

SEPTEMBER 2026

THE AMERICAN CRISIS

Prepared for
The American Public



Unsplash: Miltiadis Fragkidis

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This report seeks to offer a critical contribution to ongoing deliberations and does not claim to be fully comprehensive. To explore additional reports, tools, and dimensions of the issues raised here and to stay informed, visit www.americancrisis.report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The American Crisis report, inspired by Thomas Paine's rallying cry to a weary republic newborn 250 years ago, offers timely and essential analysis of the state of our union and emerging threats to our democracy. In harnessing the expertise of scholars and practitioners across the United States, this report begins by analyzing the crisis conditions in which our country finds itself politically, militarily, and socioeconomically and assesses the potential for these conditions to intensify in the next six months toward points of crisis that compel a collective national reckoning.

Specifically, this report analyzes the likelihood of the thwarting of electoral due process, of the disruption of constitutional government, of escalated military and paramilitary occupations of U.S. cities, and of emerging financial, health and climate threats that compound any electoral, constitutional, and military crisis.

In doing so, our objective is to alert society to clear and present dangers ahead and to prepare accordingly. The report ends by overviewing the ways in which the American public is already preparing for and responding to these threats.



Unsplash: Josh Johnson

The report also outlines opportunities for increased engagement by the whole of American society, with attention paid to the role communities, subnational institutions, and legislators will play in upholding our democracy. These are, indeed, the times that try our souls. Now more than ever, we need the kind of courage that history books heroize.

INTRODUCTION: A PERIOD OF CRISIS

The American Crisis report is addressed to the great majority of people working and living in the United States and to community leaders and public servants. The goal of *The American Crisis* report is to provide a timely and actionable resource to protect democratic processes and respond to the system failures of our time. Rather than directing a single course of action, this report draws on the knowledge of scholars and practitioners in the field of democracy to help readers set their own priorities and determine their own strategies. This report does not aim to be fully comprehensive, but rather a critical contribution to ongoing deliberations in communities across the nation as well as Washington D.C.

As context for this report, the authors acknowledge that the United States is already in a particularly acute period of political, social, economic, and ecological crisis. We invoke the words of Thomas Paine because Americans again face a widening crisis that tries our souls. In the coming weeks and months, this crisis threatens to erupt into several points of crisis, on which this report is focused.

The timing of some potential crisis points is predictable, as this report analyzes the conditions surrounding Election Day in November, as well as dates preceding and following elections, including the swearing-in of elected officials in January 2027. Other crisis points confronted in this report are not as predictable, including those related to a financial crash, climate and public health catastrophes, and ongoing or newly started wars.

The crisis points identified in this report involve a mix of political and constitutional confrontation. We anticipate that, in response to these moments, American social movements will engage in various forms of mutual aid, community action, protest, civil disobedience, and nonviolent noncooperation. There is also danger of potential mobilization of military forces and other armed groups to engage in political violence, interfere with U.S. elections, occupy U.S. cities and communities, or destabilize the country. In preparation for these potential points of crisis, our goals in assembling this report reflect the widely and deeply held democratic political values of the American people.

INTRODUCTION: A PERIOD OF CRISIS

Specifically, those values require that we should ensure democratic transition in November elections, head off and block political violence, maintain a republican and federal form of government, defend constitutional governance and civil liberty against personal rule, strengthen the capacity of communities and institutions to respond to impacts of the crisis, and help society address and move beyond underlying conditions producing the crisis.

These are non-negotiable. At minimum, these are the essential prerequisites for ensuring the long-term sustainability and health of our society. Going further, the authors of this report urge the deepening of democracy at all levels, especially in the personal participation of all Americans in the governing of their institutions, communities, municipalities, regions, and country. At the local level, this report identifies ways in which municipal and state governments will continue to be the immediate frontlines of the defense and expansion of democracy. At the national level, the report prioritizes protecting the U.S. Congress as the first branch of the national government.

The report also emphasizes that changes in the structure of government must be made through democratic processes, not through violence or unilateral action.

The signatories to *The American Crisis* believe there has not been enough deliberation and analysis about the moment into which our society is heading, especially over the next six months as the United States approaches midterm elections, the inauguration of newly elected officials, and any conflicts that may immediately follow. This report aims to contribute to this moment and is the result of a July 2026 convening timed with the 250th year of the nation's founding. Key conclusions and recommendations, offered by scholars and practitioners in the field to assist our society in better understanding the challenges and opportunities of the next six months, are summarized in this report. *The American Crisis* report's ultimate goal is to help American society understand the gravity of this moment and enable those concerned for the future of American democracy to prepare for the points of crisis identified below. With all this as a preamble, we begin.

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Conditions of the United States of America: Political, Military, and Socioeconomic

Before exploring three specific points of crisis referenced above, this report first overviews the general conditions of American society – political, military and socioeconomic – that are relevant to the periods of crisis in which we now reside.

First, the ***political conditions*** are, at the national level, increasingly favoring a unitary executive with the judicial and legislative branches capitulating to, or under attack by, the executive branch. Former federal judges are, most for the first time, going public to advocate for judicial independence, given rising threats to judges across the country under the current administration. Congressional authority continues to be undermined by White House attempts to dismantle independent agencies, bypass legislative spending controls, and indict members of Congress. These are extremely dangerous events that attempt to overthrow the original constitutional design of our national government.

