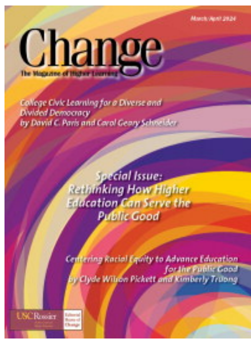

Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/vchn20

Can Higher Education Help Renew American Democracy?

John M. Bridgeland, Cecilia Muñoz & Danielle Allen

To cite this article: John M. Bridgeland, Cecilia Muñoz & Danielle Allen (2024) Can Higher Education Help Renew American Democracy?, Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 56:2, 11-20, DOI: 10.1080/00091383.2024.2322913

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2024.2322913

© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

Published online: 25 Apr 2024.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 920

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=vchn20

Can Higher Education Help Renew American Democracy?

By John M. Bridgeland, Cecilia Muñoz, and Danielle Allen

In Short

- A survey of the nation's civic health reveals troubling trends, with historic lows in trust among individuals and key institutions such as government, media, and the courts. Political polarization has significantly increased among Americans in the last 40 years, surpassing eight other democratic nations and challenging the idea that it is merely a global phenomenon.
- Higher education should focus on fostering students' understanding of democratic norms, values, and institutions, equipping them with the necessary skills and attitudes for active civic participation. Inspiring students to recognize the significance of being a responsible citizen and sharing stories of historical figures who brought about transformational change through grassroots action can encourage students to believe in their ability to make a meaningful impact on society.
- Colleges and universities can play a crucial role in supporting democracy by advancing five key goals: civic learning, national service and volunteering, bridging divides, trusted elections and representative and responsible governance, and access to trusted news and information.

John Bridgeland is the Executive Chairman of the Office of American Possibilities, a civic moonshot factory to tap the entrepreneurial talent of Americans to solve public challenges together across divides; Co-Chair and Chief Executive Officer of More Perfect; a former Director of the White House Domestic Policy for President George W. Bush; and a former member of the White House Council for Community Solutions for President Barack Obama.

Cecilia Muñoz is the Co-Chair of the Office of American Possibilities, Co-Chair of More Perfect, and a former Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council for President Barack Obama. Cecilia is a national leader in public policy and public interest technology with over three decades of experience in the nonprofit sector and eight years of service on President Obama's senior team.

Danielle Allen is Director of the Allen Lab for Democracy Renovation at Harvard Kennedy School's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation and Co-Chair of the Our Common Purpose Commission. Danielle is a leader and member of More Perfect's National Advisory Council.

Introduction by Ashley P. Finley, PhD, Vice President of Research and Senior Advisor to the President, American Association of Colleges and Universities

Thomas Jefferson founded the University of Virginia on the premise that a college education should not just be a public good for *some*, but a public good for *all*. The foundations of pluralistic democracy pervade the article by John Bridgeland, Cecilia Muñoz, and Danielle Allen. Articulated through the Five Democracy Goals, the authors call for higher education to reassert its central role in strengthening democracy by catalyzing action and confronting the inequities that continue to define our imperfect democracy even in modern times.

At the heart of this article is the mission of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, which is to advance the democratic purposes of higher education by promoting equity, innovation, and excellence in *liberal education*. To champion a liberal education is to look beyond the insinuation of "liberal" as a political label, and to embrace the meaning of the word's Latin root—*liber*—"to free." A liberal education is an education aimed at equipping students with the skills and capacities to think for themselves and to free the mind. The opposite of a liberal education is an education that is devoid of constructive dialog, action, and awareness. Bridgeland, Muñoz, and Allen provide the kind of practical roadmap needed for these historic times, as we seek to repair our fragile democracy and strengthen civil discourse. This article reminds us that higher education has a vital role to play in our democratic renewal through engaging students' civic learning and supporting their development as civic actors.

The three of us speak regularly at colleges and universities around the country. We find ourselves overwhelmed by students seeking mentorship and guidance toward civically engaged professional trajectories, but often without the support they need on our campuses. Civic education and engagement in our universities—educating toward self-government and engaged citizenship—could use a major reset.

Higher education has always been at the forefront of promoting the public good by educating generations of students to live more effectively in their times. Surveys show, however, that while most young people are worried the country is going in the wrong direction and believe they have the power to change the country for the better, far too many—particularly those from historically marginalized communities—do not feel well-informed or qualified enough to participate in their democracy and advance the public good (Booth et al., 2023).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

The current state of our democracy should sound an alarm that we need a national effort to revitalize the role of higher education in fostering the civic knowledge and engagement that are so central to democratic renewal. We are trying to do our part by working together in an effort called "More Perfect" (https://www.joinmoreperfect.us/), a national initiative to advance five democracy goals among 30 Presidential Centers, the National Archives Foundation, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Karsh Institute of Democracy at the University of Virginia, and more than 100 partners. The five goals are universal civic learning, national service and volunteering, bridging divides, trusted elections and representative and responsible governance, and access to trusted news and information. The time could not be more urgent.

The Decline in Civic Health

As we survey the nation's civic health, we have consistently found disturbing trends (National

> **Civic education and engagement in our universities—educating toward self-government and engaged citizenship—could use a major reset.**

Conference on Citizenship, n.d.). Trust in one another and in key institutions—government, media, and even the courts—are at historic lows. Political polarization has grown rapidly among Americans in the last 40 years and more so than in eight other democratic nations, debunking the notion that it is just part of a global trend (News from Brown, 2020).

Americans are increasingly isolated, with the percentage of Americans living alone having tripled since the 1950s (Chamie, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the isolation with months of shut-ins and shut-downs.

Four large-scale civic institutions that bring people together to exercise their civic muscles—faith-based institutions, daily newspapers, unions, and political parties for grassroots participation sustained beyond campaigns—have declined dramatically over the last century (Putnam & Bridgeland, 2017). In just one of those integrating institutions, more than 2,500 local newspapers have disappeared over the last two decades, together with the civic glue they represent for community engagement and holding government officials accountable (Roadmap for Local News, 2023). If there had been a more robust local news outlet reporting on the candidacy of George Santos for Congress, for example, we wonder if he would have been elected (Ellison, 2022).

Americans have also become less civically active. Regular volunteering is down from about 30 percent of the population in the years after September 11, 2001 (9/11) to just 23 percent in 2021 (Schneider & Marshall, 2023). National service opportunities in programs like the Peace Corps, Volunteers in Service to America, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps are dramatically down from the high levels after 9/11, and government agencies administering these programs are having difficulty filling available slots. The picture of democracy in America about which de Tocqueville (2000) wrote in a two-volume book—with the array of voluntary associations engaging Americans in public problem solving of all kinds—has diminished right at a time when our country needs such civic stock the most.

The decline in civic health has taken our country into even more disturbing places. An insurrection at our U.S. Capitol attempted to overturn the results of a presidential election. Five people died, and more than 138 were injured, including police officers. A former president and hundreds of candidates for public office continued to deny the legitimacy of election results, even though Republican-led reviews of court cases showed no evidence of consequential fraud (Schonfeld, 2022). The will of the people through voting and the peaceful transfer of power are basic foundations of our democracy. So are truth and truthfulness, yet our nation is awash in "alternative facts" and intentional disinformation.

In examining the evidence related to the cycle of polarization and hatred that can lead to violence and the targeting of Americans by race, ethnicity, faith, politics, or other differences, we see additional disturbing trends. Federally reported hate crimes have increased for the fourth consecutive year, to the highest levels in more than a decade (Community Relations Service, 2023). Political violence from the right and the left has reached the highest levels since 1994 (with right-wing violence three times as high as left wing, including incidents ranging from homicide to property destruction to harassment; Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2020). Last year broke the record for the most school shootings (Blad, 2022). In 2022, white supremacy activity rose to the highest levels in recent years (ADL Center on Extremism, 2023). Even the guardians of democracy are under attack—in 2020, one in six election workers reported being threatened (Edlin & Baker, 2022), threats against judges have doubled over the last 4 years (Lynch, 2022), threats against members of Congress increased more than tenfold between 2016 and 2022 (NBC News, 2022), and, in 2020, U.S. journalists faced an unprecedented level of attacks (Jacobsen, 2020).

