

# STOPPING THE COUP

## DISRUPTION

### THE ~~ELECTION~~ GUIDE FOR 2020

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# GUIDE TO THE GUIDE

Throughout U.S. history, national politics has moved back and forth between conservative and liberal poles. Nixon, Reagan, and Bush followed the civil rights movement; Trump followed Obama. Conservative backlash follows liberal “progress.” But neither pole has fully fulfilled the cries for justice amongst black, poor, indigenous, queer, trans, and marginalized peoples. Things seem to change, but in the end, so much remains the same.

This year, however, seems to be a flashpoint. We are at a moment in which many people have become so tired of the status quo that they have mobilized in the name of justice. From antiblack violence to pandemics, from environmental devastation to indigenous and queer and trans erasure, we’ve seen people stand up against injustice that affects all of us.

We want to lift up the reality that by working together we can make change happen. We offer this guide as a resource to help with your efforts.

This guide can be used beyond the election, offering resources from a broader movement mindset that are not just for this moment.

## **What is the Goal of this Guide?**

This guide offers a framing and organizational approach to respond to our current electoral moment. We live under a president who is energized by the forces of white supremacy and brutal capitalism. He is empowered to use the state’s resources to repress dissent. And he is encouraged and emboldened by a mass of people who share his interests. We believe the 2020 election will be a flashpoint, and we must be ready.

*If the right is prepared to steal the election then we must be prepared to disrupt the status quo and resist. This guide offers resources for organizing in your communities across the country.*

*It does not encourage or endorse bringing harm to any living thing.*

The 2020 election may be a pivotal moment to build toward a vision of transformation. We all must unequivocally acknowledge that there will be issues that remain long after the election is over--things that will require long and sustained organizing efforts. People have been throwing down all across the country for months, so this can't be just a "call to the streets." Rather, we need to talk about what's happening broadly and make a case for developing that street sense into broad, collective strategic action. This guide is a contribution to those efforts.

## TWO MAJOR GOALS

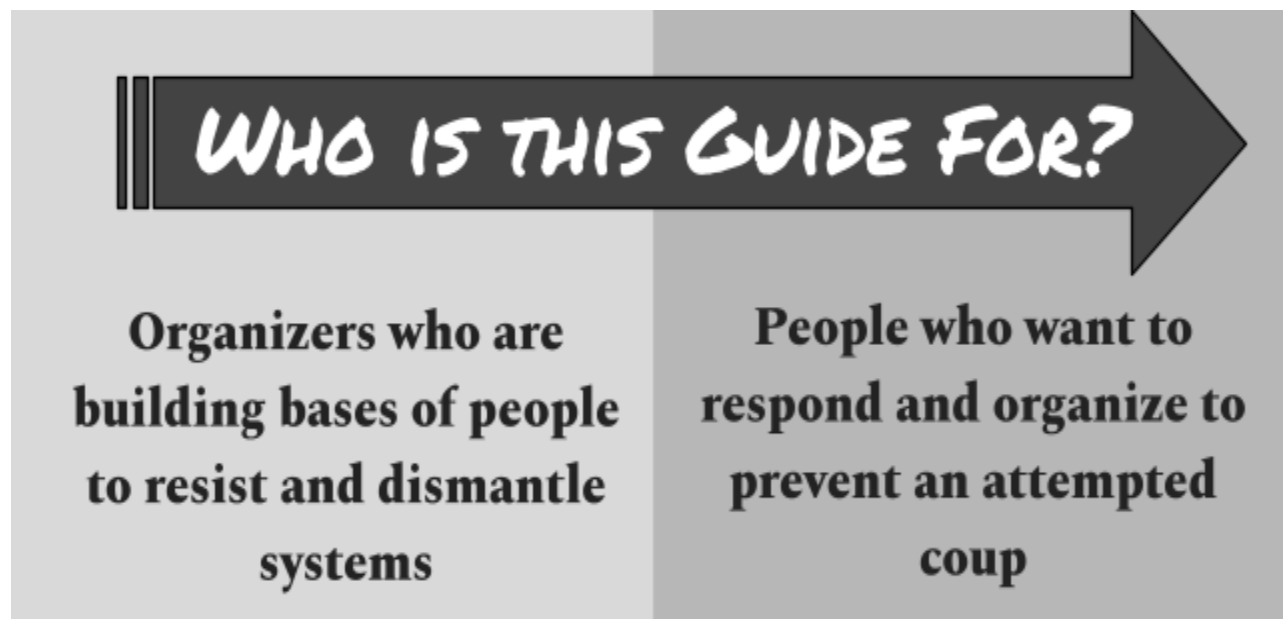
### FORMATION

**Provide resources for those who want to organize strategically and develop infrastructure for widespread and localized disruption in the event of a stolen election**

### COLLABORATION

**Help people who are already organizing and mobilizing connect with one another**

Whether you're from Iowa or Portland, Chicago or rural Ohio; whether you've been in the game for a while or you're just starting out, we hope that this guide might offer ideas, strategies, and connections for fomenting and mobilizing large-scale and widespread disruptive activity if there is a coup.



We want to be clear, though: ***we are not interested in overshadowing the work done by others.*** There are already many people, communities, and organizations who are already throwing down, already doing the work. This guide is simply a resource that offers support for those who are interested.

For those who are already organizing, you might find two parts of this guide most useful: the [\*\*Organizing to Prevent a Coup\*\*](#) and [\*\*risk assessment sections, as well as the resources\*\*](#) at the end of the guide. There, you will find organizations who are doing similar work, as well as strategies for collaborating across regions and cities.

For those of you who are a bit newer to this work, you might find the [\*\*Thinking Strategically\*\*](#) section to be most useful. There, you will find ideas for organizing communities, mobilizing people, and providing resources for people once mobilization happens.

