

## **The STATE OF DEMOCRACY**

*Delivered by Celina Stewart, March 2025*

Hello there.

I'm Celina Stewart, CEO of the League of Women Voters of the US, here to talk to you today about the State of Democracy in America.

Over the last few years, we've learned a lot about our democracy, right? We've learned about our collective power. Particularly how precious it is, how vulnerable it can be, and what it can withstand when threatened or attacked. And we are still learning in these turbulent times.

Contentious political environments, where the attacks focus on undermining the basic principles of fairness, force us to ask ourselves the hard questions. Here's a few that I hear: "Is our democracy safe? Are our constitutional rights protected?" "How many more challenges can our democracy withstand? "What can we do to ensure we protect our freedoms?"

In 2024, women, young adults, and other voters representing vulnerable communities voted on issues we cared about. From jobs and wages to immigration to personal health care choices, ballots were counted, and American voices were heard.

That's democracy at work. Yet, there was a large swath of voters who chose to sit it out, not participate and for a variety of reasons. And that is why we must keep talking about the tough topics, encouraging family, friends, and our neighbors to not only register to vote AND to turn out to cast their ballots. That is one concrete way to ensure that we elect representatives who will protect laws and procedures that reduce or eliminate the barriers some voters face in casting their ballots.

So, what lies ahead?

At the League, we have long said that democracy is a living, breathing, and evolving system that we must nurture.

Democracy doesn't happen only in Washington, DC, from where I speak to you today. It happens each and every time an individual registers to vote and casts a ballot – and not just in presidential elections but also in local contests where the outcomes may hit a little closer to home. Think: election of local commissioners, school boards, or your city councils.

Democracy happens when WE speak UP! Speaking up can take many forms, including starting or signing petitions addressing something in your community or what is happening in Congress.

Not sure how to plug into democracy? Here's a few ideas to consider sign up to become one of the 30,000 Election Day volunteers. Your local election officials facilitate elections throughout the year and could always use an extra set of hands. Or sign up to be a census worker to ensure that every person living in our borders gets counted. This work is so critical because getting everyone counted ensures that important resources like hospitals and schools can adequately support the needs of the community.

Democracy happens when you point out mis- and disinformation, and you set the record straight.

Disagreement, debate, and challenge are all parts of a healthy democracy, so we must embrace them and do the hard work ahead. We can't be silent bystanders, watching from the sidelines of democracy, aware of what is happening, but UNENGAGED. That is a non-starter. We must continue to engage and lift our voices so that those elected to represent us know what we expect them to do for our family, our neighbors and our community. And if you must tap out to rest for a moment, that's OK, just be sure to tap someone else in!

Democracy work is ours. We hold it, we are responsible for protecting it and we can do it.

We can't know at this moment all the challenges that are around the corner, but as a nation, we have walked through difficult times before. In fact, in so many ways, those challenges invigorate us... and challenge us to not get too comfortable with the way things are. Difficult times have the ability to keep us sharp and eagle-eyed for threats to those things we need to thrive – like food, shelter, and a job that enables us to take care of ourselves and loved ones.

Even while it feels like parts of our world is crashing, I remain optimistic about the future of America's democracy. If you're angry at what's happening—GOOD. If you are frustrated with what's happening – GOOD. I hope those big emotions inspire you to act and engage.

I invite you to visit the League's site at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) and learn how you can help by volunteering, donating money to help us fight to protect democracy, and helping us to spread accurate information around the country. Become an engaged citizen or active leader in your local League chapter or start one if none currently exists. Or just simply volunteer at an event or on a committee. You can take that first step and see what transformative opportunities follow.

One day, perhaps not too long from now, we'll all look back and ask ourselves if adequately we met this moment. If we nurtured our democracy when it needed it

most. If we paid attention, took a stand for what we believed in, and got involved in meaningful ways.

We don't want to be the weakest link in a legacy of overcomers. Let's get to work.

Thank you.