A nationally representative survey of Americans conducted for our Dignity.US initiative (now

named Bedrock.US; https://www.bedrock.us/) shows that 87 percent of Americans recognize that hate-fueled violence has increased in recent years, and more than two-thirds worry about their own safety in public places. Americans should not have to live in fear when they learn, work, pray, or otherwise connect to their communities.

Fortunately, these somber trends do not tell the complete story. There is also good news to report about Americans awakening to protect, renew, and renovate democracy.

Voting rates in the 2020 presidential election soared to levels not seen in decades (Desilver, 2021). Voters in six battleground states rejected for key state offices candidates who were spreading false narratives that the former president won the 2020 election (Bridgeland, 2022).

A robust civic core of millions of Americans who do most of the voting, volunteering, and community projects provides a solid foundation for civic engagement (National Conference on Citizenship, n.d.). In times of need, low-income Americans are the most likely to step up to help strangers who need shelter, food, and other essentials (National Conference on Citizenship, n.d.). Calls to action by presidents and other leaders typically result in a resounding response from the American people, as evidenced by the millions of Americans who have raised their hand to welcome the Afghan, Ukrainian, and other refugees who have recently entered the United States (https://welcome.us/).

Veterans returning from military service are finding their civic mission continues on the home front, as volunteering boosts their own connections to work, community, and family (Bridgeland & Yonkman, 2009). Innovators in the use of technology are creating communities of interest across the country and globe to tackle a wide range of challenges. Members of the youngest generations, Millennials and Gen Z, are constantly inventing new social enterprises to address public challenges of all types (National Conference on Citizenship, n.d.).

What Higher Education Can Do Now for Democracy

Higher education, of course, cannot address all these civic ills or claim responsibility for the positive developments. It does, though, have a fundamental role to play in civic education and engagement that fosters knowledgeable citizens and responsible leaders as part of its public good mission.

Historian David McCullough reminded us that every State Constitution, including the Massachusetts Constitution that preceded the federal Constitution by a decade, puts the cultivation of citizens at the center of education (2002). The drafters knew that an educated citizenry—with knowledge of our history; the Charters of Freedom; and the roles citizens play in electing representatives, checking political corruption, and ensuring that policies both reflect the will of majorities and protect minorities—was fundamental to sustaining a healthy democracy.

The father of American public education, Horace Mann, believed a nation could not remain both ignorant and free, and he helped achieve mandatory education requirements for every student in Massachusetts that then served as a model for the nation. He stated more than 150 years ago, "One of the highest and most valuable objects to which the influences of a school can be made conducive consists in training our children to self-government" (quoted in Bok, 2021).

Today, the majority of high-school graduates (62 percent) go directly to college, and millions more will eventually enroll as working adults. While civic and history learning in K–12 remains foundational, we need new attention to civic and democratic learning in higher education (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Civic learning in college can and should help democracy rebuild and renew our capacity to work together to form a "more perfect union," a durable goal for our constitutional republic.

In an article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled "The Crisis of Civic Education," former Harvard College president Derek Bok (2017) challenged the higher educational sector "to ask what more can be done to prepare young people for responsible citizenship in a democratic society" and offered a range of ideas. We ask the same question and are working together to explore innovations in higher education in a diverse range of institutions that can demonstrate how civic education and engagement can be brought to scale.

Our shared experiences with higher education tell us that much more can be done to foster new generations of students who understand democratic norms, values, and institutions and who have the skills and dispositions needed for effective and rewarding civic participation. They should be

> **We need to remind students that they, too, can make their mark on history.**

inspired to learn that, as Mortimer Adler (1987) wrote in *We Hold These Truths*: *Understanding the Ideas and Ideals of the Constitution*, for the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, in a democracy, "citizen"—not president, senator, or governor—is the highest office in the land. They should know, too, as a point of inspiration what historian Doris Kearns Goodwin talked about at the launch of our More Perfect initiative in July 2021—that transformational change comes from the ground up, from citizens often without any public platform taking action to improve their communities and country. This is the story of John Muir and the national park system, Susan B. Anthony in the women's rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., in the quest for civil rights, and many other Americans who understand the role of citizen in a democracy. We need to remind students that they, too, can make their mark on history.

In order to spark a further national conversation about the civic mission of higher education, so often embedded in the mottos of colleges and universities, we offer the following concrete ideas.

Required Courses in Democratic Citizenship

To maintain a free society, Americans have to understand democratic norms, values, and the roles of institutions. They also need a set of skills and dispositions that support the operations of constitutional democracy. We believe the faculties of America's colleges and universities should innovate by creating required civic curricula.

A vision now exists, through the Educating for American Democracy Roadmap project, for what excellence in history and civic learning looks like in K–12. That vision prioritizes an inquiry-based approach to learning and instructional strategies that give students a chance to integrate mastery of core knowledge with experiential learning to support their understanding of responsible and authentic civic participation. The Roadmap framework integrates long-lived bodies of knowledge—about the philosophical foundations of democracy and our political institutions—with more recent advances in the anchor disciplines of political science and history—for instance, new understanding of the importance of social movements to the functioning of democracy and new research that makes it possible to integrate long-hidden histories of women, people of color, and working people into the American story. We hope to see equally powerful visions for civic learning emerge in higher education and new strategies for reaching all students on campus, and many institutions are making important strides.

College faculty have struggled for decades to come to shared visions for how to support the civic development of our students. Yet this work is necessary. At a bare minimum, we cannot equip ourselves with the educators we need to deliver civic learning in K–12 if we are not providing our college students with this basic education. What would it take for our college graduates to be equipped to teach all across America in support of the Educating for American Democracy Roadmap? Considering answers to that question would help us move forward.

Some institutions have begun to step up. The American Association of Colleges and Universities has already led work on civic learning in college majors. Stanford now has a course in democracy that is taken by the vast majority of its first-year students. Arizona State has established a School for Civic and Economic Thought and Learning. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has established an Institute for American Civics that will seek to seed new courses throughout the curriculum. The James Madison Center for Civic Engagement integrates civic learning opportunities in courses and academic programs with faculty and departments across campus. In all cases, these efforts succeed because faculty members lead and make the case within the faculty that it is time for us to renew our commitment to the civic education of all of our students.

Then-Senator John F. Kennedy (1960) reminded us, "There is a connection … between achievement in public life and progress in the arts. The age of Pericles was also the age of Phidias. The age of Lorenzo de Medici was also the age of Leonardo da Vinci. The age of Elizabeth was also the age of Shakespeare." By improving

the foundation of our democracy, human talent and the entrepreneurial spirit have more room to flourish in and across all fields.

Civic Seals on Diplomas

Let us face it. Students are practical and they respond to incentives that help them do better in school, get a decent-paying job, and have opportunities to live a more complete life. Seven states have established civics diploma seals for high-school graduation. Colleges and universities could create concrete pathways that lead to civic seals on diplomas that reflect a commitment to civic learning and that honor the civic contributions of students who have engaged in serious civic work—such as national and community service, experiential learning, and other civic contributions while in college.

Experiential learning opportunities can allow students to exercise their civic muscles. We might reinstate the Learn and Serve Program at the Corporation for National and Community Service to support students in internships with local non-profits and public service roles. The Partnership for Public Service hosts the Call to Serve network (https://ourpublicservice.org/our-solutions/workforce/call-to-serve-colleges-and-universities/), an initiative to work with higher education professionals, college students, and recent graduates to help them understand the federal government and federal career opportunities. More higher education institutions should join this or similar efforts to demonstrate their commitment to government and the role it plays in our democracy. Govern for America (https://www.govforamerica.org/about-gfa) works with colleges and universities to recruit, train, and place recent graduates into full-time jobs and support them as they develop into effective public sector leaders throughout their 2-year fellowship. Public service in action should be an easily accessible opportunity for our college students.

Supporting a Year of National Service

Longitudinal studies show that those who engage in a year of national service become better citizens, with higher rates of volunteering, voting, and engagement in their communities than peers who do not perform a service year (Bridgeland & DiIulio, 2019). Some programs, such as Teach for America, generate leaders who go on to lead exceptional efforts as principals, superintendents, and chief state school officers to improve the educational outcomes of children. Conservation Corps alums become better stewards of the environment. Habitat for Humanity alums and volunteers see the crisis in affordable housing and how communities can address it. Experience in the Peace Corps influences the choice of careers of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, many of whom go on to enter government service; makes them more open to people of different races, ethnicities, religions, and national origins; and results in volunteering rates among Returned Peace Corps Volunteers more than double the national average (Bridgeland et al., 2011).

