STRENGHTENING
DEMOCRACY

BALANCING PARTISANSHIP

UBCM WORKSHOP - 2023

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strengtheningdemocracy.ca

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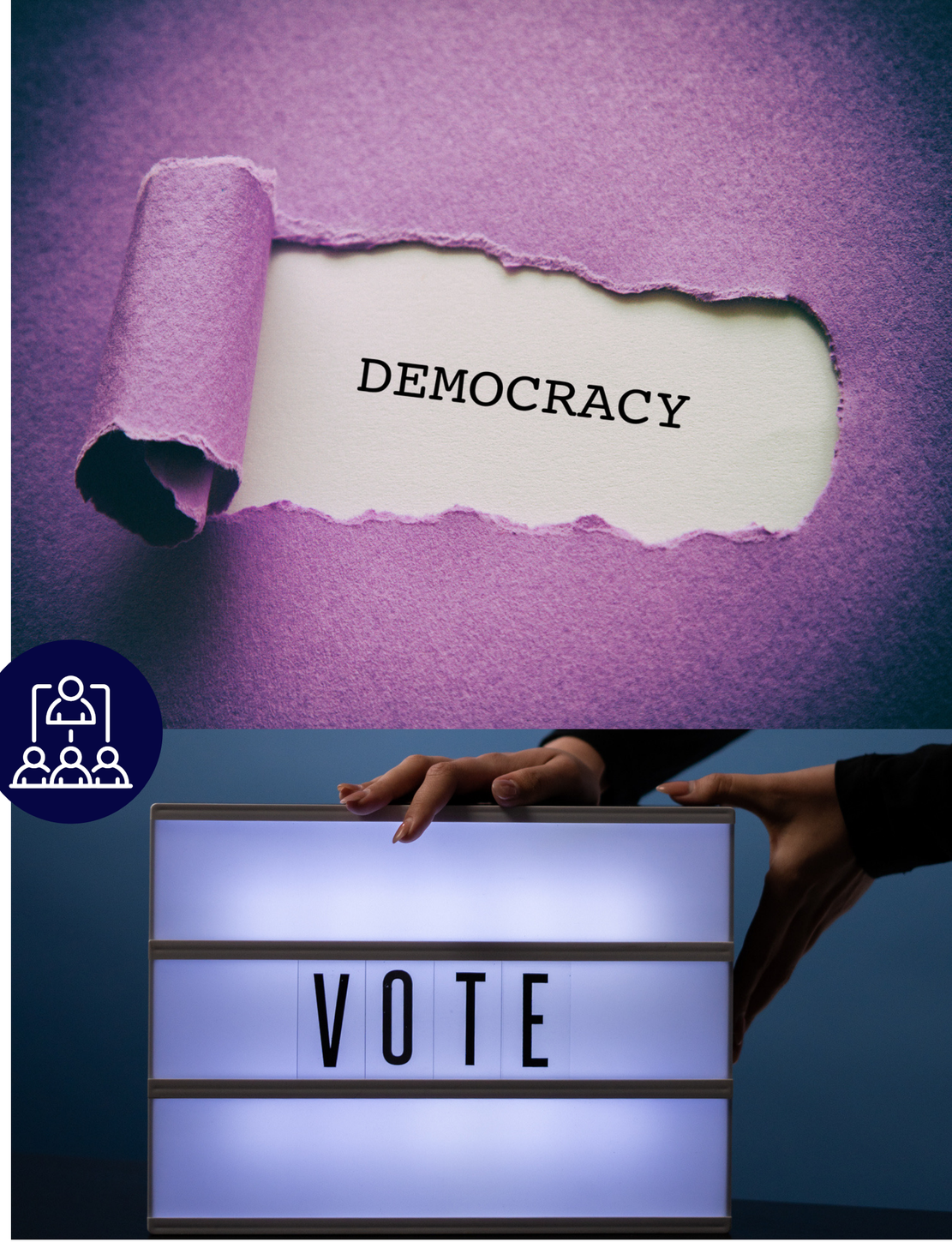

OUR VISION

STRENGHTENING DEMOCRACY

The project's vision is to spark a national conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of Canada's democracy, foster public discourse, and raise awareness about the threats to democracy. By doing so, it seeks to empower citizens to actively participate in safeguarding and improving democratic processes.

