

Supporting U.S. Democracy and Equality

THE
CARTER CENTER



Transparent, equitable, and inclusive political processes are critical to ensuring public trust and broad participation, an acceptance of election results, peaceful resolution of disputes, and an engaged citizenry. This is especially important when elections take place in challenging circumstances – such as a global pandemic – and when there are high levels of political polarization.

Since its founding in 1982, The Carter Center has focused its efforts outside the United States. International projects continue to be central to the Center's mission, but recently it has begun using the expertise it developed abroad to help address problems at home, particularly those related to political polarization, democratic backsliding, and racial and gender inequality.

The Center is supporting U.S. elections by bolstering democratic norms and values, increasing trust and understanding of the electoral process, and developing networks and messaging to mitigate political violence. It also is working to support human rights, racial justice, and access to information for women in order to promote a more inclusive and just society.

Strengthening Democracy

In 2020, because of the challenges facing U.S. democracy, The Carter Center decided that for the first time in its history it would work on U.S. elections. Unfortunately, these challenges are likely to continue in future election cycles. With this in mind, the Center's Democracy Program is:

- **Contributing information about international best practices to election reform debates**, including through

annual events with the Baker Institute of Public Policy.

- **Bolstering democratic norms and values** by engaging with stakeholders across the political spectrum and developing a code of conduct that can be used to hold candidates and their supporters accountable to core democratic values.
- **Increasing trust and public understanding of the election process** through nonpartisan election observation and voter education and information campaigns.

- **Supporting election officials**, the frontline workers of our election processes, by providing tools and resources to help them ensure that our elections are transparent and secure and by sharing with them information about how to safeguard their own well-being and mental health.
- **Combating digital threats to democracy**, including by conducting data-driven research into the spread of viral misinformation and advocating for policy changes to reduce its harms, and collaborating with leaders in the field to develop digital literacy materials to help people critically evaluate online information.



Residents of Washoe County, Nevada, wait to vote on Nov. 4, 2020. The Carter Center wants to build more trust across the country in the U.S. election process.

Mitigating the Potential for Violence

As partisan polarization increases in the U.S., so does the risk of political and identity-based violence. **Constructive dialogue and civic engagement are critical** for resolving conflict and increasing respect for those with differing views.

During the 2020 election cycle, the Center's Conflict Resolution Program worked with

leaders in a handful of communities that had the potential to become flashpoints for political violence to help them disseminate messages promoting peaceful elections. Now it is building on that work by creating **conflict resilience networks** in Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, and Arizona — with plans to expand to other states.

These cross-partisan networks will represent diverse perspectives and will function as platforms for dialogue and information dissemination. They will be equipped to **respond rapidly to crises** and will serve as credible advocates for adherence to minimum democratic and nonviolence standards, including accepting legitimate election results and resolving disputes through dialogue.

To inform this work, Princeton University's Bridging Divides Initiative has created a Violence Risk Index that tracks measures of polarization and social trust; mobilization; and violence at the county level.

Supporting Human Rights and Racial Justice

The Carter Center holds regular Human Rights Defenders Forums in Atlanta that bring together activists, including those working in the U.S., to discuss pressing challenges. The forums **amplify defenders' voices** and help them develop support networks.

Discussions and network-building continue online through the Center's Forum on Human Rights website, which offers virtual conversations on important topics such as barriers to Native American participation in U.S. elections, systemic racism in U.S. policing, and social justice through the arts.

Recently, the Carter Center's Human Rights Program entered a partnership with The King Center and the consulting firm Freedom Road to **advance truth-telling efforts** through private and public convenings and a robust communications strategy. This will



Missouri community activist Rev. Dr. Cassandra Grant participates in a recent Human Rights Defenders Forum at The Carter Center. The forums help attendees form support networks and share strategies.

include working with evangelical churches to facilitate truth-telling within their congregations. The Center also is in the process of developing a truth-telling program specific to the Center's home state of Georgia. This initiative will apply a human rights framework to the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow and will result in recommendations for policymakers on ways to address historic injustices and advance human rights for all.

Increasing Women's Access to Information

The Carter Center's extensive research has shown that **women around the world have**

a harder time than men accessing public information.

To help change that, the Center's Rule of Law Program launched the Inform Women, Transform Lives campaign.

In addition to creating a global awareness-raising social media campaign, the team is working with a group of 13 international cities to help them reach more women with information about their beneficial city services.

Two of those cities are in the United States. Each identified

critical municipal services that are under-utilized by women. Atlanta is promoting an online COVID-19 recovery resource hub along with a website and hotline that provides information on all nonemergency services, including those related to gender-based violence, economic mobility, housing, health, community safety, and food access. Chicago is focusing its efforts on the CityKey, an easy-to-obtain official ID card that also serves as a library, transportation, and prescription discount card.

The Inform Women, Transform Lives campaign will expand to include a new group of cities in 2022.



Social media posts show how Chicago and Atlanta are promoting municipal services to women. The cities are two of 13 participating in a Carter Center campaign to increase women's access to government information.