Colleges have a critical role to play in encouraging a year of national service. They could send signals in admissions that give applicants who have performed national service a leg up; they could encourage a bridge or gap year from high school to college, during college, or from college to graduate school or employment and prompt a service capstone paper reflecting on the experience; and they could promote national service opportunities as a common expectation on campus. Current federal programs and now some state programs, such as those in California (https://www.californiavolunteers.ca.gov/californiansforall-college-corps/), Utah (https://twitter.com/GovCox/status/1744416616434323610), and Maryland (https://governor.maryland.gov/news/press/pages/Governor-Moore-Signs-Revolutionary-Service-Year-Program-For-Graduating-High-School-Seniors-into-Law.aspx), provide substantial incentives and education awards that can defray the cost of college for those who do a service year. Campus Compact deserves a doubling of philanthropic support and could create competitions among colleges to boost national service enrollment (Seigsohn, 2021).

Building Bridges Across Our Divides

A nationally representative survey of American voters and research shared in the book *Our Common Bonds* shows that most Americans first identify with their families, friends, and faiths, but the national media would lead you to believe that we first identify by our political parties, as the nation is being ripped

apart by politics (de Groot, 2023; National Survey by Hart Research for More Perfect, 2023). Colleges and universities have a critical role to play in enabling students to have vigorous and contentious debates about a whole range of issues while engaging in civil discourse that respects students who may hold different views. On some campuses, College Republicans and College Democrats are experimenting with joint events (Pickus, 2022). There are exciting nonprofit efforts underway focused on bringing bridge-building programming to college campuses, such as Interfaith America, the Constructive Dialogue Institute, and Bridge USA. And campuses, too, are increasingly developing bridging programs. For instance, the Inter-Collegiate Civil Disagreement Partnership brings together cross-ideological cohorts of students from St. Philips College in San Antonio, Texas; California State University at Bakersfield, California; Santa Fe College in Gainesville, Florida; Stanford University, Palo Alto, California; and Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Students learn how to dialog across difference and help program public conversations on hard issues for their campus—tackling subjects ranging from guns to climate to abortion.

Advance 5 Democracy Goals

The world mobilized around "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs), which inspired governments, businesses, nonprofits, and multilateral institutions to help make extraordinary commitments and gains to improve health, reduce poverty, and more (United Nations, n.d.). Because of the efforts on AIDS and malaria alone, more than 35 million lives have been saved. The SDGs inspired the creation of our initiative, More Perfect, which today includes 30 Presidential Centers, National Archives Foundation, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Karsh Institute of Democracy at the University of Virginia, and more than 100 partners to advance five "Democracy Goals" (More Perfect, n.d.).

Colleges and universities can adopt and help advance these goals—civic learning, national service and volunteering, bridging divides, trusted elections and representative and responsible governance, and access to trusted news and information—and take a stand in supporting our democracy. In addition to the work to advance the first three that we reference above, colleges and universities can expand their efforts to educate students on how elections work across the more than 10,000 jurisdictions that administer them, the checks and balances that exist to avoid error and fraud, and the opportunities that students have to vote, become poll workers, and volunteer in other ways to build trust in our elections. Given the rise of allegations of "fake news," "alternative facts," and the low levels of trust in the media, students should also be taught how to decode news and information, just as they are taught to code in the digital age (Spellings & Bridgeland, 2021). College newspaper editors and reporters should be given more opportunities to do internships with local newspapers and learn about innovative models to preserve the future of local news outlets that marry smart business models with trusted journalism. Report for America (https://www.reportforamerica.org/about-us/) is a national service program that places journalists into undercovered communities.

Campus-Wide Democratic Renewal

Many universities have institutes of government or politics engaging students in learning about the workings of our democracy and issues of the day. These centers need to work with those directly responsible for the college curriculum, both its general education requirements and its departmental programs and certificates. The Karsh Institute of Democracy at the University of Virginia (https://karshinstitute.virginia.edu/) works across the university with the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, Center for Politics, Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, Miller Center, other affiliated schools and centers, and the Office of the Provost to put democratic inquiry at the center of education. Many institutes of politics and government exist within colleges and universities. Drawing on the focus and strengths of these institutions and having them work across colleges, community colleges, technical schools, and graduate schools will help increase the focus on the civic mission of higher education.

Presidential Summit on Democratic Renewal and Higher Education

The best ideas are likely to emerge from colleges and universities themselves in all of their wonderful diversity—public, private, independent, community, technical, historically black, Hispanic-serving, and tribal colleges and universities, and within the many

associations and networks that represent them. The Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition (https://www.aacu.org/newsroom/new-coalition-formed-to-advance-the-civic-mission-of-postsecondary-education) is working to strengthen the civic mission of schools (https://www.collegeciviclearning.org/) and increase civic learning for all college students, especially those who have historically been underserved both in society and in education. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences (https://www.amacad.org/) is working on a toolkit that can help all campuses think about how they can strengthen their work in democracy education. The American Political Science Association (https://www.apsanet.org/About/About-APSA) is organizing the program of its 2024 conference around democracy. The Institute for Citizens & Scholars has a network of 61 College Presidents for Civic Preparedness (https://collegepresidents.org/). The American Association of Colleges and Universities and Campus Compact are partnering with the Karsh Institute of Democracy and More Perfect to foster communities of practice across college campuses and advance the five Democracy Goals. We propose an annual action-forcing summit among college presidents and other leaders that features innovations in higher education that foster democratic renewal. Such a forum could highlight those efforts that could be brought to scale at other institutions. A report from colleges and universities to the nation could track the progress we are making on a range of outcomes and innovations over time. It could inspire more action on college campuses, philanthropic support for such efforts, and even reforms in government and across state systems to policies and programs, in areas such as national service and federal work-study (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

At a ceremony at the College of William and Mary, former secretary of defense, CIA director, and chancellor Robert Gates said, "Across history, there have been two institutions—colleges and faith-based institutions—that have transcended time to be there for every generation. They are worth investing in."

As our colleges and universities continue to play such central roles in educating and engaging generations of Americans, we can inspire students to understand our democracy and their vital role in it. And we can remind them, as John Gardner, the only Republican cabinet member in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, so eloquently put the democratic proposition, "[F]reedom and obligation, liberty and duty: that's the deal" (1991). Or as Martin Luther King, Jr., put it, the goal is "a real sharing of power and responsibility" (1968/2003)

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

■ ADL Center on Extremism. (2023, March 8). *White supremacist propaganda soars to all-time high in 2022.* https://www.adl.org/resources/report/white-supremacist-propaganda-soars-all-time-high-2022

■ Adler, M. J. (2012). *We hold these truths: Understanding the ideas and ideals of the constitution*. University of Chicago (Audiobook).

■ Blad, E. (2022, October 5). School shootings reach record level, data show. *Education Week*. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-reach-record-level-data-show/2022/10

■ Bok, D. (2017, October 1). The crisis of civic education. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-crisis-of-civic-education/

■ Bok, D. (2021). *Educating citizens*. Princeton University Press. https://press.princeton.edu/ideas/educating-citizens

■ Booth, R. B., Medina, A., Siegel-Stechler, K., & Kiesa, A. (2023, January 30). *Youth are interested in political action, but lack support and opportunities*. CIRCLE. https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-are-interested-political-action-lack-support-and-opportunities

■ Bridgeland, J. M. (2022, November 21). Opinion: Americans step up, vote to preserve our democracy. *The Enquirer/Cincinnati.com*. https://www.cincinnati.com/story/opinion/editorials/2022/11/22/opinion-americans-step-up-vote-to-preserve-our-democracy/69650554007/

References (cont'd)

■ Bridgeland, J. M., & DiIulio, J. J., Jr. (2019). *Will America embrace national service?* The Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/National-Service_TEXT-3.pdf

■ Bridgeland, J. M., Wofford, H., Quigley, K. F. F., & Milano, J. A. (2011). *A call to peace: Perspectives of volunteers on the Peace Corps at 50*. A report by Civic Enterprises and the National Peace Corps Association in partnership with Peter D. Hart Research Associates. https://www.civicllc.com/_files/ugd/03cac8_5f2b7e5ed6f64d66887b3f26d44325ab.pdf