FUTURE AHEAD

To achieve its vision, the project has outlined several deliverables, including establishing a meaningful agenda of deliverables, organizing workshops and retreats, developing a Speakers Bureau, planning a multiyear engagement strategy, generating reports and policy recommendations, securing funding and partnerships, and more. These efforts are designed to make a lasting impact on Canada's democratic landscape.

STEERING COMMITTEE

An April 30 Steering Committee in-person meeting at UBC included:
Eight former MLAs; Dave Hayer, Gordon Hogg, Penny Priddy, Linda Reid, Shane Simpson, Bruce Strachan, Mike Harcourt and Graham Bruce;
UBCM President Jen Ford
UBCM Director Sarah Fowler
BCYP Premier Abby Head
UBC Political Science Professor Max Cameron

This diverse composition reflects a concerted effort to engage various segments of society, fostering a well-rounded and inclusive dialogue on the critical issues surrounding the strength and resilience of Canada's democratic institutions.

THE FRAGILITY OF DEMOCRACY; STATS AND TRENDS ACROSS THE WORLD

- **Democracy Index Snapshot**
  - Covers 167 countries.
  - Over one-third live under authoritarian rule, only 6.4% enjoy full democracy.
- **Canada's Challenge**
  - Setback of 0.37 points, largely due to pandemic frustrations.
  - Only 10.4% feel they have "a great deal" of freedom, 13.5% prefer military rule.
- **Canadian Concerns**
  - Rising division, 61% see increased division.
  - Division linked to dissatisfaction with democracy and calls for reform.
  - This decline in Canada's index score reflects popular disaffection with the status quo and a turn towards non-democratic alternatives, exemplified by the recent trucker blockade in Ottawa.
- **Signs of Losing Democracy**
  - When the executive gains excessive authority without sufficient checks from the legislative and judicial branches, it can undermine democratic principles.
  - Gerrymandering, voter suppression, and efforts to undermine the integrity of elections through disinformation campaigns and foreign interference.

INTERACTIVE EXERCISE:

ENGAGING DEMOCRACY

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AND ENTER THE FOLLOWING CODE

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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN DEMOCRACY

Reversing declining political knowledge, distrust, and youth civic duty is crucial for a vibrant and inclusive democracy.

YOUTH VOTING

- 18-24 age group: 66% turnout; older citizens, 50+, participate more.
- Decline began post-1984 election, persists despite sporadic increases.

IMPACT ON YOUTH

- Government policies significantly affect young people.
- Low youth engagement leads to political disengagement and reduced civic participation.

GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE

- UK's Brexit: Low youth turnout influenced the decision.
- Risk of fringe movements gaining influence due to youth disengagement.

STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

- Invest in school civic education.
- Improve voting accessibility.
- Engage youth via social media and targeted outreach.
- Highlight benefits of youth involvement and positive change.

DO OUR INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL ACTIONS IMPACT OUR DEMOCRACY; SHOULD WE CARE?

01

Voter Influence

- Public opinion and activism influence policy decisions.
- In the 2019 Canadian federal election, 66% exercised their right, shaping government policies.

02

Civic Engagement Matters

- Civic involvement, like participating in municipal meetings, drives tangible community changes.
- Citizen engagement in city planning affects sustainability and accessibility.

03

Accountability and Advocacy

- Active participation in politics can help counteract extremist ideologies.
- Individuals shape public opinion and advocate for change, impacting policy reforms and awareness.
- By caring about political actions, citizens can demand transparency and accountability from government institutions.

04

Representation and Resistance

- Active election participation and advocating for diversity ensures inclusive government decisions.
- Individual activism plays a key role in resisting threats to democracy, as seen in global movements.

IMPORTANCE OF RULE OF LAW

RULE OF LAW

- Foundation of consistent and just laws for stability and fairness.
- Misunderstanding risks challenges to democracy.
- Principle of equality: Binds all, including the government, under the law, establishing constitutional limits on power.

DEMOCRATIC VALUES

- Integral to upholding human rights and democratic principles.
- Integrity-based elections, political equality, transparency, and accountability.
- Challenges to the rule of law threaten these democratic values.

