
FACILITATOR TOOLKIT

Election Crisis Scenario Planning

90 Minute Facilitator Toolkit

For affiliate leaders, partner organizations, and congregational leadership.

| Strategic Case for the Exercise

This toolkit is designed to help your organization, congregation, or coalition run a focused 90 minute scenario planning exercise. The goal is to leave the session with concrete preparation steps your organization will take in the next month, not with a fully fledged crisis plan.

The exercise is grounded in two convictions. First, what determines outcomes in a moment of democratic crisis is not the crisis itself, but the infrastructure organizations have built before it arrives. Second, planning for one red line often prepares us for others. The skills, networks, and strategies overlap.

This toolkit was adapted from a longer in-person event co-hosted by Interfaith Alliance and Protect Democracy in July 2026. The scenarios listed were informed by Protect Democracy's [Executive Override report](#). For access to the full Red Lines workbook, visit freedomtrainers.net/redline. For the HOPE-PV response curriculum, the Interfaith Alliance online training platform, and more, see the resources list at the end of this toolkit. We strongly recommend facilitators review the abstract of the Executive Override report and familiarize themselves with the [Pillars of Support](#).

| Session Outcomes

Read these aloud at the start, and check them at the close. By the end of the session:

1. You are grounded in a shared analysis of the 2026 election threats — through the pre-reads (the Pillars of Support framework and Protect Democracy's Executive Override report) and today's scenario.
2. You understand the tensions, resource shifts, and mobilization needs necessary to prepare your organization for an election crisis.
3. You understand the tensions, resource shifts, and mobilization needs necessary to prepare partner organizations and other actors for an election crisis.
4. You leave with at least one firm commitment to act on in the next month.

How to Use This Toolkit

1. **Assign the pre-reads.** Ask participants to review two short pieces in advance: the Pillars of Support framework and the abstract of Protect Democracy's Executive Override report. These establish the shared analytic ground the session builds on.
2. Pick one of the six sample scenarios in Appendix A. Choose based on what feels most urgent or most likely for your context, or what is most relevant to a current public moment.
3. Read this guide thoroughly before facilitating. Print the scenario you choose, the Landscape Mapping worksheet (Worksheet 1), and the Sequence and Commit worksheet (Worksheet 2) for every participant.
4. Aim for 8 to 25 participants. Below 8, you lose the breakout dimension. Above 25, the popcorn closing gets long.
5. One facilitator is enough. Keep tight time, hold the room, and resist letting any single activity overrun.

Agenda

Time	Section	Format
0:00 to 0:05	Welcome, framing, and outcomes	Large group
0:05 to 0:10	Choose your scenario and read it together	Large group read-out
0:10 to 0:25	Activity 1: Dry Run	Small-group breakouts
0:25 to 0:45	Activity 2: Landscape Mapping	Breakouts and debrief
0:45 to 1:10	Activity 3: Tensions, Resources, and Mobilization	Breakouts and debrief
1:10 to 1:25	Activity 4: Sequence and Commit	Org-level reflection and popcorn
1:25 to 1:30	Closing	Large group

Facilitation Guide

Time and Section	Purpose and Format	What happens (instructions and content)	Facilitator notes
0:00 to 0:05 Welcome, framing, and outcomes	Set the lens and the goal for the session. Large group, 5 minutes.	Open with the definition: <i>"A red line is an act that represents a major advance in authoritarian consolidation, and an opportunity for politicization, polarization, or mass action. It is a moment that can shock the conscience and activate people, but only if we are ready with a plan."</i> Frame the session: <i>"We are not here to scare each other. We are here to make sure the right infrastructure exists"</i>	Keep the framing tight. The framework's job is to give participants a lens. The lens gets used in the activities that follow.

