

Sixty Days Briefing: Six Things to Do Now

A civil-society briefing for protecting an election under asymmetric pressure

Working briefing v1.4 — one scenario, held as a scenario

The situation

Assume for planning purposes that the coming election faces an unusual combination of pressures:

- a political actor who may not accept losing;
- distributed supporters capable of creating disruption, confusion, intimidation, or procedural pressure;
- institutions already under strain;
- a volatile information environment in which false or misleading claims can spread faster than they can be checked;
- and a significant number of citizens whose political views may be changing, but whose relationships and sense of belonging make changing their positions difficult.

This is not a forecast. It is a scenario worth preparing for.

The strategic mistake would be to answer asymmetric pressure by trying to build a larger opposing force. A command-centered political operation has advantages democratic systems should not try to imitate: speed, message discipline, centralized loyalty, and willingness to bypass complexity. Civil society has different strengths.

Civil society does not run elections. Election officials and poll workers do that: preparing polling places, checking in voters, applying election law, protecting ballots and equipment, keeping records, closing polls, reconciling counts, and moving results through verification and certification. Our task is different. Between now and Election Day, civil society can strengthen the environment in which that work has to succeed — clear records, practiced procedures, trusted relationships, disciplined communication, visible commitments, and enough human capacity to remain functional after the polls close.

A hard, compact log burns readily when surrounded by kindling. Civil society's first obligation is not to become the kindling.

Six moves matter now.

Six Things civil society can do between now and Election Day

1. Help people understand how the election *actually* works

The first task is orientation: help people recognize what normal election administration looks like before they encounter it under pressure.

Most people do not know, in any detail, how ballots are handled, what poll workers can and cannot decide, how counting proceeds, what happens when a ballot is questioned, how results are checked, or why final results may take time. That unfamiliarity is an entry point for uncertainty and conspiracy theories. Something unfamiliar is easily read as something suspicious. A delay reads as manipulation. A correction reads as "the rules are changing." A routine procedural disagreement can be made to look like systemic failure.

Local organizations, libraries, congregations, professional groups, service clubs, journalists, educators, and trusted community figures can help people understand:

- what happens from the moment a voter arrives until a ballot is counted;
- why procedures differ between states and counties;
- how challenged and provisional ballots are handled;
- how ballots and equipment are secured;
- how counts are checked and reconciled;
- who certifies results, and who is responsible for order at a polling place;
- why some races are called quickly and others take longer;
- and what lawful processes exist when results are disputed.

This does not require everyone to become an election expert. It requires enough familiarity that ordinary complexity is not mistaken for corruption — and enough that people know where to look when they do have questions: official election offices and established local reporting, not rumor.

Awareness is not "doing nothing." A public that understands the ordinary workings of an election is harder to frighten with unfamiliar details, and better able to tell a real problem from a normal part of the process. Awareness looks like someone recognizing clickbait, another un-phased by "breaking news" about standard procedural delays; or someone noticing genuine irregularities because they know what normal looks like.

2. Make room now for people to reconsider without losing belonging

This is the one thing on this list that only civil society can do. Election officials cannot. Courts cannot. Campaigns are poorly positioned because they have an explicit interest in the answer.

People, you and me, do not make political judgments as isolated individuals weighing facts on a blank sheet of paper. Our choices are entangled with family, friendship, congregation, workplace, and community. When someone has begun to doubt a position they previously held, the obstacle is often no longer lack of information. It is the anticipated cost of saying out loud what we are thinking:

"I am not sure anymore." "Something I supported no longer looks the same to me." "I'm not sure what it is really, but something doesn't smell quite right."

If changing one's mind means losing friends, being mocked at the dinner table, being treated as stupid, or being required to confess moral failure before being welcomed elsewhere, people have powerful reasons not to examine their doubts closely.

Civil society can reduce that cost — not by steering people toward a predetermined vote, but by protecting their ability to exercise their own judgment. The useful question is not "How do we get them to see they were wrong?" It is:

"What would make it safer for someone here to tell us what they are actually seeing now?"

That may happen at a kitchen table, after a service, in a veterans' hall, at a volunteer fire station, between colleagues, between neighbors, between old friends. It is small-scale work. It changes the conditions in which political judgment takes place.

