

# **DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA 2023**

*Final Report  
to the Freudenberg Stiftung*

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## A STRONG VIBRANT DEMOCRACY

*The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.*

Alexis de Tocqueville,  
*Democracy in America*, 1835-1840

## AMERICAN DEMOCRACY TODAY

*I recently turned 18, so I have voted for the first time in this election, but my thing that I think about voting is there... there aren't really many ways that we as citizens can participate in politics, and like voting is one of the only ways, and sometimes it feels it doesn't count.*

white man, inconsistent supporter of democracy,  
focus group participant 2022

## THE CHALLENGE TO AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

To the 59% of Americans who are attitudinally inconsistent supporters of democracy, democracy is no longer an aspirational idea or ideal. It has been stripped of its symbolic meaning and import. At best, democracy is reduced to voting *or* just another system of government. At worst, its promise is a lie.

Voting is a symbolic act of questionable utility. Democratic governance? A broken system, favoring the connected, rich, and already powerful. The lie? A constitutional system that was never intended for all Americans and is to this day manipulated to exclude them – the voices of *We the People* – from governance.

The very concept of democracy is sapped of its meaning, vigor, and relevance for these Americans. What is left is a majority of the populace vulnerable to the siren songs of demagogues stoking fear, demolishing democratic guardrails, and feeding social division and political polarization.

The aspiration toward E Pluribus Unum is a chimera lost in the fear and scapegoating of fellow citizens as “the enemy within.”

Democracy in America in 2023 is on life support. The Americans who are most likely to be struggling in the democratic intensive care unit are older Gen Z and young Millennial Americans. Approximately, three-in-four of these Americans<sup>1</sup> between the ages of 18-39 are inconsistent supporters of democracy.

Given the data revealing the generational differences in consistent support for democracy (older Americans are much more supportive of democracy than younger citizens), it is probable that Gen Alpha and younger Gen Z citizens will also be highly inconsistent in their support of democracy. With political polarization at a zenith and trust in institutions a nadir in 2023, it is difficult to envision a scenario where Gen Alpha will be more consistent in its support of democracy than Gen Z.

As the American population ages, the disturbing prospect of consistent support for democracy falling is twinned with the increasing probability of the hollowing out of democracy itself.

This is the challenge confronting democracy in the United States. Why is it happening? And what can be done to fix it?

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<sup>1</sup> Data from national survey conducted for this report – see page 35.

## ANSWERING THE CHALLENGE

The *what can be done to fix it* question (the fourth planned query of this study) was originally thought to be the most important. For if support and commitment to democracy and democratic institutions is lacking among younger Americans, this is a problem to fix now before it festers.

*Why?* Because if inconsistent support for democracy is allowed to fester unimpeded, the opportunity for authoritarians and other self “interested men” to inflame the “violent passions,” which have lurked under the surface of America society since its inception,<sup>2</sup> will increase as younger Americans age.

*How Could This Happen?* If younger Americans are less likely to be consistent supporters of democracy than their parents and grandparents, then, over time as they age, the base of consistent supporters for democracy in the United States will decrease. And the farther the base of support falls, the greater the likelihood that democracy can be hollowed out by demagogues seeking power unconstrained by democratic rules and norms.

This demographic succession, where more consistent supporters of democracy are replaced by those who are less consistent, could produce a new, concerning challenge to the future of democracy in the United States that is presently unrecognized and quite dangerous -- a ticking, demographic time bomb.

This possibility leads to a fifth question that is pertinent: *Is there a demographic time bomb ticking away near the cornerstone of American democracy?* Hypothetically, given the results reported in what follows, this is quite possible. But this study was not designed to explore this question. It is an inquiry that flows directly from what was learned over the course of the last few months.

Whether the answer to this fifth question is yes, no, or somewhere in between, the findings from the other four study questions is unambiguous and points the way to one possible solution to the challenge confronting democracy in America. Stripped down to its essence we learned:

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<sup>2</sup> *The Federalist Papers*, Federalist 63.

1. Younger Americans are less likely to support democracy than their parents and grandparents.
2. Lecturing these younger Americans about the benefits of democracy and the need to support it is unlikely to change their minds.
3. Connecting them to “good work” volunteer opportunities where they live that directly help others, give back to those in need, improve the community, and foster dense social networks locally is likely to interest, engage, and activate many of them.
4. Linking this civic engagement and action at the community-level directly to the bolstering of freedoms they cherish and, secondarily, the democracy that makes those freedoms possible, demonstrates for them that there is a powerful, symbiotic relationship between civic engagement and democracy. Community caring, action, and building is the foundation of democracy; and democracy is the fierce ally of community power and voice.

At its core, this approach is Tocquevillian.

*The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.*

Alexis de Tocqueville,  
*Democracy in America*, 1835-1840

It posits that increasing the number and quality of functions (in this case community-building functions) performed by Americans 18-29 years of age will increase the overall health of American democracy.

As long as the connection between community-building and democracy is made explicit, it is an approach that is supported by this study and American history.

Looking backward, this conclusion seems obvious. What was not obvious, but is now revealed as imperative, is the need to take real action right now to answer the demographic challenge confronting democracy.

The demographic, time-bomb at the cornerstone of American democracy is ticking away. We cannot allow it to continue its countdown unimpeded.

## FINDING THE ANSWER

A study of democracy would not normally delve deeply into American volunteerism. But this research study was designed with multiple goals in mind. In addition to exploring inconsistency of support among younger Americans – estimating its scope and determining its sources -- it was hoped that this study would develop applicable recommendations for reinvigorating support for democracy in the United States.

One path to bolstering support for democracy, which became apparent during the implementation of the study's research agenda, was to connect young, inconsistent supporters of democracy to volunteer opportunities where they live. *Why?*

Most inconsistent supporters of democracy care deeply about their communities. They believe they can improve, and make America a better place to live, by volunteering in their communities. To them, volunteering can create real change locally. Some even think that change might snowball upward, leading to a better city, state, and nation, lessening polarization and division, and in doing so, renewing freedom and expanding equality.

Unfortunately, inconsistent supporters do not make the connection between community-change volunteering and democracy. That linkage, and its value to them and America, must be made explicitly as part of a program promoting volunteerism at the community level.

The stated goal of such a volunteer program, however, cannot be democracy building or bolstering. This research reveals that inconsistent supporters of democracy are unlikely to sign up for a program whose public goal is building democracy in America. Most inconsistent supporters of democracy do not see the importance and value of doing that. They care about freedom and their communities. Democracy just does not rate. Democracy building is the wrong message to attract them.

A program connecting inconsistent supporters to volunteer projects in their community and recognizing their participation through a system of acknowledgement and rewards must be – first and foremost – about community engagement and building. Democracy building can be an outcome of this work, if the program is deftly designed to foster it, but it cannot be the public goal.

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## STUDY DESIGN

### Research Questions

Four questions form the backbone of this contemporary study of democracy in America.

1. What percentage of Americans are inconsistent supporters of democracy and, importantly, is inconsistent support for democracy stable over time?
2. Are younger Americans more likely to be inconsistent supporters of democracy than older Americans?
3. Why are younger Americans inconsistent supporters of democracy?
4. How can the findings of this research be applied to increase support for democracy among younger Americans?

The first three of these questions are fundamental research inquiries at the heart of the study of democratic deconsolidation in America and across the world (see appendix four for background on this study).

The final question, *what can be done* about the findings, is the most important. For if support and commitment to democracy and democratic institutions is lacking among younger Americans, we must fix this problem now before it festers.

### Research Approach

The first and second questions examined in this study are quantitative in nature. They are examined through an initial survey. This survey is followed by a panel-back poll to ascertain the stability of consistent support for democracy among 18-29-year-olds.

The initial survey was fielded in early October. A copy of the survey instrument is in appendix two.

The panel-back study was fielded in March of 2023. A copy of the survey instrument is in appendix nine.



The third question – the *why* inquiry – is qualitative. It was examined through focus groups and three asynchronous qualitative boards (AQB) conducted with a randomly-selected panel of 64 young Americans who are inconsistent supporters of democracy.

The fourth question – *what can be done* about what we have learned -- was also explored in detail in the three asynchronous qualitative boards. A copy of the three AQB questionnaires can be found in appendix five.

## **Research Reports & Next-Step Outreach**

An interim report summarizing the preliminary findings of this research was published in January of 2023. It reported and analyzed the findings of the initial survey and focus groups. It also guided the design of the three asynchronous qualitative boards that followed and inspired a change in the study -- the addition of a review of

- foundation programs in Wisconsin (see appendix 7),
- selected civic engagement work and democracy programs around the United States including OSI in Baltimore, New Pluralists, German Marshall Fund Cities Program, and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (see appendix 8), and
- the development of a list of additional people and organizations who might be interested in the findings of this study (see appendix 10).

This additional work, completed within the existing grant, was undertaken to

1. produce a more robust and practical discussion of volunteer opportunities during qualitative boards two and three, and
2. jump start the next phase of the project – the practical application of research findings to on the ground programming.

This final report, Democracy in America 2023, will be followed by:

1. a power point presentation of findings,
2. presentations to interested parties,
3. a brief, next-steps action memo, and
4. continued outreach to potential partners in Wisconsin.

An outreach effort to the preferred partner in Wisconsin, identified during the study, is already underway. If a partnership with this foundation cannot be forged, a second option in Wisconsin will be approached simultaneously with a prime partner opportunity in Baltimore – an active and groundbreaking civic engagement program that is in transition and may be very open to collaboration.

## **Research Populations (by Tools)**

The **quantitative survey population** is a representative national sample with an oversample of young Americans (18-29 years of age). This age group was oversampled to provide a more granular understanding of younger, inconsistent supporters of democracy.

The **focus group population** is a subset of the survey population. Focus groups were held only with young (18-29), inconsistent supporters of democracy -- those who answered one-to-three of the five democracy questions inconsistently. Thus, the methodology used in the survey to estimate consistent support for democracy was also used to select focus group participants.

There were five focus groups. All focus groups were held online with participants who lived in Wisconsin. Wisconsin was chosen for these groups because of its central role in the culture war dividing America today.

Participants were separated by gender and race producing four separate focus group discussions:

- Group 1: Black men, 18-29<sup>3</sup>
- Group 2: Black women, 18-29
- Group 3: white women, 18-29
- Group 4: white men, 18-29

Because of resource limitations, focus groups were only conducted among white and Black Americans. Focus groups were held in October, November, and early December of 2022. The focus group of Black men was rerun in December because of recruitment problems with the screening of participants and technical difficulties with the online platform. The screening guide used to select participants and the discussion guide used by moderators to direct the focus groups are in appendix 3.

To encourage a frank discussion in each group, two moderators were used. A Black moderator for the focus groups with Black Americans, and a white moderator for the focus groups with white Americans.

The **asynchronous qualitative board population** was similar attitudinally to focus group participants with one exception – some younger Americans who answered four-out-of-five democracy questions inconsistently were included in the research. The panel consisted of 64, randomly-selected Black and white inconsistent supporters of democracy from around America.

To fill the panel, the country was divided by census regions, quotas were set for participants by each region based on census data, and participants were recruited to meet the demographic and attitudinal census benchmarks.

Panel discussions occurred in January, February, and March of 2023. Each discussion ran approximately 36-to-48 hours. Fewer panelists dropped out

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<sup>3</sup> AP style guide recommendations are used to guide conventions regarding the capitalization of racial categories in the text of the report. Per the AP: “After changing its usage rules last month to capitalize the word “Black” when used in the context of race and culture, The Associated Press on Monday said it would not do the same for “white.” The AP concluded white people in general have much less shared history and culture, and do not have the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color. In citations, race and sex are both capitalized throughout this report.

between panels than was anticipated. In all, 57 of the participants completed all three, in-depth panel discussions.

Guides for each panel discussion were developed dynamically, building on the analysis of previous discussions, data, and findings. Moreover, a review of foundation, civic-engagement programs (not originally planned as part of this work but added to the work plan in December of 2022) was used to produce a synthesized list of existing volunteer programs for participants to consider during the third qualitative board session. This list was compared with simpler, volunteer options developed from the participants' online research and discussions conducted as part of the second qualitative board.

The **panel-back, survey population** included 18–29-year-olds who were polled in the original survey. The original survey included the base sample, as well as the oversample, for a total starting N of 499.

The age cohort was oversampled in the original survey to

1. provide a more granular understanding of younger, inconsistent supporters of democracy, and
2. insure an adequate sample for the panel-back survey.

The panel-back survey reached 273 of the 18–29-year-olds interviewed in the first survey.

# MEASURING CONSISTENCY OF SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

Five questions were employed in this study to estimate consistency of support for democracy. These questions were used in the Democracy Fund: Voter Study Group’s omnibus analysis (2017) of “the degree to which Americans are open to departures from democracy, and the motivations behind endorsing authoritarian alternatives.”<sup>4</sup> The report based on this analysis is called “Follow the Leader.”<sup>5</sup>

The five questions are:

Introduction Q1-Q3: Various types of political systems are described in the three statements below. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing the United States?

Q1. Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with Congress and general elections.

Very good ..... 1\*\*  
 Fairly good ..... 2\*\*  
 Fairly bad ..... 3  
 Very bad..... 4

Q2. Having the army rule.

Very good ..... 1\*\*  
 Fairly good ..... 2\*\*  
 Fairly bad ..... 3  
 Very bad..... 4

Q3. Having a democratic political system.

Very good ..... 1  
 Fairly good ..... 2  
 Fairly bad ..... 3\*\*  
 Very bad..... 4\*\*

Q4. On a scale where “**1**” represents “**Not At All Important To Me**” and “**10**” represents “**Very Important To Me**,” how important is it to you to live in a country that is governed democratically?

*Not at All Important*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    *Very Important*  
 1-7 = \*\*

<sup>4</sup> Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, *Follow the Leader*, [www.voterstudygroup.org](http://www.voterstudygroup.org).

<sup>5</sup> Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, *Follow the Leader*, [www.voterstudygroup.org](http://www.voterstudygroup.org).

Q5. Which of these statements comes closest to your view?

- Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government..... 1
- In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable..... 2\*\*
- For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have. .... 3\*\*

Answers marked \*\* are inconsistent with support for democracy.<sup>6</sup> For example, agreeing that “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with Congress and elections” is a “very good” or “fairly good” way of governing the United States (Q1 above) is considered inconsistent with the basic functioning of democracy. Supporting a President who ignores Congress – a co-equal branch of government – and flouts the outcome of a free and fair election is an anathema to democracy and also, as America found on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, a recipe for insurrection.

Whether a citizen is a consistent or an inconsistent support of democracy is a simple binary question. Anyone who answers all five these questions consistently is a consistent support of democracy. Everyone else is inconsistent.

The degree to which citizens are willing to depart from democracy and democratic norms may also be scaled, hypothetically, by how many questions they answer inconsistently. Theoretically, a person who answers one of the questions inconsistently may be more likely to be supportive of democracy than someone who answers four or five of these questions inconsistently.

For this study, and other studies done since this methodology was used by the Democracy Fund, all questions are given equal weight in the scaling. In future, once the stability in the measurement is established, a weighted scale may be developed to produce a more granular picture of support for democracy.

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike the Democracy Fund: Voter Study Group, answers two and three in question five are considered inconsistent in this analysis.

# SUMMARY OF LEARNING

## Focus Group Participants Say: Democracy is...

- *Lies ... the Constitution was never actually built for Black people. It wasn't built for women, and it wasn't built for other people of color either.*
- *More lies.*
- *A broken system that doesn't work ...it doesn't work for the people...the system works for those that are in (the) higher power unit because, obviously like, it's corrupted.*
- *Broken...personally, as an African American, the system is just not built for us.*

**Black men, 18-29, inconsistent supporters of democracy**

- *Voting...(but) I think less and less people are relying on their vote, feeling that their vote even gets counted.*
- *You just start to lose faith and voting in elections because you almost feel the person you vote for isn't even gonna ...your vote isn't even going to have any effect anyways.*
- *Voting...(but) I saw this saying once and, uh, I don't know how true it is, because that's pretty conspiratorial. But they said if your vote actually counted, they wouldn't let you, they won't let you do it. Like, kind of like, an oligarchy of politicians that don't wanna give up control.*
- *[IS THERE ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT DEMOCRACY?] I just felt if we had a system that was working...as long as the system's working good and people are happy with it ...I don't think it really mattered what type of government it is.*

**white men, 18-29, inconsistent supporters of democracy**

- *Government (but) I was just thinking on the lines of the whole point of government, I thought was to make sure the country runs smoothly like um and gives everyone opportunities and everyone has a voice so I don't necessarily care if it's democratic. If everyone is still heard and has their needs taken care of.*
- *The people's voices being heard, (but) I feel like there's a difference between having the freedom to speak and then your voice being heard. Even though we call ourselves a democracy, which I mean, I don't think we are.*
- *Being able to be heard. (And) I like that we have a democracy, although I don't think our government is being run like that right now so it's disappointing.*

**white women, 18-29, inconsistent supporters of democracy**

- *So, kind of like how we have elections. (But) they tell us that we that we have these rights and that our vote matters or whatever, but it don't.*
- *What do we vote for? Like I kind of felt like that was just wasting our time to just make us make us feel like we matter the whole time and really didn't. [WHO IS WE?] ...The minorities, um the middle class, the poverty people.*
- *Democracy means like... letting people make their own decisions. It's our choice. (but) I don't think we really have a democracy as much as they say we do... And it kind of sucks because it's like, well why are we voting if you guys don't really take what we say into consideration? You know? And then other things as well, like you know, just so many issues going on and they don't really care, you know, the government doesn't really care whether it's our state government or like the White House government, they just don't care.*
- *[IS THERE ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT DEMOCRACY?] I think the last time I heard it... I heard it on the T. V. show and somebody said like this is the democracy and I just started laughing... [WHY?] It's the way... it's the way that he (television personality) said it because it was like a white it was like a white person. He was standing to another white doctor and it was the way that he said so I just started laughing me... personally I don't really know what it (democracy) means.*

**Black women, 18-29, inconsistent supporters of democracy**

## Quantitative Learning

Approximately, three-in-four Americans between the ages of 18-39 are inconsistent supporters of democracy. Older Americans are much more supportive of democracy (consistent supporters of democracy) than younger citizens, including 52% of those between the ages of 60-69, and 65% of those 70 years of age and older.

### Hypothetical Implications:

- It is probable that Gen Alpha and younger Gen Z citizens will also be highly inconsistent in their support of democracy.
- As the American population ages, inconsistent support for democracy in the United States is likely to increase.
  - This demographic succession, where more consistent supporters of democracy are replaced by those who are less consistent, could produce a new, concerning challenge to the future of democracy in the United States that is, at this time, unrecognized and quite dangerous -- a ticking, demographic time bomb.
- If inconsistent support for democracy is allowed to fester and grow unimpeded, the opportunity for authoritarians and other self “interested men” to inflame the “violent passions,” that have lurked under the surface of America society since its inception,<sup>7</sup> will increase as younger Americans age.

In total, only 41% of Americans 18 years of age and older are consistent supporters of democracy. Half of Americans 18 years of age and older (50%), who were more likely to vote in the 2022 midterm elections, are consistent supporters of democracy.

One-in-five Americans (19%) answer just one of the five questions used to measure consistent support for democracy inconsistently – an answer contrary to democracy and democratic values.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Federalist Papers*, Federalist 63.



The question most American answer inconsistently is the strong leader query, which comes from the World Values Survey.

- Americans who are inconsistent on this question agree that “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with Congress and general elections” is a very good or fairly good way of governing the United States.
  - People who select this statement in the focus groups did so primarily for two reasons:
    1. Frustration with the governmental gridlock: Democracy moves too slowly on issues where there is broad public consensus and, in times of emergency, when swift action is required.
    2. Authoritarianism: A strong leader appeals to their authoritarian disposition.

Thirty-six percent of young Americans (18-29) in the survey oversample are inconsistent supporters of democracy on just one or two of the five democracy questions asked. These Americans, in all likelihood, are key targets for any effort seeking to improve support for democracy in America.

- Another 22% of young Americans answered three-out-of-five democracy questions inconsistently. These young Americans are secondary targets for efforts seeking to bolster democracy.

A panel-back survey of young Americans found that consistency of support for democracy was statistically stable during the six-month study period.

- More longitudinal surveying should be done to track the stability of the measurement over a longer time period and among different age cohorts.

Differences of consistent support for democracy among white, Black, Hispanic, and other young Americans do not achieve statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) in a fully specified model. The focus groups, however, which were divided by race and gender, demonstrated emphatically how deeply race divides views of and support for democracy.

- Further examination of race-based, attitudinal differences should be explored quantitatively and qualitatively. For now, any efforts to bolster

democracy should be designed with racial attitudinal differences fully accounted for in the planning process. (Qualitative investigation of race-based differences were also conducted as part of the qualitative board component of this initial study.)

## **Qualitative Learning – Inconsistent Supporters of Democracy Only**

*Race and Gender.* Perceptions of American democracy and symbols are contoured by race and gender differences within race. Even seminal, current events (for example, the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection) are understood in radically different ways by Black and some, but not all, white Americans.

*Low Knowledge of Democracy.* No matter their race or gender, inconsistent supporters of democracy lack basic knowledge about democracy, the Constitution, American government, and history.

- Those who remember some civics instruction have a dim, hazy recollection of what they learned.
- Others remember learning primarily about the President, parties, and little else.

*Is America a Democracy?* Inconsistent supporters of democracy are split when it comes to the question of whether the government of the United States is a democracy. Some argue America remains a democracy. Others contend it never was. And many are unsure how to define America's system of governance.

- Their attitudes are not based on the reading of academic comparative assessments of democratic governance around the world. Instead, their opinions are heartfelt, gut feelings that come from personal experiences with, and word-of-mouth and media discussion of, how America's democracy works today.
- Perceptions like this, which are rooted in the gut and based on lived or observed experiences, are exceedingly difficult to dislodge. Each one represents both a clear and present threat to the future health of democracy in America and a potential fix that could bolster support for democracy. But unintended, they can also produce secondary effects that,

in this case, further erode support for and popular defense of democracy and democratic institutions.

- Some of the inconsistent supporters of democracy who participated in our discussion now treat democracy almost as if it were a spectator sport. For example, instead of thinking about how they as citizens could help ensure that the guardrails of democracy are rebuilt and power is transferred peacefully after the 2024 election, they are ready to sit back and watch what happens almost as if they are watching a movie or a sporting event.

*Democracy is?* To most inconsistent supporters of democracy, democracy is neither an aspirational idea, an inspirational ideal, or an intricate system of constitutional checks and balances on power that protects individual freedoms. Instead, democracy has been stripped of its symbolic meaning and import, and reduced to the limited act of voting.

- Today, the concept of democracy appears to be emotionally impoverished -- a word whose meaning has lost emotive equity.
  - Democracy is not the only word from America's past that has lost emotional resonance today. Not one participant in the focus groups rated liberty highly. The concept that patriot Patrick Henry announced he was ready to die for in 1775 – the famous and rousing declaration “give me liberty, or give me death” has been relegated, at least for now, to the dustbin of rhetorical history.

The flattening of the meaning of participatory democracy from a multifaced, civic endeavor to a unidimensional, civic responsibility of questionable utility (voting) is echoed in focus groups and qualitative boards.

- Voting is the only way most inconsistent supporters of democracy know how (or are told how) to participate in democracy. But they suspect that their voice, expressed through voting, is not listened to, heard, or even considered when the election is over. Voting is perceived by many as a sham, a symbolic act of questionable utility, an illusion of power and choice where there is neither. Their votes simply do not count.
  - Increasing knowledge of the Electoral College, from 2016 and 2020 media coverage and word-of-mouth conversations about it, has even increased questions about the actual utility of voting in presidential elections.

- MAGA-led questions about the security of the voting process have also undermined faith in the power and effectiveness of voting.
- And to almost all inconsistent supporters of democracy who participated in the qualitative board discussions, voting is the be all and end all means by which they see themselves participating in democracy.

Inconsistent supporters of democracy say that democratic government is broken and corrupt. It does not work for *We the People*. The government produced by a bogus voting process is perceived as “unrepresentative,” systemically “broken,” and “corrupt.” The system is stacked against the people. The system is awash with money. It buys power, favors the connected, rich, and already powerful.

*Democracy is a lie.* To some Black men who are inconsistent supporters of democracy, the unrepresentative and unresponsive government produced by corruption and a sham voting process is not an insignificant anomaly; it is a symptom of a fundamental problem which began with the founding of the American Republic and continues today. (This opinion was more prevalent in the focus group discussion than in the qualitative board conversation.)

- The Constitution was not designed originally to protect or advance the rights of freedom of minorities. Moreover, important changes to the Constitution are unknown or deemed irrelevant because, more than two hundred years later, the rights and freedoms of Blacks in America are still in question, under attack, or in abeyance.
- The normalization of white supremacy instigated and countenanced by Trump and his MAGA movement underscores the enduring, perilous position of minorities in America irrespective of the constitutional and institutional progress made.

To some Black men, American democracy is not (or is no longer) a preferable system of government.

- Some even doubt there is a future for democracy in America. They think a non-democratic government that works for them may be preferable to democracy as it is devolving in the United States under the influence of the MAGA minority.
  - To some Black men, January 6<sup>th</sup> was a reminder of America's long history of violence as well as the proverbial canary in the coal mine – a harbinger of what is coming.

The concerns about the future course of democracy in America raised by Black men in the focus groups are mirrored in the qualitative board discussion. Given five statements about the **future** of American democracy to choose from, only 25% of Black men who participated in the qualitative board chose *“Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone.”*

- By comparison, nearly 75% of white men, and Black and white women, agree that *“Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone”* in the **future**.

This aspiration to improve democracy **in the future** is tempered by real concerns about what American democracy is **today**. Only four-in-10 Black and white Americans in the qualitative board discussion (among two-out-of-five or three-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy) agree they want to work to keep and improve democracy **today**.

Democracy and democratic governance are hollowed-out concepts sapped of meaning and value.

- With voting perceived as pointless, and the system broken and racked by corruption, the very concepts of democracy and democratic governance are sapped of much of their meaning, vigor, and value for Black and white inconsistent supporters of democracy. What is left is a plurality of the populace disempowered and vulnerable to the siren songs of demagogues

stoking fear, demolishing democratic guardrails, and feeding political polarization and social division.

- While both white and Black inconsistent supporters of democracy question the efficacy of voting and the integrity and responsiveness of the system of governance, indifference to democracy, is found primarily among white Americans.
  - The political potential of authoritarianism in America is abetted by these inconsistent supporters' neutral and indifferent feelings about democracy.
- Black men and women worry more about the potential for repression and violence when demagogues are enabled and division is stoked. Some say that, as they watch the evolving political reality in the United States today, they no longer know what America is.

Governmental processes and outcomes in America are often perceived as undemocratic.

- While the bill of grievances against the system of government raised in the focus groups is long, rivaling the “injuries and usurpations” of the “present King of Great-Britain”<sup>8</sup> listed in the Declaration of Independence, the overturning of Roe v. Wade by the Supreme Court is the most recent and provocative example of the system ignoring the will of the people.
- Frustration with the torturous checks and balances of American democracy and the multiple institutional veto points, the “traffic cones” impeding progress as one focus group participant called it, is endemic.
- System gridlock is not just frustrating; it is perceived as getting in the way of real progress and change.
  - Concerns about the slow pace of democratic governance, however, are not organically raised in qualitative board discussions. And when offered as an option, few participants in the qualitative boards select “democracy is too slow” as a problem with American government.

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<sup>8</sup> Text of the Declaration of Independence, <https://declaration.fas.harvard.edu/resources/text>

*Freedom Matters!* While democracy is a hollowed-out concept, freedom is not. Of the seven iconic words and phrases tested, language used to describe and evoke the core values and attributes of America's democratic system, *freedom* is rated the highest among all groups of inconsistent supporters of democracy.

- Freedom is the ideal inconsistent supporters of democracy put at the heart of America.
- Freedom is the concept, in all its variations from freedom of speech to freedom to marry, that inconsistent supporters of democracy cherish.

Freedom (not democracy) is the key concept to invoke when working to reengage inconsistent supporters of democracy in public life and civic society.

- Freedom evokes emotion, passion, and a host of rich associations.

Freedom is not view as perfect in America. It is contested in many ways -- from the loss of abortion rights to calls for reparations. But these very contests make freedom relevant as a concept to inconsistent supporters of democracy and worthy of their time and engagement.

Freedom is the frame through which democracy can be reinvigorated in the United States. But white and Black inconsistent supporters of democracy have very different definitions of freedom.

- To white men and women participants in the qualitative boards, freedom means primarily "do what you want to do." Freedom is almost seen by them as an entitlement, an empowering privilege.
- To Black men and women, freedom is what enables them to breathe, a right granted to citizens, a powerful and empowering concept, and the possibility to make choices.
  - Freedom is less about privilege and entitlement to Black men and women and more about protected and protecting rights. Rights that are insecure because they can be snatched away by the political machinations of American democracy.

*Most Important Freedom?* Participants in qualitative boards (Black and white, men and women) overwhelming say freedom of speech is the most important freedom. Freedom of religion is the runner up with all groups except Black women -- who all choose speech as their top freedom. The right to bear arms is not mentioned once as the most important freedom.

- While inconsistent supporters of democracy overwhelmingly equate democracy with voting, not one -- when asked to identify the most important freedoms -- mentions voting. Similarly, when asked to find images that represent freedom, not one inconsistent supporter of democracy offers a voting visual.
  - This difference is subtle but underscores the different perceptions of democracy and freedom among inconsistent supporters of democracy. To them, the linkage between democracy and voting is a clear, top-of-mind connection: democracy = voting. The connection between freedom and voting, on the other hand, is *neither direct nor* top-of-mind.

*Freedom or Democracy?* When asked which is more important freedom or democracy, majorities of White men and women, and Black women choose freedom over democracy. (Black men choose freedom or say democracy and freedom are equally important.)

*Community Connects Us.* Like freedom, community is a value-laden, emotionally-packed term for most inconsistent supporters of democracy.

- Community is place, family, togetherness, connection, nostalgia, safety, responsibility, and hope all rolled into one.
- At its core, community is about unity – something lost in modern America and something that, in the polarized and divided national context, people are looking to find again.

