

Political Reform

 NEW
AMERICA

2024



Year in Review

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Letter from Mark

An election year can be a kind of quadrennial checkup on the condition of American democracy, and this year we took an unusual test. As was said one too many times, “democracy itself was on the ballot.” We’ve long believed that if the state of democracy were an electorally relevant issue, we could find a larger constituency for positive change.

In 2024, “democracy” and “rule of law” polled as issues important to many voters. But we learned that these words were abstractions to almost everyone, filtered through existing preferences. Even more specific ideas such as “peaceful transition of power” represented forms or processes that don’t speak to what people want from public life. Focus groups showed that contrasting words such as “authoritarianism” also appeared to have little tangible meaning. Pervasive, deserved distrust of the political system made it difficult for voters to see a sharp distinction, and a defense of “democracy” as it is wasn’t appealing.

With an incoming president who has indicated an intention to break through most of the constraints on presidential power, we need to develop a stronger, aspirational narrative about democracy’s possibilities, how it relates to more material and personal values, and above all, how democracy can fulfill its real promise, which is to give us a genuine sense of agency in our lives and communities.

That narrative should be embedded in the lived experience of millions of people engaged in their own civic spaces, formal or informal, and should embody the varied language in which people actually talk about democracy and elections. That work will involve experiments in local organizing, co-governance and citizen assemblies, along with a role for stronger political parties that help people make sense of their choices.

We look forward to building on our work in all these areas as we confront the most challenging moment for American democracy in our lifetimes.

Sincerely,

Mark Schmitt

Director, Political Reform



Year in Numbers

50

Op-eds

20

Outlets

19

Reports &
Policy Papers

38

Podcast
Episodes

17

Radio & TV
Appearances

31

Events

20

Conferences,
Speeches &
Panels

34

Quotes &
Citations

41

Publications
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Our Work

7

Staff

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Fellows

Our Three Pillars of Work

01 Reimagining
Political Institutions

02 Designing Governance
for Civic Trust

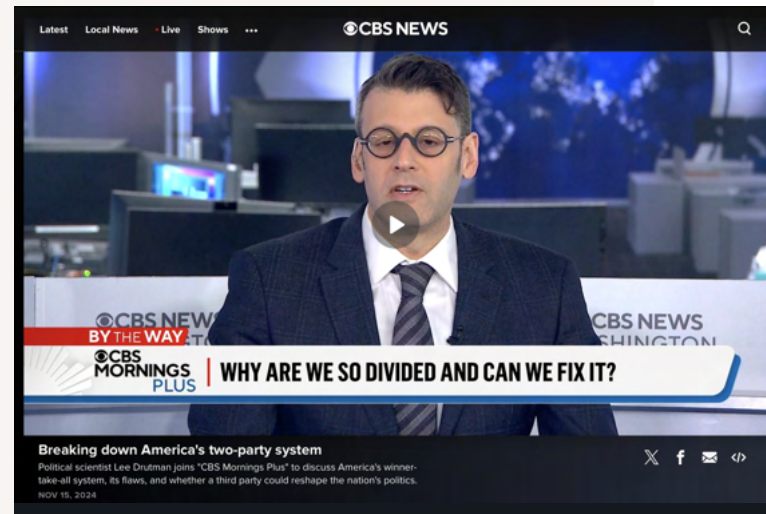
03 Cultural Roots of
Political Change

Reimagining Political Institutions

Paving the Way to Multiparty Democracy

In 2024, the Political Reform program continued its work of cultivating a more dynamic and resilient democracy in the United States. Through research, analysis, partnerships, and public events, we've imagined a political landscape where multiple parties rooted in communities and values work together to reflect the nation's pluralistic interests and identities. By opening pathways for new political parties to organize and assert real power, reforms such as proportional representation and fusion voting could provide voters with more meaningful choices and loosen the grip of the two major parties on our political system.

This year, we deepened our focus on institutional reforms that hold the potential to empower new political actors, expand representation, and create the conditions for government to better adapt to society's needs in the 21st century.



