

The Counter-Capture Playbook

Steps You Can Take Right Now

Companion to "What You Can Actually Do About It" by a little bird

Before You Start

If you are reading this, you have probably been watching the news and feeling some combination of overwhelmed, anxious, angry, and stuck. That is a reasonable response to what is happening. It is also exactly what the system needs you to feel. Overwhelmed people do not act. Anxious people scroll. Stuck people accept.

You are not stuck. You are unorganized. This document is the organization.

What follows is laid out in four layers, the same four layers the essay describes: legal pressure, civic infrastructure, information and resource hygiene, and coalition and litigation support. Each layer has specific actions you can take, organized from easiest to hardest, with the resources to do each one.

You do not have to do all of this. You do not even have to do most of this. Pick one thing in one layer and start there. When you have done that, pick another. The capture system is large. You do not need to match it personally. You need to do your one thing, and tell the people in your life about doing theirs.

If you have ten friends, tell ten. If you have three, tell three. If you have one person who will listen, tell that one. Strength in numbers is real. We cannot get through this alone, and we were never supposed to.

A note on tone. I am going to tell you what to do as if I am sitting next to you. I am not a lawyer. I am not a financial advisor. I am a researcher who has spent the last year mapping this and the last several months talking to people who are scared and do not know where to start. This is the conversation I would have with you in person.

You got this.

Layer One: Legal Pressure

The legal layer is reactive. It is what you use when the federal government acts illegally. The good news is that the existing infrastructure for these challenges is well-developed and chronically underfunded, which means your participation actually matters. We are starting here because the first two steps are short, free, and immediately useful.

Step 1: Find Your State Attorney General

Open a browser. Search '[your state] attorney general.' Find the official .gov website. Click around for the active litigation page or press releases. Most state AG offices publicize their case load.

This takes ten minutes. It tells you whether your state is currently fighting any of this in court.

The state attorneys general most active in coordinated multi-state federal-action litigation as of May 2026 are:

- California: Rob Bonta
- New York: Letitia James
- Massachusetts: Andrea Joy Campbell
- Minnesota: Keith Ellison
- Michigan: Dana Nessel
- Washington: Nick Brown
- Illinois: Kwame Raoul
- Connecticut: William Tong
- Maryland: Anthony Brown
- New Jersey: Matthew Platkin
- Oregon: Dan Rayfield
- Colorado: Phil Weiser
- Pennsylvania: Michelle Henry
- Wisconsin: Josh Kaul
- Arizona: Kris Mayes
- Hawaii: Anne Lopez
- Vermont: Charity Clark
- Rhode Island: Peter Neronha
- Delaware: Kathy Jennings
- Nevada: Aaron Ford
- New Mexico: Raúl Torrez

If your state AG is on this list and they are filing on issues you care about, you have an ally. Your job is to make their job easier by giving them political cover.

If your state AG is not on this list, your job is different. Your job is to write to them, to your local paper, and to your state legislature, asking why your state is not joining. Either way, the next step is the same.

Step 2: Write Your AG (Or Visit Their Office)

A short letter or email works. A visit to their nearest field office (state AGs have regional offices) lands harder.

If your AG is filing on the right issues, the letter is a thank-you. Specific. Name the case. Cite the federal action being challenged. Tell them you support the work and you are watching. Send a copy as an op-ed to your local paper.

If your AG is not filing, the letter is a request. Specific. Name a case other states are in. Ask why your state is not. Cite the legal grounds. Include something local. The Impoundment Control Act of 1974 (2 U.S.C. §§ 681 to 688) is being violated openly right now. Impoundment is a separation-of-powers

question, not a partisan one. Republican AGs can be moved on it.

Step 3: Find Your Federal Representatives

House.gov lets you find your representative. Senate.gov lets you find your senators. Look up their committee assignments at clerk.house.gov and senate.gov/committees.

