

# Is Our Democracy in Danger?

Harvard Professors Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky think it is. In their collaborative work, *How Democracies Die*, they provide four indicators of worrisome “authoritarian behavior”:

1. Rejection of (or weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game. For example, challenging the authenticity of a vote or undermining voting rights.
2. Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents. For example, suggesting their partisan rivals are criminals, whose violation of the law disqualifies them from participation in the political arena.
3. Toleration or encouragement of violence. For example, tacitly endorsing violence by their supporters or refusing to condemn it.
4. Readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media. For example, praising repressive measures taken by other governments.

You can decide for yourself. But if you find this small sample of the authors’ argument persuasive, then there is one clear League response: act and register voters. Clearly, League members cannot afford to become quiescent or complacent.

Besides voter registration, other steps are equally, critically important if we are to support the League’s long cherished positions.

For example, women’s rights are under siege. The Mississippi legislature has voted, and their Governor has signed, a law to ban abortions after 15 weeks, with exceptions only for “medical emergency and severe cases of abnormality.” It does not take into account incest or rape. Kentucky’s newest law prevents abortions after only 11 weeks. And Iowa’s Governor has just signed, according to the *Des Moines Iowa Register*, “the most restrictive abortion ban in the nation,” outlawing all abortions when a fetal heartbeat can be detected (around 6 weeks)—often before a woman knows she is pregnant. Each of these bills faces court challenges, but they reflect the vulnerable situation for women in those states.

And then there is the EPA, undoing the previous, important work of many previous—Republican and Democratic—administrations. Denying that climate change exists, the Head of the EPA argues that the Paris Climate Agreement “would slow the U.S. economy by hindering America’s God-given right to mine, export and burn fossil fuels.” The EPA’s recent actions negatively impact the future and our grandchildren’s health by loosening regulations on clean air, clean water, and chemical testing.

We understand—for Concordians recently supported a Petition Article promoting resiliency—that our planet’s vitality faces huge challenges. Our oceans are not self-renewable; our waters cannot clean themselves; our air—even with every plant trying its hardest—cannot purify itself.

As Pope Francis recently commented, “We have plundered her, abused her, and no one can say, ‘I am not responsible.’” We must guard this earth, for it is a precious gift.

It is encouraging that many Americans are addressing the current political situation with action. Look at the behemoth the students at Parkland have awakened. Note the marches on climate and for women, in which we have participated, that so ardently reflect our values. As summer approaches it is tempting to quote two recent Presidents (George W. Bush and Donald Trump): “Mission accomplished.” But just as they were wrong, so would we be to retreat to our lakes and beaches believing our work is done.

Even as surveys by Harvard’s Kennedy School report that most citizens believe “participation in government yields few positive results,” we know that vigilant engagement and knowledge are our best allies and can make a difference. Connect with our state and national representatives; participate in LWVMA Lobbying Days; and actively lobby for issues important to you. By remaining informed, resilient, positive, and determined we can and must make a difference.”

Respectfully, Diane Proctor