



Rebuilding Trust in American Democracy & Institutions

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

American Democracy in Peril

Trust in American Institutions has hit an all time low. Our report on the [State of Trust in America](#) delineates the severity of the problem.

- Democracy is in peril. People don't [trust our institutions](#), which are the foundation of America.
- Our [youth are disillusioned](#). [Our nation is the most polarized since the Civil War](#).
- People are yearning for leaders in government and business with a steady [Moral Compass](#).

Across the land, leaders are searching for ways to halt the demise of democracy and protect our future from being hijacked into the hands of the malevolent forces.

Distrust in our most cherished institutions is like a "termite invasion" eating out the core of American democracy and our confidence in our values -- and ourselves as a nation. Unless we take action to reverse this horrible decline, our foundations of democracy will be eroded irreparably.

America's greatness is born of a complex network of collaborations, partnerships, and strategic alliances between and within government, business, education, and communities. The breakdown in trust is eroding the sacred fabric of our society, our institutions, and our democracy itself.

The Problem is Worsening

Polarizing politics just make things worse. America can no longer afford national, state, and locally elected politicians that continually fight each other, getting nothing done, preying upon fears. We are heading into an abyss, triggering some combination of anarchy, revolution, or authoritarianism.

The collapse in trust in institutions portends the collapse of democracy itself.

**We are at a tipping point – failure to act jeopardizes our democracy, our future and our economy.
We simply cannot deny the realities and put off action any longer.**

Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln all warned of this problem; [Roosevelt prescribed a way forward](#). But their advice has been unheeded, to our peril as [Authoritarian Leaders](#) gain the upper hand.

Polarization Will Deteriorate, Not Get Better

Left unchallenged, the problems of discord and polarization will get worse, not better. Why?

Fundamental changes in our culture (not due to immigration) have changed the normative thinking and responses of Americans. Institutions such as churches, schools, and government, which were trusted by the large majority of people two generations ago, are now scorned by most citizens. Education, which once gave students a foundation in moral character development, has abandoned this role (see [Education on the Edge](#)). These shifts make it extremely unlikely we will "bounce back."

The "fix" is not simple – it requires a *strategic change* in our thinking and practice of [Collaboration](#) and [Leadership](#), which are fundamental in regenerating a [Culture of Cooperation](#) in America.



Is “Civility” Enough?

Many leaders are focusing their efforts on creating “civility.” While admirable in its intent, the results will be marginal. Why? Because “civility” is but a *symptom*; the *causes* run far deeper:

First, *Distrust* is the fundamental cause of acerbic behavior; a cure must address *distrust*, not just civility. *Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt, and Disrespect* (“FUDD”) trigger distrust. Knowing how to build, rebuild, and sustain trust is essential.

**Without trust,
everything defaults
to politics &
polarization**

Second, “civility” alone potentially *sub-optimizes* outcomes. The real value of differences in thinking is to *produce innovation*—which can only come from a deep attitudinal shift about diversity of thought in a climate of trust and respect – a rebirth of the Enlightened Thinking of the Founding Fathers coupled with new breakthroughs in innovation.

Combining Wisdom with Breakthroughs in Trust – a Four Phase Strategy

The *Rushmore Strategy* offers *realistic solutions*, and *inspiring results*, embracing our forbearers’ ideals and insights. It then moves forward based on a bold, next generation Architecture of Trust using tested best practices, science, and impactful innovations from 30 years of alliance building. It has four phases:

1. **Visibility – Making Trust a Central Organizing Principle for America.** Leaders, Media, Educators, and Government Officials must be adept at Trust Building. This needs Congress to lead the charge.
2. **Proliferation of Practice – Building Mindsets & Skillsets:** To support the strategy, we need more articulate leaders and educators engaged in attaining a far better grasp of the nature of collaborative leadership excellence and the impact of trust on economic and social well-being. We must *develop a wide array of alliances* with leadership-oriented institutions to rebuild trust.
3. **Destination Purple - Civic Affairs:** We must cure the polarization that’s paralyzing America. *Character, not party, produces trustworthy public servants*. Politicians must be capable of creating innovative joint solutions *after* the election, while not engaging in fear mongering.
4. **Trust in Institutions - Local Communities:** All democracy is foremost a local affair. Trust in Institutions starts at the local level, with local government, businesses, churches, education, and community organizations. We intend to help empower local leaders rebuild trust in their organizations.

New Roles of Congress

Congress’ role in the future must not be just to pass legislation, but to protect and preserve the very foundations of democracy – to be advocates of an enlightened 21st century citizenry. Congress – in a *bi-partisan initiative* -- must take an *innovative, proactive* course to protect our democracy’s roots:

- 1) **Politics:** Create a “*New Politics Beyond Problem Solving*” based on Principles of Trust. This initiative requires adept civic leaders and political candidates who’ve mastered a new set of *competencies* – especially *trust-building, collaborative leadership, and collaborative innovation*.
- 2) **Education:** During the last century, our education system lost its capacity to *build moral character* – with disastrous results. Jefferson and Roosevelt were deeply committed to education that developed our youth’s moral compass, thus ensuring our democratic system was preserved by a deep sense of right and wrong. (see Education on the Edge). This initiative must be advocated by leaders and can be supported by federal policies, funding, and programs.
- 3) **Capitalism:** Socialism will never be the solution to our economic problems. In its stead, we have identified a unique and promising “genetic strain” of “Collaborative Capitalism” that not only creates greater equity between investors and workers, but also generates significant competitive advantage, ensuring its long-term sustainability. It’s the *only realistic 21st century antidote to creeping socialism*. It costs nothing to implement except enlightened collaborative capitalists.

We are Fast Running Out of Time, but it's not too late to Turn the Tide – [Read Full Strategy](#)