Shaping Our Future

The largest deliberative democracy event for young people in the United States

#ShapingOurFuture

Prepared by COMM238 students at Stanford University
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ABOUT

Deliberative Polling

A rigorous social science method of public consultation that has been implemented in 30 countries, over 100 projects at varying jurisdiction levels, and on a variety of topics.

WELCOME!

It is our pleasure to welcome you to this deliberative discussion inspired by Deliberative Polling. During these two days, you will join your fellow students in discussing policy proposals for issues facing the United States today, and in hearing experts discuss those issues in response to your questions and concerns. This deliberative discussion is inspired by Deliberative Polling, a rigorous social science method of public consultation that has been implemented in 30 countries, over 100 projects at varying jurisdiction levels, and on a variety of topics. To help prepare you to discuss the issues, we have produced this briefing material. It contains background analysis and competing arguments for and against different policy proposals: a Civilian Climate Corps, universal basic income, a tax on the wealthy, electoral reform, and a regional minimum wage. Each issue briefing brings together different points of view.

WHAT IS DELIBERATIVE POLLING?

Pioneered by James Fishkin at Stanford University’s Center for Deliberative Democracy, Deliberative Polling® is an attempt to use public opinion research in a new and constructive way. The polling process reveals the conclusions the public would reach if people had the opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues. Usually with random sampling that is representative of national demographics, Deliberative Polls are used to understand what the public will look like if the people were given the platform and information necessary to engage with others.

THE PROPOSALS

This briefing material is created to lay out proposals to that cover issues at the forefront of political discussions in the United States that may be particularly interesting to young people. Why is it important to discuss these topics? Although young people are often very interested in political issues, many express not feeling like they have a real opportunity for expression and to learn more. This is a perfect opportunity for you to share your opinions, hear the opinions of others and ask any questions that can be helpful in understanding the issues you are exposed to. You don't have to agree with your peers! The idea is to have a respectful exchange of ideas.
Plenary Experts & Moderators

**Alexander Keyssar** is the Matthew W. Stirling Jr. Professor of History and Social Policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He is the author of “Why Do We Still Have the Electoral College?” which traces the origins of the Electoral College and the historical efforts to reform it.

**Cynthia Richie Terrell** is the founder and Executive Director of RepresentWomen and a founder of FairVote. She is an advocate for electoral reforms to advance women’s representation and leadership in the United States, including ranked-choice voting.

**David Kopel** is the Research Director of the Independence Institute; an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute; and adjunct Professor of Advanced Constitutional Law at Denver University’s Sturm College of Law. He has authored scholarly articles on the constitutionality of a national popular vote.

**Eileen Reavey** is the National Grassroots Director of National Popular Vote Inc, a non-profit dedicated to the promotion of the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact.
**Norman Williams** is the Ken & Claudia Peterson Professor of Law at Willamette University College of Law and the Director of the Willamette Center for Constitutional Government. In addition to teaching Constitutional and election law, he has authored numerous scholarly articles on the constitutionality of Electoral College reform.

**Lawrence Lessig** is a law professor at Harvard University and an activist. Lessig's career began with a focus on constitutional and comparative constitutional law. Beginning in the mid-1990s, his focus shifted to the internet and intellectual property. Since 2007, his focus has been on institutional corruption, and the fight to establish a representative democracy in America.

**Violet Saena** is the Executive Director of Climate Resilient Communities. Saena has served as an international climate change expert for over 10 years and has worked with various groups in a wide range of Less Developed Countries (LDCs) to protect their communities from the impacts of climate change.

**Kif Scheuer** is Climate Action Corps Director at California Volunteers, Office of the Governor where he leads development and growth of the California Climate Action Corps the country’s first state-level climate service corps designed to foster meaningful opportunities for all Californians to act on climate. He was previously the Climate Change Director at the Local Government Commission. Scheuer was also the Sustainable Communities Program Director at Strategic Energy Innovations, where he headed the firm’s work on Climate Corps Bay Area.
Anat Admati is a Professor of Finance and Economics at Stanford University Graduate School of Business, a director of the Corporations and Society Initiative, and a senior fellow at Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research. She is the co-author of the award-winning book *The Bankers’ New Clothes: What’s Wrong with Banking and What to Do About It*. In 2014, she was named by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 most influential people in the world and by *Foreign Policy Magazine* as among 100 global thinkers.

Lanhee Chen is a Fellow in American Public Policy Studies at the Hoover Institution and Director of Domestic Policy Studies and Lecturer in the Public Policy Program at Stanford University. Chen has worked in politics, government, academia, and the private sector. He has advised numerous major campaigns, including four presidential efforts.

Mia Charity is the Chief Development Officer at the Close Up Foundation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic education organization in Washington, D.C. Close Up offers programming to educate and encourage young people to participate in their civic affairs and government.

Stephen Nuñez is the Lead Researcher on Guaranteed Income (GI) at the Jain Family Institute where he leads research into guaranteed income policy, testing its practical application and design. Previously, Nuñez was Research Manager at ImpactMatters and a Research Associate in MDRC’s Low-Wage Workers and Communities policy area. He has over a decade of experience in research and program evaluation, with special expertise in housing, workforce, and community development.
Acknowledgements

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Lastly, we would like to thank the Stanford Center for Deliberative Democracy for their support and acknowledge the student-organizers at Stanford who aided in planning this event as a part of the University's Comm 238 practicum class.
Day 1

Click here for videos on what will be covered today!
Introduction

In the United States, we elect our president through the Electoral College. This system has governed presidential elections for our nation’s entire history and, for much of that history, it has been the subject of political controversy. So, for the first time in American history, we are bringing thousands of Americans together to begin a national discussion on the way we elect presidents.

You’ll be a part of an hour-long discussion on a specially designed video chat platform. On this platform, you’ll be assigned to a small, diverse group of your fellow Americans. In this group, you’ll learn how the Electoral College works, some of the proposals for changing it, and the arguments for and against those changes.

No one is expecting you to have any prior knowledge about this topic. But this is your country; your opinions and your experiences matter. No one is trying to commit you to any particular answer, and you don’t have to agree or disagree with your group members. We just want to know what you think would be best.

