

# Democracy Inventory Profile

## University of Notre Dame Democracy Initiative

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### Part One: What was the context for this profile?

The University of Notre Dame's Democracy Initiative grew out of [Notre Dame 2033](#), a 10-year strategic planning process led by Provost John T. McGreevy to help unite the work of the university to "make the most meaningful contributions to questions of national and international concern" and elevate Notre Dame as "the leading global Catholic research university in the world." Out of this process, seven University-wide strategic priorities were selected: arts, climate and sustainability, data and computational science, ethics, health and well-being, poverty, and democracy. These are coordinated efforts drawing on expertise in multiple schools, colleges, centers, and institutes, and were launched in phases starting in 2023. The Democracy Initiative was publicly launched in April 2024, and its mission is to establish Notre Dame as "a leader in the study of democracy both in the U.S. and world, as a convener for conversations about and actions to preserve democracy, and as a model for the formation of civically engaged citizens and public servants."

### Part Two: Who was involved, in what ways?

Under the Notre Dame 2033 process led by the Provost's Office, faculty submitted over 100 proposals for initiatives that shaped the seven initiative areas. Each of these selected areas formed Theme Advisory Committees in Spring 2022, composed of faculty, administrative leaders, and staff to develop recommendations for resources, programming, and structure needed to advance each theme. As it launched, the Democracy Initiative appointed both a faculty director (David Campbell, Packey J. Dee Professor of American Democracy) and a managing director (Joel Day), and reports directly to the Provost to promote cross-university work rather than being siloed beneath an academic department. The initiative also has a 12 person Executive Committee, including faculty across disciplines (Law, Political Science, Global Affairs, Economics, Engineering), and administrative leadership in Academic Strategy, Federal Affairs, and the President's Office.

## Part Three: What were some of the challenges along the way and key lessons learned?

As the Democracy Initiative has just recently launched, they remarked that they have not yet had the chance to understand some of the challenges that will come alongside this work. They are grateful for a university-wide initiative that has the support and resources of the Provost's and President's Office. Given the wide-ranging nature of the initiative, some challenges can arise in communicating the structure and range of their work to outside stakeholders, along with prioritizing and structuring the variety of work they are involved in across the university.

## Part Four: What did it produce or lead to?

The Democracy Initiative focuses on three interrelated facets of democratic engagement and research:

### Academic Research

The Initiative seeks to position Notre Dame for leadership on the academic study of democracy both locally and globally and launch educational programming across the University. This has included: launching the [Notre Dame Health of Democracy Survey](#) that tracks public sentiment on democratic values and civic attitudes; specific faculty and postdoctoral research recruitment on issues of democracy; forming four new research labs in the [Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy](#) supporting research on polarization, legislative institutions, religion and democracy, and women's representation in politics and government; creating the [Democracy Catalyst Grants](#), a \$1 million fund supporting student and faculty research projects on civic engagement starting in the 2024–25 academic year.

### Student Development

The Initiative has a specific focus on cultivating students for public service, including resourcing student groups, election-oriented programming, co-curricular opportunities, and experiential learning for students to get involved with civic engagement and democratic practice. They recently launched the [Democracy Fellowship](#) for undergraduate students across all disciplines, where Fellows help support Democracy Initiative sponsored "Democracy Talks" and commit to working on at least one

democracy-related project (including research, a class paper, an op-ed, internships or service-learning). Democracy Fellows are also given mentorship and research opportunities on campus around work advancing understandings of democracy, alongside funding to pursue a research project or a senior thesis related to these topics.

## Convening Scholarly and Public Engagement

In positioning the University as a critical non-partisan voice in conversations about democracy, the Democracy Initiative leads several campus-wide and public and scholarly engagement events throughout the year. Specifically, the initiative launched the inaugural [Global Democracy Conference](#) with the Kellogg Institute for International Studies with a focus on the state of democracy internationally, the Rooney Center's [Keeping the Republic Conference](#) on the state of American Democracy, and the [2023-2024 Notre Dame Forum on the Future of Democracy](#), which featured speakers including U.S. Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, social scientist Robert Putnam, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Maria Ressa. For students, they have recently launched a [Democracy Talks](#) series to foster civic engagement and responsible citizenship across campus. Finally, in an initial scan of the university's current involvement in democracy-related work, they have identified and engaged with over 120 projects on campus, from academic centers and institutes to student groups, internship programs, and interdisciplinary minors. They intend for the initiative to serve as a hub for coordinating and communicating this critical work to the broader campus and public as they continue their work in the coming years.