*More information on organizing*  
*[Resources for Movement Building](#)*

## **A Few Final Comments**

We've laid out our framing of the election not as a before/after scenario, but rather in the context of ongoing issues we face in the moment (militia movement, organized voter repression, etc) that will be present no matter the outcome. We're absolutely not saying the election is useless, but rather the reactivity of the right and the white supremacist will be present no matter who wins (and certainly is present beforehand), but the election will massively change the political terrain for movements over the next four years.

We want to be clear that this guide is a *living* document. As we gather more information, it will grow and change. We want to work with people and communities, so the more we find out, the more this document will grow.

# FRAMING AND THE ELECTION PROCESS

This section will discuss how we should prepare for the election. It will specifically discuss how we can prepare during the lead-up to the election, what we should be looking out for on election day, what we will need (to do) if the current president loses and doesn't want to leave, and how we will need to sustain our actions even after the election is over.

The election is already under attack. We know that individual power holders and institutions are trying to repress the vote. The Postmaster has tried to gut the post office; Florida is disenfranchising people with previous convictions, and on top of this, there are also things that we have little ability to impact--things like Russian interference and lies on social media. Since we anticipate that the election will be contested once the votes begin to roll in, we must prepare.

There are many groups working to protect the election in 2020. [Hold the Line has provided an incredibly detailed document for preparing for the election](#) that contains many good resources and solid strategic thinking. [We've also provided a list of others working on this issue.](#) But the Stopping the Coup guide is different; it offers ways of thinking and enacting a disruption of the status quo in the context of the election without needing to ally with the police or make moral assumptions about tactical choices. We have seen, in city after city, clear signs that police collaborate with white supremacists as purveyors of violence, rather than as people who are there to protect first amendment rights.

## 4 Phases of the Election

Date	Phase	Marked By
Now- Nov 3	<b><i>Lead Up</i></b>	Organizing, Planning, Voter Repression Resistance, Voter Registration and Information Distribution
Nov 3	<b><i>Election Day</i></b>	Direct Voter Assistance, Dealing with Voter Intimidation, Potential Actions at Boards of Elections
Nov 3 - Dec 14	<b><i>Count Every Vote</i></b>	Action to demand that no winner be announced until every vote is counted, mass coordinated action
Unknown	<b><i>False Declaration of Victory</i></b>	Mass Direct Action Mobilizing, Civil Disobedience and Broad Resistance

## The Lead Up

Trump is a narcissist and an authoritarian, and the entire conservative movement is happy to use him to maintain power, which means they will not allow the election to proceed without some severe amount of meddling. We might expect to see continued shows of force by DHS, ICE, and other policing (and possibly military) institutions during the lead up to the election as well as more subtle tactics. Everyone working on this issue shares an assessment of the basic questions that we should be considering in the lead up to November.

### ***Is everyone who has registered to vote on the voter rolls?***

In the pandemic it has been increasingly hard for people to register to vote. This is important not just for first-time voters, but also for voters who have moved and need to change their address. Most states had a provision for voters to register online. But, it can be very cumbersome and it is not clear that everyone who registered will be on the rolls. If you want to know more about the electoral process--particularly the mail-in electoral process--you can look [here](#) and [here](#). If individuals need



to check on their voting status, they can also go to [www.vote.org](http://www.vote.org). We must pay attention to trends; if you see a pattern and practice of voters not being put on the rolls, it will be necessary to [organize actions](#) to help ensure a fair election in your local area.

### ***Are there a sufficient number of polling places?***

In the recent primary election in Kentucky, Louisville had *only one* polling location. In Milwaukee, *only five* polling stations were open in the city. This is unacceptable. There are two things that we can do here. First, you can be a poll worker. Go to [www.powertothepolls.org](http://www.powertothepolls.org) where you and others can sign up to be a poll worker to ameliorate the shortage.

Second--and this will be a theme throughout this guide--you can organize direct action against Boards of Elections and Secretaries of State at the point it becomes clear that there is a lack of polling locations.

### ***Is everyone eligible to vote by mail able to receive a mail-in ballot?***

Sometimes, everyone who should receive a mail-in ballot doesn't always get them. Your region will doubtless have many organizations that will help individuals track their ballots, but some boards of elections may simply decide to forget to mail out ballots. Again, we should be ready to augment the lawsuits by occupying boards of elections and demand everyone receive a ballot.

We want to be clear: this election is already contested. We must be prepared to take action to ensure, as best we can, a fair election.

## **Election Day**

There is no re-do of Election Day. So we must protect voters leading up to this day, as well as on the day itself. There are at least three things to be aware and wary of on Election Day.

### ***Armed Militias Attempting to Thwart “Voter Fraud”***

[There is a legitimate concern](#) that armed white supremacist militias might attempt to scare voters away under the guise of monitoring fraud. Later in this guide, you can find some tips on dealing with militias and white supremacists. Folks working in the Frontline are [organizing people to help do poll watching](#) and on the ground de-escalation of people who might attempt to intimidate voters at the polls.

## ***Provisional Ballots***

A large number of people whose registration is in doubt may be forced to cast provisional ballots. If we hear about this early in the day, we might be able to organize actions against the Board of Elections to create some kind of hotline structure and communication with polls to ensure that votes are counted.

## ***Long Lines and Polls Closing Early***

Because of the shortage of polling stations, it's possible that people will still be waiting in line as the polls close. History has shown that raising a ruckus keeps the polls open, and the law protects those who are in line and gives them the right to cast their ballot.

## **Count Every Vote**

There are an infinite number of scenarios that can transpire between Election Day and when the election is finally over. Here are some general thoughts on what might happen

## ***Counting the Votes***

All the votes need to be counted: Many states have laws on the books that **forbid votes to begin to be counted before Nov 3rd**. This means there will be a period of time after the election where there is no clear winner. We'll have until **December 14th** (when the electoral college meets) to push for every vote to be counted. At the very least we should be prepared to engage in public actions that ***demand every vote be counted before a winner is named***. Putting pressure on the media and social media agencies to refuse to declare a victor, resisting demands to call the vote in favor of Trump, physically protecting the vote count from counter-protestors, federal agents, or white supremacist militias are all potential actions in this moment.

