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THE FUTURE OF VOTING RIGHTS IN AMERICA

No more excuses: as soon as Democrats hold a trifecta, protecting voting rights must be at the top of the agenda. In less than sixteen months, we have seen how our failure to protect voting rights has enabled an unaccountable President, partisan actors on the Supreme Court, and supine Congressional leaders to unravel historic legislative achievements: generational investments in climate change,¹ a manufacturing boom,² and the first bipartisan gun safety legislation in decades³—just to name a few.

Voting rights are preservative of all other rights. They are the context in which all other debates take place. Democracy is the very house we live in. It is the whole game.

In recent months, the Supreme Court gutted what remained of the Voting Rights Act, paving the way for craven politicians to pick their voters instead of the other way around. When elected leaders have nothing to fear at the ballot box, they stop centering the people and center their own power instead. This lack of fear and lack of accountability has empowered this Administration and certain Congressional leaders to pass legislation that hands billionaires a tax cut but leaves our children the bill, to allow the President and his family to enrich themselves at the expense of the American people, and to stay silent as illegal tariffs crush small businesses and families.

Here is what Democrats must do as soon as we regain power: investigate craven politicians, ban partisan gerrymandering, stop billionaires from buying our elections, expand our democracy, and guarantee the right to vote for all Americans.

Investigate the Officials Who Manipulated Maps to Silence Voters' Voices

Across the Deep South, partisan actors have manipulated their maps to silence the voices of Black voters. Their names and stories are virtually unknown across the country, and that is one way they escape accountability. The damage they have inflicted on American democracy, without any input from the voters, is profound.

Congress must use its tools to hold them accountable. A Democratic majority in either chamber must immediately investigate these officials, including through Congressional hearings, document requests, depositions, testimony, and, if necessary, subpoenas. We must analyze their statements, actions, and contributions to determine if there is any evidence that they broke any laws in their race to gerrymander and silence Black voices. Even this Supreme Court has made clear that intentional racial discrimination remains illegal.⁴ We owe it to voters to root out whether any illegal actions or discrimination occurred. And even if their actions are not considered illegal or unconstitutional under this Supreme Court, the American public deserves to see—in blinding sunlight—the contempt with which their state elected officials treat our

democratic values and their own voters. If the Supreme Court will not hold these officials accountable, a Democratic Congress will, and so will the court of public opinion.

Ban Partisan Gerrymandering

Going into the 2024 elections, only 22 out of 435 seats in the House of Representatives were considered competitive by political analysts.⁵ Only 37 districts were won by 5 or less percentage points—this, in a diverse and sometimes divided country.⁶

Congress must immediately ban partisan gerrymandering to ensure fair maps for all. We have ample statistical methods to assess gerrymanders, and there is no doubt that a ban on partisan gerrymandering is constitutional.⁷ Multiple legislative proposals to ban partisan gerrymandering have been introduced in recent years, including one with the support of every then-sitting Congressional Democrat.⁸

We must insist on voting on a ban on partisan gerrymandering even absent a trifecta. If some partisan Republicans refuse to ban this egregious practice, we should put them on record, and we must make them explain why on the floor of Congress and to the American people.

And once we have the trifecta again, we must not let the filibuster or any arcane Senate procedure prevent us from banning partisan gerrymandering once and for all.

Stop Billionaires from Buying our Elections

In 2024, just 300 billionaires and their families donated 19% of all money spent on federal elections.⁹ Those individuals represent less than 0.01% of the American population, yet they are the source of nearly \$1 out of every \$5 spent. This is not a partisan issue: billionaires of all political stripes have too much of a hold on our elections, and bipartisan majorities of voters agree.¹⁰ We need billionaires to spend less on elections and more in taxes.

Congress must stop this stream of political spending by establishing reasonable campaign contribution limits that allow ordinary people to make their voices heard. We also need to immediately improve disclosure requirements so that people can easily see who is funding every ad, whether on TV, streaming services, social media, or in the mail. Furthermore, we must tighten restrictions on coordination between candidates and Super PACs and ban tax loopholes that enable billionaires to engage in unlimited secret spending.