The committees that matter most for this work:

- House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (subpoena power)
- House Judiciary Committee (constitutional issues, civil rights)
- House Appropriations Committee (where impoundment violations land)
- Senate Judiciary Committee (constitutional issues, judicial nominations)
- Senate Appropriations Committee (impoundment, federal spending oversight)
- Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee (financial sector capture)
- Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee (media consolidation, tech)
- Senate Finance Committee (healthcare, Medicare, Medicaid)

If your representative or senator sits on one of these committees, your leverage is much higher than it would be otherwise. Townhalls, district office visits, and persistent specific calls work. Generic mass-form-letter advocacy does not.

Step 4: Document Your Beneficiary Status

This is the one most people miss, and it is the most powerful step in this layer.

If you receive any of the following, you have legal standing the general taxpayer does not have:

- Medicaid
- SNAP / food stamps
- Medicare
- Federal student aid
- Federal grants of any kind
- Federal disability benefits
- Veterans benefits
- Social Security
- Any other federal program benefit

If a benefit you receive has been cut, terminated, restricted, or denied in a way that violates federal law, save everything. Denial letters. Termination notices. Reduced-amount letters. Dated emails. Screenshots. Photos. Mailed copies in a folder. This is your legal evidence.

Then contact one of these civil liberties litigation organizations:

- Democracy Forward (democracyforward.org), the leading single organization on federal-action and impoundment challenges
- Public Citizen (citizen.org), consumer, healthcare, and government accountability

- ACLU (aclu.org), with state chapters at [state].aclu.org
- Lambda Legal (lambdalegal.org) for LGBTQ-affecting programs
- MALDEF (maldef.org) for Latino-affecting programs
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund (naacpldf.org) for Black-affecting programs
- Brennan Center for Justice (brennancenter.org) for democracy-affecting programs
- Center for Constitutional Rights (ccrjustice.org) for broader constitutional cases
- Earthjustice (earthjustice.org) for environmental program cuts

Tell them what happened. Tell them you are willing to be a plaintiff if they need one. They need plaintiffs with real injuries, and most people do not realize this.

If you cannot be a plaintiff (privacy, employment, family reasons), donate. Twenty dollars a month from a hundred thousand people funds an entire litigation infrastructure.

Layer Two: Direct Civic Infrastructure

The federal layer is reactive. The local layer is proactive. This is where ordinary people have the most direct power and the least competition. If the legal layer felt big and intimidating, this layer is where you can see results in your own neighborhood, sometimes within months.

Step 5: Map Your Local Government

Take twenty minutes. Make a list of the bodies that govern your daily life:

- School board
- Water board
- Planning commission
- County supervisors or county commission
- City council
- Sheriff
- District attorney

Each is elected. Each has a meeting calendar. Each has public comment. Most are decided by hundreds of votes, not millions. Many are running with no opposition or weak opposition. Most are filled by whoever showed up. You can be the person who shows up. You can also recruit the person who shows up.

Step 6: Attend One Local Meeting

In person if you can. Online if you cannot. Just observe the first time. See who is on the body, who shows up to comment, what gets discussed.

The next time, speak. Public comment is open. Two minutes. Bring something specific. People who show up regularly are recognized by name. People who show up regularly with prepared, specific comments shape what the body does.

Step 7: Track Votes

Local government meetings are usually broadcast or archived. Pick the body that affects you most. Track how each member votes on the issues you care about. Most constituents do not look. Most local elected officials know that. When election time comes, you have a record they cannot dispute.

Step 8: Plug Into Mutual Aid

Mutual aid is the parallel infrastructure that makes your community less dependent on the systems extracting from you. It is not charity. It is reciprocal community capacity, and it has existed in every functional community throughout history.

