

## **Books and Articles on Strengthening Democracy and Organizations to Help you Do It.**

*Compiled by Harry Masters with input from David Brodwin, Vicki Judson, Rich Lipman and Tom Manning*

Much has been written recently about the challenge of strengthening democracy, both in the U.S. and abroad. We aim to highlight some good introductory overview articles as well as resources for those who wish to read further.

We have also sought to identify organizations that are doing good work in this area in case you want to get personally involved or provide financial support. Some of these are projects of our amazing classmates!

This list is a work in progress and is by no means exhaustive. Please feel free to recommend additional sources and we will add them to a later version of this document.

### **Good Overview Articles**

The following high-level articles cover the threats to American democracy posed by polarization, dysfunctional politics, attacks on our essential institutions, and more.

- [“Where Does American Democracy Go from Here? Six academics discuss how worried we should be about its future”](#) in the New York Times Magazine
- [“Democracy and its Discontents”](#) in the New York Review of Books
- [“Is Democracy Dying?”](#) (the entire October 2018 issue of Atlantic Magazine.) Consider, especially, Anne Applebaum’s article: [“A Warning from Europe: The Worst is Yet to Come”](#) which shows how Poland’s descent into authoritarianism anticipated many of the strategies since unleashed in the United States.
- [“Is America Still Safe for Democracy? Why the United States Is in Danger of Backsliding”](#) by Robert Mickey et al., in Foreign Affairs.
- [“America’s Coming Age of Instability: Why Constitutional Crises and Political Violence Could Soon Be the Norm”](#) by Steven Levitsky et al., in Foreign Affairs. This recent article posits that the polarization of the country and the radicalization of the Republican Party will not lead to a Hungarian-style autocracy but to “enduring conflict between powerful authoritarian and democratic forces could bring debilitating—and violent—regime instability for years to come.”

For a deeper take on the problem consider the books below. As much as possible, books are linked to their publisher’s web sites which generally offer a synopsis as well as links to vendors.

### **Books about the slide into autocracy in general, drawing lessons from history:**

[How Democracies Die](#) by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt [also summarized here](#).

[Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism](#) by Anne Applebaum. [Reviewed](#) in the Guardian

[Fascism: A Warning](#) by Madeline Albright, [profiled](#) in the New Yorker and elsewhere

[Death Of Democracy – Hitler’s Rise to Power](#) by Benjamin Carter Hett

[The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America](#) by Timothy Snyder

[How Democracy Ends](#) by David Runciman

[How Civil Wars Start](#): And How to Stop Them by Barbara Walter, [reviewed](#) in NY times

[The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again](#) by Robert Putnam with Sherilyn Romney Garrett. This analyzes the social division and income inequality in the United States a century ago, which strikingly resembles the current situation, and describes how it was resolved.

**Books and articles more specifically about the current level of polarization and threats to democracy in the United States and how to respond:**

[Why We’re Polarized](#) by Ezra Klein

[The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It](#) by Yascha Mounk

[Divided We Fall](#) by David French

[The Politics Industry: How Political Innovation Can Break Partisan Gridlock and Save Our Democracy](#) by Katherine Gehl and Michael Porter. This book looks at politics as an industry. The website offers a brief video on rank choice voting and the role it plays in solving electoral gridlock and countering the rise of extreme candidates in primary elections.

[The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth](#) by Jonathan Rauch discusses how we determine truth, how it has been subverted, why it is essential to a successful democracy. To see what inspired this book, read the earlier article [The Constitution of Knowledge](#) in National Affairs.

[The End of Identity Liberalism](#) by Mark Lilla argues that Democrats exacerbated the problem of polarization through identity politics.

[Election experts sound alarms as costs escalate and funding dwindles](#) argues that lack of public funding contributes significantly to the problems with our elections.

**Books about broader context and root causes**

These two books look at the overall dynamics of why nations rise and fall over the course of centuries and suggest a context for our current challenges.

[Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order: Why Nations Succeed and Fail](#) by Ray Dalio. This book offers an overview of how hegemonic powers decline, and how neglecting the underlying productivity of a nation lowers living standards, and leads people to favor autocrats who promise a

return to the good old days. It suggests that our current situation manifests a predictable dynamic that has played out in many times and places.

**[Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy](#)**

by Francis Fukuyama. This book offers an excellent long term historical perspective on America's underlying problems and what to do about them. Although it was written well before the current threat to our democratic republic it provides excellent and relevant context.

**Books about underlying structure of American political system and resulting inequality.**

These two books look more specifically at the structure and assumptions underlying our founding national documents and institutions, and how these relate to the current challenges.

**[First Principles; What America's Founders Learned from the Greeks and Romans and How That Shaped Our Country](#)**, by Thomas Ricks.

**[The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution](#)** by Ganesh Sitaraman provides context and theories on why economic inequality threatens the Republic.

**Organizations involved in strengthening democracy:**

For those who want to get more directly involved in the work of strengthening democracy, these groups address governmental shortcomings and/or polarization. Many promote dialog among people with diverse/opposing points of view, and may provide an opportunity to get engaged directly in the work:

**[Braver Angels](#)**: formerly Better Angels, seeks to bring Americans together to bridge the partisan divide and strengthen our democratic republic. (Founded and led by our classmate David Blankenhorn)

**[Democracy Studio](#)** encourages dialog about our democracy in political art and political language. (A project of Harvard Square Lab, founded and led by our classmate Tom Manning)

**[Rebuild Congress Initiative \(RCI\)](#)** works for "a strong, functional and representative Congress that can fulfill its constitutional responsibilities." (Founded and led by our classmate Bruce Patton)

**[The Right Question Institute](#)** works in low-income communities to build democratic skills for asking better questions so that more people can have a voice in decisions that affect them on all levels of government. (Co-founded by Dan Rothstein, one of our classmates)

**[Millennial Action Project: Red and Blue Dialogues](#)** creates a space for conversations among diverse community members with a spectrum of different perspectives.

**[What is Essential](#)** – a resource for conversations Across the Red-Blue Divide

**[Livingroom Conversations](#)** – a program to connect people of different political orientations for respectful, well-moderated conversation

**[American Exchange Project](#)** sends high school seniors to different parts of the country to give young people a direct experience of communities very different from their own.

In addition, we found an [extensive list \(24 pages\) of other groups, organizations and resources](#) from the [Morton Deutsch Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution](#) at Columbia University.

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We invite classmates to offer suggestions of additional organizations, books, articles, video, podcasts, and other relevant resources.