This will show us what Americans really think about the way we elect presidents when they are able to discuss it together. More fundamentally, you’ll be part of an inclusive, national conversation about the future of the American electoral system, a conversation that can bridge the divides in our society and reveal some common ground.

Welcome to the conversation. We hope you enjoy it.
A National Popular Vote

The **Electoral College** is made up of 538 **electoral votes** distributed across all 50 states and Washington, D.C. When you cast a ballot for president, your vote helps determine which candidate will receive your state's electoral votes. In order to win the presidency, a candidate must win a majority of those electoral votes—at least 270.¹

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**The Electoral College**
The Electoral College is the system for electing presidents in the United States. In this system, a candidate must win a majority of the 538 electoral votes distributed between the states and Washington D.C. to be elected president.

**Electoral Votes**
The number of electoral votes a state gets is equal to the number of members (Senators and Representatives) it has in the United States Congress.

The number of electoral votes a state gets is equal to the number of Senators and Representatives it has in the United States Congress. Since every state gets two Senators and at least one Representative in the House, every state gets at least three electoral votes.

Some people argue that this formula creates an important inequality.

Since every state gets at least three electoral votes regardless of population, smaller states generally have more electoral votes per voter than larger states.² For example, in 2016, about 250,000 people voted in Wyoming,³ That means each of Wyoming’s three electoral votes represented about 85,000 voters.⁴ But in that same year, almost 9 million people voted in Texas, so each of that state’s 38 electoral votes represented about 240,000 voters⁵—almost three times as many.

Some people think that this inequality makes the Electoral College fairer. They argue that the greater electoral votes per voter among smaller states ensures that all states have an important role in selecting the president—even if the consequence
is a less equal system. Others believe that the Electoral College violates an important democratic principle—**one person, one vote**. They argue that because all citizens should be equal, we should all have an equal voice in selecting our president.

This inequality is one reason why some people believe we should elect the president by a **national popular vote**. With a national popular vote, whichever candidate wins the most votes nationwide would become the president. With a national popular vote, all votes would carry equal weight, regardless of what state they were cast in. A national popular vote would, by definition, prevent a situation where a candidate loses the presidency despite winning the most votes, which has happened several times in American history.

But some worry that a national popular vote might encourage candidates to devote most of their attention to urban and suburban areas, where voters are most concentrated, and overlook rural places. They also believe that a national popular vote ignores a key part of the way American government is set up. In the United States, power is divided between the national and state governments. This is called **federalism**. The states have certain autonomy and political power, regardless of their population, similar to countries in the United Nations. The Electoral College reflects this by giving every state a minimum of three electoral votes, regardless of population. Some are concerned that a national popular vote would move us away from this federal system.

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**IN FAVOR OF A NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE,**

With a national popular vote, each person’s vote counts equally. This reflects the important principle of one person one vote.

A national popular vote would ensure that the candidate with the most votes nationwide becomes the president. The winner of the popular vote should never lose the election.

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**IN FAVOR OF THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE,**

The greater electoral votes per voter given to smaller states makes the Electoral College fairer. Without it, smaller states and rural areas may not have fair influence over the results of elections.

The Electoral College reflects our federal system, where every state has a certain amount of influence, regardless of population. A national popular vote would move us away from this federal system.

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**One person, one vote**

“One person, one vote” is a principle of democracy that holds that everyone’s votes should carry equal weight.

**National popular vote**

In this system, the candidate who wins the most votes nationwide wins the presidency.

**Federalism**

Federalism is a principle of American democracy that holds that states should maintain some autonomy from the federal government.
Endnotes

1 There are rare instances in which the number of electoral votes is less than 538, specifically if any state fails to choose a slate of Electoral College electors in time. In such circumstances, the required majority will also be less than 270.


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


9 Ibid.
Fractional Proportional

To award electoral votes, 48 states and Washington D.C. use a system known as winner-take-all. In winner-take-all, the candidate who wins the most votes in a state receives all of that state’s electoral votes. The Constitution gives states the power to independently choose how they award their electoral votes and, over time, most states chose winner-take-all.

But winner-take-all comes with some controversy.

Because candidates only need to win the most votes (not a majority), they can win a state even if a large share of the state’s voters prefer another candidate. For example, in the presidential election of 1992, Bill Clinton won only 37% of the vote in Nevada. 63% of Nevadans voted for the other two candidates. But because Clinton received more votes than each of the other two candidates, he won all of Nevada’s electoral votes.

Moreover, some argue that winner-take-all ignores the votes cast for the losing candidate. If all electoral votes go to one candidate, those who voted for the runner-up don't have their preferences reflected in the national tally of electoral votes. Because margins of victory don't matter, just whether a candidate wins a state or not, winner-take-all makes it more likely for a candidate to win the presidency without winning the most votes nationwide.

A second concern with winner-take-all is that it gives disproportionate influence to swing states. Because of winner-take-all, which candidate will win in which states is fairly predictable each election. Take Kentucky, for example. A Republican candidate knows that they are almost certainly going to win Kentucky and a Democratic candidate knows that they are probably going to lose it. After all, this is what has happened for the past six elections. As a result, neither candidate will have a strong motivation to campaign there. The same goes for California, which is usually won by a Democrat.

States with predictable outcomes are sometimes known as “spectator states” because, after the primaries, these states don’t receive much attention from presidential campaigns. Instead campaigns focus their efforts on the handful of

Winner-take-all

Winner-take-all is a system used by most states for allocating electoral votes to candidates. In winner-take-all, the candidate who wins the most votes in the state receives all of the electoral votes of that state.

Spectator state

A spectator state is any state in which it is very likely that either the Democratic or the Republican presidential candidate will win the state in the general election. These states are usually ignored by candidates during general election campaigns.
states that are less predictable. They want to “swing” these states to their side. In 2016, there were 14 swing states. Those states saw 94% of all general election campaign appearances and, during the last month of the election, 99% of all campaign spending on advertisements.

### Swing States in 2016

![Map of Swing States in 2016]

A swing state is any state in which it is unclear whether it will be won by the Democratic or Republican presidential candidate in the general election. These states are heavily targeted by candidates during general election campaigns.

