



1/6: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Education and Action Guide

**WESTERN
STATES
CENTER**

WELCOME TO THE EDUCATION AND ACTION GUIDE FOR 1/6: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL!

The right to a fair and accurate election—in which everyone’s vote counts—is core to our democracy. And the understanding that we are all created equal in rights and dignity is crucial to ensuring that we have a democracy that works for everyone. Yet on January 6, 2021, a violent mob, fueled by disinformation and bigotry, attacked the U.S. Capitol in an effort to overturn a free and fair election. Behind the scenes, cynical politicians and pundits used lies and intimidation in an attempt to thwart the will of the people. The values of democracy, equality, and truth almost died that day in America.



The 1/6 Insurrection failed because of the bravery of a small number of public officials, police officers, and others who refused to buckle to intimidation or to give in to political violence. *But real threats to democracy, equality, and truth still remain.* The forces of autocracy, bigotry, and disinformation that drove the 1/6 Insurrection have not gone away, and some have become even stronger.

Now it’s up to all of us to prevent future insurrections and to strengthen our democracy for future generations.

In the pages that follow, we share simple steps that anyone can take to protect democracy and push back on bigotry, more ambitious actions when you feel more confident and experienced, and broader advice on what makes for effective activism. We hope you find it useful. But *you* are the hero of this story, so we encourage you to bring your own ideas, creativity, and activism to this challenge and connect with others who share your values.

About Western States Center

Based in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain States, Western States Center (WSC) works nationwide to strengthen inclusive democracy. For over 35 years, our work has advanced social, racial, and economic justice by convening, developing, organizing, and supporting the communities most affected by inequities. We’ve played a catalytic role, working with community partners to build people-centered movements, defend democracy, develop new leaders, and shift culture with our eyes on the prize of a society where all can live, love, and work free from bigotry and fear. For more information, visit westernstatescenter.org

From the Authors of 1/6: The Graphic Novel

Like many of you, we love comic books and we love democracy. Our democracy is at grave risk right now, and a graphic novel telling that story is one way to help save it. Comic books have a long history of supporting freedom and opposing bigotry—from Captain America taking on Adolf Hitler in his first issue, to Superman, Black Panther, and other superheroes fighting the Ku Klux Klan across the decades. In the end, though, the best solution we have is for everyday people who believe in freedom, equality, and democracy to get involved and to demand better. Thank you for being one of those people! Learn more about the graphic novel series and sign up for updates at www.OneSixComics.com.

—ALAN JENKINS AND GAN GOLAN

The Facts

Before you begin taking action, make sure you’re familiar with the real information surrounding the Insurrection and the threats that remain. Some of those key facts are set out below, and you can go even deeper through the resources that we include at the end of this guide.

The Insurrection combined a political plot with a violent attack.

On January 6, 2021,—two months after the November 3, 2020, election and the day set aside for certification of the Electoral College votes, cast one month earlier declaring Joe Biden the next president of the United States—thousands of people converged on the U.S. Capitol, egged on by lies about the 2020 election from lame-duck President Trump, his allies, and white nationalist propaganda. Hundreds of them unlawfully broke through security fences, attacked police officers, entered the Capitol Building, and attempted to violently overturn the results of a fair election. At least seven people lost their lives in connection with the attack, and more than **140 U.S. Capitol Police and D.C. Metropolitan Police officers** were injured. In the weeks leading up to the attack on the Capitol, then-President Trump and others pressured state and local officials to ignore or falsely change the election results. They hounded then-Vice President Pence to ignore his constitutional duty to certify the election for Joe Biden. And fake electors were sent to seven swing states to falsely claim victory for the former president. The Insurrection failed because several officials refused to be intimidated and because police officers eventually managed to suppress the attack.

President Biden was elected in 2020 through a fair and accurate election.

The Department of Homeland Security’s cybersecurity agency, led by an official who President Trump appointed, issued a statement calling

“In the weeks leading up to the attack on the Capitol, then-President Trump and others pressured state and local officials to ignore or falsely change the election results.”

the 2020 election **the “most secure” election in U.S. history**. Courts, including many presided over by Republican-appointed judges, rejected **61 of 62** of President Trump’s legal challenges to the 2020 election results. The only successful legal challenge was a procedural issue in Pennsylvania that did not change the results of the election in the state or nation.

