

# How You Can Protect Democracy

29 concrete actions you can take right now to protect democracy

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**Protect Democracy is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing American democracy from declining into a more authoritarian form of government.**

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# The stakes are high.

Democracy versus autocracy is more than just an abstract conflict between competing principles. When our nation shifts toward authoritarianism, it affects all of us. Quite literally, our lives, liberty, and pursuit of happiness are at stake. But it's also an opportunity. Our democracy has never quite been what it ought to be, so shouldn't we try to make it the best we can?

The stakes are high, and how we respond to this moment will shape what happens next. Where will you begin?

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## Learn

Cultivate a healthy information diet and an awareness of key democracy issues.

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## Bonus Actions

Help improve this guide and spread the word.

# But can I really make a difference?

National events and their impacts on our families and loved ones can feel overwhelming. We may feel a sense of fear and helplessness. In the face of so much, how can we possibly get through it — much less make a difference? There is good news: Regular citizens are the ones best suited to strengthen our democracy. This is especially true at the local level, where our sphere of influence is greatest.

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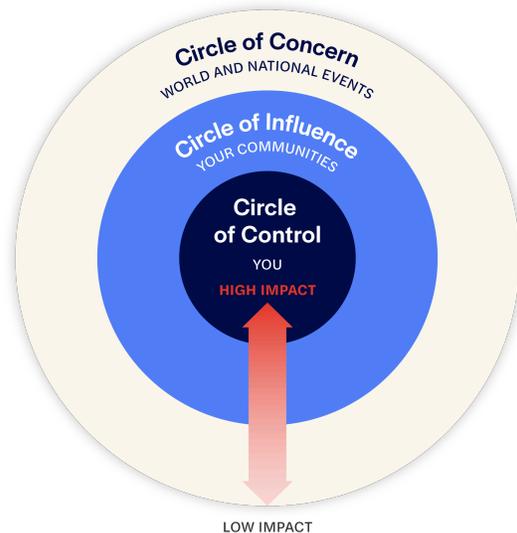
## Consider our circles of concern, influence, and control.

The closer things are, the more they impact us. But thankfully, this goes in both directions: We have the best shot at changing things immediately around us. When autocratic policies threaten our communities directly, we have an opportunity to act. **In truth, we are not helpless at all.**

## Getting started

In this guide are 29 concrete actions you can start taking right away. These actions offer not only knowledge, relief, and power, but also joy, fun, and community. And, of course, you don't have to do all of them to make an impact.

Challenge yourself (and others!) to complete as many as you can in the coming year. Some take less than 30 seconds, some may take months, and some will never truly be complete. Protecting democracy is a generational struggle. Now let's get started.



# Learn

To defeat authoritarianism, we must commit to a healthier information diet. Doomscrolling can increase anxiety or have a numbing effect that impedes our ability to act in the real world. Shifting your information consumption away from social media, cable networks, and pundits and toward more in-depth, and — above all else — accurate information is a useful first step in protecting democracy (and feeling better about the world).

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## ACTION #1

### Subscribe to *If You Can Keep It*.

We would be remiss not to suggest our own high-quality, in-depth, free newsletter on democracy, *If You Can Keep It*, which breaks down the top issues in authoritarianism and democracy in the United States. It exists exclusively to equip you with what you need to know about what's happening in our democracy.

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[Subscribe to \*If You Can Keep It\*. ↗](#)

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## ACTION #2

### Invest in local news.

Since we know our greatest impact can be at the local level, start with local news. Civic engagement [is strongly tied to local news habits](#).

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[Look up your local news provider and subscribe. ↗](#)

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**EXTRA CREDIT:** If you live in a [news desert](#), consider starting a local publication.

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### ACTION #3

## Invest in national and international news.

On the national level, make sure you're consuming (and subscribing to) news that is balanced and substantive.

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- [Check the bias and substance of the news you currently consume.](#) ↗

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  - Adjust your subscriptions (or start your first one), with an eye toward reliability.

