

Repression and Surveillance Toolkit

Survival Manual for Trans Organizers Facing State Surveillance, Infiltration, and Legal Repression





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State repression and surveillance disproportionately target trans activists, sex workers, people of color, disabled folks, and other marginalized communities. These systems of control operate through both overt and covert means, police, intelligence agencies, and private security contractors work in tandem with tech companies to monitor, disrupt, and criminalize resistance. From tracking social media to planting informants in queer spaces, the surveillance state adapts to our every move.

This toolkit exists as both shield and sword. It equips trans organizers with critical knowledge: how to recognize the signs of being surveilled, how to mitigate risks and protect community members, how to build counter-infrastructure, and how to turn surveillance's cold gaze back on the oppressor. Through collective care, operational security, and cultural resistance, we protect each other and build the foundations of a world where trans life is not just possible but fiercely defended. This isn't just about defense; it's about training for war in a world that has already declared war on us.

1. Understanding Repression and Surveillance

What is Repression?

- **State Repression:** Systematic efforts by the state to suppress dissent, disrupt movements, and silence marginalized voices through policing, legal harassment, and media manipulation.
- **For Trans Activists:** Repression often targets those advocating for trans liberation, particularly Black trans women and other multiply marginalized activists.

Types of Surveillance

✓ Physical Surveillance:

- Police and private security monitoring protest activity.
- Undercover officers infiltrating activist spaces.

✓ Digital Surveillance:

- Monitoring social media, encrypted communications, and digital footprints.
- Use of facial recognition and location-tracking technologies.

✓ Infiltration and Provocation:

- Paid informants or provocateurs attempting to sow discord or escalate violence.
- Government agencies collecting intelligence through movement infiltration.



2. Recognizing and Countering Surveillance

Spotting Surveillance Tactics

✓ Signs of Physical Surveillance:

- Repeated sightings of the same individuals or vehicles.
- People asking excessive questions about organizers or strategies.

✓ Digital Surveillance Indicators:

- Unusual activity on personal devices.
- Sudden account lockouts or password reset notifications.

✓ Infiltration Warning Signs:

- Newcomers who immediately seek sensitive information.
- Individuals encouraging escalation or violence to discredit movements.

Counter-Surveillance Techniques

✓ Physical Counter-Surveillance:

- Use the **"Four Corners"** method: Monitor all directions and vary routes.
- Limit sharing of sensitive plans in public or unsecured spaces.

✓ Digital Counter-Surveillance:

- Use encrypted messaging apps like **Signal** and **Session**.
- Use **VPNs** and **Tor Browser** to anonymize web activity.

✓ Disinformation and Noise:

- Introduce misinformation in public discussions to confuse surveillance efforts.



3. Protecting Digital Privacy from State Surveillance

Secure Your Devices

✓ **Full-Disk Encryption:**

- Enable encryption on all devices (laptops, phones, tablets).
- Use strong, unique passcodes instead of biometric locks.

✓ **Two-Factor Authentication (2FA):**

- Activate 2FA for all critical accounts.
- Use authenticator apps rather than SMS for added security.

✓ **Regular Software Updates:**

- Keep devices updated to patch security vulnerabilities.

Limit Digital Footprints

✓ **Use Burner Phones for High-Risk Actions:**

- Avoid linking burner devices to personal information.
- Disable location services and Bluetooth during protests.

✓ **Minimize Social Media Exposure:**

- Avoid sharing live protest locations.
- Use pseudonyms or alternate accounts for organizing.

4. Protecting Organizational Infrastructure

Compartmentalize Information

✓ **Limit Access to Sensitive Data:**

- Adopt a **"need-to-know"** approach for sharing sensitive information.
- Use encrypted platforms for internal communications.

✓ **Create Isolated Channels:**

- Designate different channels for public outreach and sensitive organizing work.

Vet and Verify Members

✓ **Screen Newcomers Thoroughly:**

- Require introductions and endorsements from trusted allies.
- Be cautious of anyone seeking sensitive information too quickly.

✓ **Regular Security Audits:**

- Review OpSec protocols regularly to identify vulnerabilities.
- Rotate passwords and update encryption keys periodically.



5. Handling Police Encounters and Repression

What to Do During Police Encounters

✓ Know Your Rights:

- You have the right to remain silent. State: “I am exercising my right to remain silent.”
- You have the right to refuse a search. State: “I do not consent to a search.”

✓ Do Not Engage with Provocateurs:

- Avoid escalating situations with undercover officers or provocateurs.

✓ Document Interactions:

- Use your phone to record encounters but be aware that police may confiscate devices.
- Upload footage to secure platforms like **Signal** or **Proton Drive**.

Dealing with Arrests and Detention

✓ Stay Silent Until Lawyer Present:

- Refuse to answer questions without legal counsel.

✓ Request Gender-Affirming Housing and Medical Care:

- Trans activists have the right to demand placement that respects their gender identity.

✓ Document Mistreatment:

- Record details of any abuse, misconduct, or violations.

6. Identifying and Addressing Infiltration

Recognize Infiltration Tactics

✓ Signs of Infiltration:

- Individuals asking intrusive questions about leadership or finances.
- Pressure to escalate tactics or break consensus.

✓ Establish Vetting Processes:

- Verify identities and backgrounds of new members.
- Build a culture of trust and accountability.

