



DECLARATION FOR  
AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

# 2022 Election Demonstrates Continued Need (and Support) for Transformational Democracy Legislation

*While challenges to our democracy accelerate, voters continue to demonstrate that legislation to address these threats remains a top priority across party lines.*

The [Declaration For American Democracy coalition](#) advocates for federal legislation that would create national standards to protect our freedom to vote, get big money out of politics, stop partisan election manipulation and guarantee that congressional districts are drawn to give fair representation for all. Together with our 260+ member organizations and local partners, we represent tens of millions of everyday Americans nationwide and engaged in a robust organizing effort to support the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act.

But last year, despite [broad support for pro-voter measures](#), [Senate Republicans blocked full public debate of the legislation](#), and have blocked similar legislation five times over the past two years. Now we see the outcome – plummeting faith in our election system, increasing barriers to voting, and billionaires using their money and power to drown out the voices of everyday Americans.

**The 2022 midterm election demonstrates that these sorts of bold and transformative reforms are still desperately needed to make the promise of democracy real for every American.**

Below find our top takeaways from the 2022 election.

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# Voters of Every Background Believe Democracy Is Under Threat

Democracy was on many voters' minds when they went to the polls in 2022. The AP VoteCast poll of more than 94,000 voters across the nation found that [44 percent of those surveyed said the future of democracy](#) was the main factor in their decision-making. [Sixty-eight percent of those who were surveyed as part of the National Election Pool's exit poll said that democracy is either somewhat or very threatened.](#)

Another poll of the [71 most competitive House districts](#) found that six in 10 voters cited [protecting democracy as an extremely important reason that they decided to vote in November. This put the issue ahead of inflation \(53%\), abortion \(47%\), and crime \(45%\).](#)

And President Biden addressed this concern looming large for voters in two high-profile speeches just [days](#) and [weeks](#) leading up to the 2022 mid-term election, where he described the need to defend democracy as “a battle for the soul of this nation.”

While the Beltway narrative continues to paint voting rights and democracy issues as partisan, the vast majority of Americans agree that democracy is under attack. Furthermore, many Americans characterize that threat as “[corruption](#),” the influence of money in politics or powerful elites on our government.

> An [August 2022 CBS News poll](#) found that seven in 10 (72 percent) Americans believe that democracy and the rule of law are somewhat or very threatened. And what was the number one thing that respondents believed was a major threat? “[The influence of money in politics.](#)”

> An [October 2022 New York Times/Siena College poll](#) found similar results, with 71 percent of registered voters agreeing that American democracy is “currently under threat.” When asked to provide one or two words to summarize the threat to democracy, the number one response was some version of “corruption” or non-specific politicians. This was higher than those who named Democrats or Republicans, Joe Biden or Donald Trump, “socialism” or political extremism.

When looking specifically at young voters' attitudes toward our democracy, the findings are even more dire.

> From an [August 2022 YouGov poll](#): “Young Americans believe politics is controlled by powerful, unaccountable forces. They are especially concerned about the role of the Supreme Court (the top-ranked culprit for the political status quo at 23 percent) and big corporations (the second-ranked at 14 percent).”

Americans have identified the problem; now they want leaders to do something about it. The Midterm Election Voter Poll, which surveyed more than 12,000 voters, found broad support for “passing a new voting rights act to ensure that all eligible Americans can vote without barriers,” with [83 percent of Americans in support](#). This is in line with polling from early 2022 that showed [large majorities supported federal legislation to protect the freedom to vote and restore the Voting Rights Act](#).

## Challenges to Democracy Are Accelerating

This past election cycle has shown us there are some clear concerns that emerged as Americans cast their ballots in the 2022 midterm elections.

### Barriers to Voting

Although we saw relatively high turnout for this past midterm election, in state after state in the days leading up to Election Day, [we saw reports of voter intimidation and attempts to silence voters' voices](#). We must make sure that we don't let the “successes” at the ballot last November keep us from pushing forward on important reforms for our democracy.

> In [Arizona](#), a federal judge had to issue a restraining order to stop a group of armed individuals from harassing voters who were lawfully using a drop box to return their ballots.