In practice:

- ask what the person is noticing, rather than telling them what they should notice;
- ask what concerns them now that did not six months ago;
- let uncertainty stand; listen before supplying facts or arguments;
- do not immediately correct contradictions or demand an accounting of every past position;
- do not turn private reconsideration into a public declaration;
- do not treat the conversation as recruitment, or report it back to anyone as a "conversion;"
- keep disagreement from automatically threatening membership.

The objective is not agreement. It is that the person becomes freer to arrive at — and stand behind — their own judgment. That is a democratic act in every political direction, and it should begin now. The closer Election Day comes, the more identities harden and every conversation begins to feel like a demand for a side. The remaining weeks are the window in which independent judgment can be made socially survivable before that pressure peaks.

3. Make the process — and the people who hold it — visible before pressure arrives

Election procedures should not become widely understood for the first time during a crisis. Pressure tactics gain power when people do not know what is supposed to happen, when officials feel isolated, and when every decision looks as though it is being invented in the moment.

Civil society can reduce that advantage now. The role is not to tell election officials how to conduct elections. It is to make what they already do visible — and to make it easier for them to say, in advance, that they will do it.

Visibility. Communities should know, before Election Day: **who** administers elections locally; **who** receives and counts ballots; **who** is permitted to observe; what happens if a voter encounters a problem; **how** questionable ballots are reviewed; **what** happens when margins are very close; **how** recounts and legal challenges work; **who** certifies results; **which sheriff**, police department, or other authority is responsible for order at each polling place; and **which decisions** belong to courts, election boards, local officials, or state authorities.

Civic organizations and local journalists can invite election administrators to explain this publicly. Professional groups can translate it into plain language. Libraries, congregations, and local media can point people toward it before confusion begins.

Commitment. Visibility of the procedure is half of this. The other half is the people who hold it. Civil society can create the occasions — public forums, joint statements, local press — at which the officials responsible for certifying, for resolving disputes, and for keeping order at the polls say plainly, before any pressure arrives: *these are the procedures, and I will follow them.*

This is not asking officials to take a side. It is asking them to say in advance that they will do their job. A commitment made early, in public, witnessed by the community, is far more expensive to break under pressure than a private intention — and it gives the person under pressure something to stand on later: *I said what I would do, and I did it.*

The useful commitment is not "we guarantee an outcome." It is: *these are the procedures that exist, these are the people responsible for carrying them out, and they have said so.* That becomes the reference point. If someone later claims a routine procedure is evidence of wrongdoing, people have something to compare the claim against. If someone insists an official must act outside their authority, the public already knows whose decision it actually is.

4. Prepare to support — not interfere with — the people running the election

Poll workers and election officials already have demanding jobs. Civil society should make those jobs easier, not add another layer of people trying to direct the process.

Support begins with understanding what election workers actually need and respecting the boundaries of their roles. That may include:

- recruiting people into *authorized* poll-worker and observer roles where officials are asking for them — a sufficient number of trained, calm people in authorized roles can make on-the-ground disruption much harder to exploit, because they are less likely to be pulled away from established procedure;
- helping trusted local organizations publicize legitimate recruitment needs;
- providing transportation, meals, childcare, accessibility support, or other practical help where appropriate;
- offering legal, communications, technical, or logistical expertise to election offices that request it;
- ensuring that trained people, not spontaneous crowds, respond when additional help is needed;
- and encouraging community members to follow the instructions of election officials at polling places.

Civil society can also make election workers less isolated. They may face long hours, public suspicion, contradictory claims, and deliberate pressure. Community leaders can say in advance that ordinary election work is legitimate public service and that no one should have to endure intimidation for doing it.

Supporting election workers also means not becoming another source of disruption:

- Do not organize unofficial security around polling places.
- Do not send untrained volunteers into operational spaces.
- Do not confront voters, observers, or election workers.
- Do not assume a confusing event requires immediate civic intervention.
- When something appears wrong, use the established reporting and escalation channels.

The goal is straightforward: help the people responsible for conducting the election remain able to do their work according to established procedure.

5. Refuse to become an amplifier — and keep your own record

A disruptive incident can gain far more power from the reaction around it than from the incident itself. Civil society controls part of that reaction. Every forwarded rumor, outraged repost, and dramatic headline enlarges an event before anyone knows what happened.

