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Civic Renewal

Civic Engagement

Capacity Building

Civic Education

Deliberative Democracy

TAKING STOCK OF THE CIVIC ARENA

Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums

by Brad Rourke

When citizens deliberate together about important issues, they can reach decisions and take action together on problems that confront them. An issue framework, or issue guide, is intended to support deliberation, as people wrestle with options, face trade-offs, and make decisions about how to act. *Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums* describes ways to approach naming and framing issues for public deliberation with the aim of creating an issue guide suitable to use in deliberative, public forums.

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What's Going On Here?

Taking Stock of Citizen-Centered Democracy

David Mathews

As you may be aware, each year we look closely at one area of Kettering Foundation research, which turns out to be a review of all our research from one particular perspective. This year, the foundation is concentrating on what is happening in the civic arena, broadly defined. This arena includes organized projects in civic renewal, civic engagement, civic education, and civic capacity building in communities. It also includes what people who don't use the language

of "civic engagement" see happening in the life they share with other people. We hope to learn not just what is going on but whether there is any stocktaking on lessons learned. And, if there is, what's the focus of the stocktaking? Is it about the impact of what an organization has done, or is there a broader look at what is happening in democracy and its implications for what an organization should be doing? Is strengthening civic life necessarily strengthening democracy— democracy meaning the ability of people to shape their future? We haven't finished this study quite yet, but I can share some of what we have been learning.

What People Say and Do

Kettering's studies of democracy begin with looking at what citizens are or aren't doing and their opinions on the issues of the day. Dan Yankelovich, Kettering trustee emeritus, is worried. In a May 2014 blog post, he writes that the troubled state of public morale indicates that something has gone terribly amiss in our society: "By greater than two to one margins (58 percent to 28 percent), Americans believe that the country is on the wrong track. A 70 percent majority use words like 'divided,' 'troubled,' and 'deteriorating' to describe the state of the nation."

Does the "state of the nation" include its civic life? Are people even concerned about it? Most people don't use the term *civic life* (which shouldn't be surprising), but what do they think about their fellow citizens? Some studies find a growing lack of confidence and trust. Other research by Rich Harwood, in *The Work of Hope*, paints a different picture, one that suggests people aren't so dispirited that they're unwilling to try to restore the sense of hopefulness they feel the country has lost. Lacking trust in large institutions, some people are looking to their fellow citizens to fix what is out of whack. They are investing in joint efforts to rebuild confidence; that is, to show that by working together, citizens can make a difference. For example, neighbors coming together to paint a school isn't important just because the school building will be more attractive; the painting is valued as

a demonstration of what can be accomplished when people join forces.

In response to low morale, Harwood reports, people want "to kick-start a new trajectory where actions start small and local, . . . where clear goals are set and achieved, and where people can restore faith in themselves and one another and in the belief that Americans still can get things done *together*." He quotes a Dallas woman who said that people can't wait for others to act on their behalf. "If the change is going to happen," she said, "it's going to be grass roots."

That response may be fine at the local level, but what about solving global problems? Those who believe in starting small say that without a sense of efficacy and shared purpose, people won't be able to tackle larger problems. They see a connection between local issues and national resilience. As Harwood writes, "The purpose of starting small and starting local, and . . . meeting one achievable goal after another, is to rebuild the confidence and sense of common purpose in the nation."

Yet even the most active of citizens struggle with doubts. As a woman from Idaho explained to Kettering researchers, "When I told the citizens I was supposed to work with that they . . . have more power than [they] believed, I think I believed it when I said it. And I believed it all the times that I've lived it. But I'm not sure it's as true as it used to be."

What we have found so far about what citizens see and feel is useful, but we need to go even deeper. We need to know, are people really less socially connected? Are they retreating into enclaves of the like-minded? If they are leaving traditional civic organizations, are they creating new forms of civic associations? And, if so, what are these associations like, particularly those formed through the new social media? Is Washington's polarization spreading so far that Americans themselves are turning red and blue? Are citizens as pessimistic about the future of their communities and the country as

some studies suggest, or is something else going on that we are missing?

What Civic Organizations Say

Whatever people are or aren't doing, there are numerous signs of a growth in organizations dedicated to strengthening the civic realm. For instance, most institutions of higher education now have programs of community outreach, and the Kettering Foundation has ties with more and more campus centers trying to improve civic life. Some see this growth as evidence of a civic renewal movement; others may characterize what is happen-

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ing as an emerging civic industry managed by professionals.

What is the relationship between such organizations and a citizenry that is both convinced of the need for citizens to work together and yet uncertain about whether they can count on other people? That is an open question worth pursuing, as reported in *Ships Passing in the Night?* Kettering has seen some indications that institutional outreach in higher education may not be well aligned with what citizens are trying to do to gain greater control over their lives. And foundation research on the tendency of both government and nongovernmental organizations to colonize and unintentionally destroy the unique qualities of informal civic associations has been translated by Edgar Cahn into a clever online cartoon, "The Parable of the Blobs and Squares."

What's Going On Here?

Civic organizations and grantmakers routinely do a kind of stocktaking when they look for measurable evidence of their impact. While the need to know whether their efforts are useful is understandable, a Harwood Institute study, *The Organization-First Approach: How Programs Crowd Out Community*, has found that this kind of impact evaluation can turn the focus of foundations and civic organizations inward on internal matters rather than outward to communities and civic engagement. Ironically, this turn inward may be driven by citizen boards eager to prove the benefits of their work.

Kettering is trying to find out whether any of this civic stocktaking is looking at what is happening in democracy and assessing the implications.

Kettering is trying to find out whether any of this civic stocktaking is looking at what is happening in democracy and assessing the implications. Two recent reports have concluded that democracy is in serious trouble: *The Democratic Disconnect* by the Transatlantic Academy and the *Economist*'s "What's Gone Wrong with Democracy" (March 1, 2014).

The *Economist* article points out that only a short time ago it seemed that democracy, that is, contested elections leading to representative government, would dominate the globe. Now, the article says, the political winds have shifted: "Between 1980 and 2000 the cause of democracy experienced only a few setbacks, but since 2000 there have been many." Elections are not enough, absent the rights and institutions that are essential components of a democratic system. The conclusion: "building the institutions needed to sustain democracy is very slow work indeed." This spring, a gathering of

alumni of Kettering's international residents from 22 countries came to almost the same conclusion.

Democracy in the United States may be stronger than in other countries, yet the *Economist* article argues that "America's image—and by extension that of democracy itself—has taken a terrible battering." The problems: gridlock, gerrymandering, partisan extremism, an army of lobbyists amounting to 20 for every representative and senator. The diagnosis: "the machinery and institutions of parliamentary democracy . . . look increasingly anachronistic." The prospects for reform by conventional means: not very good. Party membership is falling, as is voter participation. Not just in the United States, but in seven European countries, a majority of voters said they didn't trust their government.

The authors of the *Economist* article don't deal with the civic foundations of democracy except to note that democracies have hidden strengths and that there need to be other sources of power besides that of the state. Reference in the article to Alexis de Tocqueville's observation that local democracy is democracy at its best does open the door to consider what civic democracy can do to offset the disabilities of representative democracy.

The Transatlantic Academy report, which also finds democracy in trouble, poses somewhat different remedies for a "yawning" gap separating citizens from the institutions of government. The authors recognize that "Internet-empowered social activism of a new generation has never been more vibrant." Yet they argue that, "little of this participatory mobilization from civil society seems effectively to connect with formal structures [of government] and institutional processes." (This, by the way, is also what a recent Kettering/Public Agenda study of the institutional accountability movement shows.)

Democracy in the United States, the academy concludes, is "ailing, and badly in need of reform." But going beyond the *Economist*'s analysis, the Transatlantic report insists that the key to revitalizing

democracy is "enhancing the participatory vibrancy that represents the cornerstone of high quality democracy." One way to do that: "Visions of top-down problem solving are insufficient. Open-ended and vibrant democratic deliberation is needed." The reason, a "sense of diminished citizenship is now pervasive across the socio-economic spectrum," meaning less of a sense of civic identity and reduced "participation in the creation and receipt of public goods." This observation, whether accurate or not, does reflect Kettering's understanding of what it takes to make democracy work as it should. And the two reports make the case for stocktaking done from a democratic perspective.

Other studies of American democracy aren't so pessimistic, suggesting there is much to build on in democratic stocktaking. Peter Levine, Suzanne Morse, and Matt Leighninger have found enough success stories to argue that a new civic form of democracy is emerging—one that Leighninger believes will eclipse expert rule. Certainly, the Kettering Foundation has a deep file on citizens learning how to make a difference in shaping the future. That said, however, I wonder whether there is much merit in a debate over whether the optimist or pessimist will prove right. If institutional reform is daunting and very long term, perhaps there should be, as the Transatlantic Academy recommends, more attention to what is happening to the civic underpinnings of a democratic society or what I've called the "wetlands" of politics in a new book on *The Ecology of Democracy*.

When I think about an ecosystem, I have in mind the Gulf Coast because I grew up nearby. Governments, schools, and other established institutions could be roughly analogous to oil rigs, docks, and large buildings on the shore. The things citizens do and the associations among them might be thought of as something like barrier islands and all that happens in the marshes of the wetlands. Political life begins in the wetlands of neighborhoods, informal associations, and kitchen table discussions. This is where citizens have the first opportunities to shape

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their future and regain the confidence that they can make a difference. Then institutions like representative assemblies, government agencies, and NGOs bring other resources to bear.

