



**MORITZ COLLEGE OF LAW, DIVIDED  
COMMUNITY PROJECT, AND  
MERSHON CENTER  
FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY  
STUDIES**

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<https://go.osu.edu/dcpdemocracy>

# Speaking Out

to Strengthen the Guardrails  
of Democracy



# 2

## Checklist

Watch for the markers of a slide toward authoritarian rule and prepare a responsive approach. For the markers of such a slide, listed on the left below, consider the responses on the right.

Arousing unnecessary fears?

*Encourage hope and counteract attempts to sow ungrounded fears or manufactured emergencies.*

Lying to undermine faith in key independent public institutions?

*Defend the institutions on a bipartisan basis; point out the connection between trust in independent public institutions and democracy.*

Undercutting checks and balances?

*Make the connection between checks and balances and individual rights; urge people to vote against any anti-democracy candidates.*

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## Checklist

Watch for the markers of a slide toward authoritarian rule and prepare a **responsive approach**. For the markers of such a slide, listed on the left below, consider the responses on the right.

Lying to undermine faith in key independent public institutions?

*Defend the institutions on a bipartisan basis; point out the connection between trust in independent public institutions and democracy.*

Ridiculing and undermining the trust of ethical professionals and civic groups?

*Defend the importance of the role played by these groups in a democracy; encourage participation in them; urge these groups to speak up themselves in defense of democracy.*

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## Checklist

Promising ideas for dealing with headwinds potentially encountered in communicating the message effectively include:

### Collaborate

Collaborate with unlikely allies to speak jointly or in succession because that combination is most likely to be noticed and trusted by varied audiences and will reinforce the importance of the message, model respect across differences, and enhance safety.

### Fact check

Provide a credible fact check and anticipate resistance to a change in beliefs or views which may require speaking before false narratives take hold and framing topics to avoid offending people such that they do not listen.

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## Checklist

### Reinforce norms

Reinforce democratic norms through example by having speakers with political differences display mutual respect and join forces to support an institution or democratic norm.

### Explain legal issues

Support or oppose changes in laws and legal systems to strengthen democracy because it may help the public understand what is necessary to maintain individual rights and protect against attempts to undermine the government's checks and balances.

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## Tailor messages

Tailor messages, messengers, and media to varying audiences, so that these audiences see and trust the message and find their values reflected.

## Storytelling

Humanize the value of democracy with stories and specifics, so that they resonate with people, they learn from it, and they remember it.

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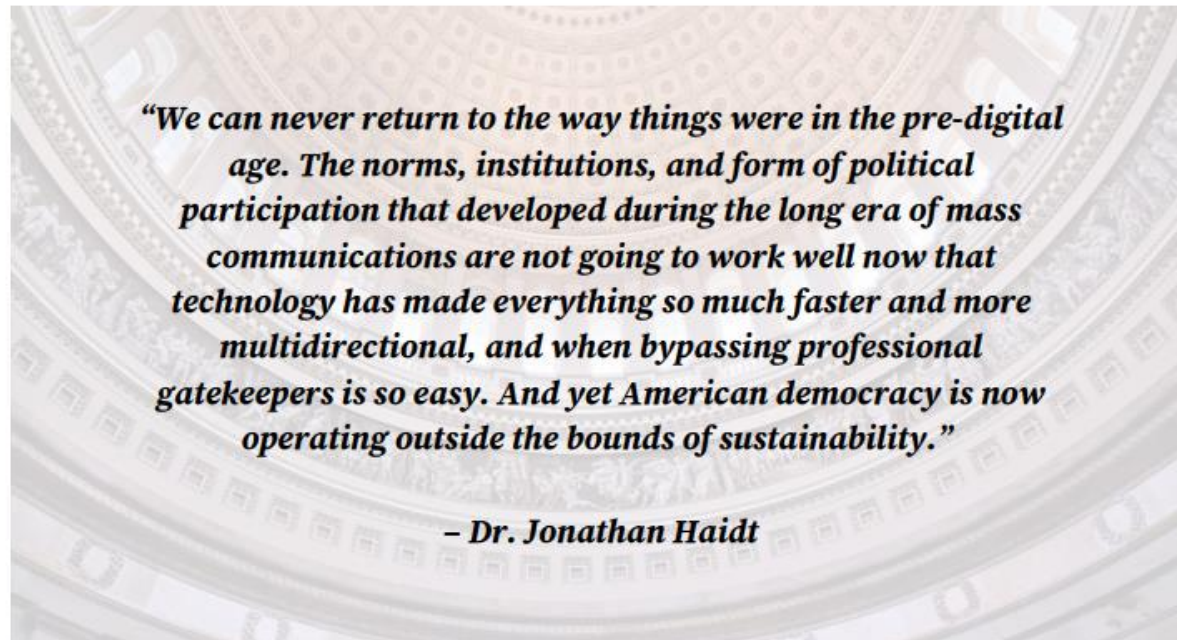
# 3

## How We Got Here

It may seem surprising to learn about the signs of a slide toward autocracy when most Americans support democracy and its move “toward a more perfect union.”<sup>4</sup>

In fact, most Americans:

- Believe that elections are fair and say that counting every vote is more important than having their preferred candidate win.<sup>5</sup>
- Support building a more fair, multi-racial and multi-ethnic democracy – perhaps the “more perfect union” referenced in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>6</sup>



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# 4

## Identifying and Countering Threats to Democracy

*"Every day for years now we have borne witness to vicious partisan attacks on the bulwarks of that democracy – our institutions of government and governance and the institutions and instrumentalities of our democracy – by our own political leaders and fellow citizens. Every day for years now we have witnessed vicious partisan attacks on our Institutions of Law themselves, our Nation's Judiciary, and our Constitution and the Laws of the United States – the guardians of that democracy and of our freedom. For years, we have been told by the very people we trust, and entrust, to preserve and to protect our American institutions of democracy and law that these institutions are no longer to be trusted, no longer to be believed in, no longer deserving of cherish and protection."*<sup>36</sup>



*J. Michael Luttig, a former federal appeals judge, warned about the dangers to democracy created by those sowing distrust in June, 2022 before the U.S. House Select Committee on Investigation of the January 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol.  
Source: Getty. Mladen Antonow, AFP.*

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# 5

## How to Speak Out

**h. Reinforce democratic norms through example**

**i. Speak directly to office holders, warning of the risks to democracy**

**j. Support or oppose changes in laws and legal systems  
to strengthen the guardrails to democracy**

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# 5

## How to Speak Out



*Photo of Kenneth Chenault, former CEO of American Express, who organized other business leaders to speak out about voting rights.  
Source: Getty. Earl Gibson III, WireImage*



*Former Governor and EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman co-founded a bipartisan center to equip those willing to oppose "anti-democracy players" who run for office.*

*Source: Getty. Steve Liss, Chronicle Collection*



*"I stand for pluralism when I learn from people who disagree with me."*

*- Eric Liu  
CEO, Citizen University*

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