Information discipline is therefore a civic responsibility. The *Civic COLREGs* — eight rules for public judgment when information moves faster than anyone can check it — exist for exactly this. They are non-partisan by design, carried on a pocket card, and usable by anyone at the polling place regardless of party. Their three habits:

Hold yourself accountable. Know what you can stand behind. Separate what you know from what you assume or have merely heard. Be the person who can be asked "how do you know?" and answer.

Check before you carry. Verify a claim before repeating or acting on it. The verb is *carry*, not *share*, because sharing disowns the cost.

Watch the unannounced changes. Pay attention when instructions, procedures, stories, or evidence shift without a clear explanation.

Before repeating anything, ask: Do I know this happened? Where did it come from? Has someone with direct knowledge confirmed it? Am I describing what is known, or what I think it means? Will carrying this help someone act — or only make more people alarmed?

None of this means minimizing real misconduct. Real problems should be reported clearly and promptly, through established channels. But reporting a problem is different from turning every uncertain event into proof that the whole election is compromised.

Keep a log. Everyone who is near the process in these weeks — volunteers, observers, workers, neighbors — is invited to keep a simple private record of anything of note: what you saw, when, where, and who else was there. Write it the same day, before anyone has a reason to remember it differently. A record made before the argument starts is worth more than any account assembled afterward.

The discipline is to **log, not post**. A private log routed to the proper channel is a record. A public log is a feed, and a feed is an amplifier — it can be mined for rumor, used to target election workers, and turned into a parallel body of "evidence" competing with the official count. Log privately; report through established channels; let any public accounting come after the fact, when it can be checked.

When an incident occurs: verify first; identify the actual location and scale; say what is known; say what remains unknown; identify what authority is responding; correct errors visibly; and do not give speculation the weight of evidence.

Attention is a resource. A precious resource of your time and energy. Do not hand it over automatically to whomever is best at creating alarm.

6. Keep civic capacity in reserve for Election Day and the days after

The civic effort should not culminate when the polls close. That may be when the hardest period begins. Counts continue. Margins stay uncertain. Claims and counterclaims accelerate. Legal challenges emerge. Election workers are exhausted. Journalists, community leaders, lawyers, officials, and volunteers are all asked to respond at once.

Do not spend every available person, dollar, channel, and ounce of public attention before Election Day. Keep capacity in reserve. Organizations can:

- arrange shifts rather than relying on the same people continuously;
- identify backup leaders and spokespersons;
- establish alternative communication methods in case primary systems fail;
- know in advance who can explain procedures accurately;
- identify legal and technical expertise that may be needed quickly;
- prepare trusted local voices who can speak calmly during uncertainty;

- plan support for election workers and their families through extended counting and certification;
- and prepare communities for the fact that reliable results may take time.

Normalize that possibility now. A result that takes time is not necessarily a result in trouble. Different jurisdictions count differently. Close elections require additional care. Errors are found and corrected. Challenges have procedures. A functioning system does not always look tidy while it is functioning.

The public needs three distinctions firmly in place before the pressure arrives:

1. Uncertainty is not illegitimacy.

2. Delay is not failure.

3. A process taking time is not evidence that there is no process.

Keeping people rested, informed, connected, and able to exercise judgment in the days after voting may be one of the most important investments civil society makes before it.

The larger strategy

Seen together, the six things do three things.

They make the election more understandable. More people know how the real process works, and are less susceptible to alarm created by ordinary complexity.

They make civil society less combustible. Fewer people amplify provocation, rumor, or fear; more people have trusted relationships and independent ways of checking what they are seeing.

They make democratic judgment more possible. People have room to reconsider, disagree, verify, wait for evidence, and act without being driven entirely by fear of losing their group.

This work looks less dramatic than confrontation. That is part of its strength. Democratic capacity is built from many small forms of complexity: independent judgment, overlapping relationships, understood procedures, professional roles, trusted local voices, records, habits of verification, and people who can stay in relationship while disagreeing. Those things make a society harder to command from a single point and harder to set on fire from one spark.

The task over the coming weeks is not to "defend democracy" as an abstraction. *It is to increase the number of places in which democratic behavior is still happening.*

Companion instrument: [Civic COLREGs](#) — *Eight Rules for Navigating Corruption in Public Life*, with [printable cards](#). More information: <https://transilience.org/civic/>