## ***The Narrative Around Fraud***

We will see clear signs on Election Night or the next day whether the Republican playbook will claim all uncounted votes are fraudulent. Trump may try to declare himself the victor before the votes are counted, or Fox News might call the race. Those who can should be prepared to take action against those who are feeding into the stolen election narrative, including social media companies that are letting falsehoods or incitements to violence spread.

## ***Superseding Election Results***

The final case of emergency is whether there are drastic actions taken to reverse the election results. For example, the Attorney General could attempt to seize all mail-in ballots and invalidate them. Or, states with Republican-controlled legislators could authorize their own set of electors regardless of the outcome of the election.

***As these scenarios play out it is our job to engage in action that is calibrated with the scale of what is happening. As attempts to defraud the vote count escalates, it is our obligation to shut things down and demand a true reckoning of the democratic process.***

# FALSE DECLARATION OF VICTORY

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*The major strategic initiative we hold in the context of a coup is to deny all legitimacy to those taking power through non compliance, strikes, refusals to participate, and disruptive action.*

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We can assume that there will be mass confusion about what actually happened on election day and the following ballot counting period. We know Republicans will lie, manipulate, red bait, and antifa-bait their base. And we also know that the president will use the power available to him to influence the election in his favor. An attempted coup is possible--and perhaps probable. In the end, the actual electorate might be split, half truly believing that Trump was elected legally, and half knowing that he was not.

**It is in this muddled context of legal and political wrangling that we must take action. We cannot wait to see how the chips fall. That will only ensure more power for the violent white supremacist machine that is the Trump administration and its supporters.**

We want to be clear here, though: we are not a group of Biden supporters. This is not about ensuring that the Democrats win, but actually preparing for the possibility that white supremacist violence will continue.

So what, then, can we do? In short, ***we can resist***. Resistance in this context must be more than symbolic action. That context demands more than marches facilitated by local authorities. We don't need to be walking hand-in-hand with the very institutions that oppress and kill us.

What we need to do, then, is ***think strategically, organize effectively, and mobilize massively***. We need to understand and then disrupt the structures that facilitate our demise. We must create our own systems that protect those most vulnerable. We must also realize that *there is a real risk if we take action and lose*. Make no mistake; this is risky work. But there are ways to share the risk--and, in turn,

mitigate some of it. Before we get into specifics about this kind of action, we want you to know: *this kind of disruptive action needs to be direct, sustained, leaderful, and sustainable.*

## **Actions Need to be Direct**

In the context of a coup or highly contested election we need to be clear that our actions must directly affect the structures and pillars of power. Our largest asset in this regard utilizes the ideas of non-compliance through massive, broad based direct action. Where we can, we need to be in the streets, on the highways, or at the sites of power and power holders. In our jobs and lives we must refuse to allow those taking control the legitimacy of the power they seek through strikes, slowdowns, and boycotts, and public refusal to accept an illegitimate ruling party.

## **Actions Need to be Sustained**

As the protests in Minneapolis, Ferguson, Portland, Seattle and countless others here and abroad show, our action needs to be both sufficiently disruptive *and* sustained over weeks or even months.

In planning to prevent a coup in this country we need to imagine our actions as not just one time events, but fully situate our actions within the framework and analysis of resistance and disruption broadly. This might mean holding space for a long period of time (Seattle's Autonomous Zone), it might mean returning to the same location night after night (Portland and Minneapolis). We need to anticipate the resources involved in this; time, human bodies, food, water, money, right wing reactions etc.

## **Actions Need to be Leaderful**

It's important to locate strategic thinking, and offer strategic tools at the grassroots level. If our different organizations, crews, and affinity groups have a shared understanding of the strategy involved we can accommodate different tactics, different groups taking lead on actions at different times, and trust that individual participants and organizers can move with confidence that they are furthering movement goals. This doesn't mean that every group you try to organize with immediately will be the right fit for the fight. It's ok to set an agenda and invite participation and allow groups to choose.

## Action Needs to be Sustainable

*Action cannot be sustained over time unless we find a way to make it sustainable for the people who are keeping it going. We need to anticipate the resources, relationships, and practices involved in this.*

Being able to divvy up the work is essential to the kind of sustained action we need in this moment. Thus, there exists an ***organizational aspect to sustained action***. We must also be tolerant (we don't use the word lightly) of many of our organizing comrades' ability to move independently. Leadership must come from our collective strategy; true leadership is shared. Once a broad strategy is set, then organizations, individuals, and groups can move as needed and make decisions independently. This could look like different groups taking up roles for a single action, or different groups holding down blockade sites that are organized from within their base of support, or different groups taking on action organizing over a long period of time to sustain the pressure.

### **Making Action Sustainable for People**

# ASSESSING AND RESPONDING TO RISK: ARMED MILITIAS AND DIGITAL SECURITY

There will be risks. We must take this seriously. There are costs to disruption. But, we should not let the threat derail us. Security is not an either/or proposition. If there is too much fear, people will not come to the streets and join us. But too much security/secrecy will stop our growth as a people powered movement. Openness supports mass mobilization, secrecy shuts it down. We must strike a balance between the need to create security for our organizing, and creating structures that allow for ease of participation. Some information needs to be distributed widely, other information needs to be held more closely. With regard to armed actors we [have developed a separate guide](#) to better understand what the risks are and how to prepare for armed violence against our protests. In this section, we want to provide a general overview of some of these issues.