*Community is a powerful concept.* In America, it always has been. Alexis de Tocqueville described healthy American communities as the backbone of America democracy.

- Community-building strategies that are framed explicitly by freedom, support democratic values, win palpable changes, and are then linked explicitly to democratic practices are a grassroots way to begin rebuilding support for democracy piece-by-piece with inconsistent supporters of democracy.

*Community is where we can make a difference.* While inconsistent supporters of democracy feel disempowered when it comes to democracy and politics at the state and national level, many are primed to become involved, take action, and serve at the community level.



- And when asked in the qualitative board discussion where does making America a better place begin, the answer, overwhelmingly among all four groups (men and women, Black and white), is again the community.

*Volunteering in the community can create positive change.* Nearly six-in-10 of the participants in the qualitative board discussions say they strongly agree that volunteering can create positive change where they live. Another three-in-10 somewhat agree, making agreement with the question nearly unanimous among inconsistent supporters of democracy.

- Inconsistent supporters of democracy are very attracted to volunteering in their community for
  - specific and heartfelt reasons,
  - the multiple benefits volunteering produces for the community and for them, and
  - the real difference in people's lives volunteering can make.

For inconsistent supporters of democracy, mentoring, tutoring, and helping young people is a key attribute of and attraction to any volunteer program.

# APPROACHES TO REINVIGORATING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

## Background: The Present Context

For a moment, think of American democracy simply as a system of government, the freedoms and values the system is designed to protect or foster (the rights and opportunities guaranteed and promised to citizens or those to which Americans aspire),<sup>9</sup> and the citizens who are entitled to participate in selecting some of their representatives and leaders as well as the people who lead the government.

Viewed through these three simple lenses, how healthy is American democracy?

*#1. System of Government:* The blueprint of the American system of government is Articles I-VII of the Constitution. Forged in Philadelphia, promoted by the Federalist Papers, and ratified in 1788, the seven articles specify the three branches of government, institute checks and balances on power, set out a process for amending the Constitution and electing leaders, and other important guides to governing a new nation. It is in part Benjamin Franklin's plan for the "plumbing" of the American system of government that has been added to and expanded through amendments, laws, regulations, rules, Supreme Court decisions, and the evolution of unwritten norms.

At best, inconsistent supporters of democracy have a vague, limited, and distorted understanding of how the constitutional system works. They learned little about it in school, retained less, and episodically hear distorted information about particular aspects of it from the media.

Black Americans, in particular Black men, are certain the original Constitution was not designed for them. They are also sure the system of government that has evolved since ratification discounts their citizenship and favors others. There is ample evidence today -- and throughout American history -- to support this perception.

Regardless of race, most inconsistent supporters of democracy think the system is broken, corrupt, self-replicating, and self-serving – favoring already rich and

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<sup>9</sup> For now, set aside the responsibilities that come hand in hand with rights and freedoms. The flaunting of the responsibilities of citizenship, or an inherent misunderstanding that with rights comes responsibilities, is another central problem confronting American democracy that is part of the qualitative panel inquiries.

powerful individuals, special interests, and corporations. The constitutional system is riddled with anti-democratic facets from the allocation of the Senate, design of the Supreme Court, the operation of the Electoral College (which they know about because of recent media coverage), the voting system, and even how representative districts at the state and federal levels are drawn every 10 years. Inconsistent supporters do not know much about the operation of these components of American democracy, but they are sure many of them are not structured to promote inclusive democratic practices.

Most inconsistent supporters of democracy also believe the system, as it works today, ignores the will of the people, and regularly delivers anti-democratic outcomes. Voter restrictions, the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, inaction on the legalization of marijuana, and the continued knuckle-dragging on climate change are proof that the American government is not democratic or less democratic than we are told it is. A true democracy would not act this way. It would be responsive to the will of the people. The American system of government is not.

The result: there is little to no emotional bond or connection between America's system of government and inconsistent supporters of democracy. While some evince pride in America (some Blacks and whites) and the flag (many whites), most do not rise, when prompted, to defend America's democratic system of government. They believe the system needs to be changed.

#2. Freedom Inconsistent supporters of democracy care deeply about freedom. While they have little emotional connection to democracy, their feelings about freedom – in its many iterations -- are intense.

The Declaration of Independence established the importance of freedom to the American experiment, but it was Madison's Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the Constitution ratified in 1791) where freedoms were first enumerated and, at the federal level, specified. These freedoms have grown and evolved over time. The Civil War amendments abolished slavery and set the standard for equal protection under law. The equal protection clause was then later used by the Supreme Court to "incorporate" the Bill of Rights and make it applicable bit-by-bit to the rights of citizens in states. Justice William O. Douglas (*Griswold v. Connecticut*) inferred that a right to privacy, though never mentioned explicitly in the Constitution, flowed

from the penumbra of other freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights and, in so doing, ushered in a new era of jurisprudence built on privacy freedoms.

Inconsistent supporters know little of this history, but the expanded set of freedoms that were established by it are perceived by them as intrinsic rights today guaranteed by their citizenship. When one of these rights is taken away by the government, for example the overturning of Roe by the Supreme Court, they become agitated and, in many cases, activated.

Freedom is the one component of democracy that has real worth to inconsistent supporters of democracy. They want their freedoms to be protected. And they do not take kindly to governmental limits on freedom.

That does not mean, however, that inconsistent supporters of democracy views on freedom are not without problems. For example, some inconsistent supporters of democracy (the anti-vaxxers segment) do not seem to understand that individual freedom is not an absolute, it must be balanced against social responsibility to others.

#3. Citizens and Leaders: The people, in this research the inconsistent supporters of democracy in our focus groups, are entitled to participate in democracy but are less likely to do so. To them, participation has been reduced to voting. Voting is a sham. Their voices are not heard when they vote, and the politicians do not understand them, are not like them, and are corrupt.

They feel repeatedly that they are not listened to. They see the system as producing outcomes that are antithetical to what they (and a majority of other Americans) want. And when the system produces an outcome they support -- for example, for Black men, the election of Barack Obama – the result is still a failure. Several Black men in the focus groups roundly criticized President Obama for doing nothing for them.

Inconsistent supporters of democracy feel they do not count in America – as much as others – and think the system promises one thing but does something completely different.

## **One Approach to Reinvigorate Democracy: Promote Community Service Programs That Are Explicitly Linked First to Freedom and Second to Democracy.**

We know that young Americans are less likely to support democracy than their parents and grandparents. We also know all too well that lecturing younger, inconsistent supporters of democracy about the benefits of democracy and their need to support it is unlikely win their hearts or minds.

We need a different approach – an approach that:

- recognizes young Americans heartfelt interest in improving the communities in which they live,
- helps them to do so,
- connects this work to protecting they freedom they value so deeply,
- and then links the concepts of community and freedom to democracy.

In short, one approach suggested by this research to reinvigorate democracy is to connect young, inconsistent supporters to “good work” volunteer opportunities where they live that directly help others, give back to those in need, improve their community, and foster dense, local social networks.

This type of approach is likely to interest, engage, and activate many young American. It can explicitly link, as part of the service pitch, civic engagement and action at the community-level to the bolstering of the freedoms they cherish. And as they participate by volunteering in their communities, the program must be designed make an important connection for them, demonstrating that there is a powerful, symbiotic relationship between civic engagement, freedom, *and* democracy.

- Community caring, action, and building is the foundation of democracy, and democracy is the fierce ally of community power and voice.

At its core, this approach is Tocquevillian. It asserts that increasing the number and quality of functions – in this case community-building functions – performed by Americans 18-29 years of age will increase the overall health of

American democracy. And as long as the connection between community-building and democracy is made explicit, this is an approach that is supported by this study and American history.

*One Caveat:* This research indicates that a color-blind application of this approach will fail or not be as successful as it could be. The attitudes, experiences, and realities of Black and white inconsistent supporters of democracy are so different on fundamental issues and concerns that a one-sized set of programs and projects does not fit – not at all. Programs must be designed and implemented with racial differences toward community, freedom, and democracy clearly understood.

## **Other Approaches & Strategies That May Be Useful in Reinvigorating Democracy**

What else does research suggest could improve support for democracy among inconsistent supporters?

- ✓ Defining citizenship and participation (in elite and other messaging) more broadly than just voting.
- ✓ Balancing freedom frames with messaging which underscores that responsibility and freedom are inextricably linked –with freedom comes responsibilities to other citizens, the community, and the nation.
- ✓ Building a network of difference makers within and across communities to serve as a catalyst for reinvigorating American democracy.
- ✓ Promoting frank and accurate discussions of the history of America from 1619 to the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection.
- ✓ Requiring the history of America from 1619 to the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection is discussed frankly and accurately in K-12 education.

None of these are new ideas. Some of them go back as far as James Madison’s five necessary and sufficient conditions for maintaining a strong Republic, which was published five years after the Constitutional Convention.<sup>10</sup> All of them flow directly from the findings of this research. But today, few of them are being pursued at a scale that makes a substantive difference in support for democracy among the inconsistent.

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<sup>10</sup> James Madison, “Parties,” National Gazette, January 23, 1792, quoted in Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800*.

## Approaches That Will Not Reinvigorate Democracy

There are clear indications of what strategies are not working when it comes to bolstering democracy with inconsistent supporters of democracy. These include:

1. *Emphasis on voting:* A singular focus on voting sets a floor and a ceiling on citizenship and participation that is corrosive to maintaining a vibrant democracy. While stressing voting serves a short-term goal -- winning elections, it appears to sacrifice a long-term necessity -- inspiring support for democracy. This is especially true when voting is perceived as a sham.
  
2. *Civic education (at least as experienced by our focus group participants):* Civic education about democracy -- for many Americans who are 18-39 years of age -- has failed to produce a working knowledge of how the system of government works, a heartfelt demand for its defense and protection, and an abiding sense of its value to them and America. Viewed through a marketing lens, democracy has lost brand equity with these Americans. There are several reasons for this:
  - a. People care about the freedoms protected under the Constitution more than how the government is designed to work. In other words, they care more about Madison's Bill of Rights (and the numerous expansions of rights and freedoms in the centuries that followed), than Franklin's original system design (Articles I-VII). Civics instruction that focuses on the system (plumbing design) more than the freedoms the system delivers and protects (the water) is backward.
  - b. Some Americans, especially the Black Americans interviewed in focus groups who are inconsistent supporters of democracy, know the Constitution was not designed for them. To this day, they see powerful forces in politics and society working to exclude them from full participation in democracy. The original sin of slavery and white supremacy haunts America's past and present. Civic education that ignores this sin deepens the wound instead of healing it.
  - c. Black and white Americans, who are inconsistent supporters of democracy, have a gut feeling that certain aspects system structure and many outcomes produced by it are undemocratic. This gut feeling

is bolstered by specific examples that they easily name. For example, on the structural side of the equation, the Electoral College and Supreme Court. Examples of undemocratic outcomes include the overturning of Roe as well as legislative inaction to curb gun violence, legalize marijuana, stop police violence against minorities, deal with climate change, ensure equal opportunity through education, and other policies that have majority public support but are thwarted by the system.

3. *Messaging focused on democracy*: Too often, elite messaging extolls the importance of democracy and democratic systems (and voting to maintain or save them), instead of focusing on freedom -- the tangible output of democracy and the benefit a democracy produces for citizens. Certainly, the far right in America, from the Freedom Caucus in the House of Representatives to Sean Hannity on Fox, understands the power of focusing messages on freedom. But too many others, starting with President Biden and former President Barack Obama during the 2022 general election, concentrate their messaging on democracy, not freedom. Freedom should be the core message for engaging and activating younger Americans, not democracy.



## FINDINGS: SURVEY DATA

**Research Question #1 – Main Sample:** *What percentage of Americans are consistent supporters of democracy?*

**Data:**

41% of Americans 18 or older are consistent supporters of democracy.

50% of Americans who were more likely to vote in the 2022 midterms are consistent supporters of democracy.

Only 41% of Americans are consistent supporters of democracy. These Americans think a strong leader who ignores Congress and elections is a bad way to govern America. They dislike the concept of the army taking power. They agree that a democratic political system is a good way to govern America. They say living in a country that is governed democratically is very important to them (an eight-10 ranking on a 10-point scale). And when asked what comes closest to their view, they choose “democracy is preferable to any other kind of government” over two other options.<sup>11</sup>

Nearly six-out-of-10 Americans (59%) in our survey answered at least one of these five democracy questions negatively, saying, for example, that a strong leader who ignores Congress and elections is a good way to govern America or that, in some circumstances, they preferred a non-democratic government to democracy. These Americans are inconsistent supporters of democracy and the reasons behind their inconsistent attitude are the subject of this research.

Inconsistent support for democracy is not monolithic. It ranges from those who are least inconsistent (one-out-of-five anti-democratic answers) to Americans who see no value at all in democracy (five-out-of-five anti-democratic answers).

Approximately 19% of Americans answer just one of the five democracy questions negatively -- in a way that does not support democracy or democratic values. The query where most Americans cross the line and become inconsistent supporters of

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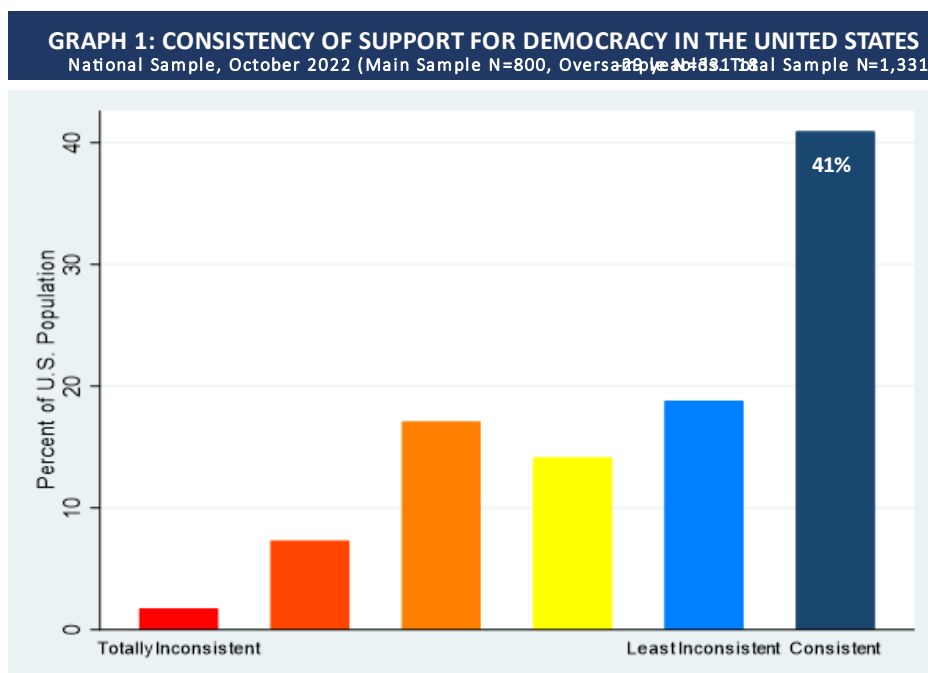
<sup>11</sup> The two other choices in this question are: 1. In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable, and 2. For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have (in America).

democracy is the strong leader question.<sup>12</sup> Thirty-two percent of Americans believe a strong leader unencumbered by Congress or elections is a very good or fairly good way to govern the United States.

The remaining 40% of Americans in the survey expressed inconsistent support of democracy on two-to-five of the democracy questions asked.

Graph 1 maps the answers of all Americans from completely consistent (navy blue) to totally inconsistent (the small red bar). Those who are inconsistent on one-of-the-five questions asked are represented by the light blue bar. These Americans (19%) are critical to the future health of democracy in the United States. Bolstering their support for democracy decreases the probability that American democracy can be hollowed out by an authoritarian demagogue hellbent on amassing power.

Americans represented by the yellow bar (14%) are the next target for civil society forces.



<sup>12</sup> The question: Would you say having a strong leader who does not have to bother with Congress and elections in the United States is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing the United States?

Consistent support for democracy among *likely* 2022 voters in America was, as expected, somewhat higher than that of all Americans of voting age. Half of Americans (50%) who said they were likely to vote in the 2022 midterm elections were also consistent supporters of democracy -- a nine percentage point increase compared to the general public. This finding is marginally lower than the 54% of voters the Democracy Fund identified in 2017 as consistent supporters of democracy in the United States.<sup>13</sup> It may represent an actual decline in support for democracy in the United States in the last six years or it may not. (Given our data, this question cannot be answered.)

**Research Question #2 – Main Sample:** *Are younger Americans (those between the ages of 18 and 29) more likely to be inconsistent supporters of democracy than older Americans?*

**Data:**

Only 26% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 are consistent supporters of democracy. By comparison, 65% of Americans 70 years and older are consistent supporters of democracy.

Surprisingly, consistency of support for democracy is also critically low among Americans between 30 and 39 years of age. Just 24% of these Americans are consistent in their support of democracy.

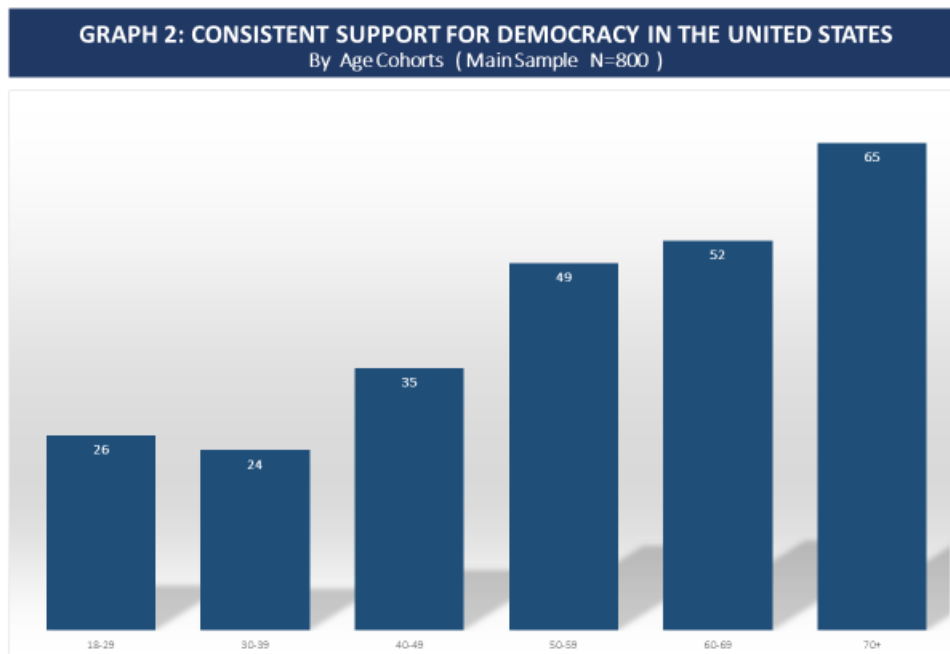
The hypothesis at the core of this study expected that younger Americans would be less consistent supporters of democracy than older Americans. This hypothesis was based on the findings of the Democracy Fund study, which found consistent support for democracy was lower among people 23-29 years of age, and surveys done in Europe that have found a consistency gap between young and old in many nations.

The results of the survey, sorted by age cohorts, fully support the hypothesis – 74% of younger Americans are indeed inconsistent supporters of democracy (Graph 2).

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<sup>13</sup> Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, *Follow the Leader*, [www.voterstudygroup.org](http://www.voterstudygroup.org).

The data also reveal an unexpected and disturbing finding. Americans 30-39 years of age are also highly inconsistent when it comes to supporting democracy. Seventy-six percent of Americans in this age cohort are inconsistent supporters of democracy.

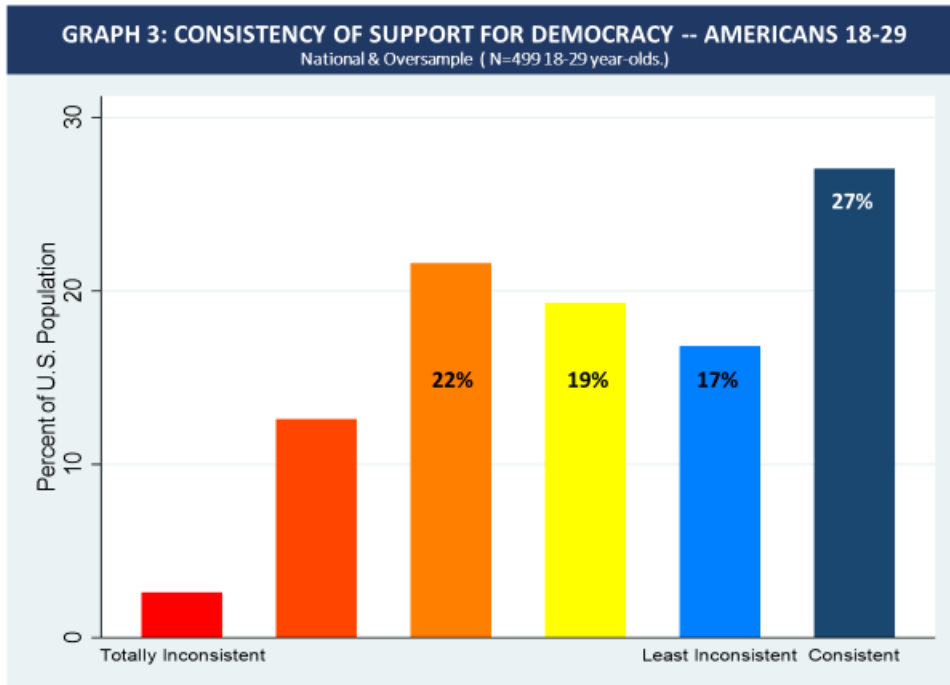


**Research Question #2 – Oversample:** *What is the distribution of inconsistency of support for democracy among younger Americans (those between the ages of 18 and 29)?*

**Data:**  
36% of young Americans in the oversample are inconsistent on one or two questions and are prime targets for efforts to improve younger Americans perceptions of democracy.

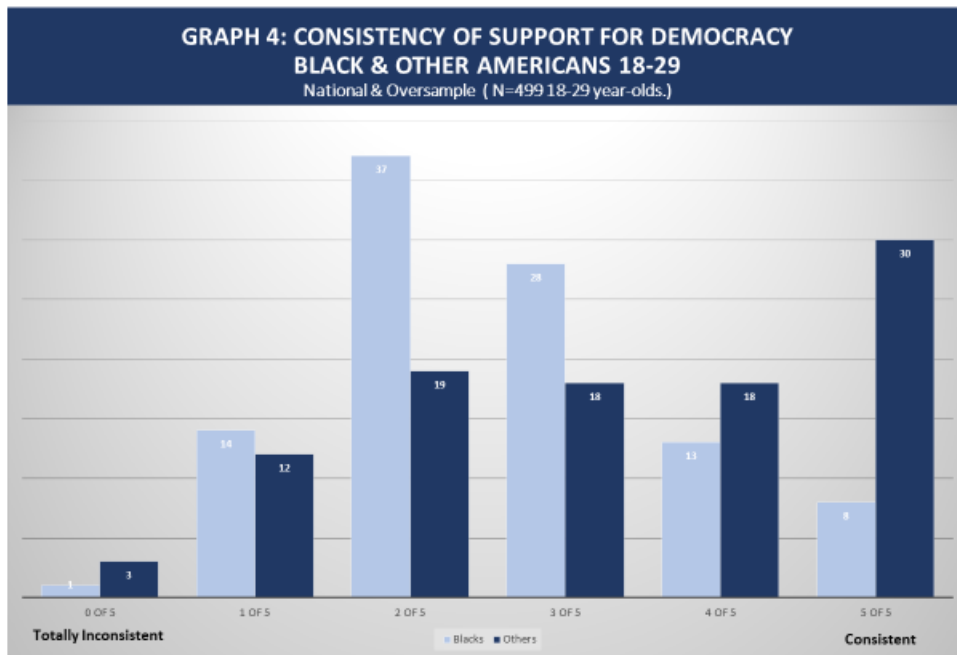
The oversample (N=499) provides a more granular view of the range of support for democracy -- from totally inconsistent to totally consistent – among younger Americans (Graph 3). Fifty-eight percent of younger Americans give answers inconsistent with support for democracy on one-out-of-five (light blue bar) to

three-out-of-five (orange bar) questions. Thirty-six percent are inconsistent on one to two out of five questions (light blue and yellow bars). These Americans are prime targets for any effort designed to improve younger Americans' attitudes toward democracy.

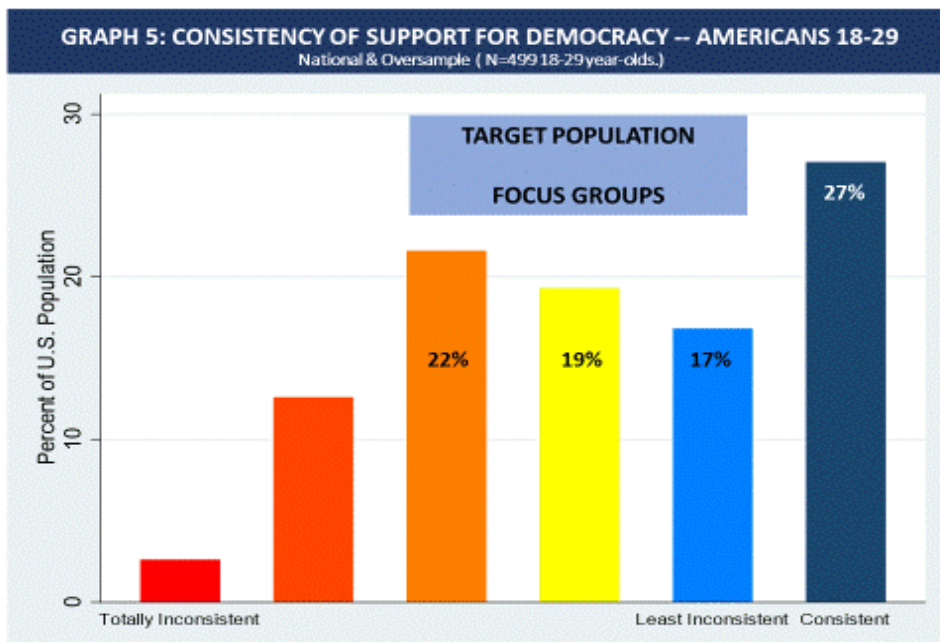


In America, inconsistent youth are more likely to be less educated, unemployed, conservative (ideologically), born again (religiously), unemployed, and less likely to vote in the 2022 midterm elections. (Employment and education findings are in part a function of the age of this cohort.)

While differences of consistent support for democracy among white, Black, and other young Americans do not achieve statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) in a fully-specified model, descriptive statistics do reveal some differences that indicate the need for further exploration of racial differences in support for democracy with a larger sample (Graph 4). The focus groups, which were divided by race and gender, also demonstrated how deeply race appears to divide views of and support for democracy.



Survey findings directed the selection of participants for the focus groups ([Graph 5](#)). Most of the participants were selected from the 36% of younger respondents who are inconsistent (one-out-of-five to two-out-of-five) supporters of democracy. A few came from the additional 22% who are inconsistent on three-out-of-five answers.



In the asynchronous qualitative boards, one-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy (17% of 18-29-year-olds) were replaced with four-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy.

From the focus group discussion and analysis of the quantitative data, one-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy were an obvious and important target for democracy bolstering efforts. Given limited analytical resources, the important question was whether those who scored lower on the support for democracy scale, including those who answered four-out-of-five questions inconsistently, were also persuadable targets.

This revised approach, dropping the one-out-of-five inconsistent supporters from the interviewing frame, increased the sample size of two-out-of-five and three-out-of-five inconsistent supporters interviewed, while enabling the addition of four-out-of-five inconsistent supporters to the conversation. The result was two-fold:

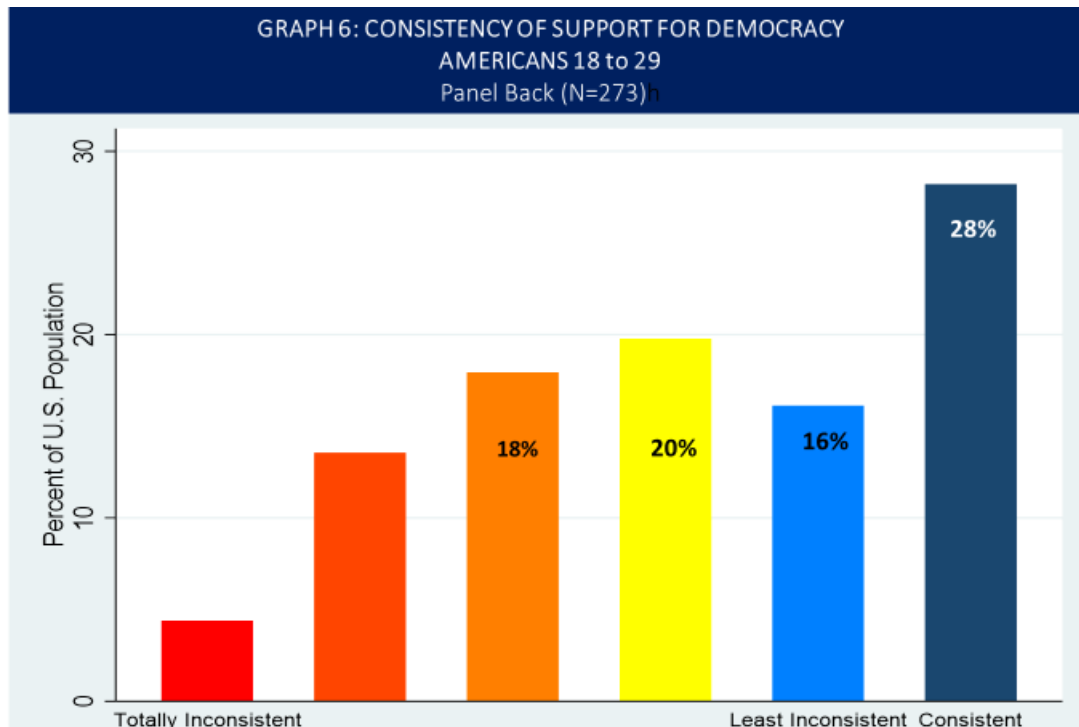
1. a more robust and productive discussion with two-out-of-five and three-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy, and
2. the realization, from several AQB datapoints, that four-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy are unlikely targets for any effort whose goal it is to increase support for democracy among young Americans. At this point, they are simply too hostile to democratic practice and governance.