More than Elections

An ecological context helps show that politics is more than what happens in elections and governments—without ignoring the importance of either. The analogy simply distinguishes the things that citizens do with citizens, which are often informal or organic, from the things that politicians and government officials do, which are usually formal or institutional. But keep in mind that the wetlands aren't totally benign. There are prejudices and conflicts there just as there are snakes and alligators in nature's domain; all the more reason that stock-taking should begin by looking into the condition of the democratic wetlands.

One of the best examples of democratic stocktaking that we have seen appears to be emerging in the field of community development. Ted Alter at Pennsylvania State University and several of his colleagues are looking into how community development can strengthen democracy. Maybe they will include what they see happening in the wetlands that can give citizens a stronger hand in shaping the future of their communities.

The foundation is starting to collect more stories of this kind of stocktaking. If you have examples, we would like to hear from you.

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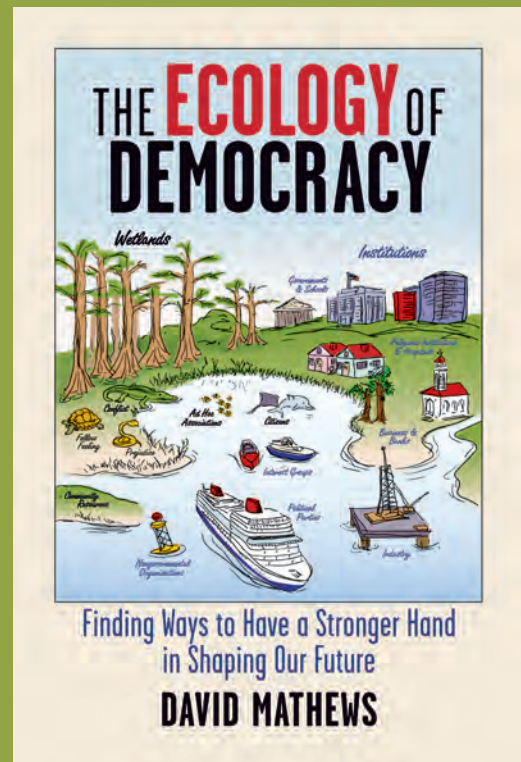

NEW from Kettering Foundation Press

The Ecology of Democracy

Finding Ways to Have a Stronger Hand in Shaping Our Future

by David Mathews

Everyday life is filled with opportunities for citizens to make a difference, beyond just casting a vote or sitting in a meeting. *The Ecology of Democracy* offers insights into where these opportunities might be found and why the work citizens do is so important. The book examines how the work of democracy can be done in ways that put more control in the hands of citizens and help restore the legitimacy of our institutions.

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$15.95 • 231 pages
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▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ **Visit www.ecologyofdemocracy.org to download a free excerpt, talk to others who are using this book to jumpstart community conversations, exchange with educators and students who are using it in their classes, share your stories of citizen initiatives in the wetlands of democracy, and more!**

Yes, Our Democracy Is a Mess,

and Yes, Our Opportunities Are Real

Richard C. Harwood

As part of the Kettering Foundation's efforts to take stock of trends affecting citizens and communities, I have recently held 10 in-depth conversations with leading thinkers and practitioners in the areas of democracy and American life.

In these discussions, we talked about the current condition of the country and the forces that are shaping it today. I asked those I interviewed about the positive trends they see among people engaging and working together in communities. I also asked how widespread these positive developments are, what is driving them, and how we can accelerate and deepen them. And I explored with these individuals what they believe resulted from the so-called civic renewal movement of the 1990s (the attempt to build new civic capacities and practices among organizations, leaders, networks, and citizens) and the implications of that movement for us today.

When I combine these conversations with what I have seen and heard working in communities over the past few years, it seems that the 1990s movement was simply too shallow and narrow in scope to withstand larger economic, political, and social trends, such as the Great Recession and the September 11 attacks. While the leaders I interviewed differed in their interpretations of what exactly happened, there was general agreement that the ideas behind those civic activities did not penetrate American society widely or deeply enough. The innovations simply failed to be adopted and embedded into the necessary structures, processes, and organizations. Indeed, the civic renewal movement didn't succeed in permeating our collective sense of how we want to connect with one another, work together, and get things done.

Harry Boyte, codirector of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College, told me, "In some ways the civic impulse spread in spaces that were less structured and bureaucratized, where the politics of knowledge was not as hierarchical and rigid. But that was also the weakness because it was quite vulnerable."

Carolyn Lukensmeyer, executive director of the National Institute for Civil Discourse, highlighted many of the positive elements of that earlier period while suggesting that the efforts did not go far enough. She observed that while the civic renewal work "was incredibly important on shifting professional practices . . . it didn't get embedded into ongoing mediating organizations in the communities it was attempted in."

What I kept hearing, in other words, is that the civic renewal movement faded away. Without question, it made a difference at the time: it changed how people, organizations, and communities worked and helped establish a foundation for many of the positive actions we see today. But it did not firmly take hold.

A Fragile Opportunity

So what now? How do we build on the good efforts that were made? How do we regain some of that positive momentum? How do we ensure that the important work happening in communities today does not, once again, dissipate?

My sense is that the nation is at a major inflection point—a pivotal moment of change. I believe we are in the early phase of a new era of engagement among people and organizations, but it is nascent, fragile, and occurring in small pockets. Understanding this stage of development is crucial because only then is it possible to identify the right strategies to move forward. To be successful in this, we must determine how to harness, accelerate, and deepen positive movement.

And that brings us to examine another important juncture: the current national narrative tells us that we simply cannot get things done together. We hear this day after day on the news as well as from various leaders and among ourselves. Diana Aviv, president and CEO of Independent Sector, explained, "Government [is] more partisan than ever before, more cynical and more out of touch with the citizenry." This negative narrative drives our mind-set, attitudes, behaviors, and actions. "The public space," Aviv observed, "is rife with all of this divide."

I have been hearing this narrative over and over again as I travel the country on the Reclaiming Main Street campaign— an initiative of The Harwood Institute to engage people in making community once again a common enterprise. I launched the campaign on the heels of the government shutdown, going to communities such as Oakland, California; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Murray, Kentucky, to talk to people about their shared aspirations.

People believe we as a nation—and as individuals—can do better. People are tired of business-as-usual. They don't believe leaders have their best interests at heart. They believe too many people and organizations are in it for their own good at the expense of the common good. There is too much finger-pointing and blame-placing. And when good things do happen, there is too much jockeying to claim turf and not enough sharing of credit. The toxic discourse and political acrimony seep into our daily lives. As a result, we are overcome by dysfunction and division.

The sense of frustration is great, but I have also seen that the will within the nation to take a different path is even greater. In my conversations with the 10 thought-leaders, I repeatedly heard

> **On one hand, we confront a bevy of obstacles to moving forward as a country. On the other, there is a deep hunger among the American people to engage and accomplish things together. We must tap into this energy to build positive momentum.**

a sentiment articulated by people such as Allison Fine, author of *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age*. People feel "bipolar" about the state of politics and public life today. In her view, "People individually are doing some phenomenally interesting and energetic things . . . [but] traditional advocacy and organizing groups are doing a miserable job of tapping into that kind of energy." Echoing that sentiment, Diana Aviv said she feels simultaneously "optimistic and anxious." On one hand, we confront a bevy of obstacles to moving forward as a country. On the other, there is a deep hunger among the American people to engage and accomplish things together. We must tap into this energy to build positive momentum.

It's Happening in Communities

After all, America is a nation of builders. Throughout our history, we have proven that we are capable of so much when we set goals and get moving—together. And people are doing just that every day in communities across the country. Ben Barber, author of *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*, rests his hope for the future of our country—and indeed, our world—on progress and innovation happening at the local level. "Cities," he told me, "have re-instilled my hope for the possibilities of democracy." He said he was encouraged by "watching what cities, when they work together, can do to solve problems that increasingly were looking

It's time to restore our belief that we can get things done, together. If we don't, communities will continue to be stuck, unable to move forward.

to be insoluble in a world of bickering sovereign nations and states that refuse to cooperate."

Despite stagnation at the national level, there is positive movement on the ground. John McKnight, codirector of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute, pointed to such positive signs as people creating more community gardens and neighborhood watch groups. In doing this work, residents are asserting themselves as citizens. They are connecting around their shared aspirations, engaging in meaningful ways, and tackling challenges together.

We need more of that work. As Martha McCoy, executive director of Everyday Democracy, put it, "We've learned a fair amount in our field about what's possible in terms of people coming together in ways that they can actually form relationships, make a difference, work with gov-

ernment more effectively." She continued, "It's happening in places, but we just haven't figured out as a country [how] to make it the routine part of how we do our work."

Still, while some of the people I spoke with believe that further strengthening local conditions can serve as a counterforce to change our country's politics and narrative, most warned that particular attention also must be paid to the national level. As former Congressman Jim Leach said, "There's a breakdown in civility . . . but the bigger issue is the pattern of decision making in which both parties are indebted to certain groups and everybody at the [national] elected level has to pay attention to their party's general position and their own vulnerability within their party." This is a challenge of the inflection point: while there are positive signs of change in pockets across the country, there is a danger they can get overwhelmed by a dangerously broken national system.

