads.

ICE at the polls: named, planned, and previewed. Bannon has explicitly called the ICE airport deployment a test run for polling places in November 2026. Nominated DHS Secretary Mullin has not ruled it out. The mere presence of ICE or CBP near polling locations, even without direct interaction, suppresses legal voters, particularly in mixed-status communities and communities of color. That is the point.

Defunding election observers. The White House is considering eliminating the federal election observer program, authorized under the Voting Rights Act since 1965. More than

1,000 federal observers were deployed in 2012. Gutting this program removes independent verification infrastructure exactly when it is most needed.

The pre-emptive fraud narrative. In 2020, the fraud narrative was deployed reactively, after results came in. In 2026, it is being built in advance. In January and February 2026, right-wing influencers with millions of followers flooded social media with videos claiming to expose voter fraud: Benny Johnson standing in front of a vacant lot in Venice Beach claiming 26 people were fraudulently registered there. Democracy Docket investigated and found every claim was false or deliberately misleading. The videos had already been viewed millions of times. The goal is to seed the narrative so broadly that when the administration claims fraud in November, millions of people will feel they already knew it was coming. Silence in the face of it gets read as confirmation.

The racial logic underneath the strategy. None of this is race-neutral, and we should stop analyzing it as if it is. The ballot seizures target Fulton County, not suburban Atlanta. The voter roll demands are designed to enable purges in dense, diverse urban counties, not rural ones. ICE at the polls suppresses Latino and immigrant communities by design. Ken Paxton's mid-count lawfare in the 2026 Texas primary targeted Black voters in Dallas. The "fraud" narrative has always been a racial narrative in procedural clothing: "fraud" means Black people voted in Detroit and Atlanta and Philadelphia. "Illegal voting" means immigrants existed near a ballot box in Phoenix and Houston. This is not incidental to the strategy. It is the engine. The right has used racial division to break democratic majorities for generations. The specific genius of the current play is that it launders white nationalist voter suppression through the language of "election integrity," making it palatable to people who would never sign on to the project if it were named plainly. **Our analysis has to name it plainly, because our response depends on refusing the racial division their strategy requires.**

The Goal Is Not to Win the Election. The Goal Is a Power Grab.

Trump does not need to cancel the elections. He does not need to win outright. He does not even need the courts to rule in his favor. **He needs enough chaos, enough contested ballots, enough court injunctions, enough ICE near polling places, enough emergency motions claiming foreign interference, to throw the outcome into legal uncertainty for weeks or months.** Courts are slow. Appeals take time. And while the litigation grinds forward, Congress cannot be seated. Certification is blocked. This is how Trump survived as a terrible businessman: tie everything up in courts so that the bill never comes due.

They tested this strategy with the seven-week delayed seating of Congresswoman Adelita Grijalva of Arizona to suspend the vote on the Epstein file release. A 17-page draft executive order, circulating with reported White House coordination, makes the full play explicit.

This is why the fraud narrative must be seeded before the election. Why the evidence base is being assembled now. Why the legal mechanisms and executive orders are already drafted and ready. And why everything in this framework must be built before November, not assembled during the crisis.

Organizing States to Meet the Moment: Unleashing a Civil Society Strategy

This is not a mobilization program, although mobilization is necessary. It is a set of strategic capacities, grounded in critical states, driven by in-state organizing organizations, labor unions, and pro-democracy actors, that builds shared analysis, distributed leadership, and the ability to fight back on multiple fronts simultaneously.

When authoritarian power moves to consolidate itself, there is a powerful temptation to look upward for salvation: to the courts, to lawyers, to elected officials. That instinct is understandable. It is also a deadly mistake. Courts function when there is a public demanding that they function. Lawyers have standing when there are people behind them. Politicians find their nerve when they feel a floor of organized people beneath their feet. Without that foundation, institutions fold, not because the people in them are cowardly (though some of them are), but because institutional power without popular legitimacy is hollow.

Civil society is the broad, distributed, multi-sector mobilization of everyday people behaving, with agency, as if the Constitution applies to them. And in doing so, making it apply.