The insurrectionists sought to overturn a fair election.

The goal of the insurrectionists was to overturn the 2020 election results and prevent the peaceful transition of power. In an Orwellian twist of language, the goal of the “Stop The Steal” rally was, in fact, to steal the election. The groups on site hoped to seize the ballots that were being counted, occupy the House and Senate chambers, or take hostages.

“Many participants were armed and an array of weapons were confiscated before and after January 6.”

Behind the scenes, then-President Trump and his allies were preparing to substitute fake electors to falsely certify victory for him in key swing states.

The Insurrection included serious threats of violence against political leaders.

Rioters were recorded chanting “Hang Mike Pence” and some had assembled a gallows and noose outside of the Capitol Building. A hearing of the U.S. congressional committee investigating the Insurrection revealed that a confidential informant from the Proud Boys told the FBI that they would have **“killed Mike Pence if given a chance.”** Many participants **were armed** and an array of weapons were confiscated before and after January 6. Trump’s staff testified that he had requested that weapons detectors be removed from entrances. Prosecutors have revealed that the far-right Oath Keepers had a **massive cache of weapons** stashed in a Virginia hotel room in preparation for the Insurrection. “I had not seen that many weapons in one location since I was in the military,” **said** one participant. Two pipe bombs were placed in front of party headquarters, before being discovered and disarmed. Insurrectionist leaders **urged Trump to invoke the Insurrection Act**, which would have deputized armed militias to use violence against fellow Americans.

White supremacy, antisemitism, and other forms of hate played key roles in the Insurrection.

January 6th rioters hung nooses that recalled the lynchings of Black people, shouted racial slurs at Capitol Police officers, and waved

Confederate flags. Insurrectionists also waved the flag for “Kekistan,” an alt-right meme modeled after the Nazi war flag. At least one rioter wore a “Camp Auschwitz” shirt, and many employed hand signals meant to denote white power. Key leaders in the attack on the Capitol were members of the extremist groups the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers. The Proud Boys have been designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Leaders of both groups have been convicted of, or pleaded guilty to, seditious conspiracy surrounding their roles in the Insurrection.

False information and “disinformation” contributed to the Insurrection.

Insurrectionists were genuinely misled by false information about the 2020 election that reached millions of people around the country through social media ahead of the Insurrection. Many have since **expressed regret** about believing what they had been told. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were frequently used for this purpose. Far-right message boards like Parler and messaging app Telegram were used as recruitment and organizing tools. As reported by *The Washington Post*, internal company documents show that Facebook officials knew “that misinformation shared by politicians was more damaging than that coming from ordinary users. Yet the company maintained a policy that...explicitly allowed political leaders to lie without facing the possibility of fact checks.” In the weeks before the Insurrection, Facebook rolled back many of the dozens of election-season measures intended to suppress hateful, deceptive content. After the November 3 election, in an infamous December 19, 2020 tweet, outgoing President Trump repeated the false claim that he had won the election and encouraged his supporters to attend the disastrous January 6th “Stop the Steal” rally, declaring, “Big protest in D.C. on January 6th,” and “Be there, will be wild!”

TODAY’S THREATS

The Insurrection did not end on January 6th. Many threats to democracy, equality, and truth remain in the wake of the 1/6 Insurrection. Among the most visible of these:

- A 2022 survey found that **15 to 20 million Americans still believe** that the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump and that force is justified to return him to power.
- Of the 291 candidates in the 2022 midterms who denied the 2020 election results, **178 won**. They ran in every region of the country and in almost every state.
- Hate crimes rooted in racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, and other forms of hatred remain on the rise. FBI data show that **10,840 hate crime incidents** were **reported** in 2021, the highest number documented in over 20 years. The total number is almost certainly much higher because these crimes are often underreported to law enforcement and many jurisdictions do not report hate crime data to the FBI.
- In June 2022, the FBI and Department of Homeland Security issued a joint statement **warning of growing threats against law enforcement, courts, and public officials**. Shortly afterwards a man tried to breach the FBI’s Cincinnati office armed with a nail gun and an AR-15-style rifle. A different man has reportedly admitted to assaulting Paul Pelosi on October 28, 2022, as part of an attempt to kidnap his wife, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.
- Armed individuals calling themselves “poll watchers” have been showing up to

intimidate voters at polling places in many parts of the country. Poll workers across the country have received **death threats**.