Time and Section	Purpose and Format	What happens (instructions and content)	Facilitator notes
		<i>in our organization before the moment arrives. By the end of these 90 minutes, each of us in the room will name at least one firm commitment to act on in the next month."</i> Read the four Session Outcomes aloud.	
0:05 to 0:10 Choose your scenario and read it together	Establish the shared situation the room is planning against. Large group read-out, 5 minutes.	Read aloud the scenario you selected from Appendix A. Participants follow on a printed handout. Hold 30 seconds of silence after the read-out before transitioning to Activity 1.	Read it word for word. Do not summarize or paraphrase. The silence after matters.
0:10 to 0:25 Activity 1: Dry Run	Establish participants' existing ability to respond to the threat, and surface where their organizational plans fall short — before any additional instruction or framework is applied. Small-group breakouts, 15 minutes.	Move straight from the scenario read-out into the dry run, with no additional guidance on how to respond. In small groups, discuss what you would literally do on the date of the scenario. Assume nothing is prepared beyond what your organization has in place today. As groups discuss, they write three sticky notes and post them on the wall: • Sticky 1: one concrete thing you would do. • Sticky 2: a second concrete thing you would do. • Sticky 3: what did you notice about your organization's response? Post the stickies on the wall and return to your seats. There is no verbal debrief — Sticky 3 captures the reflection.	Read the scenario word for word; do not summarize. The dry run's goal is twofold: pushing leaders to recognize where their organizational plans may fall short, and where they as leaders may need to feel more prepared. Keep groups moving — the value is in the honest first reaction, not a polished answer.
0:25 to 0:45 Activity 2: Landscape Mapping	Identify which institutions and actors uphold or can disrupt this scenario, where each currently stands, what movement we need from each, and what our organizations can do. 15 minute breakout, 5 minute debrief. For groups of 8 to 12, work as one group. For groups of 13 to 25, split into two breakouts of similar size.	Group instructions: <i>"In your group, fill in the Landscape Mapping worksheet (Worksheet 1) for all five named <u>pillars</u> plus an optional sixth if your group identifies one.</i> <i>Assign one or two people to each pillar. Spend the first 5 minutes individually drafting your assigned pillar's row. Spend the next 7 minutes syncing as a group, identifying gaps, and adding context. Spend the last 3 minutes selecting the one pillar to report on at the debrief, and the one question you most want to ask the room."</i> Movement Ladder (printed at top of worksheet for reference): Aware → Quietly disagrees → Speaks out → Refuses to comply → Stops the harm Debrief (5 minutes): each group shares the pillar they chose in 60 seconds, plus their one question.	Watch for the room defaulting to "media and journalists." Push at least one group onto law enforcement or election officials. The "faith communities" pillar invites self-reflection that participants may find challenging. Hold the space for honest self-assessment. We are not exempt from the mapping.
0:45 to 1:10 Activity 3: Tensions, Resources, and Mobilization	Translate the landscape map into operational understanding. What tensions are coming, what shifts are required, how we mobilize. Same groups as Activity 2. 20	Three questions to discuss in order, spending the most time on Question 1. Question 1. What real tensions and resource shifts are likely to emerge in our movement when this scenario hits? Prompts (not constraints): who decides what counts as the right response; how we navigate organizations that want to escalate versus those that	Keep it concrete and operational. If a group is drifting into theory, redirect with: "What does that look like Monday morning?"

Time and Section	Purpose and Format	What happens (instructions and content)	Facilitator notes
	minutes of discussion, 5 minutes of debrief.	want to de-escalate; how we hold a multi-faith coalition together when individual faith communities are themselves targeted. Be honest about what gets dropped or paused, and name the dollars, staff time, and infrastructure investments that need to happen now or be ready to trigger. Question 2. What resource and time shifts will our organizations need to make to respond? Name dollars, staff time, and infrastructure investments. Question 3. How will our organizations contribute to mass mobilization, specifically? What are the steps each of us needs to take to mobilize affiliates, congregants, leaders, and staff? Debrief (5 minutes): two groups share one tension, one resource shift, and one mobilization tactic.	
1:10 to 1:25 Activity 4: Sequence and Commit	Produce at least one firm commitment per participant, named publicly. 10 minute organization-level pause for individual reflection on the four guiding questions, then 5 minute popcorn share-out.	Four guiding questions: 1. Ecosystem gaps. Who do we need to connect with that we don't have a relationship with yet to be ready when this red line is crossed? 2. Internal readiness. What does our organization specifically need to do internally to be prepared? 3. Feedback loops. How will local, state, and national feedback loops be strengthened in our network? 4. The commitment itself. What is the one firm thing our organization will do in the next month? Name an owner, a partner, and a date. Popcorn share-out: Each participant names their commitment in 30 seconds.	Resist letting it become a discussion. The point is to put the commitment on the record.
1:25 to 1:30 Closing	Close out and send people back to their work with the day's frame. Large group, 5 minutes.	Quick check against the four Session Outcomes — did we meet them? Take it as a group call and response. Read aloud: <i>"Red lines are moments that can shock the conscience and activate people, but only if we are ready with a plan. Planning for one red line often prepares us for others. The skills, networks, and strategies overlap. The work is never wasted."</i> Open call for closing prayer — invite anyone moved to offer a closing prayer or reflection from their tradition. Capture all commitments in a shared document and send to participants within 48 hours.	