Lee Drutman being interviewed on "CBS Mornings Plus" about the "two-party doom loop" and how to break it.

"American politics is not in crisis because of too much partisanship but, in a sense, because of too little. Multiple, vibrant political parties are the only way to organize power in modern democracies, and if we don't change the party system we have, the two-party doom loop will only grow worse."

– Lee Drutman, "[The Case for More Parties](#)," *Boston Review*



Lee speaking at a Boston Review's "What Comes Next" webinar in December about the election, parties, and fusion voting.

“At a time when democracy is on the ballot, fusion voting could help bring about much-needed coalitions that stand up for democracy and revitalize electoral competition.”

– Oscar Pocasangre and Maresa Strano, [“What We Know About Fusion,”](#) *New America*

RELATED WORK

[“The Case for More Parties”](#)
Boston Review | Lee Drutman

[“Why Fusion Voting’s Ballot Line Packs More Power than a Taylor Swift Endorsement”](#)
The Thread | Maresa Strano

[“Five Insights On Political Parties in the Wake of Biden’s Exit”](#)
New America | Oscar Pocasangre

[“Kansas and Fusion Voting: Democratic Participation and Responsive Representation in the Sunflower State”](#)
New America | Joel Rogers

[“Governing the House with Multiple Parties”](#)
New America | Lee Drutman and Rob Oldham

[“Democracy Hypocrisy: Examining America’s Fragile Democratic Convictions”](#)
Democracy Fund | Lee Drutman, Oscar Pocasangre, and Joe Goldman

[“The Democratic Party Is \(Still\) Broken”](#)
The New Republic | Lee Drutman

[“Thinking Like a Party”](#)
The Middle Distance (Substack) | Mark Schmitt

[“Argentina’s Elections Are Becoming Dangerously American”](#)
Foreign Policy | Oscar Pocasangre and Grant Tudor

[“The Two-Party Doom Loop”](#)
Boston Globe | Lee Drutman and Farbod Faraji

[“America’s Political Divide Is Poisoning Our Food”](#)
Mother Jones | Lee Drutman and Dustin Wahl

[“The Realistic Promise of Multiparty Democracy in the United States”](#)
New America | Mark Schmitt, Didi Kuo, Julia Azari, Jennifer Wendling, Lisa Disch, Will Horne, and Oscar Pocasangre

[“Can Proportional Representation Lead to Better Governance?”](#)
Protect Democracy and New America | Oscar Pocasangre and John Carey

[“Opinion: RFK Jr. is Poised to Be a Chaos Factor in November”](#)
CNN | Lee Drutman

[“Proportional Representation and the Voting Rights Act”](#)
Protect Democracy and New America | Nicholas O. Stephanopoulos

[“Biden’s Exit and the Dysfunction of U.S. Politics”](#)
The Fulcrum | Oscar Pocasangre and Maresa Strano

[“What We Know About Fusion Voting”](#)
New America | Oscar Pocasangre and Maresa Strano

Reimagining Political Institutions

Elevating a New Vision for Structural Reform

Presidential election years put considerable strain on our political system. However, as busy Americans shift their scarce time and energy toward politics, we have an opportunity to bring our work and that of our partners in academia to new audiences. This year, the Political Reform program reached more people and amplified the important research of more scholars through our cross-ideological podcast Politics in Question, hosted by Lee Drutman, Julia Azari (Marquette University), and James Wallner (R Street). Unlike many podcasts that focus on the daily headlines, Politics in Question debates the root causes of institutional dysfunction and poses big-picture questions to inspire fresh thinking. Produced by Sarah Jacob and edited by Shannon Lynch, this year's episodes covered everything from how parties have shaped the rural-urban divide to the turnout effects of new voting laws, and featured guests like Jonathan Rauch, Congressman John Sarbanes, and Rachel Porter.



Beyond PiQ, our staff appeared on 25 podcasts and published 30 articles on Substack and the Political Reform blog. Lee continued to grow the audience for his Substack “Undercurrent Events” and Mark debuted his own Substack, “The Middle Distance” this year. New America recently launched its newest podcast venture, Democracy Deciphered, with episodes featuring Mark, Maresa, and Oscar from our program. Together with our traditional research publications and public events, these new media efforts are helping us stay at the forefront of critical discussions about democracy and reform.



