

Best Practices for Protests:

Protest is an essential part of democracy and civic engagement. Here in the United States, our right to protest enjoys strong protections under the First Amendment of the US Constitution. This fundamental amendment specifically recognizes the right to freedom of speech, the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

From small visibilities in town squares to large rallies at state houses, to marches on Washington, to mass mobilizations in the streets, non-violent protests are one way for Americans to practice dissent and demand accountability. ***By far, the vast majority of protests are safe and uneventful – in almost every instance you will walk away feeling uplifted, encouraged and sustained.***

Since the November elections, we have entered a time of heightened risk, with the legal and constitutional ground constantly shifting. We need to make sure we are informed and prepared whenever we engage in protests. We already know that the Trump administration is responding aggressively, unpredictably, and at times, illegally, to opposition and dissent. What we don't know is how this changes the calculation of risk. What once was thought to be a simple act of protest could, on a dime, be re-characterized as something else entirely by Trump and his minions.

It is in this context that we encourage people to do their own due diligence regarding specific actions. We provide these guidelines recognizing that each person is best situated to decide when and how to protest.

Our goal is not to scare anyone away from protesting. In fact, the opposite is true. We think effective and strategic protest is essential, especially now as we fight to save our democracy from dictatorship and tyranny. ***Our hope is that by providing a way for you to assess your engagement, you can protest in ways that are the safest and most impactful given your life circumstances.***

DECISION TREE APPROACH:

Make your own best decision about whether to participate, how to participate and when to leave:

- What do I know about the event?
- How strongly committed/aligned am I to the goals?

- What personal factors should I consider?
- What risks am I willing to take?
- What is my safety plan?

Assessing the Event: What Do I Know?

- What is the focus/purpose/goal of the event?
- Focused vs broader messaging – the more precise the focus (eg “Save Medicaid”) the more likely signs, chants etc. will be specific to that message. As the focus widens (eg “Defend Democracy”) the more likely there will be a wide range of messaging, some of which you may or may not be comfortable with. Are you able to tolerate a range of style, tone, anger, etc? Are you able to meet it with curiosity? As we try to build coalition across groups, you may find yourself having to go out of your comfort zone. Are you willing to engage with people with strongly held opinions who share many, but not all, of your beliefs?
- Who are the individuals or groups organizing/promoting the event? Are they trusted partners?
- Is there a stated commitment to non-violence? Have the organizers adopted a no weapons policy? (Please note, unless the protest is on private property, organizers are not able to prohibit weapons since both the US and NH constitutions guarantee the right to carry. Still, adopting a no weapons policy is a sign that the organizers are committed to non-violence).
- Is there a permit for the event?
- Is it a daytime or nighttime event?*
- How many people are expected?*
- Is it planned, last minute, spontaneous? (When in response to immediate events – be aware emotions may be running particularly high.)*
- Is this a counter-protest?*
- Are counter protesters likely or known to be attending?*
- Have the police been invited to be there? Are the police likely to show up uninvited? (Some find an added sense of security if the police are there – many others, especially Black and Brown people, immigrants and other vulnerable people find the presence of police to be intimidating and potentially harmful. It bears repeating that ultimately the presence of the police is up to the police and once they get there, it is also up to them what they do – including whether to arrest people.)

- Is the focus of the event more likely to draw negative police/counter protester attention? (e.g. a protest against white supremacy might draw neo-nazi counter protesters)*

* Nighttime protests, large crowds, counter protests, counter protesters, and/or spontaneous actions may lead to heightened security concerns and/or risk of conflict.

Self-Assessment: What Personal Factors Should I Consider?

- How strongly aligned am I with the goals and messaging? (The stronger the alignment, the more you might be willing to take personal and legal risks.)
- Based on the assessment of the event itself, do I consider my personal/physical/legal risks to be low, medium or high given such factors as:
 - Responsibility for the care of young children or others
 - Being a member of a vulnerable community
 - Having health or mobility issues
 - Employment obligations
 - Would an arrest have out-sized consequences?
 - § Custody issues
 - § Student loans
 - § Subsidized housing and other government programs
 - § Travel restrictions
 - § Legal status
 - § Employment
 - § Legal expenses
- It is okay to choose to stay home.
 - Consider others ways to support the event:
 - § Be a safety contact for those attending
 - § Donate needed materials
 - § Make signs
 - § Share on social media

Choosing to Go and At the Event: What Should I Consider?