### Campaign Events in 2016

![Map of Campaign Events in 2016]

This strikes some people as unfair. In 2016, swing states contained only a third of the national population, their population was older and whiter than the country as a whole, and their key industries differed from the rest of the country. This focus on swing states may also have unfair consequences. Research indicates that swing states may get preferential treatment from federal spending and policy. In addition, voters in non-swing states may not feel that their votes count for as much, which would explain why voter turnout in swing states is often 10-15% higher.
than non-swing states.¹⁴

Others argue that the focus on swing states isn’t a problem because which states are swing states changes over time. If voters in a non-swing state are consistently ignored or taken for granted by their party, they may swing to the other party.¹⁵

A national popular vote would leave no vote unrepresented in the national tally and end the swing state, spectator state dynamic, spreading campaigning throughout more states. But another proposal is to award electoral votes proportionally between the top two candidates in the state. This system is known as fractional proportional. Through fractional proportional, the electoral votes of a state would be awarded to the top two candidates in that state based on what fraction of the vote they get. So if the Democratic candidate received 45% of the vote in Texas, that candidate would receive 45% of Texas’ electoral votes (17.1). And if the Republican received 45% of the votes from California, that candidate would receive 45% of California’s electoral votes (24.75). With fractional proportional, the votes for the top two candidates in every state would be reflected in the national tally of electoral votes, rather than just one candidate as currently happens with winner-take-all. Moreover, there would no longer be swing states and spectator states because candidates would have a reason to fight for every vote in every state.

Fractional proportional changes the Electoral College less than a national popular vote. Small states would still have an electoral advantage. Some note that winner-take-all makes it difficult for there to be more than two powerful political parties.²⁰ By contrast, fractional proportional would make it more likely that a third-party candidate with enough support would result in no candidate reaching the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency.²¹ This would lead to a contingent election. In a contingent election, the House of Representatives elects the president with each state receiving just one vote, regardless of population.²² Although contingent elections are rare, some people worry this would move us even further away from the idea of “one person, one vote,” since a small state like Rhode Island would have the same vote as a large state like California.

Fractional proportional is a potential alternative to the winner-take-all system. In this system, the electoral votes of a state are awarded to each candidate based on what proportion of the vote they get.

Contingent election
If no candidate receives a majority of electoral votes, a contingent election decides the winner of the election. A contingent election occurs in the House of Representatives. Each state in the House casts a single vote for president and the candidate who receives a majority of these votes becomes the president.
IN FAVOR OF FRACTIONAL PROPORTIONAL,

Fractional proportional would lead to candidates campaigning in non-swing states. Currently, swing states get most of the attention in presidential elections.

Fractional proportional would ensure that votes, even for the less popular candidate, are reflected in a state’s allocation of electoral votes to candidates. This would ensure that all voters are represented in the national tally of electoral votes.

Unlike a national popular vote, fractional proportional maintains the small state advantage in electoral votes per voter.

IN FAVOR OF WINNER-TAKE-ALL,

Although winner-take-all focuses presidential campaigns on a few swing states, which states are swing states changes overtime. Voters in spectator states cannot be entirely ignored by candidates, lest their state becomes a swing state.

Fractional proportional could make it more likely that elections would result in a contingent election. This would lead to the House of Representatives choosing the president, a outcome which some may consider illegitimate.
Endnotes


11 Ibid.


13 Ibid.


 Ranked-Choice Voting

In every state except two, voters mark just one presidential candidate on their ballot. That candidate gets their vote. Whichever candidate gets the most votes like this wins the state. Whichever candidates gets the most votes wins the race. This is known as plurality voting. It’s the simplest way to have people vote in a democracy, but it’s not the only way. There is one alternative that has recently been gaining prominence and has been adopted by Maine and Alaska for presidential elections: ranked-choice voting (RCV).

Plurality voting
An electoral system in which citizens vote for one candidate and the candidate who gets the most votes wins.

Ranked-choice voting
An electoral system in which voters rank the candidates in order of preference and whichever candidate receives majority support wins.

In this system, voters rank the candidates in order of preference. Once the ballots are in, the first-choice votes are counted. If a candidate receives a majority of first-choice votes, they win the election. If, however, no candidate earns a majority of first-choice votes, the candidate with the least first-choice votes is eliminated. The votes are then counted again in an “instant run-off”, but this time, all those who ranked the eliminated candidate first have their second choice counted. If, again, no candidate secures a majority, another candidate is eliminated and another “instant run-off” is conducted. This proceeds until one candidate receives a majority of support.

- Round 1
  - Candidate A
  - Candidate B
  - Candidate C

- Round 2
  - Candidate A
  - Candidate B
  - Candidate C

A ballot of voters who had to rank any other candidates.
With winner-take-all, RCV could ensure that the winning candidate in a state has majority support. With fractional proportional, RCV could prevent a third-party candidate from causing a contingent election. And in the case of a national popular vote, RCV would ensure that the winning candidate has majority support nationwide.

Proponents of RCV point to a few benefits. RCV ensures the winner of an election secures a majority. Research also indicates that RCV may make elections more civil, by encouraging candidates to appeal to all sides to secure a majority. But the key benefit of RCV is that it reduces the chance of the "spoiler effect." An election is "spoiled" when, for example, there are three candidates, but the top two candidates are very similar. As a result, supporters split their votes between the top two candidates, so the least popular candidate ends up winning, even though voters would have preferred either of the top two candidates more. Ranked-choice voting makes spoilers like this a lot less likely because, in an instant run-off, one of the top two candidates will secure a majority.

Because spoilers are less likely, RCV allows voters to show support for a longshot third-party or independent candidate without worrying about "wasting" their vote. They can rank the candidate that they like the most as their first choice. And, if their preferred candidate is eliminated, their vote will likely be transferred to their second choice who may be more likely to win.