■ Bridgeland, J. M., & Yonkman, M. M. (2009, November 11). All volunteer force: From military to civilian service. *Issue Lab*. https://search.issuelab.org/resource/all-volunteer-force-from-military-to-civilian-service.html

■ Center for Strategic & International Studies. (2020). *The escalating terrorism problem in the United States*. https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states

■ Chamie, J. (2021, July 19). Living alone in America. *The Hill*. https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/563786-living-alone-in-america/

■ Community Relations Service. (2023). *FBI releases supplement to the 2021 Hate Crime Statistics*. U.S. Department of Justice. https://www.justice.gov/crs/highlights/2021-hate-crime-statistics

■ de Groot, K. (2023, March 10). *Matthew Levandusky's "Our common bonds."* https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/matthew-levenduskys-our-common-bonds

■ de Tocqueville, A. (2000). *Democracy in America*. University of Chicago. https://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/805328.html

■ Desilver, D. (2021, January 28). *Turnout soared in 2020 as nearly two-thirds of eligible U.S. voters cast ballots for president*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/01/28/turnout-soared-in-2020-as-nearly-two-thirds-of-eligible-u-s-voters-cast-ballots-for-president/

■ Edlin, R., & Baker, T. (2022, March 10). *Poll of election officials finds safety fears for colleagues—and themselves*. Brennan Center for Justice. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/poll-local-election-officials-finds-safety-fears-colleagues-and

■ Ellison, S. (2022, December 29). A tiny paper broke the George Santos scandal but no one noticed. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/media/2022/12/29/north-shore-leader-santos-scoop/

■ Gardner, J. W. (1991, June 16). Address at Stanford's 100th commencement ceremony. https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/news/john-w-gardners-address-stanfords-100th-commencement-ceremony

■ Jacobsen, K. (2020, December 14). *In 2020, U.S. journalists faced unprecedented attacks*. Committee to Protect Journalists. https://cpj.org/2020/12/in-2020-u-s-journalists-faced-unprecedented-attacks/

■ Kennedy, J. F. (1960). *Response to letter sent by Miss Theodate Johnson*. JFK Library. https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/life-of-john-f-kennedy/john-f-kennedy-quotations

■ King, Jr. M. L. (1968/2003). *A testament of hope*. HarperCollins. https://www.harpercollins.com/products/a-testament-of-hope-martin-luther-king?variant=32117034778658

■ Lynch, S. N. (2022, February 15). *U.S. judges faced over 4,500 threats in 2021 amid rising extremism—Official*. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-judges-faced-over-4500-threats-2021-amid-rising-extremism-official-2022-02-14/

■ McCullough, D. (2002, January). Telephone call with John Bridgeland.

■ More Perfect. (n.d.). *The five democracy goals*. https://www.joinmoreperfect.us/goals

■ National Conference on Citizenship. (n.d.). *National reports*. https://ncoc.org/category/national-reports/

References (cont'd)

- National Survey by Hart Research for More Perfect. (2023, conducted December 21–24). https://assets-global.website-files.com/63bf22e0fab9d23d9b51322c/65a938a2ff80265b0a5a94b4_MorePerfect.Hart.Survey.Dec2023.pdf
- NBC News. (2022, October 30). *Threats against members of Congress have increased ten-fold since 2016*. https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/threats-against-members-of-congress-have-increased-ten-fold-since-2016-151947845870
- News from Brown. (2020, January 21). *U.S. is polarizing faster than other democracies, study finds*. https://www.brown.edu/news/2020-01-21/polarization
- Pickus, A. (2022, November 29). *The "Great Debate" between college Democrats, Republicans, and Libertarians marks a new era of cross-aisle collaboration at BU*. Happy Medium. https://happymediummag.com/2022/11/29/the-great-debate-between-college-democrats-republicans-and-libertarians-marks-a-new-era-of-cross-aisle-collaboration-at-bu/
- Putnam, R., & Bridgeland, J. (2017, October 19). America needs big ideas to heal our divides. Here are three. *PBS News Hour*. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/america-needs-big-ideas-to-heal-our-divides-here-are-three
- Roadmap for Local News. (2023, February 2). *The Roadmap for local news: An emergent approach to meeting civic information needs.* https://localnewsroadmap.org/
- Schneider, E., & Marshall, T. J. (2023). *At height of pandemic, more than half of people age 16 and over helped neighbors, 23% formally volunteered*. United States Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/01/volunteering-and-civic-life-in-america.html
- Schonfeld, Z. (2022, July 14). Conservative group finds "absolutely no evidence of widespread fraud" in 2020 election. *The Hill*. https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/3559758-conservative-group-finds-absoluteyly-no-evidence-of-widespread-fraud-in-2020-election/
- Seigsohn, A. (2021, May 7). *Living the Compact's values through national service*. https://compact.org/news/living-the-compacts-values-through-national-service
- Spellings, M., & Bridgeland, J. (2021, December 9). You're being fed lies: How Americans can find truth in the age of misinformation. *USA Today*. https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/12/09/threat-democracy-misinformation-covid-age/6430888001/
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022, May 23). 61.8 percent of recent high school graduates enrolled in college in October 2021. *TED: The Economics Daily*. https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/61-8-percent-of-recent-high-school-graduates-enrolled-in-college-in-october-2021.htm
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Federal Work-Study (FWS) program*. https://www2.ed.gov/programs/fws/index.html
- United Nations. (n.d.). *The 17 goals*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. https://sdgs.un.org/goals

Rapid #: -23047291

CROSS REF ID:	**997239712700018 45**
LENDER:	**WTV (Whitworth University) :: Main Library**
BORROWER:	**ESR (Evergreen State College) :: Main Library**
TYPE:	Book Chapter
BOOK TITLE:	How democracies die /
USER BOOK TITLE:	How democracies die /
CHAPTER TITLE:	One - Chapter One
BOOK AUTHOR:	Levitsky, Steven,
EDITION:	First paperback edition.
VOLUME:	
PUBLISHER:	Broadway Books, an imprint of Crown Publishing, a division of Penguin Random House,
YEAR:	2019
PAGES:	11-32
ISBN:	9781524762940
LCCN:	2017045872
OCLC #:	1082520793

Processed by RapidX: 8/30/2024 5:20:39 PM

This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code)

HOW DEMOCRACIES DIE

STEVEN LEVITSKY &
DANIEL ZIBLATT

CROWN
NEW YORK

…RTH UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
SPOKANE WA 99251

Copyright © 2018 by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt

All rights reserved.
Published in the United States by Crown, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.
crownpublishing.com

CROWN and the Crown colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Levitsky, Steven, author. | Ziblatt, Daniel, 1972– author.
Title: How democracies die / Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt.
Description: First edition. | New York : Crown Publishing, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017045872| ISBN 9781524762933 | ISBN 9781524762940 (pbk.) | ISBN 9781524762957 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Democracy. | Political culture. | Democracy—United States. | Political culture—United States. | United States—Politics and government—2017–
Classification: LCC JC423 .L4855 2018 | DDC 321.8—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017045872

ISBN 978-1-5247-6293-3
Ebook ISBN 978-1-5247-6295-7
International edition ISBN 978-0-525-57453-8

Printed in the United States of America

Jacket design by Christopher Brand

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

First Edition

1

Fateful Alliances

> A quarrel had arisen between the Horse and the Stag, so the Horse came to a Hunter to ask his help to take revenge on the Stag. The Hunter agreed but said: "If you desire to conquer the Stag, you must permit me to place this piece of iron between your jaws, so that I may guide you with these reins, and allow this saddle to be placed upon your back so that I may keep steady upon you as we follow the enemy." The Horse agreed to the conditions, and the Hunter soon saddled and bridled him. Then, with the aid of the Hunter, the Horse soon overcame the Stag and said to the Hunter: "Now get off, and remove those things from my mouth and back." "Not so fast, friend," said the Hunter. "I have now got you under bit and spur and prefer to keep you as you are at present."
>
> —"The Horse, the Stag, and the Hunter," *Aesop's Fables*

On October 30, 1922, Benito Mussolini arrived in Rome at 10:55 A.M. in an overnight sleeping car from Milan. He had

been invited to the capital city by the king to accept Italy's premiership and form a new cabinet. Accompanied by a small group of guards, Mussolini first stopped at the Hotel Savoia and then, wearing a black suit jacket, black shirt, and matching black bowler hat, walked triumphantly to the king's Quirinal Palace. Rome was filled with rumors of unrest. Bands of Fascists—many in mismatched uniforms—roamed the city's streets. Mussolini, aware of the power of the spectacle, strode into the king's marble-floored residential palace and greeted him, "Sire, forgive my attire. I come from the battlefield."

