



CONNECTED TO THE ISSUES

Threat 1:
Reluctance to Embrace Living Wages

Threat 2:
Hurdles to Health Care Access

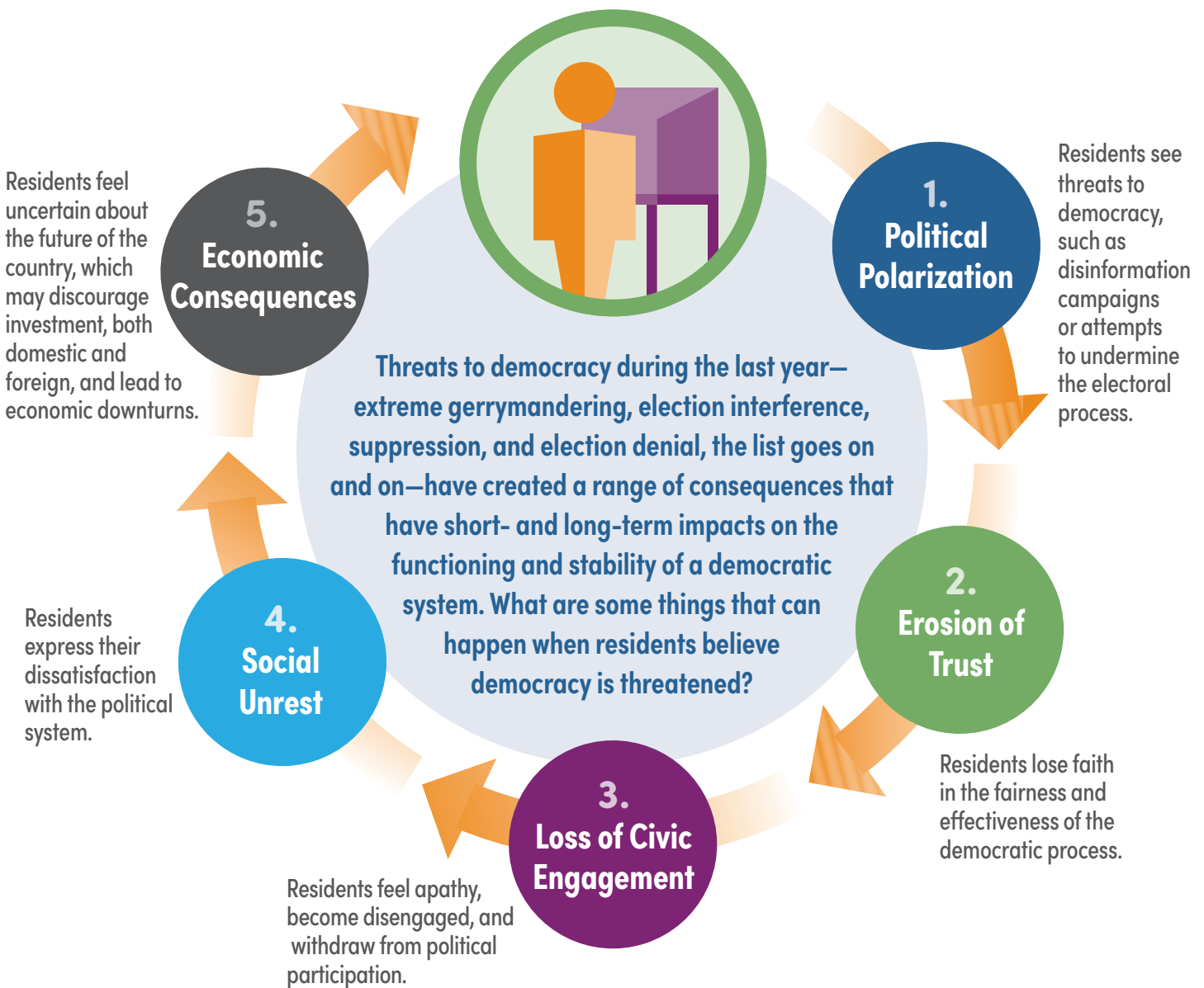
What to Watch 2024—Part 1

Democracy at a Crossroads: Navigating Threats and Charting the Course for the Future

In [What to Watch 2023](#), Advocacy & Communication Solutions (ACS) walked you through what a healthy democracy looks like—one that builds open, responsive, and accountable institutions and processes that serve the needs and preferences of the public. And, you read about how **you** can do your part to ensure a healthy democracy.

