

THE POWER AGENDA

A Framework for
Building People Power

Demos



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

Despite the United States becoming more diverse,¹ our country's long history of exclusionary policies means that Black and brown communities bear the brunt of interlocking systems of inequality. Exploitative labor laws have concentrated wealth in the hands of the top 10 percent of earners,² creating an economy that leaves millions of families struggling to make ends meet. *Citizens United* and other Supreme Court decisions gutting campaign finance restrictions have entrenched the outsized role of money in politics, creating a democracy in which economic power can translate directly into political power. Black and brown people remain overrepresented in low-wage industries³ and underrepresented at the polls⁴ and in the corridors of power."⁵

To build a representative, multiracial democracy and economy for the demos—the people—we must advance an agenda focusing on the policies and structural changes that uplift the wisdom and insight of state-based and grassroots leaders and work with policymakers to drive solutions where people can wield full economic and political power to build thriving communities.

The Dēmos Power Agenda is a multi-pronged effort toward creating a just, inclusive, multiracial democracy and economy by **building civic, political, and economic power for all**. This requires structural reforms that include goals and interventions that restore and expand voting rights, strengthen worker rights and protections, and shift power to the people.

Our Power Agenda Framework envisions—

ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR ALL

An economy where all people can regularly meet their daily needs.

Our economy leaves working families with inadequate pay and unaffordable goods and services, making it difficult to make ends meet. Structural racism in our economic institutions makes economic security even harder for Black and brown communities. An inclusive, multiracial economy and democracy requires that:

- All workers, particularly Black and brown workers, earn no less than a thriving wage without overwork or exploitation.
- Workers get an equitable share of the value they create in our economy and greater control over how work fits into their lives.
- All individuals have access to the goods and services that support a comfortable standard of living.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY FOR ALL

An economy where everyone has an opportunity to improve their economic situation over time and each generation is better off than the last.

Our economy fosters deep income and wealth inequality, making it difficult for working families to reach or stay in the middle class. Resource-depressed communities and structural racism in our economic institutions have made economic mobility much less likely for Black and brown people. An inclusive, multiracial economy and democracy requires that:

- All individuals have an opportunity to accumulate wealth through savings, investments, and fair tax treatment.

- Robust investments are made in public goods to promote economic mobility for children, families, and communities, particularly Black and brown communities.
- All children can transition into adulthood with the economic support that puts them on the right path toward income growth and wealth accumulation.

FULL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A democracy where systems are designed to encourage and cultivate the fullest expression of political voice by all.

Structural inequality and racism hinder Black and brown people from wielding their full political power. From voter suppression tactics to laws that criminalize protest, our political infrastructure does not enable all people to participate in our democracy fully and freely. An inclusive, multiracial economy and democracy requires that:

- People influence the systems, institutions, and policies that shape their lives and communities through direct action and citizen initiatives.
- Expanded access to voting and centering pro-voter policies that reduce the racial voter turnout gap, including robust language access.
- Guaranteed fair and equal representation for Black and brown communities by passing state and federal legislation that strengthens the right to vote, protects against racial vote dilution, and restores and supplements the Voting Rights Act.
- We challenge voter suppression laws and other anti-democratic practices that target Black and brown communities, including laws that restrict and criminalize protest.

AN INCLUSIVE AND EXPANSIVE ELECTORATE

A democracy where all people can fully participate, and immigrants and people impacted by the criminal legal system are explicitly embraced.

America systematically denies the right to vote to millions, creating a democracy that neither includes nor represents all of us. Both the immigration and criminal legal systems persist as

powerful tools to deem Black and brown people unworthy of participating in our democracy. An inclusive, multiracial economy and democracy requires that:

- We advance the political power and civic participation of immigrants and systems-impacted people.
- Abolish penal disenfranchisement at both the state and federal levels.
- Reduce barriers to citizenship and center immigrant justice so all people can freely and actively participate in our democracy without fear.

A REPRESENTATIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT

A government that embeds public participation in its decision-making and centers the will and well-being of the people.

Corporate and wealthy elites have a stronghold on the levers of government, creating government policies that benefit only the few, often at the expense of the public. An inclusive, multiracial economy and democracy requires that:

- We invest in public campaign financing programs that enable more Black and brown candidates to run for office and foster deeper partnerships between elected leaders and their communities.
- Expand the Supreme Court and implement other necessary reforms to stop the far-right corporate takeover of the federal judiciary.
- Ensure the public, especially Black and brown communities, are at the decision-making table so decisions benefit the public and reflect the will of the people.
- Create greater transparency and legibility in the government's decision-making processes so the public knows when and how to make their voices heard and can hold government leaders accountable for their decisions.

ENDNOTES

1. William H. Frey. "The Nation Is Diversifying Even Faster than Predicted, According to New Census Data." Brookings Institution, March 9, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/new-census-data-shows-the-nation-is-diversifying-even-faster-than-predicted/>.
2. Shehryar Nabi. "Charts that Explain Wealth Inequality in the United States." Aspen Institute, October 19, 2022. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/charts-that-explain-wealth-inequality-in-the-united-states/>.
3. Rose Khattar, and Mathew Brady. "Occupational Segregation in America." Center for American Progress, June 2, 2023. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/occupational-segregation-in-america/>.
4. Michael Waldman. "People of Color Are Being Deterred from Voting." *Brennan Center*. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/people-color-are-being-deterred-voting>.
5. Katherine Schaeffer. "U.S. Congress Continues to Grow in Racial, Ethnic Diversity." Pew Research Center, January 9, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/09/u-s-congress-continues-to-grow-in-racial-ethnic-diversity/>.