This was the beginning of Mussolini's legendary "March on Rome." The image of masses of Blackshirts crossing the Rubicon to seize power from Italy's Liberal state became fascist canon, repeated on national holidays and in children's schoolbooks throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Mussolini did his part to enshrine the myth. At the last train stop before entering Rome that day, he had considered disembarking to ride into the city on horseback surrounded by his guards. Though the plan was ultimately abandoned, afterward he did all he could to bolster the legend of his rise to power as, in his own words, a "revolution" and "insurrectional act" that launched a new fascist epoch.

The truth was more mundane. The bulk of Mussolini's Blackshirts, often poorly fed and unarmed, arrived only after he had been invited to become prime minister. The squads of Fascists around the country were a menace, but Mussolini's machinations to take the reins of state were no revolution. He used his party's 35 parliamentary votes (out of 535), divisions among establishment politicians, fear of socialism, and the threat of violence by 30,000 Blackshirts to capture the attention of the timid King Victor Emmanuel III, who saw in

Mussolini a rising political star and a means of neutralizing unrest.

With political order restored by Mussolini's appointment and socialism in retreat, the Italian stock market soared. Elder statesmen of the Liberal establishment, such as Giovanni Giolitti and Antonio Salandra, found themselves applauding the turn of events. They regarded Mussolini as a useful ally. But not unlike the horse in Aesop's fable, Italy soon found itself under "bit and spur."

Some version of this story has repeated itself throughout the world over the last century. A cast of political outsiders, including Adolf Hitler, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, came to power on the same path: from the inside, via elections or alliances with powerful political figures. In each instance, elites believed the invitation to power would *contain* the outsider, leading to a restoration of control by mainstream politicians. But their plans backfired. A lethal mix of ambition, fear, and miscalculation conspired to lead them to the same fateful mistake: willingly handing over the keys of power to an autocrat-in-the-making.

Why do seasoned elder statesmen make this mistake? There are few more gripping illustrations than the rise of Adolf Hitler in January 1933. His capacity for violent insurrection was on display as early as Munich's Beer Hall Putsch of 1923—a surprise evening strike in which his group of pistol-bearing loyalists took control of several government buildings and a Munich beer hall where Bavarian officials were meeting. The ill-conceived attack was halted by the authorities, and Hitler spent nine months in jail, where he wrote his infamous personal testament, *Mein*

Kampf. Thereafter, Hitler publicly committed to gaining power via elections. Initially, his National Socialist movement found few votes. The Weimar political system had been founded in 1919 by a prodemocratic coalition of Catholics, Liberals, and Social Democrats. But beginning in 1930, with the German economy reeling, the center-right fell prey to infighting, and the Communists and Nazis grew in popularity.

The elected government collapsed in March 1930 amid the pain of the Great Depression. With political gridlock blocking government action, the figurehead president, World War I hero Paul von Hindenburg, took advantage of a constitutional article giving the head of state the authority to name chancellors in the exceptional circumstance that parliament failed to deliver governing majorities. The aim of these unelected chancellors—and the president—was not only to govern but to sideline radicals on the left and right. First, Center Party economist Heinrich Brüning (who would later flee Germany to become a professor at Harvard) attempted, but failed, to restore economic growth; his time as chancellor was short-lived. President von Hindenburg turned next to nobleman Franz von Papen, and then, in growing despondency, to von Papen's close friend and rival, former defense minister General Kurt von Schleicher. But without parliamentary majorities in the Reichstag, stalemate persisted. Leaders, for good reason, feared the next election.

Convinced that "something must finally give," a cabal of rivalrous conservatives convened in late January 1933 and settled on a solution: A popular outsider should be placed at the head of the government. They despised him but knew that at least he had a mass following. And, most of all, they thought they could control him.

On January 30, 1933, von Papen, one of the chief architects of the plan, dismissed worries over the gamble that would make Adolf Hitler chancellor of a crisis-ridden Germany with the reassuring words: "We've engaged him for ourselves. . . . Within two months, we will have pushed [him] so far into a corner that he'll squeal." A more profound miscalculation is hard to imagine.

The Italian and German experiences highlight the type of "fateful alliance" that often elevates authoritarians to power. In any democracy, politicians will at times face severe challenges. Economic crisis, rising public discontent, and the electoral decline of mainstream political parties can test the judgment of even the most experienced insiders. If a charismatic outsider emerges on the scene, gaining popularity as he challenges the old order, it is tempting for establishment politicians who feel their control is unraveling to try to co-opt him. If an insider breaks ranks to embrace the insurgent before his rivals do, he can use the outsider's energy and base to outmaneuver his peers. And then, establishment politicians hope, the insurgent can be redirected to support their own program.

This sort of devil's bargain often mutates to the benefit of the insurgent, as alliances provide outsiders with enough respectability to become legitimate contenders for power. In early 1920s Italy, the old Liberal order was crumbling amid growing strikes and social unrest. The failure of traditional parties to forge solid parliamentary majorities left the elderly fifth-term prime minister Giovanni Giolitti desperate, and against the wishes of advisors he called early elections in May 1921. With the aim of tapping into the Fascists' mass appeal, Giolitti decided to offer Mussolini's upstart movement a place on his electoral group's "bourgeois bloc" of Nationalists, Fascists,

and Liberals. This strategy failed—the bourgeois bloc won less than 20 percent of the vote, leading to Giolitti's resignation. But Mussolini's place on the ticket gave his ragtag group the legitimacy it would need to enable its rise.

Such fateful alliances are hardly confined to interwar Europe. They also help to explain the rise of Hugo Chávez. Venezuela had prided itself on being South America's oldest democracy, in place since 1958. Chávez, a junior military officer and failed coup leader who had never held public office, was a political outsider. But his rise to power was given a critical boost from a consummate insider: ex-president Rafael Caldera, one of the founders of Venezuelan democracy.

Venezuelan politics was long dominated by two parties, the center-left Democratic Action and Caldera's center-right Social Christian Party (known as COPEI). The two alternated in power peacefully for more than thirty years, and by the 1970s, Venezuela was viewed as a model democracy in a region plagued by coups and dictatorships. During the 1980s, however, the country's oil-dependent economy sank into a prolonged slump, a crisis that persisted for more than a decade, nearly doubling the poverty rate. Not surprisingly, Venezuelans grew disaffected. Massive riots in February 1989 suggested that the established parties were in trouble. Three years later, in February 1992, a group of junior military officers rose up against President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Led by Hugo Chávez, the rebels called themselves "Bolivarians," after revered independence hero Simón Bolívar. The coup failed. But when the now-detained Chávez appeared on live television to tell his supporters to lay down their arms (declaring, in words that would become legendary, that their mission had failed "for now"), he became a hero in the eyes of many Venezuelans, particularly poorer ones. Following a second failed coup in November 1992,

the imprisoned Chávez changed course, opting to pursue power via elections. He would need help.

Although ex-president Caldera was a well-regarded elder statesman, his political career was waning in 1992. Four years earlier, he had failed to secure his party's presidential nomination, and he was now considered a political relic. But the seventy-six-year-old senator still dreamed of returning to the presidency, and Chávez's emergence provided him with a lifeline. On the night of Chávez's initial coup, the former president stood up during an emergency joint session of congress and embraced the rebels' cause, declaring:

> It is difficult to ask the people to sacrifice themselves for freedom and democracy when they think that freedom and democracy are incapable of giving them food to eat, of preventing the astronomical rise in the cost of subsistence, or of placing a definitive end to the terrible scourge of corruption that, in the eyes of the entire world, is eating away at the institutions of Venezuela with each passing day.

The stunning speech resurrected Caldera's political career. Having tapped into Chávez's antisystem constituency, the ex-president's public support swelled, which allowed him to make a successful presidential bid in 1993.