## **Physical risks: Armed militias, the threat of violence, and principles for physical security**

There are risks to organizing. Legal risks as well as physical. Repressive state forces and the armed militia movement have grown and become emboldened significantly in recent years. It's important to realize that no matter who wins the election, their presence at our actions will continue and likely escalate. We must keep people engaged. We mustn't let fear stop us from acting. We need to learn about these groups, understand basic elements of risk assessment, take precautions, and develop our political and tactical acumen so we know that when we take action it's worth the risk.

### *Striking a balance*

Further on, this guide offers thoughts about creating organizing structures that can work locally and yet expand to include tens of millions of people who are going to take to the streets in the event of a stolen election.

Physical security at actions is about awareness and preparedness. Digital security before action is about protecting our fellow organizers as best we can. However, we are not going to get hundreds or

thousands of people to adopt digital organizing security protocols, nor should we try. We believe that ultimately our sheer numbers and our defense of the election results is what protects us. In that vein, we would encourage you to prioritize communicating with and inviting in masses of people to action. Later in this document we will talk about action council structures, which enable some groups to be more closed in their communication while having more open structures for the vast majority of participants.

We must understand that the work is necessary. No good work, no transformative work, comes without risk. And, while we can try to lessen some of this risk, we must realize that any kind of mass disruption is going to raise questions and invite unwanted surveillance from the powers that be. We must balance keeping ourselves safe with the need to effectively organize to meet the need of the time.

## ***Quick and Dirty Principles for Physical Security***

**There is an entire separate guide on this topic  
that will be coming out soon**

**Know the flavor of supremacist you are dealing with. Check out the PRA [Field guide](#) to white supremacists. Learn which groups have been active in your area, and track their online presence.**

**Plan as if violence might happen. Establish response protocol, roles, and needs for support and follow up.**

**Train your people on how to respond appropriately. This means not over-reacting, as well as being able to move decisively when needed. This also means doing the [emotional prep](#) work to prepare for being in action together under heightened threat.**

**Lean into your community activist support structures like street medic collectives, safe houses, food support, and jail support.**

**When at your action, operate with a high level of situational awareness. SCAN your surroundings, ID threats, isolate or move threats decisively.**



## ***Digital Risk: Internal communication and security***

We should always anticipate that someone we don't intend is listening to us when we talk. Repressive state forces have a long history of infiltration of activist communities. We understand, however, that if we want to participate in mass movements then we do have to talk to a larger group than just our friends. As we have seen, this will generate more exposure for those who are doing the talking and posting on social media. In many cases this might be a necessary risk worth taking if it makes our action more effective. For smaller tactics conversations, or fine grained planning, we suggest to the largest extent possible keeping those off the internet.

### ***Quick and Dirty Principles for Organizing Security***

**Don't write or record anything you don't want to fall into someone else's hands.**

**Always assume someone is listening.**

**In-person conversations without phones or computers present are the safest way to communicate about the specific details of actions**

**Don't talk about past actions you've been a part of that might pose a risk to others.**

**If you don't have the information you need to do your work safely, then ask. If you don't need the information to do your work, then let it be.**

**Hedge the action ego. We don't all need to know everything about a plan.**

**Operate with trust both as an organizing principle, and as a personal commitment. If your ring of trust is small, practice expanding it.**

**Don't talk to cops, investigators, or federal agents.**

## ***Useful Digital Security Technologies***

Especially since Covid-19, the need to communicate digitally is essential. There are encrypted apps, as well as digital practices that can help protect your communications from unwanted surveillance and intervention. We offer a few of them here.

**Signal**, while having its limitations, is a free and useful encrypted messaging app already in wide use. Setting a disappearing message timer can be helpful in making sure that sensitive information is erased on everyone's phones. We should note that Signal makes it somewhat difficult to delete groups. You have to both delete and block a group to avoid being forcefully rejoined.

**Cryptpad** is an encrypted alternative to the google docs/sheets world. It offers shared documents, spreadsheets, polls and other useful tools for organizing.

**Jitsi** is a free video conferencing app that is gaining popularity because of its encryption technology. However it works best for small groups.

# THINKING STRATEGICALLY: FRAMEWORK FOR BROAD AND SUSTAINED DISRUPTIVE ACTION

As said above, it's clear that armed militias, white supremacists, radically conservative communities like QAnon, and other malicious actors will not stop *regardless of who takes office*. In this vein, ***stopping the coup is a longer-term strategy***. Disrupting the status quo does not end when the votes are counted and someone takes office.

Every action we take uses our resources and puts us at risk. We need to use our resources efficiently, and mitigate our risk by being strategic about what the goal of the action is, and who/what it targets. To think through this requires thinking about power and how to adequately push the powerful to return all power back to the people. In this section, we offer some strategic insights that can help you think through, and respond to, power.

## Spheres of Influence

Your **spheres of influence** are the areas in your life that you inhabit and can affect personally. We might not all be able to get the governor on the phone, but we can organize with those around us to create change. When we think about our spheres of influence, we need to ask “how can I organize with those closest to me for the most impact?” Your spheres of influence might include your workplace, your church, or a collective you are a part of. If we are really facing a coup, some of the usual apolitical institutions like PTAs and Little Leagues might suddenly be politicized. So think broadly about any space you have a stake in where you come into contact with others.

We can think about our spheres of influence in three ways. First, and most simply, it can be a way for us to think about organizing actual people into formations that can be useful. For example, getting our friends together to form a crew that can talk to the organizers planning street actions and offer to take up a role.

Secondly, and somewhat concurrently, we can think of the power that our spheres of influence have over larger systems. Federal employees, like postal workers, have recently been resisting attempts to slow down the mail system before the election by physically reinstalling sorting machines. In some cases these acts were taken independently and in contradiction to orders from senior officials.