This is why multi-racial formation is not just a value we hold. It is a strategic necessity. Their entire strategy depends on dividing us by race: convincing white Americans that election fraud is a problem caused by Black and brown voters, and convincing communities of color that the system is too broken to bother with. A civil society response that is racially siloed, or that treats multi-racial solidarity as an afterthought, will lose. The only formation that can withstand this strategy is one where Black, brown, white, Indigenous, and immigrant communities are aligned with shared analysis, shared stakes and prepared to explicitly call out, go public and make illegitimate the white nationalist strategy at the heart of the MAGA program.

The steps that follow are sequential in preparation and simultaneous in activation.

Step 1: Know Your State

Before any action is possible, in-state actors need a rigorous, ground-level understanding of three things: the macro threat landscape, the specific vulnerabilities of their state's election administration system, and a genuine power analysis of the people and institutions inside it.

The Macro Threat Landscape

Every in-state coalition needs a shared, accurate understanding of the unified federal threat strategy described above. This is not background reading; it is the strategic frame without which all local preparation is preparing for the wrong battle.

Many organizers, stakeholders, and elected officials are still operating with a paradigm built for "normal" elections, a semi-polite contest for swing voters in 28 battleground

districts. That frame will fail us in 2026. The first step is getting everyone clear on the real strategic conditions, what is coming and why, and refusing to let anyone dismiss this threat. We need a broadly held shared analysis, socialized across grassroots and grassroots, one that expands people's imagination for the full range of what is possible, including the extreme ends of the threat.

State-Specific Threat Mapping

The question is not only: what is the federal government doing? The question is: given how *our* state administers elections, where are *we* specifically vulnerable?

This requires mapping the actual machinery of election administration, which is rarely just the Governor and Secretary of State. It includes: county boards of commissioners and their authority over election administration; county clerks and auditors who run the day-to-day machinery (much of which is run by union members and civic leaders); local election boards and their composition (are there loyalists and deniers already seated?); sheriffs, who have shown in California and Georgia that they can be weaponized; state legislative committees with jurisdiction over election law; the specific certification process and timeline (where are the chokepoints?); and which counties or jurisdictions are most vulnerable to slowdown tactics in critical political geographies.

In many states across the country in 2020, the right-wing playbook was to plant election deniers as election judges, certifiers and pressure county boards to pass hand-count resolutions, not to win outright, but to *slow everything down*. Our job is to count the votes and certify the election and seat the winners. Their job is to slow everything down, sow confusion and chaos, weaponize the courts, and suspend certainty. The threat map must anticipate the *slowdown* strategy specifically: Are lawyers and MAGA-aligned candidates already planning injunctions? Have they attempted this before? Who are the specific county officials who might comply, or refuse?

Power Analysis of the Machinery

Knowing who sits in which seat is not enough. A genuine power analysis asks: who has leverage over that person? What does it take to move or block a specific decision? Who are the allies already inside the system? What is the procedural timeline for each key decision? Who could be positioned for sabotage? What conservative or election denier lawyers are positioned to act, and when? What have you already seen play out, and what does it reveal about the network of power being utilized?

This is the organizing discipline most pro-democracy coalitions skip. It is the most important thing to do first.

Step 2: Deterrence, Extracting a Political Cost Every Time

Deterrence has two modes that must work in concert: proactive pre-emption (showing up before the play is run) and decisive rapid response (making every move they make publicly and, if applicable, legally costly within hours, not days).

Mode A: Proactive Pre-emption, Show Up Ahead of Time

The most effective deterrence is preventing the threat from materializing in the first place. This means deploying organized people into the specific vulnerable spaces (county board meetings, legislative hearings, certification processes) well before November. The job is to pre-position the case against their power grab by naming their strategy in public, making it transparent, and going on offense.

Georgia's model: Civil society organizations collaborated with scholars who reminded public officials at the county and state level of the pain of past voter suppression efforts. The Black Male Initiative and the Scholars Strategy Network built a non-partisan mass meeting with the Secretary of State and county and state officials. This built a moral foundation for county officials to stand on and declare their support for a fair election. The pledges made at this meeting were then leveraged at each contested county, and importantly at the state level in Atlanta.

