

Commitment to Uphold Democracy: What We Demand from Elected Officials and Police and Military

A Campaign Planning Guide

Description:

The goal of the Commitment to Uphold Democracy campaign is to get public written commitments—from elected officials and police and military—that will help to protect the integrity and results of the 2020 election.

We recognize that democracy in the U.S. is imperfect, and already not adequately working for some groups and populations. At the same time, it is clear that as the 2020 election comes under attack from the Trump administration and its allies, the state of democracy that we currently have needs to be defended from advancing authoritarianism, so that it can subsequently be strengthened to work for all of us.

The Commitment to Uphold Democracy does this by seeking to ensure that:

- All eligible ballots are counted, the election results are respected, and that if evidence emerges of election irregularities, impartial investigations are launched and remedies are quickly and appropriately applied.
- Police and military respect people's First Amendment rights and also protect those rights from armed individuals and groups who may threaten them.

Full details of these are listed in the [Commitment](#) section of this document.

Strategic Rationale and Potential Benefits of this Campaign:

It is now widely expected that a winner of the presidential election will not be known on the night of Election day, November 3, 2020. This creates opportunities for the Trump administration and some of its allies to attempt to subvert the election results from that point onward. This could happen by Trump immediately declaring victory when the election results are not yet clear, then seeking to



prevent certain eligible mail-in ballots from being counted and refusing to respect the results if he loses, based on unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud.

It is anticipated that any such attempts by Trump and his allies will likely happen quickly and require rapid response. Attempts at subversion are more likely to succeed if people expect them to succeed. By the same logic, attempts at subversion are less likely to succeed if they are quickly, openly, and actively challenged by public mobilization and acts of nonviolent civil resistance. This calls for proactive and publicly visible efforts throughout election season to show that:

1. People around the country are organized to defend democracy.
2. People who are united and engaged in organized, disciplined nonviolent action are powerful and gaining momentum.
3. Election protection is a non-partisan issue focused on upholding the Constitution, and protecting widely-shared values of accountable government and democratic freedoms.
4. People around the country are watching closely and will hold accountable those who may try to subvert the election.

The Commitment to Uphold Democracy campaign will accomplish the above, and has other benefits as well, because it:

- Enables people to **organize election protection efforts where they live**, in their own communities.
- Enables people to **make specific, realistic, and achievable demands** for commitments that public officials and members of police and military have the capacity to fulfill.
- Has the capacity to generate **widespread popular support**, since it is based on the overarching goal of upholding the Constitution, and widely shared values of accountable government and democratic freedoms. It similarly can **reduce the risk of polarization** because the core demands are deeper than partisan politics.

- Can be **highly participatory**. There are many tactics that people can choose, depending on their level of commitment, available time, and risk tolerance. Some tactics can further be adapted to ensure they are **safe for people at high risk for COVID-19**.
- **Builds a narrative and sets a tone** that people nationwide are prepared to step up and protect the election. This campaign is a proactive, not reactive, demonstration of nonviolent power.
- **Provides the opportunity for people to build power together, organize each other, form bonds, and gain skills and knowledge that may be needed again in the coming weeks**. This is especially important if we need to react quickly and rapidly mobilize later—we need to know and trust who we are organizing with and have a clear idea of who the power holders are in our communities and states.
- **Bridges traditional forms of civic engagement and nonviolent activism**. Activism is like a muscle, it gets stronger when we exercise it.
- **Demonstrates to onlookers how they can organize and make a difference**.
- Has a **high likelihood of achieving results**, which builds confidence that nonviolent mobilization and civil resistance is an effective means of exerting power.
- Can improve the **perceptions of the credibility of the election** by improving public confidence in the behavior of elected officials and moderating the rhetoric of the media. This can also **reduce the risk of election-related violence**, because as perceived fairness and credibility of the election increases, the potential for people to engage in violence in rejection of the election results may decrease.
- Has **positive implications for democracy no matter who wins the election**, as evidence shows that nonviolent activism strengthens democracy in general, making power holders more responsive to their constituents.

Get Started! Steps for Implementation:

The Commitment to Uphold Democracy campaign will be most impactful if it starts as soon as possible, ideally weeks before November 3, 2020. We hope that this

campaign will also be an on-ramp for other tactics and engagement in election protection activities.

