

The Advisory Voting Initiative

A Vote, a Voice and the Power of Participation

www.AdvisoryVote.us

"There's only one solution. It's active participation of citizens in democracy. Advisory Voting can help us save our democracy from the threat of authoritarianism."

--Garry Kasparov, pro-democracy and human rights activist, and former World Chess Champion

Executive Summary

Introduction: *Our democracy is in crisis* because far too many Americans are *structurally* alienated from the political process. Hyper-partisanship, internet disinformation, voter suppression, and the delegitimization of election results are among the factors rapidly undermining trust in democratic institutions.¹ Abroad, Pew research indicates a majority no longer see the U.S. as a model of democracy.² A key factor threatening democracy in America is citizens feel they are unheard; that their voice makes no difference; and *once in office* politicians don't actually care what voters want. Research validates this sentiment.³

Americans are ready for transformative change. It comes as no surprise recent Pew Research also reports 65% say our democracy needs a major change or full overhaul.⁴ Ironically, it is little recognized that we have the capability -- and a *historic opportunity* -- to exercise our rights of speech and assembly to an extent hitherto unimaginable. Internet connectivity and smart phones now enable hundreds of millions of citizens to come together virtually to **communicate a collective voice** on issues of common concern -- *if only there were a technologically secure, politically safe, educationally sound venue to do so.*

Imagine logging-in to your private Advisory Voting account, secure as your bank account. You see a single page with the question you are getting ready to vote on, a question chosen as the most popular current issue by millions of fellow Advisory Voters. There's a short video that explains the issue under consideration, and provides fact-verified educational information to help you vote wisely. This is not a social network. You're in your own private, online voting booth, located in the palm of your hand. Your ability to cast advisory votes is 24/7, every day of the year. You now have a real voice in between elections. And nothing can get between you and your vote.

An innovative approach to exercising our First Amendment rights: The Advisory Voting Initiative recognizes that the *idea of voting* does not have to be limited to voting for candidates for office. If we are willing *to think innovatively*, we can broaden our conception of voting to include *voting on issues* of common concern -- issues *which voters themselves identify and prioritize*. Non-binding Advisory Voting can give citizens political agency -- and at mass-scale, political power -- while respecting and supporting representative government. Moreover, Advisory Voting need not be limited to the conventional two-year election cycle; it can take place *continuously*, throughout the year, as issues of mass-scale concern arise.

A bypass strategy: Unlike reform efforts, which require laws to be changed or enacted -- plus grappling with hyper-partisan and special interest obstruction -- Advisory Voting can be introduced to voters right away, because it is simply -- *and innovatively* -- an exercise of our First Amendment rights of freedom of assembly and speech. The Advisory Voting Initiative proposes a doable, paradigm-shifting, bypass strategy that will align 21st century internet technology with the originating principles of democracy in America: self-governance, political equality and representative government. The Advisory Voting Initiative can bypass entrenched structures of political polarization by establishing an independent, transparent, nonprofit **public trust** to enable and oversee *advisory* voting.

A trustworthy "We the People" voice: Pew Research clearly shows citizens want a stronger public voice in politics, *and* that their valuation of democracy is directly tied to sense of having a voice in government.⁵ Advisory Voting will establish new **civic infrastructure** to give voters a direct voice, communicated via non-binding, advisory votes. High levels of Advisory Voting engagement will provide a **public mandate** to *incentivize political will* for elected representatives to deal with issues that *most* Americans already agree should be priorities.⁶

Advisory Voting fundamentally differs from polls. *What Advisory Voting enables and polls lack* is the power of mass-scale, voter participation.⁷ This contrast applies also to petitions, referenda, surveys, and ballot initiatives.

Registered voters unite to be heard: Politicians pay attention to people who are registered and likely to vote. Therefore, official voter registration will be a requirement for becoming an advisory voter. This will infuse non-binding Advisory Voting with political power -- *and* motivate citizens to become more active as official voters.