- General Commitments

- Commit to non-violence
- Learn and practice de-escalation techniques (CLARA)
- Attend a 'Know Your Rights' training
- Commit to focus on the goals and purposes of the event; let the protest be the story. (Understand that to the degree counter-protesters are able to disrupt and create side shows, the media typically will cover those and not the main event. We want to limit engagement with counter protesters so that the organizers, and not the counter-protesters, drive the narrative).
- Commit to solidarity- don't make it about you. Recognize that your actions can have positive or negative consequences for all. Practice self-discipline.
- Respect the requests of the organizers and their designated volunteers – these folks bear a lot of responsibility for what happens at the event, so if they ask participants to limit engagement with counter-protesters or the media, to get off the State House steps, to stay out of the street, etc. please be mindful of these requests. Remember most organizers are volunteers.
- If peacekeepers are present, please be respectful and understand that they are there at the request of the organizers. Peacekeepers are not the police nor are they gatekeepers of opinion: they are trained de-escalators committed to ensuring the safety of the participants and making sure the focus remains on the message of the event itself. Remember, peacekeepers are volunteers.
- Be ready to answer the question: Why did I show up today?
- Make a safety plan
 - Make sure someone at home knows where you will be and when to expect you back.
 - Partner up
 - § Decide on a meetup place if separated
 - § Discuss what circumstances would make you want to leave (curfews, violence, etc.)
 - Write down emergency numbers, including the name of an attorney if you have one (good to have one - especially important if the risk of arrest is moderate to high)

- Practice situational awareness
 - Give yourself permission to leave for any reason (not feeling safe, tired, too hot, etc.) Just make sure you talk it over with your partner and make sure they know of your decision to leave.
- What to wear/what to bring
 - Comfortable clothes
 - Shoes that allow you to move quickly and deftly
 - Dress for the weather
 - Water and snacks
 - Backpack/fanny pack (safer than a purse or cross-body bag)
 - Cash
 - Essential medicines in original bottles and socks (if you think there is a chance you may get arrested)
 - ID (maybe, see *Wired* article below)
 - Phone (maybe, set to airplane mode, see *Wired* article below)
- Special Considerations
 - Media
 - § Check credentials and names
 - § Beware of fake or hostile media looking to create “gotcha” moments and traps. Realize that once someone has a recording of you, it is up to them how, when and where to post it. Be aware that videos can be edited to distort your words and meaning. One common tactic is to provoke people to become agitated. Ask yourself, “Is this really how I want to be seen on social media?”
 - § Don’t speak for anyone other than yourself unless authorized to do so
 - § If you think you may want to talk to the media, be prepared with some thoughts on the issues and why you chose to show up at the event
 - § Remember, there is no obligation to talk to the media or anyone else! Walking away is a good option!

- Photography
 - § Be mindful of the privacy of others: ask permission before taking pictures and before posting online (especially where people are easily identifiable)
 - § Make your own decision about whether to have an online presence from the protest.
 - § Assume you are being filmed at all times: drones, security cameras, cameras in the crowd mean that almost everything is recorded.
- Document Misconduct
 - § Film and/or otherwise document instances of police engagement, misconduct, arrests and/or bad actions by counter-protesters, agitators, etc.

Follow Up!

- Take the calls to action seriously. Commit to taking action after the protest.
- Protests are meant to be a catalyst - to inspire, motivate and build connections - Don't let this be a one and done.
- Use your experience to inspire and motivate others to action.

More Detailed Resources:

- *Wired Magazine*, ["How to Protest Safely: What to Bring, What to Do, and What to Avoid: If you're planning to hit the streets, here's what you need to know."](#) Louryn Strampe, Boone Ashworth, Lauren Goode, 4/25.
- *NRDC*, [How to Protest Safely](#), Courtney Lindwel, 10/22.
- *ACLU Know Your Rights* <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights>

Kent Street's Decision Tree Regarding Specific Protest Events

Our goal is to give people the information they need to make their own best decisions about whether or not to attend a particular event/protest. In deciding if Kent Street will uplift an event and encourage attendance, we consider whether the following criteria are met:

- Commitment to non-violence, no weapons policies
- Alignment with Kent Street mission statement, values and messaging
- Trusted and known partners/individuals organizing
- Transparency re: permitting, police and safety issues
- Presence of peacekeepers, if appropriate to the situation
- Commitment to de-escalation, not confrontation

About Non-Violent Resistance and Civil Disobedience

- At this time, Kent Street does not have the necessary experience or expertise to organize effective civil disobedience, nor is it in our current plan. However, there are situations where protests we support include a secondary component of civil disobedience (e.g. Rev. William Barber's *New Poor People's Campaign*). In such situations we look for:
 - A clear delineation between the protest portion of the event and the civil disobedience portion
 - Transparency about what is planned
 - A clear and defined strategy
 - Legal support
 - A clear opt out such that people are given time to leave before the civil disobedience action begins.

Special Considerations:

Media:

We ask that those attending events (protests or otherwise) not speak on behalf of Kent Street unless authorized to do so.

However, we encourage everyone to come prepared to speak on their own behalf – especially being ready to answer the question “Why did I choose to be here today?”.

If opting to speak to the media, always ask for names and credentials first. Beware of fake “media” (Project Veritas type groups) – they are there to do “gotcha” takes and will often try to provoke people into saying things on camera that they may later regret.

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