“Elections are a choice, and winner-take-all elections often present us with the paradox that voting for our first choice means boosting the chances of a candidate or party we see as the worst choice. That can feel like no choice at all.”

– Mark Schmitt, “You Should Be Able to Send a Message With Your Vote,”
The Middle Distance (Substack)

RELATED WORK

["The Groups' and the Backlash"](#)

The Middle Distance

(Substack) | Mark Schmitt

["Why Can't Americans](#)

[Compromise? - featuring](#)

[Jonathan Rauch](#)"

Politics in Question Podcast |

Lee Drutman and James

Wallner

["Who Rules America? -](#)

[featuring Ari Berman](#)"

Politics in Question Podcast |

Lee Drutman, Julia Azari, and

James Wallner

["Episode 1: 2024 Election Key](#)

[Takeaways](#)"

Democracy Deciphered

Podcast | Maresa Strano and

Mark Schmitt

["Episode 2: What's the Deal](#)

[with the Electoral College?](#)"

Democracy Deciphered

Podcast | Oscar Pocasangre

and Alex Keyssar

["Election 2024: Signals, Shifts,](#)

[and What's at Stake for](#)

[American Democracy](#)"

New America | Lee Drutman,

Ilyse Hogue, Sarah Jacob, Oscar

Pocasangre, Hollie Russon

Gilman, Mark Schmitt, and

Maresa Strano

["Where Voting and Elections](#)

[Are On The Ballot This Year](#)"

New America | Oscar

Pocasangre

["How Do We Fix American](#)

[Elections?](#)"

Somewhat Unlikely (Substack)

| Oscar Pocasangre

["Ranked-Choice Voting Ballot](#)

[Measures Could Cool U.S.](#)

[Politics](#)"

New America | Maresa Strano

["Convenience Isn't Everything:](#)

[Why Election Day Needs Us](#)

[Back at the Polls](#)"

New America | Maresa Strano

["The Arc Of History Is Squiggly](#)

[- And Four Other Takeaways](#)

[From The 2024 Election](#)"

Undercurrent Events

(Substack) | Lee Drutman

["Slowly, Then All At Once:](#)

[What Biden's Sudden Departure](#)

[Tells Us About How Social](#)

[Change Happens](#)"

Undercurrent Events

(Substack) | Lee Drutman

["You Should Be Able to Send a](#)

[Message With Your Vote](#)"

The Middle Distance

(Substack) | Mark Schmitt

["The Presidential Campaigns](#)

[Don't Need Your \\$5](#)"

Undercurrent Events

(Substack) | Lee Drutman

"Imagine for a second: what if this mega-marathon of manipulative election fundraising and advertising didn't consume all of politics? Let me present a different vision: year-round party organizing and community engagement."

- Lee Drutman, ["The Presidential Campaigns Don't Need Your \\$5,"](#) *Undercurrent Events (Substack)*



Designing Governance for Civic Trust and Belonging

Citizens' Assemblies: The Next Frontier of Co-Governance

Public trust in government is declining, and models for civic engagement must expand beyond the election cycle. People are seeking alternative ways to engage in civic processes and to feel connected to their communities. In response, the Political Reform program has focused this year on expanding research on citizens' assemblies in the United States. While citizens' assemblies have gained traction in Europe at both the national and local levels, the program is closely tracking efforts in the U.S. to implement this innovative new model.



Hollie Russon Gilman at a FIDE North America panel in April.

“By providing a platform for informed discussion and consensus-building, citizens’ assemblies allow elected officials to address polarizing issues and help them better align with community priorities.”