Minnesota's model: We Choose Us, a pro-democracy grassroots coalition, built grassroots County Defense Teams. They went to county board meetings over the summer to fight off "hand-count" resolutions. This worked on two levels: practical (stop the resolution before it passes) and political (make the move publicly costly, because most voters, including in red-leaning counties, do not support their county government participating in schemes to muddy up counting the votes).

Both models share the same design principle: the teams were locally rooted, led by people who live there, know the board members, and are trusted messengers who can speak to their neighbors. That is durable and persuasive in a way that national rapid-response infrastructure is not. This tactic can be adapted for any unit of power: county, city, or state legislative units can all be moved by localized pro-democracy formations. The key is to act first. Pass pro-democracy or pro-count-the-vote resolutions, host local events with officials and elections experts and grassroots leaders to shore up commitments. Or, if election deniers are moving a strategy, formations are ready to respond immediately, go public, and name the strategy transparently. When someone is up to no good, the hardest people to look in the eye are your own neighbors. Shame can be a powerful deterrent.

Mode B: Rapid Response, Multi-Track, Simultaneous, Pre-Built

When the weaponized federal government moves (a ballot seizure, a demand for voter rolls, a sheriff appearing at a counting center, ICE at county buildings where people vote early) there must be a coordinated response that fires simultaneously across all tracks. This infrastructure cannot be assembled during the crisis. It must be built and rehearsed before it.

Just as small business owners from Chicago to Minneapolis to North Carolina were trained on their rights and rehearsed what to do when ICE came knocking, local election judges, volunteers, and county office staff must know their rights before someone in a uniform shows up at their door. Just because someone in a suit or with a badge demands something doesn't mean you have to comply. People need to emotionally rehearse the conflict and

know what steps to take when the adrenaline is high. This worked in Georgia in 2020 and 2024, where trained local formations intervened decisively at critical moments.

The response has five simultaneous tracks:

Legal: Pre-positioned lawyers who can file for emergency injunctions within hours. Election law experts have noted that getting injunctions in advance of anticipated interference, not after it occurs, may be the most effective strategy available. Local officials must know their legal options before a demand is made, not while someone in a uniform is standing in front of them.

Political: Elected officials, grassroots leaders, and movement partners activated immediately. No legal strategy should exist without a political and public strategy running alongside it because a lack of public response is always interpreted as public acquiescence. They will do what they think they can get away with.

Press and Public: Spokespeople ready, narrative framed in advance, press events that call out the behavior by name. Every unlawful move must be made publicly costly within hours.

Tactical/Operational: Election workers and officials trained and scenario-planned. If someone demands ballots, access to equipment, or voter identification without legal authority: *do not comply*. Call this number. Stall. A lawyer is on the way. The pro-democracy rapid response networks are coming.

Grassroots Deployment: In 2020, the attempt to overturn the election results was interrupted by grassroots leaders prepared and ready to mobilize. MOSES in Detroit built a protect-the-vote team which directly stopped a “stop the steal” effort to shut down the vote counting in Wayne County. LUCHA in Maricopa County mobilized to ensure that election administrators were not interrupted physically in counting the ballots.

The tactical logic underneath all of this: slow *them* down and extract a political cost. Make every move they make expensive, contested, and slow. Mirror their own playbook back at them.

Step 3: Build State Capacity

Steps 1 and 2 require infrastructure. Step 3 is how you build it, across two tracks that must work together.

Track A: A State Democracy Nerve Center

Every target state needs a coordination and shared strategy network linking legal expertise, elected officials, state-level officials, movement leaders, grassroots organizations, labor leaders, and local electeds. Call it a nerve center. It aligns nodes of leaders, each with clear spheres of influence, who share a strategic analysis, move work in their own spheres, prepare their own networks, and share, align, and coordinate strategic response.