Second, America's ***military conditions*** continue to worsen as wars both abroad and here at home proliferate. Overseas, unconstitutional and illegal wars of choice continue to undermine international law and human rights, while also reinforcing extrajudicial norms that many believe make the United States less safe, not more so. Here on the homeland, the rising use of military and paramilitary force on cities and civilian populations, the militarization of U.S. police forces and the occupation of cities, the hunting down and detention of people, and the mass surveillance and politically targeted repression substantially undermine Americans' abilities to exercise their democratic freedoms.

Third, the ***socioeconomic conditions*** of the United States are characterized by extreme inequality, indebtedness, and economic stagnation and decline for the majority of Americans. Institutions that are essential to a vibrant U.S. economy, such as educational institutions, public service providers, nonprofit organizations, and foundations are facing dramatic cuts and targeting by the executive branch.

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All of this makes it increasingly difficult to address growing inequality and poverty. Meanwhile, distrust and disinformation are compromising trust and truth, core components of healthy civic culture, and contributing to an unprecedented national mental health crisis.

These conditions exist within a larger world system that is experiencing accelerating impacts from the climate crisis, including fires, floods, heat waves, and droughts, and leading to both agricultural and ecological collapse. These mounting climate impacts are significantly worsening the political, military, and socioeconomic conditions across our country. For example, the mass migration caused by climate change and resource wars is being used to foment and justify practices of nativism, racism, and authoritarianism. Add to this the specter of artificial intelligence making human work obsolete in many industries, and the broader socioeconomic conditions for system collapse become more significant. That is why the capacities of members of the public, local and state governments, national agencies and institutions to respond to these conditions are so critical.

These conditions can intensify rapidly, creating crisis points of acute danger and decision. What responses become possible in those moments depends in large part on what we have done to prepare beforehand.

America's Potential Points of Crisis

We identified potential points of crisis that have a high probability of emerging from these conditions in the coming months. In contrast to a larger system crisis, which usually develops over longer periods of time and across multiple subsystems, a crisis point is defined as a moment in which an event or series of events draw opposing movements into an intensified and potentially decisive conflict. In the case of *The American Crisis* report, the central conflict we identify is between democracy and authoritarianism.

The ***first crisis point*** regards the midterm elections. We anticipate significant election interference by state and non-state actors in and around the federal, state, and local elections, as well as significant obstruction in advance of the swearing-in of elected officials in early 2027.

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The ***second crisis point*** regards the use of military force. We anticipate a substantial increase in how and where military and paramilitary forces target U.S. cities and communities, along with the potential use and misuse of the Insurrection Act and of extralegal executive actions to bypass restrictions in the deployment of military forces against civilian populations.

The ***third type of crisis point*** involves emergent points of crises. We anticipate a potential widespread financial collapse, possibly triggered by sharp rises in bond yields or interest rates, or the bursting of the speculative artificial intelligence bubble. Other crisis points that have a high probability of emerging in the near-term are associated with the global climate crisis and domestic public health crisis. Individually or combined, these would considerably strain on our society's capacity to deliberate and act. We bring attention to these potential points of crisis in order to help our society focus existing resources on effective prevention, deescalation, and response. As the exact timing of this type of crisis point is highly unpredictable, preparation is essential.

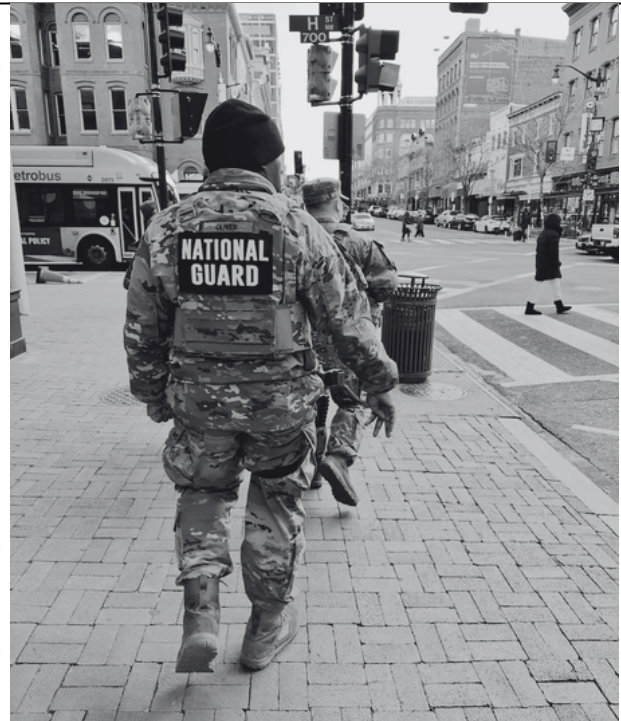


Photo: Michael Shank

Substantial preparation for each of these points of crisis has already been in motion across the U.S. and in unprecedented fashion. It is notable that some of the most significant mass protest mobilizations in American history, in terms of numbers and diversity, have occurred over the last few years. America is witnessing increasingly disciplined and self-organized nonviolent action, and communities and municipalities are stepping up as agents and defenders of democracy, often in response to federal austerity measures. Together, these developments provide a foundation for the work ahead. We aim to build outward from this foundation of democratic mobilization by analyzing each potential crisis point identified and suggesting how and where prevention and response is warranted.

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Crisis Point: Midterm Elections

As our baseline, we assume that a desirable outcome of the 2026 midterm elections is that all qualified voters are able to vote and have their votes counted and that those who are certified as winners by duly established election authorities are able to assume office without obstruction.

In advance of local, state, and national elections on November 3, 2026, there are threats, which the authors have identified below, that may emerge before, during, and after Election Day itself and which subnational actors should be prepared for accordingly. These threats include, but are not limited to, the following actions.