**Research Question #1 (Follow-up) -- Panel-Back Survey:** *Is consistency of support for democracy a stable construct?*

The initial national survey, with an oversample of 18–29-year-old Americans, was fielded in October of 2022. The base and oversample population of 18–29-year-olds who answered the survey was 499 (N=499).

In March of 2023, this initial survey was followed-up with a panel-back poll to the base and oversample survey populations between the ages of 18-29

years of age to ascertain the stability of the consistency of support for democracy measurement among them. The panel-back survey reached 273 (N=273) of the 18–29-year-olds interviewed in the first survey.



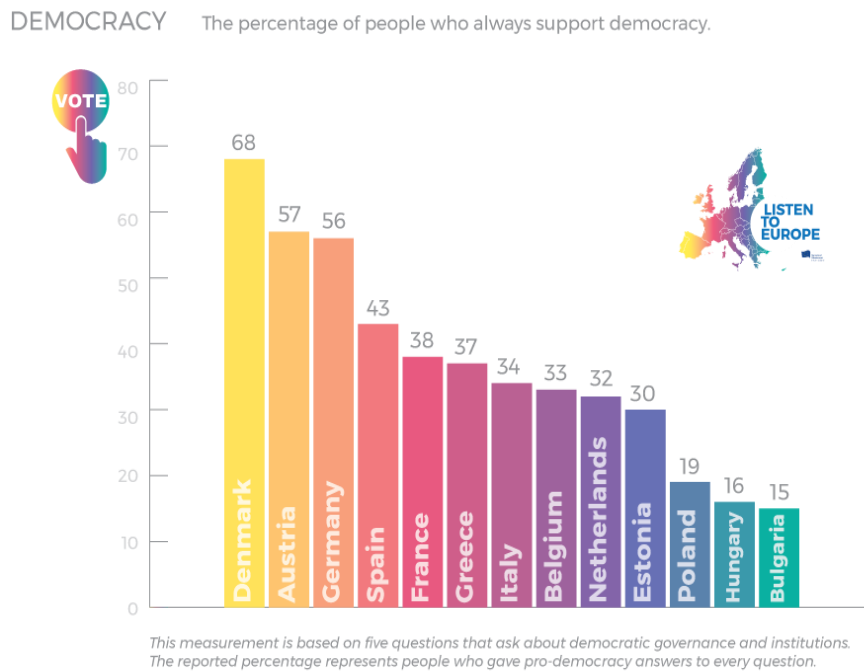
The results of the panel-back survey ([Graph 6](#)) demonstrate that, at least in this test, consistency of support for democracy was indeed remarkably stable among 18-29-year-old Americans during the six-month study period. As such, it appears to be a useful tool for estimating support for democracy.

More longitudinal surveying must be done to track the stability of the measurement over longer time periods and among different age cohorts. Moreover, to explore the demographic, ticking-time bomb hypothesis, estimating consistency of support for democracy among 12-17-year-old Americans and tracking this measurement in panel studies over time, should also be part of an ongoing research agenda on democracy.



## Consistency of Support for Democracy – Comparatively

How does the United States compare to European countries when it comes to consistent support for democracy? Surveys in 13 European countries from 2019 found consistent support for democracy ranging from 68% in Denmark to a low of 15% in Bulgaria.



Two years later, in 2021 as Europe emerged from Covid-19, surveys in seven countries documented generally lower consistency of support for democracy with the largest drop, 19 percentage points, observed in Germany (56% in 2019 to 37% in 2021).

Surveys conducted in April 2022 by European Movement International in eight European countries, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine,<sup>14</sup> found consistent support for democracy ranged between a high of 48% in Finland to lows of 29% in Hungary and 22% in Romania. This set of surveys buttressed the finding of the significant erosion of support in Germany for democracy observed in 2021. The 2022 survey found that only 38% of Germans were consistent in their support of democracy.

<sup>14</sup> Countries surveyed included Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Romania. This work was conducted as part of EMI's partnership with the Comms Hub.

## FINDINGS: FOCUS GROUPS & QUALITATIVE BOARDS

### Race & Gender

From the focus groups and qualitative board discussions, there are two poignant examples of how perceptions of American democracy (January 6<sup>th</sup>) and its symbols (the flag) are contoured by race and gender.

**The Flag.** To white women the Stars and Stripes evoke thoughts of “freedom,” the “pledge of allegiance, and “a good thing, like something positive is happening.” Reacting to the flag they say: “I love our beautiful USA” and “...the flag is more than just fabric, it’s like something people around here live and die for.”

Very positive feelings toward the flag are voiced in both focus groups and qualitative boards by white women. On the other hand, Black women’s reactions to the flag are overwhelming negative. One says “the flag gives me cracker vibes,” adding “you see a lot of white people throwing the flag up in Black people’s faces and it’s ridiculous. I feel like white people... like they are very privileged, as if they didn’t steal this land from the Indians.” Another says it makes her “think about what America has been like the last few years and this flag brings disappointment.” Rounding out how Black women feel about the flag another says, “the history of this flag, and the symbol it represents is nothing like what our founding fathers wanted. There is so much hate in America.” Another has a simple, one word response to the flag: “Death.”



White men react to the flag with pride saying “patriotism,” “so proud to live, where you live,” and “the flag expresses devotion to the country.” Only two

qualify their thoughts, answering “I’m proud to be an American, but I also want to acknowledge that America just can be very disappointing at times.”<sup>15</sup>

When the flag is shown to Black men in focus groups, they say “reparations,” “war,” “colonizers” and “sad history.” “I like America,” answers one Black man, “but the history of America is what I don’t like...so I wouldn’t be out here like ‘America!’ You know what I mean (like waving) the flag.”

In qualitative board discussions, the reactions of Black men are more mixed, voicing negative and positive emotions. The positive remarks are tied to freedom as well as the military: “I feel the flag represents our United States military, [and] I feel it doesn’t really represent America.”

Compared to white men and women, however, the positive qualitative board comments from Black men are tepid, lacking emotion and patriotic zeal.

**January 6.** Even seminal, current events are understood in different ways by Black and some, but not all, white Americans who are inconsistent supporters of democracy.



In both focus groups and qualitative boards, all but one Black women perceive the picture of the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection negatively. They call the

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<sup>15</sup> One white man’s reaction to the flag reflects on the Supreme Court’s recent attack on privacy and freedom: “when Roe v. Wade was overturned that was a time I wouldn’t say I was super proud to be an American.” The reversal of the Roe precedent by the Supreme Court in late June of 2022 revealed the tension between the ideal of freedom, valued so highly by focus group participants, and the actual practice and realities of democracy in the United States today, which are perceived as ignoring the voices of *We the People*, favoring the rich and powerful, and actively working to roll back a wide range of freedoms from abortion to voting rights.

photo another example of “white privilege,” “chaos,” “bullshit was the first word that came to mind,” and “terrorism.”

Some view Jan 6<sup>th</sup> as an apocalyptic warning, underscoring the hate dividing America: “It makes me feel like this is where America will always end. There’s too much hatred and chaos to have a real democracy.”

Black men’s reaction to the January 6<sup>th</sup> photo is uniformly negative and echoes Black women, saying the photo looks like “war,” “anarchy,” and “all hell breaking loose” led by “thugs” and “terrorists.” Some also think it is a harbinger of things to come: “It just shows (us) that democracy would soon fall, and possibly be another civil war. I think this was just the first glimpse.”

White men in the focus groups are less alarmed by the same photo, calling it “a little distasteful,” a product of “polarization,” and “like a third world country.” In the qualitative boards, white men’s reaction to the photo is much more negative and emotionally charged.

Upon seeing the photo some say “god damnit,” “dangerous,” “anarchy,” and, more equivocally, this is “what gives America a bad name sometimes.” One white man also worries about what this photo portends for the future: “It makes me fearful that this could happen to both sides and tear down our government.”

Even so, nearly a third of white men and women interviewed for this study have positive or neutral reactions to the January 6<sup>th</sup> photo. Party identification is at the core of this reaction and puts them on the opposite side of the attitudinal fence when it comes to processing images of the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection as well as reacting to the flag.

**Race & Gender – Similarities.** Though race, and gender differences within race, yield fundamentally different perceptions across a wide range of democratic concerns, there are some important attitudinal similarities that cross racial and gender lines. These similarities begin with a dearth of knowledge about the Constitution and form a common crucible in which inconsistent support for democracy is forged and reinforced.

## Democracy

**Knowledge of Democracy.** Inconsistent supporters of democracy lack basic knowledge about democracy, the Constitution, American government, and history. Most learned little about these topics in school.

*But when I did the Constitution test in Chicago, I was in like the seventh grade and we learned about it then. But that was really it for me learning about it in school. Black woman*

Those who remember some civics instruction have a dim, hazy recollection of what they learned. Others remember learning primarily about the President, parties, and little else.

*I mean we learned about things about like the president and things like that, but I wouldn't say I remember too much in school about democracy and all that. white woman*

*They say more like democracy is the people's vote, you know? I mean they covered it. But I mean nothing really stuck with me. Okay, this kind of, here's the facts, that's about it, the history of it. white woman*

**Democracy is Voting, But Voting is a Sham.** To inconsistent supporters of democracy, democracy is neither an aspirational idea, an inspirational ideal, or an intricate system of constitutional checks and balances on power that protect individual freedoms. Instead, democracy has been stripped of its symbolic meaning and import, and reduced to the limited act of voting.

*The first word that comes to mind (when thinking about democracy) is like that voting process. white man*

*They say more like democracy is the people's vote, you know? white woman*

*I learned like the rough basic concept of it (democracy) in school...it has to do with like people voting for a better cause. Right? Black man*

The flattening of the meaning of participatory democracy from a multifaced, civic endeavor to a unidimensional, civic responsibility of questionable utility (voting) is echoed in focus groups and qualitative boards. While American democracy is described in many ways, including “necessary,” “important,” and “government by

the people,” “a scam,” and “the USA as a whole is really not even a democracy,” at its core democracy is simply understood as voting.

Voting is how inconsistent supporters describe themselves taking part in democracy in focus groups. Voting images are the visuals most qualitative board participants offer when asked to produce an image of democracy.<sup>16</sup>



Voting is what almost all white men, white women, Black men, and Black women answer when asked how they participate in democracy.

*I don't really see any other way to participate in government. **white man***

*Voting is the only way I see me participating because I like my voice being heard but beside that like I said before I just be uneducated. **Black woman***

Only one white and one Black man admitted to doing more to participate in democracy, saying they protest or follow the law.

Most inconsistent supporters of democracy also feel their votes do not count. Even the participant who posted the image of Martin Luther King voting (see above) describes it nostalgically, saying “This represents democracy to me because it was a point in America when more voices were being counted. Because it was a point in time where more voices were being heard.”

Thus, while voting is the way inconsistent supporters participate in democracy, they also believe that their voice, expressed through voting, is not listened to, heard, or even considered by those in power when the election is over.

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<sup>16</sup> Secondary images of democracy depict polarization, division, fear, leaders going one way and the people another, and storm clouds over the Capitol.



*I go and vote, although I am not sure if that really matters. White woman*

*What do we vote for? Like I kind of felt like that was just wasting our time to just make us make us feel like we matter the whole time and really didn't. [WHO IS THE WE?] The minorities, the middle class, the poverty people. Black woman*

*I think less and less people are relying on their vote feeling that their vote even gets counted. white man*

*So, you know, we vote for things, but it doesn't really matter what our vote, how our vote is. We're just the little people and they'll never listen or care about us. Black woman*

*I saw this saying once and, uh, I don't know how true it is, because that's pretty conspiratorial. But they said if your vote actually counted, they wouldn't let you, they won't let you do it. Like, kind of like, an oligarchy of politicians that don't wanna give up control. white man*

*They tell us that we that we have these rights and that our vote matters or whatever, but it don't. Black woman*

In short, for many voting is a symbolic act of questionable utility, an illusion of power and choice where there is neither.

*I recently turned 18, so I have voted for the first time in this election, but my thing that I think about voting is there, there aren't really many ways that we as citizens can participate in politics and like voting is one of the only ways and sometimes it feels it doesn't count. white man*

*I participate by default, but I don't choose to. Black man*

And even if their vote mattered, inconsistent supporters of democracy think the choices produced by the two-party system are generally uninspiring and limited.

*...in America we only really have two choices which I don't necessarily like... I have to pick the lesser of the two evils. white man*

Though voting is perceived as virtually meaningless by many, some inconsistent supporters of democracy still hold to it because the act of voting produces a limited sense of accomplishment.

*The knowledge to know that we can go and do it, even if it doesn't make a difference, we can say we did it is making a difference to us. Black woman*

And a small minority continue to aver that voting is effective and important.

*I believe in voting and having a say so in rights like abortion. Black woman*

*I actively vote and try to help my community. White woman*

**Do Inconsistent Supporters See Other Ways to Participate in Democracy Beyond Voting?** To almost all inconsistent supporters of democracy, who participated in the qualitative board discussions, voting is the be all and end all means by which they see themselves participating in democracy.

*Voting is the only way I see me participating because I like my voice being heard. Black woman*

A few inconsistent supporters, primarily white men, offer working at the local level in different capacities as an additional way to participate.

*I think some ways of participating in democracy further is being even more involved at the local level. white man*

*Other ways I could participate would be participating in state and local elections and I think that I will also do this in the future. Change starts at the base level and that would begin with the city that I live in. white man*

*I could help local election runners or get more people I know to vote. But I'm just too busy to get involved like that. white man*

And two women, one white and the other Black, mentioned volunteering in the community as a way to participate beyond voting.<sup>17 18</sup>

*I don't know if I participate in democracy in other ways. But I have seen so many times in my community of everyone just helping each other out.... My community has done a great job with helping each other out when its needed. white woman*

*I could see myself participating in an organization to assist with getting the homeless off the streets and into a safe place to live. Black woman*

**Why has democracy been reduced to voting in the minds of inconsistent supporters of democracy?** Elite messaging is most likely the culprit behind the equating of democracy to voting. Beyond voting, communications about citizenship and the many roles' citizens can and should play in American democracy are episodic and limited. The main message, communicated intensively in the lead up to and during elections, is that voting is a necessary and

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<sup>17</sup> This underscores the need, in any civic engagement project with a goal of strengthening democracy, to make the connection between community volunteering and democracy explicit.

<sup>18</sup> As expected, a few inconsistent supporters of democracy in the qualitative boards admit that they do not vote. Black women with a high school education were the more likely to admit this saying "I could vote but honestly I don't feel informed enough."



sufficient action citizens should take to be a part of democracy. Nothing more is required and, implicitly, nothing more is encouraged. Vote and let your elected representative and leaders take it from there.

For decades, elites have pushed citizens to vote, vote, vote while ignoring the deeper and more important ways citizens should be involved in democracy. The result, at least for inconsistent supporters of democracy, appears to be the reduction of the recognized role of citizens in a democracy to the limited, instrumental participation of voting.

As more Americans admit “there aren’t really many ways that we as citizens can participate in politics and like voting is one of the only ways,” America falls even further from de Tocqueville’s measure of a strong, vibrant democracy.

**Democracy is Government, But Democratic Government is Broken and Too Often Does Not Work for *We the People*.** The government produced by a bogus voting process that is geared to ignore the voices of the people is perceived by many as “unrepresentative,” systemically “broken,” and “corrupt.”

These inconsistent supporters of democracy believe the system is stacked against them. The system is awash with money. It buys power, favors the connected, rich, and already powerful, and ignores the opinions of *We the People*, including those who are inconsistent supporters of democracy.

*(The democratic system) doesn't work for regular people like me, and you, and all of us in this chat right now. It's corrupted. Black man*

*It's supposed to be democracy. We vote these people in to help We the People, (but) these politicians are benefiting themselves and other people that are part of this party. They put laws in place for big companies that support them. But is it really supporting us, the people? It's supporting them and it's supporting (those) who are very powerful. It's not trickling down to us. It's nothing the laws that are being passed are not helping us, the people, we vote these people in to help us and they're not helping us; they're benefiting themselves. white woman*

*(It is a) broken system that doesn't work ... it doesn't work for the people ...the system works for those that are in (the) higher power unit because, obviously like, it's corrupted. Black man*

**For some Black men, Democracy is a Lie.** The unrepresentative and unresponsive government produced by corruption and a sham voting process is not the core problem to some Black men who are inconsistent supporters of democracy.

Instead, it is a symptom of a fundamental problem which began with the founding of the American Republic and continues today.

[DEMOCRACY IS?] *Lies ...the Constitution was never actually built for Black people. It wasn't built for women, and it wasn't built for other people of color. Black man*

[DEMOCRACY IS?] *Broken ...personally, as an African American, the system is just not built for us. Black man*

To some Black men, who are inconsistent supporters of democracy, American democracy is a lie. The constitutional system was not designed to protect or advance the rights of freedom of minorities. Important changes to the Constitution<sup>19</sup> are unknown and unrecognized, or deemed irrelevant because, more than two hundred years later, the rights and freedoms of Blacks in America are still in question, under attack, or in abeyance. Today, the voice of minorities is still targeted for suppression, limiting their ability to participate fully in democracy.

*Probably just because all the different hurdles that are kind of put in place to prevent some people from having a voice just like a whole bunch of different voting restrictions that they put on that mostly target minority groups. Things like gerrymandering and electoral college in general. This really doesn't allow us to all have an equal voice. Black man*

The normalization of white supremacy, instigated and countenanced by Trump and his MAGA movement, underscores the enduring, perilous position of minorities in America irrespective of the institutional progress made since America's founding.

The majority of Americans -- their opinions and their values -- are threatened by the MAGA zealots who stormed the Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup> with impunity in an elite led insurrection. But this menace is even more threatening to Black Americans who know that many of the insurrectionists have gotten away with their treasonous action and are regrouping to fight another day. To them a vocal and, at times, violent minority in America, is contesting politics and wielding power through the manipulation of the existing constitutional system. Some of these insurrectionists still sit in Congress and seem dedicated to creating chaos, denigrating Black Americans and other minorities, and stripping them of their

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<sup>19</sup> For example, the 13<sup>th</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, the incorporation of the Bills of Rights through the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the right to privacy penumbra articulated by Justice Douglas in *Griswold v. Connecticut* as well as civil rights legislation and the Supreme Court's rejection of Plessy doctrine of "separate but equal."

rights at every turn. The result is dangerous and a good reason, at least for one Black man in our focus groups, to be prepared to move on.

*So right now, coming from a very cultured family and growing up here in the United States, and seeing our history and everything. You know the history says a lot about something's future. So right now, I'm at this point where getting a passport is probably the smartest thing you could do right now, getting out of here. Because the way they're acting, you know, with like that picture you just showed us, storming the capital, and in my eyes that could only get worse. And with the majority of America being a minority and that's still being possible is amazing to me. So, in my opinion, the smart thing to do is to get a passport and get ready. Black man*

He was not alone in his opinion that America's developing version of democracy may not be a desirable system of government under which to live. When asked to choose which statement about democracy (among three options and a none of the above response)<sup>20</sup> comes closest to your view, half of the participants in the focus group of Black men chose: "In the times we are in today, a non-democratic government that actually works for people like me is preferable to a democratic form of government."

Democracy is not only a lie to these Black men; it is no longer the preferable system of government, at least in its recently developing MAGA incarnation.

*It goes back to what I said before about people coming asking questions about the credibility of democracy as a whole. Because you can see, like in today's times, things aren't working out with the system we have in place right now. So, I think something better needs to be brought up for the future. Black man*

*So, it got to be something better that comes after this, because honestly, we've been doing everything else that we possibly can think of. We went to school, got our college degrees, we did our high school diplomas. We worked the 1,001 jobs, we improved ourselves by enlisting in the military. You know we did all the stuff that we possibly can do to be the quote unquote equalized citizen of the United States of America, and that still has not worked out. So, something has to be better than what this currently is, and that's why I said that answer. Black man*

Some of these Black men even doubt if there is a future for democracy in America.

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<sup>20</sup> Statements tested: 1. Democracy in the United States has promoted racism, sexism, and inequality. The system hasn't worked the way it is supposed to. 2. When it comes to solving problems, democracy is just too slow. We need a government system that works faster. 3. In the times we are in today, a non-democratic government that actually works for people like me is preferable to a democratic form of government. 4. None of the above

*Eventually its (democracy in America) gonna have to come to and end...and a new system...we need to be with a new system where we need to replace the old one. Black man*

*Yeah, I agree with that. Its (democracy in America) just shown its flaws. Black man*

And opinions among them are also mixed on whether democracy is worth protecting.

[SHOULD WE DO SOMETHING TO PROTECT DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA?] *No. We shouldn't protect democracy, because as far as for us, it doesn't do anything for us. Black man*

*I think we should protect it in a way that doesn't...let somebody else take control and make it worse than it already is (like Putin), if that makes sense. (And January 6<sup>th</sup> showed) how is it that easy for people to get into the Capitol like that. It was super easy. We should protect it (democracy) in a way that protects (from that) as well. Black man*

To these men, who see a non-democratic government that works for them as preferable to democracy as it is devolving in the United States today, January 6<sup>th</sup> was a reminder of America's long history of violence and the proverbial canary in the coal mine – a harbinger of what is coming.

*It (January 6<sup>th</sup>) just shows America at its finest form. In my opinion, I think that we've never seen America, not achieve anything without violence being the top motivator behind everything that they do. So, I think this here just shows the violence that America has swept under the rug for a very long time, and we also seen a lot of privilege because I'm sure we all know that if it was one of us up there it wouldn't have been the same, you know, patience that the police had with them, and I think that it's a matter of just saying that for me this is the history that I've seen through Black America, and it just goes to show that this is what we (are). What the world really saw on January the sixth is that it's just America being America... (And) it's gonna happen again. It's just a matter of time. Black man*

The concerns about the future course of democracy in America raised by Black men in the focus groups are mirrored in the qualitative board discussion.

*Democracy is the downfall of this country. I feel like one day, it'll turn the country against each other resulting in another civil war. Black man*

Given five statements about the future of American democracy to choose from, only 25% of Black men, who participated in the qualitative board, chose *“Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone.”*<sup>21</sup>

**Democracy: Hope for the Future, But Real Concerns About Today.** While few Black men acknowledge that they want to keep and improve democracy so it works better, nearly 75% of white men, and Black and white women, agree that *“Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone”* in the future.

This aspiration to improve democracy in the future is tempered by real concerns about what American democracy is today. Only four-in-10, Black and white Americans in the qualitative board discussion (among two-out-of-five or three-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy) agree they want to work to keep and improve democracy today. The rest, a majority by the way, say:

1. “There is too much hatred and chaos to have a real democracy in America today. (or)
2. The United States is getting worse and worse by the day...I think our future is going to get worse as long as we stay a democracy. (or)
3. The government needs to be overthrown and clearly people are willing to do that. Power needs to be taken from those in charge and the people need more of a voice. That’s a real democracy.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Answers reported for two or three-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy only. Percentages are indicative of attitudes, but not statistically valid. They are estimated from a very small-N, qualitative panel that was randomly chosen and geographically and racially distributed across the United States, but is not nationally representative. Choices included: 1. *For someone like me, it doesn’t matter whether the United States is a democracy or not.* 2. *Having a strong leader who gets things done and doesn’t have to bother with Congress and elections is better than democracy.* 3. *When it comes to solving problems, democracy is just too slow.* 4. *We need a government system that works faster In the times we are in today, a non-democratic government that actually works for people like me is preferable to a democratic form of government.* 5. *Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone.* 6. *None of the above.*

<sup>22</sup> One in ten answer “none of the above.”

Attitudes toward American democracy today among four-out-of-five inconsistent supporters is even more concerning. Only 17% of white Americans and 25% of Black Americans in this segment of inconsistent supporters hope to keep and improve democracy today (one of the many reasons why four-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy are not a prime target for programs seeking to reinvigorate democracy).<sup>23</sup>

What are the drivers behind this bleak assessment of American democracy today among inconsistent supporters? From where does the attitude emanate?

The ubiquitous politics of polarization and division, the mean spiritedness of public discourse, and the elite legitimization of political violence in the United States is certainly one cause of inconsistent supporters' sanguine view of democracy today. But it is not the only likely driver.

**DRIVER 1: Democracy and Democratic Governance Are Hollowed-Out Concepts Sapped of Meaning and Value.** With voting perceived as pointless and the American system government broken and beset by corruption, the very concepts of democratic governance are sapped of much of their meaning, vigor, and value for inconsistent supporters of democracy. Today, what is left is a plurality of the populace disempowered and vulnerable to the siren songs of demagogues stoking fear, demolishing democratic guardrails, and feeding political polarization and social division.

Some inconsistent supporters express neutral and indifferent feelings about democracy.

[DEMOCRACY IS?] *It's very normal to me, neutral.* **white woman**

[DEMOCRACY IS?] *It's pretty neutral, I think of America because that is what our government is, but just the type of government to me really, I mean, I'm happy we have it, but it doesn't really evoke a certain feeling from me.* **white woman**

*I don't think there's anything necessarily (good about democracy), I don't... I don't lean one direction either way with it (democracy). I guess I'm kind of indifferent.* **white male**

[DEMOCRACY IS?] *overrated.* **Black woman**

Others question whether America is a democracy or being run like one.

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<sup>23</sup> Again, just as a reminder: Percentages are indicative of attitudes, but not statistically valid. They are estimated from a very small-N, qualitative panel that was randomly chosen and geographically and racially distributed across the United States, but is not nationally representative.

*I feel like there's a difference between having the freedom to speak and then your voice being heard. Even though we call ourselves a democracy, which I mean, I don't think we are. white woman*

*I like that we have a democracy, although I don't think our government is being run like that right now so it's disappointing. white woman*

*Democracy is an illusion. We the people have little to no say in what actually happens. Black woman*

*When it comes to the USA as a whole, it's really not even a democracy, because our opinions don't matter. It's whatever the government wants, and they trick us into believing it's a true, fair democracy. white woman*

And a few others just do not value democracy and democratic governance much at all.

*I just felt if we had a system that was working...as long as the system's working good and people are happy with it, I don't think it really mattered what type of government it is, as long as the people are happy and the system works. white male*

*I was just thinking on the lines of the whole point of government, I thought was to make sure the country runs smoothly like um and gives everyone opportunities and everyone has a voice so I don't necessarily care if it's democratic. If everyone is still heard and has their needs taken care of. I just don't know what that would be. Like it's a very vague like almost utopian idea. I don't think it's realistic, but I was just like well if that's an option, I (would) go with it. white woman*

*It really doesn't matter what kind of form of government is put in place as long as it works and is working for the people. I don't really care what kind of government that would be as long as it's efficient. Black man*

While both white and Black inconsistent supporters of democracy in the focus groups question the efficacy of voting and the integrity and responsiveness of the system of governance, indifference to democracy is found primarily among white Americans. Black men and women worry more about the potential for repression and violence when demagogues are enabled and division is stoked. Some say that, as they watch the evolving political reality in the United States today, they no longer know what America is.

*(America) claims it's a democracy, but in reality, it's not...Today, I don't know what America is. Black man*

**DRIVER #2: Governmental Processes and Outcomes in America Are Often Perceived as Undemocratic.** Inconsistent supporters of democracy readily point to democratic processes that are undemocratic and outcomes that ignore the voice, values, and opinions of most Americans. While the bill of grievances against the system of government raised in the focus groups is long, rivaling the “injuries and usurpations” of the “present King of Great-Britain”<sup>24</sup> listed in the Declaration of Independence, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court is the most recent and provocative example of the system ignoring the will of the people. To this bloody-shirt, proof point, inconsistent supporters of democracy add with ease the following grievances:

➤ *Process Grievances*

- Untrustworthy representatives who promise one thing and do another.
- The corrupting and growing influence of money in politics. (The flow of money into politics was exacerbated by the Supreme Court’s 2010 decision in *Citizens United*. This fact is not generally known by inconsistent supporters of democracy.)
- The Electoral College. (The anti-democratic aspects of the Electoral College are well known to a surprising number of inconsistent supporters of democracy. Press coverage and elite conversations about the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections are behind the rising salience of this knowledge.)
- The legitimacy, reliability, and accuracy of the voting system. (President and citizen Trump’s wholesale attack on the legitimacy of voting -- and his MAGA media and elite echo chamber -- has raised this concern among many inconsistent supporters of democracy and has probably further eroded their confidence in the entire system of government.)
- Legal efforts to disenfranchise minorities and young people from voting outright. (This grievance was voiced by both Black and white inconsistent supporter of democracy.)
- Legal efforts to make it more difficult for minorities and young people to register and vote. (This grievance was voiced by both Black and white inconsistent supporter of democracy.)
- Stories of voter intimidation at the polls. (This grievance was voiced by both Black and white inconsistent supporter of democracy.)
- The Constitutional structure itself, which is perceived by some as undemocratic and out-of-date. (Identified structural problems include: the Supreme Court’s anti-majoritarian tendencies, the lack of term limits, the lack of control over money in politics, the gerrymandering of the House of Representative districts as well as state-level election districts, and the allocation of two Senators to each state which gives unequal power to rural and small states. These particular grievances are not cited by many inconsistent supporters, but all fit in the general category of a constitutional structure which never, according to some Black men, or does not now foster democracy and freedom.)

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<sup>24</sup> Text of the Declaration of Independence @<https://declaration.fas.harvard.edu/resources/text>



➤ *Outcome Grievances*

- Supreme Court’s overturning of Roe v. Wade. (This grievance was voiced by both Black and white inconsistent supporter of democracy.)
- The government’s perceived inability to address climate change.
- The government’s long battle against the legalization of marijuana.
- The lack of equal justice under law as evidenced in every day policing, the higher incarceration rates of minorities as well as the ability of wealthy and powerful people and January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrectionists and lawbreakers to avoid justice. (This grievance was voiced by both Black and white inconsistent supporter of democracy.)
- The unequal recognition and realization of rights in American law and society. (This grievance was voiced by both Black and white inconsistent supporter of democracy.)
- The ability of special interests to win legislative victories and financial gains in Washington.