Shared Problem, Shared Solutions

So what do we do? There is no quick fix, nor should blame be placed solely on government, elected officials, the business community, nonprofit organizations, or even citizens. This is a shared problem that can only be addressed if people and institutions from all sectors step forward in a fundamentally different way. They must collectively take some small but important steps to build conditions that enable people to come together to get things done and make our communities and country thrive. After talking with these thought-leaders and reflecting on my work around the country, I believe there are three areas we must concentrate on in order to put the country on the right path:

- **Focus on shared aspirations.** Everywhere I travel I find that Americans share many of the same desires and goals for their communities and the

country. While people don't agree on everything, there is enough that unites us that we can build upon. Our work at The Harwood Institute rests on this very assumption. But our leaders, organizations, and citizens must use these shared aspirations as a guidepost—a starting point for making decisions together. By focusing on our shared aspirations, we can change the frame of the public conversation from one of "problems," "deficits," and "blame" to "what we stand for" and "what we seek to build together."

- **Work together to get things done.** Leaders, organizations, groups, and citizens must come together to get things done. People must cross dividing lines and work together on common problems—even if in small ways. This will unleash a sense of shared responsibility and instill confidence that change is possible. John Bridgeland, CEO of Civic Enterprises, called these "hope spots." He said we need to focus on the question, "Where is the country actually successful in taking these issues that are often thought to be chronically unfixable and successfully moving them?" These hope spots exist, but they need to be multiplied and connected. And they must be illuminated for all to see. This step is pivotal to getting the country moving in the right direction.

- **Change the stories we tell about the country and ourselves.** In my own work, I have found that the narrative we tell about our communities and ourselves is the greatest hidden factor that determines whether communities and people move forward. As I have said, right now the predominant narrative in the country is that we can't work together. To move forward, it is essential that we tell stories that show how people are joining together to work for the common good. Such stories must be rooted in real actions—not public relations and hype. This is not about telling more stories. The goal must be to connect different accounts of success over time and weave them into a coherent narrative that enables us to see that we are moving on a new trajectory. This

Shared Problem, Shared Solutions

1. **Focus on shared aspirations.** Change the frame of the public conversation to "what we stand for" and "what we seek to build together."

2. **Work together to get things done.** Illuminate "hope spots" for all to see—multiplied and connected.

3. **Change the stories we tell about the country and ourselves.** Connect different accounts of success that enable us to see that we are moving on a new trajectory.

narrative must highlight leaders and people so they can see that they can indeed help to create change through their daily actions. On the Reclaiming Main Street campaign, I am constantly motivated by the need to remind the country—and reclaim the practical idea—that community is a common enterprise.

It's time to restore our belief that we can get things done, together. If we don't, communities will continue to be stuck, unable to move forward. The country as a whole will remain mired in partisan gridlock. And people's faith in institutions, leaders, and our collective ability to address pressing concerns will further erode. This early phase of a new era of engagement will dissipate, just like the civic renewal movement of the past.

There are clearly challenges ahead. Maya Enista Smith, former director of Mobilize.Org, voiced the choices we face: "From this moment of doubt and search for a better alternative may come really great things. . . . Hopefully we keep believ-ing in our ability to do something better, elect someone better, or create a better system—but I'm actually not sure where the chips are going to fall on that one yet."

It is up to us to decide where the chips will fall. It is up to us to make the most of this pivotal moment and prove that we can get things done together. I remain ever hopeful that we will.

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Philanthropy at a Crossroads

Serving Citizens and Communities in an Era of Accountability and Transparency

Brad Rourke
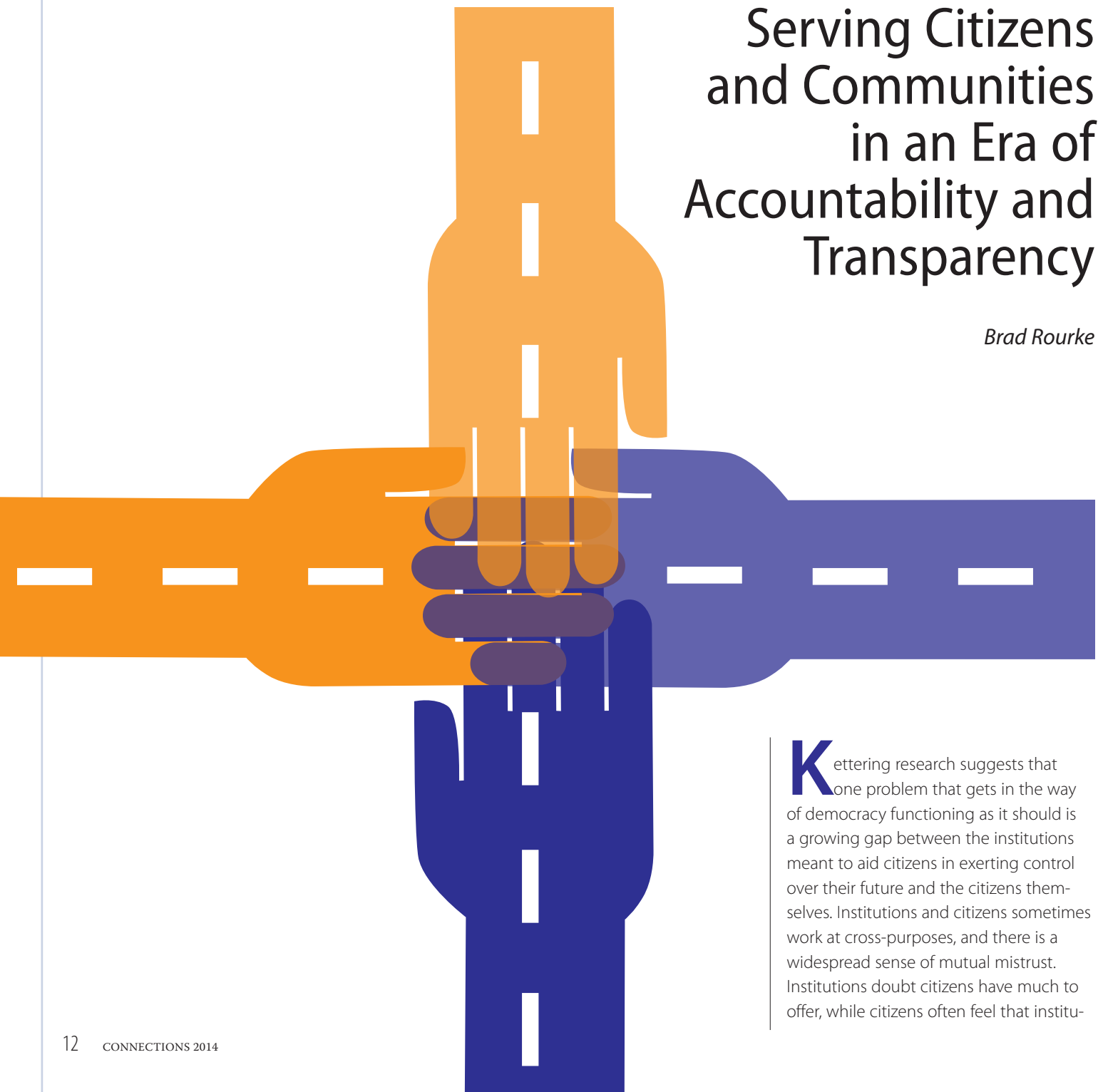
Kettering research suggests that one problem that gets in the way of democracy functioning as it should is a growing gap between the institutions meant to aid citizens in exerting control over their future and the citizens themselves. Institutions and citizens sometimes work at cross-purposes, and there is a widespread sense of mutual mistrust. Institutions doubt citizens have much to offer, while citizens often feel that institu-

tions are only concerned with furthering their own aims. So one of the things Kettering studies is ways that institutions' and citizens' work can come into greater alignment.

Institutions are not just large governmental constructs or national bureaucracies. The so-called "social sector" is filled with institutions—organizations established on behalf of the public. One such field is organized philanthropy.

Philanthropy, like most institutions, is now facing a growing public call for accountability; this provides an opportunity for the field to engage in stocktaking on the issue. Kettering research as well as that by others suggests that what citizens mean by "accountability" and what institutional actors do in response is often very different. Kettering wanted to know what this important field makes of the increasing emphasis on accountability, so we worked with Philanthropy for Active Civic Education (PACE), a group of foundations that fund initiatives related to democracy, to engage a number of philanthropy and other nonprofit leaders in a series of discussions on this issue. The results are collected in a new Kettering/PACE report, *Philanthropy and the Limits of Accountability: A Relationship of Respect and Clarity*.

The conversations that this report details did not result in a series of pronouncements or a five-point plan of action—nor were they intended to. The intent was to describe the kind of conversation that philanthropy leaders feel the field ought to have about this topic.

Following are four main insights from the report, along with questions these insights suggest. These questions could stimulate greater stocktaking in the future.