In the weeks preceding Election Day, we anticipate that election administration roles and responsibilities will be seized from states and cities, or attempts made to disrupt, sabotage, or otherwise capture their administrative powers. Based on analysis of recent and past precedent, that could include the seizing of voter rolls, the threatening of election officials, and the disruption of vote-by-mail systems.

This year alone, the Trump administration's Federal Bureau of Investigation has seized ballots and voter rolls in the state of Georgia, a concerning action which the U.S. Department of Justice subsequently endorsed. In addition to this action, the Trump administration has tried to block mail-in voting in roughly half of all U.S. states, an action that an Appeals Court has since rejected. More recently, the Trump administration appealed again to the U.S. Supreme Court to allow restrictions on mail-in voting, which the court blocked. We anticipate more of such efforts to thwart and obstruct voting abilities.

In the days leading up to Election Day, and on the day itself, we anticipate a substantial increase of voter intimidation and election disruption tactics, with new deployments of military and paramilitary forces across U.S. cities, elections offices, and polling stations. We expect that 'state of emergency' declarations by some federal and state executive officials will increase as well, enabling immediate deployments of military and paramilitary forces with fewer meaningful restrictions on how those forces may be deployed.

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We also anticipate a significant increase in both disinformation and misinformation campaigns about polling places, hours and information, as well as voter intimidation at polling locations by national, non-state, and paramilitary actors.

On and after Election Day, we anticipate major obstacles to a democratic transition of local, state, and federal seats and offices. At the state and local level, efforts to impede the post-election transfer of power include federal interference with vote tabulation and election certification by state and local governments through the use of force or police force or by other means, for example, by proxy through militias or so-called "sovereign sheriffs" groups. At the national level, efforts to obstruct or delay the swearing-in of newly elected officials include the removal of the Clerk in the U.S. House of Representatives or the refusal of the U.S. vice president and outgoing house speaker to swear in newly elected members of Congress to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, respectively. Again, there is past precedent here that illustrates the likelihood of this type of anti-constitutional obstruction.

House Speaker Mike Johnson's 50-day delay in swearing-in U.S. Representative Adelita Grijalva last year is one such example. We expect more of this type of action. Preparing for this crisis point, then, will be essential, as later sections of this report outline.

Crisis Point: Use of Military Force

As our baseline, we assume that U.S. cities and states should be protected from unilaterally-deployed federal military and paramilitary presence in public places. We are, however, witnessing mission creep as federal military forces are being deployed domestically, often without consent of or coordination with subnational actors, and with an apparent interest in sustained presence in and control of U.S. cities. This federal military mission creep is leading to more volatile and combustible political and social environments, as communities resist these deployments. Given the heightened tensions rising throughout our cities and communities, a central goal going forward must be to prevent and deescalate any possibility for political violence, particularly over the next six months.

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Beginning in the summer months of 2025, following more than a year of prior military interventions in Los Angeles, Chicago, the Twin Cities, and other major U.S. cities, the Trump administration launched a new wave of highly visible and aggressive federal operations in select U.S. cities.

The most extensive thus far has been in Washington, D.C., where the administration expanded the D.C. Safe and Beautiful Task Force, deployed more than 4,500 National Guard service members, and sent agents from multiple federal agencies to patrol public spaces. The deployment is expected to continue through 2029. The Memphis Safe Task Force, established in 2025, was modeled on the D.C. operation. These initiatives brought together the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the U.S. Marshals Service, and Homeland Security Investigations alongside state and local police and, in some cities, National Guard personnel. Their activities include street patrols, traffic stops, warrant service, fugitive apprehension, and searches of residences.

The Trump administration has signaled its intention to extend elements of this model to other cities, alongside – and sometimes in coordination with – the more widely publicized surges led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection targeting people profiled as immigrants across the country.

These deployments also normalize an overt military and paramilitary presence in urban communities. They have also been accompanied by repeated threats to use military force against American cities. Officials within the federal administration have described cities as war zones and training grounds, threatened to wage war on them, and even raised the prospect of bombing them.

Together, the federal deployments and the rhetoric treat communities as territories to be occupied and controlled rather than as constituencies to be protected. We expect further escalation of military force by the Trump administration in both the period leading up to and throughout the midterm elections point of crisis.

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We share the concerns voiced by former U.S. Senator Timothy Wirth and former U.S. Representative Richard Gephardt, who recently published joint warnings and memorandums detailing the risk that the U.S. president could misuse Presidential Emergency Action Documents to override democratic processes or contest elections. We anticipate the use of the Insurrection Act to dispatch additional military personnel for domestic use within the U.S., a threat Trump issued before to squash protests against Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations.

Even if substantial new federal military and paramilitary escalations against U.S. cities do not materialize before, during, and after the election, the administration's frequent use of unchecked and Congressionally-authorized military force in domestic and foreign policy is troubling, as the sections below illustrate. Accompanying threats by the Trump administration to dismantle international institutions built to hold countries accountable for their use of force, such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, are equally problematic.

At home, grave threats to freedom of movement and expression include the rapid militarization of law enforcement across U.S. cities and counties through a Department of Defense program providing police forces with free military equipment; the substantial expansion of Department of Homeland Security detention facilities nationwide; and the pervasive use of surveillance technology. Analysts have compared these latest developments to mid-20th Century crackdowns by the U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy in the era of McCarthyism, with some experts saying that it is far worse now. What is clear is that the White House is attempting to normalize the military and paramilitary presence in U.S. cities. The ubiquity of National Guard presence in Washington D.C. is itself one obvious example of this, with personnel numbering in the thousands and expected to remain deployed through 2029.

