

Dear Members of Congress,

We are organizations that work on a wide range of issues—from democracy protection and good government to specific policy areas like the environment and civil rights. But regardless of our specific topics of focus, we all depend on a functioning democracy to do our work. We write now because our democracy faces an existential threat—the very real possibility that the outcome of an election could be ignored and the will of the people overturned by hyperpartisan actors. There are steps we can take to prevent this dire outcome, but we must take swift action. We must push back on dangerous state initiatives that endanger democracy; Congress must enact critical provisions to protect federal elections and elections officials from partisan attacks and subversion, such as those included in the Freedom to Vote Act; and legal remedies must be brought to bear as needed. Further, elected officials and public servants at all levels must condemn attacks on the processes that allow for free and fair democratic election, free of partisanship.

A foundational principle of our democracy—indeed, any democracy—is that once the campaigning is done and voters have gone to the ballot box to have their say, the losing candidate and her supporters will accept the results. We do not claim that our democracy has been perfect. Far too many people—particularly, people of color—have been denied full participation in the democratic process over the course of our history and continuing through the present day. But our country has benefited from decades and even centuries of stability because of a broad consensus across the political spectrum that the winner of an election has the right to govern, at least until the next election.

That fundamental principle is now under severe strain. Since the 2020 election, we have seen unprecedented and coordinated efforts to cast doubt on the U.S. election system. These efforts have taken many forms, including: widespread disinformation campaigns and baseless claims of election fraud, extending to hyper-partisan efforts to revisit the 2020 election; intimidation of election officials and administrators just for doing their jobs; new state laws to make election administration more partisan and more susceptible to manipulation or sabotage; and outright violence.

Exaggerated and unsubstantiated fears about voter fraud have been a vote suppression tool for some time. But these efforts took on entirely new ferocity with the advent of former President Trump’s “Big Lie” regarding the 2020 Presidential election. Despite the fact that experts across the political spectrum—including Trump’s own Department of Homeland Security—have confirmed that the 2020 election was as free, fair, and secure as any in American history, Trump and his supporters have done all they can to cast doubt on the integrity of the process. Even before a single ballot was cast, they began to insist that the results would be fraudulent and to spread disinformation about voting by mail. As the votes were counted, Trump and his allies attacked election officials who were just doing their jobs and filed frivolous lawsuits to challenge results that he did not like.

Their campaign to mislead the American public has continued unabated, as they have continued to spread lies about election fraud without a shred of evidence to support their claims. In several states, Trump supporters have used these unfounded conspiracy theories as an excuse to launch hyper-partisan reviews of the 2020 election. These reviews are being led by unqualified and biased individuals, and are best understood not as an attempt to uncover the truth—as the truth is already well known, often through multiple legitimate reviews—but rather as another part of the effort to spread disinformation and sow doubt in our elections.

Sadly, this disinformation campaign is bearing fruit, as polling shows increasing distrust of our elections system and increasing doubts about democracy. It is also leading to an epidemic of threats and intimidation aimed at election workers. These officials and volunteers—from secretaries of state to local election officials to poll workers—are the backbone of our electoral system. In 2020, in the face of incredible challenges, they managed to do their duty to administer an election that was free, fair, secure, and safe for voters. In some cases, they also acted as a bulwark against a constitutional crisis by resisting enormous pressure to interfere with the routine counting of ballots and certification of results. For doing their jobs, they have been the targets of intimidation, threats of violence, misinformation, and other abuse. As a result, they are retiring, resigning, or being driven from office in unprecedented numbers. This massive loss of experience and expertise would be reason enough for concern, but it is exacerbated by the prospect that some may be replaced by individuals who are not equally committed to nonpartisan election administration. .

Rather than move to defend embattled election officials and the sanctity of the process, too many states have doubled down on the attacks. State legislators have invoked the Big Lie to justify proposing—and, in some cases, enacting—scores of laws that open up election administration to potential partisan assault. These laws include measures to make election administration more partisan, facilitate partisan challenges to election results, and threaten election administrators with civil and criminal penalties for perceived infractions—sometimes at the same time as they are making it harder to punish partisan outsiders who interfere with voting or the counting of ballots. In short, they are designed to make it easier to overturn the will of the voters.

The danger posed by the concerted effort to spread disinformation and undermine confidence in our elections is not hypothetical or speculative. We have already seen tragic consequences in the form of a violent insurrection at the Capitol on January 6. And we now know that talk of overturning the election was not idle chatter. Trump and his allies were actively considering a plan to ignore the will of the voters and retain power, and were pressuring the Department of Justice to aid in what would have effectively been a coup.

Although Trump did eventually leave office, the threat has not passed. We are deeply concerned that the events of 2020 could be repeated in future elections - perhaps to more devastating effect. We saw in 2020 how a few principled actors, relying on longstanding rules and norms, prevented a political coup. Now that some of those vital elements have been removed, it is not hard to imagine a successful subversion of future elections.

Fortunately, there are steps we can take to prevent this assault on democracy. Much of the work is taking place at the state level, where pro-democracy lawmakers and allies are fighting against destructive changes to election rules. It is imperative that these efforts receive robust attention and support.

But it is also necessary and appropriate for Congress to step in to protect the integrity of federal elections. That means passing the Freedom to Vote Act and its vital components to combat election subversion. The Act includes critical measures to safeguard the sanctity of voting and vote-counting. It would require paper ballots for federal elections and strengthen chain of custody requirements for ballots and other election records. It would help prevent partisan takeovers of election administration by protecting local elections officials from unwarranted removal. And it includes measures to prevent deception or intimidation of voters, as well as to protect election workers and election infrastructure against threats or violence. The bill does not and cannot address every threat to free and fair elections nationwide, but these are critical components that can stem some of the corrosive policies being put in place or threatened in communities across the country.

We call on all members of Congress to condemn attacks on our democratic principles and practices, and to affirmatively defend the integrity of federal elections by cosponsoring and enacting the Freedom to Vote Act.

As with all fundamental rights, we must also be prepared to defend voters and the sanctity of the electoral process in court. There is nothing more critical to our democracy and our freedoms than preserving the integrity of our elections.

Signed,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Asociacion Dominicana
Asset Building Strategies
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Blue Wave Postcard Movement
Boulder Area Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Brave New Films
Campaign Legal Center
Center for American Progress
Center for Common Ground
Center for Popular Democracy
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Clean Elections Texas
Common Cause
Common Defense
Decode Democracy

Defend American Democracy
DemCast USA
Democracy Initiative
Democracy Matters
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)
End Citizens United / Let America Vote Action Fund
Equal Justice Society
Fix Democracy First
Free Speech For People
Government Accountability Project
Greenpeace USA
Indivisible
League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
League of Women Voters of the United States
Mainers for Accountable Leadership Action
Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action
MoveOn Political Action
National Council of Jewish Women
NextGen America
People For the American Way
People's Action
Presente.org
Progressive Turnout Project
Project On Government Oversight
Protect Democracy
Protect Our Election
Public Citizen
RepresentUs New Mexico
Rock the Vote Action Fund
Secure Elections Network
SEIU
Social Security Works
SPLC Action Fund
Stand Up America
Supermajority
The National Vote
The Sierra Club
The Workers Circle
Un-PAC
Union of Concerned Scientists
URGE: Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity
Wisconsin Democracy Campaign