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  - Consider using a tool like [Ground.news](#), a platform that "makes it easy to compare news sources, read between the lines of media bias and break free from algorithms."

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  - If your main source of information is social media, consider reducing it.
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### ACTION #4

## Know who represents your community, at every level.

Quick quiz! Do you know the name(s) of your ...

- Neighborhood leaders (block/homeowner/community association)
- School board members (even if you don't have kids)
- Local legislators (council, etc.)
- Local executives (mayor, town manager, etc.)
- State legislator(s)
- Governor
- Member of Congress
- Senators

Make sure you know who these folks are. For the purposes of this action, they are listed in order of descending importance. This knowledge will be essential in confronting the autocratic threat at every level.

- 
- [Look up \(most of\) your elected officials.](#) ↗
-

- 
- If any of them are new to you, spend a little time learning about them, and even getting to know them. Better yet, ask some trusted community members what they think! Consult your local news sources (if available).

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- EXTRA CREDIT:** Take notes, and save their contact information (this will be helpful for future actions below). If you are on social media, follow them there!
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#### ACTION #5

## Become an expert at spotting (and fighting) mis- and disinformation.

In the hunt for a balanced information diet, we've got to equip ourselves to run into information that is not accurate; sometimes information that is spread accidentally (*misinformation*) and sometimes with intent to deliberately mislead (*disinformation*). This type of inaccurate information can come in a variety of shapes and sizes — and there's not one entity or set of partisan players that has a monopoly on it.

For a quick overview, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) offers a helpful, printable guide. And for those who really want to level up, Ponyter's MediaWise offers a myriad of resources to help you spot mis- and disinformation. Once you've mastered these skills, you can help others learn, too.

- 
- [Study CISA's guide.](#) ↗

- 
- [Study Mediawise's resources.](#) ↗
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#### ACTION #6

## Understand the 2025 authoritarian threat.

The *Authoritarian Playbook for 2025* puts the current authoritarian threat into context and lays out specific autocratic actions we can expect in 2025 and beyond. The report also includes ten strategies for the broader pro-democracy coalition to mitigate the threat.

- 
- [Read \*The Authoritarian Playbook for 2025\*](#) ↗
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## ACTION #7

# Invest in your local library.

Leaning into slower, longer-form content is a great way to improve your information diet (and attention span). Even better, spending time at your local library lets you make connections in your community's most accessible [third place](#). It can also be a spot to share signs and fliers with your community, as public bulletin boards are increasingly rare in many places.

As Jennifer Howard put it in [Humanities magazine](#), "There aren't many truly public places left in America. Most of our shared spaces require money or a certain social status to access. Malls exist to sell people things. Museums discourage loiterers. Coffee shops expect patrons to purchase a drink or snack if they want to enjoy the premises. One place, though, remains open to everybody. The public library requires nothing of its visitors: no purchases, no membership fees, no dress code. You can stay all day, and you don't have to buy anything ... in a country riven by racial, ethnic, political, and socioeconomic divides, libraries still welcome everyone."

- 
- Get your library card. If you need ideas for books to borrow, [here are some recent favorites](#) from our staff.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Attend a community event at the library.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Take a friend or family member to get their library card.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Become a monthly donor to your library.

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## ACTION #8

# Learn more about your state.

Because we have a [federalist system](#) of government, many of the decisions that impact our daily lives are made at the state level. Understanding the basics of your state can help prepare you for becoming more active in its democracy. For example: How many people live in your state, and what are their demographics? What's the median household income? Which rights are protected in the state constitution, and which are not?

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- [Learn basic facts about your state from the U.S. Census.](#) ↗  
(These are written for kids but actually pretty informative.)

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- Skim this [list of U.S. state topics on Wikipedia](#), and read a few. Here, you'll find state data on everything from life expectancy, to income, to carbon dioxide emissions.