Overseas, the frequent and unlawful use of U.S. armed forces to invade sovereign countries, to kidnap or assassinate heads of state, and steal natural resources is undermining international law and order in new and dangerous ways.

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While many previous U.S. presidential administrations have regularly used military force to unlawfully invade other sovereign nations, the manner in which these raids are being conducted is deeply concerning as it establishes new international norms for lawlessness.

By furthering a clear pattern of continued military compliance with unlawful orders – a practice several members of Congress sought to discourage last year by urging service members to refuse illegal orders – the Department of Defense becomes increasingly unaccountable to Congress, the American people, and international law.

All of this imperils and impedes the work by states, cities, and communities to manage elections processes over the next few months and without intimidation. We expect these military and paramilitary intimidation tactics to extend to other non-state or subnational actors, like nonprofit and local community-based organizations, unions, and universities, who are involved in monitoring and maintaining free and fair elections.

Going forward, we assume that any national or subnational actor could be a target, given that the Trump administration has already published multiple executive orders – including the National Security Presidential Memorandum-7 – and reports by the U.S. Department of State outlining both civilian targets and a new war against organizations critical of this administration. The State Department has been employed to assist in domestic surveillance and intimidation efforts, as has the Justice Department, which continues to issue administrative subpoenas without judicial warrants to critics of the administration. All of this bodes ill for democratic freedoms, as do a series of emerging crisis points, described below, which could compound threats above.

Crisis Points: Emerging

As our baseline, we expect that one or more financial, economic, environmental, public health, or military emergencies will likely escalate to the point of a crisis that will impact the whole of American society and further exacerbate and escalate the crisis points identified above.

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The timing of these emerging points of crisis is hard to predict, but work to further strengthen the capacities of communities and institutions must continue if we are to respond effectively.

We expect that these emerging crises, whether threatened or realized, will be used to further inflame the crisis points identified in previous sections both through federal military and judicial control of midterm elections and the scaling of military and paramilitary presence across U.S. cities and counties.

Understandably, events such as a financial crash, a devastating hurricane, a new virus, or an act of terrorism could create widespread uncertainty and precarity for the public, placing added strain on communities and institutions. These economic, infrastructural, environmental, and social shocks can generate panic and instability that may, in turn, also be used to justify an executive-branch-led military crackdown or election postponement. Consequently, we urge increased attention and short-term readiness across sectors to respond to these emerging points of crisis.

Apart from direct intervention by the White House, the primary shock that could upend the midterm elections this year or the presidential election in 2028 is a financial crash, further destabilizing an economy that is already strained by income inequality, unemployment, inflation, debt, and financial precarity for the majority of Americans. A forecasted crash of the artificial intelligence bubble could be equally disastrous for the economy, as would a credit and housing market collapse triggered by high cost of living, stagnating wages, and underemployment, although the potential for this latter collapse is considered less likely.

Secondary shocks are happening all the time. Mild to severe energy shocks are becoming increasingly common as the Trump administration invades oil-producing countries, disrupting and closing energy supply routes, and as energy grids fail, data centers overwhelm existing systems and generating capacity, or critical infrastructure is targeted by domestic terrorism amid new vulnerabilities from White House cuts to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

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Social and economic shocks from accelerating climate change, meanwhile, continue to worsen, bringing devastating fires, floods, heatwaves and droughts while disrupting energy, food and water supplies. Health shocks are also intensifying, with multiple new viruses now emerging or spreading in the context of a vaccine-adverse administration.

These are all known shocks the U.S. has experienced in the past, is experiencing now, or will experience in the near future.

What is different about many of these emerging crises is that they are becoming both more frequent and more severe and, as a consequence, increasingly mutually reinforcing and compounded.

The overall threat, consequently, is more grave. And the imperative for proactive action to prepare for and respond to these crises is all the more urgent, as the next sections of this report will explain.



Wikimedia Commons

FACING THE CRISIS

America's robust civil society is already in motion preparing for and responding to the crisis points identified above. This report aims to assist existing movements as they grapple with the new realities, identify needs, confront challenges, and create conditions for people to associate with and help one another. This free association is not only what defines free societies, but it is an essential prerequisite for more effective coordination, preparation, and response to emerging crisis points.

Notably, preparedness is not equally developed across each crisis terrain. Election defense, for example, has the most identifiable national infrastructure in place already. In contrast, community-based preparedness to effectively resist military or paramilitary invasion is quite uneven across the United States. Financial-crisis preparedness, furthermore, has a rich base of alternative institutions and ideas but little integrated crisis-specific machinery. Each terrain therefore requires a different emphasis. In this section, we address many of the social movements that are facing the American crisis and how they are doing so.



Unsplash: Kaden Taylor

In assessing movement activity across neighborhoods, cities and towns, workers, faith-based institutions, youth, universities and colleges, media, business, and public officials, we aim to showcase the breadth and depth of both crisis preparation and response. This report begins that process and the subsequent launch of the www.americancrisis.report website will continue that work.

This summary is not exhaustive as there are, undoubtedly, activities happening across all of these and other sectors that remain unreported for safety and security reasons. The primary objective of this summary, then, is to illustrate the potential breadth and depth of how social movements are facing this American crisis.

FACING THE CRISIS

Neighborhoods have historically been and will continue to be essential in mobilizing a sense of place and community for crisis response and a hub for crisis preparation when it comes to local services, mutual aid, and community safety. In recent months, local neighborhood-based rapid response networks have been activated for a range of crisis responses, from election protection and emergency rescue to community defense.

