

What Now Research Project
Leveling the Influence Playing Field
White Paper Summary - Call to Action

Declaration

We believe the MAGA News Network led by Fox News and Joe Rogan OVERWHELMED pro-democracy news sources with their “America is failing” narrative. This initial finding needs to be STUDIED MORE before we take any further steps in revising pro-democracy messaging or picking more attractive candidates. IF this shift in how voters are being influenced by MAGA news is as pervasive as the initial reports indicate, it won’t make any difference who the pro-democracy movement runs next or their message.

How We Know This

The thoughts expressed in this *summary* of our **What Now** white paper emerged from our narrative analysis of the news following the 2024 election at Vital Signs of Democracy. We had been tracking the cultural and political narratives concerning threats to democracy in America for the two years leading up to the 2024 election.

We conducted this narrative analysis from a politically independent perspective that did not favor either the MAGA Republicans or the Harris Democrats. We found fault in both the Democrats attempt to counter MAGA news claims by Trump bashing and that much of what the MAGA news was reporting was based on disinformation intentionally reported or otherwise.

<https://www.evointell.tv/vitalsignsofdemocracy>

Our most glaring finding was that pro-democracy news sources were OVERWHELMED by the MAGA news network. At first look this was a result of the superior coordination of the MAGA news network messaging headed by Fox News, Joe Rogan’s podcast, Tucker Carlson and Musk X posts. AND the pro-democracy news weak efforts to rally a stronger pro-democracy vote without reverting to hyperbole and Trump bashing. This resulted in MAGA news having far greater influence on voters. This was new and quite disturbing to the checks and balances of our democratic system of government.

This Summary Will Cover the Following Topics:

- **Our Initial Reaction to the Results of the 2024 election**
- **Narrative 1: Addressing the Sea Change in News Media Influence**
- **Narrative 2 – The Failure of Pro-Democracy Messaging**
- **Five Initial Steps to Be Taken to Regain Influence with Voters**

These topics are presented in much greater detail in our full **What Now** white paper.

Initial Reaction to the Results of the 2024 election

Now that most of us have somewhat recovered from the shock of Trump's reelection and MAGA gaining majorities in the Senate and the House the question hangs in the air... what do we do NOW? We believe one quality of that consideration demands we "*think outside the box.*" What is happening now and how we respond is not business as usual.

Many of us assumed IF Kamala Harris won the 2024 election that at the very least we would have four more years to strengthen America's rule of law, and increase the effectiveness of our existing system of checks and balances to hold outlaw movements like Make America Great Again in check.

During the Biden years congressional subpoenas were ignored, and our court system proved unable to hold Donald Trump responsible for fomenting an insurrection against the peaceful transfer of power in 2020. In addition, we believe a third major factor contributed to the reelection of Donald Trump and the MAGA movement gaining majorities in the Senate and the House. Traditional news media had less influence in informing voters of their options.

This finding was amplified by the MAGA news system OVERWHELMING pro-democracy news sources with the creative use of podcasts, YouTube channels and social media platforms that promoted MAGA disinformation 24/7. In other words, a majority of voters were more moved by the MAGA narrative than the *Save Democracy* meme based on the "news and commentary" they saw or heard.

There were a number of factors that evoked this unprecedented sea change in how voters were influenced by the news. Some were a result of the business plans of social media platforms that intentionally promoted conflict to increase the size of their audiences and subsequent advertising dollars. Some of this increase also had to do with the success of the MAGA movement convincing voters NOT to trust traditional legacy media.

Other factors included the actual messaging that both MAGA news and pro-democracy news sources promoted. It is clear the MAGA narrative (America is failing) had more influence on voters compared to the pro-democracy messages that were primarily anti-Trump.

Narrative 1: The Sea Change in News Media Influence – The Business of Breaking

Over the last decade, once radical ideas that lived on the fringes of left and right thought became mainstream content on social media platforms amplified by cable and network news programs. There was very little attempt by social media platforms like X and Facebook to moderate this disinformation because their profits continued to grow.

