

winner was chosen by picking a name out of a glass bowl. What is more, it was this election that gave Republicans control of the House of Delegates by a single seat. In the future, such control of state legislatures could have an impact not just on issues germane to the state but to presidential elections if there is a debate over the accuracy and legitimacy of voting and the delegates to be sent to the electoral college.

What happened in the small New Hampshire town of Croydon is instructive here. At a sparsely attended town meeting in March 2022, a handful of activists passed an amendment that slashed the town's education budget. Most of the townspeople were dismayed when they heard the news, but their only recourse was to convene a second special meeting at which half the eligible voters would need to turn out and vote to restore the cuts. Following weeks of intense efforts to educate and motivate the townspeople, an overwhelming majority of voters did just that in May. What matters in a democracy is not the views of a majority of the populace but those of a majority willing to get involved politically.

In short, voting matters. But the reasons voting is so important and is worth doing go beyond the potential of a single vote to affect election outcomes, which admittedly is rare. Voting is the most basic act of citizenship. It creates a bond between the individual and government and between the individual and country. It gives an individual standing in the political arena: criticism carries more weight when someone is a participant in the political process. Ideally, the process of voting increases awareness of

issues and what is at stake and thus motivates people to be better informed. It provides a mechanism for individuals to influence the political process and creates a basis for them to hold accountable those elected and appointed since they had a role in choosing them. Voting is so intrinsic to democracy's success that several democratic countries, including Australia and Belgium, legally require their citizens to vote.

As fundamental and important as it is, however, voting is hardly the only form of meaningful political participation. Even a short list of other aspects of the democratic process might include encouraging fellow citizens to register and vote and educating them on the issues, working for a party or candidate, assisting the local board of elections in administering the voting process and the counting of votes, and contributing money to the candidate, party, or cause of your choice.

There are many other ways to bolster democracy beyond voting and direct involvement in politics. What is more, you need not be famous or powerful to make a difference. As former Secretary of Defense James Mattis pointed out, "The impact of participation trickles up. Rosa Parks didn't start out by taking on all of Jim Crow; she started out by taking a seat on a local bus." A group of parents initiated what turned out to be a successful recall of three members of San Francisco's school board in 2022. One woman, after losing a family member in an automobile accident, came up with the idea that became Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), an organization that over the past four decades has

saved countless lives. Or take gerrymandering, the process by which the majority party in a state legislature draws the lines of congressional or state legislative districts in an attempt to disadvantage the minority party. (A second consequence of gerrymandering is to increase extremism, as districts tend to be dominated by one or the other party, thereby reducing the need for candidates to attract votes from the political center in order to build a majority.) In Michigan, the entire process was turned around by a woman with no political experience who in the wake of the 2016 election used social media to launch a volunteer movement that took the power to draw districts from the state government and awarded it to an independent commission.

Parents have an especially important role to play: they have both the responsibility and the opportunity to encourage their children to learn about and get involved in the political process. In recent months, we have seen parents at school board meetings arguing, sometimes violently, over how race is treated in school curricula. Alas, we are not seeing much in the way of parental involvement on behalf of including democracy in what schools teach their students. Ronald Reagan put it best in his farewell address delivered in 1989: "All great change in America begins at the dinner table. So, tomorrow night in the kitchen I hope the talking begins. . . . That would be a very American thing to do."

Corporate leaders also have the opportunity to become advocates for democracy. At a minimum, they can facilitate time off to vote on election day for all employees. Ideally, they would de-

termine their financial contributions to candidates not just on grounds of policy but also based on the person's support for democracy. Better yet, they would also refuse to advertise on media outlets that trafficked in misinformation and conspiracies. Employees can press their bosses to do all this. So, too, can investors and consumers of the company's products and services.

Similarly, religious and congregational leaders possess meaningful influence. Nearly half of adult Americans regularly attend a religious service, which, even allowing for distraction and nodding off, adds up to a good many sermons and homilies from the pulpit being heard by a good many people. I appreciate how it can be difficult for the clergy to advocate for particular policy prescriptions, but there is much in the teachings found in the Old and New Testaments and in other religious works consistent with many of the obligations put forward here. The clergy have regular opportunities to point this out.

The message that runs through this obligation is that democracy cannot be a spectator sport. Passivity and opting out simply allow others to choose for you, which almost certainly means advancing their preferences rather than your own. Given how much is at stake, it is hard to defend inaction. It is better to vote in favor of candidates who reflect your views than not to vote but attend political rallies protesting outcomes you oppose. The case for getting involved and remaining involved is overwhelming. Democracy is a form of government that empowers individual citizens—but only if citizens are prepared to get involved.