**DRIVER 3: Democratic Government is Too Slow.** When focus group participants were asked to choose which statement (among three options and a none of the above response)<sup>25</sup> comes closest to your opinion about democracy, nearly half of all inconsistent supporters of democracy select: “when it comes to solving problems, democracy is just too slow. We need a government system that works faster.”

Frustration with the torturous checks and balances of American democracy and the multiple institutional veto points, the numerous “traffic cones” impeding progress as one participant called it, was endemic in the focus groups.

*I feel like sometimes it does work too slow to pass bills or to get things done yet. We have to like go through so much. So many people get things done and even then it still takes maybe months or possibly years for something to really happen. So, I feel like we need something that can go a bit faster. Black woman*

*I do honestly feel like the stuff does go real slow. Black woman*

*It takes so long to pass some laws here and sometimes it can take like years. white woman*

*Democracy really is a very slow process. You have these big elections, you vote for all these people and then there's people stopping those people from passing the things that you want pass, which is why you voted for the other people. So, there's just a lot of, a lot of traffic cones in the way of what you want to get done. white man*

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<sup>25</sup> Statements tested: 1. Democracy in the United States has promoted racism, sexism, and inequality. The system hasn’t worked the way it is supposed to. 2. When it comes to solving problems, democracy is just too slow. We need a government system that works faster. 3. In the times we are in today, a non-democratic government that actually works for people like me is preferable to a democratic form of government. 4. None of the above.

*I just feel like there needs to be a system in place where we're able to put people in and work faster versus allowing someone to sit on their term for let's say and not able to make change. Black man*

System gridlock is not just frustrating; it gets in the way of real progress and change that people want.

*You have you know Republican and Democrat, and then you have, like the Senate and all that stuff like that, and I feel like them arguing all the time, and like going back and forth of like you know, we don't like this. But we do, all that stuff like that. I feel like that just a lot of the time that slows us down on the growth of what America could truly be. Black man*

Concerns about the slow pace of democratic governance, however, were not organically raised in qualitative board discussions. And when offered as an option, few participants in the qualitative boards selected “democracy is too slow” as a problem with American government.

**DRIVER 4: The Strong Leader Panacea** When asked to choose which statement (among three options and a none of the above response)<sup>26</sup> comes closest to your opinion about democracy, nearly twenty-five percent of women in the focus groups chose: “having a strong leader who gets things done and doesn’t have to bother with Congress and elections is better than democracy.” By comparison, only one man in both focus groups chose a strong leader as a solution to the ills of democracy, and his commitment to the option was limited in scope and equivocal – more a frustration with the gridlock produced by democracy than a full-throated support for a strong leader to take the reins of government.

*So, I don't necessarily agree with having like one leader that makes all the decisions. But I definitely think that things need to be revised within the government just to go faster, because right now it's like gridlock, and nothing is getting done. And it can just be like one or two or a group of people that can hold up this whole process for everyone. Black man*

Women had two reasons for selecting the strong leader panacea. For some, it was a true, undemocratic response to the siren call of an authoritarian leader.

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<sup>26</sup> Statements tested: 1. For someone like me, it doesn’t matter whether the United States is a democracy or not. 2. I don’t know enough about what democracy is to care whether we have one in the United States. 3. Having a strong leader who gets things done and doesn’t have to bother with Congress and election is better than democracy. 4. None of the above

*I believe that America really needs a strong leader and because now I don't really see Biden, I had high hopes for him when he became president after what happened with Trump. However, I don't really see America going into the right direction as of now. So, I would really love to see, I guess America having a strong leader and I don't really care about democracy in that scenario. white woman*

*That's one thing I can say about Trump. No one liked him, but he wasn't afraid to be himself, he wasn't afraid to be himself and he got shit done. He did and you know, he might not have been the way everybody wanted him to do it and probably didn't do it with a lot of grace and finesse, but he got things done and you have to run the country, you got to do something, you have to get up and do it. Black woman*

For others, a predilection to authoritarianism had little to do with their choice. A strong leader was simply a way to expedite democratic decision making in particular instances or during a true emergency.

*I feel like sometimes, you know there's certain bills that the president wants to pass that might be good for us and then Congress can possibly stop it. So, if it's easier to just like get them passed without having to worry about, some things that might be kind of better. Black woman*

*When the president wants to pass something, but that it has to go through everything, but when it's something that's like really important, like for example, like when the coronavirus happened and you need to make an immediate decision right now, even like with the checks and how long that took just to get partial, you know, economic health. I think when it comes down to something, what's best for Americans, it needs to happen right now. I think it would be helpful for um the president to not have to go through anybody and (instead) say this is what I'm doing, I'm doing it now, it's an emergency. white woman*

In the qualitative boards, however, very few participants chose *a strong leader who does not have to pay attention to elections and Congress* as a salve for the shortcomings of democracy.

Throughout American history, there is ample evidence that authoritarian leaders can amass support within the electorate.<sup>27</sup> But this support appears to be more a symptom than a driver of democratic decline. Of course, once activated and growing, public support for strong, authoritarian leadership is likely to lead to the erosion of democratic norms and the deconsolidation of democracy, hastening the

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<sup>27</sup> Since the founding of the United States, this danger has been a recurrent concern. For example, in Federalist 63, the essays written by Madison, Hamilton and Jay in support of the ratification of the Constitution, the infection of the violent passions by a self-interested demagogue was identified as one of the real threats facing American democracy.

hollowing-out of democratic concepts and sapping them of meaning and value – the first driver identified above.

**Is America a Democracy?** Inconsistent supporters of democracy are split when it comes to the question of whether the government of the United States is a democracy. Some argue America remains a democracy. Others contend it never was. And many are unsure how to categorize America’s system of governance.

Inconsistent supporters, who agree that America is a democracy, are undoubtedly prime targets for civic engagement programs geared to bolster Americans’ commitment to democratic values and outcomes.<sup>28</sup> But what about those who are unsure or answer no when asked if America is a democracy today? Those who say:

*I don't think we really have a democracy as much as they say we do. Black woman*

*Yes, but not a true democracy due to corruption. white man.*

*No, it's supposed to be democracy. We vote these people in to help we, the people, these politics are benefiting themselves and other people that are part of this party. They put laws in place for big companies that support them. But is it really supporting us, the people? It's supporting them and it's supporting (those) who are very powerful. white woman*

*It claims it's a democracy, but in reality, it's not. Today, I don't know what America is. Black man*

*No, not really. It's ran by a bunch of elites that we don't even know. White woman*

*I don't know. It's like: I feel as though because we were taught things like say, when you vote, the people choose who is elected and stuff like that, you would think, yeah, this country is a democracy. But, it's like in today's times? You wouldn't feel like that so much. I don't know. (I'm) more on the fence. Black man*

Their attitudes are not based on the reading of academic comparative assessments of democratic governance around the world. Instead, their opinions are heartfelt, gut feelings that come from personal experiences with, and word-of-mouth and media discussion of, how America’s democracy works today. Their reasons include:

- the fear or realization that their vote is meaningless,
- the constant demonstration of the impotence of their voice,

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- the many examples that the political class that does not listen to them, care about them, or understand them,
- the realization that the political elites are fundamentally different than they are,
- examples of the system unilaterally taking away hard-won freedoms and rights (for example, the overturning of Roe and attacks on voting rights and protections),
- examples of the power of special interests and corporations,
- examples of the influence of rich and powerful people,
- the undemocratic, structural elements embedded in the system,
- the regular demonstration that equal justice under law is not an ideal or even an aspiration to many in power, it is simply a slogan inscribed in the pediment of the Supreme Court building,
- increasing questions about the reliability of the voting process,
- institutional and personal corruption,
- growing social division,
- increasing political polarization, and
- the normalization of violence as legitimate political speech and action.<sup>29</sup>

This is a long list. Perceptions like this, which are rooted in the gut and based on lived or observed experiences, are exceedingly difficult to dislodge. Each one represents both a clear and present threat to the future health of democracy in America and a potential fix that could bolster support for democracy. But unintended, they can also produce secondary effects that, in this case, further erode support for and popular defense of democracy and democratic institutions.

For example, some of the inconsistent supporters of democracy who participated in our discussion now treat democracy almost as if it were a spectator sport. When asked about January 6<sup>th</sup> and former President Trump's attempt to thwart the peaceful transition of power (a hallmark of American democracy), they revert to speculating about what might happen in 2024. Instead of thinking about how they as citizens could help ensure that the guardrails of democracy are rebuilt and power is transferred peacefully after the 2024 election, they are ready to sit back and watch what happens almost as if they are watching a movie or a sporting event.

*I think 2024 will be a big election to watch because I don't really know if this is the new precedent, then yes, I would be very afraid if this is going to happen every four years. white woman*

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<sup>29</sup> With the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on the Capitol and the rioting and violent protests that took place after George Floyd's killing (even though most of these protests were peaceful), some white inconsistent supporters of democracy perceived the violence in Kenosha and Minneapolis as the rule and not the exception.

*I'm a little disappointed ...in past years the losing candidate has always like still congratulated the new president. But Donald Trump refused to do that this year. So, I feel like that kind of set a precedent that that's kind of even a little difficult. Like he wasn't willing to accept his loss. And so then of course the people who voted for him wouldn't be willing either. So, I think it's going to be, like (name withheld) said, interesting to see in 2024. white woman*

## Freedom

**Freedom Matters.** While democracy is a hollowed-out concept, freedom is not. Of the six iconic words and phrases tested,<sup>30</sup> language used to describe and evoke the core values and attributes of America's democratic system, *freedom* is rated the highest among all groups of inconsistent supporters of democracy.

Freedom is the ideal inconsistent supporters of democracy put at the heart of America.

*I mean America is a place of freedom. Black woman*

*I feel the whole point of America was freedom. white woman*

*I am thankful for the freedom I have. white man*

*But if we all were to come together and work through our government in a positive way, it will hopefully lead to more freedom. Black man*

Freedom is the concept, in all of its many variations from freedom of speech to freedom to marry, that inconsistent supporters of democracy cherish. As such, freedom (not democracy) is the key concept to invoke<sup>31</sup> when working to reengage inconsistent supporters of democracy in public life and civic society.

Freedom evokes emotion, passion, and a host of rich associations.

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<sup>30</sup> The six words and phrases tested simultaneously include: 1. We the People, 2. Rule of Law, 3. Created Equal, 4. Liberty, 5. Equal Justice Under the Law, and 6. Freedom.

<sup>31</sup> Josh Shapiro, the democratic candidate for Governor of Pennsylvania in 2022, centered his campaign messaging on freedom during the general election and reaped the benefits of this focus. On the other hand, President Biden and former President Barack Obama focused, in part, on the message that "democracy is on the ballot." Biden and Obama's messaging undoubtedly resonated with segments of the democratic coalition. But in all likelihood, it fell flat with inconsistent supporters of democracy. (And they were lucky the abortion issue – an issue understood by voters as a taking away of freedom – was front and center in the 2022 political debate.) Right-wing demagogues, like Sean Hannity and Tucker Carlson, have known about the power of invoking freedom for years. They frame issue-after-issue in terms of freedom, not democracy.

*I thought every, every individual would love to have freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of doing stuff they want to do without having to be scared ... Oh, because I'm Black, I can't do this because of how the society react to me doing it because I'm Black. I would love to just do whatever it is I want to do freely as long as it's not illegal and stuff like that. I feel like we should have freedom. **Black woman***

*You know, we came here you know to get away to be free of religion to be free of be able you know, freedom of speech, freedom of everything you know that is all right you know to be free. That's the whole point of this country. **white woman***

*Freedom means making your own choices and do what you want to that makes you happy ...like freedom of speech, freedom of...I can't think of the others...just being able to kind of, I mean, I don't know within reason: Do what you want or need...you have choice. **white woman***

*...it's good to um be able to go about living your life, unbothered by the powers that be assuming you're not um harming anyone else and like to live your life as you please. **white man***

*I also chose freedom ...because We the People, and you know We the People, will come together as a community. And ...if we all were to come together and work through our government in a positive way, it will hopefully lead to more freedom. **Black man***

For inconsistent supporters, the core of America and American exceptionalism is freedom, not democracy. Freedom is what must be protected from government over reach and intrusion. And some aspects of democracy, as it is realized and practiced in the United States today, are even perceived as antithetical to freedom, eroding it instead of protecting and promoting it.

While freedom elicits strong emotional responses from inconsistent supporters, democracy does not. As a concept, democracy appears to be emotionally impoverished -- a word whose meaning has lost emotive equity. But it is not the only word from America's past that has lost emotional resonance today.

Not one participant in the focus groups rated liberty highly. The concept that patriot Patrick Henry announced he was ready to die for in 1775 (the famous and rousing declaration "give me liberty, or give me death"<sup>32</sup>) has been relegated, at least for now, to the dustbin of rhetorical history.

Freedom is certainly not perceived as perfect in America. It is contested in many ways -- from the loss of abortion rights to calls for reparations. But these very

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<sup>32</sup> Patrick Henry. Speech delivered at the Second Virginia Convention in Richmond, Virginia on March 23, 1775.

contests make freedom relevant as a concept to inconsistent supporters of democracy and worthy of their time and engagement.

**The Different Meanings of Freedom.** White and Black inconsistent supporters of democracy have very different definitions of freedom.

To white men and women participants in the qualitative boards, freedom means primarily “do what you want to do.” Freedom is almost seen by them as an entitlement, an empowering privilege.

By contrast, only one Black American in the qualitative boards offers “do what you want to do” as a definition of freedom. To Black men and women, freedom is what enables them to breathe, a right granted to citizens, a powerful and empowering concept, and the possibility to make choices.

Freedom is less about privilege and entitlement to Black men and women and more about protected and protecting rights. Rights that are insecure because they can be snatched away by the political machinations of American democracy.

As one Black man warns, freedom is “a right that is granted to us that the Republicans want to take away from minorities.” And for some Black women, freedom remains an illusion in America. After centuries of struggle, freedom is still not guaranteed. It must be contested.

**Freedom’s Images.** The images Black and white inconsistent supporters of democracy produced to depict freedom are much more consistent than the words and phrases they use to define it.

Images portraying the breaking of chains and shackles were offered by all four groups (Black and white, men and women) to represent freedom. The Statue of Liberty was produced at least once by each group. Patriotic images were also part of white men’s visualization of liberty, while Black and white women both offered joyful visuals of people reaching for the sky.

**Most Important Freedom.** When asked specifically to name the most important freedom, a majority in all four groups (Black and white, men and women) picked freedom of speech. Freedom of religion was the runner up with all groups except Black women, who all chose speech as their top freedom. The right to bear arms was not mentioned once as the most important freedom.

**Voting: An Important Freedom?** While inconsistent supporters of democracy overwhelmingly equate democracy with voting, not one -- when asked to



identify the most important freedom -- mentions voting. Similarly, when asked to find images that represent freedom, not one inconsistent supporter of democracy offers a voting visual. By contrast, images of voting predominate when inconsistent supporters are asked to find visuals of democracy.

While the difference here is subtle, it underscores the different perceptions of democracy and freedom among inconsistent supporters of democracy. To them, the linkage between democracy and voting is a clear, top-of-mind connection: democracy = voting. On the other hand, the connection between freedom and voting is *neither* direct *nor* top-of-mind. The concept of freedom is more explicitly linked to freedoms listed in the Bill of Rights – primarily those contained in the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment.

When asked specifically whether voting is an important freedom, however, most inconsistent supporters of democracy agree (73% of qualitative board participants).<sup>33</sup> To them, the association between freedom and voting is, however, secondary.

Importantly, almost a quarter (27%) of inconsistent supporters of democracy who participated in the qualitative board think limits and restrictions on voting are necessary. To them, voting is *neither* top-of-mind *nor* a fundamental freedom. Access to voting, and by association, to democracy should be limited and restricted.

*Why?*

There appear to be two main reasons. First, some inconsistent supporters of democracy are concerned about ballot integrity. This concern has inevitably grown as American politicians and media have raised and spread disinformation about stolen elections. Second, some inconsistent supporters appear to believe that not all citizens deserve equal rights.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Percentages cited here are indicative of attitudes, but not statistically valid. They are estimated from a very small-N, qualitative panel that was randomly chosen and geographically and racially distributed across the United States, but is not nationally representative.

<sup>34</sup> One democracy image, offered by a Black woman, captures the essence of this attitude.



To them, voting rights are not a universal right of citizenship. Some people have more right to vote than others.

### *Who Is More Likely to Support Voting Restrictions?*

Four-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy appear more likely to favor limits and restrictions on voting.<sup>35</sup>

Half of white men and women, who are inconsistent on four-out-of-five democracy questions, agree that limits and restrictions on voting are necessary. Four-in-10 of them think that registering to vote should be made more difficult. Six-in-10 say voting should *only* be allowed on Election Day. Eight-in-10 of them agree that mail in voting encourages election fraud.

These attitudes are yet another barrier to building support for democracy among four-out-of-five inconsistent supporters.

**Freedom or Democracy: Which is More important?** When asked which is more important freedom or democracy, majorities of White men and women, and Black women, in the qualitative board discussions, choose freedom over democracy. (Black men choose freedom or say democracy and freedom are equally important.)

Their reasoning behind this choice is subtle but important to understand.

#### **Freedom is Possible without Democracy**

*Freedom is probably more important to me. I guess you can't have democracy without freedom but you can have freedom without democracy. white man*

*Freedom is more important to me because I would gladly operate freely--with or without influence/involvement of a democracy. white man*

#### **Freedom is for Everyone. Democracy is for the Majority**

*Freedom is definitely more important than democracy because freedom allows you to do what you want within reason while democracy, the majority could vote to take away your freedom. white man*

*Freedom is more important than democracy because it encompasses everyone, but democracy only promotes the majority. white man*

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<sup>35</sup> The word "appear" is used here to indicate that this observation is based on qualitative insights and is not a statistically-supported, quantitative finding.

*Freedom definitely is more important to me because democracy can create the opposite of freedom (majoritarianism). Black man*

### **Freedom is a Positive Concept, Democracy is Mixed**

*I definitely think freedom is more important than democracy. Freedom is what gives everyone the choice to make their own decisions. I think parts of democracy are great but others are not. white woman*

*I think freedom is more important, because as we see in the news, the government is trying to take away certain people's freedom when it comes to abortion rights. Black woman*

### **Awareness of What Freedom Means, Not Aware of What Democracy Means**

*Freedom seems more important to me. (I'm) not too aware of our democracy. white man*

Inconsistent supporters of democracy connect with freedom emotionally and, when given a choice, value it over democracy. Freedom is the attribute to frame communications and programmatic efforts to reinvigorate and bolster democracy in the United States.

## **Community**

**Community Connects Us.** Like freedom, community is a value-laden, emotionally-packed term for most inconsistent supporters of democracy. Community is place, family, togetherness, connection, nostalgia, safety, responsibility, and hope all rolled into one. At its core, community is about unity – something lost in modern America and something that in the polarized and divided national context people are looking to find again.

To inconsistent supporters of democracy, community is:

*Home. Black woman*

*Like as one ... Community (is) Unity. As one Unity. Black woman*

*It's a togetherness. Black woman*

*Safe space together. Unity. Black woman*

*When I hear community, I immediately think of family, you know, just saying that it takes a village to do everything. Everybody in your community is supposed to be a part of your family ...who is there to uplift you whenever you need to or just be there for you period or*

*whatever. As a community, if we all act as one and as a family and as a village and a lot of things will change, we will get a lot of things done differently for sure. Black woman*

*Holding hands. white woman*

*I think neighbors and like a church community, it's a group of people you can go to and count on and definitely like I first had like neighborhoods, you count on each other. white woman*

*I feel like I'm part of a community in my hometown where I grew up, but I also feel like I'm part of a community in my school and in the community just all-around Green Bay too. So, I have different aspects of different communities. white woman*

*We all kind of just support one another. white man*

*...the people who you're with and it can be like a hometown. I mean McFarland is right outside of Madison; it's not really huge, like kind of the biggest thing there is the high school. So as a graduate from there, I felt really connected as I was going through it and there's a lot of people come back to this high school to teach, who went through there. So that part feels really connected. white man*

*I feel connected...our Racine isn't like a super big city, but it's pretty good size city, and I think there's like a lot of events that happens in our city that kind of brings us together. Like we have this little town square on main street right where I live and there's always like these block parties that are going on and you kind of like get to see people who don't normally mix. It's pretty nice to see um so I guess um Racine is like it's a cool little place. white man*

*I think you know a group of people, basically you know, helping each other out, being there for each other. You know everything is going, you know, smoothly. Everyone's hanging out. You know, togetherness basically. Black man*

*Unity, I think unity is key for a community, just looking out for each other. Black man*

*A community is a group of people, it could be by race or a geographic place. They all have empathy for the struggles that they face together and for the problems that they can relate to. And they work together. Black man*

Community is a powerful concept. In America, it always has been. Alexis de Tocqueville described healthy American communities as the backbone of America democracy.<sup>36</sup>

Community-building strategies that are framed explicitly by freedom, support democratic values, win palpable changes, and are then linked explicitly to democratic practices are a grassroots way to begin rebuilding support for democracy piece-by-piece with inconsistent supporters of democracy.

**Community Is Where We Can Make a Difference.** While inconsistent supporters of democracy feel disempowered when it comes to democracy and politics at the state and national level, many are primed to become involved, take action, and serve at the community level.

When asked in the focus groups: Can you make a difference? They answer: Yes, in our communities!

*...as a community. if we all to act as one and as a family and as a village and a lot of things will change, we will get a lot of things done differently for sure. Black woman*

*I go around (think about) amazing women who were always there when needed for advice, anything. They were the people who made the community, the strong leaders who were able to pour onto other people. Black woman*

*I think about it on a small scale. Get more involved in my kids' school, more involved in my community, like maybe volunteer at food pantries and stuff like that is if I was going to do something that would be what I would do. white woman*

*And when I think about the community, I think of like my like my area. So, I would think about like the police, like how they build rapport with us (at) Community centers. I feel like community centers are really important, there's not one near me and I've always said that like I feel like that really sucks because that's like a big part of like children, you know and like helping them be more part of the community and building gardens and things like that. white woman*

*There's always gonna be a group of people, not specific group of people, but you know that everybody struggles sometimes. I feel like in every community there is gonna be some type of people in need and hopefully people that will come forward to help. I think that's what community is all about helping each other. white woman*

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<sup>36</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville identified several conditions that exist in healthy communities including equality of opportunity and status, open dialogue and debate, mutual support and shared interest, civic associations, and a practice of taking action to help or sustain the community and individuals within it.

*I could see myself like gathering like-minded people and almost creating, like, a little group and then as a group and working with others, then having a loud enough voice to change the world is what I'm thinking. white man*

*It's kind of hard because one, you know, one person, huge world, although also small world at the same time. But anyways, um I don't think I would as far as for the world, I don't know how much of a huge difference I can make, but in my community in my area, I think I could have a positive impact. Start small and work your way to larger areas. white man*

*For me. It's community service, so like, you know, just doing things of service. Acts of service, I think, is important.... Black man*

*Well, it goes basically by you know, whatever we do as a community, whatever we put in, I feel that determines how our community kind of grows. It has it good times, it bad times, you know, but just physically, being active and just following up on what (name withheld) says, is definitely community service, you know. I agree with that. The youth are our future. Just being there for them having that outlook because a lot of those, either, you know, don't have a parent, or both parents, or you know anybody would turn to or talk to. I feel like just being there from one another as well creates that that bond. You know that kind of creates a better community. You know the love is there. So, you know that's how I feel about community. That's what I have learned. Just, you know, doing things for the community, whether it's multiple different days, like volunteers for Thanksgiving drives or Christmas drives, or anything that do all my community or other, I feel like that's what brings us together the most, stuff like that. Black man*

And when asked in the qualitative board discussion where does making America a better place begin, the answer, overwhelmingly among all four groups (men and women, Black and white), is again the community.

*I think, making America a great place starts at the local level. That's where the biggest difference can be made, and then it needs to be replicated up the chain to the national and federal levels. white man*

*It begins in your community; you can't really control much outside of that. But once you gain a voice in your community that becomes a great first step in expanding your message across the nation. Black man*

*You've got to start from the bottom up. One community adopts the practices of another successful community and then it snowballs from there. white man*

*It should start in your community and grow to your state and then grow to the nation. Every big change just started out as a small change in the neighborhood or local*

*workplace. Due to hard work that change can grow to be a bigger change in town then the state. It can even grow to be a great big change that a nation needs. white woman*

It begins in the community how can we overcome anything if we [are] always fighting.  
**Black woman**

# COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

## As a Means to Build Support for Democracy

### Research Approach: Understanding Volunteerism

Because most inconsistent supporters of democracy appear to believe they can improve their communities, and even make America a better place to live, by volunteering, researching their attitudes toward volunteer service became an important focus of the qualitative board discussion.

To explore this behavior in detail, we began by asking several baseline questions.

Can volunteering create positive change in communities? [A]

Why is volunteering attractive? [B]

What are the recognized benefits of volunteering? [C]

Why are particular volunteering activities appealing? [D]

Then, we asked inconsistent supporters to do an online search to find specific volunteer opportunities in their community that were appealing.

From this information, we produced a simple list of 12 volunteer activities.

We divided this list in two and added to it a third group of existing volunteer programs funded by American foundations. (This list was culled from the foundation work researched in January and February.)

These three lists were then shared one-by-one with inconsistent supporters of democracy (see sections D and E below) to ascertain which ones attracted the most interest and, once again, why (see section F below).

What follows summarizes the findings of this exploration of inconsistent supporters of democracy attitudes toward volunteer opportunities in their communities. It is a useful guide to the designing and fielding of community volunteer programs that speak to inconsistent supporters of democracy.



**A. Can volunteering create positive change in communities?** Nearly six-in-10 of the participants in the qualitative board discussions say they strongly agree that volunteering can create positive change where they live. Another three-in-10 somewhat agree, making agreement with the question nearly unanimous among inconsistent supporters of democracy. (Even four-out-of-five inconsistent supporters of democracy agree with the question.)

**B. Why are inconsistent supporters of democracy *attracted* to volunteering in their community?** Qualitative boards discussions identified five primary reasons why inconsistent supporters of democracy are attracted to volunteering in their communities.

Volunteering addresses real problems:

#1. They can see, know about, or have experienced directly.

*I have been thinking about this for the last couple of weeks. Every time I drive on the highway, I see trash and I think it would be cool to get a large group of people together to clean up the highways.*

*It's important to me because I became a teen mother, at the age of 14, due to circumstances beyond my control, but I knew there was a reason and a purpose for not only me, but my child. Without the support system of my mother / family, and the pregnancy resource center, I wouldn't have been able to keep my child, provide for her, and finish school and continue to further my education. I want others to have those same options, regardless of their age, everyone needs a helping hand sometimes.*

*I know what it's like to be hungry and have to go to food banks growing up in a tough environment as a kid. So, I know what some of these people have to deal with...Having to worry about getting a decent meal in should be the least of their troubles. It's nice community's offer these types of things, and it's nice to help out being in a position where I can help out these days volunteering my time at food banks.*

*As someone who was once homeless, I would partake in helping out the homeless community. I'd try to use my time to find them housing and medical resources. Also, I'd take extra time to find abandoned properties, that could be converted into homeless information centers.*

*I live in a low-income area. A community service project I'd love to able do is to help others find what they want to do. Help them explore new skills traditional and not to be*

*able to use those to provide for themselves. Get people in touch with resources that will allow them to further their education and passions.*

**#2. A parent or role model cared about.**

*My mom used to work at a dog shelter and I've always wanted to volunteer at one someday. I love working with animals and would love to help animals in need. Something else I found was a volunteer fireman, which also might be really interesting. My step dad works there right now so it would be nice to do.*

**#3. In which they have a professional interest.**

*I would like to help with the local boys and girls club. These are kids who need extra love and attention. Anyone that can spare some time for them should. I am going to school to be a counselor so I think that is why this interests me so much.*

**#4. They learned about on social media.**

*Without even having to research I was interested in something I recently saw in a Facebook video. I saw a guy who I believed to be volunteering performing small medical services to addicts on the streets of Philly.<sup>37</sup>*

**#5. They could work on with a group of other people.**

*I would like to go around with a group of volunteers and hand out food and important supplies like soap and tooth brushes and stuff to the homeless.*

**C. What benefits do inconsistent supporters identify as outcomes of volunteering?** Inconsistent supporters of democracy identify two different types of benefits produced by volunteering:

**#1. Specific direct helping benefits to the community.** For example, helping animals, kids, young mothers, the homeless, and people in need.

**#2. Personal emotional benefits to those who volunteer.** These benefits include:

*[Volunteering] is appealing because you get to **help others in need and makes a difference** in the community*

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<sup>37</sup> During qualitative board discussions, inconsistent supporters were instructed to go online and find interesting volunteer opportunities in their community.

*By serving on a local committee or board, my voice can be heard.*

*I like helping others and **working for the community.***

*Not to mention **the smiles we get to see of the people we help. It is always nice to help those less fortunate.***

*I'd say **the most rewarding thing one can do is give back. It's a feel good all around.***

*This is a really easy thing you can do to **make a huge impact on another person's life and possibly effect their future.***

*If you're like me **and don't have much to do when you're not working, why not go volunteer when you can. It's a great feeling, and it'll get you out of the house and active in your community.***

*It makes my heart happy, makes me smile and feel good. They feel good as well.*

*It's an **opportunity to have an impact on someone's life.***

*I feel like it's important to me because I was once that kid that didn't have any role models.*

**D. What Attracted Inconsistent Supporters of Democracy to Specific Volunteering Opportunities?** During qualitative boards discussions, inconsistent supporters of democracy were asked to go online, research volunteer opportunities where they lived, and select one they liked. Then, after describing the volunteer opportunity they selected, they were asked why they chose it? What appealed to them about it?

Their answers include it:

#1. Is easy—anyone can do it.

*Well, this opportunity was appealing to me because 1) it can be done by anyone at any time, 2) it doesn't cost anything to make the trash pick-up happen other than garbage bags, and 3) it's an easy way to get all ages involved and make an immediate impact.*

#2. Is work you can do with a group of people (in other words, it has social benefits).

#3. Shows the community is caring.