Caldera's public flirtation with Chávez did more than boost his own standing in the polls; it also gave Chávez new credibility. Chávez and his comrades had sought to destroy their country's thirty-four-year-old democracy. But rather than denouncing the coup leaders as an extremist threat, the former president offered them public sympathy—and, with it, an opening to mainstream politics.

Caldera also helped open the gates to the presidential palace for Chávez by dealing a mortal blow to Venezuela's established parties. In a stunning about-face, he abandoned COPEI, the party he had founded nearly half a century earlier, and launched an independent presidential bid. To be sure, the parties were already in crisis. But Caldera's departure and subsequent anti-establishment campaign helped bury them. The party system collapsed after Caldera's 1993 election as an antiparty independent, paving the way for future outsiders. Five years later, it would be Chávez's turn.

But back in 1993, Chávez still had a major problem. He was in jail, awaiting trial for treason. However, in 1994, now-President Caldera dropped all charges against him. Caldera's final act in enabling Chávez was literally opening the gates—of prison—for him. Immediately after Chávez's release, a reporter asked him where he was going. "To power," he replied. Freeing Chávez was popular, and Caldera had promised such a move during the campaign. Like most Venezuelan elites, he viewed Chávez as a passing fad—someone who would likely fall out of public favor by the time of the next election. But in dropping all charges, rather than allowing Chávez to stand trial and then pardoning him, Caldera elevated him, transforming the former coup leader overnight into a viable presidential candidate. On December 6, 1998, Chávez won the presidency, easily defeating an establishment-backed candidate. On inauguration day, Caldera, the outgoing president, could not bring himself to deliver the oath of office to Chávez, as tradition dictated. Instead, he stood glumly off to one side.

Despite their vast differences, Hitler, Mussolini, and Chávez followed routes to power that share striking similarities. Not only were they all outsiders with a flair for capturing public at-

tention, but each of them rose to power because establishment politicians overlooked the warning signs and either handed over power to them (Hitler and Mussolini) or opened the door for them (Chávez).

The abdication of political responsibility by existing leaders often marks a nation's first step toward authoritarianism. Years after Chávez's presidential victory, Rafael Caldera explained his mistakes simply: "Nobody thought that Mr. Chávez had even the remotest chance of becoming president." And merely a day after Hitler became chancellor, a prominent conservative who aided him admitted, "I have just committed the greatest stupidity of my life; I have allied myself with the greatest demagogue in world history."

Not all democracies have fallen into this trap. Some—including Belgium, Britain, Costa Rica, and Finland—have faced challenges from demagogues but also have managed to keep them out of power. How have they done it? It is tempting to think this survival is rooted in the collective wisdom of voters. Maybe Belgians and Costa Ricans were simply more democratic than their counterparts in Germany or Italy. After all, we like to believe that the fate of a government lies in the hands of its citizens. If the people hold democratic values, democracy will be safe. If citizens are open to authoritarian appeals, then, sooner or later, democracy will be in trouble.

This view is wrong. It assumes too much of democracy—that "the people" can shape at will the kind of government they possess. It's hard to find any evidence of majority support for authoritarianism in 1920s Germany and Italy. Before the Nazis and Fascists seized power, less than 2 percent of the population

were party members, and neither party achieved anything close to a majority of the vote in free and fair elections. Rather, solid electoral majorities opposed Hitler and Mussolini—before both men achieved power with the support of political insiders blind to the danger of their own ambitions.

Hugo Chávez was elected by a majority of voters, but there is little evidence that Venezuelans were looking for a strongman. At the time, public support for democracy was higher there than in Chile—a country that was, and remains, stably democratic. According to the 1998 Latinobarómetro survey, 60 percent of Venezuelans agreed with the statement "Democracy is always the best form of government," while only 25 percent agreed that "under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one." By contrast, only 53 percent of respondents in Chile agreed that "democracy is always the best form of government."

Potential demagogues exist in all democracies, and occasionally, one or more of them strike a public chord. But in some democracies, political leaders heed the warning signs and take steps to ensure that authoritarians remain on the fringes, far from the centers of power. When faced with the rise of extremists or demagogues, they make a concerted effort to isolate and defeat them. Although mass responses to extremist appeals matter, what matters more is whether political elites, and especially parties, serve as filters. Put simply, political parties are democracy's gatekeepers.

If authoritarians are to be kept out, they first have to be identified. There is, alas, no foolproof advance warning system. Many authoritarians can be easily recognized before they come to

power. They have a clear track record: Hitler led a failed putsch; Chávez led a failed military uprising; Mussolini's Blackshirts engaged in paramilitary violence; and in Argentina in the mid–twentieth century, Juan Perón helped lead a successful coup two and a half years before running for president.

But politicians do not always reveal the full scale of their authoritarianism before reaching power. Some adhere to democratic norms early in their careers, only to abandon them later. Consider Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Orbán and his Fidesz party began as liberal democrats in the late 1980s, and in his first stint as prime minister between 1998 and 2002, Orbán governed democratically. His autocratic about-face after returning to power in 2010 was a genuine surprise.

So how do we identify authoritarianism in politicians who don't have an obvious antidemocratic record? Here we turn to the eminent political scientist Juan Linz. Born in Weimar Germany and raised amid Spain's civil war, Linz knew all too well the perils of losing a democracy. As a professor at Yale, he devoted much of his career to trying to understand how and why democracies die. Many of Linz's conclusions can be found in a small but seminal book called *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*. Published in 1978, the book highlights the role of politicians, showing how their behavior can either reinforce democracy or put it at risk. He also proposed, but never fully developed, a "litmus test" for identifying antidemocratic politicians.

Building on Linz's work, we have developed a set of four behavioral warning signs that can help us know an authoritarian when we see one. We should worry when a politician 1) rejects, in words or action, the democratic rules of the game, 2) denies the legitimacy of opponents, 3) tolerates or encourages violence,

or 4) indicates a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media. Table 1 shows how to assess politicians in terms of these four factors.

A politician who meets even one of these criteria is cause for concern. What kinds of candidates tend to test positive on a litmus test for authoritarianism? Very often, populist outsiders do. Populists are antiestablishment politicians—figures who, claiming to represent the voice of "the people," wage war on what they depict as a corrupt and conspiratorial elite. Populists tend to deny the legitimacy of established parties, attacking them as undemocratic and even unpatriotic. They tell voters that the existing system is not really a democracy but instead has been hijacked, corrupted, or rigged by the elite. And they promise to bury that elite and return power to "the people." This discourse should be taken seriously. When populists win elections, they often assault democratic institutions. In Latin America, for example, of all fifteen presidents elected in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela between 1990 and 2012, five were populist outsiders: Alberto Fujimori, Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Lucio Gutiérrez, and Rafael Correa. All five ended up weakening democratic institutions.

Table 1: Four Key Indicators of Authoritarian Behavior

1. Rejection of (or weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game	Do they reject the Constitution or express a willingness to violate it? Do they suggest a need for antidemocratic measures, such as canceling elections, violating or suspending the Constitution, banning certain organizations, or restricting basic civil or political rights? Do they seek to use (or endorse the use of) extraconstitutional means to change the government, such as military coups, violent insurrections, or mass protests aimed at forcing a change in the government? Do they attempt to undermine the legitimacy of elections, for example, by refusing to accept credible electoral results?
2. Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents	Do they describe their rivals as subversive, or opposed to the existing constitutional order? Do they claim that their rivals constitute an existential threat, either to national security or to the prevailing way of life? Do they baselessly describe their partisan rivals as criminals, whose supposed violation of the law (or potential to do so) disqualifies them from full participation in the political arena? Do they baselessly suggest that their rivals are foreign agents, in that they are secretly working in alliance with (or the employ of) a foreign government—usually an enemy one?

3. Toleration or encouragement of violence	Do they have any ties to armed gangs, paramilitary forces, militias, guerrillas, or other organizations that engage in illicit violence? Have they or their partisan allies sponsored or encouraged mob attacks on opponents? Have they tacitly endorsed violence by their supporters by refusing to unambiguously condemn it and punish it? Have they praised (or refused to condemn) other significant acts of political violence, either in the past or elsewhere in the world?
4. Readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media	Have they supported laws or policies that restrict civil liberties, such as expanded libel or defamation laws, or laws restricting protest, criticism of the government, or certain civic or political organizations? Have they threatened to take legal or other punitive action against critics in rival parties, civil society, or the media? Have they praised repressive measures taken by other governments, either in the past or elsewhere in the world?

