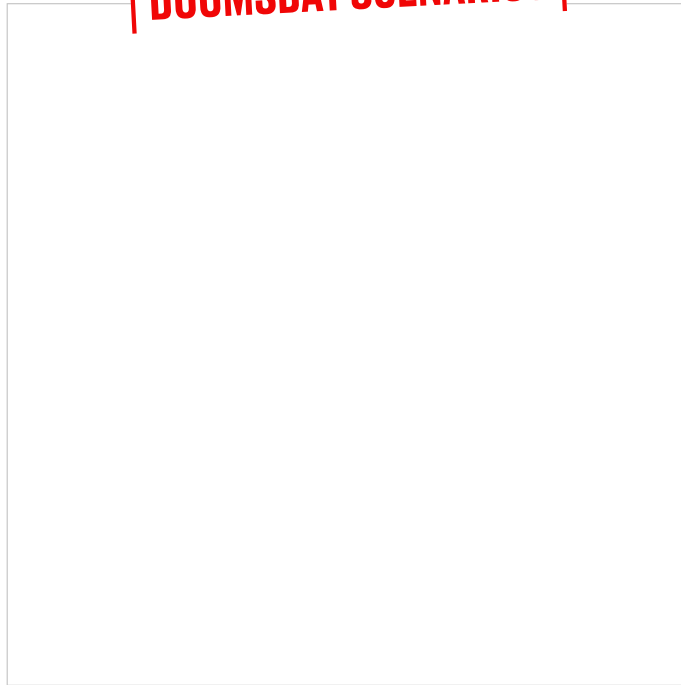




*The
Left
Secret
Preps
for
MAGA*

Violence After Election Day

| DOOMSDAY SCENARIOS |



📷 Illustration by Elizabeth Brockway/The Daily Beast

The progressive

coalition Fight Back Table has been meeting to game out what happens if Joe Biden doesn't win by a landslide. It's not pretty.

Sam Stein
Politics Editor

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L

ast
week,
a

coalition of
leading
progressive
groups gathered
on Zoom to begin
organizing for
what they
envision as the
post-Election Day

political
apocalypse
scenario.

Put together by
the Fight Back
Table—an
initiative
launched after
the 2016 election
to get a
constellation of
lefty
organizations to
work more closely
together—the
meeting dealt
with the
operational
demands
expected if the
November
election ends
without a clear
outcome or with a
Joe Biden win
that Donald

Trump refuses to
recognize.

Sources familiar
with the
discussions
described them as
serious with a
modestly
panicked
undertone. A
smaller FBT
session last fall
had talked about
post-election
planning, but
those discussions
were tabled
because of the
COVID-19
pandemic. This
was the first time
they were
bringing the
matter to the 50-
plus
organizations

that make up the coalition. To formalize the effort, they gave it a name: the “Democracy Defense Nerve Center.”

Over the course of two hours, participants broached the question of what the progressive political ecosystem can functionally do in a series of election scenarios. They began charting out what it would take to stand up a multi-state communications arm to fight

disinformation, a training program for nonviolent civil disobedience, and the underpinnings of what one official described as “mass public unrest.” And they pored over a report from the Transition Integrity Project, a bipartisan group formed in 2019, that analyzed various election season scenarios and made clear the type of ratfuckery, corruption, and chaos that potentially was

ahead.

“The potential for violent conflict is high,” the report noted.

What if Trump Won't Leave the White House?



| PLAUSIBLE |

Matt Lewis

Some of the hurdles were straightforward: how you “occupy shit, hold space, and shut things down, not just on Election Day but for weeks,” explained one

source familiar
with the
Democracy
Defense Nerve
Center
operations.

Others are more
complicated, like
what quick
transportation
options can be in
place should poll
locations
mysteriously
close. Others
have been simply
impossible to
plan out.

“I don’t know
what the strategy
is when armed
right-wing militia
dudes show up in
polling places,”
the same source
said. “This [Kyle]

Rittenhouse guy
is being lionized
on the right, right
now. If it is being
unleashed that
you can shoot
people and be a
hero, I don't
know what
preparation we
can possibly do
for that.”

Those involved in
the conversation
say this wide an
array of groups
has never
coordinated so
closely on these
matters before.
And the fact that
they were sitting
down some two
months in
advance of the
election, was a

testament to how
seriously they
take the
complications
and threats
Election Day
poses.

“It is very obvious
that Trump is
laying the
groundwork for
claiming victory
no matter what,”
said Rahna
Epting, executive
director of
MoveOn, and a
participant in the
FBT call.

“Progressive
groups at the end
of the day believe
in our democracy
and, while it is
not perfect,
believe in

building upon it
and
strengthening it.
And we will fight
to protect it from
what we truly see
as a president
who has gone off
the rails and
taking this
country down an
authoritarian
fascist path.”

And yet, for those
who have spent
considerable time
thinking about
the civil and
political unrest
that could come
this fall, last
week’s call did
not provide too
much in the way
of solace. The
prep work, they

worry, is not
happening fast
enough.