*I think it would make a big difference in the community, because it will show that we all love and care for each other which is one step to making our country a better place*

**#4. Creates feeling of unity and togetherness in the community.**

*It would lead to a greater sense of unity and togetherness. We would all be working to better our community. Once we do that it would prevent us from doing other things that would harm it. It would lead to accountability.*

**#5. Could have a big effect in the community.**

*This could make a huge difference in the community. If more people were getting fed meals, then less people will go hungry and die.*

*Imagine if everyone or even just half of the people in your town volunteered 2-3 hours a week at a foster home or boys and girls club. Imagine the difference we could make in these kids if we showed them that there are tons of people who actually do care about them. That they aren't just put into the system and forgotten.*

**#6. Fosters connection within the community.**

*Volunteering in your own community is important because it makes you connected and more accountable for your contribution.*

**#7. Could change lives.**

*I would say let's see if we can change some kids lives. Let's do something great.*

**E. Top Volunteer Opportunities Generated & Selected by Participants** Twelve brief descriptions of volunteer activities were developed to summarize the volunteer opportunities found online by inconsistent supporters of democracy during the second qualitative board discussion. These brief descriptions were then divided into two lists and shown to participants in the third qualitative board.<sup>38</sup> Participants were asked which opportunities, if any, would you volunteer for and why?

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<sup>38</sup> **I.** Clean up the environment where you live: Pick up trash, clean streams, remove invasive plants, maintain community trails. **J.** Help out in our local animal shelter: Walk, feed, train, and socialize shelter dogs and cats; clean living spaces, staff "meet and greets" with prospective adopters. **K.** Mentoring and tutoring local kids: Through Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, camps, or afterschool programs, help kids with academic and social skills, teach technical skills (i.e. design, computers, photography, etc.) or coach (sports, conflict management, life skills). **L.** Help kids with disabilities and learning differences: Work with the Special Olympics and other community organizations to support kids with special needs. **M.** Volunteer at the local food bank: Collect, sort, organize and distribute food to individuals and families at the food bank or help organize regular food drives in the community. **N.** Volunteer in the local community gardens: Work with people in the community to grow healthy vegetables

Of the twelve options tested, most inconsistent supporters chose mentoring and tutoring local kids (K). This volunteer category, with its many service possibilities from Big Brother/Sister programs to coaching and teaching technical skills, was the favorite by far.

Helping and *mentoring* young teens and teenagers. They stand out to me because it happened to me, it's close to my heart. If I could do the same thing and help out another teen like someone helped me. Then they would know **they aren't alone in this world and have someone in their corner.**

My favorite volunteering opportunity would be "K" because I like the idea of not just working with kids in one aspect of their life but in the many areas of it so they excel in all areas. I love this idea. **This opportunity stands out because the school setting enables you to reach more kids and make a positive change.**

Volunteering at a local soup kitchen (T) or a local food bank (M) were the next most selected option. Many participants who selected these options also chose helping out at a local homeless shelter (O), rounding out a second tier of favored volunteer options.

Helping with the food drive... because, **it's sad to see families with children without any food or low-income families struggling, and I've been there before.**

I think **Americas children in need should be of utmost importance**, and then volunteering at foodbanks **because so many kids and families go to bed hungry at night, meanwhile millions of dollars of food is thrown away daily all across the world.**

Supporting individuals and families in need during and after emergencies and disasters in conjunction with local Volunteer Fire Departments, medical clinics, or the Red Cross (P), and helping out at the local nursing home (S), were third tier selections among both white and Black Americans. Also, in the third tier, but

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and fruits for people who need it. Learn how to garden while helping grow the community. **O.** Help staff out at a local homeless shelter, connect clients to resources or provide supplies to unhoused people and families in the community. **P.** Support individuals and families in need during and after emergencies and disasters in conjunction with local Volunteer Fire Departments, medical clinics, or the Red Cross. **Q.** Support refugees and individuals/families in need: Distribute furniture, clothes, supplies; connect people to community resources (i.e. adult education, language learning, etc.); and act as community liaison. **R.** Support families, seniors, and veterans in need by fixing up their homes through your local Habitat for Humanity and other organizations that build, repairing or restore homes residences. **S.** Help out at the local nursing home by supporting medical personnel and staff and socializing with senior residents and patients. **T.** Volunteer at the local soup kitchen: Prepare and serve hot meals to people in our community who depend on them.

selected only by white Americans, were cleaning up the environment (I) and helping at the local animal shelter (J).

The one I found the most interesting is Supporting individuals and families in need during and after emergencies and disasters in conjunction with local Volunteer Fire Departments, medical clinics or the Red Cross. **This one stands out to me the most because I couldn't imagine losing my home to a natural disaster and not be a complete total mental mess.**

I would like to help out in nursing homes and with the Veterans Association. The geriatric population has a special place in my heart and I always love to **bring those who may not have visitor's joy.**

No matter where you are or where you go there is always trash laying around and it's so gross. **I'd love to clean up the planet and clean the waters and make things how they should be.** Littering is so harmful to the planet

Working at animal shelter to help **pets in need** and also working with Habitat for Humanity to help restore **homes in need.** I like these because it's making a **direct impact** for animals in need or homes in need. The impact on these animals or homes would be unmatched and it's nice to see the before and after effects. I like these because it makes me not only feel good about what I'm doing but also can see results and see the impact it has.

Supporting kids with special needs and disabilities (L – with the Special Olympics or other community organizations) and fixing up homes of families, seniors, and veterans in need (R – through the local Habitat for Humanity or similar organizations) were fourth tier selections.

Special Olympics... because **it's a hugeeee part of my life and I love giving back**

I think I would be most interested in the habitat for humanity. I think that would be a good fit for me working with my hands rather than trying to teach someone something. I have seen and been impressed by habitat for humanity efforts. I know there is a **spring break "trip" that friends did in college where in 1 week they would build a community center or something like that and i was blown away with how much they were able to get done in one week.**

The reasons each participant gave for picking a particular volunteer opportunity reflect the attractions and benefits of volunteering developed earlier in the qualitative board discussion.

**F. Evaluation of Eight Existing Volunteer Foundation Programs.** Eight community-based volunteer programs funded by foundations in the United States were also selected for evaluation in the third qualitative board discussion. These programs were chosen from a long list of innovative options developed and implemented by

the foundation programs reviewed in January and February. The selection of each program was based on the learning from the initial focus groups and qualitative boards one and two, with the intention of identifying the volunteer approaches most likely to interest inconsistent supporters of democracy.

Brief descriptions of each program were developed and the eight descriptions were shown to participants simultaneously.<sup>39</sup> After reading the descriptions, participants were asked to pick which, if any, of the programs they would choose to volunteer for? Participants were told they could choose “one, two, or none of these” programs. Then, participants were asked to explain their decision.

The clear favorite, as evaluated by participants in the third qualitative board, was program (B) described as “helping unemployed, underemployed, and ex-offenders receive essential job skills training and counselling so they can get a good job in your community.” While the program appealed on many levels and for many reasons, its practical skills training, opportunity and job focus, and lack of political agenda or goals (see C and E especially) were particularly valued by inconsistent supporters of democracy.

*I pick this one (B) because it is has so much impact in world.*

*Teaching people life skills and things that can better them and their future is a very fulfilling thing.*

*Everyone deserves to be able to make their own money. I would love to volunteer to help someone learn skills they need to get a decent job.*

*I think a lot of people are struggling in today's economy because of being unemployed, underemployed and ex-offenders. I think providing job skills training and counseling would not only benefit that person would also help the communities.*

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<sup>39</sup> **A.** Working to raise civic literacy and foster social justice in your community by volunteering with a Christian civic organization. **B.** Helping unemployed, underemployed and ex-offenders receive essential job skills training and counselling so they can get a good job in your community. **C.** Participating or volunteering at local community debates and workshops designed to heal partisan political divides and foster patriotic-empathy among citizens. **D.** Building a culture of powerful and responsible citizenship by mentoring teenagers on civic responsibility and developing collaborative solutions to problems in your community. **E.** Encouraging young people, especially those affected by racism and harmful policing and justice policies, to actively participate in the community and vote. **F.** Volunteer on civic projects where young and old people join together to solve problems in the community. **G.** Volunteer out at a workforce development program in your community that helps Black Americans develop marketable skills in technology and social media. **H.** Work with others to build connections and understanding among people in your community and weave a rich, social community fabric based on trust and love.

*(B) is the only one that really appeals to me... I just don't want to get that involved in politics myself. I would be all about helping people get the tools they need to be able to support themselves and make more than minimum wage, maybe that way we could stop spending so much money on aid for so many people. Teach a man to fish basics.*

*There is a lot of people in the community -- believe it -- who don't have the knowledge or certain job training skills. I myself at a point didn't have those training skills, and I had to lie on my resume because certain jobs required some type of skill.*

*I would choose B and D. I have a strong passion for working with people and helping them in areas they are struggling and could use assistance. Everyone deserves equal shot at life. Everyone should be provided with resources in order no matter social status, age or who you are in society (teenagers, ex-offenders, underemployed, unemployed).*

Mentoring teenagers on civic responsibility and developing collaborative solutions to community problems (D) and working to build connections and understanding in the community and weave a rich, social community fabric based on trust and love (H) were second tier choices.

Mentoring youth (D) is a key attribute and attraction for inconsistent supporters of democracy in any volunteer program.

*If it wasn't for a Youth Pastor being a mentor to me when I was a teenager. I can say I am not too sure where I would be if he hadn't have helped me. I would love to be able to mentor to teenagers even just be someone they can talk to and will listen to them. There isn't much activities for minors to do in my area. It has been said many times in my town "There is nothing in Jamestown to do for teenagers besides, booze, drugs, and sex!" It's a true statement because all Youth groups are based on religion. Which isn't a bad thing but teenagers don't even know what they believe in.*

*Being able to mentor them and help them. Making sure they know that they have a voice.*

*(D) appeals to me because I personally had a mentor in kindergarten all the way until High School. She still to this day has a relationship with me, and without her guidance, kindness, and her problem-solving techniques I wouldn't be as far as I am today.*

*The biggest changes comes when you work with the youth and change mindsets from early life.*

The high ranking of foundation programs B and D reinforces the finding from the test of 12 generic volunteer programs. In short, mentoring, tutoring, teaching



young people is the volunteer activity most inconsistent supporters of democracy find attractive.

The focus on community building and rejuvenation (H) also resonated deeply with qualitative board participants – an obvious extension of their belief that change begins at the community level.

*I choose (H) because it basically ties everything else in together!*

*Because it all starts in your community... to make the greater change worldwide.*

The intergenerational program (F) designed to solve community problems and (G) volunteering to help Black Americans develop marketable skills in technology and social media were third-tier choices among participants. Working together to solve community problems appeared to be the main driver behind the selection of program (F). The intergenerational component of the program was also important, but appeared a secondary benefit.<sup>40</sup>

*I feel like most people now a days stick to their own generation and don't understand the older generation and vice versa. I would be nice to integrate the young and old and to come together to do amazing things and help the community*

*I would love to help work on projects that help join our community together working to solve the issues in our area*

*Maybe F, I like this one because it involves people coming together to get things done and agree and solve issues. Younger people and older people have different viewpoints and opinions so it would be nice to have them come together and unite.*

And again, as we saw in the comments on programs B and D, mentoring youth and teaching marketable skills, the core attributes of program (G), are highly valued.

Encouraging young people, especially those affected by racism and harmful policing and justice policies, to actively participate in the community and vote (E) is a fourth-tier selection. The remaining programs (A and C) were only selected once.

**F. Promoting Volunteer Programs.** Social media promotions and influencers, as well as word of mouth networking (personally and through social media), are

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<sup>40</sup> The seven participant who chose (E) were distributed equally between white and Black inconsistent supporters of democracy. They made few comments about program.

identified by inconsistent supporters of democracy as the most effective way to promote volunteer programs. Among Black Americans, promotional flyers and working through local, community businesses are mentioned as secondary promotional tools.

For both Black and white Americans, public recognition, accolades, awards, and rewards are perceived as a good way to keep people volunteering and build a network of volunteers throughout a community and on social media.

The benefits of working with others, in-person in the community and making real connections beyond social media, is a social benefit that may prove very attractive to inconsistent supporters of democracy and be an important benefit to design into any volunteering program,

## **IN THEIR OWN WORDS – Hope for the Future**

After hours of online discussions about democracy, America and American values, current events, the Constitution, voting, volunteering, and community over three months, panel participants were asked to reflect on what they heard or learned about democracy. Their answers are poignant reminders that, while the future is uncertain, there is real hope for the rejuvenation of American democracy with many, but not all, of these young Americans.

### ***I Feel Uplifted & Empowered.***

*This has been a very thrilling experience from day one. I have gotten to learn so much about our democracy and the community, I also learned that even as our democracy is in shambles there's still a very high possibility for positive change and we can only do it by being united as one*

*[I learned] That democracy included us. We have to help each other make the community better in order for it to survive. If they don't hear our voices, then nothing can be done to fix whatever situation... arises.*

*What I learned honestly is that we as the people need to do our part [to] bring change and stop procrastinating.*

*That in order to follow the democracy way, you have to be willing to become a leader and also root for your leaders. Stand out and take a chance on making a change in the community. And volunteer to make a difference.*

*I already had a pretty decent knowledge about democracy before we started, but this discussion really made me think about how lucky we are to have this political system in place today. I really thought in depth about the other countries who are not as fortunate and have absolutely no say in their future or what they do every day. I liked how I had to think about what could be improved, and what I would do to improve our legal system. The topic I like discussing the most would be the community service projects and [it] really has me considering starting something to give back in the future.*

### ***I Want the Division & Polarization to Stop.***

*I've also learned more on details of what democracy truly is and represents for our country, along with taking the time to do more research on our history. It has broadened my knowledge and helped me understand the importance of the impact we as individual people make. If we are capable of putting certain things aside and coming together rather than dividing further, I believe that we could truly create a better future for ourselves and others.*

*People mostly vote for dems because they are terrified abortions will be taken away and on the other side of the fence people vote for republicans because they are scared the dems are going to take away their guns. I really wish we could just love the gays, HAVE OUR GUNS, weed, equality for all, all of the best things...stop all the fighting.*

*It was nice to see people engaging with others and not being judged or harassed if people had different opinions on something*

*Instead of trying to divide us, we should be doing something about working together.*

### **Community & Civic Engagement is Important.**

*What stands out to me about Democracy is the ability to make decisions and help better the communities. I feel this is possible if we all had an agreement, and if we all had a positive outlook. Picking the positive things to do with the world, helping people, teaching people, bringing world peace, being understanding and compassionate. Mainly not being selfish. Then I feel like Democracy can successfully be done, and it wouldn't be as bad as everyone seems to think.*

*This may not be something I learned but I'm now starting to wonder what role volunteering plays in democracy. Does it bring a sense of togetherness that would help us unite and have a more effective democracy?... Yea, I think volunteering could help us unite and have a more effective democracy but I think the volunteering would have to be geared towards democracy. It could make a difference just by spreading awareness and gathering support. Education on government/politics would definitely help and have people more active, but I think it would have to be more hands on than that. I have no idea what that hands on activity would be. I don't think helping at an animal shelter would affect democracy. I was paid to canvas on election day and I enjoyed it, would do it again, and it convinced me to go vote where I otherwise probably wouldn't have. But I was paid so I'm not sure I would count that as volunteering.*

### **Differences of Opinion Will Exist. We Need to Respect Them.**

*I believe I learned a lot about democracy. I think I have learned that many people have different opinions and thoughts on the matter. I don't think we all have the same understanding or necessarily share that we want democracy as it is to continue. I learned that some people are in favor of our current democratic government, and others want to see a change. Although I don't share this to use, I do respect their opinion. It is a very eye-opening experience to sit back, and really dive into what we all believe is democracy and how different people in different parts of the country view it.*

### ***I am Concerned for the Future. We Need to Take Action.***

*Democracy is going downhill and if We the People don't do something about it by voting etc., then we stand no chance in America.*

*I have learned that a lot of people are actually against Democracy. For some reason I thought that would be the most popular choice and was shocked to learn a lot of people don't care for it.*

### ***There is Little Hope for the Future of American Democracy.***

*Overall, I just learned that democracy in the US has had its faults and positives, but with the direction that we are going in now, I think eventually there will be no more democracy in the US. It's too much division already, and a long with stuff such as the tweet that you have shared with us, I can see that the fall of democracy may be sooner than we expect*

***I believe that democracy is an outdated form of government for America. When America was formed, there wasn't as many people of his many different ethnicities and backgrounds and cultures. Today when you put all that into this big mixing pot, the walls don't always add up. I believe that we just have the parties, the Democrat, the democratic party and the Republican party I don't think it's a true democracy it's more so a battle for who can be right***

If ignited, their hope is the fuel that may rekindle support for American democracy and renew the journey to realizing the aspirations of the Declaration of Independence. If their hope is ignored, it will inevitably dwindle as they grow older and rekindling democracy will become all the more difficult.

## APPENDIX 1

### DEMOCRACY IS...

- *Lies ... the Constitution was never actually built for Black people. It wasn't built for women, and it wasn't built for other people of color either.*
- *More lies.*
- *A broken system that doesn't work ...it doesn't work for the people...the system works for those that are in (the) higher power unit because, obviously like, it's corrupted.*
- *Doesn't represent everyone.*
- *Corruption.*
- *Needs to be fixed.*
- *Finesse...because it claims it's a democracy, but in reality, it's not...Today, I don't know what America is.*
- *Broken...personally, as an African American, the system is just not built for us.*

Black men, 18-29, inconsistent supporters of democracy

## DEMOCRACY IS...

- *Voting...(But) in America we only really have two choices which I don't necessarily like... I have to pick the lesser of the two evils.*
- *Voting...(But) I think less and less people are relying on their vote, feeling that their vote even gets counted. Especially in this last one, you hear about votes getting thrown or whether it's a conspiracy or you know, one party starting something or whatever. You just start to lose faith and voting in elections because you almost feel the person you vote for isn't even gonna... your vote isn't even going to have any effect anyways.*
- *Voting...(But) I saw this saying once and, uh, I don't know how true it is, because that's pretty conspiratorial. But they said if your vote actually counted, they wouldn't let you, they won't let you do it. Like, kind of like, an oligarchy of politicians that don't wanna give up control.*
- *[IS THERE ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT DEMOCRACY?] I don't think there's anything necessarily. I don't, I don't lean one direction either way with it. I guess I'm kind of indifferent.*
- *[IS THERE ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT DEMOCRACY?] I just felt if we had a system that was working...as long as the system's working good and people are happy with it ...I don't think it really mattered what type of government it is.*

## DEMOCRACY IS...

- *Government [YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT IT?] It's very normal to me, neutral.*
- *Government (but) I was just thinking on the lines of the whole point of government, I thought was to make sure the country runs smoothly like um and gives everyone opportunities and everyone has a voice so I don't necessarily care if it's democratic. If everyone is still heard and has their needs taken care of.*
- *Government /America [YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT IT?] It's pretty neutral, I think of America because that is what our government is, but just the type of government to me really, I mean, I'm happy we have it, but it doesn't really evoke a certain feeling from me.*
- *Government ...So when I think of democracy, I feel like that's what kind of form of government I would rather have rather be in.*
- *The people's voices being heard, (but) I feel like there's a difference between having the freedom to speak and then your voice being heard. Even though we call ourselves a democracy, which I mean, I don't think we are.*
- *Being able to be heard. (And) I like that we have a democracy, although I don't think our government is being run like that right now so it's disappointing.*
- *Freedom*

*white women, 18-29, inconsistent supporters of democracy*



## DEMOCRACY IS...

- *So like kind of like how we have elections. (But) they tell us that we that we have these rights and that our vote matters or whatever, but it don't.*
- *Democracy means like... letting people make their own decisions. It's our choice. (But) I don't think we really have a democracy as much as they say we do... And it kind of sucks because it's like, well why are we voting if you guys don't really take what we say into consideration? You know? And then other things as well, like you know, just so many issues going on and they don't really care, you know, the government doesn't really care whether it's our state government or like the White House government, they just don't care.*
- *What do we vote for? Like I kind of felt like that was just wasting our time to just make us make us feel like we matter the whole time and really didn't. [WHO IS WE?] ...The minorities, um the middle class, the poverty people.*
- *[IS THERE ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT DEMOCRACY?] I think the last time I heard it I heard it on the T. V. show and somebody said like this is the democracy and I just started laughing... [WHY?] It's the way it's the way that he (television personality) said it because it was like a white it was like a white person. He was standing to another white doctor and it was the way that he said so I just started laughing me ... personally I don't really know what it means.*

*Black women, 18-29, inconsistent supporters of democracy*

## APPENDIX #2

### DEMOCRACY STUDY – SURVEY QUESTIONS

National sample with oversample of 18-29, year-old Americans

#### Q23 WORLD VALUES -- Single Choice Dynamic Grid

I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each system as a way of governing the United States. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing the United States?

varlabel WVS

#### *Randomize statement order*

- A. Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with Congress and elections in The United States
  - B. Having the army rule the United States
  - C. Having a democratic political system in **the United States**
- 
- 1. Very good
  - 2. Fairly good
  - 3. Fairly bad
  - 4. Very bad

#### Q24A PRIORITIES – Clickable Rule Widget

How important is it to you to live in a country ...?

varlabel DEMOC

#### *Randomize statement order*

- A. that is governed democratically

**Label end points of ruler 1-10 “Not at all important” on the left and “Very important” on the right.**

#### Q24B DEMOCRACY FUND – Single Text Choice

Which of these statements comes closest to your view?

varlabel DEMOCFUND

- 1. Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government
- 2. In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable

3. For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have

**Q12 INSTITUTIONAL TRUST -- Clickable Rule Widget**

On a scale from 1 ('No trust at all) to 10 (Completely trust), how much, if at all, do you trust

varlabel INTTRUST

***Randomize Item Order***

- A. The Federal Government in Washington DC
- B. The State Government of Wisconsin

***Label end points of ruler 1-10 "No Trust at All" on the left and "Completely Trust" on the right.***

**Q101 PARTICIPATION: REGISTERED TO VOTE – Single Text Choice with pop-up**

Are you registered to vote?

varlabel REGISTERED

1. Yes
2. No (to POP UP Q102)
3. Don't Know (to POP UP Q102)

**Q102 POP UP FOLLOW UP**

Are you planning to register to vote for the 2022 general election in Wisconsin?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Don't Know

**Q103 PARTICIPATION – Single Text Choice**

How likely are you to vote in the upcoming election on November 8, 2022?

varlabel PART

1. Definitely will vote (Go to Q104A)
2. Probably will vote (Go To Q104A)
3. Maybe will vote (Go To Q104B)
4. Probably will not vote (Go To Q104B)
5. Definitely will not vote (Go To Q104B)
6. Not sure (Go To Q104B)

**Q104A. LIKELY TO VOTE – SINGLE CHOICE**

What is the most important reason that you are likely to vote in the upcoming election on November 8, 2022?

What is the second most important reason that are you likely to vote in the upcoming election on November 8, 2022?

**Randomize response options 1 through 11**

1. Democracy can solve real problems. Voting is how my voice is heard.
2. While politicians have to compromise to get things done. Voting is the way to get better compromises.
3. I like one of the candidates running for office. They are like me
4. Democracy is slow, but they system is working to fix racism, sexism and inequality in the country
5. Voting is the way to stop special interests from rigging the system against people like me
6. I trust some of the politicians running for office to stand up for me.
7. When it comes to voting, I know who to believe and who to ignore. My vote can make a difference.
8. It is my duty and responsibility to vote. I care about democracy and government.
9. All the arguing and fighting among politicians says to me my vote is important and necessary to get the changes I care about
10. If I want the system to work for people like me, I have to vote.
11. I vote because I am happy with things the way things are going in the United States right now.
12. Don't know

**Q104B. NOT LIKELY TO VOTE – MOST IMPORTANT & SECOND MOST IMPORTANT REASON**

What is the most important reason that are you unlikely to vote in the upcoming election on November 8, 2022? What is the second most important reason that are you unlikely to vote in the upcoming election on November 8, 2022?

varlabel NOTPART

**Randomize response options 1 through 11**

1. Democracy is too slow to solve real problems. Voting won't change anything
2. Once in office, all politicians do is compromise or sell out and fail to solve the problems I care about.
3. I don't like any of the candidates running for office. They aren't like me at all.
  4. I refuse to participate in a system that promotes racism, sexism and inequality
  5. The system is rigged by powerful interests against people like me. My vote won't change that.
  6. I don't trust the government or the politicians running for office.
  7. When it comes to voting, I don't know who to believe. I don't vote because I don't want to make a mistake
  8. I am not interested in democracy, government or voting. None of it is important to me. Why should I care?
  9. All politicians do is argue and fight. Why should I vote for any of them.
  10. My vote won't change anything. The system doesn't work for people like me
  11. I am happy with things the way things are going in the United States right now.
  12. Don't know

## APPENDIX #3

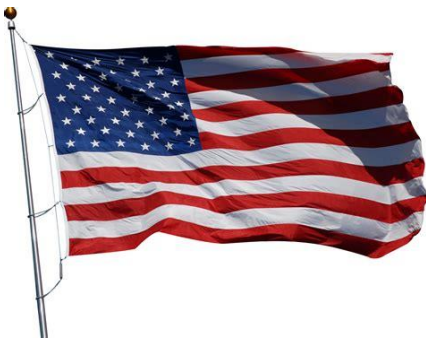
### 0. INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

**Moderator:**

- Welcome and thanks to the participants
- Brief introduction to the focus group for the process and the rules, participant self-intros (short)

### 1. TOP OF MIND THOUGHTS ( minutes)

**Moderator:** *Thank you. Now I'd like you to tell me what comes to your mind when you see this:*



- *What immediately comes to mind?*
- *How do you feel about this?*
  
- *Belonging: Do you feel you belong in the United States?*
  - *Is it your place, your home?*
  - *Is it your country?*

**Moderator:** *Was there a time when you felt...*

- *Good about America?*
  - *When was it?*
  - *What was it?*
  
- *Proud to be an American?*
  - *When was it?*
  - *Why?*

**Moderator (Quickly):** *Is there a person from America's history who you admire?*

- *Who?*
- *Why, What makes this person special to you?*

**Moderator (Quickly):** *What about today, is there a person in America today that you admire?*

- *Who?*

- Why?

**Moderator:** *Now I'd like you to think about the future.*

- What do you think the future (let's say the next few years) will be like in America?
  - **Probe:** Why?
- How will someone like you be doing in America in the future?
- Can you do anything to make the future better for people like you in America?
  - Is there anything you can do to make a difference?

## COMMUNITY

**Moderator:** *Now, thinking about today again, when you hear the phrase **community**...*

- What, if anything, comes to mind?
- What is your community?
  - How do you define it?
  - How do you feel about it?
- Is there an image that says to you **my community**
- How do you feel about how things are going in your community today?
  - Why?
- Now, what do you think the future will be like for you and people living in your community?

**Moderator:** *When you hear the phrase "make a difference," what do you think of?*

- What difference do you think about?
- Can you make a difference?
  - Where can you make a difference
  - What can you do to make a difference?

## 2. PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

**Moderator:** *Here is a word I would like you to react to. I want you to write down what first comes to your mind when I say the word. You can write down anything – a word, phrase, sentence or more. Please write it down and don't say anything until I ask you. Ready?*

- **Democracy:** *What comes to mind when you I say the word: Democracy?*
  - **Moderator:**
    - Have everyone read their written reactions. As they read classify the reaction as positive, negative and neutral
    - Then, follow up and probe those who had a positive reaction to the word.
      - *Why did you react positively to the word democracy*
        - *What's good about democracy?*
        - *What does democracy mean to you?*
        - *How would you improve it in the United States?*

- Then, follow up and probe those who had a negative reaction to the word.
      - *Why did you react negatively to the word democracy?*
        - *Why is democracy bad to you?*
        - *Could it be improved in the United States?*
          - *How*
    - [Then, if necessary] follow up and probe those who had a neutral reaction to the word.
      - *Why did you feel neutral about the word democracy?*
        - *What would improve it?*
  - *Growing up did you learn about democracy?*
    - *Who or what did you learn it from?*
    - *What about democracy did you learn?*
  - *Do you think America today is a democracy or not?*
    - *How many say it is a democracy?*
      - *What makes it a democracy?*
    - *How many say it isn't a democracy*
      - *Why isn't it a democracy*
      - *Does that concern you?*

**Moderator:** *Thank you. Now I'd like you to tell me what comes to your mind when you see this:*



- *What comes to mind when you see this?*
- *How does it make you feel?*
- *Does it say anything to you about the future in the United States?*
  - *How about the future of democracy?*
  -
- *Should we do something to protect democracy in the United States?*
  - *Can we do anything to protect democracy in the United States?*
  - *Can you do anything to protect democracy in the United States?*

- *Would you be ok if America was no longer a democracy?*

### **3. DEMOCRATIC OPTIONS & OUTCOMES**

**Moderator [Show LIST A on Screen and Read it]:** *Here are some things people say about democracy. Which one, if any, comes closest to how you feel today about democracy in the United States. Please write down the number after I have read them and then we will talk about them.*

1. *For someone like me, it doesn't matter whether the United States is a democracy or not.*
2. *I don't know enough about what democracy is to care whether we have one in the United States*
3. *Having a strong leader who gets things done and doesn't have to bother with Congress and elections is better than democracy*
4. *None of the Above*

- **Moderator:** Poll participants to find out how many chose each option on LIST A. Then discuss, from most selected to least, why participants made their choices. And how they feel about the different options.

- **Moderator [Show LIST B on Screen and Read it]:** *Here are some other things people say about democracy. Which one, if any, comes closest to how you feel today about democracy in the United States. Please write down the number after I have read them and then we will talk about them.*

5. *Democracy in the United States has promoted racism, sexism and inequality. The system hasn't worked the way it is supposed to.*
6. *When it comes to solving problems, democracy is just too slow. We need a government system that works faster.*
7. *In the times we are in today, a non-democratic government that actually works for people like me is preferable to a democratic form of government.*
8. *None of the above*

- **Moderator:** Poll participants to find out how many chose each option on LIST B. Then discuss, from most selected to least, why participants made their choices. And how they feel about the different options.