But some people think that RCV comes with its own problems. For one thing, RCV is more complicated than plurality voting. This could mean some voters would struggle to complete their ballots or feel discouraged from voting, especially those who know less about politics. Negative campaigning still occurs under RCV. And RCV may also lead to more people being dissatisfied with the result of a presidential election if a candidate won without receiving the most first-choice votes. Finally, some worry about the candidates who would be likely to win under RCV. Some argue that it is better to elect a candidate who is willing to take a strong stance on issues, even if that polarizes some voters, rather than elect a candidate with broader appeal.
IN FAVOR OF RANKED-CHOICE VOTING,

Ranked-choice voting (RCV) ensures that the winning candidate receives majority support. It is important for a winning candidate to have the support of most of the voters.

By mostly eliminating the “spoiler effect,” RCV enables voters to support third-party or independent candidates without fear of “wasting” their vote. This would allow voters to express their discontent with the two major political parties.

RCV may make elections more civil, by encouraging candidates to appeal to voters who support other candidates first. This could make elections less polarizing and reduce partisan divides.

IN FAVOR OF PLURALITY VOTING,

RCV may select candidates with broader appeal, but perhaps this is not a good thing. It may be better for candidates to take strong, even polarizing stances on issues like in plurality voting.

RCV is complicated. Voters, especially those who are less politically engaged, may have trouble understanding how to complete their ballots.

RCV may lead to more people being dissatisfied with the result of a presidential election if a candidate wins without receiving the most first-choice votes.
Endnotes


26 This is only a majority of fully completed ballots.

27 This assumes that all states are using RCV for presidential elections.


Day 2

Click here for videos on what will be covered today!
In January of 2021, President Biden announced his intent to create a Civilian Climate Corps (CCC) that will "mobilize the next generation of conservation and resilience workers and maximize the creation of accessible training opportunities and good jobs" in order to “conserve and restore public lands and waters, bolster community resilience, increase reforestation, increase carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protect biodiversity, improve access to recreation, and address the changing climate.”

Even more recently, on April 1, 2021, Senators Coons, Heinrich, Luján, Neguse, and Spanberger introduced a bill that would formalize this order. The legislation would establish a Civilian Climate Corps with the goals of putting Americans to work in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and helping communities address climate change issues. The same week, the White House announced support for $10 billion to establish a Civilian Climate Corps as part of President Biden’s American Jobs Plan. As Sen. Coors stated:

“Eighty-eight years ago, President Roosevelt tapped into the power of national service to address the unemployment crisis caused by the Great Depression and restore our environment when he created the Civilian Conservation Corps... Now, as our country faces the COVID-19 pandemic and the threats posed by climate change, we have another opportunity to address both challenges simultaneously. The Civilian Climate Corps Act will provide opportunities for people across the country to help the most vulnerable communities prepare for the impacts of climate change.”
Civilian Climate Corps Funding

At the appropriate scale, the Civilian Climate Corps could become a cornerstone of economic recovery by connecting its participants to training and employment; by building a force to tackle the climate emergency; and by cultivating a more resilient nation, community by community. While the program is still in development, questions have arisen around how many participants the CCC should support. One possible path forward is to expand the organization to 3 million members, compensated at a living wage.

Youth populations recognize the urgency of the climate crisis. For example, the International Youth Climate Movement (IYCM) is a growing campaign that is building “education, creating awareness, and taking action on climate change.” Sparked by Greta Thunberg who began skipping school to protest the atrocities of climate change, the movement has mobilized 14 million activists in 7,500 cities.

Given a rising sense of polarization in the US over the last decade, national service could also fulfill the function of strengthening social bonds and healing divides. As a recent report from the Brookings Institution argues, public service can help to “rebuild civic and social connections by bringing participants from different backgrounds, income levels, races, ethnicities, and areas of the country together in shared experiences to solve public challenges.” Moreover, public service programs could be crucial to mitigating post-pandemic unemployment among youth populations, and could significantly decrease the economic hardships they face in the future.

Some people argue that national service is a cost-effective method to address pressing issues in the United States. A Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education report found that in the U.S. youth national service programs cost $1.7 billion total annually and returned a value of $6.5 billion, which created a social benefit of 3.95 times more than the cost. Policy Study Associates found that schools that had support from the existing national service program City Year AmeriCorps were two- to three times more likely to see improvements in English and math proficiency among students.

AmeriCorps members helped 25,000 unemployed coal miners in Eastern Kentucky find jobs in other industries and contributed to a 26% decrease in violent crime in Detroit by forming neighborhood watches and escorting kids to school. If the number of participants grows, and the resulting benefits would accordingly increase.

Public service is an opportunity for those who can work to do so and further the public good. As Joe Heck, Chairman of the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, stated, in "a country of more than 329 million people, the extraordinary potential for service is largely untapped."
Opponents of expanding national service programs point out that the scale of expansion being proposed would be prohibitively expensive, especially at a moment of record-high federal budget deficits. They also point out the current stipend levels for national service programs are unacceptably low, requiring young people to live in poverty. The living stipend for an Americorps VISTA volunteer in 2020 was less than $15,000, which is not enough in many parts of the country to cover basic living expenses. But even assuming this stipend, expanding to 1,000,000 positions as some have suggested would require a minimum annual budget of $15 million dollars, which would not include the cost to administer the program.

While national service is cost-effective, this does not necessarily make it the most financially optimal investment in terms of returns. Other government programs have higher returns than youth programs. For example, NASA has an estimated ROI of $7 to $14 of new revenue for every $1 spent by the government on the program. Thus, there may be more cost-effective ways to invest in solving climate change. 49

Additionally, some argue that national service doesn't need to be expanded because the volunteer system is already booming. 28% of millennials already do volunteer work, for a total of 1.5 billion community service hours annually. Limitless voluntary programs and volunteer opportunities—federally funded and otherwise not—exist throughout the country. Since AmeriCorps was founded in 1993, over 800,000 participants have completed more than one billion service hours. Applications already outpace funding and capacity, meaning that forcing more people to participate would be difficult. As recent as 2016, there were 15 qualified would-be volunteers for every available AmeriCorps spot. The infrastructure cost to scale the organizational capacity and absorb these newly formed volunteer positions would be extremely costly.

