



Social Work,  
The Vote &  
Democracy

***Mimi Abramovitz***

**Bertha Capen Reynolds  
Professor of Social Policy, Emerita  
Silberman School of Social Work  
Hunter College & The CUNY Graduate Center**

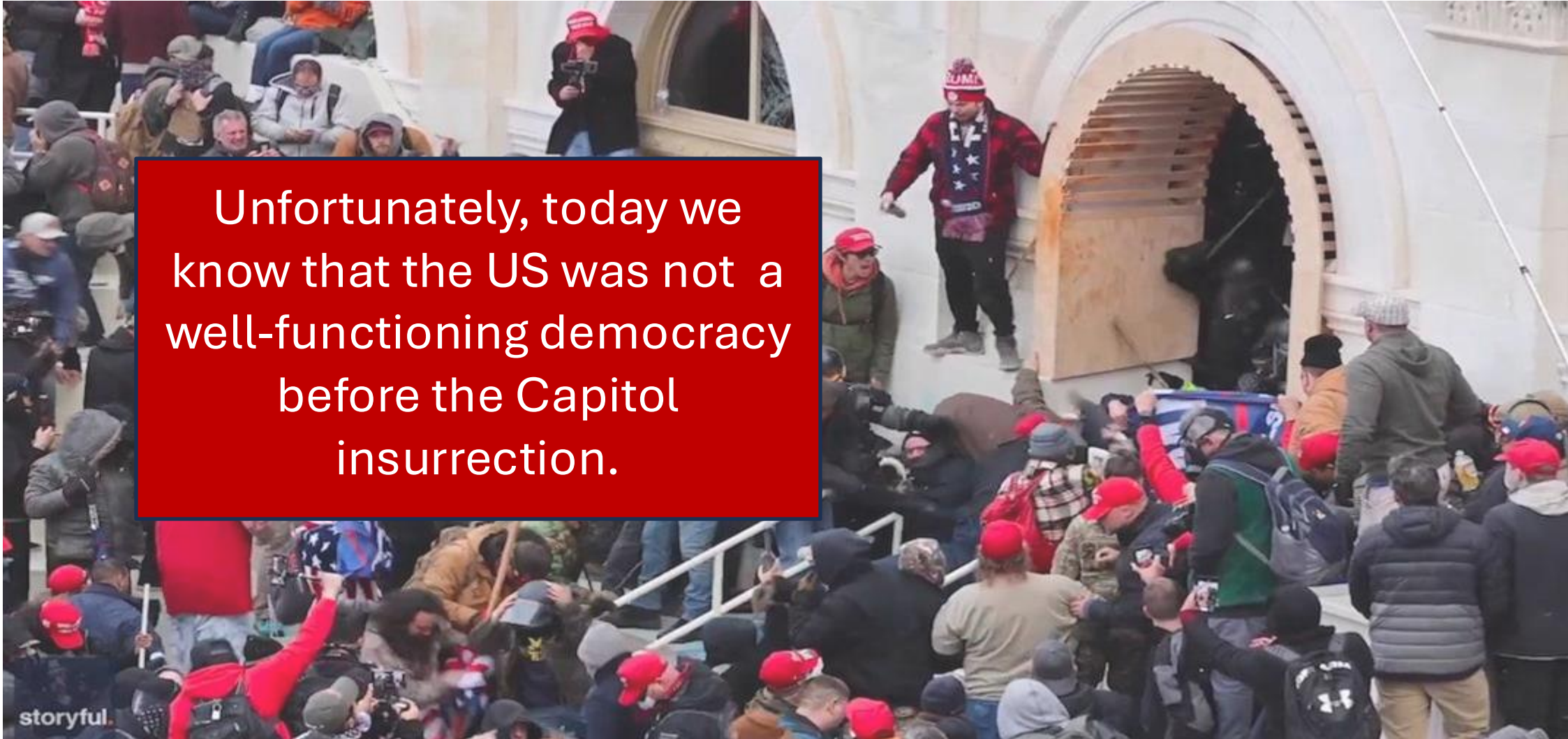
**Co-Chair:  
VOTING IS SOCIAL WORK  
The National Social Work Voter Mobilization  
Campaign**

**Board Member:  
The Social Work Democracy Project**

## Co-chair, Voting is Social Work

*For years, I rather naively assumed that US democracy was ok.*

Unfortunately, today we know that the US was not a well-functioning democracy before the Capitol insurrection.





## History Reveals a Troubling Pattern



From Reconstruction to the 1965 Voting Rights Act to the election of the first black President in 2008, *each victory threatened white supremacy, male privilege, and class power and led to an intense backlash.*

# Today, It Is Not Much Different

We now further understand what marginalized groups have always known -- especially those subjected to government-sanctioned disenfranchisement.

*We cannot take the right to vote or democracy itself for granted*



# First Came the Vote..

With easy access to unchecked dark money, the opponents of democracy have already installed legal structures to block the vote.