The power of participation: Eligible voters – i.e., non-voters⁸ -- now also can be motivated to participate *both* as official and as advisory voters. Thus, Advisory Voting will enable up to **240 million voters** to re-engage in the political process at an entirely new level of participatory agency. This update to our democracy will provide an opportunity to catalyze **a realignment of politics** around issues of mainstream, majoritarian concern.

A new model for democracy: The appeal of Advisory Voting will be recognized rapidly by voters thanks to:

- > **Ease of use** - a voting booth in the palm of your hand
- > **All-inclusive access** - discriminatory structures used to exclude voters do not apply to Advisory Voting
- > **Privacy** - zero collection of demographic user data, only verification that one is an official registered voter, and Zip Code
- > **Political agency** - no more “But, what can I do?” Now the answer is: “You can vote -- *often!*”
- > **Safety** - Advisory Voting has no place for alienating “culture war” fear-mongering and race-baiting
- > **Paying attention** - to issues that matter most to most of Americans; overcoming the politics of distraction⁹
- > **Self-awareness** - a new opportunity to discover *who we really are* as a We the People nation in terms of issues

Genuine political equality: Advisory Voting enables *equal access and status for all*, as individual advisory voters, unencumbered by party affiliation or any other group identifier; precisely because no personal data is collected.¹⁰ Advisory Voting *operationalizes* the principle of **One Person, One Vote** -- no parties, no primaries, no gerrymandering, no electoral college, no money -- everyone’s vote counts equally.

Voter success guaranteed! Advisory Voting digital democracy **meets voters where they are**, while providing politicians with a true, real-time picture of voter sentiment.¹¹ Politicians will respond to a newly engaged, mass-scale electorate; or they will face *the consequences of accountability* in subsequent official voting cycles, because Advisory Voting will attract **a new caliber of leadership** to run for office: *problem-solving public servants*.

Activist corporate leadership recognizes the urgency of not just protecting voting rights, but *maximizing voter participation*. Ken Chenault, former CEO of American Express, is an exemplar: “There is no middle ground here. Either you are for more people voting, or you want to suppress the vote.”¹²

Trust is the coin of the realm. The Advisory Voting Initiative will introduce new **civic infrastructure** to enable millions of citizens to claim their rightful place as fellow, active voters; and thereby restore trust in our democracy!

Mission: To advance citizen re-engagement and fact-based, participatory democracy at mass-scale, by means of introducing Advisory Voting to all registered voters; and claim new territory on the Internet for *civic* media.

Founders: Richard Lang, founder | Lupton Abshire, co-founder (see bios below)

Advisors

- > **Deondra Rose**, Asso. Prof. of Political Science and Director, Polis: Center for Politics, Duke University – lead advisor¹³
- > **Jeni Arndt**, Mayor of Fort Collins, Colorado and former four-term Colorado State Representative (D)
- > **Spencer Hosie**, Founding Partner, Hosie Rice LLP, nationally recognized top-ranked trial lawyer
- > **Garry Kasparov**, pro-democracy and human rights activist, and former World Chess Champion
- > **Simon Mainwaring**, Founder and CEO, We First Branding
- > **Hon. Claudine Schneider**, former five-term Congresswoman, Rhode Island (R)
- > **Sterling Speirn**, former CEO, W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- > **Siva Vaidhyanathan**, Prof. of Media Studies and Director, Center for Media and Citizenship, University of Virginia

Partner Organizations

- > **Renew Democracy Initiative** / Garry Kasparov, Founder / Promoting liberal democracy in the U.S. and abroad
- > **Smartmatic: The Elections Company** / Antonio Mugica, Founder and CEO / Secure election technology worldwide

Legal Counsel

- > **Hosie Rice LLP** / San Francisco law firm specializing in intellectual property and emerging technologies