1 **Philanthropy is at a crossroads as it experiences increased pressure from all sides to solve public problems and to be more accountable both for outcomes and its relationship with communities.**
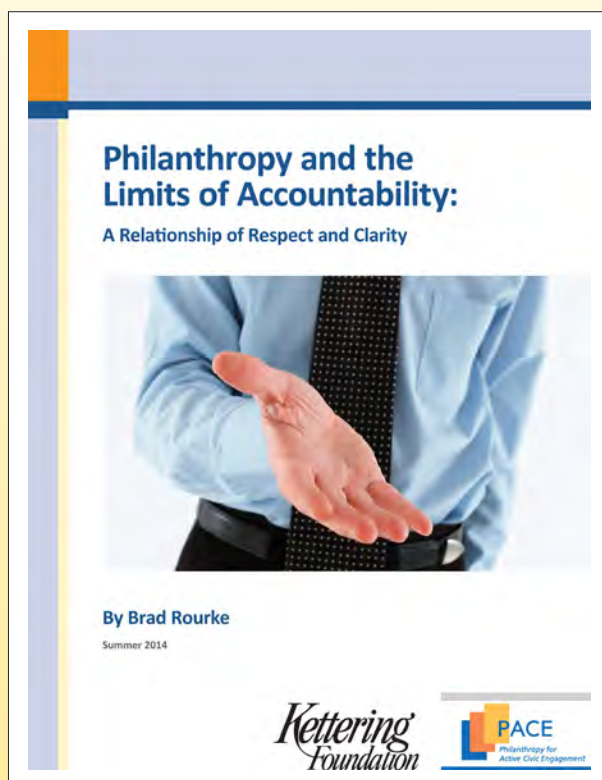
Foundations have few external pressures beyond a set of *pro forma* legal operational requirements imposed by the

Philanthropy and the Limits of Accountability
A Relationship of Respect and Clarity

by Brad Rourke

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Philanthropy and the Limits of Accountability: A Relationship of Respect and Clarity, a joint effort by the Kettering Foundation and Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE), explores how the field of organized philanthropy might think about responding to a growing movement for accountability and transparency. The report distills the results of three roundtables, in addition to one-on-one conversations, with philanthropic and nonprofit leaders about how the issues of transparency and accountability might soon impact the field of philanthropy.

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federal and state governments, yet among those within philanthropy, there is often a sense of being besieged. There is almost a bunker mentality.

Participants in these conversations point to many efforts by different levels of government that they see as threatening their ability to do their work. Foundation leaders sense a kind of growing isolation coupled with greater need to show impact. Philanthropic institutions themselves are changing, becoming both more independent and at the same time more reliant on a relationship with the public. Philanthropy is beginning to occupy a space that goes beyond the supplemental role it has traditionally played in public life.

Research suggests that there is a gap between the institutional view of accountability and what citizens mean when they think about it. Citizens want to feel that they can trust institutions and that they are in some sort of relationship together.

The sector is more and more often stepping in to play a role that had previously been the exclusive purview of the public sector.

Such public activities are difficult without a working relationship with the public, and yet how do institutions that consider themselves private find ways to constructively engage with citizens? The more it occupies this public space—and is seen as responsible for doing so—the more philanthropy will need to consider how to engage the public in their decision-making and priority-setting processes.

Philanthropy might ask: What are our responsibilities as institutions with a growing public role and public trust?

2 Transparency may be a necessary component of accountability, but it is not sufficient—and too often may be obfuscating.

One way institutions try to demonstrate accountability is through *transparency*. Institutional actors think that if the public could see the data for themselves then they would trust institutional decisions more. No one denies that transparency is an important component to establishing and maintaining trust between philanthropy and the broader public. Sunlight is a critical disinfectant. But there are problems, too, according to the participants in these conversations.

Relying solely on transparency places the burden of responsibility on the public. The public must be able to make sense of the information being provided. This can be problematic in the case of large amounts of data. People may (rightly) see these massive troves of data as obfuscating, a way to actually decrease accountability.

One conversation participant described how efforts to be accountable through transparency could create problems:

> In the end, we need some smart person, or librarian or whoever, to take all that data and process it, and be able to develop a relationship where you can have a conversation about performance that is coherent, where you can say, "So here's the deal. We've looked at this [data], and so it does look like this school's getting a little better, but when we look at it, it's really the kids from that side of Broadway, not this side of Broadway." [You need to be able] to actually make sense of it.

The idea that transparency, by itself, is just not helpful was a common theme. Foundations, these participants felt, needed to take the next step and go beyond transparency.

Philanthropy might ask: How can we add clarity and context to transparency?

3 Strategic philanthropy and collective impact initiatives may paradoxically tend to make philanthropic organizations seem less accountable.

Philanthropy works mainly through intermediaries. Foundations give money to others who in turn do work. Many foundations, seeing intractable problems in communities, are trying to structure their grantmaking so that there are clear and measurable results that can be achieved.

This desire for impact is at the heart of a growing body of thought that sees accountability as inextricably linked to institutional performance—linked to outcomes. This has given rise to a number of approaches, including *strategic philanthropy*, *impact investing*, and *collective impact*. But with the kinds of difficult public problems that philanthropy increasingly takes responsibility for, such approaches can be problematic. The empirical questions (what will achieve impact?) are one thing, but since these are public questions, they are also wrapped in normative issues: what *should* we do?

Participants in these conversations pointed out that strategic philanthropy is a double-edged sword. As foundations try to show more impact, they may take actions that can appear unilateral and unaccountable. According to the participants in these conversations, foundations are increasingly choosing and even implementing solutions themselves—as opposed to responding to the ideas of others. According to one:

> There's a rather strong strain . . . of foundations now deciding that they know what the problem is and that they know what the solution is and that they're now going to be sub-

contracting [with nonprofits] to actually do the work as if they are paid employees or paid consultants.

Philanthropy might ask: What is our real responsibility for showing impact? How much can or should we control?

4 Accountability isn't just about outcomes; it's also about relationships.

Research suggests that there is a gap between the institutional view of accountability and what citizens mean when they think about it. Citizens want to feel that they can trust institutions and that they are in some sort of relationship together. In a Public Agenda study for Kettering, *Don't Count Us Out*, citizens focused on tangible evidence of being respected: Will they pick up the phone if I call? Is there someone I can talk to about my concerns? Do they listen to people like me?

Institutional leaders view accountability differently than citizens. An institutional response will seek to show evidence of effectiveness and impact, of good processes fairly followed, of open data, and of openness to scrutiny. These add up to accountability. But others see accountability as inherently relational in nature. Results and transparency are necessary—but not sufficient.

One conversation participant summed it up: "It's not just relationships, and it's not just outcomes or metrics. It's both." Another said: "There is a deep discontent among grant recipients, including the ones that get the money, with the way in which decisions are made and the lack of humility, engagement, discussion with what's going on."

Participants in these conversations called for an approach to accountability rooted in respect for the role of the public and that seeks to provide clarity about what institutions are trying to do and why they are trying to do it.

Such a relational view of accountability assumes a different role for institutions. Rather than existing in order to do their own work, or to work on behalf of citizens, institutions are one of many means by which citizens have a hand in acting.

Philanthropy might ask: How can we improve our working relationship with citizens and demonstrate respect?

As philanthropy responds to the changed world and its emerging new role, it might do well to look for ways to consider these questions, mindful also of the fundamental relationship of respect and clarity that their publics seek.

Moving forward, Kettering and PACE hope to take part in further conversations on these questions as philanthropy continues to take stock.

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ADDITIONAL READING FROM KETTERING FOUNDATION

Philanthropy and the Regeneration of Community Democracy

by Peter H. Pennekamp with Anne Focke

The inquiry described in this Kettering Foundation occasional paper is located within a current debate in philanthropy and among its critics about the behavior of public foundations (including community foundations) and private foundations alike. Peter Pennekamp, who was the executive director of the Humboldt Area Foundation from 1993 to 2012, explores the questions of why and how community democracy can be both a cultural choice and an organizing system for philanthropy. Pennekamp accomplishes this through stories that demonstrate the principles and practices, continually refined by experiences in Northern California communities and by lessons from other communities.

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LOST— and Seeking Directions

The gap between communities and public schools is wide and getting wider. A new KF/FDR Group report outlines the causes and implications for solutions.

Steve Farkas

How do administrators of schools interact with other organizations and residents in their districts? In 1993, the Kettering Foundation and Public Agenda released a report titled *Divided Within, Besieged Without: The Politics of Education in Four American School Districts*. The study generated an unusual amount of notice, perhaps because its attention to communities appeared refreshingly distinct from the conventional focus on the technical issues of school administration and funding. *Divided Within* reported on what people in communities said they were concerned with: the qualities of human relationships. And the relationships people described were troubled. Parents, teachers, and administrators spoke of mutual suspicion and distrust, which stifled the ability to make even simple improvements to administrative practices in schools. People also spoke of deep rifts between district officials and other community-based organizations, which increasingly isolated the schools from others.

The past 20 years have seen 3 powerful trends that might have been expected to improve things:
• Public engagement strategies should have helped bridge the distance between citizens and school districts—and among stakeholders.
• The digital revolution should have made communication between districts and parents, teachers, and community groups easier and better.
• The standards and accountability move-

ment should have fostered greater trust in the public schools by letting parents and communities know what their schools were doing—and how well they were doing it.

