



Prepare to fight a Trump coup

BY ERIC STONER
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When Donald Trump recently refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power and floated the idea that we might “get rid of the ballots,” many people were shocked and frightened.

It was the clearest signal yet that Trump might seek to remain in power, regardless of what happens in the upcoming election.

But, in fact, Trump has been telegraphing for months — as polls have consistently shown him lagging behind Democratic rival Joe Biden — that he intends to reject any outcome that does not result in his reelection.

It’s even pretty clear how he intends to pull it off — by claiming that only those votes cast in person on Nov. 3 should count, while absentee ballots cast by mail should be disregarded. That’s why he has repeatedly insisted, without a shred of evidence, that mail ballots are fraudulent.

Biden’s supporters are expected to cast a larger percentage of their ballots by mail, due to their concerns about COVID-19. That means Trump could be ahead on election day but lose after all the votes are

counted.

If Trump does refuse to step down under these circumstances, the people of this country must be ready to act. It’s not a matter of left or right, but of defending our fragile democracy from collapsing into an outright dictatorship.

A 2017 academic study by University of San Francisco professor Stephen Zunes examined a dozen coups — eight of which were thwarted through widespread civil resistance. It offers important insights for this moment.

First, numbers matter. We will likely need a mass movement larger — and more diverse — than any other in U.S. history. Black Lives Matter, which brought out millions of protesters, laid a foundation that must be built upon.

Energy must be directed to critical areas. Those responsible for ensuring that all votes are fairly counted must be strategically targeted. They can be called upon to respect their oath of office and uphold the Constitution.

This mobilization must be disruptive of “business as usual.” Tactics can include sit-ins, blockades of roads and buildings and a widespread general strike that shuts down the economy.

Everyone can do something.

But disruption does not mean violence. To the contrary, the movement must be grounded in deep understanding of the strategic necessity of nonviolence to win. If the conflict devolves into street fighting and property destruction, more people will gravitate toward Trump’s calls for “law and order.” It will also lead to heavier repression by police, with less likelihood that their violence will backfire.

Nonviolent discipline doesn’t just happen. Historically, it is often the result of serious training. A new group of veteran trainers called Choose Democracy is thankfully doing just that. They have created a pledge of resistance (see choosedemocracy.us) and are offering online training to anyone interested in preparing to defend this historic election.

This is an “all hands on deck” moment that will test our nation in unprecedented ways. Despite our extreme polarization, protecting the integrity of our elections should be one cause that we all can agree on.

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