



How can Anabaptists respond to authoritarianism?

What is authoritarianism?

When federal government power is concentrated by a single person or a group to act in ways that are not constitutionally accountable, the foundations of democracy are weakened. This is known as authoritarianism.

Typically, authoritarian regimes direct investigations against critics and political opposition, give license to lawbreaking for political allies, deploy the military domestically to suppress dissent, often refuse to leave office, and target vulnerable communities.[1]

This current moment in U.S. history is seen by some as a time of authoritarian breakthrough—a short window in which a would-be authoritarian regime attempts to rapidly consolidate power, eliminate checks on their power, and operate with impunity.

Even in governments with strong democratic structures, oppression of different forms can exist, impacting certain populations or localities more than others. Throughout history, Black Americans, indigenous people, those of Chinese, Japanese and Mexican origin, and others have experienced brutality and persecution at the hands of the U.S. government.

What can individuals, church and community do to resist authoritarianism and oppressive actions?

Because of the history of selective application of democracy and freedom in the U.S., citizens who are less likely to be targeted by government forces in a time of rising authoritarianism have a greater capacity and responsibility to act to protect democratic institutions and practices.

Scholars at the Horizon Project [2] suggest that authoritarianism cannot function without the support of five key pillars: business, unions, police/military, civil service, and faith groups. If these key groups refuse to cooperate with the demands and expectations of the regime, its power will diminish.

Faith groups can have a unique role to play in noncooperation and resistance when they use their strong organizational networks, moral power, and belief in the dignity of all humans to push back against injustice.

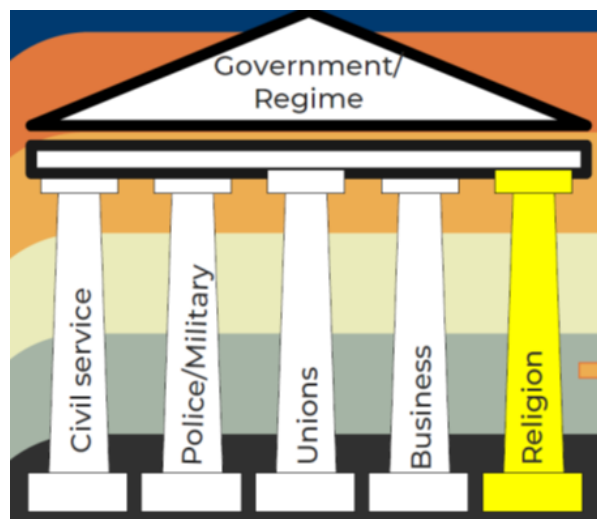


Photo courtesy of the Horizons Project

[1] authoritarianplaybook2025.org

[2] horizonsproject.us/the-pillars-of-support-project-url





“The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ‘When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.’ But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.” (Exodus 1:15-17)

Brenda Stoltzfus, an MCC worker in the Philippines, helped women resist and recover from abuse and exploitation carried out by U.S. servicemen in the 1980s, during a time of aggressive U.S. foreign policy. Stoltzfus accompanied the women in vulnerable situations, organized and hosted long-term support groups, enabled participatory research, and marched and protested with them in solidarity. [3]

- If you can, vote—in local and national elections —and encourage others to do the same
- Train to be a poll watcher and document threats to voters
- Advocate to members of Congress on key issues related to accountability, treatment of marginalized communities and concentration of power.
- Be in solidarity with affected communities through court watch, documentation of police, or accompaniment of vulnerable groups
- Participate in mutual aid and create alternative economies (potlucks, food banks, etc.!)
- Train in civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance
- Join nonviolent protests
- Take part in strikes and boycotts

Resources for learning more:

- [The Faithful Fight: Toolkits for Countering Authoritarianism](#) (with Project Democracy)
- [THE PILLARS PROJECT: The Faith Community](#)
- [Case studies of how faith actors have challenged authoritarianism in the U.S. and globally](#)
- [Songs in the Key of Resistance: A Movement Songbook](#)
- [Holy Obedience by Cliff Kindy](#), Page 18
- [Mennonite Action](#)
- [Mennonite Action Hymns](#)

[3] Stoltzfus, Brenda (1984-1995). Alumni Collection (IX-61-AC Stoltzfus, Brenda). Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Archives, Akron, PA, United States.

