

THE REVERE GUIDE TO DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE



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Best Practices for Small Circles of Citizens

*Organizing, Communicating, and Acting Together
to Preserve Democracy Against Creeping Authoritarianism*

Drawing from Timothy Snyder's On Tyranny (2017/2024)
and allied scholarship in political science, communications, and nonviolent resistance



WHO THIS
IS FOR

Every person who wants to do something — not just feel something — about what is happening to American democracy. You do not need to be an organizer, an activist, or a politician. You need a few trusted people, a little discipline, and the willingness to act.

PART I: FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Why Small Circles Matter

Authoritarians have one primary weapon that precedes all the others: atomization. They want citizens isolated, frightened, scrolling alone in the dark, convinced that everyone else has already given up or gone over to the other side. The first and most subversive thing a citizen can do is refuse to be alone.

Timothy Snyder drew this insight from hard history. In the 1930s and 1940s, the societies that fell most quickly to fascism and Stalinism were the ones where intermediate institutions — churches, unions, civic clubs, neighborhood associations, professional bodies — had already been hollowed out. The societies that resisted longest were those where people were densely connected in small, overlapping webs of mutual obligation and trust.

This is not a metaphor. It is a mechanism. When you are connected to real people who share your values, you are harder to deceive, harder to intimidate, and harder to silence. You have a reality check when the information environment becomes chaotic. You have mutual aid when personal pressure arrives. You have witnesses.



SNYDER'S
CORE
INSIGHT

Post-truth is pre-fascism. The deliberate flooding of the information environment with lies, contradictions, and noise is not incidental to authoritarianism — it is one of its primary tools. The antidote is not more scrolling. It is more trust: real relationships with real people who share a commitment to reality.

The Three Enemies of Democratic Citizenship

Snyder and allied scholars identify three conditions that authoritarians cultivate and that citizens must actively counter:

- **ISOLATION:** The deliberate destruction of social trust and civil society, leaving each person feeling alone against a powerful state. Counter it with organized connection.
- **DISTRACTION:** The flooding of the information environment with noise, spectacle, and outrage, so that citizens cannot sustain attention on what matters. Counter it with curated, deliberate information sharing.
- **DESPAIR:** The manufacturing of hopelessness and cynicism, convincing citizens that nothing they do matters. Counter it with visible, regular, collective action — even small action.

Everything that follows is a practical response to one or more of these three enemies.

The Architecture of a Circle

A democratic resilience circle is not a club, a committee, or a formal organization. It is a small, active, trusted network of people who commit to staying informed together, sharing verified information, discussing its meaning, and supporting each other in civic action. Its defining features are:

- **Small:** 5 to 15 people is ideal. Large enough for diverse perspectives; small enough for genuine trust and accountability.
- **Active:** Regular communication is not optional. Passivity defeats the purpose. Every member brings something.
- **Trusted:** These are people you actually know. Trust is not assumed — it is earned through time and demonstrated shared values.
- **Outward-looking:** The circle is not a support group. Its purpose is civic action in the wider world. It sustains the people who take that action.
- **Overlapping:** The most resilient networks are webs of circles, not isolated pods. Each circle should connect to others through individual members who belong to more than one.

PART II: TWENTY BEST PRACTICES

The following practices are organized in four groups: forming and structuring your circle; maintaining your information environment; communication discipline and security; and moving from circle to civic action.

Group A: Forming and Structuring Your Circle

1. START WITH TRUST, NOT NUMBERS

“*Make eye contact and small talk. It is part of being a citizen and a responsible member of society.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Begin with the two or three people you already trust most — not the largest group you can assemble. A small circle of genuinely trusted people is worth more than a large group of acquaintances. Expand slowly, through direct personal invitation from existing members only.

The quality of trust in a circle determines everything else. Premature expansion introduces distrust, conflict, and vulnerability. Resist the temptation to grow fast.