Appendix A: Sample Scenarios

Six sample scenarios follow. Pick the one most relevant to your context, or use these as models to draft your own. Each scenario is brief on purpose. The work is in the activities, not in absorbing complex policy.

1 Scenario 1: Certification Crisis

It is the night of Election Day, November 3, 2026. By midnight, two swing-state governors have announced their states will not transmit their electors, citing "unverified ballots" and "foreign interference." By dawn on November 4, three more states are following suit, and the administration amplifies the governors' claims and calls for counting to stop until "integrity is restored." Within 48 hours:

- Alternate slates of electors are being floated in five states with tight U.S. Senate races.
- State legislatures in two of those states announce emergency sessions to consider "corrected" certifications.

Pro-democracy organizations call for emergency mobilization and vigils at state capitols. National media coverage is split, with right-wing outlets treating the governors' claims as credible. Congregants are scared and confused, and clergy are feeling pressure to speak from the pulpit about whether the election was "stolen." The legitimacy of the 2026 election, and the balance of the U.S. Senate itself, is being decided in real time — and faith leaders are among the few trusted voices who can call for patience without being dismissed as partisan.

2 Scenario 2: Insurrection Act Invocation

It is late October 2026, the final two weeks of early voting. Following protests in three major cities against escalating ICE operations, President Trump invokes the Insurrection Act and orders the deployment of regular Army units to "restore order." The presidential order is broadly worded, naming "antifa," "proponents of radical gender ideology," and "foreign-funded agitators" as threats to be addressed. In the days that follow:

- Several faith organizations and clergy are publicly identified by administration allies as fitting one or more of those categories.
- Army units begin enforcing curfews in neighborhoods that overlap with major early-voting precincts.

Voters in those neighborhoods report being afraid to leave home, and early-voting turnout drops sharply in exactly the districts with the closest races. Local officials are asking faith leaders to provide visible witness and accompaniment to polling places, but moving openly carries arrest risk. Clergy are fielding calls from frightened members asking whether it is safe to vote in person, and coalition partners are divided over whether to keep mobilizing turnout or pull back to protect their communities.

3 Scenario 3: Judicial and Official Arrest

It is October 2026. A federal court orders the administration to halt a specific ICE enforcement operation. The operation proceeds anyway. When a state-court judge issues subpoenas to the federal officers involved, the administration directs federal marshals to detain the judge for "obstructing federal operations." In quick succession:

- A state attorney general from a different jurisdiction publicly questions the legality of the detention and is also charged.
- Administration allies signal that clergy and nonprofit leaders who "harbor or aid" targeted organizations could face similar exposure.

The arrests dominate the news cycle and create a clear "they came for the judges" moment in the pro-democracy narrative. Congregations that have offered sanctuary or accompaniment are suddenly unsure of their legal exposure days before the election. Movement leaders are uncertain whether to escalate public confrontation, focus attention on the rule of law, or shift resources to legal defense.

4 Scenario 4: Premature Victory Claim

It is election night, November 3, 2026. Polls have closed in the East and Central time zones. Key Senate and governor races remain too close to call, with millions of mail and same-day registration ballots still being counted. At 11:30 PM ET, the President declares victory in those races on national television and Truth Social, citing partial counts and calling continued counting "a Democrat coup." Within hours:

- Right-wing media outlets follow the lead and treat the races as decided.
- Calls for "stop the count" rallies are circulating in at least eight states, and crowds begin gathering outside election offices.