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- [Read your state constitution.](#) ↗

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- Learn [when your state's legislature is next in session.](#) ↗
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#### ACTION #9

## Learn more about our nation.

[A 2018 survey](#) found that just one in three Americans would pass the U.S. citizenship test. Even citizens who have lived here their entire lives can be remarkably ignorant about our country. Having a strong command of the (not-so-basic) basics can really help put things in perspective — and will be essential to push back against autocrats.

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- Review the [U.S. citizenship test.](#) ↗ What percent can you answer correctly?
- 
- In many ways, our government is shaped by how we design our elections. Learn the [basics of electoral system design](#) and [how we could do things differently.](#)
- 
- From crime, the economy, and education to health and population, [USA Facts](#) ↗ is a great, non-partisan tool to learn more about our nation. Watch one of their videos and subscribe.
- 
- Our constitution is central to our democracy. [Explore the U.S. Constitution at the Constitution Center.](#) ↗
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# Build Community

Reaching out beyond your immediate circle of control can feel daunting, especially if you're introverted. But becoming involved with collective decision-making and action is a crucial part of sustaining democracy. So to really have an impact, you need to build a strong local network.

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## ACTION #10

### Clean up (and build up!) your contacts.

It may seem odd, but this is probably the most powerful action you can take on this list. Review your contacts, and consider categorizing them. If you're only in touch with some people on social media, now is the time to send them your real contact information and request the same.

You cannot rely on social media to manage your contacts, or for the purposes of outreach and advocacy. Your network is your most powerful asset, and you want as much influence over it as possible. Social media networks can [collapse](#), get banned, or be purchased by an autocrat.

Note that this action is best done with a decent-size screen and a keyboard:

- Use a single platform to store and manage contacts: Google Contacts, iCloud, a spreadsheet, or whatever works for you.
  - Clean up your existing contacts: Delete outdated addresses, numbers, etc.
  - Reach out to friends and family (even the ones with difficult politics) via social media to get their real contact information (phone, email), and add them to your contacts. Augment your contacts with more useful information (like birthdays, mailing addresses, and even pictures if you like).
  - Add local community activists to your list (regardless of their respective issues or whether you know them personally).
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Add local elected officials to your list.

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Organize your contact list into categories or groups (such as local, family, work, college friends, softball league, church, etc). You don't have to go overboard, but these lists will be really useful later.

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**EXTRA CREDIT:** Find a respected loved one or community leader, and offer to help them do this action, too.

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#### ACTION #11

## Secure your communications.

Given both continued cyberattacks and the threat of an autocratic administration, [it is highly advisable to better secure your communications with others](#). This not only protects you but also your broader community.

An encrypted messaging application like Signal is free and far more secure than traditional text messaging. It also allows you to set messages to automatically disappear after a set time period and you can use it across all your devices, including your desktop.

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[Install Signal on your devices.](#) ↗

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Enable disappearing messages.

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**EXTRA CREDIT:** Urge your friends and family to install it as well.

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#### ACTION #12

## Go to a local community meeting.

There will be times when national actions are necessary, but you will be in a better position to respond if you have already built a strong local network, and if you have already established genuine relationships with those you seek to influence.

A great place to start is a local community meeting (think school board, town hall, council meeting). And while you can go just for the sake of becoming more locally focused, if you can find a meeting relevant to an issue you care about, all the better. The more of these you attend,

the more informed you'll be, and the more your local network will rely on you to keep them in the know, too.

- 
- Find one local community or government meeting that you're interested in. Add it to your calendar.

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  - Bring a friend! They may end up being the next great community leader.

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  - Try to meet at least one new community member at the meeting, and ideally get their contact information. Follow up with them, even with just a short "Nice to meet you!"

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  - If the meeting turns out to be interesting and a good use of time, email your list of local contacts with details for the next one.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** When inviting others, attach a calendar invite with the date, time, and address so it's already in their calendar. Offer to give them a ride if you can, and grab a beverage after to discuss how it went. In other words, make it as easy as possible for them to make (and enjoy) it.
- 

#### ACTION #13

## Organize people who agree with you.

This one is especially for the leaders reading this guide. You're not the only one worried about how things are going or who has ideas about how conditions can be improved. Within your network are plenty of people ready to help; they just need to know what to do. You don't need anyone's permission, or anyone's blessing, to start organizing these people towards action.