- ✓ Invite people you know personally and have observed under pressure.
- ✓ Have a direct, honest conversation with each prospective member about the circle's purpose before they join.
- ✓ Give new members time to observe before expecting full contribution.
- ✓ Never invite someone primarily for their social media following or prominence.
- ✓ If someone consistently breaks trust — sharing private discussions publicly, escalating disagreements into personal attacks, or introducing destabilizing content — address it directly and, if necessary, remove them.

2. ESTABLISH A SIMPLE, EXPLICIT COMPACT

“*Institutions do not protect themselves. They fall one after the other, unless each is defended from the beginning.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Every circle needs a brief shared understanding of what it is, what it does, and how it behaves. This does not need to be formal or long — a single page is plenty. But it should be explicit and agreed upon by everyone.

Without an explicit compact, every disagreement becomes a negotiation about first principles. With one, disagreements can be resolved by reference to shared commitments. The compact is your institution. Defend it.

- ✓ Agree on the circle's core purpose in one or two sentences.
- ✓ Agree on communication platforms (Signal group, in-person meetings, etc.).
- ✓ Agree on a basic norm for sharing information: sourcing standards, how to flag uncertainty, how to handle misinformation introduced by a member.
- ✓ Agree on a confidentiality norm: what stays in the circle, what can be shared outward, and how.
- ✓ Agree on a simple decision-making process for collective actions the circle might take.
- ✓ Revisit the compact every six months. Adjust what is not working.

3. ASSIGN ROLES, EVEN INFORMALLY

“Do not obey in advance — but do take responsibility.” — Timothy Snyder, On Tyranny

Circles without structure drift. A little informal structure prevents a few people from doing all the work (and eventually burning out) while others coast. Roles do not need to be permanent or formal. They just need to exist and rotate.

- ✓ Designate a rotating “curator” who takes responsibility each week for sharing two or three pieces of verified, important information with sourcing.
- ✓ Designate a “convener” responsible for scheduling and facilitating regular meetings or calls.
- ✓ Designate an “action anchor” who tracks what civic actions the circle has taken or discussed and keeps the group accountable to its intention to act, not just discuss.
- ✓ Rotate all roles at least quarterly to prevent burnout and build shared capacity.
- ✓ Acknowledge contributions explicitly and regularly. Circles that do not recognize their members' effort slowly lose them.

4. CONNECT YOUR CIRCLE TO OTHER CIRCLES

“Practice corporeal politics. Put your body in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people. Make new friends.” — Timothy Snyder, On Tyranny

An isolated circle is brittle. A web of overlapping circles is resilient. Each member of your circle should, ideally, also participate in at least one other circle — a faith community, a neighborhood group, a professional network, a civic organization. They bring news in and carry action out.

This is how the Minneapolis mutual aid networks that successfully organized against Operation Metro Surge were built: not as one large organization, but as hundreds of small trusting groups connected through overlapping memberships and shared platforms.

- ✓ Identify which members of your circle have meaningful connections to other civic groups.
- ✓ Create intentional overlap: organize joint discussions, shared readings, or joint actions with a neighboring circle.
- ✓ Maintain a simple “network map” noting which circles your members also participate in and which issues those circles focus on.
- ✓ When urgent action is needed, the network is more valuable than any single circle.

Group B: Maintaining Your Information Environment

5. COMMIT TO VERIFIED, SOURCED INFORMATION ONLY

“*Post-truth is pre-fascism.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

The single most important discipline of a democratic resilience circle is its commitment to verified, sourced information. This is not about being right. It is about refusing to be a transmission vector for the deliberate misinformation that authoritarians deploy as a primary weapon.

Snyder is precise about this: the goal of authoritarian disinformation is not to make you believe specific lies, but to make you believe that truth itself is impossible to determine — that everything is spin, that all sources are equally biased, that reality is just a matter of opinion. Once that cynicism takes hold, organized democratic resistance becomes nearly impossible.