> In [Georgia](#), eligible voters were unable to cast a ballot because a group had challenged their eligibility and officials had removed them from the registration rolls.

> In [Florida](#), election officials reported voters being verbally harassed when trying to cast their ballots at early voting sites.

> In [Texas](#), a local Republican Party official has been knocking on voters' doors and falsely accusing them of voting illegally.

The [Brennan Center has tracked 42 new anti-voter laws in 21 states](#) since January 2021.

# Billionaires, Secret Money, and Foreign Money

## Billionaires

The 2022 political cycle was the most expensive midterm election on record. Campaign ad tracking firm AdImpact [reported that \\$8.9B was spent on advertising alone, more than doubling the \\$3.9B spent during the 2018 midterms](#). In fact, this year's midterm spending was just \$119M shy of 2020, the most expensive political cycle of all time.

The spending spree is being driven mainly by billionaires and wealthy special interests dropping absurd amounts of money into (ostensibly) independent groups, as well as their own campaigns. Through the end of September 2022, [Americans for Tax Fairness calculated that 465 billionaires had spent \\$881 million](#) on federal elections. That incomplete figure is already a 44 percent increase over the 2018 total, illustrating how billionaire campaign spending is continuing to escalate since the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United* opened the floodgates to unlimited political contributions.

All of that big-donor cash is perverting our political system. Billionaires like [Richard Uihlein](#), [Peter Thiel](#) and others, and former billionaire Sam Bankman-Fried, spent big last cycle to prop up their chosen candidates in primaries and push their own agendas, whether it's [pro-crypto legislation \(Bankman-Fried\)](#) or ultra-conservative social policies (Uihlein). Even [Mitch McConnell might have some misgivings](#) about allowing a mercurial billionaire like Thiel to exert so much power over the candidate selection process through [super PACs](#).

But wealthy donors aren't just giving to super PACs – in many cases, they're donating to their own campaigns. An [Insider report found 22 self-funding candidates had donated more than \\$435 million](#) to their own races. After the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 ruling in *FEC v. Cruz*, [self-funders can now pay themselves back unlimited sums from donors](#), leading to campaign contributions going directly into candidates' pockets. Of course, this tactic is only available to wealthy candidates who can afford to make massive loans to their campaign coffers. As running for political office increasingly becomes a rich person's game, Congress will become even more inattentive to the needs of middle-class Americans.

## Secret Money

Another escalating trend is secret money moving from nonprofit groups, which often do not have to reveal their donors, into super PACs, which do direct political activity. Secret money groups aren't just hiding dirty politics – in several states, they've been part of criminal scandals.

> In [Ohio](#), the former state House Speaker was indicted in "likely the largest bribery, money-laundering scheme ever perpetrated" in state history.

> In [Florida](#), secret money funded a "ghost candidate" scheme that has already led to the conviction of a local GOP leader.

> In [Oklahoma](#), the state auditor was hit with secret money attacks – likely funded by a charter school operator – after the auditor found the school had wasted \$20 million in taxpayer dollars. The fraud is now under criminal investigation.

This past summer, news publications (rather than disclosure requirements) revealed that [Leonard Leo solicited and directed a 1.6 billion dollar donation](#) to a secret money group that has worked to block progress on climate change, voting rights, reproductive healthcare, and more.

And just last week, it was revealed that the advocacy arm of the [Heritage Foundation, spent more than \\$5m on lobbying in 2021 to block federal voting rights legislation and to advance aggressive voter suppression measures in battleground states.](#)

## Foreign Money

It is also becoming clear that foreign powers are making use of the gaps in U.S. anti-corruption and election laws to move money directly and indirectly into our elections. For instance, a Washington Post story that broke in January 2023 detailed how the United Arab Emirates had [“exploit\[ed\] the vulnerabilities in American governance, including its reliance on campaign contributions, susceptibility to powerful lobbying firms and lax enforcement of disclosure laws intended to guard against interference by foreign governments,”](#) according to intelligence officials.