- **Moderator:** Now ask participants to choose which of the statements from LISTS A & B comes closest to how they feel about democracy today in the United States. Short probe of final answers.



#### 4. CONCEPTS A

**Moderator:** Here are some words and phrases I would like you to look at [**SHOW ENTIRE LIST IN BOLD**]. Take a look at them for a minute and write down which ones, if any, are important to you and how you live your life today.

- **We the People**
- **Rule of Law**
- **Created Equal**
- **Liberty**
- **Equal Justice Under the Law**
- **Freedom**

**Moderator:** Read through the list to discern (show of hands) how many people

- Think a word/phrase is important
  - Then ask: *Why is it important to you?*

**Moderator:** Looking at the list again, are there any that you would say are a myth, a fairy tale or simply no believable?

- Which ones, if any,
- Who uses words and phrases like this

#### 5. CONCEPTS B

**Moderator:** Here are a few more words and phrases for you to react to [READ LIST ONE-BY-ONE THIS TIME]. For each one I want to know immediately what comes to your mind when you hear it.

- **One person, One vote:** What comes to mind when you hear the phrase: *One person, one vote?*
  - Probe
  - *Is this the way it works in America today?*
- **I Can't Breathe:** What comes to mind when you hear the phrase: *I Can't Breathe?*
  - Probe
- **Black Lives Matter:** What comes to mind when you hear the phrase: *Black Lives Matter?*
  - Probe
- **White Supremacy:** What comes to mind when you hear the phrase: *White Supremacy?*
  - Probe
- **UnAmerican:** What comes to mind when you hear the phrase: *UnAmerican?*
  - Probe

**Moderator:** Which of these words and phrases are most important to you?

- *Why?*

*Some people talk about the “American Experiment.”*

- *What do you think of when you hear the phrase American experiment?*
- *What about the phrase “American Idea?” What does American idea mean to you?*

*Are any of these last six phrases linked or tied to the concept of the “American Experiment” or the “American Idea”*

*Which ones?*

## **6. CLOSING EXERCISE**

**Moderator:** One last question before we leave tonight. Please complete the following sentence:

## APPENDIX #4

“Can freedom become a burden, too heavy for a man to bear, something he tries to escape from?”

Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*

**DATA ON DEMOCRACY:** The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute’s<sup>41</sup> Democracy Report 2022 documents that democratic deconsolidation is a growing global problem. Countries with liberal democratic forms of governing (34 nations representing only 13% of the world’s population) are down to the lowest level in 25 years. Thirty countries, with 26% of the world’s population, are now closed autocracies. And “a record 35 countries suffered significant deteriorations in freedom of expression”<sup>42</sup> -- up from 5 countries just 10 years ago.

Using different metrics, Freedom House<sup>43</sup> has measured 16 consecutive years (since 2005) of decline in global freedom. And the Economist’s Democracy Index fell to its lowest level since it was established in 2006, reflecting an “unprecedented withdrawal of civil liberties among developed democracies and authoritarian regimes alike”<sup>44</sup> spurred on by Covid-19.

Of the 167 countries that comprise the Democracy Index only 21 are full democracies. Another 53 are flawed democracies. The United States fell from *full democracy* to *flawed democracy* status in the 2017 Democracy Index and, five years later, continues to lose ground in terms of democratic practice and performance.

The deterioration of democracy documented by these different global measures has occurred with a concomitant rise in the four factors indicative of potential or actual “democratic deconsolidation”<sup>45</sup> at a national level. The increasing potential for deconsolidation is accompanied by a “disquieting” fact: Support for foundational elements of representative democracy (for example, free and fair elections) is “weaker among younger voters”<sup>46</sup> in the United States and Europe.<sup>47</sup>

Using a different measurement to explore why Americans support “alternatives to democracy,” the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group found in 2017 that only 54% of Americans consistently supported

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<sup>41</sup> Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg

<sup>42</sup> V-Dem *Democracy Report 2022*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Freedom House, [freedomhouse.org/country/united-states/freedom-world/2022](https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-states/freedom-world/2022).

<sup>44</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2021 The China Challenge*, p. 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Foa & Mounk, The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect, *Journal of Democracy*, July 2016, V27 N3. The four factors measured are support for democracy as a whole, support for key institutions, willingness to work within the guardrails of the existing democratic system of government, and openness to authoritarian alternatives -- including military rule.

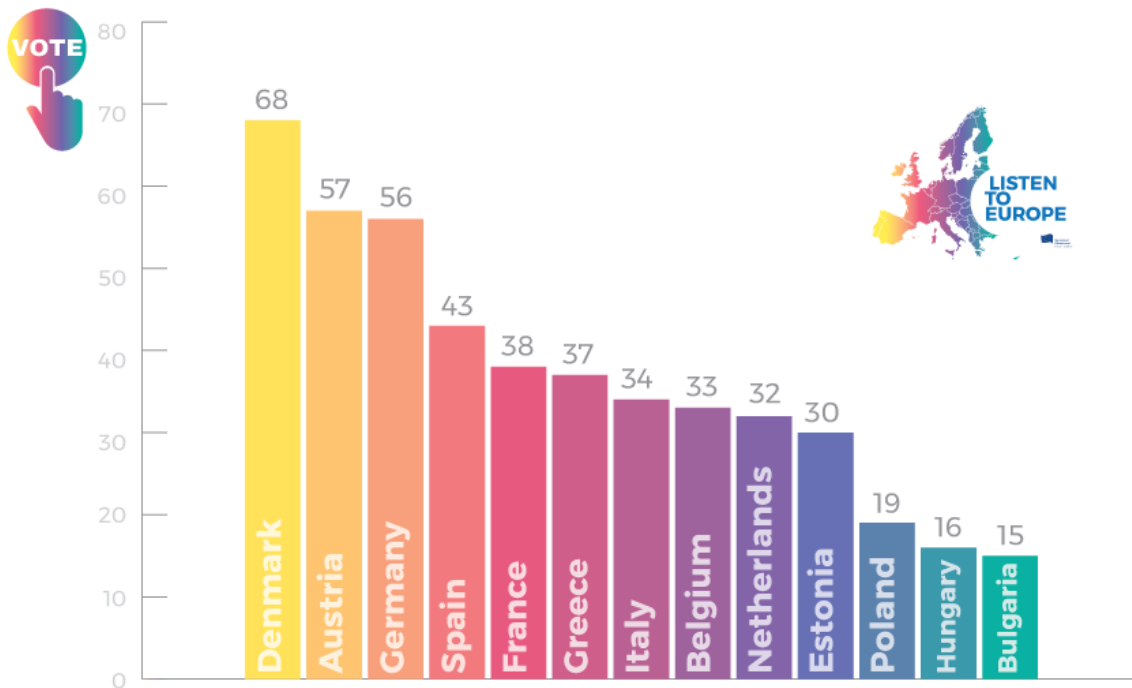
<sup>46</sup> Foa & Mounk, *The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect*, *Journal of Democracy*, July 2016, V27 N3, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> The lower support for democratic practices in the United States and Europe is not a global phenomenon. For example, Foa & Mounk note that “the opposite pattern is found in places such as China, India, and sub-Saharan Africa (p.10).” My own research in Ukraine also found greater support among younger age cohorts for foundational democratic practices.

democracy.<sup>48</sup> And almost three in 10 (29%) of Americans between the ages of 23 and 29 agreed that “democracy is not always a preferable” form of government.<sup>49</sup>

The measurement of consistency of support used by the Voter Study Group is compelling. In 2019, I replicated it in surveys in 13 European countries. The results of these surveys were stunning; and a clear and present warning for anyone who cares about the future of democracy (see chart below).

**DEMOCRACY** The percentage of people who always support democracy.



*This measurement is based on five questions that ask about democratic governance and institutions. The reported percentage represents people who gave pro-democracy answers to every question.*

Moreover, in country-after-country surveyed, consistent support for democracy among younger citizens (18-29 years of age) was statistically lower than older citizens. A follow-up survey in eight countries in Europe in 2021 confirmed these findings.

**KNOWLEDGE & HYPOTHESIS:** From this research, there is a solid base of knowledge. There is also a remaining question (in terms of the United States) to test as an hypothesis.

KNOWLEDGE: It is clear that

- support for democracy is falling globally,

<sup>48</sup> Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, *Follow the Leader*, [www.voterstudygroup.org](http://www.voterstudygroup.org), p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, *Follow the Leader*, [www.voterstudygroup.org](http://www.voterstudygroup.org), p. 17. PLEASE NOTE: Among the same age cohort, only 9% agreed that a strong leader who does not pay attention to elections or Congress is a very good or somewhat good way to run America.

- consistent support for democracy is lower than elites, policymakers, advocates, and progressive activists in Europe and the United States assume, and
- in several European nations consistent support for democracy is lower among young citizens (18-29) than old.

HYPOTHESIS: From a review of existing data, in the United States it appears that

- consistent support for democracy is also lower among young citizens (23-29!) than older Americans.

This hypothesis is debated, however, and needs to be examined. In doing so, the age range tested in the United States need to be expanded to 18-29.

The preliminary assumptions of the reasons for the lower support for democracy among young people are:

#1. For younger audiences, used to the speed, immediacy, and immediate feedback/implementation of the internet, democratic decision making seems archaic and out of touch with reality.

- Impatience with the process of governing democratically

#2. As a corollary, democracy – and the compromise it entails – is standing in the way of solving what are clear and present dangers to younger audiences – climate change for example.

- Problem solving derailed

#3. The people they see practicing democracy do not look like them or act like them

- Generational divide

#4. In their lifetimes (and in history) democratic outcomes have countenanced and, at times promoted, racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, economic inequality, colonialism etc...

- Democracy producing outcomes they consider immoral and unethical. (The notion of working towards a more perfect union that lives up to the aspirations of the Declaration of Independence seems like selling out fundamental values.

#5. Democracy (and government) is captured by and the playground of special interest. Their input is not wanted.

- This age cohort rejects government as a solution and (in some surveys) is more likely to volunteer and build social capital

#6. Institutions – government and others – are untrustworthy

- Lack of trust in institutions is a comorbidity of 1-5.

#7. Post Truth information environment. (This is a more recent contributing factor I believe.)

#8. Lack of civic instruction and historical understanding.

- They know less about why democracy is important and have never experienced a time (the Russian threat and global rise of autocracy is a very distant concern for them) when democracy was in danger
- Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it!

#9. Polarized politics is an anathema to many young people (those it doesn't grip and engage). This dislike disempowers them, dissuades them from participating or thinking that they can make a difference.

#10. The system does not and has not delivered – and seems incapable of delivering -- the change they demand (a corollary to #2).

## APPENDIX #5

### Online Discussion Board Guide: Democracy in America – Day One

**Audiences:** Inconsistent Supporters of Democracy, 18-29, separated into Black Americans and white Americans

**Online Discussion Board Dates:**

**Question Masking:**

- **Full Masked/INTERVIEW:** The participants NEVER see each other's answers.
- **Partially Masked/UNINFLUENCED:** The participants ONLY see each other's answers after they have left their own response. This is good for eliminating bias from other's previous responses, but still allows the participants to see and react to the other's answers later.
- **Unmasked/REGULAR:** The participants can see each other's answers before they've left their own response.

#### DAY ONE – SECTION 1

Welcome! My name is Nicole, and I will be guiding you through our online discussion over the next three days. The purpose of our discussion is to get your thoughts and opinions related to important issues affecting people in America (don't worry, I'll provide more specifics as we move further into the discussion). I am an independent researcher, which means I'm interested in all points of view. There are no wrong answers here. **I really just want to hear your honest opinions. I want to hear good and bad things. The more details the better!** Note that if I do not understand something you write, or need more clarification, I may ask a follow-up question. Please respond to these follow-up questions as soon as you can. All questions must be answered for complete participation.

#### Text Response [Unmasked]

Are you ready to share your true, honest opinion? If so, choose "Yes, I understand and am ready to get started" below.

- Yes, I understand and am ready to get started

**1. Text Response [Unmasked]** Hi everyone! Once again, I'm Nicole and I will be the moderator for this project. I live in a small town and when I am not moderating research projects, I enjoy spending time cooking for friends and family. I have a dog named Toffee and love hiking with her. I look forward to learning more about each of you over the next day or so – and in the next few months. We'll do about an hour of questions this month, then again in February and March. Once you finish all the questions for the month (the board will be "open" for about 48 hours), you will receive our "thank you" (\$75 each month). If you participate for all three months, you get a bonus of \$125!

Please take a moment to tell me a little about yourself.

- Help me get a general picture of who you are (your job, interests, significant other/spouse/children, anything that you think is important). I'd love to hear what makes you unique. If you'd like, you can upload a video about yourself instead of or in addition to a written response.

2. **Text response [Partially Masked]** Thank you. Now, I'd like to show you an image. Please tell me the first thing that comes to your mind when you see it (this can be a word, phrase or idea).



3. **Text response [Partially Masked]** Okay, tell me why do you feel that way about the flag? (**Explain why you choose the word or phrase you did in the previous question**)
4. **Text response [Partially Masked]** And do you feel you belong in the United States today? Why or why not?
5. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** Now I'd like you to fill in this blank. *Democracy is.....* And then, tell me WHY you feel this way.
6. **Picture Response 1 [Partially Masked]** Using the internet, find and upload a photo or image that represents democracy in America to you. Try to do this without specifically searching the word "democracy."
7. **Picture Response 2 [Fully Masked]** Why does this photo or image represent democracy to you?
8. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** Do you participate in democracy in America? If yes, HOW do you participate? If no, why don't you participate?
9. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** Are there any other ways you can see yourself participating in democracy? What are they? Why don't you do those things now?
10. **Text response [Partially Masked]** Now I'd like you to fill in another blank. This one is: *Freedom is.....* And then, tell me why you feel this way.
11. **Picture Response 3 [Partially Masked]** Using the internet, find and upload a photo or image that represents freedom to you. Try to do this without specifically searching the word "freedom."
12. **Picture Response 4 [Fully Masked]** Why does this photo or image represent freedom to you?
13. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** What freedoms are most important to you and why?
14. **Text Response [Fully Masked]** Now take a look back at the different images for democracy and freedom that others posted in Questions 6 and 13. Is there one image that stands out or means more to you than the others? If so, which one and why?
15. **Text Response [Fully Masked]** Now thinking about democracy and freedom a bit more, is one of these ideas more important to you than the other? If so, which one and why?



16. **Notice:** Thanks so much for your participation so far. Please log in again later today to continue our discussion OR continue now to the next question(s) if you like.

**DAY ONE – SECTION 2**

17. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** Welcome back. Now, I'd like to show you an image and get the first thing that comes to your mind when you see it. [Please write the first word, words or phrase that comes to your mind]



18. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** How do you feel about the U.S. Constitution? Why did you choose the word/words or phrase you did?

19. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** When and how did you learn about the U.S. Constitution?

20. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** Does the Constitution work in today's America? What tells you that the Constitution is working or not working?

21. **Multiple Choice [Fully Masked]** Which of the following comes closest to how you feel about the U.S. Constitution?

- The Constitution should not be changed. It is fine as it is.
- Minor changes should be made to the Constitution to update it.
- Major changes should be made to the Constitution to update it
- The constitution should be completely overhauled so that it reflects the values of Americans today and the changing times.
- What is in the Constitution doesn't really matter to me.

22. **Text Response [Fully Masked]** Why did you choose A, B, C, D or E? Please explain as fully as possible.

23. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** Now, I'd like to show you an image and get the first thing that comes to your mind when you see it. [Please write the first word, words or phrase that comes to your mind]



24. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** How does the image in the previous question make you feel about the future of democracy in the United States?

25. **Text Response [Partially Masked]** Do you think the United States is a democracy right now? IF yes, what tells you that the United States is a democracy today? IF no, what tells you it is not a democracy?

26. **Multiple Choice [Partially Masked]** Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?

- A. *For someone like me, it doesn't matter whether the United States is a democracy or not.*

- B. *Having a strong leader who gets things done and doesn't have to bother with Congress and elections is better than democracy.*
- C. *When it comes to solving problems, democracy is just too slow. We need a government system that works faster.*
- D. *In the times we are in today, a non-democratic government that actually works for people like me is preferable to a democratic form of government.*
- E. *Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone.*
- F. *None of the above*

**27. Text Response {Fully Masked}** Why did you choose A, B, C, D, E, or F in the previous question?

**28. Multiple Choice [Partially Masked]:** Which word or phrase below is most important to you and how you think about America today? [RESPONSES ROTATED]

- a. We the People
- b. Rule of Law
- c. Created Equal
- d. Liberty
- e. Equal Justice Under the Law
- f. Freedom

**29. Text Response [Fully Masked]** Why did you choose the word/phrase you did in the previous question?

**30. Text Response [Partially Masked]** Please fill in this blank: America would be a great place if.....

**31. Text Response [Partially Masked]** What could you do personally to make America a great place to live?

**32. Text Response [Partially Masked]** Does making America a better place begin in your community, your state, or nationally? Please explain your answer.

**33. Text Response [Partially Masked]** Can you name anyone, or do you know of anyone, who is working to make America a better place right now? Who is it and HOW are they working to make America a better place?

**Thank you! If you completed all the questions for Day 1 (and any follow-up questions which may come to you via email), you will receive your first payment in 7-10 days. Look for an email link for Day 2 in February! [Remember, you will receive payment of \$75 after each completed session, and a \$125 bonus if you complete all three sessions!] Your opinions are very appreciated! It's not required, but I'd love to hear your thoughts about this first day of questions or anything you'd like to share...have a great day!**

## Online Discussion Board Guide: Democracy in America – Day Two (February 2023)

### DAY TWO – SECTION 1

34. Text response [Partially Masked] – Welcome back to the discussion we started last month! Remember, I want to hear your candid opinions – there are no right or wrong answers. I really want to understand what you are thinking, so be sure to EXPLAIN your answers as completely as you can so I don't need to bug you with a lot of follow-up questions. Please be sure to answer any follow-up questions I do send your way so you can full participation credit.

One more thing – don't forget to read and comment on other people's responses – this is a lot more interesting and fun if it's interactive.

Are you ready to get started and share your honest opinions? Give me a quick “yes” and a one-word description of how you're *feeling* right now (your mood, state of mind, etc.)

35. Text/Pic/Video response [Partially Masked] I'd like to know a bit more about you and for you to get to know each other as well. If you haven't already done so, add a picture to your profile of something you care about or think about a lot, and then EXPLAIN/DESCRIBE it here. If you already have an avatar photo, post another photo here or post a video describing something you care about or think about a lot (it can be anything that means a lot to you, or would help someone understand who you are/what matters to you). [Hint: to add a photo to your profile...click on Profiles tab at top→View profile→Use default avatar→Upload new avatar...then choose a photo and upload. It might take a few moments. Once the photo is uploaded, you will click on it to make it your avatar.]

36. Text/Pic/Video response [Partially Masked] Using the internet, find and post here a photo of someone from American history that you admire. Then EXPLAIN/DESCRIBE who it is and WHY did you choose them?

37. Text response [Partially Masked] If your historical figure looked at democracy in America today, what do you think they would say about it?

- What would your historical figure feel is the biggest threat to democracy in America today?
- What would your historical figure do to improve or fix democracy in America today?

38. Multiple Choice 1 [Fully Masked] Which of the following statements comes closest to how you feel about democracy in America today? [Pick one and then EXPLAIN your thought process]

- There's too much hatred and chaos today to have a real democracy in America today. Democracy could work in America, but just not with how the U.S. is now.

- The government needs to be overthrown and clearly people are willing to do that. Power needs to be taken from those in charge and the people need more of a voice. That's a real democracy.
- The US is getting worse and worse by the day. There's fires, protests, and shootings everywhere now. I think our future is going to get worse as long as we stay a democracy.
- Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone.
- None of the above.

**39. Text response [Partially Masked]** Which of these statements do you disagree with the most? [Pick one and then EXPLAIN what makes you disagree with it]

**40. Text response [Partially Masked]** Which photo comes closer to how you feel about America today? [Pick #1 or #2 and EXPLAIN your thought process] NOTE 2<sup>nd</sup> VISUAL WAS CHANGED TO "Love It & Work TO Fix It"



**41. Text response [Partially Masked]** FOR THOSE WHO CHOSE...LEAVE IT: Who should leave America? Why? How would this help America? FOR THOSE WHO CHOSE...WORK TO FIX IT. What can be done to fix America? Who is responsible for doing this work?

**42. Multiple Choice and Text response [Fully Masked]** Which of these statements do you prefer? [Pick one and EXPLAIN your thought process]

- Using democracy and constitutional processes to find solutions to America's problems
- Requiring racial and gender equity in America
- Limiting the power of the federal government
- Reinstating Roe vs. Wade to protect a woman's right to choose

**43. Text response [Fully Masked]** FOR THOSE WHO CHOSE...B, C, or D: If the action/statement you chose was accomplished through Executive power instead of constitutional process, would you still choose it? EXPLAIN your thought process.

**44. Text Response [Masked]** We have only one more short exercise before I give you a break. I want you to take some time researching online, about 15 minutes, to look up volunteering in your community. Find a type of volunteer work you would really like to do if you had the time. This doesn't have to be something that exists in your community right now, but it could be. When you have found an activity/action/effort you like and think would be great to do, write down a few sentences describing it for everyone.

45. **Text Response [Masked]** Now, write down a few sentences about what makes this type of volunteering in your community appealing. Why is it important to you?
46. **Text Response [Masked]** Finally, I'd like you to write a few sentences trying to convince the other people on this board today to sign up and volunteer with you. What would you say to a friend, classmate, colleague, or new acquaintance to get them to participate in that volunteer activity?
47. **Text Response [Masked]:** Thanks so much for your participation so far. We're going to do a little break to give everyone a chance to post their ideas. Please log in again later today (anytime after 1pm Eastern/10am Pacific) to continue our discussion.

**DAY 2, SECTION 2**

48. **Text Response [Masked] Welcome back!** Okay, now everyone please go back and read all the responses in questions 11-13 about volunteer opportunities. Once you have done that, I want you to describe the volunteer opportunity (or opportunities) you would be most likely to choose to do if you had the time and name the person or people who mentioned it. (You can always choose your own, but please pick at least one other activity/action/effort that someone else mentioned).
49. **Text Response [Masked]** What **specifically** appealed to you about the volunteer opportunity (or opportunities) you chose? Please list TWO OR MORE things that are appealing about the activity/action/effort(s) you chose.
50. **Text Response [Masked]** What difference do you think that action/activity/effort would make in your community? Please be descriptive – imagine you were trying to convince your boss to give you paid time off from work to volunteer or trying to get a local group to fund the activity.
51. **Picture Response #3 [Partially Masked]** Thank you. Now, something different. Tell me the first *feeling or reaction* you have when you see this image. Give me the first word, words or phrase that describes your feeling/reaction and EXPLAIN what makes you feel/react that way to the photo.



52. **Text response [Masked]** Do you think it is possible to have the freedom and liberty promised by the Statue of Liberty in the United States without having a representative form of democracy as our government? Don't forget to EXPLAIN your thought process...
53. **Text response [Masked]** Some people say that "real responsibilities come with the freedoms guaranteed to us as American citizens." Do you agree or disagree – and WHY?

**54. Text response [Masked]** *If you agree:* what responsibilities do you see yourself having to your community and your country as a citizen? *If you disagree,* tell me more how we have guaranteed freedoms without real responsibilities. How does that work?

**55. Text response [Masked]** Some people describe “freedom” in America as “doing what you want,” or “saying what you want.” Does society need any limits on “doing what you want,” or “saying what you want?” If so, how should the limits to freedom be determined?

**56. Multiple choice & text response [Masked]** Which statement comes closest to your view:  
[Chose one and then EXPLAIN your thought process]

“The right to vote is an important freedom in America and the election process should encourage participation of all eligible voters.”

OR

“Limits and restrictions on voting are necessary to ensure election integrity, even if they discourage participation or make it difficult for some citizens.”

**57. Text response [Masked]** How big a problem is election fraud? Do you feel stopping all election fraud is more important than making voting accessible to all eligible voters? Please EXPLAIN your thinking.

**58. Text response [Masked]** Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement? Please EXPLAIN your response.

It should be more difficult to register to vote.

**59. Text response [Masked]** Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement? Please EXPLAIN your response.

Polls should only be open on Election Day (no early voting allowed).

**60. Text response [Masked]** Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement? Please EXPLAIN your response.

Restricting the number of polling places discourages participation in elections.

**61. Text response [Masked]** Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement? Please EXPLAIN your response.

Mail-in voting encourages election fraud.

**62. Text response [Masked]** Thank you! If you completed all the questions for Day 2 (and any follow-up questions I sent you), you will receive your 2<sup>nd</sup> payment in 7-10 days. Look for an email link for Day 3 in March. (Don't forget you get an extra \$125 if you complete all three days). It's not required, but I'd love to hear any overall reactions or feelings you have about this discussion...and thanks again for your honest opinions!

## Online Discussion Board Guide: Democracy in America – Day Three (March 2023)

### DAY THREE – SECTION 1

**63. Text response [Partially Masked]** – Welcome back to our third and final month of discussion! So glad you're here! Remember, I want to hear your candid opinions – there are no right or wrong answers. I really want to understand what you are thinking, so be sure to EXPLAIN your answers as completely as you can so I don't need to bug you with a lot of follow-up questions. Please be sure to answer any follow-up questions I do send your way so you can full participation credit.

One more thing – don't forget to read and comment on other people's responses – this is a lot more interesting and fun if it's interactive. Are you ready to get started and share your honest opinions? Give me a quick "yes" and a brief description of the last social media post you saw (or made yourself), including what platform (i.e. TikTok, Insta, etc.)

**64. Text/Pic/Video response [Partially Masked]** I

I want to apologize that this platform does not keep your profile pics from one session to the next. I have requested they make this programming adjustment for future studies...

To start this time, I want you to upload here (and/or add as your profile pic), the photo of someone you admire/respect/pay attention to who has a currently active public profile or presence.

- Person can be from any interest/industry/skill (i.e. entertainment, sports, business, etc.)
- Can be a local or national figure
- Known widely (i.e. mainstream media) or in/on a social or professional network
- NOT someone in your family or a personal friend

\*\*\*AFTER YOU UPLOAD THE PHOTO, please tell WHY this person is someone you admire/respect and would be inclined to pay attention to them.

[Hint: to add a photo to your profile...click on Profiles tab at top→View profile→Use default avatar→Upload new avatar...then choose a photo and upload. It might take a few moments. Once the photo is uploaded, you will click on it to make it your avatar.]

**65. Text response [Partially Masked]** Now I'd like you to fill in this blank to finish this sentence.

*Democracy is.....*

**66. Text response [Partially Masked]** What makes you describe democracy in this way?

**67. Text response [Partially Masked]** Is there a difference in your mind between democracy and the Democratic party? Don't look this up! Please explain in your own words either 1) HOW they are the same OR... 2) HOW are they different?

**68. Multiple Choice [Partially Masked]** Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion?

*G. For someone like me, it doesn't matter whether the United States is a democracy or not.*

- H. *Having a strong leader who gets things done and doesn't have to bother with Congress and elections is better than democracy.*
- I. *When it comes to solving problems, democracy is just too slow. We need a government system that works faster.*
- J. *In the times we are in today, a non-democratic government that actually works for people like me is preferable to a democratic form of government.*
- K. *Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone.*
- L. *None of the above*

**69. Text response [Partially Masked]** Please explain what made you choose the statement you did in the previous question.

**70. Multiple Choice and text response [Partially Masked]** Now, take a look at this list of words. Of all these words, pick one that is most important to you as a person and then EXPLAIN what makes it most important.

- A. Faith
- B. Sharing
- C. Service
- D. Fairness
- E. Equality
- F. Community
- G. Trust
- H. Equality
- I. Unity
- J. Compassion

**71. Text response [Partially Masked]** We talked a lot about volunteering in your community, but never asked if you do any volunteer work now. Do you volunteer in your community now and, if so, what do you do?

**72. Text response [Partially Masked]** Whether you volunteer in your community now or not, what is a good reason to do it?

**73. Text response [Partially Masked]** And what, if anything stands in your way of volunteering to help out in your community? Think deeply: what would help you overcome that hurdle and actually start to volunteer?

**74. Text response [Partially Masked]** A Member of Congress from Georgia, Marjorie Taylor Greene, posted this Tweet on Twitter about a month ago as a solution to the problems in the United States. Do you think this is a solution? Why or why not? What does “separating by red and blue states” mean for the country?





75. **Text response [Partially Masked]** What does a “national divorce” where the United States is “separated into red and blue states” mean to you? Would it affect your life? If so, how?
76. **Text response [Partially Masked]** How does this make you feel about the future of democracy in the United States?
77. **Text Response [Partially masked]:** Thanks so much for your participation so far. We’re going to do a little break to give everyone a chance to post their ideas. Please log in again later today (anytime after 1pm Eastern/10am Pacific) to continue our discussion.

### DAY 3, SECTION 2

78. **Text response [Partially Masked]** Here are eight community-based volunteer opportunities. Tell me (by the letters) which, if any, would you volunteer for - you can choose one, two, or none of these. Then, use a few sentences to EXPLAIN why you picked those opportunities or why none appealed to you.
- A. Working to raise civic literacy and foster social justice in your community by volunteering with a Christian civic organization
  - B. Helping unemployed, underemployed and ex-offenders receive essential job skills training and counselling so they can get a good job in your community
  - C. Participating or volunteering at local community debates and workshops designed to heal partisan political divides and foster patriotic-empathy among citizens
  - D. Building a culture of powerful and responsible citizenship by mentoring teenagers on civic responsibility and developing collaborative solutions to problems in your community
  - E. Encouraging young people, especially those affected by racism and harmful policing and justice policies, to actively participate in the community and vote
  - F. Volunteer on civic projects where young and old people join together to solve problems in the community
  - G. Volunteer out at a workforce development program in your community that helps Black Americans develop marketable skills in technology and social media
  - H. Work with others to build connections and understanding among people in your community and weave a rich, social community fabric based on trust and love

**79. Multiple Choice [Partially Masked]** MULTIPLE CHOICE: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I think that by volunteering I can create positive change in my community?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Somewhat Agree
- C. Somewhat Disagree
- D. Strongly Disagree
- E. Don't know

**80. Text response [Partially Masked]** Why did you (Agree/Disagree) in the previous question? How do you define positive change?

