

## OUR COMMON PURPOSE

### REINVENTING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

**T**he American Academy of Arts & Sciences was established in 1780 by the country's founders to help guide a young nation through challenges and emerge stronger. This is one of those times.

**A BIPARTISAN COMMISSION** was convened by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences to assess and address the widespread sense that our constitutional democracy is in crisis. Members of the Commission – drawn from academia, civil society, politics, business, and the arts, from across the ideological spectrum – worked for nearly two years and hosted almost fifty listening sessions around the country to develop recommendations to strengthen America's institutions and civic culture.

The Commission's final report – *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century* – presents a sweeping and comprehensive proposal for reforms to how our country is governed, including:

- Expansion of the House of Representatives (and therefore the Electoral College) by at least fifty members.
- A constitutional amendment to permit more effective limits on campaign expenditures.
- Limiting Supreme Court justices to 18-year terms, at the end of which they could transition to federal appeals courts.
- A public interest mandate for social media platforms, along with policies to reverse the severe deterioration of independent journalism.
- A culture and expectation of national service by all Americans.
- Experimentation with electoral reforms aimed at offering alternatives to single-member districts and winner-take-all elections.

- Universal voting for all eligible Americans, and instant voter registration.
- Public and philanthropic initiatives to invest heavily in civic education and support the civil-society ecosystem focused on strengthening American civic values.

Most of the Commission's work was completed before the coronavirus crisis and before the nationwide protests for racial justice; the problems of governance that are glaringly obvious now were clearly apparent then. The country has successfully reformed its governing system several times in the past in response to governing crises. Another of these occasions for renewal has now arrived.

An essential strength of our constitutional system is its capacity to adapt to new challenges while retaining and improving realization of core commitments to freedom and equality.

The Commission's 31 recommendations reach across six broad areas that are fundamental to a healthy American democracy, each of which currently falls short. They are:

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## EQUAL VOICE, EQUAL REPRESENTATION

Elections and the representatives they produce are critical to the health of our democracy. This set of recommendations – addressing redistricting, congressional districts, and campaign finance reform – outlines how we can meet the Constitution’s promise of equality of voice and representation.

## EMPOWERED VOTERS

Removing barriers that constrain Americans from exercising their right to vote and promoting voting as a powerful, profound, and joyful expression of political agency are essential actions that must be taken to strengthening the election process.

Our system can and should be made more representative, more responsive, and more encouraging to a political and civic life that fosters a sense of community and a shared commitment to solving problems rather than fighting with opponents.

## RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT

Government institutions at the local, state, and national levels must become more responsive and adopt technologies that facilitate citizen participation, ranging from increasing direct interaction to engaging constituents through participatory budgeting.

## CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Increasing social and democratic infrastructure will support the places and programs that bridge community divides and invest in developing the “civic one million” who will lead civic renewal in communities and who are needed more than ever as the nation emerges from the pandemic’s effects.

## SOCIAL MEDIA WITH COMMON PURPOSE

Social media platforms are not inherently bad for democracy. They can be redesigned to support, rather than erode, our constitutional democracy and sense of common purpose and shared information.

## CULTURE OF SHARED COMMITMENT

Fostering a culture of commitment to constitutional democracy and one another can be achieved by supporting civic education, establishing an expectation of national service, and honestly grappling with the nation’s past to cultivate faith in a democratic future.

The Commission issued its report in the firm belief that significant change is not only necessary, but also possible – and positive.

The Commission’s leaders, its members, and the American Academy are moving forward to work vigorously with partners and champions to promote the recommendations in *Our Common Purpose* and the recognition that change is necessary and possible for America to reinvent its democracy for the 21st century.

To learn more about the people, project, and publications, and to read the entire report, go to [www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose](http://www.amacad.org/ourcommonpurpose)

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# THE COMMISSION ON THE PRACTICE OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

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