

Facilitation Plan: Exploring the *End of American Democracy?* Exploring the Mechanisms of Democracy

I. CONTEXT SETTING: Introducing the Discussion (2-3 mins.)

In this conversation, let's explore together the formal aspects of the workings of democracy. What are the sorts of institutions or processes that we need for a healthy democracy? We can think of democracy as the way we can collaborate as free and equal participants to organize our lives in community with one another. What are the structural things we need to make democracy work on a society-wide level? You might think of these as the mechanisms for democracy. (The next discussion will focus more on the spirit of democracy, the values and beliefs that animate these mechanisms).

As we think of all the different formal features or structural components that make for a healthy democracy, let's also talk about where we see them being threatened, and how we might help them resist these threats. As we pursue these questions, let's remember that we don't need to reach a consensus agreement. Let's help each other to develop our thinking in a collaborative way that acknowledges different perspectives and possibilities. national government.

II. DISCUSSION AGREEMENTS:

It helps to have some group agreements about how we'll engage in this conversation. Our suggestions are:

- **Be generous:** Helping each other to explore and remaining open to the truth others express
- **Be bold:** Opening ourselves up to new and different perspectives
- **Be connected:** We're here to make connections with each other rather than to win an argument

III. ROUND ONE: ROUND ROBIN Introductions and Personal Connections to the Topic (5-10 mins.)

Take a minute or so to introduce yourself and share an answer to the following: When you think about the mechanics of democracy, what is one institution or process that you think is essential to make democracy work – and why?

IV. ROUND TWO: OPEN DISCUSSION

Expanding a Sense of the Essential Mechanisms for a Healthy Democracy (40-60 mins.)

Let's continue to develop a sense of the institutions and processes that are needed for a functional, healthy democratic system. Think of the essential features to make a democracy work as a democracy. Share something that you would add to our list — and tell us why.

- Now that we have a sense of some of the institutions or processes that are essential to make democracy work, let's explore the challenges or threats they face. Let's develop a sense of the concerns we might have about the workings of a healthy democracy. What risks or threats do you see for these institutions or processes?
- What institutions or processes do you see as at risk for democratic backsliding? What concerns do you have about their ability to resist anti-democratic, or authoritarian, pressures?
- What forces do you see threatening or weakening these essential institutions or processes? Why (and how) are these institutions or processes at risk?
- What institutions or processes of U.S. democracy are NOT in service of democracy? What features of our American system seem to be anti-democratic or seem to work to weaken our ability to have a healthy, functioning democratic system?

V. ROUND THREE:

Looking Ahead and Wrapping Up (10 mins.)

Shifting to a more positive perspective, how can we reform or bolster our institutions or processes to better promote a healthy democracy and better resist authoritarianism?

- What new institutions or processes might we need for a healthy democracy of the future?
- As we wrap up, what are some of the key insights or questions that you will take away from this conversation?