- ✓ Establish a simple two-source rule for anything shared in the circle as fact: can you find confirmation from two independent, reputable sources?
- ✓ Distinguish clearly between news, analysis, and opinion when sharing. Label each.
- ✓ When you are uncertain, say so explicitly rather than presenting a guess as a fact.
- ✓ If you share something that later proves inaccurate, correct it in the same channel with the same visibility as the original post.
- ✓ Challenge misinformation from fellow members gently but consistently. A circle that does not self-correct loses its value as a truth-anchor.

6. CURATE A SHARED SOURCE LIST

“*Believe in truth. To abandon facts is to abandon freedom.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Your circle should maintain a shared, evolving list of trusted sources appropriate to the specific issues your circle monitors. This is not about partisan media choice; it is about journalistic standards, transparency, and track record.

- ✓ Differentiate your source list by type: daily news reporting (AP, Reuters, PBS NewsHour, local papers), investigative journalism (ProPublica, The Intercept, The Marshall Project), legal and policy analysis (Lawfare, American Immigration Council, Brennan Center), and primary sources (court filings, government documents, official statements).
- ✓ Prioritize primary sources wherever accessible: read the actual court ruling, the actual budget document, the actual executive order. Do not rely solely on summaries.
- ✓ Include at least one local news outlet with strong community coverage.
- ✓ Flag sources that have issued significant corrections or retracted stories.
- ✓ Revisit and update the list quarterly. News organizations change.

7. DEVELOP A SHARED VOCABULARY FOR INFORMATION QUALITY

“*Investigate everything.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Your circle will be more effective if members share a common language for describing the quality and certainty of what they are sharing. This reduces the cognitive load of every information exchange and helps prevent the conflation of rumor, inference, and established fact.

- ✓ Adopt simple labels: CONFIRMED (multiple reputable sources), REPORTED (single reliable source, not yet independently confirmed), CLAIMED (attributed to a person or organization but not yet independently verified), RUMOR (circulating without attribution to a credible source), OPINION (clearly someone's view, not a factual claim).
- ✓ Make it a norm to include your confidence level when sharing: “This is confirmed by AP and Reuters” vs. “I only have this from one source so far.”
- ✓ Praise members who volunteer their own uncertainty. It is a form of epistemic courage, not weakness.
- ✓ Treat viral social media posts with particular skepticism. The speed and emotional intensity of a post are inversely correlated with its reliability.

8. RESIST THE URGENCY TRAP AND THE OUTRAGE CAROUSEL

“*Be calm when the unthinkable arrives. Do not fall for it.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

One of the most effective tools of authoritarian information strategy is to generate a constant succession of shocking events — firings, provocations, absurd statements, apparent crises —

at a pace that exceeds any individual's ability to process them. The result is exhaustion, numbing, and eventually disengagement.

Your circle should consciously resist this. Not every outrage requires immediate response. Not every alarming headline is equally important. The discipline of prioritization is itself a form of resistance.

- ✓ When something alarming appears, your first question should not be “How do I react?” but “Is this confirmed, and how significant is it relative to what else is happening?”
- ✓ Resist pressure to amplify or respond to breaking news before it has been verified.
- ✓ Distinguish between events that are symbolic outrages and events with concrete legal or institutional consequences. Focus more energy on the latter.
- ✓ Periodically step back to assess the landscape rather than the daily stream: What is actually changing structurally? What institutions are being weakened? What norms are being eroded?
- ✓ Protect your circle members from information burnout. Acknowledge that the pace is designed to overwhelm.

9. READ LONG-FORM AND HISTORICAL WORK TOGETHER

“*Read books. Recall that some of what is happening was anticipated by those who came before.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Democracy is not defended by the news cycle alone. The citizens who have historically been most resistant to authoritarian pressure are those with a deep understanding of how democratic backsliding works across time, why it succeeds, and what has stopped it.