Statehood for DC and Self-Determination for Territories

The answer to those trying to fight the democracy is more democracy. The 700,000 residents of D.C. live in America, are American citizens, pay federal taxes, enlist in our military, yet lack full voting representation in Congress.¹¹ We have celebrated the 250th anniversary of our nation, and we are still fighting this old fight against taxation without representation. We are well past due to admit the District of Columbia as a full state into the Union and to grant D.C. residents the full Congressional representation and voice that they deserve.

Similarly, people living in territories like Puerto Rico deserve to decide their political status for themselves. If they want statehood, and they are willing to accept its attendant duties, these Americans deserve to be heard in Congress as full and equal members of our Republic.

Guarantee the Right to Vote for All Americans

“We the People of the United States . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

From the very beginning, our country has been oriented towards the principle of allowing all people to have their say. Even when we have not realized this promise, the long arc of our history has been to expand “We the People.”

For too long, we have left the right to vote to the mercy of state legislatures and courts. Our Constitutional rights do not vary from state to state, and every American should be guaranteed a baseline for access to the ballot. This requires restoring the protections of the Voting Rights Act, including its protections for communities of color across our country. It must also include establishing reasonable minimum standards for early voting, vote by mail, and in-person Election Day voting. Too often, voting is at the caprices of whether the boss will give a lunch break, whether a voter registration deadline from a month ago was met, whether the polling location hasn’t been changed at the last minute, whether a state legislature hastily and confusingly redrew district lines, or whether a kid gets sick at the last minute.

“We the People.” Not we the wealthy, not we the car owners, not we who remembered to update our registration six weeks ago, not we who can find our birth certificate from eight decades and six states ago. We the people need an affirmative right to vote and the means of doing so.

Congress must pass an affirmative right to vote for every American, including minimum standards for how our elections are conducted. And after Congress puts in these safeguards, we need a Constitutional amendment to enshrine this fundamental right once and for all.

¹ Molly Hanson, *Two Years Ago, We Passed the Biggest Climate Spending Bill Ever. Here's What It Has Achieved*, Earthjustice (Aug. 20, 2024), <https://earthjustice.org/article/the-biggest-climate-spending-bill-ever-just-turned-two-heres-what-it-has-achieved>.

² *Then and Now: U.S. Manufacturing Under The Trump and Biden-Harris Administrations*, BlueGreen Alliance (Aug. 2024), <https://www.bluegreenalliance.org/resources/then-and-now-u-s-manufacturing-under-the-trump-and-biden-harris-administrations>.

³ Don Clyde and Shauneen Miranda, *Biden Signs Gun Safety Bill Into Law*, NPR (Jun. 25, 2022), <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/25/1107626030/biden-signs-gun-safety-law>.

⁴ *Louisiana v. Callais*, No. 24-109, slip. op. at 23 (U.S. Apr. 29, 2026).

⁵ Erin Covey, *Final House Ratings: The Majority Is Still on a Knife's Edge*, Cook Political Report (Nov. 1, 2024), <https://www.cookpolitical.com/analysis/house/house-overview/final-house-ratings-majority-still-knifes-edge>.

⁶ Michael Li, *How Gerrymandering and Fair Maps Affected the Battle for the House*, Brennan Center for Justice (Dec. 16, 2024), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/how-gerrymandering-and-fair-maps-affected-battle-house>.

⁷ *Rucho v. Common Cause*, 139 S. Ct. 2484 (2019).

⁸ Freedom to Vote Act, S. 1, 118th Cong. §§ 5001-08 (2023).

⁹ Mike Baker and Steven Rich, *The Scale of Billionaires' Campaign Donations is Overwhelming U.S. Politics*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 9, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/09/us/billionaires-federal-election-campaign-contributions.html>.

¹⁰ Alex Brunet and Marina Pino, *Poll: Voters Want Solutions for Government Corruption*, Brennan Center for Justice (Jun. 2, 2026), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/poll-voters-want-solutions-government-corruption>.

¹¹ *QuickFacts: District of Columbia*, U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/DC/PST045225> (reflecting July 1, 2025 population estimates).