This is not another coalition. Every state already has coalitions. What most states do not have is a body that: shares a common, rigorous analysis of state-specific threats and vulnerabilities to their election administration process and the politics that underlie it; has done genuine scenario planning, not for the most likely scenario, but for the full bands of possibility; has inoculated all relevant players *before* the crisis, so that when a move is made, no one is encountering it for the first time; has pre-assigned roles and responsibilities for each scenario; and meets regularly enough that trust and communication are already established when speed is required.

The problem in America is that we are inexperienced with lawless, authoritarian behavior. We are caught unprepared and we lack imagination for what the bands of possibility really are. The scenario planning must go further than feels comfortable.

Scenarios to plan for explicitly: attempted stoppage of the count; ICE or CBP deployment at or near polling places; lawfare deployed mid-count (as Ken Paxton attempted in the 2026 Texas primary, targeting Black voters in Dallas); MAGA media armies declaring fraud before the count is finished; federal agents appearing at counting centers demanding access; certification refusal by a county board.

The nerve center should work with partners including Protect Democracy, the Brennan Center for Justice, Democracy Docket, the ACLU, and the 866-OUR-VOTE coalition, all of whom have state-specific legal resources and scenario-planning capacity.

Track B: Mass Training of Grassroots Leaders

Community leaders are the foundation of any success for this strategy. A community leader is someone with a real network of relationships, in their neighborhood, school, congregation, childcare center, apartment building. These leaders are essential to organizing scaled and aligned public action with agency, and to maintaining a distributed strategy that cannot be decapitated.

The training has two components.

Political education. Many grassroots people are actually ahead of elites and elected officials in their sense of alarm about the upcoming elections. They want to hear an articulation of how Trump's power grab is not only about the results of an election, but about consolidating his power to continue to advance his corrupt agenda for himself and his billionaire friends. People understand, even if they voted for him, that this Administration is not working on their behalf, and the election is one shot people have to course-correct. The stakes are high not only to protect and defend our right to free and fair elections, but our right to a responsive and accountable government that delivers to working people. What local grassroots formations need is a coherent analysis, a clear picture of the Trump strategy, and a strategic program of action that they can lead with confidence. Political education builds that shared, accurate picture. Connected to our interests and desired agenda, people need to understand *our plan* and what we can do about it. That clarity is what turns alarm into distributed, action-oriented leadership.

Tactical preparation. This is concrete, role-specific, and scenario-based. Not a lecture, a rehearsal. The training must answer: what do *you* do when X happens? A poll worker. A county commissioner. A union steward. A volunteer accompanier. Each role has a specific set of actions. Each scenario has a specific protocol. *This is what you see. This is what you do. This is who you call.*

This is, in effect, the federal election observer program (the very program the White House is trying to defund) rebuilt from the ground up at the community level, without bureaucracy and grounded in a power and leadership orientation. The training should be designed to be delivered by in-state partners: labor unions, congregations, community organizations, civic groups. The accompanying operational playbook details specific training models, relational research actions, and tactical protocols for implementation.

Step 4: Fight Back in Real Time

Step 4 is activation. Strategic capacity is built to be nimble and adaptable under conditions of radical uncertainty. We do not know which state or location will be targeted. We do not know precisely how. What we know is that this Administration will attempt to weaponize the federal government to sow chaos through sabotage, and that even if the fight is not in our own backyards, we will need to mobilize for free and fair elections everywhere, because we all have a stake in the outcome.

The opposition will move on multiple fronts simultaneously. The response must do the same.

Courts: Pre-positioned legal teams filing emergency injunctions, not scrambling to find lawyers. In some cases, filing for injunctions in advance of anticipated interference.

Field: Trained accompaniers at polling places. County Defense Teams activated. Grassroots volunteers deployed through the infrastructure already built. People physically present, protecting the vote. Just as we legally observed ICE and CBP through constitutional legal observer networks in Minnesota, we will observe, witness, and protect our neighbors' right to vote.