In 2024, ACS will examine some of those policy trends—in our workforce, health care systems, and schools—through two installments of our What to Watch Newsletter, through which we provide strategic insight into how we can navigate those threats in the coming year while working towards preserving democracy.

Democracy is a form of government in which the power to govern is placed in the hands of the people. Through the democratic process, those people make decisions and select their leaders. Residents participate in the democratic process in various ways beyond casting votes—through political activism, contacting representatives, community involvement, etc.



The health of our democracy is inextricably tied to the physical, emotional, and economic wellbeing of our people. When we are healthy and have the money and other resources we need to live safe and stable lives, we are more able and likely to participate in our communities, society, and democratic processes. Therefore, it is imperative that we fight against policies that threaten the safety and stability of our population and fight for those that provide (among other things) equitable and sustainable access to a living wage, affordable high-quality health care, and quality public education.

In the first installment below, ACS delves into two critical topics: living wage in our workforce and access to health care.

Happy Birthday ACS!

Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC, is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2024! Throughout this entire year, we will be looking back at our journey to get to where we are today, and looking forward to what the future has in store.



For 20 years we've helped our clients in nonprofits, for profits, government agencies, and philanthropic organizations successfully share their messages about target issues with key audiences, advocate for policy change, and position themselves as leaders in their respective fields. Just imagine what the next 20 years will bring!

Threat 1: Reluctance to Embrace Living Wages

Democracies thrive when there is equitable distribution of resources that fosters economic security. Economic security enables residents to focus on civic engagement rather than struggling to make ends meet. A living wage helps create economic security by ensuring people can meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, and health care. [Research](#) shows that when people are economically stable, they are more likely to vote, participate in community initiatives, and voice their opinions on public policies. In addition, a living wage contributes to reducing income inequality and provides more opportunities for education and personal development, which helps residents achieve their potential and contribute to society.

Policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels set the minimum wage, which is the lowest wage allowed by law. (Although \$15 per hour is currently cited as a living wage benchmark,

the estimated true living wage is [\\$20–\\$26](#) per hour, depending on where [one lives](#)).

The last time the federal minimum wage was increased—to \$7.25 per hour—was 2009. Advocates have been [pushing](#) for a federal minimum wage increase for more than a decade, most recently through the [2023 Raise the Wage Act, which would raise the minimum wage to \\$17 per hour by 2028 and impact 19 percent of the U.S. workforce](#). While progress at the federal level has stalled, many state and local policymakers have forged ahead. [Since 2012, more than 26 million workers](#) have won higher pay.

Fights for increased wages are gaining momentum across the country. If you are interested in getting involved in advocacy efforts to raise the minimum wage, visit raisetheminimumwage.com to learn more and find local campaigns.

United States Wages Ages 25 to 64 Earning \$15 per hour or more

68%
people of color



82%
white people



This disparity stems from current and historical racist policies and practices that kept and continue to keep people of color from accessing education and higher-paying careers.

Threat 1: What's on the Horizon for 2024?

In [2023](#), the minimum wage increased in 27 states and 59 cities and counties, reaching or exceeding \$15 per hour in 57 of those jurisdictions. In 2024, minimum wage increases [will take effect](#) in California, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, and Nebraska. Starting April 1, 2024, the minimum wage for California's 500,000 fast food workers will jump to \$20 per hour. It will be important to watch how these policies affect local and state economies, build economic security for workers and families, and potentially increase civic engagement.

Threat 2: Hurdles to Health Care Access

Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provide health coverage to more than [90 million](#) low-income individuals, including children, pregnant people, parents, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. Medicaid and CHIP ensure

that low-income individuals, including many vulnerable populations, have access to essential preventive care, mental health services, and long-term care services, making them more likely to be [healthy](#), active, and engaged residents who can meaningfully participate in the democratic process. (For more on the connection between health and voting policies in your state, visit democracyindex.hdhp.us/data.) From an economic perspective, Medicaid lowers out-of-pocket medical spending and medical debt, thus [increasing economic stability](#) and opening the door for people to participate more actively in political processes.

