

- Analysis

# WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO DEFEND THE ELECTION? HERE'S ONE WINNING STRATEGY

A knee-jerk protest won't stop a Trump power grab. It's going to take several clear, do-able strategies that together enable us to win.

George Lakey September 10, 2020



Protesters march in New York on September 5, 2020, during a "Trump-Pence Out N... [see more](#)

AFP | KENA BETANCUR

How would you like a strategy that does all of the following?

*Enables you and your friends to act close to home.*

*Gives you some "wins" on the way to the big goal of defeating a power grab.*

*Is easy to explain to your friends.*

*Allows any number of people to participate because it will all add up.*

*Reduces the risk of violent confrontations.*

*Can be calibrated to the amount of risk of arrest that you can handle.*

*Can be done in-person in a way that keeps the pandemic at bay.*

*Targets a set of people who especially have a personal stake in the elective process.*

*Takes on the politically powerful who are hesitating to commit, pressuring them to do the right thing.*

*Draws on the strengths that already exist in our political system.*

*Puts us on the offensive instead of merely protesting.*

*Invites the 30 percent of Trump supporters polled who fear that Trump won't obey the law and leave if he loses the election.*

*Doesn't add to the polarization that already has our country in overload.*

*Maximizes the number of people who participate in the movement.*

*Doesn't have to be the only strategy being carried out in order to be successful.*

**OK, here's the idea:** Go to people who hold elective political power near you, in your town, county, city, state. Urge them to "Join us in demanding every vote be counted."

Previous Coverage



Mass

• direct action might be the only way to stop Trump from stealing the election

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Wait for them to join our demand, then issue a press release telling how they did so. Wait in their office, in the corridor outside, on the sidewalk, at their place of worship, at their child's school, at their home, at a meeting where they plan to speak. Share the results with [ChooseDemocracy.us](https://www.choose-democracy.us) — a new website founded by Daniel Hunter, me and others that offers a unity-building pledge, strategy development and training. We'll publicize the actions and keep track of the "wins."

Don't assume that Democratic office-holders already agree. Some might be ready to compromise. Insist they find ways to beat their own drum louder.

You have options. Your team can be there 24/7. You can barge in and refuse to leave. You can sing, dance and bring your brass band. You can bring your children and your aged relatives. You can sell crafts and goodies to eat. You can rotate kinds of people who do the action: one day youths, then workers, then religious leaders, then elders, then Rotarians.

You're not protesting. Protest may make sense when someone does something wrong and you know that, if you protest, they'll change and fix it. Trump will not change his mind because we protest! Actually, he'll double down.

The way to meet a possible disaster with strength and confidence is to have a plan.

Instead of protesting something the elected official is doing wrong, you're insisting they do something right. Something that is as American as the flag. If they refuse, they're the ones trying to justify an impossible position. Instead of complaining, moaning or otherwise creating the drama of exasperation, all you need to do is insist (boldly, nonviolently, firmly) that they do the right thing, the fair thing. (If you're OK to put it this way, "the American thing.") Your tone is full expectation that they'll figure out sooner or later that it's wise for their future as politicians to say yes.

Notice this is not about opinions on Trump's politics — pro-Trump politicians can agree that every vote should be counted, that the election should be concluded fairly.

Notice also that this strategy need not wait until November, though it can be highly effective if started then. Hardy Merriman, author of the new handbook "[Hold the Line: A Guide to Defending Democracy](#)," points out that starting to implement it early might get media attention — especially the more dramatic tactics — and encourage others to do likewise.

It's a big country. As the strategy spreads in October, it could influence the DNA of the mass November upsurge that happens if Trump makes a power grab. That would be good because this strategy minimizes violent attack on us. After all, who would invade the office of a town council member to beat us up? Yet, were that to actually happen, the positive value of a beating would be maximized. As Merriman says, "The messaging, tone, levels of organization — all of that may be noticed by the wider movement."