Organization Summary: Incorporating as the **Advisory Vote Foundation**, an independent 501c3. When fully established, with a board in place and staffed for launch and on-going operational capacity, this new institution will be presented to the citizenry as a *public trust*, dedicated to the revitalization of democracy in America. Founder, **Richard Lang** has developed patented technology and intellectual property, which can be made available to the foundation. Co-founder, **Lupton Abshire**, is directing strategic outreach according to five key operating principles:

- > **All-inclusive Voter Participation**
- > **Ethics: Establishing a Public Trust**
- > **Educational & Media Support for Presenting Fact-based Issues: Civic Media**
- > **Cybersecurity and Non-exploitative Technology**
- > **A Global Example: Participatory Democracy vs. Authoritarianism¹⁴**

Technology: Patented technology for Advisory Voting originally was developed for civic engagement and educational applications by Richard Lang a decade ago. The [WeJIT](#) was designed for use by organizations of all types, including local municipalities; and became the foundation for [Collaborize Classroom](#), an online blended-learning platform, used by over 74,000 school teachers worldwide, and engaging an estimated 11 million students. [Smartmatic](#), a leader in global election technology, has agreed in principle to build the advisory voting platform with an emphasis on cybersecurity and user authentication, contingent on early-stage funding.

Marketing and Launch Plan: Despite the endemic polarization that plagues our politics, the *reality* is most Americans are in basic agreement on what issues need to be addressed by elected representatives. **The problem with politics** is that it's structured to be inordinately influenced by "bases" at the extremes and self-serving special interests.¹⁵ The **majority in the middle** has no effective way for *their* voice to be heard. The Advisory Voting Initiative aims to blitzscale registration of this 115 million+ target demographic by means of:

- > **Collaborating with voter registration organizations, campus initiatives, grassroot and faith networks across the country.**
- > **Earned media and advertising via Social and Mass Media outlets. Celebrity promotion via fan networks.**
- > **Engage 1,400 mayors across the country¹⁶ to launch self-serve, white label, free-trial, local versions of Advisory Voting.**
- > **Target voters most receptive to updating our democracy, a population of 98.9M, as identified by [Citizen Data](#).**
- > **"Claim Your Advisory Voting Account": Invite registered official voters to claim an AV account already waiting for them!**

Educational Civic Media: Vetted educational and media resources for presenting fact-based issues under advisory voting consideration can be produced in-house or in collaboration with partner organizations such as PBS, universities, or other civic educational organizations.

Financial Plan: With viable launch capacity requiring at least \$25M, start-up funding will likely necessitate philanthropic leadership from very wealthy individual donors. There is a plan for long-term **self-sustainability**, which includes marketing Richard Lang's patented advisory voting technology to the 19,500 municipalities¹⁷ across the county. Proceeds will fund ongoing operations of the Advisory Vote Foundation, eventually leading to complete self-sustainability.

A Democracy Ecosystem: Advisory Voting is not an end in itself, but the beginning of a **long-term strategy** to create new infrastructure for positive, citizen re-engagement; and the advancement of mature, participatory democracy; including, but not limited to:

- > **Vertical integration to provide for local, regional and state versions of Advisory Voting.**
- > **Catalyze new civic media dedicated to participatory democracy and citizen agenda journalism.**
- > **Introduce a version of Advisory Voting for high school and middle school students that will revitalize civics education.**

Closing Statement: The Advisory Voting Initiative is for everyone who understands that *democracy in America* is not an option, but a *mandate* from the founding generation of the United States of America AND nothing less than a *calling* for the present generation to *take responsibility* for self-governance, political equality and representative government -- of the people, by the people, for the people.

Advisory Voting will empower every voter to act on that calling, and thereby enable our democracy to *evolve* into a new level of participatory maturity – *and* serve as an example for the rest of the world!

“Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy.” --Martin Luther King, Jr.

Richard Lang is a pioneer in the technology industry. The inventor of "burst technology," which helped enable true internet video-on-demand (seed funding provided by Irish rock band U2), and co-inventor of the world's first dual-deck VCR. Founding CEO of [Democrasoft](#), developer of online, collective decision-making tools. He has presided over multiple technology development teams, coordinating new innovations, market launches and ongoing product development, and monetization strategies. Richard is the author of [Virtual Country: Strategy for 21st Century Democracy](#).