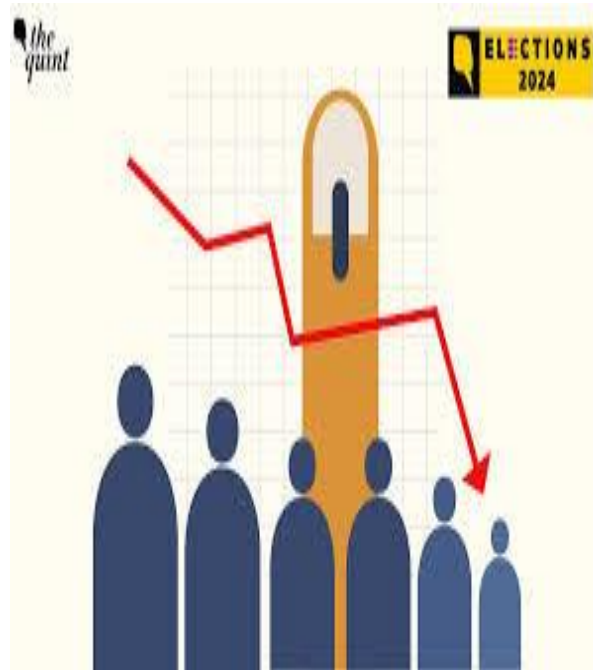
Voter Suppression

Overriding  
Election Results

Voter Intimidation

Election Deniers

Gerrymandering



Blocking the Vote is designed to:

Lower voter turnout.

Silence the preferences of  
marginalized groups.

Allow a small number of people,  
with an outsized voice, to install  
their anti-democratic, if not  
authoritarian, agenda and  
otherwise achieve their own  
ends.

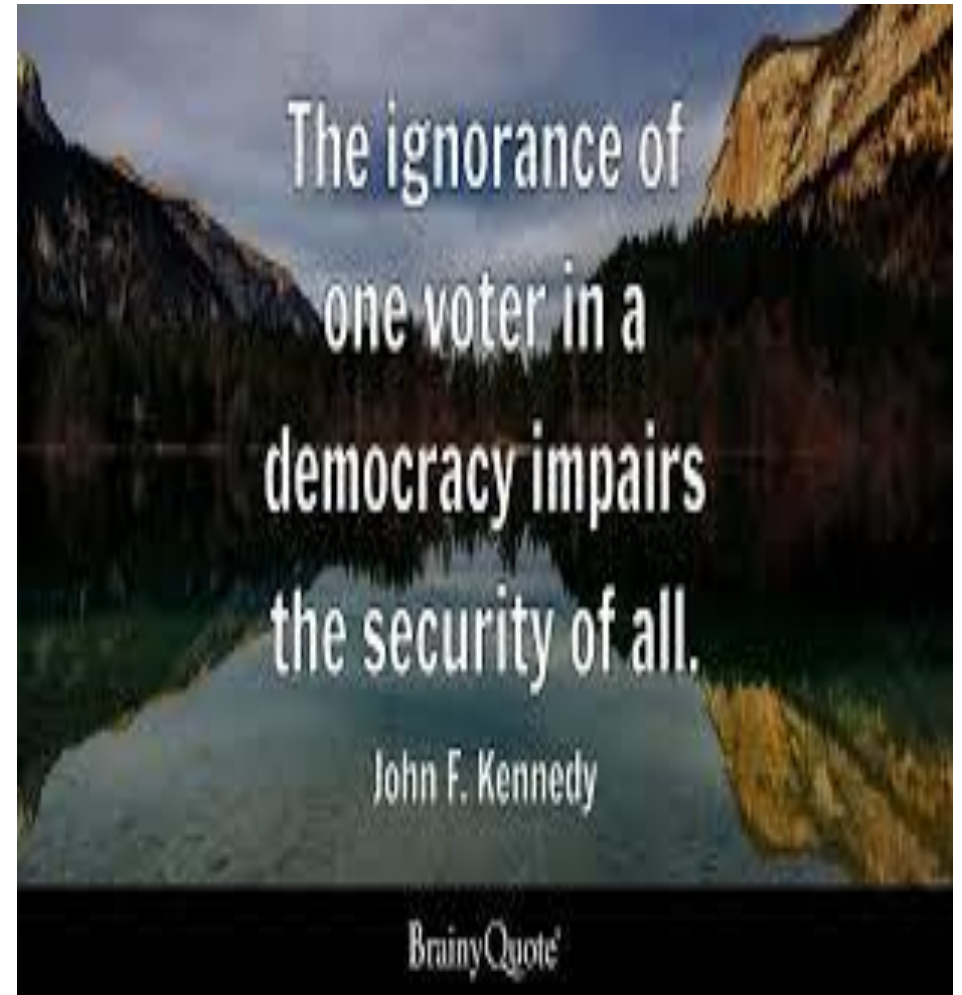


But  
It IS NOT  
just the Vote

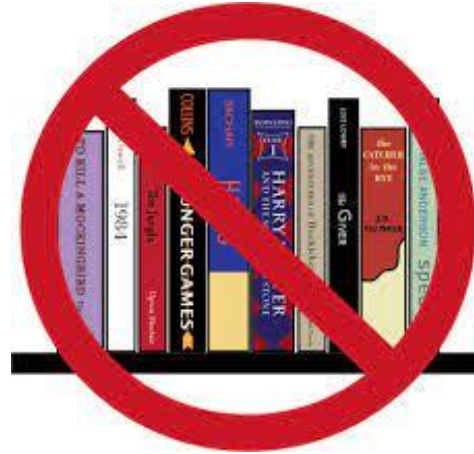
# Other Guardrails of Democracy Have Also Been Broken