• Politicians in many places are making it harder to vote by creating new eligibility requirements, closing down polling places, and opposing vote-by-mail and other strategies that increase participation. **In 2022 alone, 11 new state laws passed restricting voting.**

• **Politicians around the country are increasingly banning books—a hallmark of authoritarianism.** According to Pen America, “the scale and force of book banning in local communities is escalating dramatically,” and “[t]he move to ban both fiction and non-fiction books dealing with diverse characters and experiences—including racial, ethnic, and religious identities, gender identities and sexual orientations—reflects a backlash against attempts to bring a more diverse and inclusive set of voices and perspectives into the curriculum.”



Taking Action!

There's a lot that we can do—individually and together—to address these threats and move toward a stronger and more just democracy. Experience and research from around the country and globe point to several core principles and some effective strategies.

PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER

GET LOCAL

A number of organizations work to uphold democracy and combat discrimination and disinformation at the national level, and we list several of them at the end of this guide. But local efforts are critical, and that's where most of us can have significant impact. Key elements of the 1/6 Insurrection were executed at the local level, and the groups who organized them are still working to impact local governments and community institutions like schools, libraries, and city councils. Your community relationships, memberships, activism, and voting can all help to strengthen our democracy.

BE STRATEGIC

You can do the most good in the fight against bigotry and authoritarianism if you can explain why it matters to you and if you focus on the actions that call on your unique skills. Your faith tradition, creativity, volunteerism, or cultural practices can all help you connect with others and inspire people to action.

BE PRAGMATIC

Big, high-profile actions like mass protests and rallies are impactful, but they require a lot of organizing work and organizational infrastructure. Depending on where you are with your activism, you may want to begin with a more straightforward action like circulating a petition urging school officials to address hate in schools or asking pointed questions of officials at a town hall meeting. Such actions are important on their own and can help build momentum for more ambitious activities. You can also get very creative. For inspiration, take a look at these creative tactics from [Beautiful Trouble](#).

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Prioritize your audiences and set clear goals. The most strategic audiences are typically *Decisionmakers* who can get you what you want (e.g., a mayor, school board member, or swing voter) and *Influencers* who your Decisionmakers will find persuasive (e.g., a faith congregation, editorial board, or local business leaders). The most effective goals typically consist of "SMART" objectives—aspirations that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timebound. (For more in-depth planning, check out Spitfire's [SMART Chart 4.0](#))

BE INCLUSIVE

As you connect and organize with others in your community, work to assemble a diverse coalition from the start, including people from different walks of life, racial and ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, and other perspectives. Support the leadership and safety of people who are particular targets of discrimination and intimidation based on their identity.

PRIORITIZE ACTIVATION OVER PERSUASION

Instead of trying to convince an avowed white nationalist that they are wrong, focus on getting people who you know care about democracy to take some simple first steps. Start conversations with questions rather than statements, and listen to people's concerns and ideas.

MAP YOUR PERSONAL POWER

Figure out why democracy matters to you, how you want to make an impact, and how you inspire people around you. Do you know a local elected official? Are you a graphic designer who can make flyers? Are you active in your house of worship? You can draw on your unique strengths to build community resilience to bigotry.

LEAD WITH SHARED VALUES

Focus less on winning the argument and more on finding points of connection. When you start conversations with shared values like "we believe in democracy, fairness, or feeling safe in your community" rather than with outrage or rhetoric, people are more likely to see you as on their side.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

You will be the best judge of what will work in your local community at any given time. And we encourage you to get creative, with the above principles in mind. To get you started, here are some activities that have proven effective for others. We've included a range of options, including more straightforward actions and heavier lifts.

SIX THINGS YOU CAN DO AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL

➔ **Talk With Your Friends and Family:** If you're concerned that friends and family believe misinformation, consider PEN America's [advice](#). Think twice before responding publicly, both because being called out can cause people to double down, and because your comment may draw more attention to the misinformation. When you do engage, opt for a supportive and empathetic tone that will avoid alienating them. If the conversation goes poorly, don't escalate, but instead continue to share trustworthy and accurate information with those

who do want to listen. If you're talking with a family member or friend who disagrees with you about policies related to democracy and rights, this [resource](#) has tips on how to keep the lines of communication open and engage based on values.