Step 1: Gather Your Team

Identify several people or local organizations that are concerned about the election and share this campaign idea with them. If you have already done past organizing with them before, that's great. If not, that's fine too. We're excited for you to start assembling a group. Your first act of activism is organizing this group.

Supporting resources:

- **Start an election protection group:**
You can find guidance on starting an election protection group in Part III of [Hold the Line: A Guide to Defending Democracy](#), which offers a four step-process on how to do so.
- **Search for other groups in your area:**
You may want to explore if any groups already exist in your area that you might connect with. You can find a list of member organizations that might have a presence in your area in the [Additional Resources](#) section at the end of this guide.

Step 2: Choose One Category to Focus on and Review the Commitments to Uphold Democracy

Start by choosing **one category** that you will focus on: either elected officials, or police and military. As your campaign grows, you may want to expand to focusing on both categories, but it's often good to begin by focusing your energies narrowly.

Once you've chosen the category you will focus on, review carefully the [public commitments](#) for that category and make sure everyone in your group understands those commitments and that they make sense to you. You will have to decide whether to use these standard commitments we've drafted, or whether you want to customize some of the commitments for your particular community or state.

Regarding customizing commitments, there are pros and cons to doing this:

1. A benefit of customizing commitments is that it allows you to incorporate mention of specific circumstances or laws relevant to your particular community.
2. A benefit of adopting the standard commitments included in this plan is that it enables a level of standardization across a wide range of efforts in this campaign. Having large numbers of people demanding the *exact same commitments* prevents your target from claiming to be confused about which set of commitments they should agree to (if they are being presented with multiple versions of commitments from different groups). Using standardized commitments can also show unity, which has a number of benefits, especially focusing media attention on the language of the commitments themselves and the number of people who support them, rather than possible competing versions.

Step 3. Identify Specific Individuals within Your Chosen Category

The next task is to identify specific individuals you will focus on, within your chosen category.

Some internet research can reveal who the public officials are for elections in your county and state. Likewise, you can identify who your chief of police is, your sherriff, and officials in the national guard in your state.

You have a lot of discretion about who you choose to target. In general, you will want to focus your attention on senior individuals. For example, this includes your governor, state representatives, secretary of state, county clerk, mayor, city clerk, sheriff, chief of police, and high ranking officers in your state's national guard. However, you may also want to seek commitments of other mid- or entry-level employees if you feel that will be useful in your circumstances, especially if you have personal relationships with those employees.

Once you have developed your list of targeted individuals, create a public google spreadsheet where you list them and their names next to the commitments you want them to make.

Then, if you feel comfortable, email us at defend@holdthelineguide.org to let us know about your campaign and consider posting on social media about it with the

hashtag **#UpholdDemocracy** When we know about your efforts, we can help draw attention to them.

Supporting resources:

- **More information on public officials**

For a list and background information on public officials you may want to target, take a look at Part III (Step 2) of [Hold the Line: A Guide to Defending Democracy](#).

- **Spreadsheet to track commitments**

The *Speak Up Now* campaign created a [spreadsheet](#) to track public officials in the state of Oregon. If you like their format, click here for a blank spreadsheet you can save as your own.

- **Sample emails**

The *Speak Up Now* campaign also used these [sample emails](#) to collect commitments.

Step 4. Plan Your Tactic(s)

As stated, an advantage of this campaign is that you can choose many different kinds of tactics, enabling a wide range of participation. These tactics could include:

- Requesting meetings.
- Petitions, letter writing actions, or phone banks to local officials.
- Rallies in various locations pressuring certain individuals, companies/organizations, or media.
- Various forms of artistic expression and performance.
- A range of social media actions, i.e. the use of symbols or video.
- Sit-ins, walk-outs, stay-at-homes.
- Sudden work stoppages (even if just for a few hours), limited strikes.

- Car caravans.

The above are just ideas. Your creativity and local circumstances will guide you. You may also want to try several tactics to create multiple pressure points.

