

Campus Coffees *for* Change

GATHER FRIENDS. BUILD COMMUNITY. RAISE HOPE.

TOOLKIT

POWERED BY DEMOCRACY
FORWARD 

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Dear Friend,

Thank you for organizing a Campus Coffee for Change! As part of Democracy Forward's Together for Democracy initiative, Campus Coffees for Change was created to **build community on college campuses and inspire students to protect and advance our democracy.**

Threats to the American people and our democracy, harmful policies, and a neverending flood of news stories can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed, isolated, and disconnected. **But we, the people, will defy these efforts and find strength and courage together.**

We also know that joy is an act of resistance, so we created this toolkit to help make your Campus Coffee for Change a fun and productive experience. You'll find tips for organizing a successful event, conversation starters, practical action items, and even pro-democracy book recommendations!

Thank you for being an important part of our vibrant, diverse community. If you have any questions, please email campus@democracyforward.org.

In solidarity,

The Democracy Forward Team

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Tips for Organizing a Campus Coffee for Change



Every Campus Coffee for Change is unique, so get creative and have fun! Meet at a local coffee shop for a caffeine hit and good conversation. Not a coffee drinker? Grab a table during dinner at your dorm. Have some people over for pizza. The options are endless!

Before Your Coffee

- **Find your people.** Figure out who you'd like to invite to your event. Campus Coffees are set up to work for any range of guests, from a group of three or four people to larger groups, such as classes or student organizations.
- **Set a date and pick a place.** Impromptu get-togethers are great, but sometimes it's a good idea to decide on a date and location ahead of time.
- **Review this toolkit.** There's no need for anything formal, but having a rough plan for the conversation can help keep things on track.
- **Need some music for your event?** Play our [Spotify playlist](#) or order *Democracy Forward*, the [limited edition double vinyl album](#) produced in collaboration with prominent literary magazine [The Bitter Southerner](#).

During Your Coffee

- **Welcome everyone.** If possible, start by showing [this brief video](#) from Democracy Forward President and CEO, Skye Perryman.
- **Learn about each other.** The [conversation starters](#) are meant to prompt discussions you may not normally have with your friends or new connections. Pick a few that best fit your group or select some at random.
- **Take action.** Talk through the [suggested action items](#). Maybe start small by posting photos from your Campus Coffee on social media. Or you go all in and volunteer for a local campaign every Saturday this semester. Every action counts.
- **Decide what's next.** If your group decides to hold another Campus Coffee or take action in your community, designate a point person to coordinate.
- **Tag us on social media!** When you post photos from your event, don't forget to tag your friends, new connections, and [Democracy Forward](#).



After Your Coffee

- **Send us your photos.** After you post your favorite pictures, send them to us at campus@democracyforward.org. We may feature your event on our social media!
- **Spread the word.** Send this toolkit to your group and encourage them to organize their own Campus Coffees. Tell your family and friends at home about [Dinners for Democracy](#) – another great way to bring people together!
- **Stay connected with us.** Sign up for the [Democracy Forward newsletter](#). Buy some fun [Democracy Forward merch](#). Follow us on [social media](#).
- **Stay connected with each other.** Whatever you do, keep your community close. We need each other now more than ever.



Conversation Starters for Your Event



Reflect on how your family and childhood have impacted your view of the world.

- Did your family or loved ones discuss current events growing up? How has this shaped your views?
- Has your college experience changed these conversations with your family? If so, how?
- Do you come from or currently practice a faith tradition? If so, does your experience impact how you view democracy and what's happening in the world?
- Do you think your elementary, junior high, or high school education was impacted by the political or religious climate in which you were raised? If so, how?

Talk about campus culture.

- How do the demographics and campus culture at your college compare to your hometown? What impact has this had on your college experience?
- How does your campus culture differ from or reflect the surrounding community?
- What are you involved with on campus? How did you become involved?
- How are current events incorporated into your classes?

Discuss the issues.

- Do you follow current events? If so, where do you get your news? Have your news sources changed since starting college?
- What's something good that's currently happening in government – federal, state, or local?

Share your go-to strategies for hope and self-care.

- What brings you joy?
- How do you find calm when the world around you feels overwhelming?
- What is your favorite guilty pleasure?
- Who do you follow on social media that shares positivity or inspires hope?

What's next?

- What do you need from today's leaders to help your generation succeed?
- What kind of world do you want to create after you graduate?
- What concerns do you have about entering the workforce?



Practical Tips for Advancing Democracy



Take action on campus.

