Reimagining for Democracy for the Year 2076

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Background

The overall lack of long-term thinking in the U.S. democracy field leaves us ill-prepared for the changes that will impact American democracy in the coming decades. We must begin to build our democracy proactively, anticipating how circumstances are likely to evolve. This goes beyond improving current institutions; we need to consider if the right institutions exist in the first place—and whether they have the appropriate authority. For example, few people working in the U.S. democracy field think beyond the traditional model of the nation-state. However, most people working on the future of governance believe nation-states will become obsolete as global problems, such as climate change, necessitate global governance and hyper-local implementation. An investment in long-term visioning is essential to fully realize the goal of a liberal democracy that delivers for all Americans.

Democracy 2076 was founded in July 2023 with the aim of closing this gap by experimenting with three transformational ideas:

1. **Crafting a Constitution for 2076**: Envision a Constitution that meets the challenges of 2076 and creates a democracy that is inclusive, responsive, and effective. Build and execute a campaign plan to realize that Constitution with grassroots organizers and state legislators, shifting the window of possibility on incremental reforms and building an affirmative vision for today's pro-democracy movement.
2. **Imagining 2076**: Support the creation of storytelling and narratives that depict effective democracy and protopian futures in Hollywood.
3. **Building Pro-Democracy Political Coalitions in 2076**: Shape future realignments of political coalitions to ensure that all coalitions are pro-democracy in 2076.

To make these ideas a reality, our governing infrastructure must be updated to effectively address current and future challenges. Journalist Jill Lepore and political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt have recently written about how unusual it is that our Constitution has gone so many years without amendment. In turn, the disconnect between governing institutions and Americans' experiences is creating openness to authoritarianism as Americans grow increasingly frustrated with our governing institutions' failure to deliver, leading to growing disengagement. More in Common's research on hidden tribes refers to the "exhausted majority": those who are fed up with polarization, flexible in their views, and interested in finding common ground but are largely forgotten and ignored in the public discourse. They comprise a two-thirds majority of Americans.

Objective

We need **a U.S. Constitution for 2076** that meets the challenges of the future and creates a democracy that is inclusive, responsive, and effective as America comes to its tricentennial. To accomplish this, we must build and execute a campaign plan with grassroots organizers and state legislators, shifting the window of possibility on incremental reforms and building an affirmative vision for today's pro-democracy movement.

Approach

Until now, long-term visioning work for our Constitution has been largely a thought exercise for pro-democracy organizations, without the goal of developing a concrete campaign strategy to bring those changes about. For example, the National Constitution Center gathered legal scholars of different political leanings to imagine a Constitution for the future, and More in Common conducted polling on potential constitutional amendments.

In December 2023, Democracy 2076 piloted a strategic foresight process, hosting a convening with 53 participants from across 41 states and Washington, D.C. We developed four scenarios of the future using four archetypes created by the School of International Futures (based on Jim Dator's four archetypes of the future framework). These scenarios include: 1) continued growth, which assumes sustained growth of both positive and negative current trends, e.g., continued economic growth and a continued decline in democracy; 2) transformation, characterized by both technological advancements and a societal values shift, where folks value material consumption less and social connection more; 3) constraint, featuring strong governance and the imposition of limits; and 4) silver linings, which has our dominant systems failing to continue, leading to the emergence of more localized, homogenous communities.

Of the participants, 39 worked at the state-level, four were constitutional law experts, one was a comparativist, four were artists/journalists, and five were futurists. Eight groups were created, so that each scenario was tackled twice. Participants were assigned to one of the four scenarios and used Richard Lum and Michele Bowman's verge domains to build out their scenario into an imagined world. They considered aspects including how goods and services are created in this world, how consumption happens, the technologies and practices that connect us, and the social structures and relationships that inform how we relate to one another. Additionally, participants explored the concepts, ideas, and paradigms that define this hypothetical world, along with what gets destroyed.

Next, while still in their scenario group, participants selected amendments to the Constitution. They started with a pre-created menu of amendments based on ideas from across the ideological spectrum based on real-world examples from history, other countries, and specific U.S. states. The goal was to consider what amendments are necessary over the next 50 years to realize the positive attributes of each scenario and prevent the negative ones.

After the initial amendments, we introduced three projections about 2076 based on existing data: a demographic shift (both the aging of the U.S. population and a racial demographic shift), climate change, and expanded inequality in the face of workforce adaptation challenges as technology changes the nature of work. Each group discussed the implications of each projection for their particular scenario, considering additional amendments based on the new governing challenges posed by the projections.

