

PROTEST

101



How to do it and Why you should



What you're about to read is not legal advice. It's a mix of facts and personal opinion based on years of experience and observation on the front lines of American democracy. There are many ways to participate in democracy – protest is only one of them.

Every person's situation is different. Know your rights. Exercise them often and wisely.

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by Bronwyn Mauldin

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Bronwyn Mauldin is a novelist and a long-time political activist. She has a master's degree in public administration and has worked in state and local government. Over the years she has participated in – and organized – many protests.

Protest 101 was the first zine in her **Democracy Series**, and was originally published in 2016.

What is a protest?

At its most basic, a protest is when someone makes a public demand for redress or change. A protest is an opportunity to stand up and be counted, a way of demanding that your voice be heard.

A single person standing in front of a building can be a protest. Thousands of people marching through the streets while chanting and waving signs can also be a protest.

Did you go to one of the January 2017 Women's Marches? That protest woke up many Americans to the power of standing together for what we believe in.

Without that protest, we might never have seen the huge airport protests only a short time later that put the brakes on the Muslim ban. It didn't change everything, but it mattered.

Imagine the world we might be living in if we hadn't had the Women's March.

You can demonstrate *against* something you don't like

But don't forget to demonstrate *for* the things you want and the values you believe in.

Protest can take many different forms, including

demonstration
rally
march
vigil
picket
sit-in
civil disobedience
direct action
petition
boycott
street theater
strike



January 21, 2017 Women's March in DC. Photo by Molly Adams

Your right to protest is enshrined in the Constitution

Don't ever forget this.

The First Amendment gives Americans the rights to free speech and to peaceably assemble. The Fourteenth Amendment says this right applies equally to everyone (equal protection clause).

The Supreme Court has ruled that local governments can require permits for public assemblies, and they can limit demonstrations if there is a risk to public safety. However, they can't limit a protest simply because they don't like the message or the messengers.

But wait, there's more!

Your right to protest is recognized under international human rights law

A number of international treaties recognize this, as do the national laws of many countries. The right to protest is rooted in the human rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and freedom of speech

For even more info, check out this ACLU flyer:

Know Your Rights: Demonstrations and Protests



At a 2008 demonstration for marriage equality

Democracy works better
when you bring friends.

Are protests safe?

Overwhelmingly, yes

Demonstrations, marches, and vigils that take place during daylight hours and are organized by established groups are generally quite safe. Most of them will have secured an official permit for the event. Crowds may be large and may become loud, but they are generally no more dangerous than a sporting event or music festival.

If you see vandalism happening, you can walk away. If you see someone hurting another person, you can intervene, or contact the marshals or police for help. Both are unlikely to happen.

Sometimes more radical groups will show up. This can happen in particular at protests that take place after dark. Some of them may break off from the main protest in order to engage in acts of civil disobedience, such as blocking streets and refusing to leave. You do not have to join them – unless you want to!

What if I'm ready to take it to the next level?

If you want to engage in civil disobedience, do your homework first. Read about your legal rights: the ACLU and National Lawyers Guild have great resources, and they may offer workshops. This is something you'll definitely want to do with a group and plan ahead well. Have a friend standing by to support your group as you go through the legal process.

Read up on the history of civil disobedience. It is a powerful tool that should be used thoughtfully and with care. History is replete with examples that will inspire you.

The people you'll meet

Your fellow protesters

This can include people who share the same vision but whose perspectives and priorities are different from yours. This is a great opportunity to discover what you have in common.

Organizers and speakers

Event organizers will be rushing about making sure everything is working as planned. They might hand out signs or banners to carry. At very big demos, you might never see them in action.

Marshals

Some protests have volunteers to help keep the marchers on the approved path or to intervene if any problems arise, such as a medical emergency. They might be identifiable by matching t-shirts or they may wear safety vests.

Legal observers

These are volunteers from civil rights organizations that attend marches where there is some risk of conflict, in order to monitor, record, and report unlawful or improper behavior. The National Lawyers Guild and American Civil Liberties Union often do this work.

Police

Of course they'll be there. See page 12.

