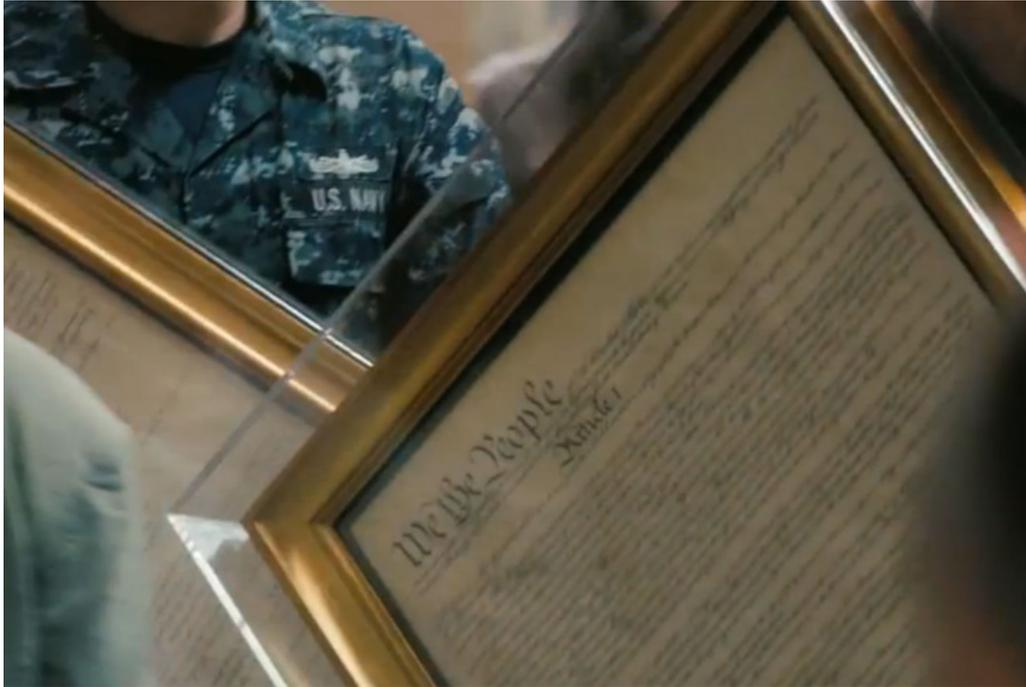




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How the Government Would Protect the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence During a Zombie Apocalypse

By Dan Amira



World War Z, which opened over the weekend, is a film about a catastrophic zombie outbreak. If you haven't seen it yet, we're not giving away any secrets about the plot when we say that these zombies cause some major headaches for humanity — billions dead, cities in ruins, and so on. But amid all the chaos, the American government does make sure to protect the nation's founding documents. We know this because, in a very brief clip, soldiers are seen carrying the glass-encased Constitution (and something else — probably the Declaration of Independence) *somewhere*. The movie does not mention where the Constitution is being taken, but we can presume it's someplace where zombies won't be able to add amendments, by hand, such as "Also, it's totally okay to turn people into zombies."

It's good to know that our *movie* government has a plan for the Constitution in the event of a zombie apocalypse. But what about our *real-life* government? How would it protect our most sacred pieces of paper if a zombie outbreak — or, more realistically perhaps, some other kind of cataclysmic event — were to occur?

We posed this question to [David Ferriero](#), who, as Archivist of the United States, oversees the National Archives, where the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights — what are known as the Charters of Freedom — are displayed and stored.

"We do have a plan, BUT I'd have to kill you if I told you," Ferriero joked. Seriously, though, he added, "security arrangements for the Charters are not public."

Despite Ferriero's best efforts to conceal the government's plan from America's citizens, a.k.a. potential future zombies, we do have a pretty good idea of how the Charters would be protected in the event of a zombie outbreak.

Line of defense No. 1: the "Charters Vault." In 1953, during the Cold War, a "Charters Vault" was built and installed at the National Archives. "At the closing of the building each night, the documents and their protective display cases were lowered into the vault," according to [Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940](#). "This was also done in the event of a nuclear attack."

It would be pretty tough for a zombie to get inside a vault that could withstand a nuclear strike. But, *ideally*, you would get the Charters out of the area of zombie activity altogether and allow the remnants of human civilization to gaze upon them from time to time.

This was, in fact, the plan, at least at one time. As [Time reported in 1992](#):

One of the most difficult challenges facing doomsday planners was deciding what cultural treasures should be saved ... Between 1979 and 1981, a government task force called the Cultural Heritage Preservation Group met to draw up priority lists. The Library of Congress's "Top Treasures Inventory" includes a Gutenberg Bible, the Gettysburg Address and various papers of James Madison, Thomas Jefferson and George Mason. For the National Archives, which is seven blocks from the White House, the single most precious item would be the Declaration of Independence, followed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Though the National Archives building has a 55-ton steel-and-concrete vault on the premises, the scenario calls for the evacuation of these and other documents, probably by helicopter, to an underground facility, if there is adequate warning time.

According to *Time*, the art, at least — and presumably the Charters as well — would be sent to Mount Weather, a Virginia complex known to include a bunker that would serve as one of the sites the government would retreat to [in the case of a nuclear strike](#). Whether this is still the plan, we can't say for sure.

"When I was at the Archives in the eighties and first half of the nineties, we had a list of the highest-priority items (including the 'Charters') that would be protected in case of a national emergency," Trudy Huskamp, a former Archivist of the United States from 1993 to 1995, e-mailed from the Marshall Islands. "I assume there is still such a list; however, I don't know where the items would be relocated."

But rest assured: Though you, personally, will not be whisked to Mount Weather in the case of zombie apocalypse, the Charters very well may be. And somewhere in the deep recesses of your mind, behind the part consumed with an insatiable hunger for human flesh, you will know the Charters are safe, and this will bring you comfort.

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