

Priority #6: Democracy2.0

Voting Rights, Voting Turnout, Voter Suppression, Campaign Financing,
Civic Education, Foreign Interference in U.S. Elections



**All of us are needed to make a positive difference
in maintaining and improving our Democracy!**

Change will not come from the top down.

Real change will come from the bottom up.

Let us all do our part to make that happen!

These are the opening words of the United States Constitution.

"We, the People,
In Order to form a **more perfect Union,**
establish Justice,
insure domestic tranquility,
provide for the **common** defence,
promote the **general** Welfare,
and secure the Blessings of Liberty
to **ourselves** and **our Posterity**
do ordain and establish this Constitution
for the United States of America."

And these are the closing words of the Declaration of Independence:

"And for the support of this Declaration,
With a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence,
We mutually pledge to each other
Our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

It is significant to note that the words highlighted in red are all about us as a group. The words "I" or "Me" are nowhere to found in either of these quotes.

Both quotes set forth the ideas, ideals, and framework for the spectacular success of our country.

We are not a perfect country. No country is perfect now, in the past, or will be in the future.

But for the last two hundred plus years, our country has been a beacon to the world to which millions of our parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and those who may have preceded them have come to our country for freedom and the opportunity to pursue a good life for themselves and their posterity.

For two hundred plus years, each generation of Americans has contributed to keeping the ideals of “We, the People...” at the forefront of our country’s promise and hope.

Democracy and its benefits are not guaranteed. It will only continue if each and every one of us does what we can to “form a More Perfect Union.”

What are each and every one of us willing to do to ensure that we live up to those high ideals going forward?

What are some of the challenges to our Democracy today?

The following are some areas of challenge to our Democracy. They are not listed in order of priority, and, I am sure, there are more issues than I have listed below.

Low Voter Registration: Unfortunately, voter participation in our democracy is at the bottom of the economically advanced countries in the world and has been for many years. Only 56% of the voting age population in our country are actually registered to vote. That means that 44%, or almost ½ of the voting age population is not registered to vote. The average of eligible voters registered in 16 other economically developed countries is 68%, with Belgium leading the pack with 87% of its eligible voters registered to vote. Sweden is next with 83%. Denmark is next with 80%, and Australia is next with 79%. Many of the countries which have high levels of voter registration have a national registration process where everyone who reaches voting age is automatically given voter registration status by the government.

More Restrictive Voting Laws: Many U.S. States over the last several years, and particularly because of the impact of Covid-19, tried to make it easier for people to vote. Mail-in and early voting was made simpler and easier to do because of the fear of catching and/or spreading the coronavirus. Those procedural changes facilitated more votes being cast in the 2020 general election than any previous election in our country’s history. Unfortunately, a number of state legislatures who were not pleased with the election results nationally and within their state, have been passing legislation to make voter registration and voting more difficult, hoping to diminish future high turnout turnouts.

Unfounded Claims of Voter Fraud: Ever since the 2016 General Election, some politicians have promoted the idea that voter fraud is widespread. There have been numerous recounts, special commissions, and court cases related to the question of vote fraud. A few recounts are still on-going. But the many recounts and court cases that have been concluded have shown minimal errors in counting votes and almost zero voter fraud.

Gerrymandering: Attempts to gerrymander election districts have been tried by both Democratic and Republican parties since the earliest times of our country. In the last 20 years, both state and national legislative election districts have been drawn to enhance the opportunities for legislators to be elected in “safe” districts while at the same time reducing the number of districts where real election contests can take place. For example, the party with the most votes statewide does not get a proportionate share of legislative seats . There were some recent cases before the U.S. Supreme Court which tried to change this practice. At this point in time, the Supreme Court has sent the legal questions back to lower courts to make decisions.

Citizen’s United U.S Supreme Court Decision: The *Citizens United U.S.* Supreme Court decision in 2010 said that corporations and unions can make political contributions without limitation. The Court decision basically said that corporations are citizens (just as individuals are citizens), and therefore, should be able to make contributions to

political campaigns and parties just as individuals are able to do. Contributions from business corporations far outweigh contributions from regular citizens. The Citizens United decision has greatly enhanced the power of money and influence in elections. It reversed century-old campaign finance restrictions and enabled corporations and other outside groups to spend unlimited funds on elections. While wealthy donors, corporations, and special interest groups have long had an outsized influence in elections, that sway has dramatically expanded since the *Citizens United* decision, with negative repercussions for American democracy.