In the present crisis, neighborhoods are taking action to protect local residents from military and federal police incursions. And in recent years, neighborhood-based rapid response networks have proven life-saving in preparing for and responding to emerging crises, like pandemics and climate disasters. Neighborhoods are vital in preserving and protecting free association for Americans and will be increasingly important in the defense of democracy as federal protections are further dismantled. Minneapolis's Defend 612, for example, is a neighborhood-based rapid response network involving more than 80,000 neighbors organized through support networks across the entire city.



Unsplash: Bill Nino

Free DC is another well-developed model combining active neighborhood organizing, popular education, civic noncooperation training, role-plays, jury power, worker and taxpayer leverage, as well as a culture of joy and belonging. Chicago's rapid response and mutual aid networks have been essential in resisting raids by the Department of Homeland Security, as well as providing legal defense funding for residents. Every major city has its own version of these neighborhood-based rapid response networks. These networks will provide essential human infrastructure in the coming months to overcome the many challenges identified in this report. What is important is that these networks remain in place going forward.

FACING THE CRISIS

Cities and towns, in holding and uniting representations of the neighborhood movement identified above, are the sites, sources, and manifestations of community power. These municipalist movements, through which citizens of municipalities work both to democratize their local governments and strengthen federations of cities and towns across America, have assumed new agency and authority in their defense of democracy. In many ways, some of the most democracy-rich activity is happening across local governments right now, in protecting elections, defending against military occupations, building resilient economies, providing social services, responding to climate change, and preparing for pandemics.

Given the federal regulatory and funding rollbacks in climate policy and disaster preparedness and response – as two examples among myriad federal rollbacks – local governments are leading in new ways. While the impetus is far from ideal, as we believe that the federal government should play an active role in supporting resilient communities, this is serving to embolden municipal governments.

The Mayors Innovation Project (MIP), for example, has traditionally provided pro-democracy resources for mayors on long-standing best practices for city leaders, such as building proactive inter-and-non-governmental partnerships and leveraging their status as trusted messengers to provide clear, accurate, and consistent messaging before, during, and after crises. Given emerging trends and evolving threat landscapes, MIP has been providing enhanced and updated resources and guidance on issues related to federal immigration actions, election protection, and threats and harassment of elected officials and public servants.

Recent lawsuits by multiple cities and counties against the Trump administration, furthermore, after the Department of Homeland Security issued new elections-related grant requirements, indicates new momentum by local governments to resist executive branch overreach into the crisis areas identified earlier. We expect to see more of this local leadership in the coming months as cities and towns step up their efforts to protect their communities from escalating crises.

FACING THE CRISIS

Federal, state, and county legislators and public officials, including anyone working in or retired from federal and state governments and agencies, offer another important line of defense in preparing for and responding to the crisis points identified in this report. Many of these legislators and officers, as well as military veterans, are also active members of professional associations and unions. Others have formed new organizations in response to Trump administration firings and rollbacks.

On multiple crisis terrains identified in this report, state officials will be the front line of defense in preserving their state's electoral integrity from executive branch tampering, ensuring their cities are not occupied by federal military or paramilitary forces, and protecting their populations from emerging crises like health and property impacts stemming from climate change.

Legislators across several states have exercised their power to thwart democratic backsliding by staging state legislative walkouts, breaking quorum, and leaving the state entirely.



Unsplash: Tareq Ismail

Former federal officials, similarly, have organized to protect what the executive branch has dismantled, including climate and health science research, interior conservation efforts, and aid and development agendas. Veterans groups, furthermore, like the Veterans for Peace, Veterans Against Fascism, and Veterans Fighting Fascism, have launched new efforts to prepare for and respond to the emerging crises. All of this momentum sets the stage for increased activation among legislators and agency personnel past and present.

FACING THE CRISIS

Universities, colleges, schools, and think-tanks are supporting the broader social movement through general public education, knowledge production, and the pursuit of truth. *The American Crisis* report, as one example, was made possible with the support of the academic community, which continues to convene discussions, like the one that preceded this report, to better understand democratic contexts, decline, and backsliding.

Ensuring that these institutions, and the student movements that emerge within these institutions, remain unfettered in their ability to promote critical thinking is essential to a free democracy.

The signatories of this report, some of whom work in academia, are concerned with the rising attacks on knowledge production. The recent lawsuits by the Trump administration, against think-tanks analyzing the safety and security impacts and efficacy of the National Guard in Washington D.C, is just the latest example of executive branch pressure on public education, knowledge production, and the pursuit of truth.



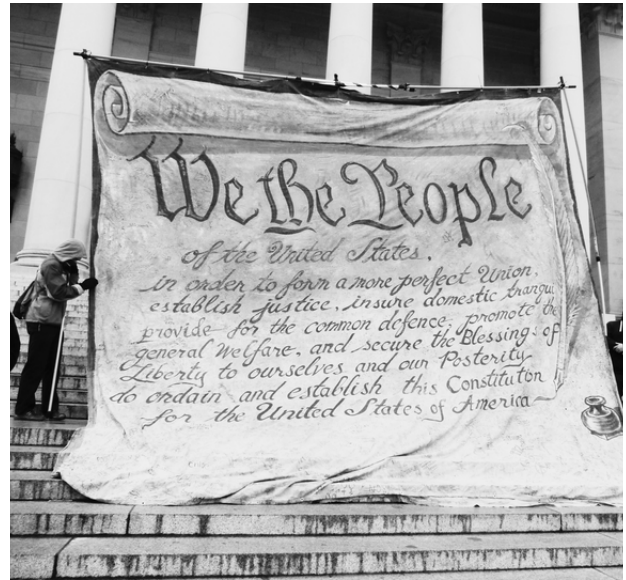
Photo: Ben Manski

And while the courts are sometimes a helpful backstop, as witnessed by a federal judge only recently dismissing a Trump administration lawsuit against Harvard University, the authors of this report expect these lawsuits to continue and anticipate public education and broader knowledge production to be under regular assault. Ensuring that both public educators and knowledge producers are organized in their own defense, and coordinated across universities, colleges, schools, and think-tanks, will provide some needed protection from federal overreach in the coming months.

