



# SIX MONTHS OUT: SIX PRIORITIES TO PROTECT OUR DEMOCRACY

In less than six months, citizens around the country will start voting (early, by mail, and in person on Election Day) for positions ranging from school board to President of the United States. As they have since the January 6 insurrection, anti-democracy forces, including candidates who use rhetoric to undermine faith in America's [safe, secure, and fair](#) elections, will try to thwart our democratic processes.

On the pro-democracy side, election officials have been working day in and day out to not only protect our democracy but also to strengthen it. As these state and local officials continue their preparations for November, we offer six initiatives to prioritize over the final six months. These recommendations for election officials are drawn from the NewDEAL Forum's Democracy Working Group and the [Democracy Playbook](#) the group released in early 2023 to guide efforts around voting, election integrity, and civic engagement. While it remains important to improve election laws, the general election is fast approaching. It is critical to work urgently within current laws to maximize access to voter registration and the ballot box, and to improve protections for and transparency of the elections system.

Here are six concrete actions elected officials around the nation can take to strengthen our democratic processes:

## 1. PRIORITIZE VOTER REGISTRATION EFFORTS

Use your voice as an elected official to publicize how and where citizens can register to vote. If there is online registration in your state, use social media to share the website. Link to [nonpartisan websites](#) that explain the voter registration process. Partner with local media around key events, such as Fourth of July parades, local sporting events, and [National Voter Registration Day](#), to publicize voter registration drives. And reach out to [business and corporate leaders](#), who can take actions such as holding voter registration drives for employees and customers. If your state allows same-day registration (where voters can register to vote and cast their ballot on the same day), do all you can to inform voters of such options.



## **2. PUBLICIZE ALL VOTING OPTIONS**

Election officials should work to inform citizens of all their options to vote, so that as many Americans can have their voices heard as possible. There is a growing trend among a large swath of Americans to vote early or vote by mail, enabling them to cast ballots in a time and manner that is most convenient for them. During the height of the COVID pandemic, millions of Americans embraced the idea of absentee voting as a safe, secure alternative to voting in person. As voting locations are being finalized, election officials should work with community and civic leaders to ensure poll locations and drop boxes (where allowed) are broadly accessible to everyone in the community, paying particular attention to groups that have historically faced discrimination, including voters of color and young voters.

## **3. RECRUIT A DIVERSE ARRAY OF POLL WORKERS, INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE**

During midterm and presidential election years, roughly half a million people serve as poll workers across the nation. Given that [polling](#) shows democracy is a top issue for Americans, many will want opportunities to ensure our elections are safe and secure. According to [CIRCLE](#), only nine percent of poll workers are under the age of 25, and only three percent are under age 18 (all but six states allow individuals under the age of 18 to work as poll workers). Local elected officials should seek out partnerships with youth organizations – including high schools and colleges – to recruit poll workers.



## **4. PROTECT VOTERS AND POLL WORKERS**

Violence and threats of violence can discourage individuals from voting or signing up to be poll workers. It is imperative that election officials work with community leaders and appropriate law enforcement personnel to ensure the safety of elections – including of those in elected positions, volunteers, and voters themselves. Elected officials should work with law enforcement and media to make clear to the public that acts of violence, and threats of violence, will not be tolerated. Law enforcement officials should work closely with prosecutors to ensure those who engage in violent or harassing behavior are held accountable.

## **5. EMBRACE ELECTION TRANSPARENCY**

Mis- and disinformation can spread rapidly when people are unclear about the facts of a situation. Election officials can embrace transparency to actively counter harmful rumors and rhetoric before they even take off. For example, state and local election officials should open pre-election voter machine testing to the public and local media, thus showing the accuracy of the machines. In addition, many states have online ballot tracking measures so voters can track the progress of their

absentee ballot. Election officials can work with local media to publicize how citizens can access this information. And after elections, officials should conduct a post-election risk-limiting audit (publicly hand-counting a sample of paper ballots to show the accuracy of the mechanical counting method) to ensure the accuracy of the election.

## **6. AGGRESSIVELY COUNTER MISINFORMATION**

The 2020 election and aftermath show the damage that lies about elections can do. Election officials must plan to counteract the potential harm of newer threats to misinformation, such as [AI-generated](#) material. In some states, officials are engaging in tabletop exercises to help identify potential issues and work through plans to address them. Further, falsehoods should be addressed quickly and matter-of-factly, in order to blunt their effectiveness. When countering the misinformation, election officials should use both social media and relationships with reporters. Election officials should consider partnering with other local officials and civic organizations to reach as many voters as possible with accurate information.



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Strengthening and protecting American democracy played a major role at the [NewDEAL Forum's 2024 annual Ideas Summit](#). Throughout the Summit, experts and elected leaders acknowledged that threats to democracy are real, and they are serious. However, they also struck a confident, determined tone, putting their faith in both adequate preparation of election officials and the determination of the American people. With continued effort, America's elections will remain free, fair, safe, and secure.

## **ABOUT THE DEMOCRACY PLAYBOOK**

The [Democracy Playbook](#), released in February 2023, is a product of the NewDEAL Forum's Democracy Working Group, and was written after months of extensive conversations with election experts, civic leaders, and elected officials. The group is co-chaired by:

- Jocelyn Benson, Michigan Secretary of State;
- Adrian Fontes, Arizona Secretary of State;
- Sandra Jauregui, Nevada Assemblymember; and
- Ken Lawrence, former Montgomery County, PA, Commissioner.

## **ABOUT NEWDEAL FORUM**

The [NewDEAL Forum](#) is a Washington-DC based non-profit organization which identifies and promotes innovative, future-oriented state and local pro-growth progressive policies that can improve the lives of all Americans. By facilitating the identification and spread of policy ideas, the NewDEAL Forum seeks to foster economic growth, reduce barriers to opportunity, and promote good government in communities throughout the country.