Results

This process yielded 11 major categories of amendments:

Figure 1: Prevalence of proposed constitutional amendment. Courtesy Rachel Ellen Margolis/Democracy 2076.
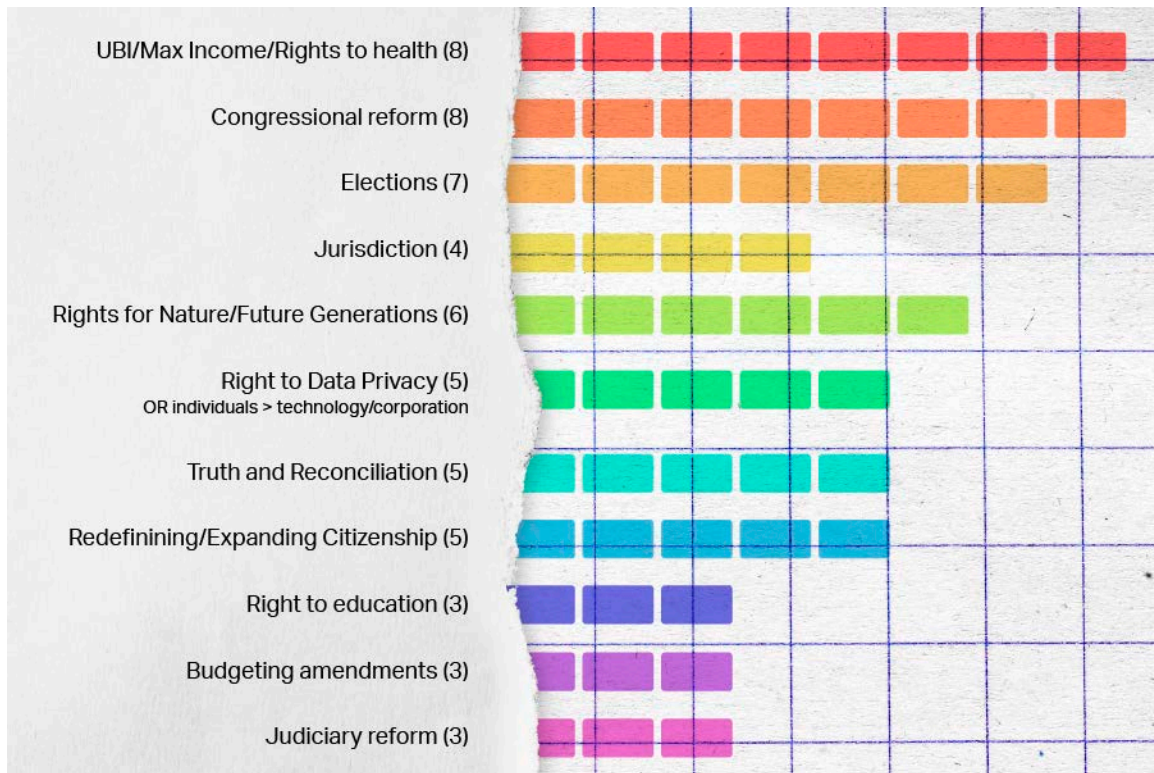
In the image above, each rectangle represents one of the scenario groups. People had different strategies and ideas for implementing guaranteed rights/a universal basic income, effecting structural changes to congress, and running elections. For structural changes to Congress, for example, there was everything from abolishing the Senate to implementing multi-member districts to using citizens' assemblies to inform the Senate. Our next steps will involve reconvening the initial group from the December convening as well as those who are working on these issues.

Key Findings

This process taught us five major lessons:

1. Folks are working on a short timeline but *want* to be doing more proactive, offensive work; they just don't have the space. "It was refreshing to be out of reaction territory—where we often live—and push ourselves so far into the future. It helped me think through how we can identify opportunities to steer our work," said Gwen Frisbie-Fulton, communications director for Down Home North Carolina. Garrett Blad, political director for Faith in Indiana, added, "It got me

much more clear about the scale of the offensive work we need and the imperative to do offensive work on constitutional change across the country. We need to move the Overton window on what's possible if we're going to have a shot at a transformation scenario."

- 93% of state-level organizers are working on a 10-year timeline or less, with 50% operating on a five-year timeline.
- 82% of state-level organizers said that we need to be doing more offensive work.
- 83% of all participants said this event changed how they think about offensive work.

2. People need a new set of tools to do long-term work robustly. "Scenario planning is an exercise I want to run through with members and staff to help sharpen our political analysis and plan for political crisis points," attested Mary Le Nguyen, executive director of Washington CAN.
   - 52% of participants had never participated in a scenario-planning process.
   - 78% of participants are planning to replicate this process at work or incorporate pieces of it into their work.

3. Imagining a renewal of democracy deepens people's commitment to democracy. Pele Irgang Laden, program director of Pennsylvania Stands Up, said, "I have more belief that liberal democracy could actually work for poor and working people." Gwen Frisbie-Fulton, communications director of Down Home North Carolina, added, "I've lived in—as many of us—a space that we think democracy is static. But this introduced the many, many changes that can be made without throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

4. We're not currently advocating for the right set of solutions. "I appreciated how the scenarios provoked conversations about immediate amendments that codify rights vs. amendments that are focused on institutional change. . . ." said Reverend Terrance McKinley, senior pastor at Campbell AME Church. "The organizing spaces I am in can be hyper-focused on the immediate . . . I am leaving this week with a heightened awareness of the urgency in addressing our ailing institutions that demand immediate repair." Nicole Hensel, New Era Colorado's executive director, explained, "So much of our work is focused on issue campaigns; it was really nice to think about how governance/jurisdiction legislation can have direct impacts on the likelihood of success of our issue campaigns. It elevated the issue of representation and responsiveness of the government to real people and how we can get to a place where more people are better represented, especially young people of color."
   - At the beginning of our time together, only 7.5% of participants felt that the current solution set promoted by the democracy ecosystem is equipped to meet the anticipated challenges over the next 50 years.
   - By the end of the convening, nearly 75% of participants were confident that a set of solutions exists.