- **Post about current events on social media. Use your platform and your voice!** Follow these [media literacy tips](#) and become a trustworthy source of information for your friends and family. Spark conversation, engage others, and raise awareness about important issues. If relevant, don't forget to tag [Democracy Forward](#) when you post!
- **Find a student group that sparks your interest and creates new connections.** Colleges are full of opportunities for students to become involved on campus or in the surrounding community. Even if you can't commit long-term, explore student activity fairs or opportunities and drop in on a few meetings to see what fits.
- **Become a Democracy Forward Campus Ambassador.** Join our professional development and community engagement program for students enrolled in a postsecondary institution (e.g. trade school, community college, or university) and who care deeply about protecting democracy. [Learn more and sign up here.](#)

Take action in your college town.

- **Get a library card from the public library.** While you have access to lots of resources through your campus library, supporting your local public library is a powerful way to show solidarity and stand against censorship. Check out challenged books, explore library resources, or volunteer. And don't forget to browse our [Pro-Democracy Reading List](#).
- **Follow the local news in your college town.** Always remember that you're a student and a member of the community. Not sure where to start? Search the Institute for Non-Profit News [Find Your News](#) feature, explore the American Journalism Project [portfolio of independent local newsrooms](#), or stream your [local NPR station](#).
- **Volunteer on a local campaign.** Campaigns for local races like school board and city council typically have small budgets, so volunteers are essential. Offer to talk with voters, distribute yard signs, or even host an on-campus event for a candidate. Everything helps.



- **Join a student service organization or participate in a campus community service day.** Organizations in communities across the country are facing an uncertain future. Volunteering your time connects you with local issues and helps organizations do more with limited resources.

Take action at the ballot box.

- **Vote!** Register to vote with your college address or vote by mail in your hometown. Either way, don't forget to vote! National, state, and local elections are all vital to a thriving democracy.
 - Learn more about voting as a college student from the [Fair Elections Center](#).
 - Use [Vote 411](#) to find out if you're registered to vote and learn about what's on the ballot in your state.
- **Register others to vote.** Volunteer for a voter registration drive on campus or start your own! For more information, check out [Students Demand Action](#) and the [Fair Election Center](#) state voter registration drive guides.
- **Learn what's at stake.** Understanding the world around you can impact how you vote. Knowledge is power.
 - The National Association for Media Literacy [Youth Advisory Council](#) offers helpful resources, such as [tips for practicing digital health and wellness](#).
 - As part of its [Respectful Conversations](#) program, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte offers media literacy resources, including infographics, fact-checking tools, and games.
 - The [Interactive Media Bias Chart](#) from Ad Fontes Media charts national and international news sources based on their reliability and political bias.



Become a Democracy Forward Campus Ambassador



The Democracy Forward Campus Ambassador Program is a professional development and community engagement opportunity for students who care deeply about protecting democracy.

Campus Ambassadors bring Democracy Forward's successful [Campus Coffees for Change](#) and [Dinners for Democracy](#) programs to their campus. This is an opportunity to share Democracy Forward resources, build community, and bolster hope in the face of the harmful and unlawful actions of the Trump-Vance administration.

Actions to Take

- Gather small groups of friends or classmates for coffee, tea, a bite to eat, or happy hour at least four times per academic year (approximately September to June). These gatherings can take place anywhere – dining halls, local coffee shops, at home, or a favorite park.
- Use Democracy Forward's [conversation starters](#) to facilitate conversation during each event.
- Commit to taking at least one concrete action to advance democracy; encourage fellow students to do the same. Democracy Forward provides suggestions for how to get involved [here](#).
- Create social media content that highlights your gatherings and/or the actions taken to advance democracy, and be sure to tag [@democracyforward](#) in your post(s).
- Submit event photos and/or videos by email for potential use in the Democracy Forward newsletter, website, or social media channels. (campus@democracyforward.org)
- Share feedback from your events. We want to hear about the pro-democracy actions your group chose, highlights from your discussions, and feedback on the overall program.

Benefits to You

- Hone marketable skills, such as grassroots organizing, event planning, public speaking, and group discussion facilitation.
- Access to a private Democracy Forward Campus Ambassadors LinkedIn group to connect with Ambassadors at other campuses.
- Access to invitation-only, online events (e.g. virtual resume and cover letter feedback sessions with Democracy Forward staff, virtual office hours, and more.)

- Opportunities to earn resume-enhancing credentials, such as Campus Ambassador awards.
- Students who commit to becoming Campus Ambassadors by December 1, 2025, will be entered into a lottery to attend Democracy Forward's Together for Democracy conference in January 2026 in Washington, DC (all expenses paid).

To Be Eligible

- Interested students must be enrolled in a postsecondary institution (e.g. trade school, community college, or university) in the United States.

Questions? Contact us at campus@democracyforward.org

[Click here to sign up!](#)

The State of the Union Is up to Us

SKYE L. PERRYMAN, JD • March 4, 2025



President Donald Trump's address to Congress will cap off a month of chaos and confusion that has left Americans wondering if our democracy can hold. His administration is, by its own terms, "flooding the zone," imposing tariffs that raise costs, weaponizing federal funding and threatening essential services, dismantling civil rights, gutting programs focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, decimating consumer protections, weakening the federal oversight that checks corruption, undermining public health initiatives, abandoning America's role as a global leader, and intimidating and threatening public servants. The list goes on.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, that's not a coincidence.