FACING THE CRISIS

Legal institutions remain a vital line of defense, as many lower court judges face rising intimidation and attacks by the executive branch, in turn leading to unprecedented judge-led protests in the press and in-person. As of September 1, 2026, the U.S. Marshals Service has reported a total of 601 investigations and 425 threats to judges year-to-date.

Legal organizations responding to these crisis points, with both litigation support and legal analysis, include Protect Democracy, the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, Democracy Docket, the Not Above the Law Coalition, the American Civil Liberties Union, and more. As a result of their efforts, the Trump administration is now facing a historic volume of legal challenges, which the New York Times Lawsuit Tracker is currently chronicling. In responding to and preparing for the crisis points identified in this report, more than 850 lawsuits have challenged the Trump administration's sweeping range of executive actions and policy changes. These lines of action will be essential in defending democracy, but they are not guaranteed to succeed.



Unsplash: Larry Alger

On the whole, the higher tiers of the federal courts, led by the Supreme Court, have significantly enabled the rolling back of voting rights, citizens' rights to resist military or paramilitary occupation, and taxpayer and human rights to hold fossil fuel and related petrochemical companies, financial sector firms, and pharmaceutical companies accountable.

Consequently, increased vigilance in the next six months by legal aid and reform organizations and others will be vital in contesting the destabilization of U.S. democracy.

FACING THE CRISIS

Workers, active in every American city, town and neighborhood, are finding new ways to act collectively through labor unions, regional labor federations, and other workers organizations, to protect individual workers and groups of workers and strengthen the power of workers at work and in society. Labor unions are playing a pivotal role in responding to the crisis points identified earlier in the report, strengthening community-based and workplace-based infrastructure in U.S. cities, regions, and states that may face federal interventions.

Labor unions increasingly play significant roles in crisis preparedness and response. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) maintains an active Democracy Defenders program, for example, to ensure eligible voters are able to cast a ballot and have it counted. AFT is now scaling up its monitoring efforts in advance of the midterm elections. May Day Strong, as another example, is organizing over 500 labor and community organizations in mobilizations across the United States, with thousands of accompanying actions planned.



Courtesy of the Labor Temple Association

The U.S. is witnessing a rise in cross-sector worker organizing, worker and consumer cooperatives. With workers in transportation, utilities, water, internet, and other infrastructure strategically situated for coordinated nonviolent resistance in preparation for and in response to crisis points. This activation will be essential in securing sufficient people power in and around the crisis points identified earlier.

FACING THE CRISIS

Businesses, including many media outlets, are still finding their footing after recent years of rollbacks on environmental, social, and governance commitments. In advance of the midterm elections, there are corporate pledges being circulated, inviting business leader signatories to support statements like “a strong and vibrant state requires free and democratic elections,” and, “a thriving economy requires a healthy democracy.”

Relatedly, business-led lawsuits against the Trump administration are on the rise. The Walt Disney Company and ABC recently challenged the Trump administration by filing a federal lawsuit against the Federal Communications Commission over alleged retaliatory threats to the network's broadcast licenses. The media outlet The Intercept and the Freedom of the Press Foundation also recently filed a federal lawsuit against the Trump administration to block the president's personal social media business, Truth Social, from selling advance access to the president's posts. More of this kind of pushback by the business community will be essential in the defense of our democracy.

This is especially true as the White House's actions continue to affect U.S. businesses small and large both here and abroad. Tariffs, in particular, have led to significant headaches for many sectors, including manufacturers and retailers, as well as others with global supply chains. Additionally, the Trump administration's actions have substantially impacted U.S. multinationals' standing and brand value, triggering consumer flight and intentional decoupling of government procurement from American companies closely tied to the administration.

These and other social movements, including thriving racial justice, Indigenous, environmental, women's, LGBTQIA+, faith-based, youth and other movements, have led courageously in recent years and will continue to provide leadership in critical areas. New movements and new forms of organizing will also continue to emerge and reemerge over time.

America's social movement is made up of many movements, all of them social in the sense that they seek to create conditions for a universally free society.

FACING THE CRISIS

Building Capacity and Coordination

What is clear across these movements is the need to develop stronger pathways that move our society from reaction and defense into longer-term, relationship-based, and proactive forms of engagement and power-building. Preparedness is uneven by place. Some cities possess dense networks of trusted relationships, training, and rapid response, while communities facing equally serious threats – particularly cities led by Black-elected officials facing hostile state governments – may receive far less sustained national attention, investment, and support.

One of the central conclusions of this report is that, while the United States possesses significant democratic-response capacity, much of it remains fragmented. Local neighborhood networks, labor organizations, faith communities, public institutions, legal advocates, and local governments frequently operate without shared language or common protocol, trusted coordination or practiced ways to act together. The central preparedness challenge is therefore not only to build more capacity, but to connect, test, and mobilize what already exists.