Mainstream media: Brief selected reporters ahead of time. Share concerns, share what we are looking for, frame the contest before the chaos begins. Immediately call and share with the press any interference of *any* kind. This is about our constitutional right to vote, our democracy, and our freedoms. We are the protectors and guardians of that right.

Social and digital: A counter-narrative operation ready to respond to the fraud claims before they take hold. The fraud narrative will start before the count is finished. Silence is interpreted as confirmation. The counter must be pre-built and pre-positioned. Do not let propaganda go unanswered. Address it and launch a counter-offensive immediately.

Institutional: Elected officials, county voting officials, governors, attorneys general speaking with coordinated voice and a clear operational plan when harassment, death threats, the MAGA smear machine, and aggressive MAGA activists turn up at the door.

Non-compliance: Election workers and officials who know exactly what they will and will not do when unlawful demands are made, and who have legal backup ready when they refuse.

The animating principle: act free to be free. Organized civil society acts as if the Constitution applies, demands its rights out loud, in public, and in doing so, makes them real.

Step 5: Mass Mobilization and Strategic Non-Compliance, When the Rubicon Is Crossed

The four steps above are built for a fight through election day and the immediate aftermath, one where the process is being manipulated, slowed, and corrupted, but where democratic institutions still nominally function. Maybe we prevent them from accomplishing their goal. But maybe we don't.

We must also prepare for a harder scenario.

If duly elected leaders are not seated. If Congress is suspended or its constitutional role is nullified through *delay*. If the results of a free and fair election are simply refused. In those moments, the courts will be too slow. The lawyers will need time we do not have. The institutions we are counting on to hold will be precisely the ones under attack.

In that scenario, civil society cannot wait. It must move, and it must move with the speed, scale, and clarity that only comes from preparation done long before the crisis arrives.

The Minnesota Proof of Concept

When the federal government occupied our communities in January 2026, up to 350,000 Minnesotans withheld their labor on January 23rd, the first general strike in more than 40 years. The Day of Truth and Freedom. Labor, faith, and community organizations came together to call for a day of "No Work, No School, No Shopping" and it was executed in two weeks. *Two weeks*. When the strategic conditions shift, what was once impossible becomes possible, but only if people and leaders are already prepared. The months of nonviolent direct action, constitutional observer training, and investment in decentralized community leadership made it possible. That synthesized with an acute crisis, and it moved.

Given the stakes for our country and our lives, this needs to be the floor. Not the ceiling.

What This Step Requires

Between now and November, we have to rehearse and exercise our muscles in the traditions of non-violent civil resistance. Movement organizations and beyond should find ways to socialize the narrative, to bring thousands, then tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands of people into a shared understanding of what is at stake and what their role is, so that if the moment comes, we are not building from scratch.

We do not have millions of dollars or the prestige of elite actors, but we do have people. And those people have power if they wield it in concerted, non-violent direct action.

Sustained physical presence at sites of high symbolism: the U.S. Capitol, state capitols, large public squares. If they try to take our right to free and fair elections, we cannot have a “day of action.” We need to suspend the daily order of things. Constant vigils, witness, occupation of public spaces. Our bodies need to be out, on display, demonstrating our refusal to comply.

General strikes and economic non-compliance. Coordinated work stoppages, business closures, and economic withdrawal that make the cost of unconstitutional action visible and felt. If corporations and the business elite will not fight, then we will not work, we will not go to school, we will not buy their products. This is about sustained pressure. We must stop the daily order of things.

Nonviolent strategic direct action. Targeted, disciplined, nonviolent disruption aimed at the specific actors and organizations that are either explicitly trying to end our democracy or complicit in the suspension of our constitutional order. Sit-ins, strikes, occupations, direct action.

Pre-built municipal and state infrastructure. Cities and states must prepare now, not improvise in the moment. Governors, mayors, city councils, and state legislatures need to have already discussed, already decided, and already communicated what they will do if the constitutional order is suspended.

