Social Work, The Vote & Democracy

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What Does Voting is Social Work Do? We:

Engage and mobilize social workers, students, faculty, agency practitioners, and the community to register people to vote.

Ensure that people get to the polls and cast their votes, especially those targeted by voter suppression.

Promote ongoing civic engagement in social work education, social service agencies, and the community.

For more information go to:
VOTING IS SOCIAL WORK.ORG
Thoughts on Democracy and the Vote

As co-chair of the National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign (Voting is Social Work) I have been asking myself the following question for months:

*How have voter suppression, election subversion, and false claims of voter fraud affected our democratic institutions?*

It seems that I am not alone!

In late August 2022, "Threats to Democracy" became the e No. 1 issue facing America-- topping "cost of living."

On 9/1/22, President Biden forcefully warned us of this threat!

As the co-chair, I also spend much of my making sure that Voting IS Social Work.

*Voting rights and democracy go hand in hand. Therefore I want to step back a bit today to REFLECT on the current attack on US democracy.*
First Reflection

Remember that democracy can’t be taken for granted.

@RayDalio
Second Reflection

Voting is the most basic right in our democracy.

But it was not easy to get here.
Social Movements Played a Key Role

History tell us that since 1900, the victories of the Suffrage, Labor, and Civil Rights Movements increased access to the ballot for women, workers, and persons of color.
We cannot assume that the US was a well-functioning democracy before the Capitol insurrection. History reveals a troubling pattern. Each expansion of voting rights threatened white supremacy, male domination, and class power—and immediately came under attack by those seeking to maintain the status quo.
The Right to Vote is Still Under Attack Today
Voter Suppression: Intentionally Designed to Demoralize the Electorate.

Suggests that the system is rigged.

Makes people believe that voting does not matter.

Makes people think their vote does not count.

To date lawmakers in 39 states have considered at least 393 restrictive bills up from 75 bills in 24 states in 2021.
Catalog of Current Voter Suppression Laws

1. Purging voters from registration lists
2. Reduced early voting
3. Restricted use of provisional & absentee ballots
4. More Voter Id Requirements
5. Lack of language access
6. Disenfranchising felons
7. Creating at-large local offices diluted minority vote
8. Reduced voting hours
9. Fewer polling place
10. Lack of funding for elections
11. Intimidating and deceiving voters
12. Poorly trained poll workers
13. Slowing down the delivery of the US mail
14. Less time to collect of 2020 census data
15. 2020 Census count confirmed an emerging multiracial America > New intensified
Election Subversion
Election Subversion: Intentionally Interferes with the administration of elections and overrides the will of the voters by:

Replacing existing election administrators with highly partisan officials.

Substituting preferred candidates for those the voters chose.

Criminalizing the election certification process.

Damaging the legitimacy of and trust in the government and the democratic process.

As of April 2022, 33 states considered 229 bills to subvert, overturn, or undermine elections and otherwise override the will of the voters, up from 148 bills in 2021.
Since the 2020 census, states have redrawn district lines.

Based on racially gerrymandered maps many of the new districts systematically disenfranchise Black and Latinx voters.

Along the way The Supreme Court eviscerated the Voting Rights Act (not to mention abortion).
Impact of the Attacks: Fewer Persons of Color Vote

Record Voter Turnout in 2020, The Largest in 120 years.

Yet, 71% of white persons but only 58% of persons of color voted.

This racial gap will worsen with the new restrictive voting laws.
An Attempted Coup

On January 6, 2021, we witnessed an attempted coup.

An insurrectionist mob—falsely claimed that the election was stolen.

It stormed the Capitol to stop Congress from counting the electoral college votes.
We Were Warned:

In *How Democracies Die* two political scientists identify four warning signs of democracies in trouble.

*The signs include:*

- Rejecting Democratic Norms or The Rules of The Game
- Denying Legitimacy of Political Opponents
- Curtailing Opponent’s Civil Liberties Including the Media.
- Tolerating or Encouraging Violence

*Nearly all the signs evident in the US today*

*The authors conclude:*

Democracy does not necessarily end with a bang, a violent military revolution, or by a coup. Rather, it ends with a whimper i.e. The slow, steady weakening of critical institutions (i.e., the vote, elections, the press, the courts, the media, etc.)
Even President Biden declared

“The long-standing guardrails of US democracy have been shaken.”

“They have placed a dagger at the throat of democracy.”

1/6/22 & 9/1/22
But
It Is Not
Just The Vote:
Other Institutions of Democracy Under Attack

**Banning Books:**
39 states have introduced more than 150 bills to ban more than 1000 books on any topic that might make students “uncomfortable.”

**Less Independent Press:** From 1970 to 2020
# of Daily papers (down 28%)  
# of Investigative journalists, (down 50%)  
Meanwhile, large media corporations own 80% of all daily newspapers.

**Less Trust in Government**
In 1960, *three-quarters of Americans trusted* the federal government -- *“always or most of the time.”*  
Today, it is 20%, an all-time low.
DEMOCRACY IN TROUBLE

The Democracy Index (DI)
Calculated by The Economist (British) since 2006

The DI: Ranks 167 countries from 0 to 10 based in 5 measures of democracy. Places countries in 1 of 4 categories. Full Democracy, Flawed Democracy, Hybrid Regimes, Authoritarian Regimes

US Ranking by year
2006: Full democracy (8.22)
2016: Flawed democracy (7.98)(even before Trump)
2020: Flawed Democracy (7.92)
2022: Flawed Democracy (7.85)

DI Concludes
US sits between democracy and authoritarianism.

The DI scores fell in 44% or 75 of the 167 countries.

Highest score
Norway  925

US falls behind:
Canada : 8.87
UK  8.61
US  7.85
These threats to democracy take place in the context of record high inequality.

Supreme Court Justice, Lewis Brandeis (1856-1941) warned:

“We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can’t have both.”
We are good at diagnosing individual and social problems. Yet, we along with many other Americans, are not always ready or comfortable with assessing the status of our democratic institutions.

What Can Social Workers Do?

We Need To Up Our Game!
We Can and Must “Up Our Game” To Strengthen Democracy by Registering Voters & Getting Out The VOTE

- It is the right thing to do!
- It supports the profession’s mission and social justice values.
- We are in the right place!
- We sit at the intersection of the individual and society where we are best-positioned to:
  1. Witness and address the harms brought by a faltering democracy.
  2. Bring voter mobilization into the community, civic participation into agencies, & human rights into the US.
Never forget:
What has been done, can be undone!!
Imagine if all 700,000 social workers in the US registered three voters and got them to vote and then they registered three more voters and they also voted ...and so on.

NO NEED TO IMAGINE!

Join the Voting is Social Work Power of Three Voter registration and Get Out The Vote Campaign.
You can Speak OUT!

YOUR VOTE IS YOUR VOICE.

BE HEARD.
Thank you!