Many of the capacities needed in a crisis will not be freshly created. Instead, they will come from institutions, relationships, and infrastructure reoriented beyond their ordinary functions in times of normalcy. Neighborhood rapid response networks will continue to support election protection or broader community defense, yet may develop new functions. Schools and public buildings will serve as distribution and coordination centers. Transit, utility, postal, education, manufacturing, government, and care workers will exercise strategic leverage. Faith institutions, campuses, and cultural spaces will become trusted gathering and communications sites. The American people will act through multiple roles, as workers, jurors, tenants, consumers, citizens, and public servants.

This is a time of great innovation and ingenuity, where subnational actors will revitalize and reform to meet the moment. There is new power and possibility to be harnessed by these developments, especially when coordinated across sectors and mobilized across states. This is the opportunity that awaits for creating a healthy democracy and a thriving republic.

CONCLUSION: UNITE AND STRENGTHEN

We recognize that significant work is happening all across the country as millions of Americans prepare to face the crisis. There is much that can be done to build on these movements. Some preparations are taking place in public. Other preparations are taking place in confidential spaces and places, given the threat of attack by the executive branch. The recommendations that follow, then, should be understood merely as contributions to a larger societal response to a rising American crisis. Starting at the local level, in our neighborhoods and communities, and ending with our national representatives, there are processes that can and should be advanced immediately.

Communities, Lead: Communication, Coordination, and Solidarity

We have identified local communities, first and foremost, as the central locus of control in stabilizing America's democratic transition, as republican power has always ultimately remained with the people. But American communities can only effectively exercise this power if they deliberately orchestrate their actions in concert.

This is why there is a primary need for increased communication, coordination, and solidarity among U.S. neighborhoods, cities, towns, counties, and regions.

This, then, is the order in which leadership must be grounded, with municipalities at the forefront of this movement to restore U.S. democratic checks and balances. These local bodies best represent the public interest and the public need. If municipalities align, their collective influence can help deescalate, overcome, or prevent the crisis points described in this report – especially when backed by state governments exercising their many constitutional powers and by public, community, and business institutions.

This solidarity among communities will go a long way toward protecting the American people from electoral and military takeover. This solidarity can provide greater security against the economic, public health, and ecological harms faced by millions of Americans. Without it, more fracturing lies ahead. The leadership role in this time of crisis, then, is with municipalities.

CONCLUSION: UNITE AND STRENGTHEN

In preparing for the points of crisis identified here, and through our ongoing conversations with movement leaders, it has become clear that many significant assets and capacities are already in play, but they remain far too disconnected.

If we hope to respond adequately to any of these major crises, this will need to be addressed. The convening that shaped this report is one of many gatherings taking place in advance of the midterm elections. It is incumbent upon the social movement in the U.S. to ensure that these kinds of convenings happen with regularity, rigor, and discipline.

As part of this coordination skilling and scaling up, the authors want to emphasize that communications should be treated as crisis infrastructure, not merely public relations. What has become clear is that communities and movements need more trusted messengers, rapid documentation and narrative response, and secure cross-organizational channels, as well as low-tech alternatives that can function during surveillance, platform failure, or internet disruption. These are musts going forward.

Institutions, Prepare: Public Discussion, Planning, and Mobilization

There is an urgent need for broad public deliberation on these specific points of crisis, as well as on underlying systemic causes of these crises, more generally. All actors mentioned in this report have a role to play in this deliberation and education.

Those that have heretofore taken on this role, like universities and colleges, are under increased attack from the executive branch, which is why all subnational institutions, from local governments to schools and colleges, as well as state and federal public servants, must assume new roles as deliberators of crisis points and educators of systemic causes.

Local municipalities are particularly well primed for this task given local proximity, trust, and direct ties with local communities. Given that public trust in local officials is usually higher than it is among state and federal representatives, there is an opportunity for local leaders to assume new roles in preparing, planning, and mobilizing the public.

CONCLUSION: UNITE AND STRENGTHEN

Furthermore, because the anti-democratic obstructionism described in *The American Crisis* undermines municipal governments' ability to conduct business as usual across a range of services, local leaders must take the lead in this preparation, planning and mobilization work.

Effective preparation for these crises should include scenario exercises, shared crisis indicators, decision and activation protocols, and escalating structure tests that can reveal whether and how organizations, institutions, and local groups can act together under pressure. This essential work should not be done in a vacuum nor in an ad hoc fashion. In most cases, the solutions and capacities already exist; employing them in concert across sectors can be an empowering process for all involved.

In preparing for constitutional, climate, or pandemic crises, similar kinds of transition programs are already available because the U.S. has faced repeated points of crisis in the last few decades that are similar in substance, if not similar in potential scale, to those identified in this report.

These crises are both familiar and similar because they emerged from the same underlying systemic conditions. Thus, the socioeconomic, political, and ecological transition programs Americans produced in response remain relevant today.

Significant work is still needed to develop intelligible alternatives ready for post-crisis rollout. For example, in preparation for a financial crisis, substantial building blocks for an alternative response – including labor, tenant, and farmer organizing, mutual aid, credit unions, public banking, cooperatives, land trusts and municipal capacity – must be teed up.

Currently, there is still insufficient crisis-specific coordination among these existing efforts and capacities. A positive, effective reconstruction program must be prepared before a financial crash, because decisions about who is protected, who bears the losses, and what institutions are rebuilt will be made quickly once a crisis is underway. Therefore, this preparatory work is needed now, well in advance of an emergency rather than later, when the crisis is already unfolding.