– Hollie Russon Gilman, Sarah Jacob, and Amy Eisenstein, “Comparing Citizens’ Assemblies across the United States,” *New America*

RELATED WORK

“Partnering with Organizations on the Ground: Washington’s Community Assembly Model”

New America | Hollie Russon Gilman and Sarah Jacob

“Comparing Citizens’

Assemblies across the United States”

New America | Hollie Russon Gilman, Sarah Jacob, and Amy Eisenstein

“Making Child Care Accessible through a Citizens’ Assembly”

New America | Hollie Russon Gilman and Sarah Jacob

“Engaging Communities for Equitable Economic Recovery”

New America | Hollie Russon Gilman and Sarah Jacob

EVENTS

Democracy Beyond Elections

Series: Citizens’ Assemblies from a Politician’s Perspective

Co-hosted by New America, Columbia World Projects, and FIDE North America

Building Civic Assemblies: A

Collaborative Approach in Washington State

Co-hosted by New America, Columbia World Projects, and FIDE North America

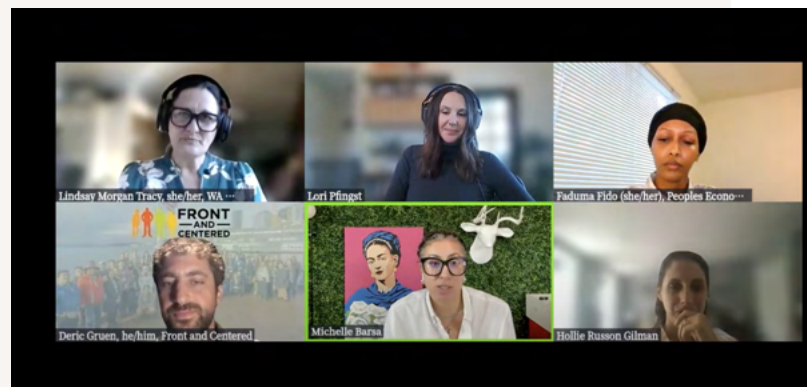
Future of Democracy: Citizens’

Assemblies and Beyond

Hosted by New America

“We recognized the need for tools like assemblies as a means to operationalize the cornerstones of collaborative governance. This, along with other tools, has served as a catalyst for good governance.”

– Faduma Fido, People’s Economy Lab, “Engaging Communities for Equitable Economic Recovery,” ***New America***



Panel discussion with leaders organizing community assemblies in Washington State, moderated by Michelle Barsa and Hollie Russon Gilman.

Designing Governance for Civic Trust and Belonging

Bridging Divides with Civic Tools and Leveraging AI for Public Good

In an era where division feels inevitable, civic tools offer a path forward to bridging gaps and increasing accessibility. This year the Political Reform program explored how organizations across the country and globally are using technology in innovative ways. From using AI to analyze city data in Boston to collaborative platforms that promote greater transparency with citizens in Taiwan, new models of civic technology are reimagining how to engage citizens.

This second focus of our co-governance work sits at the nexus of emerging technology and people-led practices. In November, in collaboration with DemocracyNext, the program hosted a public event spotlighting the tech-enhanced citizens' assembly held in Deschutes, Oregon.



Hollie briefing the Bertelsmann Foundation Fellows in July.

“There is no single solution for engaging disaffected young people in democracy. Instead, a multi-faceted approach that allows for experimentation, learning, and agile iteration can help introduce new ideas into the conversation.”

– Hollie Russon Gilman, Maresa Strano, and Sarah Jacob, “What does digital civic infrastructure look like in the 21st century?”, *Democracy Takes*

RELATED WORK

“Cities Are at the Forefront of AI and Civic Engagement”

NextCity | Hollie Russon Gilman and Sarah Jacob

“What does digital civic infrastructure look like in the 21st century?”

Democracy Takes (Substack) | Hollie Russon Gilman, Maresa Strano, Sarah Jacob

“Exploring Plural Voting as a Method for Citizen Engagement”

New America | Hollie Russon Gilman and Sarah Jacob

EVENTS

Lessons from Deschutes, Oregon Civic Assembly on Youth Homelessness

Co-hosted by New America and DemocracyNext

How Technology Can Reinvigorate Democracy: Conversation with Audrey Tang and Glen Weyl

Hosted by New America

Bertelsmann Foundation
Fellows Cohort Briefing on Co-Governance and Grassroots Democracy

Hosted by New America



Hollie at the Knight Media Forum in Florida after giving two talks on AI and civic engagement.