➔ **Keep Hate Groups From Recruiting Kids:** White supremacist and anti-democracy groups know that many young people feel confused and alienated and are increasingly recruiting them online through video games, social media, and other spaces. Use



“Your voice matters.”

[Western States Center resources](#) to learn how to intervene and talk to the young people in your life about the harmful effects of bigotry.

➔ **Support Survivors of Hate:** If there is a hate incident in your community, reach out to the organization that was targeted and ask what you can do to help. If it's an individual or group of people being targeted, support the local organizations that are responding. Knowing that community members like you are supportive will reduce the sense of fear and isolation that attacks can trigger.

➔ **Vote for Democracy:** Civic participation starts with you. Research the candidates and referenda

SIX THINGS YOU CAN DO AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

➔ **Learn What to Look For:** Many white nationalist and anti-democracy groups use coded words, phrases, and symbols, sometimes called dog whistles. If you hear or see something that feels out of place, cross-check it against [the symbols used by the groups that organized 1/6](#) and lists of other [symbols, slogans, and slurs](#). If you do hear coded phrases from people you know, Western States [Center's Confronting Conspiracy Theories and Organized Bigotry at Home](#) has guidance on how to assess the level of risk and how to respond. Talk with your neighbors about what they're seeing, pay attention to local newspapers and neighborhood groups on social media, and attend city council meetings to understand who is organizing for bigoted or anti-democracy

on the ballot in your district and ask their positions on truth, democracy, and equality issues. Be aware of deadlines, register, and vote your values on Election Day.

➔ **Shape the Story:** Your voice matters. Consider writing an op-ed or letter to the editor in your local paper or commenting on a community blog. Consult [The Opportunity Agenda's](#) media advice—especially leading with shared values, lifting up solutions, and asking your audience for action. For example, ask readers to sign a pledge to oppose bigotry or to thank a neighbor who has worked the polls during every election for years.

➔ **Contribute:** While direct action is important, contributions still matter. If and when you're able, consider contributing financially to pro-democracy and racial justice organizations that align with your values. The nonprofit resource [Guidestar](#) allows you to search for verified nonprofits by issue and location. Among the groups to consider are [Western States Center](#) (that's us) and [The Opportunity Agenda](#) (co-founded by 1/6 co-author Alan Jenkins), both of which promote inclusive democracy and freedom from discrimination.

aims in your community and who stands for equality and democracy. Once you know what's happening, it will be easier to figure out what to do about it. Tools like the Southern Poverty Law Center's [Hate Map](#) can also help you get a better understanding of the main groups driving bigoted organizing.

➔ **Prepare Now:** When you see swastikas or racial slurs graffitied on local buildings, you will want to already have a sense of how to respond. Think ahead of time about who to notify and what resources might be available to you. When things are quiet, conduct research, connect with other activists in your area, learn more about your local elected officials, and practice what you might want to say or do when something does happen.

➔ **Respond to Organized Bigotry:** When hate incidents or bigoted organizing happen in your community and garner attention, it can force leaders to pick a side—for democracy or for bigotry. You can help push them to pick democracy by speaking out and encouraging the organizations you're part of to do the same. Other creative tactics can help lessen the fear and intimidation that organized bigotry creates. For instance, if a white nationalist group spreads propaganda in your neighborhood or hosts a rally, community groups can turn their goals upside down by fundraising for pro-democracy organizations for every flyer distributed or [minute the rally lasts](#).

➔ **Host a Public Conversation:** Ask the leaders of your religious congregation, union, parentteacher association, or other local group to host a discussion on protecting democracy and keeping bigotry out of our communities. Democratic values should be shared across political differences.

➔ **Help Folks Get to the Polls:** [Vote.org](#) has all the information you need on your local deadlines

FOUR THINGS YOU CAN DO AT THE POLICY LEVEL

➔ **Participate in City Council or Local Government Meetings:** Many local government officials are [repeating anti-democracy conspiracy theories](#), while others have [faced death threats](#) and other attacks for trying to dispel them. Show up at local government meetings and speak out in support of elected officials who make pro-democracy and anti-bigotry statements. If your elected officials are promoting conspiracy theories, let other voters know about it. Even better, partner with a local group to hold them accountable. If your elected officials are somewhere in between, let them know how important it is to you that they clearly side with democracy.

