The Democracy Initiative (DI) is a network of membership and issue-based organizations recognizing that we must work together in order to build a democracy where our dreams can be realized. We believe that the voice of every voter should be heard and counted, so all of us have an equal say in a democracy that is of, by, and for the people.

As it stands now, our democracy is in crisis as powerful and wealthy special interests have tilted the balance in their favor. Our environment will suffer as energy legislation stalls and clean air and water protections are rolled back in favor of the interests of big polluters. Workers will continue to see stagnant wages and a reduced share of economic prosperity while billionaires rig the system. People of color continue to be denied justice in our judicial system as numerous headlines have recently demonstrated. We cannot stand by as working families are left behind, citizens are put behind bars unjustly, and we mortgage our planet’s future. In order to restore the balance we must address the power of political money and ensure Americans are voting.

The Democracy Initiative’s 60 organizations are fighting back. Collectively representing more than 30 million Americans from labor, environmental, and civil rights organizations, we are building a movement for democracy that aims to put political power in the hands of the people and empowers everyone with an equal voice. A functioning representative democracy, in which elected officials are accountable to the people, not wealthy special interests, is the way to ensure that we have a government that works for us.

“"To change everything, we need everyone. When our voices are drowned out by attacks on the ballot box and big money in politics, our democracy suffers, and so does our ability to address critical issues like the climate crisis. Only by mobilizing and empowering millions of people across the country with an equal voice will we be able to build a strong, healthy democracy.”

Michael Brune
Sierra Club Executive Director
MOBILIZING FOR DEMOCRACY

Americans are demanding change and an equal voice. However, voting and access to elected officials are becoming out of reach. The Democracy Initiative is fighting back, building a movement of millions of Americans fed up with the status quo. Examples of recent mobilizations:

RALLY IN ROANOKE, VA
In June on the 2nd anniversary of the Shelby County v. Holder decision, more than 500 hundred environmental, labor, and civil rights activists joined member organizations of the Democracy Initiative and the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights, and journeyed to Elmwood Park in Roanoke, VA to rally for voting rights and an equal voice for all in our democracy. As a fix to the Voting Rights Act languishes in Congress without even a hearing, we took the fight to House Judiciary Chairman Bob Goodlatte’s home district.

Demonstrating our collective passion for justice and our democracy, our community rallied in solidarity across organizations and communities. The Democracy Initiative member organizations turned out hundreds of people en masse, with activists from the environmental, labor, civil rights, women’s rights, immigration, and faith communities standing together in a brilliant display of compassion and urgency to show Roanoke and America what democracy looks like.

AMERICA’S JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE
As NAACP President & CEO Rev. Cornell William Brooks states, voting is a civic sacrament. This summer, the NAACP with support from member organizations of the Democracy Initiative, embarked on America’s Journey for Justice on a march from Selma, AL, to Washington, DC demanding voting rights and carrying the message that our lives, our votes, our jobs, and our schools matter.

- 1,000+ participants in the march
- 1,002 miles in 46 days across 5 states from Alabama to Washington, DC
- Op-eds from allied voices from DI organizations explaining how the march addressed environmental advocates, union members and democracy activists in addition to those concerned about education and justice featured in local and state publications
- Nearly 2 million social media impressions from DI organizations on Twitter and Facebook
- Local events and teach-ins organized by DI organizations along the way that brought in local activists and marchers to learn about voting rights and other critical issues
- Final Advocacy Day Rally joined by 1,000+ people at the U.S. Capitol from 27 organizations
- 200+ visits with Members of Congress and staff about restoring the 1965 Voting Rights Act

America’s Journey for Justice was the largest mass mobilization of the Democracy Initiative to date and demonstrated that together we are more than the sum of our parts.

“Millions of Americans across the country are demanding an equal voice in our democracy. It’s up to us to work together to see that they get it.”

Miles Rapoport
Common Cause President

“The primary goal of the Democracy Initiative is to build our democracy movement. Only through collective action will we be able to see progress on workers’ rights, civil rights, climate change, and other critical issues of our day.”

Larry Cohen
Democracy Initiative Chair

“As America’s Journey for Justice marched through the South, the efforts by Democracy Initiative organizations to mobilize, educate, and build a democracy movement were invaluable. DI endorsing organizations from labor, environment, and other backgrounds worked hand in hand with local activists and advocates in the state to unite people while fighting for voting rights and a voice in our government.”