### **The thinking behind this approach**

This is not the only strategy needed. Others can also be used, even simultaneously. Hopefully those strategies will also be clear, coherent, with specific objectives. This proposal has the following strategic objectives:



● We need a plan to prevent a Trump takeover — and this anti-coup research shows the way

1. **To maximize participation**, throughout the country. Anti-coup research suggests it helps to have size — participation “beyond the choir.” A recent example is the participation by small-town America in this spring’s Black Lives Matter movement, generating responses even by NASCAR and the National Football League! Obviously, having a target that is geographically within reach of nearly everyone is an easy way to maximize participation.
2. **To step aside from the polarized Trump mania**, which will only increase in the fall, with its accompanying violence. We like safety not only to maximize participation but also for its own sake: Haven’t we had enough injury and death in this country in 2020?
3. **To encourage tactics that include a range of risk** while harmonizing for maximum impact.
4. **To disperse the places where the actions can happen** (office, outside, the office-holder’s home, religious place, golf course where they play, etc.) That reduces the chance of violence, which would confuse the message we’re sending.
5. **To invite creativity and life affirmation**, one of the American strengths that goes overlooked in too many earnest activist initiatives, and again changes the subject from the toxic shame-and-blame cloud that pollutes our political discourse.
6. **To present as soon as possible to nervous Americans a strong, do-able strategy** that gives them a vivid, clear sense of how they can make a difference if that moment comes. The way to meet a possible disaster with strength and confidence is to have a plan. Don’t worry that no plan is ever complete. When we have a plan, we can move into a challenging situation with the presence of mind needed to deal additionally with the

unexpected.

And perhaps most importantly...

**7. To exert maximum pressure on the political center** that would rather not commit during chaotic polarization, to commit to fair play. We know, again from coup research, that the outcome of an attempted power grab is often decided by whether the center commits and, if so, which way it commits. This strategy is dedicated to influence this crucial variable.

### **Why say this proposal is only one strategy among several?**

A broad struggle often needs more than one strategy. During the American Revolution, Bostonians were prepared for British invasion: “One if by land; two if by sea.” An analogous strategy to this proposal might be developed targeting the financial and economic elite, who have a vested interest in an outcome that promises stability so they can make money. We leave it to people in that world to develop a strategy for that.

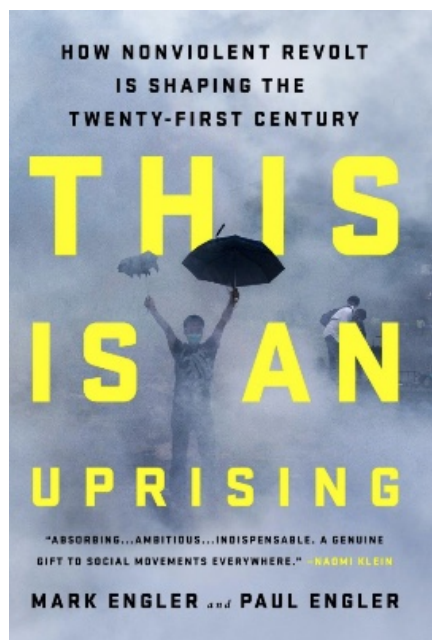
This may be the big chance for activists to enter the wonderful world of strategy. Gamers, this is your moment!

While this strategy pointedly ignores Washington, D.C. — in favor of the many advantages that come with reaching this country’s somewhat decentralized political structure — a strategy also needs to be proposed for the federal level.

The advantages of getting strategy proposals out in September include anxiety-reduction, helping people “wrap their minds around” the practical needs for possible action, and stimulating other strategy-creation.

The worst thing that could happen would be for activists to continue in knee-jerk “protest mode” — therefore easily manipulated by Trump and even contributing toward a situation verging on civil war.

The election threat is nothing that can be handled by protest. Period. Therefore this may be the big chance for activists to enter the wonderful world of strategy. Gamers, this is your moment!



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#### **A model for other strategies**

This strategy proposal suggests how people can do actions/tactics to accomplish specific objectives that in turn contribute to an overall purpose.

Its strength is that the strategy is specific, targeting a particular pillar that currently supports Trump: politicians accessible on state and local levels who won't directly challenge a power grab, but can't oppose calls to count every vote. The strategy is limited, clear, internally coherent, practical and do-able!

We need the same thing for the other pillars that might support or resist a power grab — for example, federal government workers in Washington, D.C.

If you're reading this and want to do something, you might try to assemble a team to create another strategy proposal that meets criteria important to you, stimulating discussion and debate. Show how it will achieve your objectives and the overall result that we want when we choose democracy.

Let's create a multi-prong "grand strategy" by the end of October. If it's strong enough and meets people's needs it might make quite a difference.

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## GEORGE LAKEY

George Lakey has been active in direct action campaigns for over six decades. Recently retired from Swarthmore College, he was first arrested in the civil rights movement and most recently in the climate justice movement. He has facilitated 1,500 workshops on five continents and led activist projects on local, national and international levels. His 10 books and many articles reflect his social research into change on community and societal levels. His newest books are "Viking Economics: How the Scandinavians got it right and how we can, too" (2016) and "How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning" (2018.)

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