Keeping authoritarian politicians out of power is more easily said than done. Democracies, after all, are not supposed to ban parties or prohibit candidates from standing for election—and we do not advocate such measures. The responsibility for filtering out authoritarians lies, rather, with political parties and party leaders: democracy's gatekeepers.

Successful gatekeeping requires that mainstream parties isolate and defeat extremist forces, a behavior political scientist Nancy Bermeo calls "distancing." Prodemocratic parties may engage in distancing in several ways. First, they can keep

would-be authoritarians off party ballots at election time. This requires that they resist the temptation to nominate these extremists for higher office even when they can potentially deliver votes.

Second, parties can root out extremists in the grass roots of their own ranks. Take the Swedish Conservative Party (AVF) during the perilous interwar period. The AVF's youth group (an organization of voting-age activists), called the Swedish Nationalist Youth Organization, grew increasingly radical in the early 1930s, criticizing parliamentary democracy, openly supporting Hitler, and even creating a group of uniformed storm troopers. The AVF responded in 1933 by expelling the organization. The loss of 25,000 members may have cost the AVF votes in the 1934 municipal elections, but the party's distancing strategy reduced the influence of antidemocratic forces in Sweden's largest center-right party.

Third, prodemocratic parties can avoid all alliances with antidemocratic parties and candidates. As we saw in Italy and Germany, prodemocratic parties are sometimes tempted to align with extremists on their ideological flank to win votes or, in parliamentary systems, form governments. But such alliances can have devastating long-term consequences. As Linz wrote, the demise of many democracies can be traced to a party's "greater affinity for extremists on its side of the political spectrum than for [mainstream] parties close to the opposite side."

Fourth, prodemocratic parties can act to systematically isolate, rather than legitimize, extremists. This requires that politicians avoid acts—such as German Conservatives' joint rallies with Hitler in the early 1930s or Caldera's speech sympathizing with Chávez—that help to "normalize" or provide public respectability to authoritarian figures.

Finally, whenever extremists emerge as serious electoral contenders, mainstream parties must forge a united front to defeat them. To quote Linz, they must be willing to "join with opponents ideologically distant but committed to the survival of the democratic political order." In normal circumstances, this is almost unimaginable. Picture Senator Edward Kennedy and other liberal Democrats campaigning for Ronald Reagan, or the British Labour Party and their trade union allies endorsing Margaret Thatcher. Each party's followers would be infuriated at this seeming betrayal of principles. But in extraordinary times, courageous party leadership means putting democracy and country before party and articulating to voters what is at stake. When a party or politician that tests positive on our litmus test emerges as a serious electoral threat, there is little alternative. United democratic fronts can prevent extremists from winning power, which can mean saving a democracy.

Although the failures are more memorable, some European democracies practiced successful gatekeeping between the wars. Surprisingly big lessons can be drawn from small countries. Consider Belgium and Finland. In Europe's years of political and economic crisis in the 1920s and 1930s, both countries experienced an early warning sign of democratic decay—the rise of antisystem extremists—but, unlike Italy and Germany, they were saved by political elites who defended democratic institutions (at least until Nazi invasion several years later).

During Belgium's 1936 general election, as the contagion of fascism was spreading from Italy and Germany across Europe, voters delivered a jarring result. Two authoritarian far-right parties—the Rex Party and the Flemish nationalist party,

or Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (VNV)—surged in the polls, capturing almost 20 percent of the popular vote and challenging the historical dominance of three establishment parties: the center-right Catholic Party, the Socialists, and the Liberal Party. The challenge from the leader of the Rex Party, Léon Degrelle, a Catholic journalist who would become a Nazi collaborator, was especially strong. Degrelle, a virulent critic of parliamentary democracy, had departed from the right edges of the Catholic Party and now attacked its leaders as corrupt. He received encouragement and financial support from both Hitler and Mussolini.

The 1936 election shook the centrist parties, which suffered losses across the board. Aware of the antidemocratic movements in nearby Italy and Germany and fearful for their own survival, they confronted the daunting task of deciding how to respond. The Catholic Party, in particular, faced a difficult dilemma: collaborate with their longtime rivals, the Socialists and Liberals, or forge a right-wing alliance that included the Rexists, a party with whom they shared some ideological affinity but that rejected the value of democratic politics.

Unlike the retreating mainstream politicians of Italy and Germany, the Belgian Catholic leadership declared that any cooperation with the Rexists was incompatible with party membership and then pursued a two-pronged strategy to combat the movement. Internally, Catholic Party leaders heightened discipline by screening candidates for pro-Rexist sympathies and expelling those who expressed extremist views. In addition, the party leadership took a strong stance against cooperation with the far right. Externally, the Catholic Party fought Rex on its own turf. The Catholic Party adopted new propaganda and campaign tactics that targeted younger Catholics, who had

formerly been part of the Rexist base. They created the Catholic Youth Front in December 1935 and began to run former allies against Degrelle.

The final clash between Rex and the Catholic Party, in which Rex was effectively sidelined (until the Nazi occupation), centered around the formation of a new government after the 1936 election. The Catholic Party supported the incumbent Catholic prime minister Paul van Zeeland. After van Zeeland regained the premiership, there were two chief options for forming a government: The first was an alliance with the rival Socialists, along the lines of France's "Popular Front," which van Zeeland and other Catholic leaders had initially hoped to avoid. The second was a right-wing alliance of antisocialist forces that would include Rex and VNV. The choice was not easy; the second option was supported by a traditionalist faction that sought to upset the fragile van Zeeland cabinet by rallying the Catholic rank and file, organizing a "March on Brussels," and forcing a by-election in which Rex leader Degrelle would run against van Zeeland. These plans were thwarted in 1937 when Degrelle lost the by-election, largely because the Catholic Party MPs had taken a stand: They refused to go with the traditionalists' plan and instead united with the Liberals and Socialists behind van Zeeland. This was the Catholic Party's most important gatekeeping act.

The Catholic Party's stand on the right was also made possible by King Leopold III and the Socialist Party. The election of 1936 had left the Socialist Party as the largest party in the legislature, which gave it the prerogative to form a government. However, when it became evident that the Socialists could not gain enough parliamentary support, rather than call a new election—which may have handed even more seats to extremist parties—the king met with leaders of the largest parties to talk

them into a power-sharing cabinet, led by incumbent prime minister van Zeeland, which would include both the conservative Catholics and the Socialists but exclude antisystem parties on both sides. Although the Socialists distrusted van Zeeland, a Catholic Party man, they nevertheless put democracy ahead of their own interests and endorsed the grand coalition.

A similar dynamic unfolded in Finland, where the extreme-right Lapua Movement burst onto the political stage in 1929, threatening the country's fragile democracy. The movement sought the destruction of communism by any means necessary. It threatened violence if its demands were not met and attacked mainstream politicians whom it deemed collaborators with Socialists. At first, politicians from the governing center-right Agrarian Union flirted with the Lapua Movement, finding its anticommunism politically useful; they met the movement's demands to deny communist political rights while tolerating extreme-right violence. In 1930, P. E. Svinhufvud, a conservative whom the Lapua leaders considered "one of their own," became prime minister, and he offered them two cabinet posts. A year later, Svinhufvud became president. Yet the Lapua Movement continued its extremist behavior; with the communists banned, it targeted the more moderate Social Democratic Party. Lapua thugs abducted more than a thousand Social Democrats, including union leaders and members of parliament. The Lapua Movement also organized a 12,000-person march on Helsinki (modeled on the mythical March on Rome), and in 1932, it backed a failed putsch aimed at replacing the government with one that was "apolitical" and "patriotic."

As the Lapua Movement grew more radical, however, Finland's traditional conservative parties broke decisively with it. In late 1930, the bulk of the Agrarian Union, the liberal Progress Party, and much of the Swedish Peoples Party joined

their main ideological rival, the Social Democrats, in the so-called Lawfulness Front to defend democracy against violent extremists. Even the conservative president, Svinhufvud, forcefully rejected—and eventually banned—his former allies. The Lapua Movement was left isolated, and Finland's brief burst of fascism was aborted.