Over the past month, in large cities and small towns, in red states and blue states, among older Americans and younger ones, the American people have felt what the Trump-Musk agenda is trying to achieve. People have woken up each morning to anxiety and confusion, wondering if Meals on Wheels will be able to deliver services, if child care centers will be open, if our public health authorities will be able to provide information regarding bird flu, if Elon Musk and a band of 19-year-olds will have access to their most personal data, and, after last Friday, if our nation will support our strongest global allies or align with a leader who invades his sovereign neighbors.

All of this chaos and confusion is the point. The "shock and awe" approach that the Trump-Vance administration is pursuing

follows from a well-known playbook that is aimed at making people feel alone, isolated, and defeated. It's an attempt at an autocratic power grab to make it appear as if the die has already been cast—that there is nothing that can be done to build a different future except to comply and be silent.

What I know about this country is that we don't like power grabs and we don't like kings—and we certainly don't like being silent. What I also know is that we, the people, stopped this power grab eight years ago, and we can again.

It will be hard work against long odds, but nothing that we can't do together.

First, we must exploit the Trump administration's extreme overreach—an overreach that is offensive to the vast majority of Americans—conservative, liberals, and independents. During the 2024 election, President Trump and his allies disavowed extreme agendas like Project 2025 because they are so unpopular with all Americans. Now, he is abusing the trust the public put in him and is installing the architects of this extremism within the government. People who may not agree on everything, but all reject extremism and adoption of the Project 2025 playbook will come at a political cost.

Second, we must use the checks and balances that exist. That starts with the courts. Here's a statistic I think should get more attention—court cases against Trump's first administration were successful 78 percent of the time. Already, we are seeing the courts again provide important checks. Since inauguration, more than 85 lawsuits have been filed against Trump administration executive orders and actions and judges of all stripes have ruled against the administration. At Democracy Forward alone, we have filed more than 25 legal actions since Jan. 20 on behalf of courageous people and communities, securing major protections for the American people ranging from blocking immigration enforcement in houses of worship; overturning the freeze on essential services and federal funds across the nation, stopping the enforcement of executive orders that try to penalize people for adopting diversity, inclusion, and accessibility measures, and halting the termination of civil servants.

In the coming weeks and months, there will be more cases filed. Lawyers at my organization and so many others will work day and night to ensure that unlawful and harmful action is met with swift respons-

es. And, while Trump and Musk may suggest they don't intend to follow court orders—those suggestions are garnering pushback from even Republicans.

Third, we must resist isolation and intimidation. Extremists and anti-democratic actors want us to feel alone and isolated, and so building community is not just essential for our work together, but for the very existence of a pro-democracy community. Community also creates the conditions for courage—courage to stand up for ourselves and for each other, courage to not give into attempts to divide us.

And finally, we must never underestimate the power we all have—we, the people. The late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, who spoke truth to power in the halls of Congress during the Watergate hearings, used to say, "The stakes are too high for government to be a spectator sport." Those words ring so true today.

Our very present and futures are at stake, and we cannot stand idly by or be pushed into thinking that we can't turn the tide. Hard work and long odds are what Americans before us have done and that is what we will do again. As President Trump delivers his remarks to Congress, we must remember that the state of the union is on us. All of us.



Skye L. Perryman is president and CEO of Democracy Forward, a nonpartisan, national legal organization that promotes democracy and progress through litigation, regulatory engagement, policy education, and research.

The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.

Pro-Democracy Reading List



On Tyranny by Timothy Snyder

Democracy in America by Alexis de Toqueville

Bad Law by Elie Mystal

Formidable by Dr. Elisabeth Griffith

**Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable
Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead** by
Brené Brown

**Democracy May Not Exist, But We'll Miss It When It's
Gone** by Astra Taylor

**Democracy or Else: How to Save America in 10 Easy
Steps** by Jon Favreau, Jon Lovett, Tommy Vietor, and
Josh Hallway

Hope in the Dark by Rebecca Solnit

The Originalism Trap by Madiba Dennie

**Reading the Constitution: Why I Chose Pragmatism not
Textualism** by Stephen Breyer

Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times by Neil Astley

We Can Do Hard Things by Glennon Doyle, Abby
Womabach, and Amanda Doyle

Who is Government by Michael Lewis

On Liberty by John Stuart Mill

for kids!

A is for Activist by Innosanto Nagara

Democracy! By Philip Bunting

Democracy for Dinosaurs (And Kids!) by Laurie Kransy
Brown

Grace for President by Kelly DiPucchio

Grace Goes to Washington by Kelly DiPucchino

The President of the Jungle by André Rodrigues, Larissa
Ribeiro, Paula Desgualdo and Pedro Markun