**81. Text response [Partially Masked]** Here are six more community-based volunteer opportunities (training and guidance would be provided for each of these opportunities). Tell me (by the letters) which, if any, would you volunteer for - you can choose one, two, or none of these. Then, use a few sentences to EXPLAIN why you picked those opportunities or why none appealed to you.

- I. Clean up the environment where you live: Pick up trash, clean streams, remove invasive plants, maintain community trails
- J. Help out in our local animal shelter: Walk, feed, train, and socialize shelter dogs and cats; clean living spaces, staff "meet and greets" with prospective adopters
- K. Mentoring and tutor local kids: Through Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, camps, or afterschool programs, help kids with academic and social skills, teach technical skills (i.e. design, computers, photography, etc.) or coach (sports, conflict management, life skills)
- L. Help kids with disabilities and learning differences: Work with the Special Olympics and other community organizations to support kids with special needs
- M. Volunteer at the local food bank: Collect, sort, organize and distribute food to individuals and families at the food bank or help organize regular food drives in the community
- N. Volunteer in the local community gardens: Work with people in the community to grow healthy vegetables and fruits for people who need it. Learn how to garden while helping grow the community

**82. Multiple Choice and text [Partially Masked]** You already chose the word from this list that is most important to you. Of the words that remain, which one is the second-most important to you as a person and WHY?

- K. Faith
- L. Sharing
- M. Service
- N. Fairness
- O. Equality
- P. Community
- Q. Trust

- R. Equality
- S. Unity
- T. Compassion

**83. Text response [Partially Masked]** Here are the last six more community-based volunteer opportunities (training and guidance would be provided for each of these opportunities). Tell me (by the letters) which, if any, would you volunteer for - you can choose one, two, or none of these. Then, use a few sentences to EXPLAIN why you picked those opportunities or why none appealed to you.

- O. Help staff out at a local homeless shelter, connect clients to resources or provide supplies to unhoused people and families in the community
- P. Support individuals and families in need during and after emergencies and disasters in conjunction with local Volunteer Fire Departments, medical clinics, or the Red Cross
- Q. Support refugees and individuals/families in need: Distribute furniture, clothes, supplies; connect people to community resources (i.e. adult education, language learning, etc.); and act as community liaison
- R. Support families, seniors and veterans in need by fixing up their homes through your local Habitat for Humanity and other organizations that build, repairing or restore homes residences.
- S. Help out at the local nursing home by supporting medical personnel and staff and socializing with senior residents and patients
- T. Volunteer at the local soup kitchen: Prepare and serve hot meals to people in our community who depend on them.

**84. Text response [Partially Masked]** Of all the volunteer opportunities you have read about in this entire discussion, which one or two are you most interested in finding out more about? What makes these opportunities most interesting? Why do they stand out to you?

**85. Text response [Partially Masked]** Of all the ways you could learn about these volunteer opportunities in your community, which way would be most likely to reach you and catch your attention? If you were trying to inform others like you about these opportunities, how would you do it?

**86. Text response [Partially Masked]** Now I want to take a minute to sum up your thoughts about one of our topics. Thinking about all the discussions we have had over the last three months, what have you heard or learned about **democracy** that sticks out to you? Please explain or be as detailed as you can so I understand what stands out to you.

**87. Text response [Partially Masked]** Finally, what is the one thing, if anything, do you think could be done to improve democracy in the United States?

**88. Text response [Partially masked]** Thank you again for honest opinions. If you completed all the questions for Day 3 (and any follow-up questions I sent you), you will receive your 2<sup>nd</sup> payment in 7-10 days as well as a \$125 bonus for completing all three discussions. It's not required, but I'd love to hear any overall reactions or feelings you have about this research...it has been great hearing your thoughts and getting to know you over these last few months.

## APPENDIX #6

### Selected Foundation Programs: Tested In Qualitative Board 3

Organization	Volunteer Opportunity	Website	Location	Source
AND Campaign	Christian civic organization raising civic literacy and fostering social justice. Sign Prayer and Action Justice Initiative petition to oppose racial injustice on the basis of biblical guidance. Can further volunteer in prayer and addressing social issues on a local or national level, especially on criminal justice and police reform	<a href="https://www.payerandactioncoalition.org">https://www.payerandactioncoalition.org</a>	national	New Pluralists
Baltimoreans United in Leadership Devt	Volunteer with Turnaround Tuesday for "returning" or under/unemployed citizens to receive essential skills training, case management, job readiness, and job placement	<a href="https://turnaroundtuesday.org">https://turnaroundtuesday.org</a>	Baltimore, MD	OSI-Baltimore
Bmore Empowered	Volunteer with the Women's Business Cohort Incubator for Black women business owners in to launch new ventures.	<a href="https://bmoreempowered.org">https://bmoreempowered.org</a>	Baltimore, MD	OSI-Baltimore
Braver Angels	Bi-partisan organization and national movement to bridge the partisan divide and depolarize US politics, by fostering patriotic-empathy for country-citizens. Attend or volunteer to support local community debates and red-blue workshops to heal polarization and the partisan divide	<a href="http://www.braverangels.org">www.braverangels.org</a>	national	New Pluralists
Center for Rural Strategies	Volunteer with "Daily Yonder" digital news platform on rural life - to inform rural Americans and people who care about them about important issues	<a href="https://www.ruralstrategies.org/the-daily-yonder">https://www.ruralstrategies.org/the-daily-yonder</a>	national (not sure if they accept volunteers)	New Pluralists
Citizen University	Builds a culture of powerful, responsible citizenship across the US. Volunteer to mentor teenagers as they develop their moral compass and sense of civic character; or help create a collaborative solutions incubator for your community	<a href="https://citizenuniversity.us/programs/">https://citizenuniversity.us/programs/</a>	national	New Pluralists
Civic Nation	Volunteer with the #BaltimoreVotes initiative to increase civic participation among young people and other Baltimoreans affected by harmful justice policies	<a href="http://civcnation.org">civcnation.org</a>	Baltimore, MD	OSI-Baltimore
CoGenerate	Volunteer with projects where older and younger people join forces to solve problems, bridge divides, and co-create the future while fostering generational solidarity	<a href="http://cogenerate.org">cogenerate.org</a>	seems national	New Pluralists
Generation Citizen	Volunteer with Action Civics - a collaborative, project-based approach to civics education, in which young people actively work through the political process to address issues in their own community	<a href="http://www.generationcitizen.org">www.generationcitizen.org</a> ; <a href="https://www.kickstartactioncivics.org">https://www.kickstartactioncivics.org</a>	CA, TX, MA, NY, OK, RI (not sure if they accept volunteers)	New Pluralists
Monique Bess. OSI Community Fellow	Volunteer with a workforce development program that helps connect Black people to skills in technology and social media. The program will initially focus on youth, ages 18-25.	n/a	Baltimore, MD	OSI-Baltimore
Weave: The social fabric project	Supports weaving interpersonal connections to form a strong social fabric. Participants/volunteers start building connections in their communities and leading the weaving of a rich social fabric based on trust and love to reduce isolation and fear.	<a href="https://weareweavers.org/about/">https://weareweavers.org/about/</a>	seems national	New Pluralists

## APPENDIX #7

### Overviews of Selected Milwaukee, Wisconsin Foundation Programs

We reviewed the 31 foundations based in Milwaukee or greater WI which had made contributions of more than \$1M in the most recent tax year when records were available. The Foundation Directory Online which is part of Candid (candid.org) and other sources were used for this analysis. The full spreadsheet, attached below, includes all 31 with rankings based on their estimated potential to be interested in supporting a follow-up project based on the Democracy in America 2023 study. Here are the top 6.

1 - The Greater Milwaukee Foundation seems like it might be the most appropriate fit. A community foundation of 1,300 pooled funds with the common goal to make communities better. Promoting racial equity and inclusion in the Milwaukee area is a declared goal. They are working to embed racial justice in projects. Very progressive, while not directly political. <https://www.greatermilwaukeefoundation.org>

2, 3 - Herbert H Kohl Charities could also be interested (as you know; they do have a focus on education in urban environments, factors contributing to economic opportunity, and quality of life especially for the marginalized), with \$13.9M in giving in 2019 (<https://www.herbkohlphilanthropies.org>).

3 - The co-founder of Kohl's department stores (Jay Baker) also founded the Patty and Jay Baker Foundation (giving \$1M in most recent year) which theoretically could be invited to join Mr. Kohl's foundation. (website not available)

4-6 - Most of the other foundations seem not to be politically engaged or taking on possibly thorny issues, but are more active in "safe" charitable spaces. That said, there are a couple which at least target urban issues/social equality/inclusion:

- Julieliem Family Foundation - \$1.8M in giving in most recent year; supports diverse progressive causes with a Catholic component (more leaning toward liberation theology?) (no website)

- Bader Philanthropies - \$16M in giving in most recent year; supports progressive causes generally ([www.bader.org](http://www.bader.org))

- Daniel M Soref Charitable Trust - \$3.3M in giving in most recent year (no website)

Rating	Grantmaker	City	Total Assets	Total Giving (most recent year)	Focus areas	Add Info	Website
5	Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Inc.	Milwaukee	\$742,721,258	\$75,546,527	Community fdn of 1,300 pooled funds. Common goal is to make communities better, e.g. to strengthen education & neighborhoods, increase economic opportunities and promote racial equity & inclusion in the greater Milwaukee area. Each donor may have a different goal. Working to embed racial justice alongside a broad variety of goals/projects; most grants are in \$25-50k range	Focused on the greater Milwaukee area (Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee and Washington counties). Civic Engagement department enables the Foundation to take a much more active civic role by expanding partnerships, more strategically and actively engaging interested parties to address community problems, commissioning research to inform and prompt community dialogue, and addressing public policy matters	<a href="https://www.greatermilwaukeefoundation.org">https://www.greatermilwaukeefoundation.org</a>
3.5	Herbert H. Kohl Charities, Inc.	Milwaukee	\$44,810,415	\$13,881,408 (2019)	Education (focus on urban envts), Economic Opportunity (many contributing factors), and Quality of Life (esp for the marginalized); HK Educational Foundation a subset (\$3.22M giving in '19)	Milwaukee focus; seems to take a diversified grantmaking approach - broad understanding of community benefit; MM's friend, so may be strong prospect	<a href="https://www.herbkohlphilanthropies.org">https://www.herbkohlphilanthropies.org</a>
3.5?	Patty and Jay Baker Foundation Inc	Milwaukee	\$1,878,905	\$1,000,000	supporting primarily performing arts, education and health care-large institutions	Jay Baker is co-founder of Kohl's Dept stores; perhaps could be brought in with Mr. Kohl?	
3.5	Jullelem Family Foundation	Milwaukee	\$922,065	\$1,871,000	diverse progressive, with a catholic component	has no public profile/website/etc.	
3?	Daniel M. Soref Charitable Trust	Milwaukee	\$60,701,928	\$3,300,141	diverse education, urban, medical project support	has no public profile/website/etc.	
2.5	Bader Philanthropies, Inc.	Milwaukee	\$19,722,144	\$16,064,265	Alzheimers, community matters, employment, neighborhood, social equality, urban education, arts, youth devt	similar values, but not strong emphasis on democracy and racial issues	<a href="https://www.bader.org">https://www.bader.org</a>

## APPENDIX #8

### Overviews of Selected National Foundation Programs

#### **1. New Pluralists** (a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors) newpluralists.org

**“Many Voices One Future: Building a Nation of Belonging for All”**

*Def. of Pluralism:*

- *a condition or system in which two or more states, groups, principles, sources of authority, etc., coexist. (Oxford languages, languages.oup.com)*
- *Pluralist democracy, a political system with more than one center of power (Wikipedia.org)*

**Overview:** “New Pluralists is dedicated to catalyzing a culture of belonging in the US... Its principles enable us to build a society where we’re able to live among, work with, and care about people who are different from us, including by race and ethnicity, faith, geography, generation, and political beliefs.”  
...transforming relationships and culture...

New Pluralists is a cross-ideological funder collaborative focused on supporting the growing field of practitioners, storytellers, researchers and innovators working to foster a culture of pluralism in America. It works in deep partnership with diverse field leaders, grantees and other partners who are tackling these challenges from different fields and perspectives. To realize the vision of a politically vibrant, multi-racial, multi-faith democracy, it is collaborating to invest at least \$100M in the next decade to renew the promise of America by ushering in a new pluralism. On Sept 15 at the White House’s “United We Stand Summit,” it announced a new initiative to galvanize funders to invest \$1billion over the next 10 years, therein responding to the outpouring of interest to address toxic division. “85% of Americans are exhausted by the current division in politics and looking for ways to work together.”

**Key words/themes:** supporting a culture of inclusion, bridging the divide

#### **2022 RFP: “Healing Starts here: Local Solutions to America’s Divisions”**

Goal: To enable communities to respond to local flashpoints – events that risk eroding trust and respect for one another’s humanity..... deepening our commitment to living in a diverse and welcoming society where everyone feels they can belong and contribute. Focus areas: 1) supporting the leadership of people who are building trust across divides (and often facing burnout), and 2) supporting communities’ efforts to create and act together across differences. Priority interests include supporting local leaders; reclaiming

stories (telling stories rooted in shared traditions, make meaning together, and challenging circumstances that are feeding fear or distrust of neighbors); and taking action across differences

- Grants = \$100-500k (for up to 24 months)
- Application deadlines = July 15 and Aug 31, 2022
- More than 800 proposals were received
- Awards to be announced in early 2023
- Also plan to support complementary research, strategic communications, and relationship-building to help draw insights and learning across projects.

**Field Builders:**

- About 50 individuals who help shape shared the collaborative’s aspirations and strategy
- They contribute across a range of domains from depolarization, social healing, bridge building, and racial reconciliation to immigrant inclusion, collaborative problem-solving, civic skill-building, and interfaith engagement
- They will shape how the work evolves and ensure responses support local community goals/needs so that all in the US see themselves represented in these efforts.

**Opportunity for involvement with Democracy in America 2023 Project** – Field Builders (FBs) are engaged in community work to build pluralism (i.e. democracy). Inconsistent supporters of democracy on both sides of the ideological spectrum value community level work which provides a potential access point to them. FBs’ community work can be enhanced by sharing the learnings of the research with them and FBs can contribute new ways to utilize the learnings. For example, FBs could engage with their audiences more effectively to support their goals by understanding how to utilize resonant language (such as freedom and not democracy); this tactic could contribute to increased support for democracy. It could be worthwhile to present the survey results to all of the FBs to see how they respond and could find it useful. A sample of potential highly relevant FBs follows below with an expanded list in Appendix 1 (spreadsheet).

Name (Title)	Organization	Purpose	Notes
John Wood, Jr (National Spokesperson)	Braver Angels	Bi-partisan organization – national movement to bridge the partisan divide, depolarize US politics, by fostering patriotic-empathy for country-citizens	Former vice-chair of Republican Party of LA County, former nominee for congress
Layla Zaidane (Pres & CEO)	Millennial Action Project	Orgn of millennial lawmakers; activates young policymakers to bridge the partisan divide	Transforming American politics by building a political culture grounded in empathy



Andrew Hanauer (President and CEO)	One American Movement	Founded by faith and community leaders after 2016 election to fight polarization	Launch projects to bring Americans together to address race relations, opioids, etc.
Hahrie Han (Director)	Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins U.	Strengthens global democracy through powerful civic engagement and informed, inclusive dialogue	Specializes in study of organizing, movements, civic engagement, and democracy
Ted Johnson (Director of Fellows Program)	Brennan Center for Justice	Exploring race and pluralism	His book, <i>When the Stars Begin to Fall</i> (Spring 2021), explores how national solidarity can address the effects of racism.

**Funders collaborative**

- The New Pluralists funders have distinct priorities and divergent ideological views – and see these differences as essential to a healthy democracy and effective philanthropy.

***Opportunity for involvement with Democracy in America 2023 Project***

- Many of the funders are aligned with supporting democracy via inclusion and engagement and could possibly be involved in supporting follow-on projects related to Democracy in America 2023.
- Grantees of donors could benefit from the project’s learnings. It could be very interesting to present results to the donors as a group and see their level of interest/engagement.

Core partners:

- Lubetzky Family Foundation – Mission to foster empathy and critical thinking to build resilient democracies and safeguard humanity; one pillar of work is to counter global trends towards authoritarianism, xenophobia, hate and extremism through the advancement of liberal-democratic values including free speech, the rule of law, basic human rights and a free and independent press (lubetzskyfamilyfoundation.org)
- Klarman Family Foundation - Preservation of democratic norms lies at the core of their work, recognizing that a healthy democracy is crucial to all efforts (klarmanfoundation.org)
- Hewlett Foundation - U.S. Democracy Program at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation seeks to strengthen national governing institutions and support trustworthy elections in our polarized age (Hewlett.org)
- Fetzer Institute – Work focused on building the spiritual foundation for a loving world; current program areas of Democracy, Education, Faith & Spirituality, and Organizational Culture (fetzer.org)

- Einhorn Collaborative - Nonprofit foundation dedicated to addressing America’s growing crisis of connection by advancing the science and practice of empathy, mutual understanding, and relationship building (<https://einhorncollaborative.org>)
- Stand Together Trust (formerly Charles Koch Institute) – Partner with social entrepreneurs to help them challenge the status quo and expand ways to tackle big problems; issue areas: Criminal Justice, Economic Progress, Education, Foreign Policy, Free Speech & Peace, Health Care, Immigration, Poverty, Technology & Innovation ([standtogethertrust.org](http://standtogethertrust.org))
- Acton Family Giving – Donor advised fund at Fidelity Charitable; focus on empathy building, gender and reproductive equity, New Pluralists, and others ([actonfamilygiving.org](http://actonfamilygiving.org))
- John Templeton Foundation – Character Virtue Development, Intellectual Humility, and Science of Virtue funding areas involved with New Pluralists

Affiliated partners:

- Rockefeller Brothers Fund – thematic programs in the areas of democratic practice, sustainable development, peacebuilding, arts and culture ([rbf.org](http://rbf.org))
- Omidyar Network – social change venture that reimagines critical systems and the ideas that govern them to build more inclusive and equitable societies; focus areas – responsible technology, reimagining capitalism, building cultures of belonging ([Omidyar.org](http://Omidyar.org))
- Walmart Foundation – work areas: creating opportunity, advancing sustainability, strengthening community, center for racial equity ([walmart.org](http://walmart.org))

## 2. OSI Baltimore

**Key words/themes:** Community-based, participation, empowerment, restorative, education, justice

Overview: OSI Baltimore supports programs in four primary areas – the first three of these may have partners interested in the results of the US Youth Democracy Support Project.

- *Community Fellowships*
- *Education and youth development*
- *Criminal and juvenile justice*
- *Addiction and health equity*

OSI grants are made to both fellows and community-based organizations in Baltimore which, in the context of this project, represent:

- Possible sources of input for ongoing studies/surveys that are part of this project*
- Possible advisors for development of programmatic ideas to address inconsistent support for democracy among youth and young people (aged 18-29)*
- Possible implementors of such initiatives*

An overview of OSI grants which most engage with inconsistent supporters of democracy (who are statistically less educated and unemployed) follows below. (A review of approximately 400 grants was

conducted.) *Ultimately, OSI Baltimore will be in the best position to advise on potential partners and modes of engagement, but this survey below provides background information to inform such a conversation. In addition to a program's compatibility with the goals of a potential youth democracy support initiative, some other factors to consider for possible engagement are the size of the program (reach to target audience), the date of the project and most recent impact, and whether engaging an implementing partner (fellow or organization) and/or a network-based organization such as a foundation would be most helpful.* OSI Baltimore's Community Fellowships Network may also be a helpful group to connect with.

**1) Community Fellows and Special Opportunities Grants:** OSI-Baltimore has long supported innovative social entrepreneurs and organizations addressing diverse problems in underserved communities in the city. Over the past six years, only two projects appear to have focused on exclusively voting among young people. Several other initiatives reach out to young, African American people directly or as part of a larger group, including Generation Z/young millennials. Many potentially relevant programs support skills development initiatives to empower people at critical life moments.

***Opportunity for involvement with Democracy in America 2023 Project:***

*Several programs which could be interested in engaging with young inconsistent supporters of democracy focus on supporting people trying to improve lives through education, better employment, etc. as listed below. And several focus on empowerment and communication with the target group. Depending upon what solutions the survey findings suggest, a tailored approach to each entity could be developed for feedback and engagement in next steps of the project to increase support for democracy among African Americans aged 18-29, particularly men.*

- Strong City Baltimore – Goal to expand the capacity of the #BaltimoreVotes initiative to increase civic participation and leadership among young people and other Baltimoreans affected by policies that threaten their health and safety (2020, \$75,000)
- Civic Nation - To expand the #BaltimoreVotes initiative to increase civic participation among young people and other Baltimoreans affected by harmful justice policies (2018, \$25,000)
- Troy Staton (fellow) - To work across a citywide network of 12 barbershops and salons to address issues in the community, including health disparities, food deserts, literacy, trauma-informed care, teen sexual awareness, and elder abuse (2020)
- Tehya Janae Faulk (fellow) – Focused on engaging Generation Z and young millennials who are at the intersection of two or more oppressed identities, to create an online platform that shares stories from those who have experienced marginalization, including people of color, queer people, and immigrants. (2020)
- Monique Bess (fellow) - To launch a workforce development program that will help connect Black people to skills in technology and social media. The program will initially focus on youth, ages 18-25 (2022)
- James Henderson (fellow) – To better prepare high schoolers in Baltimore City for life after school and for college options (2020, \$73,225)
- Public Justice Center – To enable Black Leaders Organizing for Change to provide training initiatives for youth and other marginalized community organizers in Baltimore to organize

and empower their communities to address the root causes of issues negatively impacting their communities (2020, \$200,000)

- Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) – Goal to support citizens returning from prison with essential skills training, case management, job readiness and placement (2020, \$25,000)

**2) Education and Youth Development** – According to OSI, approximately 85% of youth in the Baltimore City Public Schools live in poverty and over 90% are students of color (81% African American, 10% Latino). They experience the effects of generational poverty, coupled with limited exposure to opportunities, compounded by discriminatory treatment in and out of school. (Note: Maryland permits 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections and caucuses if they will be 18 by election day.)

***Opportunity for involvement with Democracy in America 2023 Project:***

Engagement with these grantees could focus on juniors and seniors in high school and educate on areas related to democracy and foster the desire to participate and benefit from the democratic process. Longer term initiatives could focus on embedding more empowering democracy learning opportunities earlier in the education system and within curricula. Examples of relevant partners could be:

- Fund for Educational Excellence – To help the Baltimore City public school district identify and expand the use of successful strategies learned from the High Value High Schools initiative and support implementation of intensive restorative practices in 20+ schools. The High Value HS program creates rigorous and supportive options in Baltimore to significantly increase graduation rates and post-secondary success, particularly for Baltimore’s African-American male students. (2016-2019 funding, \$340,000)
- University of Maryland Baltimore Foundation – To enable the Positive Schools Center at the U of MD School of Social Work to train educators and students in Baltimore City public schools to use restorative and complementary practices to improve school climates (2016-2019, >\$900,000)
- Family League of Baltimore City - To support coalitions and training to advance adoption of alternatives to suspension and to improve school climate and implement the Baltimore Schools’ Restorative Practices Plan (2016-2017, \$830,000)

**3) Criminal and Juvenile Justice** – The vast majority of projects OSI supports in this area seek to change incarceration and bail policies (via high level advocacy) and help people transition out of prison into a productive life. In light of the complex challenges faced by individuals transitioning from prison back to mainstream society (i.e. finding housing, work, reconnecting with family/friends, and sometimes drug involvement), embracing democracy may not be a priority for most. Focusing on this segment of OSI’s work would not likely bring results as quickly as desired.

**4) Drugs and Health** - The vast majority of OSI projects in this area support advocacy for progressive drug and health laws and policies (harm reduction, drug legalization, drug offense sentencing reform and other prison reforms), as well as improved treatment options, insurance coverage, and other related health services. Project participants are not likely at the best point of their lives to increase their

investment into democracy and democratic institutions. Thus these grantees are not likely to be optimal for targeting.

### **3. CIRCLE Overview (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)**

Tufts University, Medford, MA

**Overview:** CIRCLE conducts research and analysis on the political life of young people (aged 18-29) in the US, with a focus on those who are marginalized or disadvantaged. It conducted its own surveys in 2016 and 2018 (which have included questions on race, poverty, and education) and has analyzed other data sets to derive independent conclusions. Its focus is on youth voting and civic engagement, but with a prioritization on growing and diversifying the voting population as a desired outcome and driver of a healthy democracy. Many of their research products do not delve into definitions of democracy or alternatives to democracy as the Democracy in America 2023 survey did. CIRCLE also does not seem to have conducted focus groups, at least in recent research.

**Key words/themes:** youth, voting, democracy, participation, civic education, civic engagement

CIRCLE's scholarly research is designed to inform policy and practice for healthier youth development and a better democracy. **CIRCLE has three primary data/research products:**

- 1) "Youth Voting and Civic Engagement in America" (2016 and 2018, 2020 data pending) – data tool that offers a unique way to explore the relationships between voting and other forms of civic participation, and some conditions that shape engagement,

https://circle.tufts.edu/explore-our-data/youth-voting-and-civic-engagement-america

**SELECT DATA**

Select state or compare all states  OR Select Congressional District  OR Select County  Not all data are available for states. [Find out why.](#)

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**YOUTH VOTING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT** (select up to 3)

**YOUTH & ELECTIONS**

2018

- Voter turnout (2018)
- Voter registration rate (2018)
- Votes cast (2018)
- Vote choice, Senate (2018)
- Vote choice, Governor (2018)
- YESI Ranking, Senate (2018)
- YESI Ranking, Governor (2018)
- YESI Ranking, Congressional District (2018)

**YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

- Belong to a group
- Volunteering
- Make consumer choices for political reasons
- Work with neighbors to do something positive for community
- Do favors for a neighbor
- Discuss political/social issues with neighbors
- Discuss political/social issues with friends or family
- Talk with people of different backgrounds
- Share views about news/politics on social media
- Contact or visit public official to express opinion

[Why these data points?](#)

**CONDITIONS THAT SHAPE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT** (select up to 3)

**POPULATION**

- Youth citizen population
- Youth/adult ratio

**EDUCATION**

- Youth enrolled in college
- Youth with college experience
- Youth without high school diploma

**QUALITY OF LIFE**

- Median household income
- Income disparity
- Child poverty rate
- Violent crime rate
- Broadband internet access

**CIVIC CULTURE**

- Nonprofits per capita
- Nonprofits serving youth
- Rate of Associations
- Youth residential stability
- Residential racial segregation

**POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

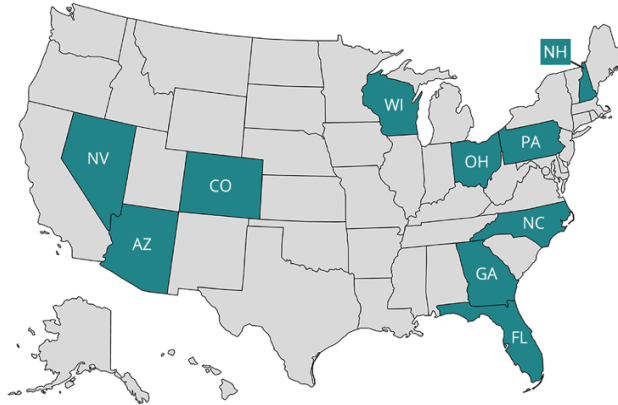
- Partisan lean
- Winning Presidential candidate
- Was the last Presidential election close?
- Facilitative Election Laws
- Statute on high school voter registration?

- 2) “Youth Electoral Significance Index” (YESI) (2022 rankings) - a data-driven ranking of the top 10 races where young voters have the highest potential to influence election results;

## Top 10 States and Districts by Youth Electoral Significance

Parties and other political groups often overlook the votes and energy of young people, even where youth can have a decisive influence on the outcome of the race. CIRCLE is providing data-driven insights about the states and districts where youth are poised to have a disproportionately high electoral impact in 2022 — if campaigns and organizations invest in engaging them.

Senate Races
Governor Races
House Races



Top 10 YESI Senate Races

- 3) “Reaching All Youth Strengthens Engagement” (RAYSE) Index (April, Oct 2017) – an index of indices; identifying potential youth influence on elections; identifying conditions that correlate with youth civic engagement; <https://circle.tufts.edu/explore-our-data/rayse-index>

**Where should you invest in youth civic engagement?**

Choose areas, characteristics, and demographics to narrow this list and find out where an investment of time, money, or people has a high potential for improving youth engagement.

**FILTER TO NARROW YOUR SEARCH**  
Current List: 3148 Counties

**STATE**

**GROUPS**  
Show me counties matching all criteria selected:

- 34% or more African American
- 34% or more Hispanic
- 15% or more Asian American
- 20% or more Native American
- 8% or more speak languages other than English primarily (top 5%)
- 30% or more children under 18 live in poverty.