To understand the impact of these trends, the Kettering Foundation asked the FDR Group to look anew at the state of relationships around education in communities. The foundation was particularly interested in the following questions:
• How do today's district leaders see themselves and their schools' roles in their communities? What roles do they see for others in the community in educating youngsters?
• How do leaders of civic organizations and other district leaders recognize roles that their organizations play in educating youth?
• How do nonprofessionals describe their relationships with the schools? How has the accountability movement affected that perception?

The resulting new Kettering/FDR Group report, *Maze of Mistrust: How District Politics and Cross Talk Are Stalling Efforts to Improve Public Education*, relies on four school districts with different demographic profiles. They invited us in to interview staff, school leaders, parents, and community groups under the promise of confidentiality and anonymity.

We ran into trouble immediately. The first sign: it was difficult to find school districts that would agree to participate. Even district leaders who knew our work well and trusted us were begging off. Too much had been hitting their districts: they were under intense scrutiny, and they and other stakeholders were distracted by political turf wars.

We almost lost our first cooperating district before the interviewing even started. A local reporter had gotten wind about a "consultancy firm" coming in, and she called with questions: Who hired us? Were we preparing for an upcoming change in the superintendent? How much was the district paying us? An interview with a board member from this district illustrated how frayed nerves had become:

The threat of litigation hangs over so much of what we do. People don't want

to talk without their lawyers present. It's much harder to negotiate, everything has to be cleared—will this be something they can sue us over? Is this going to hold up in court? It's hard to be a leader when you are constantly looking over your shoulder.

So what has been the impact of the three trends?

Public Engagement

Public engagement strategies were partly conceived as an antidote to the distrust and backlash greeting education reforms. The idea was to integrate the concerns of citizens and stakeholder groups early in the process.

We learned that district leaders use the term *public engagement* freely. But to them it meant adopting its *techniques*—not its *vision* or *purpose*. Leaders used town meetings, for example, to unveil their initiatives to community groups

and try to win them over. They used focus groups to anticipate resistance and develop ways to counter it. Virtually no one looked to citizens for useful input about the direction of the schools. Leaders longed for more community support, but they mainly regarded people outside the schools as constituencies they needed to coax, manage, or reassure.

What's more, leaders still instinctively looked to the last levy vote or school board meeting to gauge if they were in sync with the community. Their perspective of the public's role was still a narrow one:

> The less we hear from the public the better our relationship with our community is. There's very low turnout to our meetings, unless there is a unique situation, like when we had to rezone students

to a newly built high school. There was squawking then. Otherwise, there's very low turnout and not too much competition in school board elections. A quiet public is a happy public. We can leave the work to the educators.

The past 20 years have seen 3 powerful trends that might have been expected to improve . . . the state of relationships around education in communities.

One district's effort to engage its teachers in its strategic planning process backfired, dramatically exposing the cen-
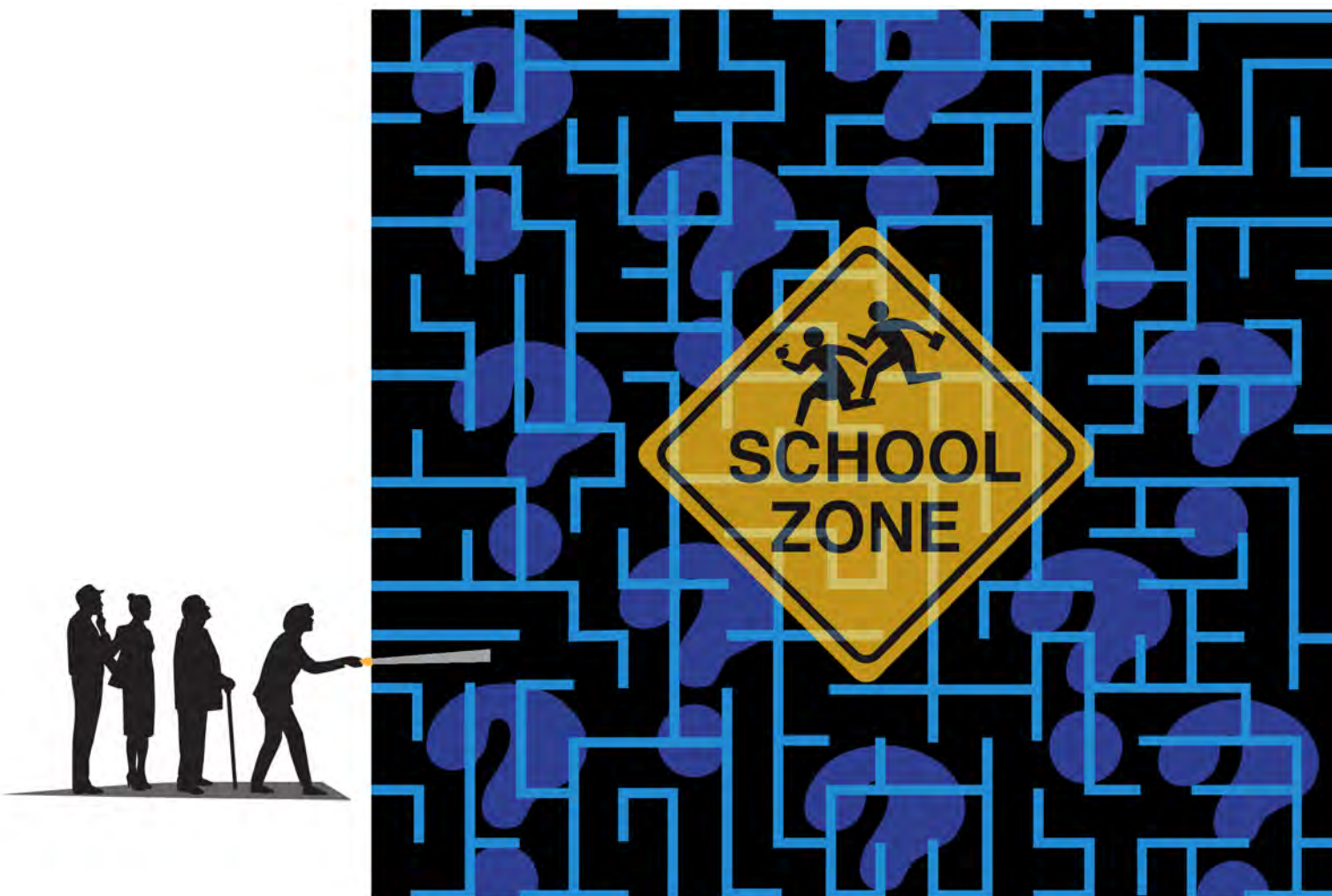
ADDITIONAL READING FROM KETTERING AND FDR GROUP

Maze of Mistrust

How District Politics and Cross Talk Are Stalling Efforts to Improve Education

by Steve Farkas and Ann Duffett

Kettering Foundation and FDR Group | 2014
FREE • 27 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-59-7

In 1993, the Kettering Foundation and Public Agenda released *Divided Within, Besieged Without: The Politics of Education in Four American School Districts*. For this new report, the Kettering Foundation asked the FDR Group to look anew at the state of relationships around education in communities. *Maze of Mistrust: How District Politics and Cross Talk Are Stalling Efforts to Improve Public Education* finds that, despite the advent of public engagement, the explosion in communication technology, and the standards and accountability movement, the distance between school districts and their communities shows no sign of diminishing.

▶ ▶ ▶ To download this FREE publication, visit **www.kettering.org**.

tral office-teacher divide. The teachers had been reluctant to participate in discussion groups, skeptical that they were anything but public relations. When pressed, they opened up with anger that had been pent-up for years. From complaints about the condition of the teachers' lounge, to accusations that a principal was incompetent, to grievances about out-of-touch district leaders, the conversations became nasty. The principal resigned within a year; the district superintendent left shortly afterward.

That district's experience was extreme. But in the four districts we studied, leaders routinely used the rhetoric of public engagement, raising citizens' expectations and then disappointing them, until skepticism became their default reaction.

New Technology

The technology boon should have enabled a leap in the effectiveness of communication for school districts—and in some ways it has. Districts now produce professional-looking newsletters, distribute updates quickly via e-mail and over their websites, and conduct auto-calls to students' homes. But new channels of communication have also heightened divisions, amplified scandals, and handed "megaphones" to those who are most strident.

Districts now pay more attention to limiting online access and behavior of staff and students, concerned over security and appropriate use. One of the districts we visited was dealing with fallout after a teacher added her own colorful commentary to a superintendent's e-mail message and distributed it to colleagues using her official e-mail address. A seemingly small matter absorbed much of the district's energy and attention.

But the worst story of technology gone wrong was when an ordinarily peaceful district was hijacked by a blogger who regularly wrote inflammatory posts relying on ostensibly private conversations among school board members. The quotes had the ring of truth about them, and stakeholders fell into squabbling, with flare-ups triggered every time a post went up. Relationships that

had been civil deteriorated, and people stopped talking to each other. "Technology made things much harder," recalled one administrator. "The blog made it possible for the most shrill people to have an impact. People are not obligated to talk responsibly, they say hurtful things, and they could make accusations without evidence."

