



JUSTICE FOR HER, DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

Executive Summary

Women are central drivers of American democracy and have been foundational in nearly every major advancement in civil rights in the United States. Black women and women of color in particular have led efforts to achieve social change. Their unwavering fight to expand equal access to the political systems has led to an increase in their economic, educational, professional, and reproductive independence, and by doing so, they have raised the floor for everyone.

These advances have strengthened our democracy by redistributing power more equitably, fostering more representative leadership, and expanding the legal rights of all people. Taken together, it becomes clear that gender justice and democracy are not just interrelated—they are foundational to one another.

Yet, both are under attack as rapidly rising income inequality over the [past several decades](#) (with women [disproportionately impacted](#)) and the consolidation of wealth (overwhelmingly in the [hands of white men](#)) have fostered the rise of America's growing anti-democratic movement.

The public overwhelmingly rejects democratic backsliding. [84% of Americans report](#) that our democracy is in crisis or, at least, facing serious challenges. Only [17% trust](#) the federal government to do what is right most of the time, and [two-thirds believe](#) the government is corrupt.

Our democracy cannot thrive when the public — justifiably—distrusts their government and elected officials. Our society cannot thrive when our government leaders are beholden to wealthy special interests rather than the people who elected them. Reform is necessary. And, as has been the case historically, women are at the center of efforts to challenge those currently in power.

As authoritarians have long recognized, gender equity poses a direct threat to efforts to consolidate power and decision making under a select “elite” few. The Trump administration is following the authoritarian playbook by intentionally targeting the institutions, legal protections, and democratic norms that advance and protect women's equality.

The tactics the Trump administration is using to limit women's freedom and opportunities—and concentrate their own power—includes abusing executive authority, breaking government norms, defying the courts, and using intimidation tactics to threaten their perceived enemies.

Examples include:

- Weakening women's right to vote through executive orders and pushing for legislation that would make it harder for women to vote, such as the SAVE Act.
- Deploying gendered and racist narratives to discredit female leaders, journalists, and activists, including Federal Reserve Board Governor [Lisa Cook](#), Representative [LaMonica McIver](#), New York Attorney General [Letitia James](#), journalist [Catherine Lucey](#), and activist [Greta Thunburg](#).
- Distorting the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's](#) historic role in protecting the rights of women and people of color at work to instead favor white men.
- Attacking women's studies departments within [higher education](#) and undermining the celebration of [historical achievements by women](#).
- Rolling back critical [protections for reproductive health care](#) access established after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and sanctioning violence against providers and clinics.
- Reinforcing sex stereotypes and outdated biological assumptions by [attacking the ability of trans people](#) to receive health care and participate in school athletics.

Pulling democracy back from the brink requires attention—and continual reforms—to institutions and laws that help govern the distribution of power. To rebuild faith in democracy, the public must believe that this system of government is capable of delivering outcomes that will improve their lives. That is why fighting for gender justice is essential to democratic reform: the goals it seeks to achieve—economic equity, bodily autonomy, and equal opportunity—are central to creating a government that is responsive, representative, and fair for all people.

Through a gender justice lens, these are the National Women's Law Center's four pillars of democracy reform:

Ensure Everyone Has a Voice: Restoring and Advancing Voting Rights

The most fundamental aspect of any democracy is not simply the right to vote, but the ability to exercise that right freely. However, under this administration, we've seen the gutting of the Voting Rights Act and calls to [overturn the 19th Amendment and establish "household voting"](#) in which a husband and/or father casts a single vote—two developments that disproportionately impact women and people of color.

A meaningful reform agenda must ensure that voter participation is fully accessible, including federal voting protections, removing unnecessary barriers to registration and ballot access, reforming campaign finance laws, and eliminating discriminatory vote dilution.

Ensure Participation Without Fear: Ending Political Violence and Harassment

Women leaders have always faced increased threats of violence as particular targets for sexualized harassment. However, this administration and its allies have employed [coordinated efforts](#) to direct violence and harassment towards and undermine the credibility and political power of women leaders.

Perpetrators of violence and harassment must be held accountable, and the role digital platforms play in amplifying harassment and threats needs to be addressed. Further, we must insist on a sustained commitment by elected officials, donors, and the heads of major technology platforms, and others that participation in public life is safe and accessible for all.

Ensure Equal Access to Justice: Ending the Weaponization of the Law

Women and other historically marginalized communities have heavily relied on the [promise that all people are equal under the law](#) to advance their social and political gains. The principle that every American is subject to the same legal standards has been critical to undoing systemic gender and racial hierarchies. However, as this administration has politicized the Department of Justice and other key agencies to intimidate and punish disfavored communities and Trump's perceived enemies, this principle of equality under the law has been fractured.

Wide-ranging reforms to the operations of key enforcement agencies must be established; civil rights protections must be strengthened to prevent targeting gender and racial equity efforts; and lawyers complicit in Trump's attacks on civil rights must face meaningful professional accountability.

Ensure Rights & Reforms Will Be Upheld: Restoring Judicial Independence & Fairness

Since taking office, the Supreme Court has cleared the way for Trump's authoritarian agenda by refusing to check his power and even [preventing lower courts](#) from reining in his administration's unlawful actions. This is not surprising—over years wealthy and powerful interests have handpicked an ideologically biased Supreme Court Majority that has abolished women's rights and overturned legal doctrines that have stood for decades—from the [right to abortion](#), to the right to be free from [religious coercion in school](#), to [the right to vote](#) without disproportionate burdens based on race. And these decisions have all occurred as the Court has often operated in the shadows, issuing radical orders without explanation, and as some of its members face serious ethics scandals.

A serious democratic reform agenda, therefore, cannot be separated from efforts to restore the integrity and independence of the judiciary, and of the Supreme Court in particular. Changes to the structure and administration of the courts are long-overdue.

Conclusion: The Future of Democracy and Gender Justice Are Intertwined

Authoritarians are hostile to women's power, independence, and democratic participation because such practices expand and fairly distribute money and power amongst the public. To protect our democracy, we need to double down on protecting women's rights and freedoms. Only in a country where everyone can fully participate without fear or discrimination will a democracy truly be able to thrive.

NWLC's full *Justice for Her, Democracy for All* report is available [here](#).