EMERGING THREATS

- Challenges evident in well-established democracies (e.g., US Capitol attack).
- Loss of faith in democratic structures and threats like foreign interference.
- Canada faces foreign interference risks due to its resources and multiculturalism.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS AND DEMOCRACY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

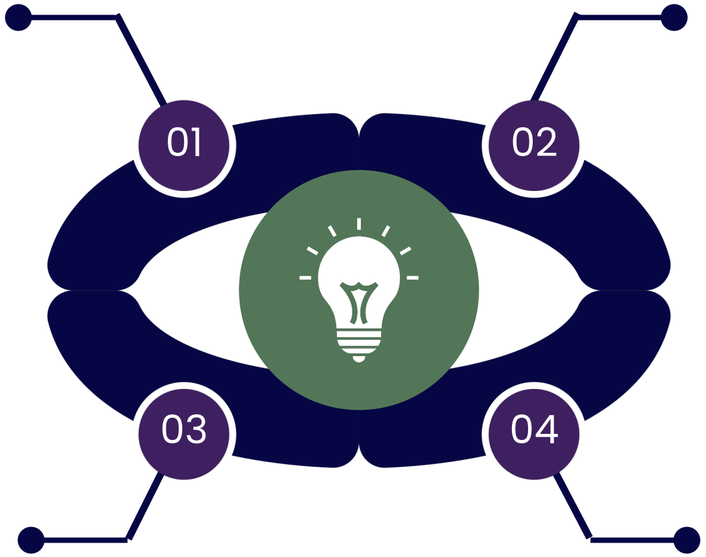
Government Responsiveness

- 53% also perceive their municipal government as "very responsive" or "moderately responsive.“
- In contrast, only 40% view the federal government positively, with 53% regarding it as "not too responsive" or "not responsive at all."

Municipality Engagement

- Only 31% of British Columbians engaged directly with their municipality in the past year, including 39% in Southern BC and 35% in Vancouver Island.
- Among those who engaged directly with their municipality, 54% are "satisfied" with how their issue was handled, while 43% are "dissatisfied."

Data from survey by Mario Canseco of the Research Co. polling firm
mario.canseco@researchco.ca



Ideas Related to Municipal Politics

- 50% agree with abolishing political parties or "slates" and having all candidates run as independents.
- 47% support making voting mandatory for all citizens in municipal elections.
- 62% support allowing permanent residents who have lived in a municipality for at least six months to vote in municipal elections.

Threats to Democracy

- Over 70% see "Fake news" on social media and online publications, polarization, and racism/discrimination as threats to democracy.
- Only 32% consider immigration a threat to democracy.
- About two-thirds identify low citizen engagement and low voter turnout as threats.

EMPOWERING LOCAL DEMOCRACY THROUGH MAYORS & COUNCILLORS

Constituent Connection

- Mayors and councilors directly represent constituents.
- They build trust and accountability through open-door policies and community engagement.
- Collaboration, consensus-building, and working across party lines are essential for effective governance.

Addressing Global Challenges Locally

- Local governance must balance local relevance with global challenges.
- Innovative approaches are needed for ethical governance, sustainability, and solidarity in public policies.
- Responsive service delivery, sustainability, and crisis response are key responsibilities.

Transparency and Civic Engagement

- Transparency is crucial, with open access to municipal operations and financial information.
- Civic engagement initiatives like participatory budgeting empower communities and promote democratic ownership.

MOVING FORWARD

FOSTER CIVIC EDUCATION

Invest in comprehensive civic education programs within schools to ensure young people understand the importance of voting and their role in the political process. Engaging students early can instill a sense of civic duty.

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY

Use social media and online platforms for outreach and engagement, making information readily available to all constituents.

COLLABORATIVE DEMOCRACY

Encourage open dialogue, inter-group relations, and a broader community identity. Focus on solving problems and fostering trust among diverse participants.

INSPIRE PUBLIC TRUST

Rebuild public trust by ensuring that government actions align with the needs and values of the people. Address popular disaffection and perceptions of division through responsive governance and political reform.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Your actions and decisions have a direct impact on the lives of your constituents and the strength of our democratic system.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

THANK YOU

FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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