A few considerations when developing tactics:

1. You will want some visible tactics that can generate media coverage. For example, collecting signers through online petitions may not be highly visible, but the delivery of the petitions can be, so that a portion of your campaign will be an opportunity to generate visible and media-worthy coverage.
2. For some tactics, such as requesting a meeting or submitting a petition, you will likely want to communicate a prompt and specific deadline (i.e. “by 12:00pm on ___ date”) by which you expect written agreement with the Commitment to Uphold Democracy. We are very close to the November election so we cannot allow power holders to delay for weeks in responding to these demands.
3. Consider a plan to escalate pressure if a power holder does not meet your deadline, or refuses to agree to the Commitment to Uphold Democracy. Escalation may involve adding or sequencing different tactics so that you create multiple forms of targeted pressure. Innovative new tactics are also more likely to create media attention and generate continued interest and enthusiasm.
4. You may also want to develop certain promotional resources—i.e. graphics, video, email templates—for your campaign.
5. A further option is to consider as part of your campaign a “pledge of resistance.” A pledge of resistance notifies your target(s) that if they do not adhere to the Commitment to Uphold Democracy, you will hold them accountable by mobilizing through nonviolent resistance.

Supporting resources:

- **Guidance on planning tactics**

This [Tactic Planning and Brainstorming](#) worksheet by *Hold the Line* may be helpful to you.

- **Different tactic ideas for public commitments**
This [article](#) by George Lakey of *ChooseDemocracy.us* offers tactic ideas for a public commitments campaign.
Here is a list of “[198 Methods of Nonviolent Action](#)” by Gene Sharp
Here is a list of [guidelines for various kind of tactics](#) by *Beautiful Trouble*
- **Sample petition**
This [petition](#) was launched by the *Speak Up Now* campaign in Oregon. They used commitments that have similar intent, but somewhat different wording, than the ones in the Commitment to Uphold Democracy campaign.
- **Campaign graphics, email templates, and other materials**
Here are examples of [custom graphics](#) and [email templates](#) developed by the *Speak Up Now* campaign. A written form with the commitment can also be handed to public officials to sign.
- **Pledge of Resistance**
You can find a pledge of resistance on [ChooseDemocracy.us](#)

Step 5. Carry Out Your Action(s)

Notify the media ahead of time. You can also notify us ahead of time via email at defend@holdthelineguide.org

Carry out your action(s).

Document your own actions to post on social media.

Use the hashtag **#UpholdDemocracy** and we can amplify your posts.

Step 6. Follow Up

Watch the power holders from whom you’re demanding commitments. Keep the pressure on them. Try to keep media attention focused on them. When they sign the commitments, thank them publicly and note it on your public online spreadsheet,

especially if they are a Republican. Thanking those who have agreed to the Commitment to Uphold Democracy will create incentives for others to do so and increase pressure on those who have not yet done so.

When a power holder does sign, make sure that you watch them as events develop in the coming weeks and remind them periodically of their public commitments.

If a power holder does not sign the commitments, that becomes a media story and grounds for further action. They should be asked repeatedly and publicly (and ideally by a diverse range of constituents) why won't they sign the commitments? What are they concerned about? Consider your plans to escalate pressure. It's important to keep at it and not give up. In addition, if your campaign involves a pledge of resistance, consider if or when it may be time to invoke it.

The Commitment to Uphold Democracy:

For State and Local Officials who Oversee Elections or Certify Election Results

The right to vote in free and fair elections is a cornerstone of our democracy. Therefore:

1. I commit to use my authority to ensure that: every eligible citizen can vote, every vote is counted, and the election results are respected.
2. I commit to clearly and regularly communicating the process and timeline for counting, tallying, and reporting election results prior to and following the voting period.
3. I commit to use my authority to prevent, investigate, and remedy any efforts to: intimidate voters, interfere to illegitimately disqualify ballots, or otherwise tamper with the election results.
4. I commit to respecting the will of the voters and taking actions consistent with my commitment and oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States.

<See next page for The Commitment for police and military>

For Police and Military

I recognize that the First Amendment of the United States Constitution states the following:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Therefore,

1. I commit to respect people's First Amendment rights, including when they assemble, protest, and nonviolently seek redress of grievances.
2. I commit to protect people who exercise their First Amendment rights from other people who may threaten or use violence against them.
3. I commit to uphold my oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.
4. I commit that I will not issue or follow unconstitutional or unlawful orders.

<See next page for Additional Resources>

Additional Resources:

Organizations and Groups:

There are a growing number of groups working to protect democracy and the 2020 election. Below is just a partial list. Online research and talking to people in your community are a good way to start mapping who is active in your community.