➔ **Organize a Letter or Email Action:** If, for example, the Proud Boys protest inclusive programming at your local library or your school district is facing a book ban, write an email or letter to your representatives and senators to encourage them

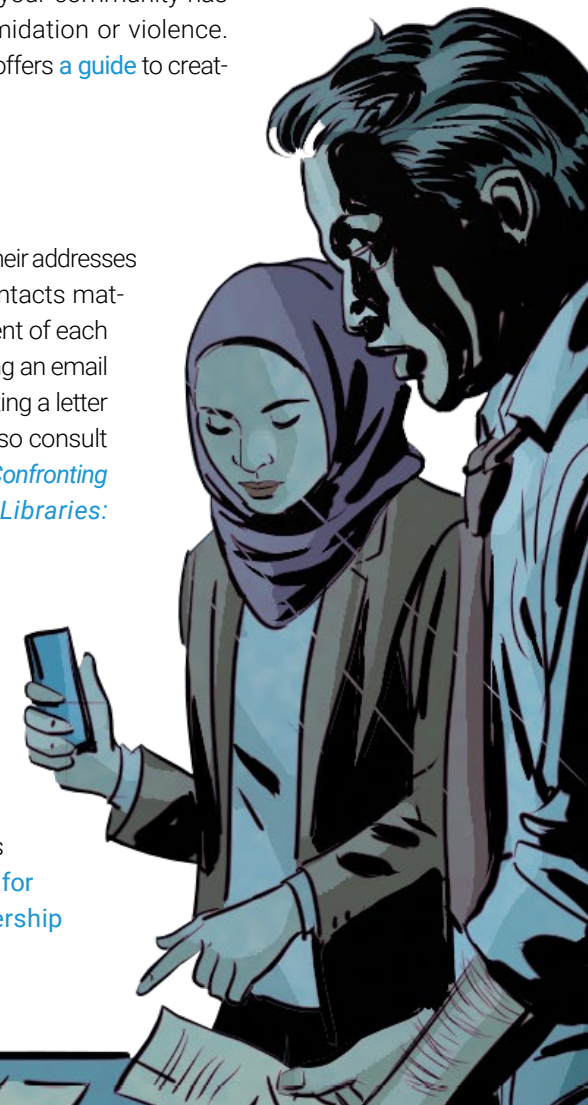
and requirements, so you can visit the site to get informed and help your friends and family overcome obstacles to get registered and cast their votes. On Election Day, send them a reminder text to get out and vote and, if you have a car and some flexibility, take the day off from work and give people rides.

➔ **Build Community:** Get out into your neighborhood, even if it's not for something you might think of as political. Consider volunteering at the local food bank, becoming a member of the Rotary Club, or volunteering more with your child's school or the local library. Community engagement is an important part of strengthening democracy!

➔ **Make Public Art:** Bringing the community together to create art that champions democracy can be an opportunity for healing and solidarity—especially if your community has been impacted by intimidation or violence. Downstream Strategies offers [a guide](#) to creating a community mural.

to respond. You can find their addresses [here](#). The volume of contacts matters more than the content of each piece, so consider creating an email template to share or hosting a letter writing party. You can also consult Western States Center's [Confronting White Nationalism in Libraries: A Toolkit](#).

➔ **Share Solutions:** If your state government is considering a law that restricts voting rights, speak out against it and offer real solutions to the challenges our democracy is facing. [Brennan Center for Justice](#) and the [Leadership](#)



[Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) have great solution-based resources.

➔ **Run for Office:** School boards, library boards, and town councils can be low-profile, and even a few hundred votes can be enough to win. Many

groups offer boot camps and tools for first-time candidates. If you're not ready to run, consider volunteering for a local candidate who shares your values around protecting democracy. Or serve as a poll watcher on Election Day.