“Much like algorithms, a healthy democracy relies on continuous engagement and feedback to function effectively.”

– Hollie Russon Gilman and Sarah Jacob, “Cities Are at the Forefront of AI and Civic Engagement,” **NextCity**

Cultural Roots of Political Change

We're nowhere near finished parsing the 2024 election results, but one thing is clear: many American voters were driven more by cultural and identity related issues than by strict ideology or the current (or previous) administration's policy record. As the United States continues to grapple with a cultural realignment that intersects with economic, social, and technological disruptions, our program is widening the aperture for political reform research. We're studying the attendant threats to and opportunities ahead for our democracy through the lenses of comparative politics and of different demographics, from gender to ethnicity to immigrant status. For example, our Gender, Extremism, and Engagement Initiative, led by Political Reform Senior Fellow Ilyse Hogue, examined how the dislocation of young men—accelerated by technology and cultural shifts—fuels pathways to isolation and extremism, and is currently testing interventions to disrupt these harmful dynamics both in the U.S. and globally.

Our 2024 work was shaped by perspectives and practices traditionally underrepresented in the American democracy conversation. We focused on citizens' assemblies and proportional representation (innovations pioneered beyond our borders) and amplified the

voices of Latino leaders and climate justice storytellers across the United States. We also published a report with Democracy Rising on a series of focus groups with immigrant communities that sought to understand their engagement with existing political structures and openness to alternative systems.



U.S. Senator Chris Murphy being interviewed by The Atlantic's Christine Emba at a debrief at New America on men and the 2024 election.

“Understanding and addressing the grievances of young male voters is critical—not to excuse toxic behavior, but to prevent further radicalization and reclaim a majority aligned on shared values of freedom and democracy.”

- Ilyse Hogue, “Are Those Young Men Gone Forever?,” *Democracy Journal*



U.S. Senator Chris Murphy being interviewed by The Atlantic's Christine Emba at a debrief at New America on men and the 2024 election.

“Communities are thirsty for productive civic discourse and given the opportunity, regardless of whether they can vote or not. These conversations provided a space to think together and feel less isolated.”

– Maria Perez and Grace Ramsey, “Democracy and Belonging: Learning from Immigrant Communities,” *New America*

RELATED WORK

“Are Those Young Men Gone Forever?”

Democracy Journal | Ilyse Hogue

“Latino Voices: Six Questions with Latino Leaders Shaping America’s Future”

New America | Oscar Pocasangre, Lilian Coral, Vanessa Rangel, Elena Silva, and Leslie Villegas

“Democracy and Belonging: Learning from Immigrant Communities”

New America | Maria Perez and Grace Ramsey

“Trump’s Making an Aggressive Play for Aggrieved Young Men. Dems Should Take Notice”

The Bulwark | Ilyse Hogue

“White Dudes For Harris Seemed Weird: I Was Wrong”

The Daily Beast | Ilyse Hogue

“Listening to Rural Voices: The Transformative Power of Story Circles”

New America | Hollie Russon Gilman and Sarah Jacob

“RFK Jr. has a distinct appeal when it comes to young male voters”

MSNBC | Ilyse Hogue

“Argentina’s Elections Are Becoming Dangerously American”

Foreign Policy | Oscar Pocasangre

“Climate Justice and Local Storytelling: Lessons from the Road”

New America | Ann Florini and Vann R. Newkirk II

Leadership Behind the Scenes

In addition to visible activities like publishing op-eds, reports, and event appearances, our team works consistently behind the scenes with organizations and influential thinkers and leaders to advance political reform. We inform stakeholders across institutional contexts, from lecturing at universities to hosting private cross-partisan discussions, sharing insights and learning from others to expand our community and increase our impact.

Lee Drutman briefed the Fix Congress cohort on Capitol Hill, served on the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' task force on multimember proportional representation, and on the Election Reform Task Force whose work was presented at the American Enterprise Institute in December. Lee also continued to serve as co-founder of both Fix Our House and the Center for Ballot Freedom.