Find existing networks:

- Mutual Aid Hub (mutualaidhub.org), directory of active networks by region
- Local food cooperatives, community gardens, CSAs (Local Harvest at localharvest.org)
- American Community Gardening Association (communitygarden.org)
- TimeBanks USA (timebanks.org), time-based exchange networks
- Seed Savers Exchange (seedsavers.org), seed library and heritage seed resources
- Neighborhood Signal groups, Facebook groups, or Discord servers (often functioning mutual aid networks under different names)

You bring what you have. Gardening. Childcare. Medical training. Mechanical repair. Sewing. Cooking. Driving. Carpentry. Translation. Legal knowledge. Whatever you can do, offer it. Whatever you need, ask for it. Most people are surprised at how much they have to give once they think about it specifically.

Step 9: Build Communications and Energy Redundancy

Where you can:

- Switch your default messaging to Signal (signal.org)
- Switch your email to Proton Mail (proton.me)
- Use Tor (torproject.org) for sensitive browsing, and consult the EFF Surveillance Self-Defense Guide (ssd.eff.org)
- Get a hand-crank radio
- If you have the interest, get a ham radio license through the Amateur Radio Relay League (arrl.org)
- Keep paper maps of your area (offline maps on your phone are a backup, not a substitute)
- Keep a backup battery for your phone
- Look into residential renewable energy through National Renewable Energy Laboratory (nrel.gov), Solar United Neighbors (solarunitedneighbors.org), and Rewiring America (rewiringamerica.org)

This is not survivalism. It is making yourself and your neighbors less brittle.

Layer Three: Information and Resource Hygiene

You cannot rely on the consolidated media stack alone. You cannot rely on the consolidated subscription stack alone. Building redundancy in both is a daily, ongoing practice, and it has the immediate side effect of saving you money.

Step 10: Subscribe to Local Journalism

Local nonprofit newsrooms are doing the accountability work that consolidated national media is abandoning. They run on small subscriptions and donations.

- Search '[your city] nonprofit journalism' or '[your city] independent news'
- Institute for Nonprofit News directory (inn.org)
- LION Publishers directory (lionpublishers.com)
- Report for America (reportforamerica.org), which places journalists in local newsrooms

Pay them directly. Even ten dollars a month matters when there are five reporters covering your county.

Step 11: Build International News Diversity

The consolidated US media stack has clear blind spots. International outlets see the same events from different angles. None of them are neutral. The value is the diversity of angle. A starter set:

- Reuters (reuters.com), direct, not aggregator
- BBC (bbc.com)
- Al Jazeera English (aljazeera.com)
- South China Morning Post (scmp.com)
- Le Monde (lemonde.fr), English version available
- Deutsche Welle (dw.com)
- NHK World Japan (www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld)
- The Guardian (theguardian.com)
- The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (thebureauinvestigates.com)
- International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (icij.org)

You do not have to read all of them. You have to know they exist and check them when a story feels off.

Step 12: Practice Citizen Verification

When a major story breaks, before you share it, before you have an emotional response to it, take a beat:

- When did the Wikipedia page get created? (Pages created the day before a news cycle are a flag.)
- What are the timestamps on the source documents? (Different government sources telling different timelines is a flag.)

- Is the silence-to-severity ratio of the response consistent? (A small story with overwhelming social media coverage is a flag. A large story with strange social silence is also a flag.)
- Who is funded by whom?
- What is being framed in, and what is being framed out?

This is a skill. Practice on small things first. The Dray Dossier (@thedreydossier on TikTok and Substack) ran a two-part investigation of the MV Hondius hantavirus event in early May 2026 that demonstrates the methodology in practice. Read it as a worked example.