In another example of foreign manipulation of our elections, a [recent FEC split decision](#) traced how a Putin-connected Russian oligarch funneled money through a web of shell corporations and opaque nonprofits into a Louisiana election. This conduit contribution scheme, and [others like it](#), making use of opaque nonprofits that are the heart of the country’s secret money disaster, demonstrates that protecting our democracy by reforming our anti-corruption and election disclosure laws and rules is a national security imperative.

## Fair Districts

The 2022 election was the first congressional election cycle after redistricting, and the new maps illustrated the need for fair maps for many Americans living in states where politicians drew the lines for political gain, rather than communities’ needs.

> In [Ohio](#), voters had to cast their ballots in districts that had been ruled as unconstitutional by the state’s supreme court multiple times.

> In [Alabama](#), politicians packed and cracked Black voters to dilute their power.

> In [Louisiana](#), the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated a congressional district map that had been rejected by the governor because it did not add a second majority-minority district.

[Partisan gerrymandering led to fewer competitive districts in states including Texas, Oregon and Illinois.](#) In contrast, in states where independent commissions drew the congressional district maps (for example, Colorado and Michigan) we saw more competitive races.

The U.S. Supreme Court will issue final decisions on Alabama and Louisiana’s racially gerrymandered maps in 2023, likely further eroding the Voting Rights Act’s protections.

*The dominance of big and secret political money, the deliberate barriers to voting and fewer competitive districts are continuing to erode public confidence in our political system and making voters believe their voices aren’t being heard.*

## Solutions Exist — And Communities Are Taking Action

States and local communities aren’t waiting for federal action to help protect free and fair elections and our democracy. Here are just a few examples of state and local ballot measures that won approval in November.

> [Michigan’s](#) Proposal 2, the “Promote the Vote” initiative, won with nearly 60 percent of the vote. The initiative requires ballot drop boxes and nine days of early voting, allows all voters to cast their ballot by mail, ensures military and overseas ballots are counted if postmarked by Election Day and recognizes the right to vote without harassment or intimidation.

> In [Arizona](#), 73 percent of voters supported Proposition 211, the “Voters’ Right to Know Act,” which shines a bright light on secret money and requires disclosure of the major donors to independent expenditure committees.

> [Oakland](#) voters overwhelmingly backed Measure W, the Oakland Fair Elections Act, which requires independent expenditure ads to list their top donors, lowers campaign contribution limits and creates an innovative “Democracy Dollars” program to allow every Oakland resident to be a campaign donor.

> In [Portland, Maine](#), a projected 65 percent of voters approved Question 3 to expand the state’s popular Clean Elections program to city elections.

These victories show that voters want substantive reforms that can make the promise of democracy real for all of us.

# Solutions Exist — Championing the Reforms That We Need

The Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act would address many of the problems mentioned. However, Senate Republicans have continued to block comprehensive democracy reform legislation, despite broad support for such reforms from voters across party lines.

This time last year, on the one-year anniversary of the January 6th insurrection, activists gathered in over 300 communities across this country to demonstrate their support for the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act. In order to continue building momentum for our next opportunity to pass reforms, voters and advocates must continue to see elected leaders fight to protect our freedom to vote. As President Biden said, this is the foundational issue for our democracy.

While sweeping reform is unlikely in this new Congress, **it will be critical for you and your boss to continue to advocate loudly for these types of reforms using hearings, floor speeches, other public commentary, and, where appropriate, stand-alone votes. We also encourage you to defend our democracy against anti-voter legislation that may come through the U.S. House.**

[The Declaration for American Democracy coalition has also called on President Joe Biden to take further action](#), recommending executive orders that would protect and strengthen our elections; support justice, equity, and the rule of law; build an ethical and accountable government; and combat corruption. One of those solutions is a [contractor political spending disclosure executive order](#), which would require contractors that receive over \$1 million from the federal government to disclose all their political spending, which would be the first blow to secret money at the federal level since the 2010 ruling in *FEC v. Citizens United*.

The upcoming thirteen-year anniversary of the disastrous Citizens United ruling (on January 21st) provides an opportunity to highlight the corrosive impact of big and corporate money in our elections. Please join us in voicing your support for passing the legislation necessary to create a democracy that is responsive to all of us.

Thank you for all that you do.

Signed,  
**The Declaration for American  
Democracy Coalition**