Snyder's own call to “read books” is not antiquarian. It is tactical: historical knowledge gives you pattern recognition that the news cycle cannot provide.

- ✓ Establish a shared reading practice: one book every six to eight weeks, discussed as a group.
- ✓ Prioritize history of democratic erosion and authoritarian transition: Snyder's *On Tyranny* and *The Road to Unfreedom*; Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*; Masha Gessen's *The Future is History*; *Autocracy Inc.* by Anne Applebaum; *How Democracies Die* by Levitsky and Ziblatt.
- ✓ Supplement with long-form journalism and in-depth policy analysis on the specific issues your circle monitors.
- ✓ After each reading, spend at least one discussion explicitly connecting what you read to current events. Pattern recognition is the goal.
- ✓ Keep a shared document of key insights from your readings that members can reference.

Group C: Communication Discipline and Security

10. CHOOSE THE RIGHT PLATFORMS DELIBERATELY

“*Establish a private life. Remember that email is skywriting.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

The platforms you use for communication are not neutral. Some are designed for surveillance, some for engagement-maximizing outrage, some for security. Choose platforms appropriate to the sensitivity and purpose of each type of communication.

- ✓ For sensitive operational coordination (monitoring activities, legal observer schedules, mutual aid logistics): use Signal, which provides end-to-end encryption by default and does not store message content.
- ✓ For regular information sharing and discussion: a Signal group chat is suitable. Avoid Facebook for anything sensitive — its business model is built on harvesting and sharing behavioral data.
- ✓ For public-facing action (event announcements, civic campaigns): use whatever platform reaches the community you are trying to reach, understanding that this communication is effectively public.
- ✓ Enable disappearing messages on Signal for the most sensitive channels.
- ✓ Use strong, unique passwords for all civic and political accounts. Enable two-factor authentication everywhere.
- ✓ Periodically audit what information about your civic activities is publicly accessible and consider whether it should be.

11. STRUCTURE YOUR SIGNAL GROUP FOR CLARITY

A Signal group without structure quickly becomes overwhelming noise that members start ignoring — defeating the entire purpose. Even a small, simple structure dramatically increases the group's effectiveness.

Consider creating multiple Signal groups for your circle: one for urgent alerts (kept very low-traffic so that everything in it gets attention); one for regular information sharing and discussion; and optionally one for logistical coordination of specific actions.

- ✓ Pin a brief description of the group's purpose and norms to the top of each Signal chat.
- ✓ Establish a norm against one-line reaction messages that do not add content (“Wow!”, “So scary”) in the information-sharing channel. Reserve that for discussion channels.
- ✓ Use thread replies where available to keep related conversation together.
- ✓ Designate a weekly “highlight”: the curator shares one or two most important items each week, clearly labeled as the week's priority reading.

- ✓ When sharing an article or document, always include a one-to-three sentence summary of why it matters. Do not make your members click before they know whether it is worth their time.
- ✓ Call out and thank high-quality contributions explicitly. This shapes culture over time.

12. MEET IN PERSON REGULARLY

“*Practice corporeal politics. Power wants your body softening in your chair and your emotions dissipating on the screen.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Online communication is essential, but it is not sufficient. Regular in-person gatherings do something that no digital channel can: they remind members that they are part of something real, embodied, and human. They prevent the loneliness and abstraction that erode commitment over time.

The Minneapolis community networks that so effectively organized against Operation Metro Surge were built on years of in-person connection in community spaces — churches, mutual aid kitchens, neighborhood meetings — not just Signal groups.

- ✓ Meet in person at minimum once a month, ideally every two weeks.
- ✓ Rotate hosting among members to distribute the burden and ensure everyone's home turf is included.
- ✓ Include both structured discussion (a specific topic, reading, or issue) and unstructured social time. The social time is not a luxury — it builds the trust that makes everything else work.
- ✓ Conduct at least one meeting per quarter entirely offline: no phones, no laptops. Rebuild the capacity for sustained, distraction-free conversation.
- ✓ Occasionally move your meeting into the broader community: a local library, a community center, a neighborhood business that needs support.

