

CHAPTER
10



DEMOCRACY

IDEA 21

National service could help heal America's political divide.

Polarization is up, civic engagement is down, and blue America and red America seem farther apart than ever. Somehow, people need to see that we are all Americans first and foremost. When people start thinking their neighbors are enemies because they think differently, that's when democracies fall apart.

Ask most any member of the US military and they'll tell you how quickly class, race, gender, and religious divides fall away when you know you're all part of the same mission and are all responsible for one another's well-being.

A new program of universal national service is one way for the next president to start healing the divisions in our nation and helping Americans see how much we have in common with one another.

It could require or incentivize one million young people to devote one year of their lives to service by serving in the military, working as a teacher, building up disadvantaged communities, or helping in countless other ways.

National service wouldn't be a panacea, but in bringing together Americans of different creeds, backgrounds, and political beliefs to solve problems, it would remind us that what unites us as Americans is so much greater than what divides us.

IDEA 22

Our children should have a civics education that will make them informed, engaged, and active participants in our democratic system.

America is the oldest continuous democracy in the world. Generations of Americans have sustained this great experiment because they had pride in our country and because they understood and embraced the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

But America is enduring a crisis of confidence.

Just 38 percent of Americans say they are “extremely proud” to be American, and the sentiment is even worse among young people. Only a quarter of them feel this way.

Many Americans also don’t know the basics of our federal government or the Constitution. Half of young adults rarely or never participate in civic or political activities, and the US ranks twenty-fourth in voter turnout among developed countries.

One reason why Americans have such a deficit of patriotism and of an understanding of our government is that only seven states require a yearlong civics course in high school, while 13 states do not require civics at all. Navigating civic life in America is already hard enough; it’s much harder if you’ve never even learned the basics.

In our divided America, even patriotism has become a partisan issue. But it shouldn’t be. That’s why the next president should see to it that resources are available for every American high school to offer every student a yearlong stand-alone civics course so our students can understand why we should all be proud to be Americans.

IDEA 23

The public has the right to know. Political parties, social media companies, and government institutions should not be able to censor information they don't like.

The free flow of information is crucial for a free society. For a democracy to work, the people must have access to the whole truth and hear from all sides of the debate.

But governments, big corporations, and many social media platforms are increasingly colluding to shut down access to information they don't like. This goes well beyond censoring child pornography, terrorist videos, violent hate speech, or other content every decent person would reject.

The so-called Twitter Files, a series of whistleblower reports about Twitter's content moderation decisions over the last few years, confirmed Americans' worst suspicions.

The administrations of both Presidents Biden and Trump pressured Twitter and other platforms to ban their critics. In addition, Twitter secretly boosted or suppressed users and content based on those users' political views around issues like COVID and climate change, and the FBI and other agencies were proactively advising Twitter and other platforms to ban certain content.

It's but one example of a fast-growing and serious problem, and most Americans would support a ban on political parties and government institutions censoring online information unfavorable to them.

IDEA 24

The First Amendment to the US Constitution protects free speech. No American should face discrimination at school or at work because of their political views.

In America, you get to speak your mind.

The First Amendment says government can't censor your speech, and our society has always championed free expression. It's who we are, or at least it's who we were.

Today, too many Americans who go against conventional wisdom are met with discrimination, retaliation, and cancellation.

On college campuses—where uncomfortable ideas should be debated freely—40 percent of students feel afraid to disagree with a professor, and nearly a quarter report self-censoring “often” to avoid backlash. Over half of professors are afraid to lose their job for saying the wrong thing. In the workplace, about a quarter of Americans say they have recently faced bias for their political beliefs—more than double the amount in 2019.

It's just common sense: you shouldn't be denied an education or a living based on your opinions. Twenty-two million government employees already enjoy protection from being discriminated against for their political beliefs—it's time to give all Americans the same treatment.

IDEA 25

Every legal voter should have the right and the ability to vote, every legal vote should be counted, and every counted vote should be verified.

Poll after poll paints a deeply concerning picture of American democracy: just under half of Americans trust that election results are accurate. Skepticism of election integrity is more prevalent among Republicans, who think the 2020 presidential election was stolen (it wasn't, according to over 60 court cases—many overseen by judges appointed by former president Trump, that rejected the Trump campaign's stolen election charges after the 2020 elections), but a growing share of Democrats don't trust our election system either.

Here are three easy fixes to make voting both more accessible and more secure, which our next president could champion and states could implement if they chose:

- *Make it easier to vote by mail, which is how 40 percent of Americans voted in the 2020 election. One problem with mail-in voting: many state laws don't even allow election officials to start counting mail-in ballots until the polls close on Election Day, dragging out the race and creating space for conspiracy theories to run amok.*
- *States should let mail-in ballots be counted early, so votes could be counted within 24 hours of Election Day.*
- *Finally, every voter should need to have a valid ID. It can be too hard or cost prohibitive for elderly, rural, or low-income voters to get an ID. But the answer isn't to reject ID requirements; the answer is for every state to make it free and easy to get an ID.*