Wildcat strikes, possibly independent of larger union formations, like NBA players recently utilized, will also be extremely valuable in grinding our economy to a halt in the context of a larger attempt to prevent a coup. On a smaller scale, after cops responded violently to protesters in Philadelphia, employees of local diners and coffee shops refused to serve them, creating an unwelcome context for those who choose to harm activists rather than help them.

Lastly, you may be able to affect change within larger systems by demanding change as an individual participant operating in collective action, for example, refusing to purchase goods from a store owner that supports a coup. You may not personally know anyone else who is participating in the boycott, but when done collectively it can have an impact if sustained over time.

We all occupy positions of power and influence. We all sit within and alongside institutions that can become critical players in preventing a coup. So think about your spheres of influence and begin to work along three critical lines of questioning.

# BUILDING BLOCKS OF MOVEMENT ORGANIZING

This section covers a series of strategic concepts for organized resistance and disruption of the status quo. Much of this can be applied to the specifics of the election, but there are some strategic issues that apply beyond the specific flashpoint of November.

## Power Mapping

We must know who's in power, and how to pull the levers of power to make those powerful people bend to the will of *the people*. **Power mapping** helps you understand your context, who the various players are, and what leverage points you might have with them. We traditionally think of power maps as documenting those in power who can support or are opposed to our campaign or movement. They can help us identify those who we need to target. Local mayors, legislators, city council people, and business leaders are all potential players that can be moved or focused on.

Making your power map public can let power players know that you're targeting them, and might help push them to change. You can even include other relevant information like affiliations, boards they sit on, foundations they are a part of, churches they go to, and other organizational information. If you're distributing this map publicly, with the purpose of pressuring your targets, be sure to include what they can do to get their name or institution off the map (by publicly supporting your agenda, for example).

## Physical Mapping

Another tack in mapping is to think about the physical geography of your city, region or town. If we begin to think about shutting down entire cities, regions, or lines of commerce we need to map the physical locations that might get us to our goal. Power exists within individual power holders but also **flows along geographic lines**. We can demand change and embody non-compliance by shutting down physical areas like highways, urban districts, or individual buildings. Last summer **Shut Down DC** used multiple affinity groups to organize actions at multiple intersections across the city, effectively halting operations across a wide region. If our goal is to truly interrupt business-as-usual as an act of resistance to a coup, then we should know how business flows. What intersections in your town make sense to coordinate to take over and hold? Are there major highways that act as regional conduits for traffic and commerce that can be sites for actions? Are there relevant

institutions that could be permanently occupied that would stop the functioning of business and/or political processes?

## Points of Intervention

Once you have mapped who holds power and how it flows you need to determine the safest and most effective [Point of Intervention](#). Can you shut down the entire downtown area or shut down a single highway? Should you pressure your target by going to their headquarters or by occupying a space that disrupts commerce and publicly forcing a reaction from them? Answering these questions is about identifying your point of intervention.

## Identifying Allies

Knowing who you need to move to stop a coup will be an important part of local organizing efforts. National targets are one thing, but locally you have to decide who in your area needs to be on your side for you to win. Don't spend too much time thinking about how to convert your most ardent opponents. Instead, focus on actions that will bring the masses of people who are inactive onto your side. The [Spectrum of Allies Tool](#) can help map this out and can be useful in thinking about planning actions.

## Audience, Messaging, Framing, and Effectiveness

Messaging is central to recruiting, engaging, and mobilizing people. Framing your message is also crucial. Framing is everything! Too often we fall into oppositional framing, only responding defensively to attacks. Have clear talking points that share your framing, and stick to them. Use Media Justice's [Guiding Questions for Framing](#) to help you create your framing. And know that you won't please everyone with your actions or your desires. Know who your audience is, and target a message that appeals to them with shared values. Make sure everyone in your action knows a few basic messaging points and that they know their role in delivering the message. Racial Equality Tools has a plethora of [Messaging Resources](#).

## Action Logic and Building Capacity

You don't want onlookers to leave wondering, "What was that about?" Think about how the action itself can answer that question. Ensuring that the action connects to the reason for the action is called [Action Logic](#). How does your disruption make it even clearer to the public that a coup is occurring?

A well-orchestrated action should build strength, not diminish it. Think about the long term trajectory of the campaign before planning an action. For example, don't organize your first actions in a way that prevents future actions from being able to happen, for instance getting your entire leadership arrested. Who will carry on the campaign? Using tools like the **SMART Objectives** can help you plan actions, including disruption, that build capacity, propelling your movement toward victory.

# ACTION PREPARATION BASICS

## Build Support Structures

### *Food*

In the context of uprisings, especially sustained uprisings, basic human needs should be taken into account. In the past, mobilizations have often included a dedicated team of cooks who try to provide meals to folks in the streets. If you've been out at a protest recently you might have been handed a snack. That's what we're talking about. If your community has a mobile propane kitchen set up that can feed 5000 people, wonderful. If you can help organize 10 people to make burritos in a kitchen and distribute them to folks in the streets, also wonderful. And if you are encamped, consider the consequences of food... Do you have outhouses or composting toilets?

### *Medics*

Street Medics are trained to respond to the basic needs of protest. Often this includes minor wounds and offering water to thirsty protesters, but can also include responding to physical trauma, tear gas and pepper spray, and other injuries. While many street medics are minimally trained and not necessarily healthcare professionals, they can be crucial in offering medical assistance in a context in which the authorities have little or no interest in protecting people. Local trained street medics should also have useful information on basic safety practices like eye flushes and what to use (and not use) in your eyes. Please no baking soda, cola or milk.

