

Friends Committee on North Carolina Legislation
FACT SHEET
Preparing to Choose Democracy
October 2020

FCNCL Policy Statement: We support electoral reform, led by the Quaker testimonies of Equality and Integrity and in support of our FCNCL minute on antiracism.

Recent events have caused concerns about voter suppression and the integrity of our election. North Carolina is a swing state. If the vote is close, and if there are many ballots uncounted at the end of the day on November 3, it is very possible that some actors may attempt to shut down the vote count.

Running up to this election, numerous unfounded claims have been made that mail-in ballots will be fraudulent. We believe that such claims are fabricated to confuse voters. Our elections have worked because there is agreement in the country that the election process will be protected and that we will honor the results of elections.

However, several organizations are working to support the democratic process in this coming election:

- The Washington DC Interfaith leaders, including Friends Committee on National Legislation, are calling for integrity, safety, and fairness in this election:
*“This nation can only live up to its democratic ideals when all are confident that they can vote freely and without undue hardship for the candidates of their choosing. This is particularly critical in light of the long history of racial disenfranchisement in the United States. Polling places must be equally accessible, safe, orderly, and free from intimidation. **All votes must be counted in a fair and transparent manner. The decision of the majority must be upheld with a peaceful transition. These core democratic ideals should be fiercely protected by all of us, regardless of political persuasion or religious affiliation. An election “won” by undermining democratic processes is a loss for us all.**”*
- The **Choose Democracy** project was developed by several Quakers and others and the group is organizing individuals to commit to vote, to refuse the results of an election until all votes are counted, and to train for non-violent civil disobedience in the event that the legitimacy of the elections is not respected (see more on this below). (<https://choosedemocracy.us/prepare/#.X33q5pNKh3k>).
- **The National Council On Election Integrity**, a bipartisan group of former leaders including former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is mounting a national ad campaign highlighting the country's ability to hold safe and secure elections during the coronavirus pandemic and stressing that all citizens' votes must be counted, regardless of whom they vote for.

<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-bipartisan-council-formed-to-defend-election-integrity-launches-20-million-public-education-campaign-to-count-every-vote-301147320.html>)

- **Hold the Line** (<https://holdthelineguide.com>) has guidance and trainings designed to help people from all walks of life take action to ensure that the election is free and fair, and that the results are respected.
- **Shutdowndc.org** describes steps our government might follow in a disputed election: <https://www.shutdowndc.org/updates/timeline-to-a-meltdown>

What to do? Below are paraphrased points highlighted by the **Choose Democracy** project.

1. Prepare to deter an undemocratic assumption of power *before* the election.

The best way to stop such an action is to prevent it before it starts. One of the easiest things you can do is to sign the [pledge to choose democracy](#) and encourage people **across the political spectrum** to sign it as well! Because the best way to prevent a subversion of democracy is to deter it. This is not about partisanship, but about preserving democracy.

2. Don't expect results on Election night.

As election results start coming in, the message "count all the votes" needs to come through loud and clear.

3. If the government does any of these three things, call it out as a coup. A coup is defined as:

- Premature stopping of the vote count;
- Declaration of a winner who didn't get the most votes; or
- Allowing someone to stay in power who didn't win the election.

4. Know that illegal seizures of power have been stopped by regular folks.

Such an attempt requires quick seizure of multiple levels of institutions by a person or party that is not the legitimately elected party. Illegal actions to subvert democracy tend to fail when government institutions (like elections) are trusted, there is an active citizenry, and other nations are ready to become involved. Active citizens are crucial because during the period right after an attempted seizure when a party or administration is claiming to be the "real" elected government, all the institutions have to decide whom to listen to. These are moments for heroism amongst the general population. It's how we make democracy real.

5. Focus on widely shared democratic values, not on individuals.

Appeal to your fellow citizens to choose democracy. Avoid listing issues or grievances against a vilified leader - avoid partisanship. Ask civic organizations, churches, business groups, and others to pledge to support the Constitution and the normal development of the institutions of government and democracy. Exalt widely shared core democratic values. **Choose democracy!**

6. Convince people not to freeze or just go along.

Soon after an unconstitutional seizure or retention of power is attempted, doubt will be sown, leading to a tendency for people to freeze. But in all the research

on preventing such seizures, there's one common theme: people **stop doing** what the plotters tell them to do. These are not a times to just watch and wait until "someone else" figures it out. No matter who you are, you can be part of choosing democracy.

7. Commit to actions that represent rule of law, stability, and nonviolence.

Mass resistance to an illegal assumption of power wins by using walk outs and strikes, refusing orders, and shutting down civil society until the legitimately democratically elected leadership is installed. For mass movements to succeed, they should absolutely adhere to nonviolence. Historically, whichever side resorts to violence the most tends to lose. In a moment of uncertainty, people pick the side that promises maximum stability, respects democratic norms, and appears to be the safer bet. It is a contest of who best represents the legitimate continuation of democratic institutions. Avoid dehumanizing people who disagree with you.

8. Yes, this it *can* happen in the United States. It has happened in North Carolina.

Voter suppression, threats of violence, and actual violence have been used in the U.S. to overthrow legitimately elected governments. In Wilmington, North Carolina, it [occurred](#) when white vigilantes terrorized Blacks and white liberals to keep them from voting and forced the resignation of the legitimate mayor and city aldermen in 1898. It can happen here.

9. Center in calm, not fear.

It is scary to realize we are having to talk about a subversion of the democratic process in the United States, but we are doing this to prepare. Fearful people are less likely to make good decisions. So, aim for calm and avoid hyperbole. Be a reliable source by double-checking rumors and spreading high-quality facts. Sure, read social media... but spend some time, you know, doing real things that ground you. Breathe deeply.

More on what to do now:

Letters to those who have a voice and a platform from which to speak remain effective and timely.

Write a letter to the editor of your local paper urging the state and county board of elections and state representatives and senators to respect the need to count **every vote** and defend the integrity of our election. Urge others to contact their representatives of both party affiliations. .
..no matter their party affiliation

Here are important points to include in your letters and phone calls to your representatives:

- Don't expect results on election night.
- Insist that all votes must be counted
- *Appeal to your fellow citizens and elected officials - no matter who they vote for or their party affiliation - to [pledge](#) to choose democracy*

- Resist any calls for anti-democratic actions, such as for the legislature to appoint electors
- Avoid listing issues or grievances against a particular candidate
- Urge law enforcement officials to protect voting sites against attempted voter intimidation