Cornell William Brooks,
NAACP President & CEO
CLEAN ELECTIONS IN MAINE

In 1996, Maine passed the historic Clean Elections Act creating a robust public funding system for candidates running for statewide office. At its high point in the 2006 and 2008 elections, 81% of legislative candidates opted into this system, creating one of the most blue-collar legislatures in the country. However, in 2011, the Supreme Court weakened the law and it made it less attractive for candidates to use. The original purpose of the Maine Clean Election Act — fairness, accountability and transparency in elections, along with Mainers’ free speech — was compromised.

The Democracy Initiative identified this campaign as a strong opportunity to advance a democracy agenda and mobilize key advocates to organize in the state. Organizations like Every Voice, CWA, the Sierra Club, U.S. PIRG, the League of Conservation Voters, and others committed organizers and advocates to work hand in hand with Mainers for Accountable Elections to canvass the state, knock on doors, and educate voters on the importance of this law.

On Election Day, voters restored the Clean Elections Act. The Democracy Initiative’s efforts to mobilize labor and environmental organizations on behalf of the campaign demonstrate the power of our coalition and illuminated a path for democracy centered on state-based initiatives. As a result, all Mainers who care about the state can run for office, not just those with a network of wealthy friends and all those elected need to care about voters before wealthy special interests.

“The Democracy Initiative’s efforts were invaluable in Maine as we worked together in order to mobilize Mainers to take back control of their elections. Their efforts to connect national organizations to the work on the ground and build capacity throughout the state among a diverse set of organizations made a crucial difference in allowing Mainers to resume control of our elections.”

Andrew Bossie
Executive Director, Maine Citizens for Clean Elections

SIERRA CLUB:

“We have the opportunity to show the country that getting money out of politics is a moral issue: that ordinary people deserve the opportunity to run for office without having to rely on wealthy donors and special interests.”

Joan Saxe
Sierra Club Maine Chapter

The Sierra Club committed staff and encouraged their local members and activists to join the DI’s tele town hall and enlisted their help with canvassing, organizing, and other activities throughout the state over the last couple of months.

CWA:

“When we band together for common goals like we have with other Democracy Initiative organizations, America becomes an even better place for middle class Americans.”

Serina DeWolfe
CWA Local 1400

CWA worked hard to turn out every single Mainer and make their voice heard on Election Day, committing two organizers to the campaign to help with canvassing, organizing, and other activities throughout the state.
MOBILIZING MILLIONS TOGETHER

The Democracy Initiative’s power correlates directly with the strength of our endorsing organizations. Building a movement is about more than elevating and coordinating their efforts, but leveraging actions, mobilizations, and research toward the common goal of a stronger democracy in which every American has an equal voice in a government of, by, and for the people.

INTEGRATING DEMOCRACY WORK

The Sierra Club has organized a periodic meeting with representatives from other environmental organizations, including LCV, NRDC, Greenpeace, Center for Environmental Health, and Food & Water Watch, to discuss and plan democracy engagement and integration. We see this as a model for other sectors, and in addition to her work with this “caucus,” we will look to seed similar conversations with the idea of creating a democracy caucus in other communities.

DEMOCRACY RESOURCES

The Democracy Initiative Education Fund, in partnership with CWA and Every Voice, published its first report this year, Democracy at a Crossroads: How the One Percent is Silencing our Voices, detailing efforts to consolidate power in the hands of the few through attacks on labor and our democracy. Additionally, we have released to resource newsletters this year on money in politics and voting rights, designed to give organizations and their staff a compendium of information to bring them up to speed on the issues and how to stay connected.

OUR VISION REMAINS THE SAME

Originally formed as the Democracy Initiative (DI), we have recently established ourselves as a stand-alone 501(c)(3), the Democracy Initiative Education Fund, and a 501(c)(4), the Democracy Initiative. Despite these changes our vision remains the same. We seek a vibrant democracy where everyone can participate fully in the democratic process, every voter has an equal voice, and policymakers are accountable to the people and the public interest.

“America’s biggest polluters like the Koch brothers, are spending millions to make sure our politicians let them continue pumping out poison. The Democracy Initiative gives me hope by bringing together labor, civil rights, racial justice and environmental groups among others to get money out and people in to our democracy.”

Annie Leonard
Greenpeace USA Executive Director

“The democracy movement is about more than just ideas. It’s about people— their livelihoods and their ability to provide for their children and families. We must continue to fight day after day to make sure every American’s right vote to vote is secured and their voice can be heard.”

Tefere Gebre
AFL-CIO Executive Vice President

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