Sometimes, technology also gave district leaders false confidence about their relationship with citizens. When asked about public engagement, one superintendent was quick to point out that he had given out his personal cell number to all parents in the district. But the same superintendent launched an effort to replace all textbooks in middle school with e-readers without consulting parents or teachers. As visiting researchers, we picked up intense grousing: parents were attached to seeing their children with books, and teachers doubted youngsters would use the technology appropriately. The superintendent had assumed he was connected enough and was taken by surprise by the backlash. The initiative was scaled back substantially the next year.

Standards and Accountability

The standards and accountability movement also seems to have increased acrimony. Even as teachers expressed disdain for standardized testing and school ratings, they felt they were held responsible for them. Administrators often viewed those efforts as tools for managing and motivating teachers—and also felt the pressure. Meanwhile, publicized test scores and ratings have heightened a consumerist mentality toward the public schools.

One teacher said:

What does excellence mean anyway? They're changing the ratings all the time. Are the assessments valid in what they're assessing? The assessment that the state gives has no way of measuring how well my students are doing with critical thinking.

But her superintendent said:

What gets measured gets done. Until it gets measured, it doesn't get done. I implemented assessments ahead of

state requirements for the shock value, and if we're going to do right by kids, we gotta start working on it now. If I don't measure it, it's not going to be done with fidelity.

School leaders—whether at the district or building level—are also feeling the pressure. In one district, when a school slipped one grade from the previous year's rating, the principal and the teachers could talk of nothing else. Said the principal:

I put the data in front and people are automatically on the defensive. I know you need to build trust with teachers, but there's no course on how to do it right in graduate school. Some people were not happy being called out, and I wasn't happy either. That was my school on the line, that's my job on the line.

If education appears to go wrong, it's the public schools—and teachers especially—that feel the blame even as they believe that forces outside the classroom determine so much of what their students learn. Conversations on how to improve education mostly focus on how to improve teaching in the schools, not at home or out in the community. In the words of one teacher:

People don't want to talk about student motivation and parents. But the kids are not held responsible, the parents are not held responsible, we are the ones solely held responsible. All of this top-down data mumbo jumbo is all smoke and mirrors of political correctness, because it's not PC to hold the kid accountable. And it's not PC to hold the parent accountable.

Meanwhile, active parents are adopting a consumerist mind-set toward the schools, and educators know it. Suburban parents described their decision-making process: an Internet search for high-performing school districts within commuting distance of their company's office, a comparison of property taxes to the cost of private school, and the size of the house they could get. Then they interview district educators:

I shopped. We moved out here, we could have lived anywhere. I looked

at test scores, I talked to the superintendent. I visited several of the elementary schools. I'm the consumer, I get to check.

Implications

Divisions among district stakeholders show no signs of abating since our 1993 study, despite the advent of public engagement. Rather than helping, administrators say that the explosion in communication technology has simply created more ways for people to say the wrong thing and say it loudly. For its part, the standards and accountability movement has strengthened the preexisting tendency to view the public schools as the central lever for educating youngsters. The distance between school districts and their communities shows no sign of diminishing. Citizens and community groups tend to see the schools as institutions standing apart from them, rather than as an integral part of their community.

There is a lot that's good about technology, standards, and public engagement. That they've had negative consequences probably says something about how they've been implemented. But it also says something important about the condition of school districts and of democracy itself.

Advocates of school-reform initiatives should take heed. They need to plan ahead for destructive district dynamics—these will inevitably sabotage their most carefully designed reforms. Those interested in democratic governance should also pay attention. The estrangement between citizens and governing institutions is not just a problem to be overcome with the right tools. There are dispositions and habits of mind and behavior among leaders and citizens that will undermine efforts to bridge the gap between them, regardless of the techniques used. When leaders view citizens merely as a force to coax, co-opt, or bypass, they will use any tool to that purpose. And when citizens view government only as the provider of services that they pay for with their tax dollars, responsibility for what it does will not be theirs. The problem is a problem of democracy.

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When Communities Work . . . and Why Citizens Have Work to Do

In recent books, two Kettering board members see ways out of democracy's current dilemmas. Keith Melville, Kettering associate and founding executive editor of the National Issues Forums, talked with Suzanne Morse and Peter Levine.

Keith Melville

Much of the commentary about American public life is a recitation of what's wrong, a depiction of partisan slugfests, dysfunction in Washington, and public despair about a democracy that no longer works as it should. As former Senator Bill Bradley put it, "Politics is stuck. So many people in America want to improve their own and others' lives but don't know how."

At a time of civic despair, recent books by two Kettering Foundation board members are particularly welcome. Suzanne Morse's volume, Smart Communities *(Jossey-Bass, 2014), and Peter Levine's* We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For *(Oxford, 2013) have much in common. The two volumes are explorations of a citizen-centered politics, and what's needed for it to succeed. As indicated by the subtitle of Levine's volume—* The Promise of Civic Renewal in America—*these are hopeful and practical books about what happens when citizens address the problems facing their communities.*

In Smart Communities, *Suzanne Morse draws on her experience over more than two decades working with dozens of towns and cities to provide a profile of what happens when communities come together to solve their problems. As she writes, "Success is neither place nor size bound. It comes from a set of seven leverage points that help communities decide their futures."*

In his book, Peter Levine examines why civil society has declined over the past half century. He acknowledges the challenge posed by the dysfunctions of the political system. "Plainly," in his words, "our institutions do not work." They are inadequate, he says, "to address our accumulated problems, and the prevailing ideologies offer no plausible solutions." At a time when many Americans feel like spectators, not citizens, Levine underscores the message in his title, We Are the Ones. . . : *"The obligation to address our problems falls on us—American citizens— more profoundly than in the past." His thesis is that "people must change the norms and structures of their own communities through deliberate civic action—something they are capable of doing quite well." Throughout*

his book, Levine describes the values, skills, and strategies required to achieve broad-based civic renewal.

I talked with Suzanne Morse and Peter Levine about their prescriptions for civic renewal, and civic practices that provide, in Levine's words, "the building blocks with which a new civil society can be constructed."

Suzanne Morse: Revealing the Habits behind Successful Communities

KM: *You have worked with many different kinds of communities, large and small, including communities that seem to have few resources but turn out nonetheless to be "smart" communities that are able to come together to address common problems. You point out that there are no "one-size-fits-all" solutions. Still, some places, as your title suggests, are much*

better than others at making good collective decisions and acting on them. What are some of the readily apparent characteristics of "smart" communities?

SM: This is a great question. Some communities have a "resilient" gene built into the community DNA. That is, they seem to have community members who can bounce back no matter what. I would suggest that Pittsburgh and Minneapolis are those kinds of places. Both communities have active multisectoral leadership, strong academic institutions, and a broad nonprofit network. However, you also find smaller places such as Almena, Wisconsin, and Chimney Rock, North Carolina, that continue to revitalize their communities. What are the common threads? Small groups (or not so small groups) of people and organizations that are committed to taking risks, trying new things, and not giving up. They have these community characteristics, I would argue, because they have practiced good habits: talking together, working together, and believing in their communities. When a downturn or upturn happens they know how to get things done and not be stymied by the situation.

KM: *You mention that "collaboration" and "partnerships"—two words that are commonly used—are critical elements of successful communities. As you write, "Collaboration is more often talked about than actually done." You refer to effective collaboration as both a process and a goal. Tell us about effective community collaboration and what it requires.*

SM: The short answer is that you have to give a little to get a lot. In far too many instances, community organizations feel

that giving up control or the spotlight will cost them in dollars raised and in visibility. They don't see the payoff in working with others. Actually the more impact that organizations can have together, the more visibility they all get. I am particularly impressed by broad-based collaboratives that come together for different reasons and with different skills. Collaborations supporting better outcomes for young people tend to have people from all sectors but have a different entry point for their interests. Rarely do collaboratives, or any of the family of organizing structures, have only one type of organization. The really

> **Some communities have a "resilient" gene built into the community DNA. That is, they seem to have community members who can bounce back no matter what.**

successful ones have framed the purpose broadly enough to meet the interests of a range of stakeholders. They essentially ask the question our Kettering colleague Ed Dorn posed once: Who do we need in the room [or collaborative] to solve this problem or meet this opportunity?

KM: *You refer to seven "leverage points" that comprise the "smart communities" process, which are necessary to produce better decisions, build a strong sense of community, and a sense of inclusion. Why are all seven necessary, and what happens if one or several of them are missing?*

SM: The answer is partially embedded in an earlier answer. What if instead of referring to the seven as leverage points, I called them "habits"? We would all be hard pressed to decide which good habit we could do without. All are required to move communities in the right direction. It cer-

tainly won't hurt to practice one or two and not the others but it definitely will not get a community where it wants to go. Think of any improvement process from losing weight to constructing a building. Each one requires a combination of factors to accomplish the goal. It is the same here. A community that really wants to take charge of its own future has to be

Communities that use their collective wisdom to decide together have better results. While different vehicles are used to accomplish this, there is a recognition that we know more together than we do alone.

engaged in doing all seven. Otherwise, you get predictable results, not transformative ones. The combination of the seven is the secret sauce of community well-being.