At a time when government spending has reached an all-time high with the 2020 $2.3 trillion coronavirus relief bill and recently President Joe Biden’s 2021 $1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package, many are worried that increasing spending even further could lead to severe economic consequences. Deficit spending, or providing more services than taxes pay for, increases public debt, which in turn threatens to trigger higher inflation, interest rates, and capital flight. Over time, the cost of servicing this huge increase in debt will become a larger portion of the budget, which ultimately results in taxpayers getting less than they pay for. So while the reported social benefit of youth service programs may be almost 4 times the cost, this could erode given rising inflation. The $10 billion bill proposed by Biden would expand AmeriCorps membership from 75,000 to 250,000 over the next three years, as well as increase the living stipend for members. Increasing membership in the CCC to 3 million members would require a significant increase in public spending for national service.

These benefits and drawbacks must be taken into account as we determine whether service in the CCC will be voluntary or compulsory.
In considering the proposal of increasing membership of the CCC, it is possible to consider the objections and moral obligations people may raise as a result of their beliefs regarding climate change. How would you feel about being mandated to serve for a year? Would you participate in the CCC or a different organization you found independently? Should we instead gradually increase membership? Is taxpayer money better invested in other ways? Are there better ways to address climate change with public funds?

### Keywords

**Living wage**: The minimum income necessary to support workers and their basic needs in a given location.
Vulnerable Communities & the Civilian Climate Corps

Scholarship and research studies have shown that the effects of climate change are concentrated among specific populations. The 2018 Fourth National Climate Assessment found that:

*Impacts within and across regions will not be distributed equally. People who are already vulnerable, including lower-income and other marginalized communities, have a lower capacity to prepare for and cope with extreme weather and climate-related events and are expected to experience greater impacts.*

Likewise, the World Economic Forum asserts that “communities of colour are disproportionately burdened with health hazards” related to environmental pollutants. Finally, the NAACP notes that “race is the number one indicator for the placement of toxic facilities” in the US. Given the evidence that climate change will not impact everyone to the same extent, it is worth examining the role the most vulnerable communities should play in the CCC.

Some people argue that communities disproportionately impacted by climate change have important insights into how to combat climate change around the world. Therefore, they argue, these communities ought to be represented to a greater degree in the CCC and similar organizations. This already happens in groups like Intersectional Environmentalist, Indigenous Climate Action, and the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program. Each of these initiatives considers the relation between climate impacts and factors like race, class, and region.

Moreover, supporters argue that the benefits and impacts of the projects executed by the CCC need to be centered where the risk is greatest; ensuring that the most vulnerable communities play a larger role in the CCC is a vital step to ensuring that the projects reach this goal. Communities that have historically been impacted by climate change have important insights on climate action largely because they have already experienced the detrimental effects of climate change. Therefore, they should take up a disproportionate role in programs like the CCC. Indeed, in order for the CCC’s projects to be sustained in the long term, it is critical that the communities have the capacity to carry on with them beyond the scope of the CCC, thus ensuring that they are the ones setting the agenda would increase the likelihood that the projects are in line with local needs, realistic, and achievable, and would build capacity in frontline communities.
Supporters also contend that it is fair for members of impacted communities to be disproportionately represented in climate action organizations like CCC because they are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Given the disproportionate impact of the climate crisis on certain communities, members of those communities should assume leadership roles at the forefront of climate action, including in the CCC. While low-income communities, communities of color, and Indigenous communities disproportionately experience the effects of climate change, those same communities have historically been under-represented in decision-making around climate action. As such, weighting the input of stakeholders from impacted communities offers a way to redress the structural inequalities of the previous under-representation. This would also contribute to diverse leadership in the climate field by grounding the work in frontline communities and encouraging those most affected to join because they could help their own communities.

On the other hand, some argue that it is fundamentally unfair for members of impacted communities to be disproportionately represented in climate action organizations because that violates the idea of equal and civil rights. The impacts of climate change are not restricted to a single community or set of communities. As such, the scope of the CCC should be calibrated to the far-reaching, widespread effects of climate change rather than focused on a specific set of communities. Leadership in climate action should be restricted to figures who will weigh the needs of all communities equally, without privileging any one given community over another. Moreover, some argue that the process of designating certain communities “disproportionately impacted” can be very subjective, and thus should not be incorporated into policy-making and climate action.

Foregrounding disproportionately impacted communities may result in unevenly distributed climate action, or result in certain communities’ needs being addressed while others’ are inadequately met. The CCC is not the only step and not the final step in the climate fight; CCC is both a political lever and a climate program. We want to build a legacy and momentum nationally, some argue, and having a program skew strongly towards impacted communities may leave other communities less engaged in the climate fight and thus less supportive of long-term climate action, which ironically might actually undermine the achievement of long-term benefits for impacted communities while having near-term benefits for those same communities.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
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<th>Arguments Against</th>
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<tr>
<td>The communities most vulnerable to climate change should determine the projects and priorities of the Civilian Climate Corps.</td>
<td>The benefits and impacts of these projects need to be centered where the risk is greatest: ensuring that the most vulnerable communities play a larger role in the CCC is a vital step to ensuring that the projects reach this goal. Building capacity in frontline communities would leave a legacy of strength after the program ends. It is fair for members of impacted communities to be disproportionately represented in climate action organizations like CCC because they are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Communities that have historically been impacted by climate change have important insights on climate action. Therefore, they should take up a disproportionate role in programs like the CCC. While low-income communities, communities of color, and indigenous communities disproportionately experience the effects of climate change, those same communities have historically been under-represented in decision-making around climate action. As such, weighting the input of stakeholders from impacted communities offers a way to redress the structural inequalities of previous under-representation. This would also contribute to diverse leadership in the climate field by grounding the work in frontline communities and encouraging those most affected to join because they can help their own communities.</td>
<td>It is unfair for members of impacted communities to be disproportionately represented in climate action organizations because that violates the idea of equal and civil rights. Because the impacts of climate change are not restricted to a single community or set of communities the scope of the CCC should be calibrated to the far-reaching, widespread effects of climate change rather than focused on a specific set of communities. Leadership in climate action should be restricted to figures who will weigh the needs of all communities equally, without privileging any one given community over another. The process of designating certain communities “disproportionately impacted” can be very subjective, and thus should not be incorporated into policymaking and climate action. Foregrounding disproportionately impacted communities may result in unevenly distributed climate action or result in certain communities’ needs being addressed while others’ are inadequately met. If we want to build a legacy and momentum for climate action nationally, having a program skew strongly towards impacted communities may leave other communities less engaged in the climate fight and thus less supportive of long-term climate action, which might undermine achievement of long-term benefits for impacted communities while having near term benefits for those same communities.</td>
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**Questions to Consider**

How do you feel about the over-representation of some people in leadership? How should being more vulnerable to climate change affect how you are represented in climate action, like the CCC? How might this kind of approach reduce national support for climate action? What are some alternatives for ensuring that the impact of the CCC reaches the most vulnerable communities and areas?