**Democracy's opponents know that exposure to new ideas and an informed citizenry strengthen democracy.**

**Following the authoritarian playbook, they are dumbing down the electorate.**



# Dumbing Down The Electorate



## Banning Books:

23 states have introduced or passed laws to ban more than 4000 titles on any topic that might make students “uncomfortable,” up 65 percent in one year.

Target marginalized voices and controversial topics.

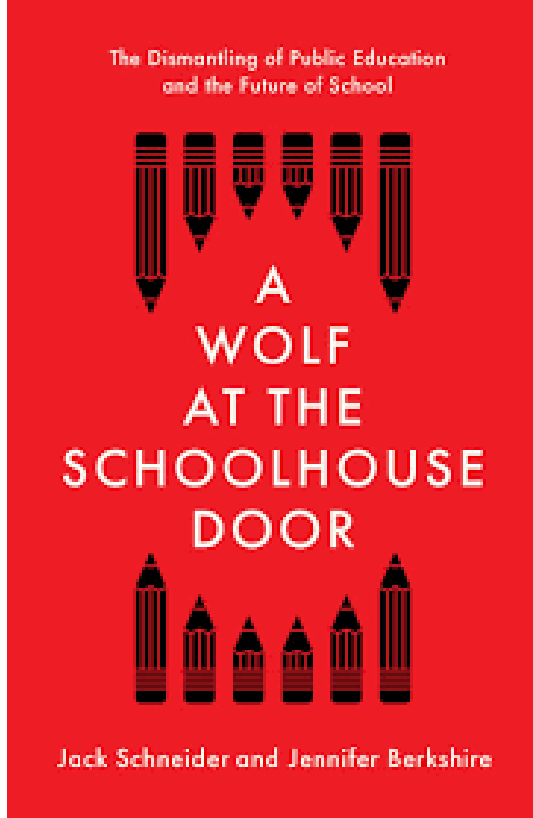
## Less Independent Press:

Since 1970 the number of independent newspapers has fallen by half –most replaced by corporate-owned media.

Today only **45%** of Americans **trust** the news media to report fairly.







# Censoring Public Education

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Those hostile to democracy have also changed how public education is taught, funded, and regulated.

States now outlaw critical race theory, gender studies, and DEI programs.

Project 2025 promises to abolish the Department of Education.





## **Last, But Not Least, The Rule of Law**

**The Supreme Court has lost its way.**

**Once believed to protect our basic rights, the current Supreme Court regularly *overrides* the will of the majority --in favor of the top 1%.**

**Today only 25% of Americans express confidence in the Court.**

# Death by a Thousand Cuts

The loss of democratic rights does not result from a single cataclysmic event.

It is more like death by a thousand cuts.

In isolation, each *incremental erosion of a democratic institution often feels inconsequential*.

But the ongoing impact is cumulative.

Whoever wins the US presidential election, many anti-democratic structures are already in place-- and will be difficult to reverse.



# Outcome: Less Trust in Democracy

In 1960, three-quarters of Americans trusted the federal government – “always or most of the time.” Today, it is down to 20%, an all-time low.

Two-thirds of the world’s population (5.7 billion people) live under an authoritarian leader, up 48% from 10 years ago.

*American democracy has always been a work in progress.*

*But, not since the American Civil War has there been so much concern that it is under serious threat.*



**The Good**  
**News Is:**  
We have a  
**flourishing**  
**pro-democracy**  
**movement**



At least 44 states considered 631 bills and 23 states passed 47 laws to expand the vote in 2024.

Our country is strong when voters pick their leaders—not when leaders pick and choose their voters.

We cannot rest until every voter has equal access to the ballot and actually votes.

# What Can Social Workers Do?



We Can and Must “UP” Our Game” to Strengthen Our Democratic institutions

**We are in the Right place!**

Everyday, we bear witness to and address the harms brought by a faltering democracy.

We are well-positioned to bring civic participation into the *classroom*, voter registration into the *practicum*, and human rights into the *US*.



**A Mobilized Citizenry  
Democracy's Best Defense**

**Imagine if all 700,000 US social workers registered three voters...and then they registered three more voters...and so on...**

***NO NEED TO IMAGINE!***

***Join the VISW Power of Three  
Voter Registration Campaign***

**Go to [Voting is Social Work](#)  
for information and resources.**



**You can  
Speak out.  
If not now,  
When?**



10-23



# Thank You

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