Election workers, many in volunteer or part-time roles, are reporting threats and considering walking off the job. Pro-democracy organizations have called for calm and patience, but the message is being drowned out. Faith leaders are being asked to serve as poll chaplains and de-escalators outside tabulation centers, and to counter the "stolen election" narrative with their own congregations before it hardens overnight.

5 Scenario 5: Federal Takeover of Election Operations

It is late October 2026. Citing "credible threats of illegal voting and foreign interference," the administration orders the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security to take operational control of voting machines, ballot processing, and tabulation in three swing states. Federal personnel enter state and county election offices. In response:

- Election directors in two states publicly refuse to step aside, citing state law and constitutional limits on federal authority.
- The Department of Justice files emergency lawsuits and orders federal agents to enforce the federal action, while local courts issue temporary restraining orders that are contested on the ground.

Faith communities in the affected states are being asked to provide visible presence at election offices in support of state officials, but doing so carries arrest risk and uncertain legal protection. Clergy are weighing whether to stand publicly with election workers — many of whom are their own congregants — and coalitions are scrambling to agree on a shared message while the legal picture changes by the hour.

6 Scenario 6: Voter Intimidation Campaign

(This is the scenario used in the in-person election scenario planning event co-hosted by Interfaith Alliance and Protect Democracy.)

It is October 2026. DHS abuses, protests, and violent responses to protests have been escalating all year. On October 12, a video is posted online of a violent arrest of a faith leader in a mid-sized city in your region. This sparks large protests nationwide. Right-wing media seize on a small number of videos depicting rioting and clashes with police. The Trump Administration responds by:

1. Sending federalized National Guard forces to participate in ICE and CBP operations, under the auspices of protecting the federal officers, with a particular focus on Latino neighborhoods in swing districts across the country.
2. Announcing federal criminal charges against the leaders of key pro-immigrant movement organizations, including coalition partners doing election protection work with faith organizations.

Early voting has already begun in the following states: AZ, CA, CO, GA, IL, IN, ME, MN, MS, MT, NE, NM, OH, PA, SD, VT, VA, WY, and is about to begin in several more. Your organization is working with other organizations to fight arrests, charges, and voter suppression via the courts and legal proceedings.

From pro-democracy groups, the prevailing message is to vote by mail and vote early to avoid any deadline issues caused by the new USPS postmark policy.

Due to fears of violence and arrests or detainment, many voters are afraid to leave their homes and vote in person or drop off their absentee ballots at voting locations, drop boxes, or clerks' offices.

Worksheet 1: Landscape Mapping

Movement Ladder (for reference): Aware → Quietly disagrees → Speaks out → Refuses to comply → Stops the harm

Pillar	Current relationships	Movement needed	What our org can do
DHS and federal law enforcement			
State and local election officials			
State and local law enforcement			
Media and journalists			
Faith communities (self-analysis: where we are; what we need to do internally)			
Open (your group's choice; name it):			

Group reflection prompt: Which one pillar's movement would matter most in this scenario, and why?

Worksheet 2: Sequence and Commit

For each commitment you make, name an owner, a partner (if applicable), a due date, and how you will know it is done.

Organization name	
Lead in the room	
Partners present	
1. Ecosystem gaps Who do we need to connect with that we do not have a relationship with yet?	
2. Internal readiness What does our organization specifically need to do internally?	

3. Feedback loops How will local, state, and national feedback loops be strengthened in our network?	
4. Our one firm commitment What is the one thing our organization will do in the next month?	

Additional Resources

- Faith Red Lines workbook: freedomtrainers.net/redline
- HOPE-PV response curriculum: www.endpoliticalviolence.org
- Interfaith Alliance online training platform: interfaithalliance.org/training
- Protect Democracy Executive Override report: protectdemocracy.org/executive-override
- CLNI campaign overview: lovenotice.org
- Freedom Trainers noncooperation library: freedomtrainers.net/noncooperation-library