Maybe start with a short email about your ideas, hopes, and concerns. Ask if they're interested in getting more involved. Or organize a party/cookout/coffee klatch/book club, etc., to get people together in person. Become a connector of people, and you will unlock tremendous power in your community. Remember, these events don't necessarily need to be about democracy or politics.

Even just getting people together and building local community is a great start:

- 
- Send a message to potentially like-minded folks, and see who is interested in getting together/involved. These are most effective with direct messages. (Goal: 20 recipients)
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Organize an event, and ask people to bring a friend. (Goal: five attendees)

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**EXTRA CREDIT:** Organize a second event. (Goal: ten attendees)

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**SUPER EXTRA CREDIT:** Organize a third event. (Goal: 20 attendees)

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#### ACTION #14

## Dialogue with people who don't agree with you.

This is a tough one, and in some cases may even be impossible. But if you can do it, it can have a profound impact on the fight to save our democracy. Find a way to sit down and have a conversation with someone you think (or know) may see things differently.

This is important: At this point, your goal is *not* to convince them they're wrong. It's to understand why they think the way they do and see if you can help them understand why you see things your way. There's a good chance during this conversation that one or both of you will feel angry, and that's okay. Try to keep it civil and keep the door open for future conversations if you can.

If you need help, check out the [Sustained Dialogue Institute](#). They can help you bring people of different views together in an intentional way. There's also a great West Virginia Public Radio podcast, [Us & Them](#), which explores all sides of the cultural issues that often divide us.

When you're ready:

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Sit down with someone who disagrees with you, and discuss a difficult topic (like democracy).

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Listen, and understand why they feel the way they do (doesn't mean agree with them).

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Help them understand why you feel the way you do. This may need to wait for a future conversation (below), and it doesn't mean convincing them of your perspective.

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**EXTRA CREDIT:** Have a follow-up conversation in a few weeks.

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## ACTION #15

# Set a giving budget.

As autocracy impacts local communities, organizations on the ground can push back and help those most affected. But they need resources to do their work. Compared to most other countries, [Americans tend to give a lot more to philanthropy](#). But this giving is often sporadic, and can make it difficult for organizations to budget and make long-term plans. Further, one-off gifts come with more overhead for nonprofits, so they're not terribly economically efficient.

For this action, it's ideal to provide reputable groups with a dedicated, recurring source of revenue. Better to dedicate \$10 every month than \$120 all at once. And as with prior actions, you may want to focus on local groups.

- 
- Set a sustainable monthly or annual giving budget (ideally a percent of your income).

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  - Make a list of local organizations doing good work.

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  - Set up recurring monthly donations to these organizations that align with your budget. (You can always increase or decrease later depending on your circumstances.)

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Email your contact list and ask them to do the same, or make a pitch for one of the groups you support.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Reach out to the groups you're supporting to learn more about their work, and see if there are other ways you can support them. Go see the work they do.
- 

## ACTION #16

# Volunteer in your community.

Volunteering is an easy way to meet other people in your community and build your local network. Of course, you don't have to volunteer for a political cause or something explicitly democracy related. Just getting involved locally is a great first step.

- 
- The nonpartisan [Election Protection](#) coalition, led by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, offers great volunteer opportunities for legal professionals (and the rest of us).
-

- 
- Find broader volunteer opportunities in your area with [VolunteerMatch](#). ↗
- 

- Try one (or a few) and see if you like them.
- 

#### ACTION #17

## Connect on democracy issues with your local religious leaders.

Communities of faith can play a critical role in defending free and fair elections, addressing polarization, and building trust and cohesion among individuals with different political beliefs. Connect with your local religious leaders to offer nonpartisan election resources, courtesy of our [Faith in Elections Playbook](#).