[Arm in Arm](#) hubs around the US have regional coaches and are taking action on the election and over the coming two years to ignite an era that ends the climate crisis by centering racial and economic justice. **Arm in Arm co-launched the Commitment to Uphold Democracy campaign.**

[Choose Democracy](#) holds trainings on nonviolent action to protect democracy, has a pledge of resistance if attempts are made to subvert the election, and has resources on defending against coups.

[Hold The Line](#) published [Hold the Line: A Guide to Defending Democracy](#) and offers workshops on setting up your own election protection groups and planning nonviolent action. **Hold the Line co-launched the Commitment to Uphold Democracy campaign.**

[Protect Our Election](#) has information related to election protection, especially related to swing states, and a variety of pledges that people can support.

[Protect the Results](#) is a joint project of [Indivisible](#) and [Stand Up America](#) to protect the valid results of the 2020 election. It is building a coalition of voters ready to mobilize if Donald Trump refuses to accept the results of the 2020 presidential election.

[Speak Up Now campaign](#) is an Oregon-based campaign focusing on the vulnerability of local, state and national elections; as well as the systemic racism that continues to go unaddressed, and drive inequality across the nation. **Speak Up Now co-launched the Commitment to Uphold Democracy campaign.**

Articles:

[“10 things you need to know to stop a coup”](#)

by Daniel Hunter, [WagingNonviolence.org](#) Sept. 18, 2020

[“What will it take to defend the election? Here’s one winning strategy”](#)

by George Lakey, *WagingNonviolence.org* Sept. 10, 2020

Guides and Action Resources:

[**Hold the Line: A Guide to Defending Democracy**](#)

This guide offers a roadmap for people around the US to protect the 2020 election. It has four part:

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

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

Part III provides a four-step process to *start an election protection group in your community*.

Part IV offers an in-depth analysis and model of change drawn from the field of civil resistance. It takes *insights from how ordinary people have advanced democracy and won against authoritarian-style rulers in other parts of the world*, and applies these lessons to the current situation in the United States.

[**State Fact Sheets: Laws barring unauthorized private militia groups**](#)

Georgetown law school has created a fact sheet for all 50 states explaining the laws barring unauthorized private militia groups and what to do if groups of armed individuals show up near a polling place or voter registration drive.

[**A Civic Refresher with the National Guard: Discussion Guide on Community Safeguarding**](#)

This guide will help you: 1) Create and moderate an educational event; 2) Invite elected officials in Congress, your community, your state + the state National Guard; 3) Educate the public about US law, command authority and the use of force; 4) Frame security as safeguarding.

[**Backfire Manual: Tactics Against Injustice**](#)

Freely downloadable manual available in English, Spanish, and 8 other languages. Offers a powerful, five-step process by which repression against nonviolent activists can be made to backfire.

[Civil Resistance Against Coups: A Comparative and Historical Perspective](#)

Offers numerous case studies and creates a typology of different kinds of coups and resistance against them. Key takeaways for civil society groups starting on page 93.

[Nonviolent Direct Action Training Resources](#)

A list of organizations and groups offering trainings and educational resources on nonviolent action. Compiled by [Conspire for Good](#).

Films

[Bringing Down a Dictator](#)

A 60-minute Peabody award-winning film about how the *Otpor* (“Resistance”) movement in Serbia resisted the authoritarianism of autocrat Slobodan Milosevic and enforced lawful election results in the face of electoral fraud in 2000. Free-streaming film online 16 languages.

[Orange Revolution](#)

A 90-minute film about how the *Pora!* (“It’s Time!”) movement in Ukraine used popular nonviolent action to prevent the 2004 president election from being stolen, and enforced lawful election results. Free-streaming film online in seven languages.

About this Campaign Planning Guide:

This campaign planning guide was developed in a collaborative process convened and led by [Hold the Line](#) during Sept. 27-Oct. 4, 2020. The following groups and individuals (listed alphabetically) contributed to it:

Groups: [Arm in Arm](#), [Hold the Line](#), [Peace Voice](#), [Speak Up Now](#)

Individuals: Erica Chenoweth, Paulina Gonzalez-Brito, Daniel Hunter, Ben Naimark-Rowse, Maria Stephan.