### *Sustainable action*

Sustained action is hard. Not only physically, but also emotionally and mentally grueling. Interpersonal and inter-community conflict in times of crisis is real and is also used by federal agents to tear apart organizing communities. Building effective communities of care, conflict engagement (as opposed to resolution), downtime, arts and culture, as well as understanding the nature of historical and personal trauma and how it can affect us in moments of crisis is all the deep and long work of keeping people in action. Organized groups of people who can proactively offer



trauma and emotional support to the movement can help break the cycle of fatigue, avoidance, and eventual burnout. Building teams dedicated to proactive conflict engagement can help break the cycle of our people tearing each other apart and leaving the work.

***Other question for sustainable action  
might include:***

**Do we have access to resources we need, like time, human bodies, food, water, transportation, gear, and money?**

**Do we have people with specialized skills who can help others learn those skills?**

**Are we making time to check-in with one another (tension checks, one word affirmations, and other expressions that deepen respect, demonstrate care, and facilitate mutual growth)?**

**Are there any basic shared practices that can we introduce to our action spaces in order to ground us in difficult moments and support us to stick together through uncertainty, fear, and even set-backs?**

Each practice will be specific to each community's organizing culture, strategy, and action logic/setting. Examples of culture-building customs or actions include land acknowledgement, repeated use of particular music/movement/songs/speeches to focus and connect those gathered, and intentional check-in practices for action buddies/affinity groups and support teams to engage with one another before engaging in or witnessing action/taking risk.

## ***Movement Legal Support***

If we are to participate in the kind of actions needed in response to a potential coup, we will break some laws. We must be prepared to break the laws, and support those who are arrested.

Behind every good action is a dedicated group of people tracking arrests, charges, bails, bonds, future court dates and fundraising. Check out this **primer video**, [Law for Black Lives'](#) page, and Mutant Legal's [Best Practices for Jail Support](#) for useful information and support on building a local jail support team.

It should be noted in the context of many bail funds that have arisen recently that, at times, bail funds and jail support teams differ in their focus.

[Bail funds](#) raise and provide money for bail. Many bail funds will see protest arrests as an integral part of what they support.

[Jail support](#) teams are dedicated to tracking people throughout the process of arrest, detention, release, and subsequent trial. They are generally built to support a specific action or mobilization, but in some cases they can exist as independent pieces of movement infrastructure that are ongoing. Jail support teams can be essential in filtering communication between the inside and outside of jail and coordinating inside and outside needs of those arrested. Jail support teams will hold the [jail support forms](#) that might be filled out by those taking action. While it's unlikely in a moment of mass resistance a jail support team will know everyone in the streets, individual organizing groups (your crew, your buddies, your affinity group) can record personal information and provide it to a larger movement or action jail support team if people are arrested as a way of tracking people without centralizing all information.

[Jail Solidarity](#) in the context of mass action once meant the refusal to give personal information as a way of slowing down processing of individuals, mitigating the targeting of those at risk, and opening up the possibility that everyone would be released with a reduction in charges. While current systems in many jails make identification a simpler and quicker process, if we broaden our definitions of jail solidarity to include all forms of solidarity amongst those incarcerated or arrested, it can

still be helpful in protecting vulnerable arrestees while in custody, and can certainly make the difference in the outcome of trials down the road for co-defendants.

*We would offer that in the context of a stolen election or other disruptive scenarios, jail solidarity, when practiced by those who have the privilege to do so, can be an incredibly compelling tactic. If tens of thousands of people are in jail, and held at stadiums, and other government buildings because the jails overflow, it delegitimizes the regime in power. Many of us should make the choice not to cooperate with a fundamentally unjust system.*

## ***Agreements***

Creating action agreements as part of your organizing lead up can be an integral part of building a cohesive group strategy. Action agreements allow for clarity of purpose and unity of strategic vision. They can also be useful in anticipating conflicts that might emerge and addressing them before they become public problems.