It is not only in distant historical cases that one finds successful gatekeeping. In Austria in 2016, the main center-right party (the Austrian People's Party, ÖVP) effectively kept the radical-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) out of the presidency. Austria has a long history of extreme right politics, and the FPÖ is one of Europe's strongest far-right parties. Austria's political system was growing vulnerable because the two main parties, the Social Democratic SPÖ and the Christian Democratic ÖVP, which had alternated in the presidency throughout the postwar period, were weakening. In 2016, their dominance was challenged by two upstarts—the Green Party's former chairman, Alexander Van der Bellen, and the extremist FPÖ leader Norbert Hofer.

To the surprise of most analysts, the first round left Van der Bellen and the right-wing outsider Hofer as the two candidates in a second-round runoff. After a procedural error in October 2016, the runoff was held in December. At this point, several leading politicians, including some from the conservative ÖVP, argued that Hofer and his Freedom Party had to be defeated. Hofer had appeared to encourage violence against immigrants, and many questioned whether an elected Hofer would privilege his party in ways that violated long-standing norms of the president remaining above politics. In the face of this threat, some important ÖVP leaders worked to defeat Hofer by supporting their ideological rival, the left-leaning Green candidate, Van der Bellen. The ÖVP's presidential candi-

date, Andreas Khol, endorsed Van der Bellen, as did Chairman Reinhold Mitterlehner, Cabinet Minister Sophie Karmasin, and dozens of ÖVP mayors in the Austrian countryside. In one letter, former chairman Erhard Busek wrote that he endorsed Van der Bellen "not with passion but after careful deliberation," and that, furthermore, the decision was motivated by the sentiment that "we don't want congratulations from Le Pen, Jobbik, Wilders and the AfD [and other extremists] after our presidential elections." Van der Bellen won by a mere 300,000 votes.

This stance took considerable political courage. According to one Catholic Party mayor of a small city outside Vienna, Stefan Schmuckenschlager, who endorsed the Green Party candidate, it was a decision that split families. His twin brother, another party leader, had supported Hofer. As Schmuckenschlager explained it, power politics sometimes has to be put aside to do the right thing.

Did the endorsements from the ÖVP help? There is evidence that they did. According to exit polls, 55 percent of respondents who identified as ÖVP supporters said they voted for Van der Bellen, and 48 percent of Van der Bellen voters said they had voted for him to prevent Hofer from winning. In addition, the strong urban/rural division that has always marked Austrian politics (between left-wing urban areas and right-wing rural areas) was dramatically diminished in the second round in December 2016, with a surprising number of traditional rural conservative states switching to vote for Van der Bellen.

In short, in 2016, responsible leaders in the ÖVP resisted the temptation to ally with an extremist party on their own ideological flank, and the result was that party's defeat. The FPÖ's strong performance in the 2017 parliamentary elections, which positioned it to become a junior partner in a new right-wing government, made it clear that the dilemma facing Austrian

conservatives persists. Still, their effort to keep an extremist out of the presidency provides a useful model of contemporary gatekeeping.

For its part, the United States has an impressive record of gatekeeping. Both Democrats and Republicans have confronted extremist figures on their fringes, some of whom enjoyed considerable public support. For decades, both parties succeeded in keeping these figures out of the mainstream. Until, of course, 2016.

9 **have fueled an insidious reaction:** Robert Mickey, Steven Levitsky, and Lucan Ahmad Way, "Is America Still Safe for Democracy?," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, pp. 20–29.

CHAPTER 1: FATEFUL ALLIANCES

11 **Benito Mussolini arrived in Rome:** Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1.

12 **"I come from the battlefield":** Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage, 2004), p. 90.

12 **At the last train stop:** Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, p. 2.

12 **a new fascist epoch:** Ibid.

15 **"We've engaged him for ourselves":** Quoted in Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 308.

15 **"fateful alliance":** Hermann Beck, *The Fateful Alliance: German Conservatives and Nazis in 1933: The Machtergreifung in a New Light* (New York: Berghahn Press, 2011). Also see Daniel Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

15 **"bourgeois bloc":** Alexander De Grand, *The Hunchback's Tailor: Giovanni Giolitti and Liberal Italy from the Challenge of Mass Politics to the Rise of Fascism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), pp. 241–42.

17 **"It is difficult to ask":** Taken from Cristina Marcano and Alberto Barrera Tyszka, *Hugo Chávez* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 304.

18 **Caldera's departure and subsequent antiestablishment campaign:** See José E. Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela's Party System," in *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*, eds. Jennifer L. McCoy and David J. Myers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 162.

18 **"To power":** Quoted in Jones, *Hugo!*, p. 186.

18 **he viewed Chávez as a passing fad:** Ibid., p. 189.

18 **in dropping all charges:** Marcano and Barrera Tyszka, *Hugo Chávez*, p. 107.

18 **he stood glumly:** Jones, *Hugo!*, p. 226.

19 **"Nobody thought that Mr. Chávez":** Quoted in Marcano and Barrera Tyszka, *Hugo Chávez*, p. 107.

19 **"I have just committed":** Quoted in Larry Eugene Jones, "'The Greatest Stupidity of My Life': Alfred Hugenberg and the Formation of the Hitler Cabinet, January 1933," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 1 (1992), pp. 63–87.

20 **1998 Latinobarómetro survey:** Source: Latinobarómetro, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp.

21 **"litmus test":** Juan J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 29–30.

21 **Building on Linz's work:** See ibid., pp. 27–38.

22 **All five ended up:** Steven Levitsky and James Loxton, "Populism and Competitive Authoritarianism in the Andes," *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2013).

24 **"distancing":** Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 238.

25 **The AVF's youth group:** Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy*, p. 344.

25 **The loss of 25,000 members:** Ibid.

25 **"greater affinity for extremists":** Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, pp. 32–33.

26 **"join with opponents":** Ibid., p. 37.

27 **The party leadership took:** Giovanni Capoccia, *Defending Democracy: Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 121.

28 **created the Catholic Youth Front:** Ibid., p. 120.

28 **The Catholic Party supported:** Ibid., p. 121.

28 **The choice was not easy:** Ibid., pp. 122–23.

28 **when it became evident:** Capoccia, *Defending Democracy*, p. 121.

29 **the extreme-right Lapua Movement:** Risto Alapuro and Erik Allardt, "The Lapua Movement: The Threat of Rightist Takeover in Finland, 1930–32," in *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe*, eds. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 130.

29 **The movement sought:** Ibid., p. 130.

29 **At first, politicians from the governing:** Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, p. 240; Alapuro and Allardt, "The Lapua Movement," pp. 130–31.

29 **P. E. Svinhufvud, a conservative:** Alapuro and Allardt, "The Lapua Movement," pp. 130–31.

29 **the Lapua Movement continued:** Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, p. 240.

29 **Lapua thugs abducted:** Alapuro and Allardt, "The Lapua Movement," p. 130.

29 **The Lapua Movement also organized:** Ibid., p. 133.

29 **the bulk of the Agrarian Union:** Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, p. 240.

30 **Even the conservative president:** Ibid., p. 241.

30 **The Lapua Movement was left isolated:** Ibid., pp. 239–41.

31 **"not with passion":** "Bürgerlicher Aufruf für Van der Bellen (Citizens Appeal to Van der Bellen)," *Die Presse*, May 14, 2016, http://diepresse.com/home/innenpolitik/bpwahl/4988743/Buergerlicher-Aufruf-fuer-Van-der-Bellen.

31 **a decision that split families:** Interview with author, March 16, 2017.

CHAPTER 2: GATEKEEPING IN AMERICA

34 **extremist groups existed in the United States:** Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 152.

34 **naming Mussolini its "Man of the Week":** Lipset and Raab, *The Politics of Unreason*, pp. 170–71.

34 **"ever to happen to radio":** Quoted in Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin & the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 119.

34 **He delivered speeches to packed stadiums:** Ibid., pp. 83, 175–77.

35 **lined his route to see him:** Ibid., p. 119. As late as 1938, a Gallup poll found that 27 percent of Americans approved of Father Coughlin, while 32 percent disapproved (Lipset and Raab, *The Politics of Unreason*, pp. 171–73).