**Keywords**

**Vulnerable communities**: Communities most affected by the environmental effects of climate change, such as people of color who are more likely to live near sites with higher rates of pollution, and Indigenous populations whose land may be under threat due to fossil industry practices. A metric would be created by the government where communities receive a score to determine the amount of impact a community faces.
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Income inequality is rapidly rising in the United States, witnessing an increase of 20% between 1980 and 2016. One of the most notable trends is that the wealth gap between upper- and lower-income families is widening, while the share of income held by middle-income families is falling.

Some argue that inequality in and of itself is not worrisome as long as free markets are working well because individuals have the opportunity to work and thus improve their economic standing regardless of the wealth gap. This line of argument claims that the amount earned by the top 1% of the population “has no bearing on whether the bottom 20% can move up,” which means that inequality is not a barrier to upward mobility.

On the other hand, although it is not a universal conclusion that income and wealth inequality should be a source of concern, there is substantial evidence that demonstrates the adverse effects of inequality on society as a whole. Rising income and wealth inequality has been linked with political instability, lowered economic growth, increased health and social problems, and an overall lower level of happiness and life satisfaction among the population. Some argue that people with less wealth and lower incomes may experience less economic opportunity and mobility as inequality rises. Others warn that the disadvantaged may also experience a negative effect on their political influence, as inequality gives the wealthy a disproportionately share of power in the political sphere. In this way, while there is a debate on how much inequality is tolerable within society, many agree that the current trend could have far-reaching consequences. If we understand inequality to be an issue in the United States, it is necessary to consider potential policy solutions to this problem.
Regional Minimum Wage

The current federal minimum wage is $7.95 per hour, a rate that has not increased since 2009. Many economists and labor groups agree that Congress should raise the federal minimum wage, but there is less consensus about what the new wage should be. The minimum wage policy aims to prevent the exploitation of workers and pull people out of poverty by requiring a base rate compensation of labor. With the federal minimum wage extremely low and remaining stagnant, many Americans living off of minimum wage have been unable to keep up with the increased cost of living. Additionally, many point to the unchanging minimum wage as another force contributing to economic inequality. This remains a massive issue in the U.S.; as of October 2020, the Fed reported that the top 1% of income earners hold 30.4% of household wealth in the U.S. while only 1.9% of all wealth is held by the bottom 50% of the U.S. income earners.

There are many proposals to adjust the minimum wage to ensure all full-time workers can earn a livable wage. Many labor groups and unions advocate for a $15.00/hour minimum wage, which the Congressional Budget Office estimates would affect 27 million workers and lift 1 million out of poverty. The annual income poverty line for families of two in 2021 was $17,420; however, a person working 40 hours, 52 weeks in a year would earn $15,080 if they earned the federal minimum wage. Many advocates for an increase in federal minimum wage see it as an opportunity to draw a large portion of the American population above this poverty line. On the other hand, many are concerned that such a policy would place too much pressure on employers who are already struggling to pay their employees after the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in states like Kentucky or Alabama where the state minimum wage is at the current federal level. Opponents of a $15.00 minimum wage note that the cost of living varies widely across the U.S., and that such a significant increase would disproportionately impact employers in states or communities where costs are lower. Additionally, economists estimate a $15.00 minimum wage would lead to between 500,000 to 1.5 million lost jobs as employers reduce their number of workers in response to this higher wage. Proponents of the $15.00 wage note that the increase would be gradual over five years to give companies time to adjust, and that variation in the cost of living across the U.S. has narrowed.
An alternative proposal is the implementation of a regional minimum wage. A regional minimum wage would be based on the cost of living and current wage in a given area, and would automatically increase over time with inflation. The United States is “made up of hundreds of micro-economies,” and the purchasing power of the dollar varies greatly depending on where you are located. For example, the average home value in West Virginia is $107,064, while in California it is $579,332. Under this proposal, the minimum wage would be higher in states like California that have a high cost of living. Many argue that this will more effectively draw Americans out of poverty. First, it will not put so much strain on employers and allow them to retain their current amount of employees. Second, the employees will still be compensated enough to succeed in their community’s economy. The goal of this proposal is to raise the minimum wage enough so that the number of full-time workers pulled out of poverty is optimized while not raising it too high to cause “automation, a reduction in low-wage worker hours, or off-shoring.”

Additionally, with the minimum wage being tied to inflation in a given area and automatically increasing overtime, minimum wage adjustments will no longer have to wait for congressional approval. This remains a massive draw to the proposal as stagnation in this policy area has led to a continuous decrease in the value of minimum wage over the past twelve years with the devaluation of the dollar. Congress will no longer have to play catch up with inflation, as minimum wage will be adjusted automatically.
Another argument in support of the regional minimum wage is that it could act as an equalizing lever in the purchasing power in different areas. Jim Kessler and Ryan Zamarripa from Third Way, a policy think-tank, propose a five-tier regional minimum wage. Table 2 illustrates the projected purchasing power after the implementation of such an approach. They argue that a regional approach would more effectively equalize purchasing power across the U.S.

The Economic Policy Institute compared this regional minimum wage proposal to the Raise The Wage Act of 2019, which would increase the federal minimum wage to $15.00/hour by 2024. They found that with a regional minimum wage, 15.6 million fewer workers would get a raise. Additionally, 5.6 million fewer women of color would get a raise, and “among black workers, the average raise in annual income for a year-round worker under the regional proposal is $1,700 less.” These findings show that despite the purchasing power becoming more equal, the uneven distribution of wealth among other demographics may not be improved in this proposal. Additionally, rural areas would see smaller increases in the minimum wage than urban areas, which could deepen the urban/rural divide. Opponents also point out that regional variation in wages has actually narrowed over the last 50 years, making one standard federal minimum wage more appropriate and more effective at raising the incomes of low-wage workers.

