

# 12 PRIORITIES OVER 12 MONTHS TO PROTECT DEMOCRACY

America's [safe, secure, and fair](#) elections require year-round work from state and local officials. As these officials continue their preparations for the next national election, we offer twelve initiatives to prioritize over twelve months, drawn from our Democracy Working Group and the [Playbook](#) the group released nearly a year ago to guide efforts around voting, election integrity, and civic engagement. While it remains important to improve election laws, the 2024 primaries are 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 twelve concrete actions elected officials around the nation can take to strengthen our democratic processes:

# 1

## ENCOURAGE VOTER REGISTRATION

Use your voice as an elected official to publicize how citizens can register to vote. If there is online registration in your state, use social media to share the website. Or link to [nonpartisan websites](#) that explain the voter registration process. Also, partner with local media around key events, such as local football games, to publicize voter registration drives. And work with businesses who can encourage workers and patrons to register to vote.

# 2

## MAKE VOTING ACCESSIBLE

The decision of where to place polling locations is critical to ensuring equal access to voting. Polling centers - and secure drop-boxes where allowed - should be located conveniently for as many people as possible. Election officials should work with community leaders when determining voting locations, and should take special care to ensure access for historically disenfranchised groups such as voters of color and young voters.



## **STREAMLINE EARLY VOTING**

One improvement to early voting is allowing voters to cast their ballot at any early voting location in a given area, usually a county. If allowed under state law, local election officials should implement countywide voting. Given the technology to make voter rolls accessible anywhere, there is no reason for counties to limit early voting participants to casting their ballots in a specific precinct.



## **PUBLICIZE ABSENTEE VOTING OPTIONS**

During the height of the COVID pandemic, millions of Americans embraced the idea of absentee voting, or voting by mail, as a safe, secure alternative to voting in person. Localities should ensure voting by mail, where allowed, is publicized so that residents know it is an option. Where possible, ensure that secure drop-boxes are placed in broadly accessible locations.



## **RECRUIT YOUNG PEOPLE AS POLL WORKERS**

During midterm and presidential election years, roughly half a million people serve as poll workers across the nation. According to [CIRCLE](#), only nine percent of poll workers are under the age of 25, and only three percent are under 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.



## **PROTECT POLL WORKERS**

Violence and threats of violence can discourage individuals from 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 all election officials – those elected to the position and those who volunteer to work on Election Day. Acts of violence, and threats of violence, undermine our democracy and cannot be tolerated.

## **7 PROSECUTE ALL ACTS OF VOTER/ELECTION INTERFERENCE**

Elected officials at all levels must work with prosecutors to ensure cases of election violence (including threats of violence, harassment, and interference) are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law to prevent the spread of such activity.

## **8 PUBLICIZE BALLOT TRACKING MEASURES**

Many states have online ballot tracking measures so voters can track the progress of their absentee ballots. According to the [Center for American Progress](#), such a system “allows voters to track their ballots through every step of the process, from the moment they request a ballot to the time it is counted.” In some states, such as California, voters can receive a text message letting them know their vote has been counted. Such a measure also increases the transparency of elections and can counteract misinformation efforts. Elected officials should do what they can to publicize these measures.

## **9 AGGRESSIVELY COUNTER MISINFORMATION**

The 2020 election and aftermath showed the damage that lies about elections can do. It is best to address falsehoods quickly and matter-of-factly. When countering the misinformation, use both social media and relationships with reporters. Election officials should partner with other local officials and civic organizations to reach as many voters as possible with accurate information.

## **10 PUBLICLY TEST VOTING MACHINES**

Nearly every jurisdiction tests voting machines before elections. Yet state and local election officials can (and should) open such testing to the public, thus transparently showing the accuracy of the machines. Widely publicizing the testing is a great way to both engage journalists and blunt potential arguments from bad-faith actors seeking to undermine elections.

## **PARTNER WITH 3RD-PARTY OBSERVERS**

# 11

Poll observers play a critical role in ensuring elections are administered fairly. Observers can alert precincts to issues (such as long lines or disturbances at an election site) as well as ensure election officials are not engaging in unlawful voter suppression efforts. In the lead-up to and on Election Day, election officials should view third-party observers as partners, not opponents. Observers operating in good faith have the same objectives as officials: To ensure a fair, safe election.

## **REQUIRE POST-ELECTION AUDITS**

# 12

A post-election risk-limiting audit consists of election officials publicly hand-counting a sample of paper ballots to show the accuracy of the mechanical counting method used by the county. Secretaries of States and other election officials should do all they can to publicize the results of audits. According to the [Brennan Center](#), post-election audits “confirm whether votes are recorded and tallied accurately — and, in turn, help restore public confidence in elections.”

While primary responsibility lies with elected officials, civic-minded residents can contact these officials and encourage them to take these steps. After all, protecting and strengthening democracy is as much our civic duty as theirs. And it is one that should transcend partisanship, uniting us as one nation dedicated to the highest ideals of liberty and justice for all.

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## **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, Montgomery County, PA, Commissioner

## **ABOUT NEWDEAL FORUM**

The NewDEAL Forum is a Washington, D.C.-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.