5. Connecting in this interdisciplinary way is valuable. "I deeply benefited from sharing common space with organizers around the country operating in different political and demographic environments and seeing what discrete policy issues and organizing tactics those different organizers were employing in their respective communities," shared Derek Duba, a regional organizer for the Western U.S. with Common Defense. "To me, this provided much-needed perspective on the through-lines between our work, because those common priorities and goals illuminate the areas that my work could most likely augment and be supported by the work of fellow attendees."
   - 100% of participants said they developed new connections.
   - Numerous people pointed out the benefits of working across disciplines and learning from their colleagues' expertise in different areas.

Future Work in 2024

A Constitution for 2076

Our process is now available for others to replicate. Democracy 2076 is working with participants to apply this method in their home states, on their campuses, and with national networks to extend it to their communities. We are also planning to reconvene this group alongside national partners in June 2024 to begin developing a campaign strategy for constitutional amendment.

Imagining 2076

While many participants left with new hope for democracy, part of the challenge in imagining positive futures with effective governance is that most of the pop culture we consume is dystopian. In recent years, Hollywood has shifted from more optimistic depictions of the future (e.g., *Star Trek*) to more dystopian depictions (e.g., *Hunger Games* and the *Last of Us*). Similarly, there has been an increase in depictions of authoritarian tactics in portrayals of government (e.g., *Scandal, House of Cards, Veep*), while portrayals of representative, responsive, and effective government (e.g., *West Wing*) have decreased. Given that only 59% of Americans reported taking a civics education class in high school and 38% said they often or sometimes avoided the news in 2022 (with only 42% saying they trust most news most of the time), Hollywood plays an essential role in developing their understanding of government.

To support campaigns for change, including but not limited to constitutional amendment, Democracy 2076 will work with Harmony Labs to conduct a content analysis of depictions of democracy and the future in popular media. Additionally, we will study the impact of portrayals of future democratic institutions on audience attitudes toward our political system, the future, and the impact on civic engagement. We believe that **future-oriented stories will facilitate buy-in to a U.S. Constitution for 2076.**

Future Possible Directions

Pro-Democracy Political Coalitions

Beyond imagining democracy in 2076 through Hollywood storytelling for the average viewer, campaigns for constitutional change require that political parties are pro-democracy. Historically, American political coalitions realign approximately every 30 years. We are currently living through a realignment that will be complete in 2024, positioning us to have a white ethno-fascist party for the next 30 years. We have an opportunity, with substantial and coordinated cross-sector interventions, to shape the *next* political realignment to ensure pro-democracy tenets are at its core. (I write more about this here.)

This is particularly important because trust in our political system is one of three issues causing division among millennials and Gen Z. That, combined with both generations' desire for a more active and involved government, is a recipe for authoritarianism. As such, there is a high likelihood that democracy will be a wedge issue in the future. Protect Democracy and the American Political Science Association's recent report predicts that coalitions could realign around pro-democracy issues, particularly if there is pressure from social movements to do so. However, there is currently little active advocacy around understanding and influencing that realignment.

In the future, Democracy 2076 hopes to partner with Horizon 2045 to run a participatory strategic foresight process on the future of U.S. political parties. Using the scenarios developed through Horizon 2045's strategic foresight process on global security as context, we will assess what issues may divide the parties, which voters are in each party, and whether the parties are pro-democracy or not. We will bring together a coalition of organizers (especially those working with communities of color

susceptible to authoritarian appeals), experts in authoritarianism, and pollsters to participate in the process to ensure our findings are informed by those best positioned to utilize them. We believe that **proactive development of pro-democracy coalitions will facilitate the political space necessary for a Constitution for 2076.**

Conclusion

We need solutions to inspire faith in the future of our democracy. Democracy 2076 is working to create an avenue for action via a campaign for a Constitution for 2076. Our goal is to build the world's first multi-racial democracy that is responsive to the will of the majority and effective in the face of the intersecting existential threats we can anticipate over the next 50 years.

About the Author

Aditi Juneja is the founder and executive director of Democracy 2076. Previously, she was chief of staff at Movement Voter Project and spent four years at Protect Democracy, where she led the staffing for the National Taskforce on Election Crises in 2020. She holds her JD from NYU Law and her BA from Connecticut College in Economics.

About the Ash Center

The Mission of the Roy and Lila Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at is to develop ideas and foster practices for equal and inclusive, multi-racial and multi-ethnic democracy and self-government.

About the Second Interdisciplinary Workshop on Reimagining Democracy

This essay was adopted from a presentation given at the Second Interdisciplinary Workshop on Reimagining Democracy held on the campus of Harvard Kennedy School in December 2023. Convened with support from the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation and the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, the conference was intended to bring together a diverse set of thinkers and practitioners to talk about how democracy might be reimagined for the twenty-first century.

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