The Through Line

We do not have a guarantee that everyday Americans will meet the moment. That is the truth. Nothing is predetermined. **What we do know is that the kind of leadership required in the face of tremendous uncertainty can be cultivated.** The Day of Truth and Freedom happened because people leaned in when the choice was clear and decided to take a powerful risk. The woman in the pink coat who stepped forward with her iPhone when CBP was murdering Alex Pretti made a courageous choice that worked to expose the lies of DHS. That kind of leadership does not emerge from nowhere. It emerges from formation through organizing, from shared analysis, from people who have already processed the stakes and know what they are willing to risk when the moment comes.

That is what we are building. Not a guarantee. A readiness to shape our future when everything is on the line.

We can clarify the stakes. We can pose the question. We can extend the invitation. We can prepare hundreds of leaders so that when we arrive at the moment between the past and the future, right there, in that space, they are ready to choose.

What happens next depends on what people decide. That is why democracy is hard. And it is why it is worth fighting for, because freedom feels just like this: it is unpredictable and wild.

Sources and Citations

1. Washington Post / PBS NewsHour — 17-Page Draft Executive Order on Elections — reported February 26, 2026. [Trump says he's not mulling a draft executive order to seize control over elections. Here's what we know](#)
2. Democracy Docket — Full Text of Draft Executive Order — February 2026. [Read a draft of the emergency executive order for Trump to take control of elections](#)
3. Center for American Progress — Trump Administration Has No Legal Authority to Take Over Elections. [The Trump Administration Has No Legal Authority To Invoke National Security and Take Over Elections](#)
4. ProPublica — FBI's Search of Fulton County, Georgia, Election Center Is Unprecedented, Experts Say (January 29, 2026). [FBI's Search of Fulton County, Georgia, Election Center Is Unprecedented, Experts Say](#)
5. CNN — 2020 Election Deniers Drove FBI's Fulton County Warrant (February 10, 2026). [2020 election deniers drove the FBI's seizures of Fulton County ballots, new documents show](#)
6. Democracy Docket — GOP Sheriff Seizes 650,000 Ballots in Challenge to California Redistricting Vote (March 2026). [GOP sheriff seizes 650,000 ballots in challenge to California redistricting vote](#)
7. DOJ — Justice Department Sues Five Additional States for Voter Rolls (February 26, 2026). [Justice Department Sues Five Additional States for Failure to Produce Voter Rolls](#)
8. Brennan Center — Trump Administration Has Sued More Than 20 States for Refusing to Turn Over Voter Files. [Trump Administration Has Sued More than 20 States for Refusing to Turn Over Voter Files](#). See also: [Tracker of Justice Department Requests for Voter Information](#)
9. Politico — Bannon Calls for ICE and Military at Polling Sites (February 4, 2026). [Steve Bannon calls for Trump to deploy ICE and military troops to polling sites](#)
10. Democracy Docket — Secretary Noem Won't Rule Out ICE at Polls (March 3, 2026). [Noem won't rule out ICE agents at polls](#)
11. ProPublica — Heather Honey, Election Denier, Appointed to DHS (August 26, 2025). [Heather Honey, election denier, appointed to DHS](#)
12. Politico — Democratic AGs War-Gaming Election Defense (February 23, 2026). [Dem AGs plot to thwart Trump election interference](#)
13. Election Protection Coalition — 866ourvote.org
14. Brennan Center — Laws Protecting Voters from Intimidation. [Laws Protecting Voters and Election Workers from Intimidation](#)

15. Protect Democracy — protectdemocracy.org
16. Democracy Docket — democracydocket.com
17. Democracy Docket — Right-Wing Influencers Are Going Viral Claiming Voter Fraud (February 16, 2026). [Right-wing influencers are going viral claiming voter fraud. The problem? They're wrong](#)
18. Democracy Docket — Election Deniers Think Maduro's Capture Will Expose Plot to Steal 2020 Vote (January 6, 2026). [Election deniers think Maduro's capture will expose plot to steal 2020 vote](#)
19. MSNBC/Rachel Maddow Blog — Trump Advances Bizarre Conspiracy Theory About Venezuela, 2020 Election (January 21, 2026). [Trump advances bizarre conspiracy theory about Venezuela, 2020 election](#)