Media

Depending on the size of the protest, you might see both mainstream and alternative media. If you are approached by the media you can do the interview or you can politely decline. Read more about media coverage on page 16.

Poor People's March, 1968. Photo by Warren K. Leffler



#NoDAPL – direct action at Standing Rock, 2016. Photo by Revolution Messaging





A suffrage parade in 1921.
Thanks to suffragette protests, women can vote in America. And run for public office.

How to dress for a protest *and other preparations*

- Wear comfortable clothes, especially shoes
- Check the weather forecast and layer accordingly
- Don't forget sunscreen or a hat if it's during the day
- Bring snacks and a bottle of water
- Bring any medications you might need
- Carry some cash – you might want to buy food from a street vendor or a t-shirt to commemorate your adventures in democracy
- Bring only essential cards in your wallet
- If it's a march that goes from point A to point B, plan for the return trip
- Let someone know where you'll be and when you expect to be back
- Make signs! (see page 8)
- **BONUS:** Bring a musical instrument. Nothing brings people together like rhythm & music.

Can I bring my kids?

Most daytime demonstrations and marches are family-friendly events. Strollers, slings, and babybjörns are welcome.

Will the police be there?

The number of police is generally proportionate to the size of the turnout. Police may be on foot, on bicycle, in cars, or on horseback. Police may block traffic to allow marchers to pass safely. At very large demonstrations, groups of police may be staged a short distance away, on call in case some kind of disturbance breaks out.

You might observe police taking photos or video of the march. Some police departments use drones to collect images. Some law enforcement agencies may be using drones to collect data from cellphones. Any of what they collect will likely be kept in official files. Undercover police may join the crowd. Police in uniform are always required to wear identification.

Do I have to engage in civil disobedience?

Only if you want to. If you see people engaged in civil disobedience, you can simply walk away. Before conducting arrests police usually make an announcement and give people a chance to leave. The process of arresting protesters can be surprisingly ritualistic and orderly. Most protests do not include civil disobedience or and no arrests are made.

What if counter-protesters show up?

Ignore them, unless they are threatening to hurt someone. Remember they have the same rights to protest that you do. Television news outlets love to get video of shouting matches, and this won't help your cause.

What if the crowd isn't very big?

If you went to one of the January 2017 Women's Marches, you may have been to the biggest protest you'll ever go to in your life. Everything since then might seem small. You can't go to every demo and neither can anyone else. The size of the crowd isn't the point. Choose your protests wisely and bring as many people with you as you can.

Know the difference

These three terms are often confused
in public discourse about protests.
They are very different things.

demonstration

In a demonstration, a group of people join together in a public place to make themselves heard. This could be on a street corner or in front of a business or government building. There might be a stage with speakers, or there might not. A vigil is usually quiet. In a march, people walk along a route determined in advance by the protest organizers.

civil disobedience

Civil disobedience is a type of protest where a person or group of people intentionally refuse to obey a law they consider to be harmful, immoral, or illegal. Mahatma Gandhi famously led people to collect salt illegally on a beach in India to protest the British salt monopoly. When Rosa Parks refused to sit at the back of the bus, she was breaking a law, and thus engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience.

riot

A riot is a form of civil disorder where crowds of people act out violently in public. Riots generally involve vandalism and property destruction. Some common types include bread riots, police riots, religious riots, and sports riots. For example, after the 2014 World Series, Giants fans rioted, vandalizing vehicles, shattering windows, scrawling graffiti, and throwing bottles.

MAKE SIGNS, NOT WAR!