FOUR WAYS YOU CAN USE 1/6: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL FOR EDUCATION AND ORGANIZING

1/6: The Graphic Novel is intended to entertain while educating and activating new audiences. Alongside this guide, you can use the comics in a number of ways:

➔ **Organize a Community Reading:** Assemble a group of folks who might be disengaged or disenfranchised with traditional politics but enjoy comics or speculative fiction. Libraries, college campuses, congregations, and community groups are all places to consider. Talk about whether and how the book's themes play out in the real world—especially in your community. If there's interest, take the next step and discuss whether some of the actions in this guide might be a fit in your community. Be prepared for participants with differing views and treat all participants with respect. Disagreements can be opportunities to do collaborative research, preferably at the library or from other reliable sources.

➔ **Create a Comics and Democracy Book Club:** Create a reading list that includes *1/6: The Graphic Novel* and related graphic works like *V for Vendetta*, *Maus*, and *Calexit*. Solicit the group and your local comic book store for their favorites, including superhero titles like *X-Men: Days of Future Past* or *Superman Smashes the Klan*. And make sure the works are age appropriate for your participants. Develop a few questions for discussion, like what participants would do in different characters' positions and what the authors have said about their

work.

➔ **Use 1/6 for Organizing:** When organizing around issues of democracy and discrimination with new, skeptical audiences, consider using copies of the comic book to break the ice and start new conversations. Barber shops, beauty parlors, laundromats, and other places where people have spare time are fair game for this strategy.

➔ **Request Free Copies for Events and Conferences:** We are making a limited number of free comic books available to verified non-profit organizations that focus on democracy and freedom from bigotry. If you're with one of those groups, you can request free copies [here](#).

These are just a few examples of actions that you can take at the personal, community, and policy levels. We list additional tools, resources, and other sources of trusted information at the end of this guide. And, again, we hope that you'll get creative with activities that uphold our shared values and move us forward together.



Thank you for considering the advice in this guide and for your commitment to truth, equality, and democracy. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Open Society Foundations, the Ford Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, the Kettering Foundation, and Ken Grossinger, as well as the many everyday supporters who made this guide possible.

TOOLS, RESOURCES, AND OTHER SOURCES OF TRUSTED INFORMATION

General Resources

- [Final Report](#) of the Select House Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. [Supporting documents](#) are also available.
- The Bard Center for the Study of Hate, Western States Center, and Montana Human Rights Network's [Community Guide for Opposing Hate](#)
- [Skin in the Game: Antisemitism, White Nationalism, and the Work for an Inclusive Democracy](#) webinar

Communication Advice

- The Opportunity Agenda's [Vision Values Voice: Messaging for Lasting Change](#) and [Tips for Responding to White Supremacist Terrorism](#)
- The ACLU's [Tips for Writing Your Elected Officials](#)

For Working With (and Within) Local Government and Institutions

- [She Should Run](#) and [Emerge America](#) Candidate Boot Camps
- Western States Center's [Strengthening Local Government Against Bigoted and Anti-Democracy Movements](#)
- Western States Center's [Confronting White Nationalism in Libraries: A Toolkit](#)
- Western States Center's [Confronting White Nationalism in Schools: A Toolkit](#)
- Race Forward's [H.E.A.L. Together](#) Pledge

Tools for Parents and Families

- Western States Center's [Confronting Conspiracy Theories and Organized Bigotry at Home](#)
- Southern Poverty Law Center and PERIL's [Building Resilience and Confronting Risk: A Parents and Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization](#)
- Western States Center's [Hate in the Homeland Reader's Guide](#)

Other Groups to Learn From

- [The Brennan Center for Justice](#) develops and analyzes policies to protect and promote democracy.
- [The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights](#) offers resources on protecting voting rights.
- [The League of Women Voters](#) has local chapters across the country dedicated to protecting the future of democracy.
- [Not Above the Law Coalition's](#) Our Freedoms, Our Vote [site](#) has pro-democracy actions you can join and encourage others to participate in.
- [People's Action](#) and the [NAACP](#) run campaigns all across the country on a range of issues.
- [Protect Democracy](#) analyzes the threat of authoritarianism in the U.S. and offers concrete solutions to push back against it.
- [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) tracks and analyzes anti-democracy, bigoted, and white nationalist groups.
- [Race Forward](#) brings analysis and innovation together to promote racial equity.



WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED BY WESTERN STATES CENTER | APRIL 2023