# **ACTION AGREEMENTS**

## **POSSIBLE ACTION AGREEMENT**

**DON'T AIR DIRTY LAUNDRY**

**RESPECT TACTICAL DIFFERENCES**

**DO IT IF IT ADVANCES THE STRATEGIC GOAL**

**FOLLOW INTERNAL LEADERSHIP**

## **PURPOSE**

**REQUIRES COUNCIL MEMBERS TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT INTERNALLY**

**CREATES TIME/SPACE AGREEMENTS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTIONS**

**ALLOWS FOR GROUPS TO MOVE INDEPENDENTLY IN ORGANIZING ACTIONS**

**CREATES ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN THE COUNCIL ITSELF**

## **General Advice on Being in the Streets**

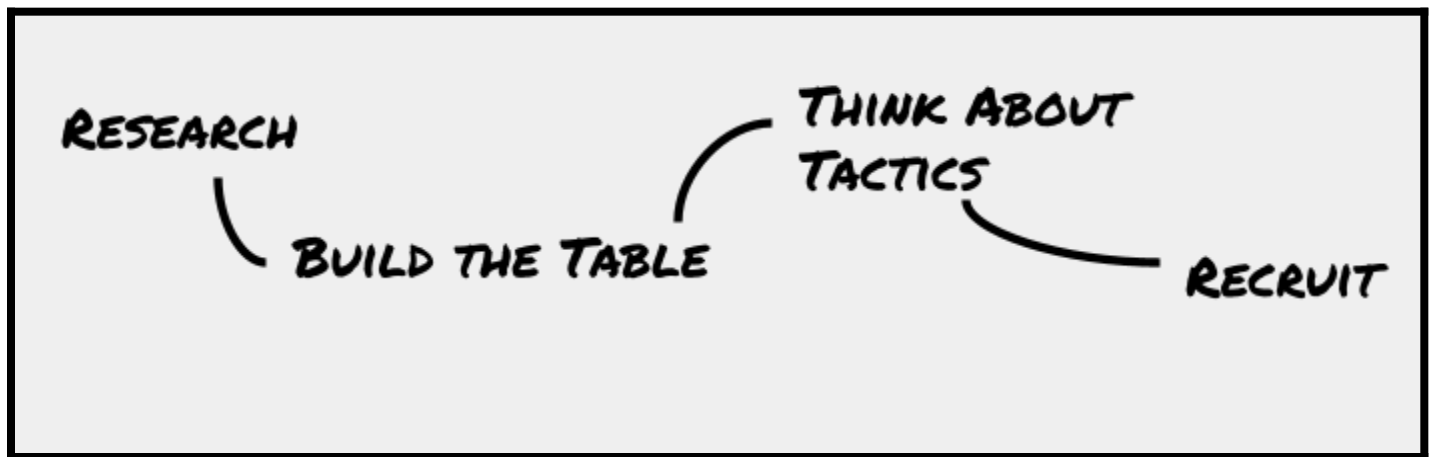
### **THERE IS A LOT MORE INFO IN OUR RESOURCES DOCUMENT**

- Be flexible, and spontaneous. Embrace emergence in the crowd. Don't be so devoted to your plan that you can't pivot when needed.
- Be clear about your targets and why they are important. What can they do or who are we trying to call on to make a public stance on the issue?
- Be prepared for a police response, plan and dress appropriately.
- Don't spread unconfirmed rumors. They can move through a crowd like fire.

- Don't purposefully avoid tension with authorities. We are there to do our action and we will try to accomplish our goals.

# ORGANIZING TO PREVENT A COUP

We must be ready for a coup. (Stephen Zunes has written a [historical analysis](#) for this kind of preparation.) And one way to respond to a coup is to shut things down, to find physical chokepoints that will disrupt the flow of capital. We suggest building what we call “shut down tables.” This section of the guide is organized to that end.



## Getting Into Formation: Building a “Shut-Down Table”

First of all, trust yourself and those you are working with; there is no one way to build something that is capable of shutting down a region. You know your local conditions best.

Planning is going to be messy. We are talking about a huge undertaking, so it will not be possible to make the perfect plan. There are four main areas you want to think about: *research*, *building the table*, *tactics*, and *recruitment*.

### *Research*

In order to really win we will need to force some **pillars of power** (business, military, media, or other major institutions) to decide to side with the people, or at least get out of the way. If everyday life goes on, a despot will not leave power, and so there will be no incentive for real systems change. You

want to think about what it might take to stop business-as-usual. This will require research. We've organized that around two questions:

***Who runs the region?*** If there is in fact a coup we must keep industry and government from functioning. Make lists of key government officials and the local corporations.

***What goods are being produced in your region, and how do they move?*** The other way to think about shutting down business as usual is to think about how goods and people move. Your region might have a system of highways and rails and ports. You might even be able to find out how things move by looking at your local Port Authority Website, if there is one. If there isn't, search for "logistics hubs" in your city.

As you start to plan, think about what it would take to shut things down, and remember to build in redundancy. One highway blockade can be cleared, but multiple ones are more challenging. Encampments outside homes combined with street blockades build in a kind of protection that if one tactic does not work, another one might.

## ***Building the Table***

If we need to deploy to prevent a stolen election, we expect millions of people to take to the streets, organized or not. In that way, when we think about who needs to be part of the plan, it is less about groups that can mobilize large numbers of people, and more about who has credibility and tactical acumen. The **action council** is a useful mobilization model for working with many independent groups.

***An Action Council is a coordination group representing many organizations, crews, affinity groups and support people focused on a single mobilization or strategy.***

In the past, Action Councils have been used to coordinate thousands (or tens of thousands) of self organized people in mass action. The Ferguson Uprising is one example that used this kind of council.

## ***The Basic Principles of Organizing an Action Council***

**It is a tactical coordinating body, not a coalition.** Action Councils are really good at coordinating roles of many independent groups for a moment of mobilizing. They are less useful as meetings where organizations are seeking philosophical alignment with each other. Some groups may be comfortable with different levels of risk than others, and action councils provide a way for there to be different levels of escalated action and risk-taking.

Use the **spokes council model** if your group is large enough, or each of the members of the council are representing many people.

**Equal participation** for scrappy smaller groups and larger unions and community organizations. Since we are entering a time of so much uncertainty, having a bigger budget does not necessarily mean that you're able to deploy larger numbers of people.

**Share critical mobilization infrastructure.** We are going to need direct action trainers, medics, jail support, food, and communications (including communications if authorities shut off cellphones or the internet). A council utilizes groups that can be of service to multiple groups. In other words we share the infrastructure that undergirds what is necessary.

**All groups who agree to the principles are welcome.** Because the council is not a decision-making body, we can invite all groups to participate.

***However we may want to be clear on a few things that come with an invitation.***

- **Clarity of Purpose and Principles:** Make sure people and groups you invite understand that this is a table designed to shut things down, so people do not get confused and disagree with the premise. It also helps to have principles that people can sign onto. Here is an example of **Shut Down DC's principles**.



- **Transparent Agendas and Facilitation:** If groups think someone else is getting the agendas in advance, or that a facilitator is biased, it can disrupt planning very quickly.
- **Encourage Lots of Roles and Tactics:** Remember that there is room for many many people to participate. Folks need to be clear about what they and their group is offering to do. Different groups will have different tactical and organizational methods. They are all welcome as long as they fit within the principles the council has agreed to.
- **Welcome People In:** Some groups invite everyone new to come an hour early to understand how the council works and answer their questions. Refrain from using jargon, and speak so that the newest people in the room, with the least experience in justice work, understand what you are saying.
- **Be Aware of Security, But Don't Overdo It:** Some groups will want to keep their plans discreet, and others may be open. The main advantage of openness is increasing your ability to recruit, so make sure that those open groups get a chance to recruit new people every meeting.
- **Encourage Representation:** Once your council gets rolling, to have a seat at the council means that everyone present is representing more than just their individual self. Unless someone is offering to fill a very specific individual role (like a facilitator or lawyer giving an update) you need to be organized (at least representing a crew of people or affinity group) in order to weigh in. This is also a method of minimizing the impact of problematic participation by individuals.