This "shift" in attention from traditional legacy news sources to podcasts and mobile phone apps has grown in popularity resulting in the crescendo of noise and chaos we are

experiencing today no matter your political orientation. Truth and facts are now routinely dismissed by half the country (progressive and conservative) and societal trust in government agencies and legacy news organizations is at an all-time low.

At the heart of this sea change in news coverage and the distribution of disinformation is a group of savvy marketing people who have created a highly profitable social media and podcast business by dividing our society against itself. This “business of breaking” traditional legacy media’s influence was perfectly timed to take advantage of many societal-changing innovations like the internet, email, podcasts and online news.

Far from the original intent of the democratization of factual information on the Internet, our current “news” environment is filled with social media platforms promoting falsehoods and unvetted stories for profit. For the moment this chaos and lack of trust is benefiting MAGA’s efforts to carry out their anti-democracy mandate outlined in the Project 2025 white paper. We are literally witnessing a hostile take over of the American government aided by a lack of effective resistance from the pro-democracy movement.

Narrative 2 – The Failure of Pro-Democracy Messaging

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One reason given for Trumps victory was the failure of pro-democracy messaging in countering the disinformation of the MAGA narrative. As a result, we believe IF we don’t give citizens a new vision for our democratic system of governance to vote for America’s future election results could be the same as 2024. Why would anyone, particularly younger voters, get angry about a governance system under attack IF they have NO understanding how that system should operate if it was healthy. The features of this new democratic governance system and the need to properly convey its desirability to a majority of voters would represent a major shift in pro-democracy strategy.

One of the questions that we are currently asking ourselves in this shift in strategy is... does our current system of governance protect the rule of law and our system of checks and balances sufficiently given the way it is under attack by the MAGA movement? Or conversely the Democrats failure to defend it.

Since the election of MAGA politicians in 2016 preverbal holes in our current system have been utilized by Trump and his allies to circumvent normal moderation guardrails. These guardrails are now revealed to be norms of conduct not laws that can be enforced.

Currently, he has created by executive decree shadow “advisory groups” like the DOGE group headed by Elon Musk that are gaining illegal access to sensitive citizen data and federal budget systems. They are doing so without being required to present any proof of their claims of fraud and corruption. DOGE in the first month of Trumps new administration has already fired thousands of federal employees and halted critical Congressional

approved funding programs without any oversight or review by elected officials or the courts.

Initial Steps to Be Taken to Regain Influence with Voters

Step 1: Research – Study HOW the MAGA news media overwhelmed pro-democracy news sources in 2024. The data from this study will influence how we approach challenging the social media conflict profiteers to change their business plans, and expanding our narrative to include the changes we want to see to strengthen our democratic system of governance instead of just more Trump/Musk bashing.

Step 2: Convene – Gather small groups of pro-democracy and news media experts to develop an new coordinated strategy for communicating this new vision of democracy to a majority of Americans not just Democrats using podcasts, YouTube and social media platforms.

Step 3: Coordinate Message– Based on the results of our research and the strategic points that emerge from our meetings of experts the What Now project will undertake the development of a message coordination network the includes the top pro-democracy news sources. We will also consult based on our research findings how those coordinated messages should be language.

Step 4: Test with Voters – Test our initial message coordination efforts with moderate conservative, independent and liberal voters. Revise campaigns accordingly.

Step 5: Deploy – Facilitate the distribution of these coordinated messages in the run up to the 2026 mid-term elections over a wide variety of news platforms.

Scope of the What Now Project

The changes we detail in the full What Now white paper may seem at first read overwhelming. While systemic change can have that quality we don't have to make the changes all at once. We can work towards them over time. What is important however, is that pro-democracy news sources learn how to promote carefully coordinated messaging. And this VISION of a new, strengthened democratic system of governance be offered Americans NOW so they can support candidates and ballot initiatives that want to see these changes come about.

For us this campaign begins simply and gathers steam over time. We feel it is vitally important to shift our view of what we want as American citizens and get busy bringing it about.