- 
- Reach out to your local religious leaders and share the [Faith in Elections Playbook](#). ↗
- 

#### ACTION #18

## Engage with a younger person.

Historically, younger people vote less frequently than everyone else. And in the most recent presidential election, youth turnout dropped considerably. Whatever your age, engaging younger people (even kids!) in democracy in a meaningful and sustained way will have long-term benefits for our democracy.

- 
- Sit down with someone under the age of 25, and learn a bit about their thoughts on politics and democracy.
- 
- EXTRA CREDIT:** Help someone under the age of 25 [register](#) (or pre-register) to vote, or update their registration to their current address.
- 
- EXTRA CREDIT:** Bring someone under the age of 25 with you next time you vote.
-

# Engage in Political Action

Participation in elections is essential to democracy, but shouldn't be the only thing you do to protect it. Ideally, political action is an extension of deeper personal and community engagement — including actions in this guide focused on [learning about the issues](#) and [strengthening our networks](#). Then it's time to take that power and use it.

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## ACTION #19

### Reach out to your elected officials.

Calling your local officials about an issue makes a big difference — as does just getting to know them better. Note that whoever answers the phone or checks email is keeping a tally of messages for and against a particular issue, so when you reach out, you don't have to be particularly eloquent or barrage them with statistics. Just (civilly) make your position clear, and make sure they know you're a constituent who votes.

As you become more sophisticated in your activism, try to understand which issues fall under which jurisdiction (local, state, federal). In other words, don't call your U.S. senator about town zoning or your local council member about international conflicts.

- 
- If you haven't yet, add your elected officials to your contacts.

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  - Reach out to one (or more) elected official about an issue that falls into their jurisdiction; ask them what their priorities are for their next legislative session; or just get to know them better.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Ask your (local) contact list to do the same.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Get to know not only your elected officials but also their staff.

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## ACTION #20

# Organize around an issue, not a candidate.

As candidates have begun to [forgo “issues” pages on their websites](#), it’s worth taking the time to ask: Are we choosing candidates because we like them personally, or based on their ability and willingness to represent our interests? If it’s ultimately about the issues, then it’s logical to start organizing there.

There are added advantages to organizing around an issue. First, you may bridge political divides and find unlikely allies. Second, issue-based organizing is more resilient in the long term. Once you’ve built consensus in your community, it’s a lot harder for any one elected official to go against the popular will without serious consequences. Finally, organizing around a specific issue can build longer-term political power that can translate into elections in the future.

- 
- Identify a local issue you’re passionate about.

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  - Research the topic in depth. (Warning: Your feelings about the topic may become more nuanced or may even change completely.)

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  - Find others in your community already working on this issue. The more you connect with those around you, the easier it will be to find these folks.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** If no one is already actively involved in an issue you think is important, it’s up to you to take the lead.
- 

## ACTION #21

# Get involved with a local political party.

A record [six in ten](#) Americans view both political parties unfavorably. But parties are an essential and inescapable feature of any democracy. The real question is, what should those parties be like? How representative and responsive will they be? Who will control them? How cohesive, coordinated, and effective will they be? Will they uphold democratic norms and values?

In many ways, the growing antipathy to political parties is a negative feedback loop. As many Americans disassociate with parties, it creates openings for those who are more extreme, ideological, or committed to securing power — even at the expense of our democracy.

- 
- Learn about the [role of political parties](#) in a democracy.
- 
- If you live in a closed-primary state (where only people registered in a party can vote in its primary), consider registering in the dominant party. Because primaries have much lower turnout than general elections, your vote goes much further. Note that you don't need to vote the party line in the general.
- 
- If you live in a state that allows [fusion voting](#) (where multiple parties can nominate the same candidate), figure out which party best represents your values and vote for your preferred candidate on that line, even if it's a minor party.
- 
- Get involved in activities as a member, volunteer, or elected officer of your local political party. And when you do so, be a voice for democracy, not just partisan priorities.
- 

#### ACTION #22

## Learn how to assemble safely and effectively.

The right to assemble and protest is a fundamental right that lies at the heart of democracy. In the U.S., it is also protected by the Constitution. Learning what actions are permissible, and what actions are out of bounds, is key to effectively expressing yourself.