**ELECTORAL HISTORY**  
Show the counties where...

2016

- 2016 election was too close to call
- Clinton won in 2016
- Trump won in 2016

2012

- 2012 election was too close to call
- Obama won in 2012
- Romney won in 2012

2008

- 2008 election was too close to call
- Obama won in 2008
- McCain won in 2008

**YOUTH TURNOUT**

**EDUCATION**  
Percent of the population ages 18-29 who are ENROLLED IN COLLEGE (National median - 28%)  
Select a range

0%  100%

Percent of the population ages 18-24 in the county who have LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL graduation equivalent (National median - 18%)  
Select a range

0%  100%

County	State	RAYSE Rating	Education Index	Close Elections Index	Potential Youth Influence on Elections	Quality of Life Index	Community Civic Culture Index
Autauga County	Alabama	***	MED	LOW	MED	MED	LOW
Baldwin County	Alabama	***	MED	LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
Barbour County	Alabama	****	LOW	HIGH	MED	LOW	LOW
Bibb County	Alabama	**	LOW	LOW	MED	LOW	MED
Blount County	Alabama	**	LOW	LOW	LOW	MED	MED
Bullock County	Alabama	***	LOW	LOW	HIGH	LOW	MED
Butler County	Alabama	***	LOW	LOW	MED	LOW	HIGH
Calhoun County	Alabama	**	HIGH	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW
Chambers County	Alabama	*	MED	LOW	LOW	LOW	MED
Cherokee County	Alabama	*	MED	LOW	LOW	LOW	MED
Chilton County	Alabama	**	MED	LOW	LOW	LOW	MED
Choctaw County	Alabama	**	LOW	LOW	HIGH	LOW	LOW
Clarke County	Alabama	**	LOW	LOW	HIGH	LOW	MED
Clay County	Alabama	****	MED	LOW	HIGH	LOW	MED
Cleburne County	Alabama	**	MED	LOW	LOW	LOW	MED
Coffee County	Alabama	**	MED	LOW	LOW	MED	LOW
Colbert County	Alabama	**	MED	LOW	LOW	LOW	MED
Conecuh County	Alabama	****	LOW	HIGH	MED	LOW	MED
Coosa County	Alabama	*	MED	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW
Covington County	Alabama	*	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW	MED
Crenshaw County	Alabama	***	LOW	LOW	HIGH	LOW	LOW
Dallas County	Alabama	**	MED	LOW	LOW	MED	MED

CIRCLE | About the RAYSE index | [circle@tufts.edu](mailto:circle@tufts.edu)

**CIRCLE works nationally with youth-serving organizations** to help them understand and assess the impact of their programming, as well as make the case for policy and infrastructure that supports youth engagement. (CIRCLE does not list the organizations it is assisting.)

CIRCLE implements **two main projects to support democracy/civic engagement with the conclusions of its data/research:**

- 1) “Teaching for Democracy Alliance (TDFA)” - The Alliance creates and aggregates high quality resources for K-12 teachers and administrators to prepare students for democratic participation.
- 2) “Rep Us” – Representation of all groups via voting is important for democracy and representation of youth in the media is important to youth engagement. Thus this project researches these topics and aims to engage youth civically via the media; it offers research to inform communications and outreach to achieve this goal.

**Recent research products - after the 2022 mid-term elections:**

- 1) “Youth Are Interested in Political Action, but Lack Support and Opportunities” (1/2023) - *youth see the potential of democracy* but question their own capacity to impact it
- 2) “Youth in 2022: Concerned about Issues but Neglected by Campaigns” (12/2022) – youth are concerned about the issues, *neglected by campaigns*; this also identifies *barriers by race*; whether potential voters were contacted by voter outreach also made a difference; also analyzed *profiles based on ethnicity and other factors*
- 3) “**Young voters in 2022: Black and Non-college Youth Were Underrepresented**” (12/22) – *White and college educated youth remain overrepresented* among mid-term voters. <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/young-voters-2022-black-and-non-college-youth-were-underrepresented>
- 4) “**Youth More Optimistic about Democracy than Older Voters, Less Inclined to Identify with Major Parties**” (11/22) – While “*the majority of all voters, regardless of age, feel that our democracy is threatened, young voters in 2022 were slightly more likely to feel like it is “very” or “somewhat” secure (35%).* That sentiment is much more prevalent among young men (47%) than young women (24%)—though young white men were overrepresented and data on young Black and Latino men was not available. They also did not have data for every subgroup of youth by race, gender, and education. Youth are also less committed to political parties. Yet Young women (46%), Latino youth (44%) and especially Black youth (62%) were even more likely than youth overall to identify as Democrats. Only 4% of Black youth said they identify as Republicans. (data from National Election Pool Exit Poll conducted by Edison Research)

Overarching research areas are listed immediately below; additional details follow in next pages:

- [Broadening Youth Voting](#)
- [Equitable K-12 Civic Learning](#)
- [Understanding Youth Attitudes and Beliefs](#)
- [Youth in Media for Democracy](#)
- [Youth Activism and Change](#)



- Civic and Economic Mobility

Opportunity for “Democracy in America 2023” – CIRCLE is very much engaged in complementary work with “Democracy in America 2023.” It could be meaningful to share Matthew/FF’s more recent research with CIRCLE to offer some deeper insights into some of the attitudes driving democratic disengagement, in particular among minorities. They seem like they could benefit from a greater racial lens to their work. Matthew/FF’s survey results could be shared within CIRCLE’s “Teaching for Democracy Alliance” (TDFA) to help engaging with different student populations and it could also be helpful to CIRCLE’s “Rep Me” project to help frame media and communications messages to/with/by specific youth segments. In general, it could be productive to discuss with CIRCLE additional ways of collaborating on research, for example, integrating support for alternatives to democracy or authoritarianism into their surveys, to foster enhanced analysis. CIRCLE also convenes meetings of democracy-supporting donors to share recent research which could be an appropriate venue for sharing Matthew/FF’s research results and connecting with donors or other partners. For example, CIRCLE co-convened a call with PACE Funders and other donors on “Philanthropy’s Role in Finding a Path through the History Wars” on Feb 7. (Separate notes are available upon request.)

#### **Additional details on overarching research areas:**

- Research Area - Broadening Youth Voting

2018 and 2020 saw major increases in youth voter turnout. However, there's still much work to do. *The preparation many young people receive (or fail to receive) to become informed voters is inadequate, leading to significant variations in voting rates by race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and other socioeconomic and demographic factors.*

#### Data Tools and Major Reports/Projects

##### **a) CIRCLE Growing Voters**

Released in 2022, the CIRCLE Growing Voters report introduces a new framework to transform how communities and institutions prepare youth for democracy. It includes major recommendations for organizations across sectors to do this *work more equitably and effectively*. [Read the Report and Learn More](#)

- Research Area - Equitable K-12 Civic Learning

There's no single strategy that is effective in encouraging civic participation among all young people. The exception is K-12 education; teaching students about elections and voting is vital for a range of reasons. According to a CIRCLE study, *youth who are taught about elections and voting are 40% more likely to vote when they turn 18*. (<https://circle.tufts.edu/circle-action/teaching-democracy-alliance>)

#### Data Tools and Major Reports/Projects

- The **CIRCLE Growing Voters report** introduces and details *a paradigm-shifting framework for developing the next generation of voters*. Based on rigorous, comprehensive research,

including findings from an exclusive survey of teens, it serves as *a guide for every institution and community to play a role in this work.*

- b) **Educating for Democracy (EAD) Roadmap** (March 2021) - The Roadmap explicitly recommends a shift from the way that most schools have taught history and civics: from a model based on the learning of long, detailed, and practically unteachable sets of state standards to one that uses an inquiry process that weaves history and civics together, and that inspires students to learn by asking difficult questions and then seeking fact-based answers in and out of the classroom. *This approach to learning inspires students to want to become involved in democracy and help to sustain our Republic;* <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/educating-american-democracy-roadmap-transform-k-12-civics>
- c) **Teaching for Democracy Alliance (TFDA)** - Since 2016, CIRCLE has helped coordinate this coalition of national nonpartisan organizations committed to working together to support schools to embed teaching about elections and voting into their classrooms and schools in a way that meets students where they are, and builds from there. The Alliance creates and aggregates high quality resources for K-12 teachers and administrators to prepare students for democratic participation.

- Research Area - Understanding Youth Attitudes and Beliefs

**a) Publication: Millennials' Diverse Political Views: A Typology of the Rising Generation**

March 1, 2018 (detailed text copied below due to relevance)

*Our analysis of young people's views goes beyond liberal/conservative to explore their core values and their belief (or lack thereof) in civic engagement.* Millennials are already the largest group of potential voters and are destined to dominate American politics in decades to come.

We use recent data to identify clusters of Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 into five groups:

- *Activist Egalitarians (39% of Millennials)*
- *Participatory Libertarians (29%)*
- *Disempowered Egalitarians (8%)*
- *Alienated Libertarians (5%)*
- *The Lost and Disengaged (18%)*

The two **egalitarian** groups are concerned about social, political, and economic inequality, and they tend to support government action to combat it. The two **libertarian** groups are concerned about individual freedom and are more skeptical of government. These orientations characterize some, but not all, core characteristics of young people's beliefs about the size and responsibilities of government, and whether inequality is seen as a major barrier to progress.

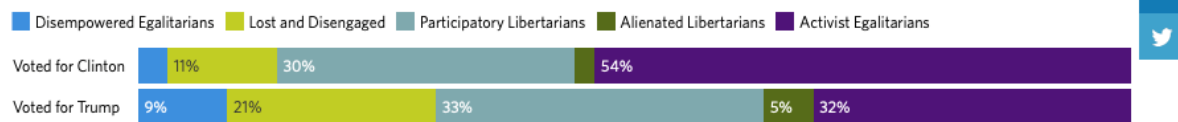
Within both the libertarian and the egalitarian sides, there are disagreements about *civic engagement*. Millennials all differ on whether it is useful for people like them to engage with

fellow members of their community or with institutions to change society. Meanwhile, *the **Lost and Disengaged** do not seem sure where they fall, are disconnected from news media, and largely disengaged from civic life.*

The largest group, **Activist Egalitarians** fit an influential stereotype of Millennials. However, they number less than two-fifths (39%) of all Millennials, and are themselves not monolithic. Less than a third (28%) see themselves as liberal or extremely liberal, and 14% see themselves as conservative or extremely conservative. More than half (54%) of Hillary Clinton’s Millennial voters came from this group, but they have mixed feelings about the Democratic Party.

### Twice as Many Youth Who Voted for Donald Trump Are "Lost and Disengaged"

Among young people, ages 18-34, who self-reported voting for each candidate, the percentage who fall into each category in our typology.



**CIRCLE** Tufts University Tisch College - CIRCLE  
 Source: Analysis based on CIRCLE's 2016 survey of Millennials  
[Get the data](#)



***Participatory Libertarians** are almost three times as likely to have a college degree as the **Lost and Disengaged**.*

*Among the two **Egalitarian** groups, the **Activists** are almost twice as likely to have completed college as the **Disempowered**, more than half of whom have no college experience at all. That a lack of civic efficacy and confidence correlates with these disparities only exacerbates political and social inequalities.*

*Those who do not believe in the power of people’s collective work in communities and society vary not only on their **Egalitarian-Libertarian** polarity, but also on why they may not believe that people can make a difference:*

**Disempowered Egalitarians** acutely feel social inequities but may be hopeless that anything could change.

**Alienated Libertarians** appear to worry about individual prosperity first and foremost and believe that everyone should look out of themselves rather than work with institutions or with each other.

**We must implement multi-pronged, short- and long-term strategies for engagement that support all young people as they develop their civic and political identity.** And we must ensure that Millennials have the resources and opportunities to express their identities with a loud and clear voice, and to turn that voice into effective action.

**b) Publication: The Gun Violence Prevention Movement Fueled Youth Engagement in 2018**  
(<https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/gun-violence-prevention-movement-fueled-youth-engagement-2018-election>)

- Civic and Economic Mobility

*Our society has divested from the key transition period between adolescence and adulthood, especially for youth who are not part of traditional institutions such as colleges, stable employment, or families, and may experience challenges in multiple facets of their lives. This type of divestment has severely limited youth opportunity to develop into civic and political leaders and to experience economic mobility. Once young people exit high school and do not or cannot attend college, opportunities are very limited, especially for youth of color, to obtain career opportunities with growth potential.*

Young adults often gain relevant career skills when they immerse themselves in civic work, such as coalition-building, communication, project development and implementation, meeting facilitation, and problem-solving. Training and employment programs for young adults also teach valuable civic skills which can improve young people's professional prospects.

*CIRCLE's continued research into these intersecting mobilities focuses on what can be imagined as opportunities for youth to gain skills and contribute to the cause they work on, but also gain credentials and marketable skills that can serve as a catalyst for the next steps that they envision for themselves, their families, and their communities.*

#### **4. German Marshall Fund Cities Program**<sup>50</sup>

The **German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)** is an American public policy think tank that seeks to promote cooperation and understanding between North America and the European Union. Founded in 1972 through a gift from the West German government on the 25th anniversary of the Marshall Plan, GMF contributes research and analysis on transatlantic and global issues; convenes policy and business leaders at international conferences; provides exchange opportunities for emerging American and European leaders; and supports initiatives to strengthen democracies. GMF focuses on policy, leadership, and civil society.<sup>51</sup>

GMF Cities Program helps cities learn from each other and change how they serve their citizens. With partners, they spread what works now in democratic values and governance from the municipal to the multinational levels. The program includes high-impact gatherings, peer exchanges, and applied research to spark transformative change: with this learning, the best

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<sup>50</sup> Almost all content from German Marshall Fund website, except parts related to "Democracy in America 2023" project.

<sup>51</sup> Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German\\_Marshall\\_Fund](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Marshall_Fund), 1/30/23

policies and practices can be replicated at scale. The program collaborates with public, private sector, and NGO leaders.

GMF participant cities were chosen because they further and fortify democracy; see that there is agency for all; promote justice – social, economic, and climate; and drive enterprise and entrepreneurship to social good. GMF Cities are problem solvers on big issues with local participants; build bridges to all levels of government; and are innovators. **\*Participant cities: Amsterdam, Athens, Barcelona, Charlotte, Dublin, Fort Collins (CO), Frankfurt, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Warsaw.**

GMF Cities Program strategic program directions: 1) *democracy*, 2) *ensure agency and equity for all*, 3) *justice (social, economic, climate)*, 4) *enterprise and entrepreneurship*, 5) *universal*

Key words – transatlantic experience sharing, democracy, diversity, policy, practice, trust

### 1) Strategic Direction: Democracy

#### a) Cities Fortifying Democracy Project

A two-year project with all 12\* American and European cities working together to collaborate on what cities can do to strengthen the foundation of democracy from the ground up. *Seven representatives from each city will examine trends, innovations and ideas of how local actions can strengthen local institutions.* Research areas include governing, voting & elections, public safety & justice, local journalism. *They will produce a toolkit of best practices that can be shared with all cities looking to further and fortify their democracies*

Rationale: The policies cities pass and the practices they use to involve residents in decisionmaking or remain accountable to local residents can either enrich or erode the institutions of democracy key to its survival. Things like a vibrant local press, trust in governing, free and fair local elections, and support of the justice system are all critical ways that communities defend their systems of democracy. The collective trust that is essential to a vital democracy is built locally. The project will identify and explore some of the best of these local innovations to empower stakeholders around the world to strengthen democracy through agency and action at the city level.

Opportunity for “Democracy in America 2023” – To present research to the 7+ members of each GMF City team, as well as the affiliated researchers which are working on democracy issues. Perhaps some guidance from “Democracy in America 2023” could be included in the toolkit of best practices. Little information about implementation grants and plans is available online. Most info on the website is at a high level and fitting in with the “dissemination” component of the program. The I-990 form does not provide details about the millions of dollars in grants made each year. We could request additional implementor/grantee info from GMF.

#### b) City Strength of Democracy Index Project

GMF and Gallup will partner to develop the City Strength-of-Democracy Index (CSDI), **a rigorous measurement of local democracy that includes expert analysis of the qualities of a strong democracy as well as the voice of the resident (i.e. public opinion survey data)**. The CSDI would: 1) benchmark cities across fundamental dimensions of democracy; (2) reveal the benefits that accompany higher levels of liberal democracy; and (3) identify and incentivize specific ways cities can take action to strengthen democracy. *The CSDI should point the way to improve civic culture, from volunteerism to overall community and well-being.* It should offer insights for policymakers and residents alike on building inclusive, participative, deliberative local societies that observe the rule of law, all the valued and requisite freedoms and responsibilities, and strengthen the trust so critical to democratic strength.

*CSDI's emphasis on local governance and resident voice will offer a bottom-up assessment of democracy (at the city level) that complement existing top-down measures (from the national level).* For researchers and academics, the CSDI will provide a rich set of comparable indicators for democracy at the local level that do not currently exist. Moreover, the indicators will reveal how democracy is associated with other outcomes of interest, like health and wellbeing.

#### Survey/research implementation:

Survey indicators was planned to be piloted in 25 cities (2020-2021), refined and then fielded as a full survey in 123 cities in Europe and North America (2021-2022). The survey results from the 123 cities will serve as a benchmark of resident voices that tracks changes in aspects of democracy in each city over time. **Milwaukee was one of the initial possible cities to be surveyed**; no final list is published. Ongoing measurement is planned for 2023-2026. Sample size would be a minimum of 500 residents for each of the 123 cities in North America and Europe, including adults aged 18 and over who live full-time in each city. Gallup would include demographic quotas (e.g., by age, gender, education level, **and racial/ethnic group**) to ensure the final sample reflects each city's population. Surveys seem to be done online. Both the pilot and final instruments will focus on dimensions of local democracy that are inadequately captured through publicly available data, such as extent of social capital, sense of political agency, perceived responsiveness of local government, etc. **Dissemination of the results would include roundtable discussions, published blogs and news articles, and a public release event to provide maximum exposure for the project and the major findings that come out of the research conducted.** A more detailed concept note is available for this project. **No results appear to have been disseminated yet.**

Opportunity for "Democracy in America 2023" – Since the survey seems to have already been conducted, it could be interesting to compare CSDI survey results with the results of Matthew's support for democracy questions. Resident focus groups also do not seem to have been conducted, but collaboration in a focus group effort could possibly be envisioned. It could be interesting to create some joint publications for dissemination with the GMF Cities program.

### c) Pact of Free Cities – Project in development

The Pact of Free Cities will be a platform where cities can support each other as well as reflect, share, and plan ways in which they can be lighthouses of liberal democracy and fight back against democratic backsliding. Started by the mayors of Budapest, Warsaw, Prague, and Bratislava, it was embraced and enhanced by the GMF Platform and expanded across the Atlantic. The workstream includes research and analysis; expanding support for the pact; and strategic convening and dissemination. This project seems to be an enabling component to support overall GMF City participation.

## 2) **Strategic Direction: Ensure Agency and Equity for All**

### “Everyone In” Project

This project will engage with different stakeholders in selected cities to develop ways of *improving diversity in civic life and leadership in a place-based manner, including political, social, cultural, and economic spheres*. The “Everyone In” project starts by analyzing the local context and consulting with a wide range of local cross-sector entities before convening a local seminar. The seminar will draw from innovative ideas and methodologies of transatlantic cities and will work with local actors to identify and ideate pathways to leadership in civic life for diverse communities that could effectively be implemented locally.

#### ACTIVITIES

1. Initial Consultation & Analysis - with key partners/stakeholders to get a better understanding of the local context to help shape the convening and program activity.
2. Convening Preparation – on the basis of research conducted
3. Local Stakeholder Convening - a 1.5-day seminar with diverse representation of civil society associations, selected city officials and representatives from key institutions to build a pathway to activating leadership and engagement in civic life by diverse communities.

Opportunity for “Democracy in America 2023” – Since this project is focusing on growing diversity within government and civil society leadership, it would touch upon racial issues. As such, there may be an audience for learning about the results of this survey. The 1.5 day seminar could be an appropriate venue for sharing the research results.

## 3) **Strategic Direction: Justice (Social, Economic, Climate)**

### Chicago-Torino Lab: Cost of Segregation Project

GMF Cities will support *an exchange between Chicago and Torino, Italy* to deepen city professionals and appointed officials' understanding of and appreciation for the *effects of segregation by race and/or ethnicity, and explore how to build, strengthen or bolster policy and practice responses to counter these*. The objective will be to leverage such an exchange to prompt Chicago and Torino to assess current practice and its effect; to explore how to expand on or improve current best practice; and where practice is absent, to explore what practices are needed to address *the social and economic costs of segregation*. Specific topics will include how cities can leverage state and federal dollars more effectively to address the cost of segregation; regulatory barriers and how to overcome them; and how to overcome institutional bias in city bureaucracy. In addition, the project aims to *raise awareness and generate a public dialogue regarding the potential costs of spatial segregation* and solutions, to individuals and society.

Opportunity for “Democracy in America 2023” – This project is focused on raising awareness of the cost of segregation among city officials in order to address it. The alienation of African-Americans from democracy/democratic processes could be one cost of segregation which would be relevant to share. In addition, these learnings could be shared within the project component aimed at generating a public dialogue. The project seems to approach the issue of race cautiously and isn't focused on civil society or the general public, so it may not offer a high potential for collaboration.

Background info:

1) **“Can cities help us to believe in government again?”** website post  
<https://www.gmfus.org/news/can-cities-help-us-believe-democracy-once-again>

Here lies the power of the Cities Fortifying Democracy initiative: it is not telling cities that they must engage in specific “pro-democracy” reforms. Rather, it provides a space for cities to share common challenges, exchange best practices, and—perhaps most importantly—view their own critical work through a democracy lens. As these cities involve their citizens in the practice of governance, focus on repairing relations between police and communities, and emphasize the importance of local journalism, they are also promoting democracy as an effective governance system that involves, and listens to, its people.

Along the way, maybe these reforms will help lead to municipal elections in which the vast majority of citizens cast their vote. Perhaps the most important thing that cities can do to fortify democracy is to help their own citizens to once again believe in the potential and power of democracy. For if citizens do not believe in democracy, it will not survive.

2) **“Threats to Democracy: City Edition”** website post  
<https://www.gmfus.org/news/threats-democracy-city-edition>



GMF Cities surveyed a diverse group of city managers, public-safety officials, journalists, and activists to better understand what they perceived to be the greatest threats to democracy in their cities. Though there were transatlantic differences, a clear common message emerged: when the people do not work together, democracy dies. Time and again, city officials observed that residents who are wary of government are gravitating toward extreme views (polarization) or dropping out of the process entirely (low participation in elections and other forms of civic activity). Both of these trends are dysfunctional and incompatible with democratic survival.

There was transatlantic agreement that lack of trust between public safety officials and residents and the proliferation of misinformation were among the top threats. *However Europeans were more concerned about resident participation (excluding elections) and transparency, while Americans were more concerned about poor civic education, low voter turnout, and an unfair justice system.*

**3) Advancing Just, Multiracial, Multicultural Democracy – Blog post**

<https://www.gmfus.org/news/advancing-just-multiracial-multicultural-democracy>

Geared towards European cities – more focused to what governments can do to change policies, practices, participation, implementation

**4) The Key to Stronger Local Democracy: Equitable Engagement – related publication**

<https://www.route-fifty.com/finance/2021/09/key-stronger-local-democracy-equitable-engagement/185352/>

“Federal stimulus funds provide an opportunity for cities to authentically connect with their residents and regain their trust.” 9/13/21 - How to utilize COVID stimulus funds to regain support for government and its value/democracy’s results for society via meaningful, racially inclusive engagement of the public.

## **5. Google Foundation (google.org)**

### **Overview:**

#### Focus areas:

- Economic empowerment – digital skills training for job seekers, equitable access to capital, and SMEs in underrepresented communities
- Technology and innovation – use of technology to address societal and environmental challenges; advocacy on AI and emerging technology issues
- Learning - equitable access to quality learning materials, computer science education, and digital responsibility
- Initiatives in the US – organizations that work to make their neighborhoods, and the country, a place where everyone can thrive

### Approach:

- Look for big ideas and entities which understand the needs of the excluded and which work to address inequities at scale
- Funding: \$200M yearly to nonprofits and social enterprises globally (grants seem closer to \$50m/year with additional pro-bono support)
- Tech Expertise: Google fellowship - staff volunteer expertise for up to 6 months full-time to nonprofits or civic entities
- Innovation: make research and products accessible to specific nonprofits

**Funding mechanism** = Impact Challenges (RFPs) – supporting ideas that can create change quickly; boldest ideas are given funding, mentorship, and technical support

- 2022 - AI for UN SDGs (\$25M commitment)
- 2022 - Climate Innovation (\$30M commitment)
- 2021 – Women’s and girls’ empowerment (\$25M commitment, grants from \$300K-\$1M); examples =
  - o Girls Inc (NYC) – building a financial budgeting app for girls of color from low-income households
  - o Black Girls CODE – establishing equal representation in the tech sector for Black women and girls through programming and tech
- 2021 – Let’s rebuild a better Bay (\$10M) – positive social change projects to make San Francisco Bay area a place where everyone can thrive; examples = STEM education and career success program for first-generation students from low-income communities; first common application for public benefits and services

**Key words/themes:** solve the biggest challenges, think big, scalability, support underserved populations and opportunity for all

### **Connection to Democracy in America 2023:**

Google Foundation does not directly address democracy; it seems to make larger grants to mid-sized organizations (less grass roots and smaller scale support); their support areas are either global/universal issues or those related to areas of Google technology or their workplaces. Google Foundation doesn’t seem to prioritize playing a convening or networking role with other donors or partners. If Google Foundation took an interest in democracy, it could possibly generate impact because of the volume of its funding support, but if not, it doesn’t seem like it would be that helpful.

## APPENDIX #9

### DEMOCRACY STUDY – PANEL-BACK QUESTIONS

18-29 year-old Americans originally survey in October 2022

#### Q23 WORLD VALUES -- Single Choice Dynamic Grid

I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each system as a way of governing the United States. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing the United States?

varlabel WVS

#### *Randomize statement order*

- D. Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with Congress and elections in the United States
  - E. Having the army rule the United States
  - F. Having a democratic political system in the United States
- 
- 5. Very good
  - 6. Fairly good
  - 7. Fairly bad
  - 8. Very bad

#### Q24A PRIORITIES – Clickable Rule Widget

How important is it to you to live in a country ...?

varlabel DEMOC

- B. that is governed democratically

*Label end points of ruler 1-10 "Not at all important" on the left and "Very important" on the right.*

#### Q24B DEMOCRACY FUND – Single Text Choice

Which of these statements comes closest to your view?

varlabel DEMOCFUND

- 4. Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government
- 5. In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable
- 6. For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have

**Q101 PARTICIPATION: REGISTERED TO VOTE – Single Text Choice with pop-up**

Are you registered to vote?

varlabel REGISTERED

13. Yes
14. No
15. Don't Know

**Q102 CONSTITUTION**

Which of the following comes closest to how you feel about the U.S. Constitution?

varlabel CONSTITUTION

1. The Constitution should not be changed. It is fine as it is.
2. Minor changes should be made to the Constitution to update it.
3. Major changes should be made to the Constitution to update it
4. The Constitution should be completely overhauled so that it reflects the values of Americans today and the changing times.
5. What is in the Constitution really doesn't matter to me.

**Q103 DEMOCRACY & ME**

Which of the following comes closest to your opinion?

varlabel DEMOCME

***Randomize Answers 1 through 5. Answer 6 should always be last.***

1. For someone like me, it doesn't matter whether the United States is a democracy or not.
2. Having a strong leader who gets things done and doesn't have to bother with Congress and elections is better than democracy.
3. When it comes to solving problems, democracy is just too slow. We need a government that works faster.
4. In the times we are in today, a non-democratic government that actually works for people like me is preferable to a democratic form of government.
5. Democracy in the United States has its problems, but I want to keep it and improve it so that it works better for everyone.
6. None of the above.

**Q104 WORD/PHRASE**

Which word or phrase below is most important to you and how you think about America today?

varlabel MYPHRASE

***Randomize 1-6***

1. We the People
2. Rule of Law
3. Created Equal
4. Liberty
5. Equal Justice Under the Law
6. Freedom

## APPENDIX #10

### ADDITIONAL PEOPLE/ORGANIZATIONS OF INTEREST

Name/Title	Organization	Purpose	Notes
John Wood, Jr (National Spokesperson)	Braver Angels	Bi-partisan organization – national movement to bridge the partisan divide, depolarize US politics, by fostering patriotic-empathy for country-citizens	Former vice-chair of Republican Party of LA County, former nominee for congress
Layla Zaidane (Pres & CEO)	Millennial Action Project	Orgn of millennial lawmakers; activates young policymakers to bridge the partisan divide	Transforming American politics by building a political culture grounded in empathy
Andrew Hanauer (President and CEO)	One American Movement	Founded by faith and community leaders after 2016 election to fight polarization	Launch projects to bring Americans together to address race relations, opioids, etc.
Hahrie Han (Director)	Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins U.	Strengthens global democracy through powerful civic engagement and informed, inclusive dialogue	Specializes in study of organizing, movements, civic engagement, and democracy
Ted Johnson (Director of Fellows Program)	Brennan Center for Justice	Exploring race and pluralism	His book, <i>When the Stars Begin to Fall</i> (Spring 2021), explores how national solidarity can address the effects of racism.
Mohammed Naeem (Sr Mgr for Strategy and Partnerships)	American Immigration Council	Works to strengthen America by shaping how America thinks about and acts towards immigration and moving toward a more fair and just immigration system	Center of Inclusion and Belonging Team, formerly with More In Common; Advisory Board member of Stanford U's Strengthening Democracy Challenge
Deepti Doshi (Co-Director)	New_Public	Org committed to building healthy digital public spaces	Deepti's work focused on intersection of social media, community organizing, leadership devt. Established "groups" at Meta.

Justin Giboney (attorney and President)	AND Campaign	Christian civic organization raising civic literacy and fostering social justice	2012 and 2016 GA delegate at DNC
Travian Shorters (founder)	BME Community	National Movement for institutional leaders to define black people by their aspirations and contributions	Retired tech entrepreneur, <i>NYT</i> bestselling author, etc.
Michael-Ray Mathews (Deputy Director and Chief Faith Officer)	Faith in Action	Creating a world where everyone belongs, can thrive, and has a say in the decisions that shape their lives	Engages multi-faith leaders in conversations about cultivating communities of belonging and sacred resistance to injustice
Elizabeth Clay Roy (CEO)	Generation Citizen	National Non-profit that provides youth with the knowledge and skills to actively participate in our democracy	
Whitney Kimball Coe (Director of National Programs)	Center for Rural Strategies	leads "Rural Assembly" to build better policy and opportunity for rural communities	
Kayla Demonte (Managing Director)	Citizen University	Builds a culture of powerful, responsible citizenship across the US	
Tim Dixon (Co-Founder)	More in Common	Combats polarization and unites divided societies through partnerships with institutions	
John A Powell (Director)	Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley	research institute	expert in civil rights, civil liberties, structural racism, housing, poverty, and democracy
Frederick Riley (ED)	Weave: The social fabric project	Supports weaving interpersonal connections and a strong social fabric	To shift our culture from one that values achievement and individual success to one that finds value in deep relationships and community success