13. PRACTICE GOOD OPERATIONAL SECURITY WITHOUT PARANOIA

“*Establish a private life. Nastier rulers will use what they know about you to push you around.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

The goal of OPSEC for a lawful civic circle is not to operate in secret — it is to prevent your information from being used against you or your community, to protect sources who are vulnerable, and to maintain the integrity of your work. There is a difference between healthy privacy discipline and counterproductive paranoia.

- ✓ Keep personally identifiable information about vulnerable community members (undocumented individuals, people in legal jeopardy) strictly out of group digital channels.
- ✓ Have a clear protocol: before sharing anything that involves a third party's personal situation, ask yourself whether that person has consented and whether putting this in a digital record creates any risk for them.
- ✓ Assume that information in any large social media group (especially Facebook) is effectively public. Treat it accordingly.
- ✓ Conduct a simple periodic review: could anything in your digital channels be mischaracterized or used against your members or sources if obtained by a hostile party?
- ✓ Know your rights: members who are approached by federal agents should know they have the right to remain silent and the right to refuse consent to search.

Group D: From Circle to Civic Action

14. CHOOSE AN INSTITUTION AND DEFEND IT ACTIVELY

“*Defend institutions. Do not speak of ‘our institutions’ unless you make them yours by acting on their behalf. Institutions do not protect themselves.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

This may be Snyder's most urgent lesson, and it is the one most often honored in words and neglected in practice. Institutions — courts, a free press, local government, public schools, libraries, election administration — do not defend themselves. They depend on citizens who show up, financially support them, publicly defend them, and refuse to abandon them when they come under political attack.

The lesson of twentieth-century democratic collapse is consistent: institutions fall one by one, and by the time citizens realize what has happened, the institutional infrastructure needed for accountability no longer exists.

- ✓ As a circle, identify one or two specific institutions that are most important to your community and most under current threat.
- ✓ Take concrete action: subscribe to your local newspaper. Attend a school board meeting. Show up to a city council session. Donate to a civil rights legal fund. Write an actual letter to your representatives.
- ✓ When an institution is publicly attacked with false characterizations, respond publicly and on the record — letters to the editor, social media posts with your real name, public comments at official meetings.
- ✓ Identify the humans inside the institutions — the judges, journalists, election workers, librarians, public defenders — and support them specifically and personally.

15. DO NOT OBEY IN ADVANCE

“*Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. A citizen who adapts in this way is teaching power what it can do.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Snyder calls this the most important lesson of all — and the one that is hardest to follow in practice, because the temptation to accommodate, to stay quiet, to avoid the fight, is constant and feels reasonable in the moment.

Anticipatory obedience — adjusting your behavior, self-censoring your speech, withdrawing from civic life before you are actually compelled to — is the mechanism by which authoritarianism achieves most of its power without ever having to use overt coercion. If enough people comply voluntarily, coercion is rarely needed.

- ✓ Notice when you are adjusting your speech or behavior in anticipation of a hostile audience you have not actually encountered.
- ✓ Name this in your circle when you observe it: “I think I’ve been self-censoring about X.” Naming it is the beginning of reversing it.
- ✓ When you hear colleagues, neighbors, or family members pre-emptively accommodating in ways that trouble you, find a way to say something. Not aggressively — but clearly.
- ✓ Remember that professional contexts are not exempt: lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers, and civil servants who quietly accommodate political pressure normalize that pressure for everyone.

16. ENGAGE IN MUTUAL AID AND DIRECT SUPPORT

“*Be kind to our language. Avoid pronouncing the words everyone else does.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

The Minneapolis mutual aid response to Operation Metro Surge was one of the most successful examples of organic civic mobilization in recent American history precisely because it was built on the infrastructure of existing circles and networks. When the crisis arrived, the capacity was already there.

