



Viewpoint: The Future of Democracy

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Harvard Kennedy School Professor Erica Chenoweth and Harvard Professor Steven Levitsky, in a recent article (<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policy-topics/democracy-governance/democracy-2025-harvard-professors-rising>) point to the top signs of democratic backsliding in 2025. They posit that “the United States has entered a phase of competitive

authoritarianism, in which a leader who is democratically elected acts undemocratically once in office—they might punish critics, remove civil servants, and abuse power to shift the electoral field in their favor. It’s neither full democracy nor full authoritarianism.”

Experts and recent assessments highlight several critical trends captured with the help of AI. Here is what AI told me beginning with information describing the source and its summarized findings:

Significant Democratic Decline

The Century Foundation is a progressive, independent think tank that conducts research, develops solutions, and drives policy change to make people’s lives better. They pursue economic, racial, gender, and disability equity in education, health care, and work, and promote U.S. foreign policy that fosters international cooperation, peace, and security. To do so, they recently developed the United States Democracy Meter.

The first report on the new tool compares U.S. democracy in 2024 and 2025, and finds that a democratic collapse has already occurred, with an overall score dropping nearly 28 percent in just one year—well into authoritarianism. It further indicates that consolidation of executive power is the biggest problem facing U.S. democracy. Nonstate sectors like the media and civil society remain relatively resilient, though they are under pressure. But rights, particularly of immigrants and outspoken opponents of the government, are being threatened by the federal government.

Emerging Threats to Institutions

The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit public policy organization that equips decision makers with

nonpartisan research and policy strategies to create a more prosperous and secure country and world. They have identified several emerging threats to U.S. institutional stability stemming from the current administration's policies and restructuring efforts. These include erosion of civil service independence, retaliation against law firms, weaponization of the DOJ, immigration court pressure, weakening of oversight and checks, and tariff uncertainty.

A Response: My Viewpoint

In 2026, the future of U.S. democracy faces a critical, high-stakes moment, characterized by intense partisan battles, structural shifts toward expanded executive power, and significant concerns over the health of democratic norms. The midterm elections are seen as a defining moment for congressional checks on power, with analysts predicting a volatile, highly polarized environment that could determine if the U.S. continues to function as a representative democracy.

In these turbulent and uncertain times, it is imperative to have community conversations about the eroding foundations of a just, equitable, and inclusive country, state, city, and neighborhood. Key questions should include:

- Individually and collectively, what can we do to maintain the integrity of the 2026 elections?
- How do we continue to manage or approach our daily work within this context of our threatened democracy?
- What is the role of trusted, reliable local news in a healthy democracy?

These discussions will help pave avenues of hope, facilitate opportunities for learning, and spur civic action to preserve our democracy.



After 28 yrs at MSU, the last 13 at CCED, I am retiring as of July 1, 2026. It has been, especially my time at the Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED), a transformational journey. My time at MSU and CCED allowed me to dive deeply into Asset-Based Community Development, which has become foundational in all my efforts. My community building follows me into retirement. I will never give up on the great people and city of Flint. You have all inspired me. I am eternally grateful.

~ **Robert Brown**
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