Internet Influence and Impact on Voter Persuasion and Voting Results: A new area of concern is the use of the internet, in some cases by foreign governments, and specifically Russia, to influence election results in the U.S. There have also been concerns raised about how personal information which is shared via Facebook and other social media has been used by interest groups to spread false information about candidates and political issues and decisions which affect all of us. These issues are brand new to our democracy and other democracies around the world. What has been going on for the last few years is still being investigated, and possible solutions to these problems have not yet been put forth.

Reduction in Civic Education and Involvement: Over the last 40 years, civics classes in elementary and high schools have generally been eliminated as part of the standard school curriculum. Also, the number of required history courses which a student must take to successfully graduate from high school and colleges have been reduced. One evidence of this lack of civic education is that approximately 65 % to 75% of the voting age population in our country cannot name the three main branches of our national and state governments which are the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches. When a majority of people in a democracy know so little about the basic structures, ideas, and decision-making processes of the political world in which they live, it is difficult for people to make informed decisions about who and what to vote for when they go to the polls.

The Loss of Truth in Political Discussion: Determining the truth about any topic of study can be difficult. No one has all the answers to the many important topics which have political and practical consequences for our country as a whole and for each of us individually. Unfortunately, for citizens trying to be informed participants in the political decision-making processes, understanding what is true has become more difficult. Some politicians, some of the news media and social media, have spread falsehoods about issues and candidates increasing confusion, distrust of government, and misunderstanding public issues.

What are some ideas which will help us meet these challenges and hand on to our posterity a "More Perfect Union"?

Increase Voter Registration: Those economically developed countries which have significantly higher percentage of their citizens registered to vote usually have national systems of voter registration. One thing we might try is to use the social security number system in our country to identify those who are legally entitled to vote and linking it to the diverse and often difficult processes of registering to vote through local government entities (cities, villages, counties). Such a system could easily and consistently identify who are legal voters while maintaining local verification of residency in order to vote.

Pass Legislation That Makes it Easier to Vote: Increase voting time periods prior to election days. Increase opportunities for people to vote via mail. Increase the number of secure ballot drop-off locations. Make it easier for people who have moved between elections to register to vote in their new geographic location.

Have Paper Ballots as Part of All Voting Processes: The potential for hackers to affect election tallies and results is becoming more of a threat and will continue to grow as a problem in the future. Using computerized systems to count election results can still be used but having paper ballots which are securely protected by those conducting the elections should be the basis for investigating any questions of fraud or errors. This is generally the case today, but as digital processes related to voting continue to grow, we need to maintain hardcopies of the actual ballots cast by voters.

Expand the Resources Allocated to Oversight of Digital Platform Roles in Elections: The Federal Election Commission as well State Election Commissions need sufficient funding to address the issues raised by the influence of digital platforms in political campaigns and the tabulation of votes. This is a new issue which has arisen over the last 10 years in our country and around the world. We need to be able to guarantee that we hold free and fair elections. It is important that we allocate dollars to this effort and strongly encourage national and state cooperation in this area of governance by Democracy.

Support a U.S. Constitutional Amendment Which Eliminates Identifying Corporations as Citizens: For the first 220 plus years of our country, corporations were not considered citizens. In 2010, the sitting Supreme Court ruled that a corporation is a citizen and cannot be restricted from donating to political campaigns. The most direct and complete way to address that Supreme Court decision is to have a Constitutional Amendment eliminating that language.

Support Efforts to Promote Civic Education in Schools: As parents and as members of our communities, encourage educational institutions to re-instate civics education as an important element in all levels of education so that we are informed and empowered members of our Democracy.

Community-wide Participation in Decision-Making: Contribute your knowledge and expertise to a local government board or community organization addressing an issue you are particularly interested in, for example, the environment, community safety and well-being, education, local food production, addressing hunger issues, etc.