Mutual aid — the direct, material support of community members in need — is both a practical service and a political act. It demonstrates that civil society, not the state, is the actual foundation of community welfare. It builds the dense social connections that make further action possible.

- ✓ Identify specific, practical needs in your immediate community that your circle could help meet: food access for families sheltering at home, legal referral connections, childcare, transportation to appointments, language interpretation.
- ✓ Connect with existing mutual aid organizations in your area rather than reinventing the wheel.

- ✓ Establish a simple internal mutual aid norm: if a circle member faces a crisis — job loss, arrest, illness, housing insecurity — the circle responds concretely, not just emotionally.
- ✓ Document what your circle does. This creates a record of civic capacity and models behavior for others.

17. REMEMBER PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

“Remember professional ethics. When political leaders set a negative example, professional commitments to just practice become more important.” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Every member of your circle who works in a profession — law, medicine, education, journalism, social work, finance, government service, technology — carries with them a professional ethical framework that was developed precisely to resist the corrupting pressure of politics and power. Those frameworks are resources.

Authoritarianism cannot function without the cooperation of professionals. It cannot hold show trials without judges who comply, cannot manage concentration camps without businessmen who cooperate, cannot build surveillance infrastructure without technologists who build it. The choice of individual professionals matters enormously.

- ✓ In your circle, explicitly discuss the professional pressures members are facing and how professional ethics applies to them.
- ✓ Support members who face professional retaliation for acting on their ethics. This support — practical, emotional, public — makes ethical courage more possible.
- ✓ Know the professional ethics codes and whistleblower protections that apply to your own work.
- ✓ Identify professional associations in your fields that are speaking out or taking positions on democratic governance issues, and support them.

18. VOTE, ORGANIZE, AND SUPPORT ELECTIONS

“Be a patriot. Set a good example of what America means for the generations to come.” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Elections remain, for now, the fundamental mechanism of democratic accountability. Every election — federal, state, local, school board, judicial — matters. Local elections in particular are frequently decided by tiny margins and have enormous practical consequences for the communities where your circle lives.

- ✓ As a circle, commit collectively to 100% participation in every election, however small.

- ✓ Do not just vote — help others vote. Offer rides, childcare, accompaniment. Know your state's laws on voter assistance.
- ✓ Support election workers, poll workers, and election administrators who are under unprecedented political pressure. Attend canvassing sessions at your local election office. Write thank-you notes.
- ✓ Treat attempts to intimidate voters or compromise election administration as the most serious threats they are — not as partisan complaints.
- ✓ After elections, stay engaged. Electoral accountability is the beginning of civic engagement, not the entirety of it.

19. BE CALM WHEN THE UNTHINKABLE ARRIVES

“*Modern tyranny is terror management. When the terrorist attack comes, remember that authoritarians exploit such events in order to consolidate power. Do not fall for it.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

One of the oldest and most reliable tools in the authoritarian playbook is the manufactured or exploited crisis: the event that requires — we are told — extraordinary measures, the suspension of normal rules, the silencing of dissent, the concentration of emergency power.

Your circle's role in such moments is to provide exactly what the authoritarian fears most: calm, fact-based, historically-informed resistance to panic. Panic is the authoritarian's accelerant. Calm, steady, collective action is the extinguisher.

- ✓ Develop in advance, as a circle, a shared understanding of what constitutes a genuine emergency and what constitutes a manufactured or exploited crisis.
- ✓ When alarming events occur, your first obligation to your circle is to verify before amplifying. Slow the signal down.
- ✓ Hold an in-person meeting as quickly as possible after any major destabilizing event. Shared physical presence counteracts the disorienting effect of information overload.
- ✓ Identify in advance the specific civic actions that would be most important in a genuine constitutional crisis: who to call, what to show up for, what to defend first.