Since the option to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act became available to states in 2014, [41 states](#) have done so. In these states, [research](#) shows that Medicaid expansion has improved access to care, utilization of services, affordability of care, and financial security among low-income people.

Medicaid is a complex program and looks different in each state based on which federally approved options and policies the state adopts. For example, as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, states were able to extend postpartum coverage for new mothers for up to 12 months, and [35 states have implemented or plan to implement this option](#). Many states continue to [expand benefits](#) for mental health and/or substance

Threat 2: What's on the Horizon for 2024?

One challenge states will face in managing Medicaid in 2024 and beyond is the need to re-enroll people into Medicaid or move them to new plans, also called “redetermination.” This is because a federal COVID-related policy that allowed continuous coverage ended in April 2023.

Completing the paperwork for redetermination is a big barrier for many people, meaning many eligible individuals lose Medicaid coverage they deserve. This could lead to a decline in Medicaid enrollment of 8.6 percent in 2024, meaning that more than 7 million people could lose their health insurance. The federal government has required states to share how they plan to manage the redetermination process to minimize the negative impact on beneficiaries. Strategies include efforts to update beneficiary mailing addresses, process renewals over a longer period of time (12-14 months), follow up with individuals who need to take action to maintain their coverage, and expand the number of staff who re-enroll beneficiaries. States can also check electronic databases to verify people's eligibility before reaching out to beneficiaries, which reduces the burden on individuals to complete paperwork.

use disorder services. There also has been progress in recent years to [make it easier](#) for insurance companies to cover patients’ health-related social needs, like housing, transportation, and food. These policies will help more people get and stay healthy.

No matter where you live, you can help ensure eligible residents in your state maintain their Medicaid coverage by raising awareness. Check out [Healthlaw.org](#) for messages and materials you can share on your personal and organizational communication channels.

Look for What to Watch Part 2, where ACS dissects two more policy trends, this time examining those that impact our schools—parental “rights” and school vouchers.

WANT MORE?

Want to learn how communication, strategy development, advocacy, or capacity building can move your organization forward? Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?

Contact one of our team members, call toll free at 1-877-372-0166, or visit our website at [advocacyandcommunication.org](#).

Lori McClung, CEO

Scarlett Boudier, President

Cassie Gaffney, Senior Strategist

Lauren Sogor, Senior Strategist

Jennifer Judkins, Senior Communication Manager

Morgan Riley, Senior Operations and Administration Manager

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Fall 2023 Newsletter

The Great Reshuffle—Is a better deal in the cards for America's workforce?

Since the COVID pandemic, we've read countless stories of how America's employers are struggling to attract and retain employees—especially in industries such as hospitality, health care, and retail goods and services. There have been many theories for the seeming reluctance of people to rejoin the workforce, ranging from lack of childcare to a desire for more flexibility to manage the demands of home and work.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, nearly 100 million people (97.8 million to be exact) quit their jobs in 2021 and 2022 in what was dubbed "The Great Resignation." The Chamber notes that many of these workers who quit their post-pandemic jobs have since been hired elsewhere, making the "Great Resignation" more of a "Great Reshuffle." In September 2023, however, there were 6.6 million job openings across the country, but only 6.3 million unemployed workers—even as news outlets reported strong employment growth.¹

¹https://www.uschamber.com/economy/employment/great-resignation-2023/

Summer 2023 Newsletter

Effective Communication in a Post-Pandemic Work Environment: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The COVID-19 pandemic forced employers and employees in many industries to think differently about the way we all work. Some businesses were able to work remotely, and their employees had to adjust to that reality. This meant Zoom meetings instead of in-person meetings; more phone calls instead of passing one another at the water cooler or in the hallway; and managing all the activity without being face to face. When workers began to return to offices at the COVID-19 pandemic receded, communication of the workplace for everyone demanded yet another shift. In short, the office has forever changed, and communication in the hybrid world is a challenge that must be acknowledged.