Limit Damage from Infiltration

✓ Compartmentalize Sensitive Work:

- Separate high-risk actions from broader organizing efforts.

✓ Debrief and Assess After Actions:

- Conduct after-action reviews to identify potential security breaches.



7. Responding to Legal Repression and Crackdowns

Prepare Legal Defense Strategies

✓ Connect with Legal Aid Organizations:

- Build relationships with the **National Lawyers Guild (NLG)** and **ACLU**.
- Have legal observers present at high-risk actions.

✓ Know Bail Fund Contacts:

- Identify bail funds that prioritize trans activists and marginalized communities.

Develop Emergency Legal Protocols

✓ Create an Arrest Plan:

- Establish communication protocols for alerting legal teams.
- Designate emergency contacts and post-arrest support teams.

✓ Secure Sensitive Data:

- Wipe sensitive information from devices before high-risk actions.
- Use encryption and secure deletion tools.

8. Crisis Response and Emergency Plans

Develop a Crisis Management Plan

✓ Establish Secure Communication Channels:

- Use encrypted apps for emergency response communication.

✓ Identify Safe Houses and Rapid-Response Networks:

- Create secure locations for activists facing immediate threats.

✓ Coordinate Jail Support:

- Ensure community members provide emotional, financial, and legal support post-release.



9. Emergency Checklist for Dealing with Repression

✓ Before High-Risk Actions:

- Encrypt devices and secure sensitive information.
- Develop legal support networks and post-arrest plans.

✓ During Protests:

- Monitor for infiltration and suspicious behavior.
- Use encrypted channels to coordinate safely.

✓ After Actions:

- Conduct security reviews and assess for vulnerabilities.
- Provide emotional and legal support for impacted activists.



10. Trusted Resources for Surveillance and Repression Defense

When repression strikes, your safety depends on who you trust and what you know. These aren't just organizations, they're tools in your survival kit. Learn them. Share them. Use them.

Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)

Focus: Digital security, surveillance resistance, internet freedom

The EFF is a frontline defense against digital authoritarianism. They publish deeply accessible guides on protecting your online presence from dragnet surveillance, doxxing, spyware, and more. Their Security Self-Defense toolkit offers step-by-step instructions for securing communications, browsing anonymously, and resisting censorship.

Use them for:

- Hardening your phone or laptop against intrusion
- Learning how to navigate protests without being tracked
- Monitoring tech bills that affect privacy

 eff.org

National Lawyers Guild (NLG)

Focus: Legal support for direct action and political resistance

The NLG has supported radicals since the 1930s. Their green-hatted Legal Observers™ are fixtures at protests, and their Mass Defense Committee organizes lawyers to represent arrested demonstrators for free. They publish know-your-rights materials and coordinate legal support hotlines during uprisings and sweeps.

Use them for:

- Legal aid after arrest or police harassment
- Pre-action trainings on your rights and risks
- Accessing pro bono lawyers who understand political context

 nlg.org



Digital Defense Fund

Focus: Cybersecurity for queer and trans communities

Created specifically for the reproductive justice and LGBTQ+ spheres, this org offers digital security tailored for high-risk organizers. Their guides cover everything from avoiding surveillance while organizing protests to securing trans-specific mutual aid networks. They also run community workshops and offer consulting to groups in need.

Use them for:

- Culturally competent security trainings
- Tips on managing secure donor platforms and anonymous payment tools
- Help with securing websites and organizing platforms from fascist attack

📌 digitaldefensefund.org

ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)



Focus: Civil liberties, constitutional defense, impact litigation

While sometimes slower than grassroots orgs, the ACLU can bring heavyweight lawsuits and visibility to trans civil rights issues. They have a deep bench of lawyers and an increasing focus on trans justice. Their LGBTQ+ Rights Project is a critical component of defending access to healthcare, education, and legal identity.

Use them for:

- Suing anti-trans officials or institutions
- Backing up local fights with national media/legal muscle
- Tracking legislation with their real-time bill dashboards

📌 aclu.org

Mutual Aid Networks (Decentralized)



Focus: Rapid-response care, post-repression recovery, community survival

These aren't always official orgs. Sometimes it's a Signal thread. A Google Sheet. A secret Discord. But these decentralized collectives are often faster and more effective than any formal nonprofit. Many now include bail funds, anti-surveillance skillshares, protest medics, and safe house coordination.

Use them for:

- Getting someone out of jail fast, without waiting on formal systems
 - Emotional and physical support after state violence
 - Staying fed, housed, and cared for while targeted
- Where to find them:
- Look for your local mutual aid groups on itsgoingdown.org, linktr.ee, or social media hashtags
 - Check out mutualaidhub.org for map-based directories



Resist, Protect, and Persist

Repression. Surveillance. Harassment. Criminalization. These are not abstract threats; they are daily realities for trans people living in an increasingly authoritarian United States. From drag bans to forced detransition laws, from targeted police violence to digital surveillance of activists, the state is investing in fear. But fear is a currency we don't trade in. We trade in mutual protection, collective defense, and radical care.

This is not a drill. It's a war on our right to exist.

Protect each other. Stay ungovernable.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This document is provided for informational and educational purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice, nor does it advocate or instruct unlawful activity. All operational suggestions should be adapted to local laws and conditions. For legal guidance, consult the National Lawyers Guild, ACLU, or trusted radical legal defense collectives.