Lupton Abshire has over 30 years of experience serving faith communities across the country and abroad. He is an ordained minister in the Episcopal Church. His career began working for a large conglomerate in the field of organizational development. He has degrees in business management, theology and philosophy. Contact lupton.abshire@gmail.com for more information.

¹ [“Democracy in Dark Times: The 2020 IASC Survey of American Political Culture” by James Davidson Hunter, et al.](#)

² [“Most believe the U.S. is no longer a good model of democracy,” Pew Research 6/9/21](#)

³ [“Politicians Don’t Actually Care What Voters Want” by Joshua Kalla and Ethan Porter, NYT 7/11/19.](#) For a recent proof point see [“Coal Miners Want Manchin to Reverse Opposition to Build Back Better,” CNN Business 12/21/21.](#)

⁴ [“Big Majorities in France and U.S. Say Their Political System Needs Dramatic Change,” Pew Research 3/30/21](#)

⁵ [“Global Public Opinion in the Age of Democratic Anxiety,” Pew Research 12/7/21](#)

⁶ Majorities agree: [climate change](#) - [health care](#) - [infrastructure](#) - [police reform](#) - [For the People Act](#) - [economic inequality](#) - [gerrymandering](#) - [campaign finance](#) - [regulating social media](#) - [Freedom to Vote Act](#) - [reject banning books; for teaching about race](#)

⁷ For example, [a recent poll](#) indicates 50% of all voters now say climate change is a critical threat, 26% an important threat; while 19% say not a threat, 5% no opinion. **Imagine the difference it would make** to incentivize political will to take decisive action on this issue, if – rather than an *extrapolation* from 76% of a pool of 1,990 respondents, with a +/-2% margin of error – instead, out of a pool of more than 100 million advisory voters there were more than 76 million *actual* voters saying climate change is a significant threat. Zip Code location – the only data point – would tell politicians how many of these voters are in their districts or states.

⁸ [“Poll: Despite Record Turnout 80 Million Americans Didn’t Vote. Here’s Why.” NPR 12/15/20](#)

⁹ See [“The Great Fracturing of American Attention” by Megan Garber, The Atlantic 3/5/22](#)

¹⁰ “When our political positions are decoupled from the means of identifying us as left or right, party member or ideologue, and we are asked about individual issues, our traditional political labels begin to lose their meaning and relevance. Advisory Voting will give voters the freedom to take any political position on any issue, even if the position is not consistent with that of his or her political party.” See [Virtual Country: Strategy for 21st Century Democracy](#), pp. 37, 5.

¹¹ Cf. “Things are changing so rapidly...the question is: In a democracy that’s such a genius as ours, can you get consensus in a time frame that can compete with autocracy?” –President Biden <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/28/politics/china-us-democracy-autocracy/index.html>

¹² [“Black Executives Call on Corporations to Fight Restrictive Voting Laws” by Andrew Ross Sorkin and David Gelles, NYT 3/31/21.](#)

¹³ Signatory to [“Statement in Support of Freedom to Vote Act,”](#) signed by over 200 scholars nationwide.

¹⁴ Cf. “Make no mistake, this is **a war on Ukraine’s democracy** and has nothing to do with Russian fears of it one day joining NATO. For Putin, **the example** of a free, independent Ukraine on Russia’s border is **too inspiring a model for his own people who might eventually demand something similar at home**, and that would mean his ouster.” [emphasis added] --Kathryn Stoner, Director, Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, Stanford University <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/02/25/putin-russia-ukraine-invasion-endgame-experts-00011652>.

¹⁵ For example, [“Poll: Majority Want to Keep Abortion Legal, But They Also Want Restrictions,” NPR 6/7/19.](#)

¹⁶ Members of the [United States Conference of Mayors](#)

¹⁷ [City Mayors.com](#)