“I wish we were
having these
conversations six
months ago,” said
Rosa Brooks, a
law professor at
Georgetown
University. The
co-founder of the
Transition
Integrity Project,
Brooks has
conducted war
games to play out
the range of
Election Day and
post-Election Day
scenarios. And
virtually all the
outcomes, save
one—a Biden
landslide—have
ended up

facilitating a
nightmarish
fallout.

“My fear,” she
said, “is we are
still behind the
eight ball.”



📷 Chip Somodevilla/Getty
Images

Within Fight
Back Table, there
is disagreement
over how
secretive they
should be about
these talks. Those
on the side of

keeping plans
under wraps felt
it would be wise
not to advertise
their prep work.
Those in favor of
discussing it
openly thought
there was utility
in the public
knowing how bad
things could
actually get.

The latter camp
was bolstered in
their belief by a
white paper from
Brooks'
Transition
Integrity Project
titled "Preventing
a Disrupted
Presidential
Election and
Transition." The
22-page

document—which
Brooks
summarized in
The Washington
Post and which
was obtained by
The Daily Beast—
described four
simulation
exercises: a clear
Biden win, a
narrow Biden
win, a murky
result, and a
Trump Electoral
College win with
popular vote loss.
Those
simulations were
played out with
67 prominent
public officials
and academics
role-playing on
seven teams: the
Trump campaign,
the Biden

campaign,
Republican
elected officials,
Democratic
elected officials,
career federal
government
employees, the
media, and the
public.

The top line
takeaways were
red siren items.
The election
results would
almost certainly
be contested, and
the transition
process would
likely be marred
by tumult and
corruption. The
word “violence”
was listed 15
times in the
document;

“chaos” nine
times; and
“crisis” a dozen
times.

Below the
surface, it was
even more
harrowing. In the
simulations, the
Trump campaign
was “consistently
more ruthless
than Team
Biden,” the
authors wrote.

The options that
Team Trump had
to use or misuse
included
manipulating
classified
information,
selectively
releasing
“classified
documents for

political
purposes, fueling
manufactured
rumors,” freezing
“assets of
individuals and
groups the
president
determines to be
a threat,” and
restricting
“internet
communications
in the name of
national
security.”

That was just the
beginning. The
report’s authors
noted that Trump
could also “rely
on surrogates to
embed operatives
inside protests to
encourage violent
action” as well as

“mobilize a range
of law
enforcement
actors... who
might, without
proper training or
if led by
politicized actors,
escalate
matters.”

In some
simulations, the
Trump team
“succeeded in
invoking the
Insurrection Act
and sending
active duty
military troops
into U.S. cities to
‘restore order,’
‘protect’ voting
places, or
confiscate
‘fraudulent’
ballots.” In

others, the team
“had Attorney
General Bill Barr
order the seizure
of mail-in ballots
to ensure that
vote counting
would stop.”

Those running
the simulations
said there was
“quite a bit of
speculation that
Trump might
himself initiate a
foreign crisis
shortly after the
election or during
the transition,
perhaps to
change the media
narrative.”

Team Biden, for
its part, had fewer
tools with which
to work. Under a

simulation of a narrow Biden win that Trump contested, the Transition Integrity Project war game saw more than 4 million Americans take to the streets for the Democratic nominee.

“Violent skirmishes and vandalism took place during these demonstrations,” the authors wrote.

Beyond demonstrations, Team Biden was also able to recruit 1,000

influencers, all
living presidents,
moderate
Republican
governors, and,
eventually, some
Republican
senators to
denounce
Trump's refusal
to keep counting
ballots or to leave
office. From
there, more
hardball tactics
followed. The
simulation saw
Team Biden work
with "local
Democratic
elected officials to
call on the
Adjutant General
of the National
Guard, along with
representatives
from the

technology sector,
to monitor vote
counting.” They
also attempted “a
capital strike and
a work stoppage
as part of an
overall effort to
push corporate
leaders to insist
that all ballots be
counted.”

But hardball
tactics would
bring more
aggressive
responses from
the right. The
simulation for a
narrow Biden win
saw a scenario in
which “Infowars
published a list of
addresses, phone
numbers, and
other personal

information of electors pledged to vote for Joe Biden.” The announcement “included spurious claims linking 88 of these electors to [George] Soros and 14 to child sex trafficking.”

In real life, former (now aggrieved) associates of the president have warned that he will use extraordinary means to hold on to power. And Biden himself has openly worried that Trump might move to contest

the election
results if they
don't go his way.
Beyond that,
there has been
very little said
about what plans
the Democratic
nominee or his
team have in
store. Under law,
Biden is
restricted from
coordinating with
outside groups
like those
involved with the
Democracy
Defense Nerve
Center.

An aide to the
campaign told
The Daily Beast
that they are
“aware of the
concerns

expressed by
many of these
groups” and are
“actively planning
for all
contingencies and
scenarios.” They
declined to
comment
further.