20. BE COURAGEOUS — EVEN IN SMALL WAYS

“*If none of us is prepared to die for freedom, then all of us will die under tyranny.*” — Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

Snyder's final lesson is the most demanding and the most important. Democratic resilience ultimately depends not on any particular tactic or platform but on the character of citizens — on whether enough people are willing to say something true when saying it is uncomfortable, to stand somewhere visible when standing there is risky, and to refuse to accommodate what they know to be wrong.

This does not require heroism in the cinematic sense. It requires the everyday courage to speak up in a meeting, to publicly defend a person being unfairly targeted, to write a letter under your real name, to attend a demonstration, to say ‘I disagree’ to someone with power over you.

- ✓ In your circle, celebrate acts of civic courage explicitly — especially small ones. Normalize courage by naming it.
- ✓ Create a low-stakes practice of courage: say something difficult but true in a low-stakes setting, building the habit before it is needed in high-stakes situations.
- ✓ When a member of your circle takes a courageous civic action and faces consequences, show up for them concretely and publicly.
- ✓ Ask yourself Snyder’s most clarifying question regularly: What will I tell my children or grandchildren I did during this time?
- ✓ Remember that courage is not the absence of fear. It is the decision that something matters more than the fear.

PART III: QUICK-START GUIDE

You do not need to do everything at once. Start here.

| WEEK | ACTION | WHAT IT ACHIEVES |
|----------------|--|--|
| 1 | Invite 3–5 trusted people | Establishes trust foundation. Resists atomization immediately. |
| 1 | Create a Signal group | Secure, private channel for sharing. Choose your platform deliberately. |
| 1 | Have your first conversation | Agree on purpose, norms, and a basic meeting schedule. |
| 2 | Share your first curated item | Establishes the information-sharing practice. Model the sourcing standard. |
| 2 | Assign first rotating roles | Builds shared ownership. Prevents the ‘one person does everything’ drift. |
| 3 | Hold first in-person meeting | Embodied trust. Nothing digital replicates this. |
| 4 | Choose one institution to defend | Converts discussion into concrete commitment. |
| Monthly | One book or long-form piece discussed | Pattern recognition. Historical depth. Shared vocabulary. |
| Monthly | One concrete civic action | The circle acts, not just talks. Members see their agency. |

| | | |
|------------------|--|--|
| Quarterly | Review your compact and source list | Adaptation. Prevents drift. Keeps the circle alive and relevant. |
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PART IV: ESSENTIAL READING LIST

The Core Canon

Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (2017, updated 2024). The foundational text. Buy it. Read it. Give it away.

Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (2018). The deeper historical analysis behind *On Tyranny*, tracing the intellectual and political roots of contemporary authoritarianism.

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). The scholarly foundation for all subsequent work on how authoritarian and totalitarian systems arise and function. Dense, but irreplaceable.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (2018). Focuses specifically on democratic backsliding in constitutional systems — how elected officials dismantle democracy gradually, from within.

Masha Gessen, *The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (2017). A deeply reported account of how post-Soviet Russia returned to authoritarianism, told through individual lives. Bracingly applicable.

Anne Applebaum, *Autocracy, Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World* (2024). The current landscape of authoritarian international cooperation and what democratic societies can do about it.

On Information, Truth, and Democracy

Peter Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality* (2019). The best popular account of how contemporary authoritarian regimes use information warfare — not to convince, but to confuse and exhaust.

Renee DiResta, *Invisible Rulers: The People Who Turn Lies into Reality* (2024). The clearest current account of how disinformation spreads and how it can be countered.

Katharine Viner, “A Mission for Journalism in a Time of Crisis” (*The Guardian*, 2017). On the role of facts and journalism in democratic society.

On Nonviolent Resistance

Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (1993/2010). The strategic handbook for nonviolent resistance movements, developed from decades of scholarship and field testing. Available free online.

Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011). The landmark empirical study demonstrating that nonviolent movements are twice as likely to succeed as violent ones.

“*History does not repeat, but it does instruct.*”

— Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*

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