Support of a regional minimum wage comes down to citizens’ priorities in the face of economic equality in the short run, and their perceptions of possible long-run outcomes. Some believe that with improving purchasing power equality in the short run, economic equality and more even wealth distribution will occur in the long run. However, others believe that with more equal and higher incomes now, the purchasing power will likely equalize in the long run.
How can minimum wage be federally regulated to ensure a larger percent of full-time workers are earning a livable wage? Should the focus of minimum wage policy be on equalizing the nominal or real value of an earned wage?

**Questions to Consider**

How can minimum wage be federally regulated to ensure a larger percent of full-time workers are earning a livable wage? Should the focus of minimum wage policy be on equalizing the nominal or real value of an earned wage?

**Keywords**

**Nominal wage**: the numerical value of money received as a wage without taking into account inflation or the purchasing power of the wage.

**Real wage**: the value of a wage taking inflation into account. In other words, wage as a measure of its purchasing power.

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<tr>
<td>The federal government should adopt a regional minimum wage that reflects differences in the cost of living across the U.S.</td>
<td>The cost of living in some cities and regions is higher than others, and the minimum wage should account for these differences in the cost of living across the U.S.. The indexing of minimum wage based on a region's price level allows it to better reflect a particular community's cost of living and policy needs. Citizens' opinions are more effectively taken into account since policy makers are focused on a specific region and smaller group of constituents. By indexing minimum wage to a region's price level, citizens will see real wage changes rather than nominal wage change. A regional minimum wage that automatically adjusts to inflation would eliminate the need for Congress to consider future changes. Fewer jobs will be lost as employers will be able to keep up with minimum wage adjustments.</td>
<td>A minimum wage based on region could worsen economic inequality in the U.S. by locking in lower wages in some regions, notably in the South, and deepen the urban-rural divide. Regional wage disparities are already at historically low levels, making this proposal unnecessarily complicated and a federal minimum wage a much simpler solution. Businesses may move to areas of lower minimum wage to avoid regional policies. Increasing the minimum wage to $15/hour nationally would lift more low-wage workers out of poverty. Regional minimum wage would leave millions behind in low-wage areas, and this would disproportionately affect people of color.</td>
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Universal Basic Income

UBI would be a federally mandated program consisting of an individual, universal, and recurring monthly payment of $1,000 to all adult US citizens regardless of income or need. Supporters argue that UBI has “potentially profound ramifications for inequality,” as it provides an important safety net against poverty, and, more importantly, allows people to make long-term investments in themselves; the certainty of receiving a UBI might allow people to invest in their education, start their own businesses, build wealth for retirement, or just keep out of debt from medical bills and other expenses. Not only would a UBI help people stay out of poverty, but it could also grow the economy by boosting consumer spending.

Opponents complain that UBI would be expensive, though perhaps it could replace other welfare programs. Some of the debate about UBI centers on whether it would be a supplement to current welfare programs or a replacement. Critics of current programs argue it is more efficient to just give people cash to spend as they need it, rather than allocate some government welfare dollars to food, others to health care, some to education, etc. If a UBI does replace existing welfare programs, it could result in reduced federal assistance to the very neediest, who may currently receive more than $1,000 per month in government support through various programs. Moreover, the sheer cost of the current welfare system in addition to UBI might be unsustainable, meaning that it is a “one or the other” kind of situation.

Opponents also argue that a UBI provides an incentive not to work because people will be paid whether they work or not, which will mean that many able-bodied adults might simply choose not to work or to work much less. Some argue that it is unfair for those who work to fund the inactivity of those who choose to not work. Moreover, the implementation of UBI could harm the economy, leading to stagnation or inflation. Some are concerned that some people might not spend the money wisely; instead of investing in education, they might engage in recreational activities or buy illicit drugs. In this way, UBI might not be capable of addressing inequality as well as those who support it claim.
UBI has been implemented in different countries across the world. A UBI program was run nationally throughout Iran in 2010. The specifics of the Iran UBI are relatively similar to this proposal, except that all working-age adults were given 29% of the measured median income as opposed to a flat $1,000 USD. Supporters claim the benefits are evident, reducing inequality and showing no signs of workers leaving the job market—the economy was, arguably, improved, as the cash grants were used by those receiving them to support and expand their smaller businesses.

Another UBI program was run within the late 1970s in rural Manitoba, Canada, which offered working-aged adults $16,000 CAD per year in response to a financial crisis. The UBI allowed more workers to commit themselves to more secure, full-time work, but doubt is expressed regarding whether or not this program could be practically carried out on a national scale. More recently, a UBI program has been implemented in the Canadian city of Hamilton, Ontario, which offered $17,000 CAD to a sample of 1,000 financially vulnerable adults. In the US, the city of Stockton in California also conducted a similar program. Both programs have reported increased financial support for recipients, while not reporting any lack of participation in the workforce, which suggests that the UBI is successful in rural and urban environments alike.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated how cash transfers of this kind can be tremendously effective in alleviating poverty. Although not a UBI, the recent American Rescue Plan provides the majority of children in low-income families access to minimum incomes and expands child tax credits. Most working and middle-class families will get a child tax credit of up to $3,600 for each child under the age of 6 and of $3,000 for each child between 6 and 17, some of which will come as a check from the government. This plan is expected to reduce the overall poverty rate from 13.7% to 8.7% this year, in addition to reducing child poverty by half.