CONCLUSION: UNITE AND STRENGTHEN

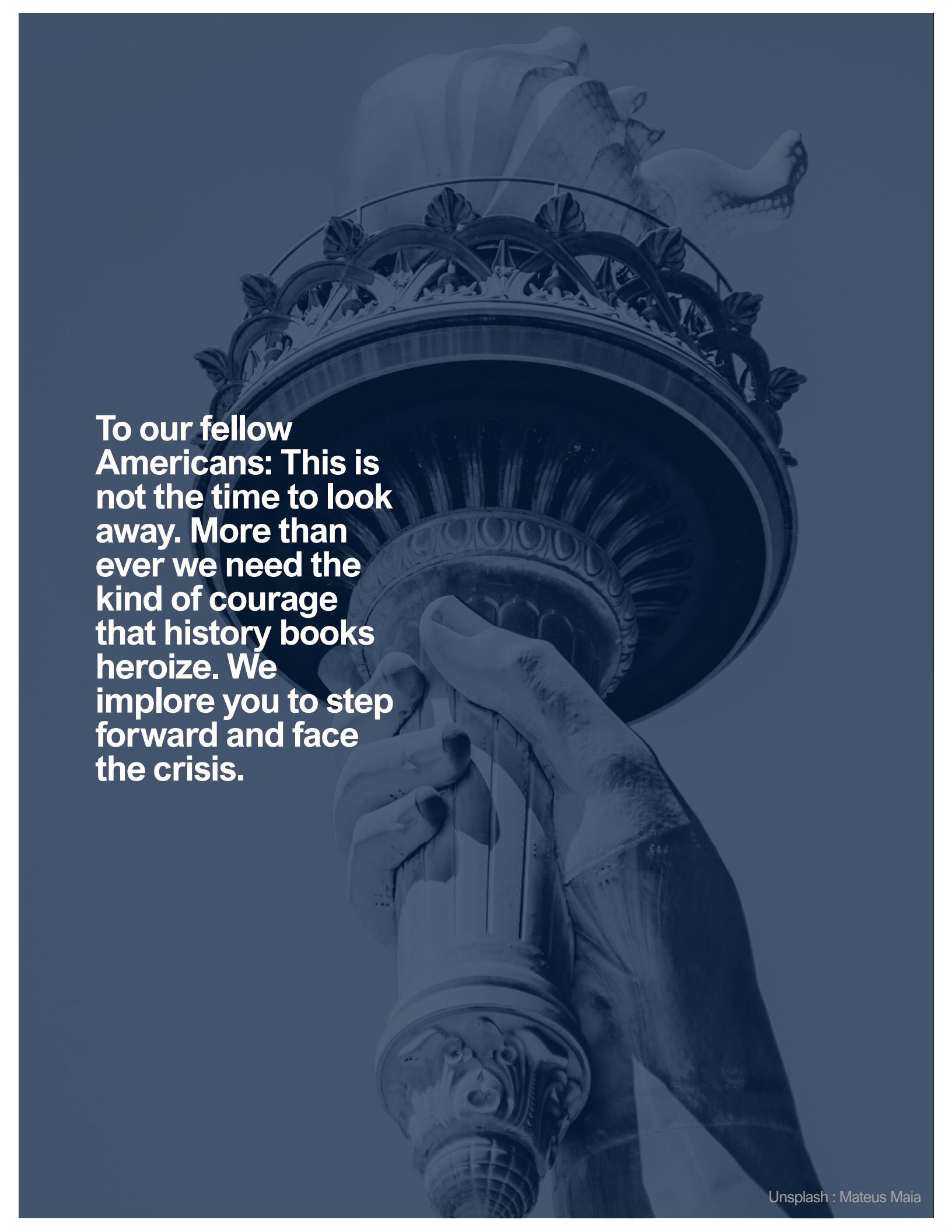
Congress, Stand Fast: Honor Your Oaths

This is the time for the U.S. Congress to assert itself as the primary branch of the federal government. The generation of 1776 intended to establish a republic, not a monarchy. They chose to grant Congress supremacy over the rest of the federal government: supremacy in the making of laws; supremacy over the national military; supremacy in regulating the courts; and supremacy in supervising the executive branch. This is the reason the legislative branch is described first in the U.S. Constitution, as Article I. Over many years, much of this Congressional supremacy, representing the sovereignty of the American people and their states, has been gradually abdicated or stolen. Without Congress, there is no republic, only dictatorship. If the U.S. is to remain a republic, members of Congress must take seriously their oath to uphold the Constitution by ensuring a successful democratic transition of power. That oath requires members of Congress to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies, bear true faith and allegiance to it, and faithfully discharge their duties.

Americans have the right to expect this from members of Congress in the coming months, as well as their support for members of the military, if necessary, in refusing to follow illegal orders if ordered to interfere with elections. Additionally, we look to national legislators to support state legislators in upholding both the 9th and 10th Amendments to the Constitution, as those reserved rights and powers are essential to the balance of forces intended by the founders.

The time for action is now, before Congress relinquishes even more of its constitutionally-enumerated powers to the executive branch. There is mounting anger among the American public and a strong desire for change. Meanwhile, system collapse is accelerating and people's lives are increasingly getting caught up and destroyed in that collapse.

The United States has all of the capacity and capability it needs to provide for a better life for all of America, but that can only be accomplished if democracy is unleashed. In contrast, authoritarianism thwarts America's potential at every turn.



**To our fellow
Americans: This is
not the time to look
away. More than
ever we need the
kind of courage
that history books
heroize. We
implore you to step
forward and face
the crisis.**

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*This report seeks to offer a critical contribution to ongoing deliberations and does not claim to
be fully comprehensive. To explore additional reports, tools, and dimensions of the issues
raised here and to stay informed, visit www.americancrisis.report*