But while Biden is
keeping his plans
coy, other
Democratic Party
luminaries are
beginning to
make noise.

Sen. Bernie
Sanders (I-VT)
has become
increasingly
outspoken about
the need to
prepare for the
possibility of
Trump refusing

to leave office
even if he loses.

One senior
Democratic
source said that
the former
presidential
candidate
recently had a
discussion with
Brooks about the
role he and his
robust supporter
network could
play if there is a
need to mobilize.

Brooks declined
to talk about
private
conversations.

But the source
said that Sanders
“is certainly
thinking about
that role” and has
also talked about

it with Senate
Minority Leader
Chuck Schumer
(D-NY).

There is no
playbook for
navigating the
possibilities that
await this election
season. The
Transition
Integrity Project's
paper said the
closest analogy
could be the
tensions of the
1876 election that
resulted in the
end of
Reconstruction.
But the group
stated that the
most relatable
parallel would be
what happened in
2000, when the

final results
remained in
limbo for weeks
amid a recount of
votes in Florida.

What's difficult to
remember was
just how ill-
prepared
everyone was for
that moment.

When Al Gore
dispatched top
campaign aides to
Tallahassee, the
presumption was
that election
officials would
quickly find
another box of
ballots that would
change the vote
count in a way
that left no
ambiguity as to
who won. Ron

Klain, Gore's top emissary in Florida, recalled telling his wife he'd be home by the coming Saturday.

The ordeal ended up lasting 36 days. And in looking back on it many years later, Klain said that the fundamental mistake Democrats made was treating it, primarily, as a legal fight.

"Vice President Gore believed very strongly that this should be a legal process, not a political process," Klain

recalled in an
interview with the
podcast
Candidate
Confessional in
2016. “I also
think there was a
political calculus
that he just
turned out to be
wrong on, which
was that if we
played by a set of
rules that elite
opinion—*The*
New York Times
editorial board,
The Washington
Post editorial
board—would
weigh in against
Bush and create a
downdraft of
Republicans then
weighing in
against Bush...
That obviously

failed badly.”

The progressive
leaders helping
spearhead the
Democracy
Defense Nerve
Center harbor no
such illusions.

Though
conversations
have just now
begun dealing
with the
operational
details of how to
navigate life after
Election Day, few
if any anticipate a
scenario in which
Trump bends to
elite opinion.

Instead, the
larger game plan
is to apply
pressure through
mass

mobilization.

“We are not the forces of organized capital,” said Maurice Mitchell, the national director of the Working Families Party and a participant in the FBT discussions.

“Ultimately, the thing we rely on is organizing people.”

The nominal point person for the FBT on these and other efforts, source say, is Deirdre Schifeling, a former top official at Planned Parenthood.

Schifeling did not return a request for comment. The coalition includes labor groups, like SEIU and the American Federation of Teachers, social justice entities like Color of Change, and progressive movement outfits like Indivisible and MoveOn. It is also collaborating with mission ally Protect the Results, a group of 80-plus left-of-center and some NeverTrump entities that are also planning mass mobilization in

more than 1,000
locations across
the country.

“There are a lot of
scary scenarios,”
said Sean
Eldridge, the
former
congressional
candidate and
Democratic
activist who is
running Protect
the Results. “We
have to be
prepared to
mobilize in
unprecedented
ways.”

While the sheer
number of groups
and volunteers
involved in the
effort has given
organizers hope,
there is some fear

that they may not all be operating from the same playbook. Two sources involved with the FBT discussions said they worry Biden would concede a contested election too early, with an eye toward ensuring a peaceful transition of power. Inside the coalition, there is dispute over whether Biden should even concede if he wins the popular vote but loses the Electoral College, à la Clinton in 2016 and Gore in 2000.

Under that scenario, Eldridge said, his organization would not support mass mobilization. “I support the national popular vote,” he explained. “Our organization does advocacy for the popular vote... Unfortunately, the Electoral College is the system that we have.”

But the Transition Integrity Project noted that there would be immense pressure on

Biden to fight it out if, for the third time in 20 years, the Democratic candidate won the popular vote but didn't take office. In a simulation they ran, Team Biden "encouraged Western states, particularly California but also Oregon and Washington, and collectively known as 'Cascadia,' to secede from the Union" unless structural reforms were made. In exchange for Trump getting

the presidency,
for instance,
Republicans
would need to
agree to abolish
the Electoral
College, give
Puerto Rico and
D.C. statehood,
and divide
California into
five states for
better Senate
representation.

A top official
participating in
the FBT
discussions said
the possibility of
an Electoral
College-popular
vote split did
come up and that
there were mixed
opinions over
what to do.

“It’s the hardest scenario,” the source said. “It’s 2016. But it’s that plus all Trump has done on voter suppression. So I think there is a question but I think both sides are going to fight this till the very end.”

And what, we asked, was the very end?

“I don’t know,” the official replied.

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