Step 13: Audit Your Subscriptions

Open your bank statement. List everything you pay monthly. The total surprises most people. Then defect from one stack at a time:

- Adobe Creative Cloud → Affinity Suite (one-time purchase) at affinity.serif.com
- Photo and design tools → GIMP (gimp.org), Inkscape (inkscape.org), Krita (krita.org), all free
- Video editing → DaVinci Resolve (blackmagicdesign.com), free professional
- Spotify → Bandcamp, direct artist purchases, owning your music files
- Microsoft 365 → LibreOffice (libreoffice.org) or OnlyOffice (onlyoffice.com)
- Google search → DuckDuckGo (duckduckgo.com) or Startpage (startpage.com)
- Chrome → Brave (brave.com) or Firefox (mozilla.org/firefox)
- Gmail → Proton Mail (proton.me) or Tutanota (tutanota.com)
- Cloud storage → Proton Drive, Sync.com, or self-hosted Nextcloud (nextcloud.com)
- Operating system → Linux Mint (linuxmint.com) or Ubuntu (ubuntu.com), beginner-friendly
- Major banks → Credit unions (locator at nca.gov/credit-union-locator) or community-impact banks (mightydeposits.com)
- Subscription healthcare → Direct Primary Care (dpcfrontier.com) or local free clinics (nafclinics.org)

Each defection saves you money and weakens the financial logic of the consolidation. Each one also reduces your data exhaust.

Step 14: Pick One Skill to Rebuild

Cooking from raw ingredients. Sewing and mending. Repairing electronics. Gardening. Food preservation. Basic first aid. Basic plumbing. Basic financial literacy. Configuring your own router. Knowing how to read a contract.

Pick one. Learn it. Teach it to someone else. You do not have to do all of them. You have to do one, and pass it along. Each skill you learn is anti-capture infrastructure. Each skill you teach multiplies the resistance surface.

Layer Four: Coalition and Litigation Support

The work in the previous layers is mostly individual or local. Coalition and litigation work scales it.

Step 15: Join a Coalition

Pick one whose work most overlaps with your existing capacity and concerns:

- Indivisible (indivisible.org), the largest grassroots coalition focused on federal democracy issues
- Common Cause (commoncause.org), government accountability and money in politics
- League of Women Voters (lww.org), voter access and informed civic engagement
- People's Action (peoplesaction.org), multi-issue progressive coalition
- Working Families Party (workingfamilies.org), candidates and electoral strategy
- Democracy 21 (democracy21.org), campaign finance reform
- MoveOn (moveon.org), online activism platform

Local chapters meet regularly. Most have free email lists and free actions. You can plug in at any level.

Professional coalitions matter too. If you are a lawyer, your bar association has policy positions. If you are a journalist, the Society of Professional Journalists (spj.org) and Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (rcfp.org) are organizing on press freedom and source protection. If you are a healthcare worker, Physicians for a National Health Program (pnhp.org) and National Nurses United (nursingnursesunited.org) have positions on healthcare policy. If you are a teacher, your union has political action infrastructure. If you are a scientist, the Union of Concerned Scientists (ucsusa.org) and 500 Women Scientists (500womenscientists.org) are organized.

Step 16: Set Up Recurring Donations

The civil liberties litigation organizations from Layer One run on donations. Recurring matters more than one-time, because cases take years.

Twenty dollars a month from a hundred thousand donors funds an entire litigation infrastructure. If you cannot do twenty, do five. If you cannot do five, donate professional skills. Graphic design, web development, accounting, social media, photography. Most of these organizations have volunteer infrastructure.

The Last Thing

I am one person doing this from rural Northern California, working a day job, building the Dissidents Network on the side. California pilot is up. Other states are coming as fast as I can build them. While you are waiting, this playbook is what you can do for yourself, for your state, for your community, right now. Eventually each of these steps will live in the per-state Guide section on the DN. While that is being built, this is what you have.

You do not have to do all of this. Start with one thing.

When you have done that, pick another. Tell someone what you did. If they are scared, tell them they are not alone. If they want to help, give them this document.

One person doing this is maybe nothing. Ten people doing it is something. Ten people who tell ten people, who tell ten people, is what they are afraid of.

That is the math. We should use it.

This playbook accompanies the essay "What You Can Actually Do About It: The Math of Distributed Defection" by a little bird. The full citation dock with all sources, statutes, case law, and organizational links is published as a separate document. The Dissidents Network nonpartisan scoring tool (California pilot) is at dissidentsnetwork.org.