KM: *One characteristic of the community success stories you write about is that they aren't single-project initiatives. Rather, they involve a set of civic habits, the ways communities organize around common problems and take action. These habits—a set of practices applied in a series of situations—enable some communities to succeed over the long haul. Can you give us an example of how effective communities rely on certain civic habits when they confront new challenges or problems?*

SM: One of the best examples is Chattanooga, Tennessee. Cited by the EPA in 1969

as the city with the worst air quality in the nation, Chattanooga is now considered one of the urban success stories. Having landed a Volkswagen manufacturing facility a few years ago, it continues to build its success record. Looking at Chattanooga today it would be hard to identify which of the seven points has made the most difference. But they are all there. The EPA designation was a wake-up call. The processes and procedures initiated to address the environmental issue began decades-long practices of working together on issues of common concern. First institutionalized in an organization called Chattanooga Venture, the practices of building on assets, practicing deliberative democracy, working collaboratively, and imagining a new future are now business as usual in Chattanooga. The early environmental clean-up success fueled a broad-based commitment to community building, investments, and resilience that has paid enormous dividends.

KM: *In several places in* Smart Communities *you emphasize the importance of a certain mind-set in effective communities, which starts with recognizing a community's assets—both individual talents and collective resources—and bringing them to bear on shared problems. How do communities gain this mind-set and get to the point where they recognize shared assets and draw on them as important resources?*

SM: An addition to the tenth-anniversary edition of *Smart Communities* was the Broadmoor neighborhood in New Orleans.

After Hurricane Katrina, Broadmoor was one of the neighborhoods that received a green dot from the local administrators—which, as the residents learned, was not a good thing. Early in 2006, neighborhoods that were "dotted" were given four months to prove their viability to come back or risk becoming a park or green space. The "dot" mobilized Broadmoor to action. That meant bringing home owners and renters back to rehabilitate their homes, craft a strategic plan, and build on the assets of the neighborhood. Over a four-month period leading up to the deadline, people in the neighborhood stepped forward with ideas, talents, and expertise on ways to make the neighborhood even stronger than before Katrina. Today, Broadmoor has new infrastructure, new leaders, and new possibilities as a neighborhood.

KM: *Both you and Peter Levine write about the importance of deliberation as a way of coming to agreement about the problems communities face, and discussing what course of action is in their best interest. Tell us why this phase of talking-together-before-acting is so important, and why it seems to be a key ingredient in community problem solving.*

SM: The problems communities face are very difficult. Many are wrestling with poverty, disinvestment, and challenges brought on by a changing economy. The solutions to these "wicked" problems are not singular or short-term. They require, almost by definition, multipronged, sustainable approaches. Communities that use their collective wisdom to decide together have better results. While different vehicles are used to accomplish this, there is a recognition that we know more together than we do alone. National organizations such as the National Issues Forums Institute and Everyday Democracy's Study Circles provide a methodology and materials to allow communities to discuss difficult choices. Local initia-

tives such as the Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI) have developed strategies to bring people together to "decide and act." Whatever the vehicle, the ability to deliberate and think together about an action plan puts communities ahead of the game.

KM: *In your final chapter, you write, "Smart communities are smart because they have made tough decisions, included more people in the process, built on their assets, and learned to adapt." When you are invited to communities that are struggling, what is your advice about where they should start, and how they can acquire the skills and habits that are apparent in smart communities?*

SM: The most important first step for communities is to open their eyes and their minds to their own capabilities and resources. After many years of working with communities, I would say that the biggest problem most communities face is that they do not know what they have. This is the key to imagining a new future. Most places have many more assets than they realize. The second step is to open opportunities for more people to engage in the leadership of the community. This requires various skills, such as the ability to build partnerships, create new vehicles for communication, and devise strategies for action. It also requires a willingness to widen the circle of leaders. Finally, people often don't know which projects they should prioritize to revitalize their community. I encourage them to think about what they have always appreciated or enjoyed about their community and how that might be recaptured and supported in new ways. Recognizing community assets provides a way to focus their energies. It offers a positive start, helps fashion goals and strategies, and guides actions that are authentic to the place.

KM: *Thank you, Suzanne.*

Excerpt from Suzanne Morse's
Smart Communities

Americans don't always agree. We have strong feelings about athletic rivalries, political parties, and religious beliefs. There is one thing, however, that receives almost universal agreement: working together is better. In a survey, *What Will It Take? Making Headway on Our Most Wrenching Problems*, commissioned by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change in 2003, Americans said overwhelmingly (93 percent) that working together more closely on community problems leads to better results. When asked what would *most* improve the quality of life in the community, 40 percent said "working together" versus 14 percent who said "voting." These responses define our challenge—how to make working together business as usual.

The search for explanations of success for communities leads to the most predictable answer: groups of community members work together across sectoral lines. The expectation and the evidence is that people tackle the good times and bad more effectively together.

People join together on a myriad of projects, interests, and concerns. The world has witnessed enormous outpourings of support and generosity in times of crisis—floods, hurricanes, and tragedies of all types. The evidence is clear that people can link arms and join hands with the proper motivation. The key to community success, however, is the *habit* of working together, not the *incident* of working together. Democracy itself hinges on the ability of citizens to hang together and hang tough on the critical issues of the day.

Our communities no longer have the luxury of "going it alone." The complexity of the problems facing every corner of the world requires that people and organizations be willing and able to come together to craft strategies that are effective in good times and bad. In places where genuine joint action has occurred, results happen. These are not just pie-in-the-sky experiments, but rather gritty processes that bring citizens, educators, organizations, governments, and businesses together to create a different outcome. . . .

Communities have the capacity to meet important challenges directly and multilaterally if they organize themselves to act. However, rarely is it just structure that is the key to success. Americans choose to work together in different ways and for different reasons. However, it is clear that sustained efforts—those developed for a purpose and that work over time—must have a structure for working together that has broad implications for building social capital, creating unusual partnerships, and taking action on systemic issues, but also the public will to act.

Excerpt from Suzanne Morse, Smart Communities: How Citizens and Local Leaders Can Use Strategic Thinking to Build a Brighter Future, *2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 55-56. Copyright © 2014 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*
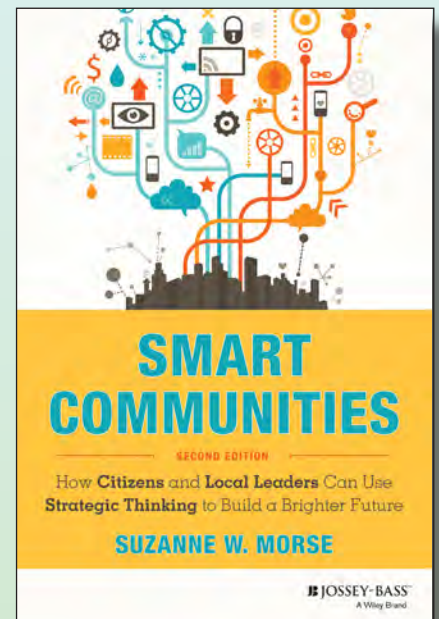
Peter Levine: Calling a Million Citizens to Action

KM: *You have written a bold book.* We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For *is a call to action, a how-to book with an ambitious goal, "to organize one million active citizens into a self-conscious movement for civic renewal." Given all the obstacles and deterrents to public engagement, which you acknowledge, it takes a leap of faith to believe that such a movement can become the fulcrum for changing the nation's civic culture. How do you respond when skeptics say it's not realistic, given the systemic nature of our public problems? At a time, in your words, when "our political institutions are inadequate to our problems," why should we believe that a substantial number of citizens working mainly at the local level can change the nation's political culture?*

PL: Hope is a scarce but renewable resource. Stocks of hope are low right now. In *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, I propose a reason for optimism. Even though the large-scale trends in civic engagement are downward, we are living at a time of impressive civic innovation. I estimate that at least one million Americans are deeply committed to civic work at the local level, not only taking on issues but also making space for others to engage. One million dedicated people is enough for a movement. Right now, they work in separate geographic communities, policy domains, and streams of civic work, such as community organizing, deliberative democracy, or citizen journalism. But they have common interests. The task of organizing them (or I should say, "organizing us") into a movement will not be easy. But networks are already forming, and civic activists seem to be receptive to the message that a movement is necessary.

KM: *What strikes me about your book is that its premise is so different from most commentary about public problems. Most political discussion is about government, in particular the federal government, and what it should or should not do. Yours is an argument for a citizen-centered politics. Your thesis is that citizens "must change the norms and structures of their own communities through deliberate civic action." Moreover, you say that "deliberate civic action is something people are capable of doing quite well." You describe promising civic innovations and instances of effective civic engagement. But often these seem like islands of democratic action in a sea of civic indifference. What's necessary to spark the coalescence of civic activists and achieve a critical mass of engaged citizens?*

PL: You summarize my view well. I think government is a tool that people may decide to use or not. It is not an end in itself. We generally get the government we deserve; it is a reflection of our civil society. Nevertheless, I call our political institutions corrupt and argue that their corruption has become a substantial barrier to civic engagement. The response I propose is to organize a large and demographically diverse group of civic leaders to fight against corruption and for civic renewal.