- 
- Read the [ACLU's guide to protester's rights.](#) ↗
- 
- Study this toolkit from the [Center for Applied Nonviolence.](#) ↗
- 

#### ACTION #23

## Get a job.

Maybe you're ready to dedicate more than just your free time to making a difference in our democracy. If you want to make a career of it, there are plenty of great organizations (including ours) that may need your skills. Here are some places to begin your search:

- [Protect Democracy's job openings](#) ↗
- [Democracy Jobs](#) ↗
- [Idealist](#) ↗

#### ACTION #24

## Thank your election official.

Over the past few years, your local election official and their staff have likely endured threats, harassment, major changes to election procedures, and plenty more. Write them a short note thanking them. Of course, if there are areas for improvement, give them this feedback, too.

- 
- [Look up your local election official.](#) ↗ (And add them to your contacts.)

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  - Send them and their staff a nice thank you note.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Thank your state election director and their staff.

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  - EXTRA CREDIT:** Ask your local contact list to do the same.
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#### ACTION #25

## Become a poll worker.

Even better than thanking your local election official, help them out and maybe make some money, too!

- 
- [Find out how to become a poll worker.](#) ↗
- 

#### ACTION #26

## Help someone run for office, or run for office yourself.

If there's a local candidate who aligns with your positions, why not get involved in their campaign? Maybe you can even manage it and leverage your (now impressive) contact list.

If you've determined there is no one running who meets your standards, run for office yourself. Here's a (very) streamlined [guide on how to run for office](#). If you're serious, consult your local election office so you understand the full requirements and deadlines.

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Help someone run for office.

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**EXTRA CREDIT:** Run for office.

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**ACTION #27**

## Help your network vote.

Communicating with your now-considerable network on when and how to vote — not just in the general election, but especially in lower-turnout elections like locals, primaries, and runoffs — is a fairly easy action:

- The National Association of Secretaries of State has specific pages that connect voters to their state's website on the following topics:

[Registering to vote](#) ↗

[Checking voter registration status](#) ↗

[Finding your polling place](#) ↗

[Voter ID requirements](#) ↗

[Mail-in \(absentee\) voting and early voting information](#) ↗

- [Vote.org](#) outlines important deadlines related to the election and allows you to sign up to get reminders of upcoming deadlines.
- The League of Women Voters has a checklist to [make your plan to vote.](#) ↗
- Should anyone have problems with voting, share the following phone numbers:

1-866-OUR-VOTE

1-888-VE-Y-VOTA (Español)

1-888-API-VOTE (Asian multilingual assistance)

1-844-YALLA-US (Arabic)

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Send your contact list accurate information about the next election, well before the registration deadline.

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Send a reminder shortly before voting begins.

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**EXTRA CREDIT:** Include your own well-researched endorsements, or talk about your interactions with the candidates who are up for election.

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# Bonus Actions

The actions in this guide are only a start, and there are always more ways you can engage to protect our democracy. Now it's your turn to help add new ideas and spread the word.

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## ACTION #28

### Improve this guide.

At Protect Democracy, we have a culture principle: "Cherish feedback and give feedback responsibly." Now that you've gone through this guide, you may have thoughts about what is missing or what might be changed or improved. If so, [please let us know](#).

## ACTION #29

### Become a leader in the democracy movement.

Now that you've [cleaned up your contacts](#), why not share this guide with your network? You can send it all at once or share a few actions at a time. Print copies and bring it to your next community event. You don't need anyone's permission or invitation to become a democracy leader — just your own gumption and this guide are enough to start getting others involved in this important work.



Protect Democracy is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing American democracy from declining into a more authoritarian form of government.

[protectdemocracy.org](https://protectdemocracy.org)