If you follow these guidelines and if those who are invited agree to them, then you should invite as wide an array of groups and people as possible. Think about labor unions, community organizations, Movement for Black Lives groups, those who led the protests this summer, migrant rights groups, LGBTQ groups, Indivisible and MoveOn chapters, and climate groups. Everyone will have a stake.

## ***Tactics***

Again, there is not one way to operate, and our [resource page](#) has a whole bunch of tactical resources. The council should not get in a debate about tactics. Rather, it should support organizers who are planning escalated mass actions that are sustainable. Thousands of people plugging up

major highways is an effective and highly accessible way to disrupt the movement of capital. Encampments outside the mansions of violent and repressive leaders is also another accessible tactic. Keep things simple, and well organized; lead marching crowds to more strategic places (see the [research](#) point for thinking about which places are most strategic). And remind people we're in this for the long haul; we lose if we go home after a couple of hours. We will actually have to shut things down, not just say we want to shut things down.

- Don't be afraid to exercise tactical leadership. But, be flexible and responsive to innovation from the crowd.
- Art and banners are useful for holding space. Music and song are tools that can create the feeling of invitation, but the tone of your action is yours to set and your songs, chants and art should reflect the tone you choose.
- Train as much as you can. We know it's a pandemic and most meetings will take place over Zoom, but if you can train outside, you'll be much better off.
- There may be all sorts of practice actions you can take. Our comrades at Shut Down DC have already done home visits to Chad Wolf, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and Louis DeJoy, the head of the Post Office. We hope to have a list of major political players available to share by mid-October.

## ***Recruitment***

As we mentioned earlier, we're going to need tens of thousands of people across the country to block ports, rails, streets and neighborhoods. **You should recruit in advance.** You can send out emails, texts or start petitions to get folks to pledge in advance and be ready. Build as big a list as possible. Also use your action council structure to let groups organize their own people.

Anticipate that there will be a large swell of people wanting to do something who have not been involved in any previous planning. **Prepare memes, Facebook posts, and messages that can guide people to useful actions on the days they are needed.** An invaluable piece of your planning is anticipating the moment when everyone wants to do something but no one knows where to go.

We believe there will be some leadup before we need to shut things down. For example, the rallies the day after Election Day will more likely than not be about getting the votes counted before things

escalate. If your groups aren't directly involved with those events, then use them as places to recruit for further actions.

There are two kinds of recruitment: mass recruitment, and individualized recruitment of leaders to the council.

### ***Recruiting leaders and organizations***

For people who are going to be part of the core, one-on-one conversations are necessary. Emails aren't going to cut it. There is no better way to listen to someone's interests and concerns, ask them questions, answer their questions, understand whether or not they are aligned with your effort, than to talk to them personally.

### ***Mass Recruitment***

There will not be a shortage of people taking to the streets in the event of a contested election. However, we will need as many of them as possible thinking about why we need a shut down, rather than planning to hold signs. Some things we can do to recruit include: social media advertising, asking groups to email their lists, putting out a public call for meetings and training, asking everyone in each meeting to make a list of their friends, and using tools like peer-to-peer texting and phone banks.

### ***Keeping Track of People***

Thousands of folks are likely to get involved so we need systems for communicating with them. Phone calls and texts are so much more critical than social media. When we have too many folks to do that individually, there are progressive database and email programs like Action Network and Peer to Peer texting operations like Strive Digital that come from labor or progressive politics that you can use. If you are recruiting individuals in advance to affinity groups on the action council or to mass actions, you need a dedicated group of folks thinking about how we communicate with them.

## **Putting Out/Responding to a Call to Mobilize**

There will likely be a lot of confusion about what's happening on the days after the election and different national groups will be planning different responses. Two things will likely be true through the haze:

*The call for mass action will not come from a single organization or group*

*There will be a lot of rumors and mis-information floating in the media*

Like we mentioned in the [framing section](#) the election will also likely have three broad actionable moments or phases:

1. **Lead up actions and organizing**
2. **Count every vote** (Nov 3rd- Dec 14th)
3. **False Declaration of Victory**

The best thing for your action council or group to do is prepare for each phase of the election which we outlined in the [beginning of this guide](#).

**Stick to your plan, stay unified, and don't get sidetracked by unconfirmed reports or random calls to action.**

## **Other Groups Organizing National Action**

Other groups working on this issue can be found in the [resource guide](#).

# WHEN INSTITUTIONS BREAK DOWN

All the above information has been generally applied to moments of localized resistance, mobilizations, and uprisings. We are living in a moment, however, when larger institutions of support may begin to break down, either because of the tactics of repression on the part of those in power or because of the need to halt business-as-usual. Many in the country already live in communities where basic infrastructure (access to food, clean water, and medical support) is severely restricted or not available at all. Those communities will likely be even more affected by any breakdown in existing systems.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, individual communities have been practicing localized mutual aid. Mutual aid organizations have emerged in the past few years in response to natural disasters and Covid-19. They can help provide an example to communities seeking to plan around what are essentially other forms of disaster. If we find ourselves in a time when the existing structures we rely on begin to falter or cease to exist, the work of these communities of practice will need to expand. Being aware of the physical needs of impacted communities, talking to people face to face about basic needs, and creating needs documents might all be a part of what ongoing resistance requires of us. Proactively mapping community needs and identifying who might be able to provide assistance is work that is ongoing in communities with mutual aid groups.

# RESOURCES

**STOPPING THE COUP GUIDE: RESOURCES AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**DEALING WITH THREATS: FROM ASSESSMENT TO (RE)ACTION;  
DIGITAL TO PHYSICAL**

**Contact: [info@disruption-project.org](mailto:info@disruption-project.org)**