



## Digital Democracy: Can Democracy Survive in the Digital Age?

A study proposal by the League of Women Voters of Maine

LWVUS National Convention 2022

*The League of Women Voters of Maine respectfully asks you to support our study proposal, outlined below. Although it was not recommended by the LWVUS board, we will move to place it on the agenda in Plenary Session 1, on **Friday, June 24**, and, if that succeeds, move for adoption in Plenary Session 3, on **Sunday, June 26**.*

Political scientists, analysts, and international scholars have been raising alarms about the role of social media giants in undermining democracy. Fake news is nothing new, but the scope and scale possible on the internet and the profit-maximizing incentive structure have created an uncontrolled epidemic of viral misinformation. We propose a study to better understand the totality of threats that the operating model of profit-driven online social platforms poses to democracy, its institutions, people, and values, and how the League can participate in shaping solutions.

A study should explore questions such as: Do online platforms uniquely aggravate hate and division, foster misinformation, erode civil discourse, exacerbate polarization, and ultimately contribute to the deterioration of democracy and the rise of authoritarianism? How could transparency, disclosure, research, regulation, market competition, antitrust, or tort liability be brought to bear? What other means could or should be deployed that protect the opportunities of the online sphere, including respecting free speech and the free flow of information, while ensuring that civic society is not harmed?

While we are aware that there is reluctance to take on new studies, we believe this topic is appropriate for a national study, because it fits squarely into the Making Democracy Work agenda. The League's principles and positions for Representative Government do not provide a basis for evaluating legislation in this area. For example, which of those positions would be used to advocate for or against the Platform Accountability and Transparency Act? We believe that approaching this issue by concurrence with a state position may be limiting, as this issue requires a national, if not global response. The National League of Women Voters must not relinquish this opportunity to defend our democracy.

**Please contact us for more information!** LWVME has developed an engaging, 25-minute video presentation that explores these emerging threats to democracy in greater depth. A recording is available at <https://www.lwvme.org/DigitalDemocracy>.

Join us at our caucus at Convention (date and time TBA).

For more information, contact Ann Luther: [annmluther@gmail.com](mailto:annmluther@gmail.com)