Use your own words to tell the world why you're there

Make it as fancy or plain as you like

Host a pre-protest sign-making party

Hand paint it on posterboard

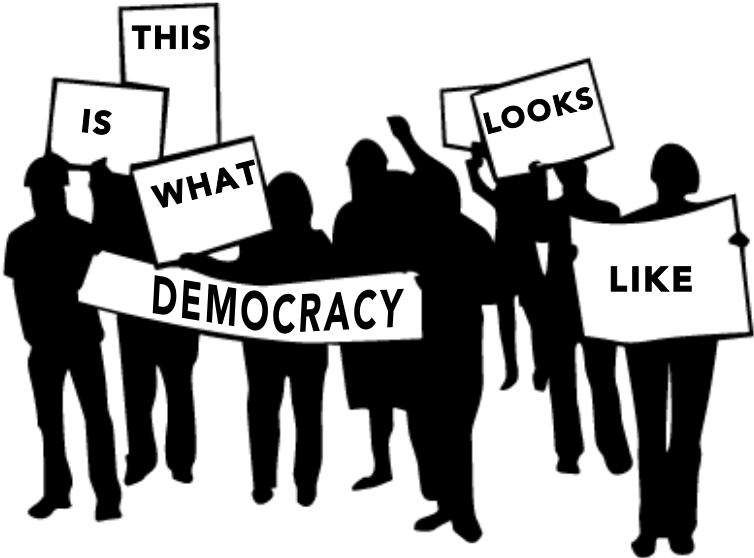
or

Print it out on regular copier paper

Carry it in your hands

or

staple it to a broom handle or post



Big organizations might have professionally printed signs ready and waiting. You can carry theirs or bring your own.

Protest Pro Tips

Protests never start on time. Ever.

Protests can be any size – a handful of people or thousands.

Meet your friends elsewhere and arrive together, especially if big crowds are expected. (Extra protest points for carpooling or using public transit!)

Chants are optional (but usually fun).

If cars honk at you, it's usually in support. Wave and thank them.

There might be speakers on a stage. Or there might not. The stage might be the back of a truck. You can listen to them. Or not.

It can sometimes be hard to tell when the protest is over. Feel free to leave whenever you want.

*"Protest is a powerful antidote to helplessness and confusion."
--Masha Gessen*

Media coverage – what to expect

The mainstream media struggles to cover protests well. The January 2017 Women's March marked a change for the better in coverage of protests, but many of the old issues still remain.

Crowds of people on sidewalks or streets celebrating a band or a new consumer product always get positive coverage. Crowds of people standing in the streets engaged in democratic action are still too often depicted in news stories with suspicion or condescension.

Watching how the media covered protests, town halls, and the wave of calls and faxes to elected officials in 2017, it became clear that too many of them - especially the national outlets - don't believe ordinary people can make change. They identify with political and economic elites even when they are doing their best to speak truth to power. This attitude creeps into their coverage of all the ways in which we regular folks engage with democratic processes.

What you can do about it

Keep going to protests. Keep organizing protests. Invite your friends to join you. Post pictures on social media showing how much fun you're having. Tell everyone why you protest, and why it matters.

Write letters to the mainstream media to correct them when their coverage misconstrues or mischaracterizes an event you attended.

When they get it right, thank them. The media still have a critical role to play in our democracy.



...where you vote as you please.
Where the privileges of democracy
belong to all people equally...where
your government is your servant,
not your master • *This is your America*

... Keep it Free!

What do I say to my friends who say protests are a waste of time?

- Protests are a way to stand up and be counted.
- Protests let people who are under threat know they are not alone.
- Protests put leaders on notice that you are paying attention and will not go along with bad laws or policies.
- Protests are a way to show support for people in power who are doing the right thing
- Protests are a place to build community.
- Protests are fun and cathartic – they can be better than an hour on your therapist’s couch.
- Protests are only one of many ways to engage in democracy. Tell your friends about all the other democratic activities you’re engaged in.

See the next page for ideas → → → →

“I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”
--James Baldwin

Protests are just the beginning!

*Check out all these amazing ways **you** can participate in the democratic process:*

- ✓ Call or write your elected officials
- ✓ Take a group to meet with an elected official
- ✓ Testify at a public hearing
- ✓ Speak up at a town hall meeting
- ✓ Donate to advocacy organizations
- ✓ Donate to good candidates for public office
- ✓ Volunteer for an advocacy group
- ✓ Doorbell or phone bank for a candidate for office
- ✓ Write letters to the editor at mainstream media outlets
- ✓ Volunteer for a local government commission or committee
- ✓ Vote
- ✓ Run for public office

INSIDE!

Your guide for how to...

Protest like a pro!

Demo like a demi-god!

March like a mofo!

Act as if democracy depends on you