Ilyse Hogue worked with UCLA Professor Benjamin Radd and Fascination Lab to develop new forms of sentiment analysis for young men through engagement in Discord servers, contributing to the evolving field of political research for digital natives. She was also a featured speaker to moms' groups about preventing radicalization of young men. Ilyse served as an advisor to state and federal elected officials, a resource to members of the media on how to reach young men, and a board member of Demand Justice, a judicial reform organization.

Maresa Strano served on the boards of ProRep Coalition, Rank the Vote, and the Center for Ballot Freedom, and advised multiple journalists about their 2024 coverage of U.S. elections and politics. She's also working on a new multi-year project to expand ballot initiative processes to more states, and co-organizing three events to increase research and awareness around parties and party-centric reforms in 2025.

Oscar Pocasangre joined the research network convened by the Guinier Project on Race, Reform, and Multiracial Democracy hosted at Harvard Law School. As part of this collaboration, he's writing about how electoral systems affect minority representation and about the effects of electoral systems on polarization and democratic stability. He has also co-led an internal group at New America to explore the experiences and perspective of Latino communities in the United States.

Hollie Russon Gilman presented at the annual Democracy Funders Meeting (DFN) on civic engagement and online tools. She is also working with DFN on a funder's guide to impact the field of funding for citizen assemblies and will be hosting an in-person, off-the-record briefing for philanthropists. She is actively advising a range of social sector, civic organizations, and governments looking to advance more inclusive engagement and governance.

Mark Schmitt, in collaboration with New America's Education Policy program, advised the Mellon Foundation and others to build a response to anti-democratic threats to institutions of higher education.

About Us

OUR TEAM



Lee Drutman
Senior Fellow



Ilyse Hogue
Senior Fellow



Sarah Jacob
Program Associate



Oscar Pocasangre
Senior Data Analyst



**Hollie Russon
Gilman**
Senior Fellow



Mark Schmitt
Senior Director



Maresa Strano
Deputy Director

FELLOWS

Lydia Bean
Ann Florini
Didi Kuo
Kimberlyn Leary
Vann E. Newkirk
Robert Oldham

FRIENDS OF THE PROGRAM

Our co-governance partners include [Columbia World Projects](#), [FIDE North America](#), and [Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative](#). We're especially grateful for the collaboration and support of People's Economy Lab, Poverty Action Network, Washington State's Department of Social and Health Services, DemocracyNext, SNF Agora Institute, Unify, USDA Rural Partner's Network, Center for Rural Strategies, 2C Mississippi, and Art of the Rural.

We'd also like to thank [Protect Democracy](#) for their partnership in co-publishing a series of [white papers on proportional representation](#), as well as [Democracy Rising](#), the [Center for Ballot Freedom](#), the [R Street Institute](#), [Fix Our House](#), the [MGGG Redistricting Lab](#), and the Guinier Project at Harvard Law School.

Our Funders

Democracy Fund

JPB Foundation

Mike Schroepfer and Erin Hoffmann

Family Fund

Omidyar Network

Open Society Foundations

Porticus Foundation

Rockefeller Foundation

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

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Our Mission

New America's Political Reform program starts from the premise that repairing the dysfunction of American democracy and restoring trust in government calls for more than just public outrage, new advocacy coalitions, or smarter messaging. It requires fresh ideas and perspectives, experimentation, a robust and innovative public sphere, and an aspirational yet realistic vision of American democracy and equality. Launched in 2014, the Political Reform program seeks to develop new strategies and innovations to repair the dysfunction of government, restore civic trust, and rebuild the promise of American democracy.

You can stay in touch with the [Political Reform program](#) by following us on Twitter ([@PolReformNA](#)) and [subscribing](#) to our program's email list.



Lee Drutman, Sarah Jacob, Mark Schmitt, Oscar Pocasangre, and Maresa Strano at the New America equity retreat in June. Not pictured: Hollie Russon Gilman and Ilyse Hogue