However, universal basic income has not always produced the desired effects. A basic income experiment was also implemented in Finland in the years 2017 and 2018, granting a fraction of unemployed people regular payments of €560 EUR. This program was considered subpar, showing no changes in employment, questionable impact on subjective happiness, and recipients showed preferences towards previously existing welfare programs. Supporters of the UBI claim, however, that these issues are more about execution and implementation than the proposal itself, and the failures of this specific program have not stopped other countries—such as India—from considering similar programs. Similar observations have occurred in several national experiments held in Mongolia within the last decade. While inequality and poverty have been diminished, the national deficit has been inflated—again, supporters cite the cause primarily as poor planning.
Questions to Consider

Should the government ensure that all citizens receive a basic income regardless of their employment status? Why or why not? Some say that such a program may be interpreted as a demand for freedom, while others say it is a step towards fiscal stagnation. What are your thoughts on this proposal? What are the reasons to support this proposal? What are the reasons to oppose this proposal? Should UBI be implemented at the expense of all other welfare programs?

Keywords

National Deficit: also known as national debt; it means the amount of money owed by the government to its creditors. Governments usually borrow money when their expenditure is greater than the amount they have taken in from its citizens' taxes.

Welfare Programs: related to the idea of a “safety net,” whereby the government provides people who are struggling to make ends meet, usually due to illness or difficulties in finding employment, with a sum of money that is usually intended to help them meet basic needs.

Fiscal Stagnation: a condition of flat or slow growth in the economy which is usually related to high numbers of unemployment, inflation (where the cost of goods increase) or economic policy that prevents economic development.
Taxes on the Wealthy

The US has a progressive tax rate. Earned income is taxed at a different rate depending on a person’s income, with the aim that those with lower incomes pay less than those who earn more. The current rates are 10%, 12%, 22%, 24%, 32%, 35% and 37%.

Historically, the wealthiest Americans have been expected to pay a substantial amount of their income in tax. In the 1950s and 1960s, the wealthiest paid a top income tax rate of 91%. At present, the top income tax rate is 37% and the income tax rate for the wealthiest 1% of earners stands at 24.7%. Notably, investment income is taxed at a lower rate than the taxes most Americans pay on earned income (salary and wages) and higher earners do not pay 37% of all their income as tax, but instead, 37% is a top marginal tax rate.

A top marginal tax rate means that any amount of income above the specified tax bracket, that will be taxed at the corresponding rate. For example, a family of 4 with an income of $100,000, will not have all of its income taxed at 24%, but will instead pay a total of 6% in taxes due to the different levels of taxation certain amounts of income will face. This is highlighted in the chart on the right.
Some characterize this as unfair, and assert that the wealthiest find different ways of avoiding paying their dues, such as setting up a multi-generational trust. With the expansion of technology, the likely replacement of some of the workforce by machinery, and rising inequality, many view the taxation of the wealthiest people in the country as a necessary step to ensure the government can fund public programs. In fact, some of the wealthiest people in the country have expressed a desire to pay more taxes. Billionaire Warren Buffet has said, referring to the US tax system, “the wealthy are definitely undertaxed relative to the general population.” And, to address growing inequality, Bill Gates stated that “we’ve updated our tax system before to keep up with changing times, and we need to do it again, starting with raising taxes on people like [him].”

In comparison to other developed countries, taxation in the US is relatively low. Whereas in European countries taxation exceeds 40% of gross domestic product (GDP), in 2018 for the US it represented 24 percent of GDP.

In recent years, proposals for taxing the highest earners in the country have been widely discussed. This proposal is to implement a 2% annual tax on any wealth over $50 million and 3% for wealth over $1 billion. The tax base would consist of a household’s financial and non-financial assets such as stocks and land (at market prices) minus a household’s debts. The wealth tax would be an additional tax to the current tax systems such as federal, state, and local corporate income taxes, individual income taxes on interest income, capital gains, and dividends, and estate and gift taxes.

Supporters of this proposal argue that taxation on the highest earners is a necessary step to ensure the government has enough capital to invest in public services such as education, infrastructure, and child care. Additionally, supporters view the wealth tax as a way to reign in the growing wealth gap in the US, especially because the income of top 5% earners’ has long increased faster than that of others.
In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the wealth tax has also been put forward by supporters as a necessary step to mitigate the economic downfall suffered by many families. Specifically, Black, Latino, Indigenous, and many immigrant people have felt the effects of the economic downturn more than white people. Moreover, the wealthiest members of American society saw their wealth increase while millions of citizens across the country suffered from the recession.

A 40% exit tax on wealthy Americans would be implemented in order to deter those who seek to renounce their citizenship to avoid a wealth tax. If implemented, it is estimated that about 100,000 Americans would be subject to a wealth tax in 2023.

Opponents argue that this would be difficult to implement because of the likelihood of tax evasion schemes, the difficulty of valuing assets, and a potential reduction in US economic output. They also point to potential market distortions since it is likely that savings would be discouraged and consumption encouraged.

Estimates vary over how much revenue a wealth tax could raise. For example, Kyle Pomerleau of the American Enterprise Institute reviewed 13 publicly available revenue estimates of wealth taxes that varied from $366 billion to $5.3 trillion over 10 years. This variation is likely due to uncertainties on how to value privately held assets that do not have a straightforward market price such as stocks or bonds. This uncertainty leads some to claim that it would, therefore, be better to reform the current tax system rather than create a new tax structure.

Several countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), including Austria, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Iceland, Luxemburg, Ireland, and Sweden, chose to repeal their wealth tax during the last 30 years because of limited revenue collection, and high administration and compliance cost, tax avoidance, and evasion. The experience of enacting and then repealing wealth taxes shows that they were not effective tools. Notably, France repealed their wealth tax in 2018 and replaced it with a tax on real estate. Six OECD member countries (Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy) still administer an annual net wealth tax, and net wealth taxes made up 3.79 percent of total tax revenues in Switzerland in 2019.
Questions to Consider

In contemplating the contentions for and against more progressive tax structures, it is possible to consider the role of taxes within a state. Does there exist a moral obligation to uphold the collective? What are your thoughts on this proposal? What are the arguments in support of this proposal? What are the arguments against this proposal?

Keywords

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** refers to the total value of all services and goods produced in a country, usually in the span of a year.

**Bonds:** a document that represents a loan between an investor and a borrower.

**Dividends:** a distribution of profits by a corporation to its shareholders. When a corporation earns a profit or surplus, it is able to pay a proportion of the profit as a dividend to shareholders.

**Capital gains:** the profits from the sale of an asset, such as shares of stock, a piece of land, or a business.
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