KM: *You describe the half-century decline in genuine civic engagement and discuss its causes. It's not so much, you say, that motivation to engage has weakened, but that institutional support for engagement has declined—the kind that unions, political parties, and national organizations that recruited civic actors formerly provided. What do you regard as the best prospects for rebuilding institutional support for active citizenship?*

PL: The old civil society was by no means ideal. It was segregated and hierarchical. But institutions like unions, parties, activist religious congregations, and metropolitan daily newspapers had certain advantages that we have largely lost. They had means to recruit large numbers of people who initially lacked civic motivations, and they had incentives to develop their own members' civic capacities. Today's civil society is almost exclusively voluntary—reliant on individuals' prior interests in civic engagement—and often dependent on philanthropy. I don't think we can go back, but we must develop alternatives that can solve the challenges of recruitment and funding. We can build on community development corporations, land trusts, congregations, and other small but thriving community organizations. The new digital media have cut the costs of organizing by automating many tasks, such as maintaining membership lists and printing and mailing publications. But I do not believe that civil society can become completely free and voluntary as a result of the Internet.

KM: *You make a strong case—it's the core of your theory of change—for*

acting collectively rather than as individuals, by identifying, joining, and influencing networks of civic organizations. Indeed, your book is chiefly addressed to members—or potential members—of civic renewal coalitions. But isn't it the case that the most civically active people are the most partisan and that many civic networks have a partisan agenda? Do you see many examples of civic networks that reach across partisan differences?

PL: One way organizations differ is in terms of ideological unity versus diversity. Some groups deliberately enlist people who share common views, whether on the left or right. Others try to bring people together for discussions across ideological differences. Both are valuable. Another way organizations differ is in terms of scale versus depth. For instance, Scott Reed, who leads the faith-based community-organizing network known as PICO, recently described to me the deep and transformative work that PICO does with its grassroots leaders. But "scale is what we are trying to figure out," he said. "How do you get to scale? Today, we are nowhere near where we want to be." Meanwhile, MoveOn's leader, Anna Galland, told me that her organization has "tremendous scale and little depth." MoveOn's goal, she said, is to "move from a list of eight million to horizontal connectivity." If you think of these as two dimensions— ideological unity versus diversity, and scale versus depth—it produces an array of four kinds of organizations. I can name examples of three of the four types. There are deep and unified groups, deep and diverse groups, and large and unified groups. But I do not believe we have any large and ideologically diverse groups. The National Issues Forums network is diverse and fairly large, but small in proportion to a national population of 310 million. This is a gap we need to fill.

Excerpt from Peter Levine's
We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For

Good citizens deliberate. By talking and listening to people who are different from themselves, they enlarge their understanding, make themselves accountable to their fellow citizens, and build a degree of consensus.

But deliberation is not enough. People who merely listen and talk usually lack sufficient knowledge and experience to add much insight to their conversations, and talk alone rarely improves the world. Deliberation is most valuable when it is connected to work—when citizens bring their experience of making things into their discussions, and when they take ideas and values from deliberation back into their work. Work is especially valuable when it is collaborative: when people make things of public value together. They are typically motivated to do so because they seek civic relationships with their fellow citizens, relationships marked by a degree of loyalty, trust, and hope. In turn, working and talking with fellow citizens builds and strengthens civic relationships, which are scarce but renewable sources of energy and power.

A combination of deliberation, collaboration, and civic relationships is the core of citizenship. If we had much more of this kind of civic engagement, we could address our nation's most serious problems. Indeed, more and better civic engagement is a necessary condition of success; none of the available ideologies or bodies of expertise offers satisfactory solutions, which must emerge instead from a continuous cycle of talking, working, and building relationships. Unfortunately, genuine civic engagement is in decline, neglected or deliberately suppressed by major institutions and ideologies and by the prevailing culture. Our motivation to engage has not weakened, but we have lost institutionalized structures that recruit, educate, and permit us to engage effectively.

Nevertheless, we live in a period of civic innovation, when at least one million Americans, against the odds, are working on sophisticated, demanding, and locally effective forms of civic engagement. These Americans see the need for citizenship and are building impressive practices and models. Their work remains scattered and local because it is contrary to mainstream national policy. Civic engagement cannot achieve sufficient scale and power without reforms in our most powerful institutions. The way to achieve such reforms is to organize the one million most active citizens into a self-conscious movement for civic renewal.

Reprinted from We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For *by Peter Levine with permission from Oxford University Press USA. Copyright © 2013 by Peter Levine.*

When Communities Work . . .

KM: *Although you say that "talking alone rarely improves the world," you underscore the importance of citizen deliberation and enumerate its benefits: It enlarges people's understanding, makes them more accountable to each other, and builds a sense of consensus or common ground. In brief, in your words, "It helps solve problems." What do you regard as particularly promising ways of expanding the occasions for citizen deliberation and ensuring that elected officials are listening?*

PL: I would encourage proponents of deliberation to think beyond the organizations that intentionally organize events at which diverse people come together to talk. Those organizations are important

The most valuable forms of civic engagement combine deliberation (discussing what to do in a community or group), collaboration (actually working and acting together on public problems), and relationship building. Not only do exemplary citizens participate in these ways, but they make it possible for others to participate as well.

to me personally. But they are too small and politically marginal to turn the United States into anything resembling a deliberative democracy. I would relax our standards of neutrality, civility, and ideological

diversity and make common cause with organizations that have some deliberative impulses. To name one example, Organizing for America is obviously (although not officially) partisan. Its Web address is BarackObama.com. But OFA's leaders are proud of moments when they collaborate with truly nonpartisan local organizations, and they want to build a broader agenda. I would recommend trying to nudge groups like that (from both the right and left) in somewhat more deliberative directions, rather than trying to build a deliberative democracy based on nonpartisan experiments.

KM: *You mention that books about politics and public life feature provocative accounts of specific problems, but they end with weak and unpersuasive prescriptions about what should be done—and especially what we as citizens could do. In this respect, your book, like Suzanne Morse's* Smart Communities, *is a notable exception. Your final chapter on civic strategies includes a series of proposals about how to accomplish civic renewal. Among the items on your list, which do you regard as the most promising, in the sense that certain initiatives have the potential to significantly change the nation's political culture?*

PL: I list policy proposals at the end of the book as examples. A book is a static

medium, and I recognize that the policy agenda for civic renewal will shift rapidly and will vary by community. We most need a durable movement whose policy agenda can evolve over time. That said, I don't believe we can make much progress on civic renewal without curtailing the power of money in politics, and therefore I would put campaign finance reform at the top of the list. Campaign finance reform at the national level is not realistic in the next five years, but local reform remains possible and important.

KM: *The word* citizen *is often used, but people don't necessarily agree about the role of citizens in the life of a democratic nation. When you use the phrase "good citizenship," what do you mean?*

PL: The most valuable forms of civic engagement combine deliberation (discussing what to do in a community or group), collaboration (actually working and acting together on public problems), and relationship building. Not only do exemplary citizens participate in these ways, but they make it possible for others to participate as well. As Everyday Democracy's executive director, Martha McCoy, told me recently, good citizens "enable other people to have a voice." They "make sure that democracy allows people to deliberate," to participate in "dialogic, empathetic, problem-solving work, connected to the community as a whole." They pay attention to the mega-structures that allow everyone to participate. Civic engagement, so defined, benefits the individuals who participate; it pays economic, social, and environmental dividends for their communities; and it improves governance. Civic engagement may not be a sufficient solution to our nation's problems, but it is a necessary component.

KM: *Thank you, Peter.*

From Both Sides Now: A Field Report from New Orleans

What happens when a community advocate becomes a government bureaucrat?

Lucas Díaz

Making the switch from working as a community advocate to working as a government bureaucrat is never easy, particularly if one isn't interested in a long-term government career. That's where I found myself when I agreed to join newly elected Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu to direct the launching of the City of New Orleans' first-ever Neighborhood Engagement Office (NEO) in 2011. I had no idea that I was signing up for one of the most rewarding and challenging jobs of my life.

At the time, public satisfaction in local government was at an all-time low, with widespread belief that all local government was inept and corrupt. As a community advocate, I struggled to convince fellow advocates to build substantive, meaningful relationships with government decision makers. Even when couched in the best possible light, partnership seemed to imply a certain not-so-ethical coziness that smacked of negative self-service. My community-organizing training told me that it could be possible to work with local government based on mutual understanding, even in a place with such a storied history of corruption as New Orleans.

My short tenure as director of the mayor's Neighborhood Engagement Office would have its hiccups, setbacks, and no short amount of contention, but through it all I pursued one singular agenda—get the community and local government to speak a common language focused on public participation.

My short tenure as director of the mayor's Neighborhood Engagement Office would have its hiccups, setbacks, and no short amount of contention, but through it all I pursued one singular agenda—get the community and local government to speak a common language focused on public participation. I pursued this not so much as a government bureaucrat, but more so as a community advocate working in a governmental role.

Prior to Mayor Landrieu's tenure, the concept and language of effective public participation received little attention in local government. Community members understood the concept better than government officials. When the local community spoke of public participation, they wanted to have a say in decision making. When local government spoke of public participation, however, they wanted peaceful public meetings. One side wanted more involvement in decision making; the other side didn't even recognize the possibility of community-informed decision making.

A meaningful relationship between community and government would never be possible if both sides continued to speak past each other. And yet, how does one go about changing what appears to be a cultural way of engaging? Both community and government were so accustomed to speaking at each other in New Orleans in a particular way that it appeared cultural. The historically ineffective way of engaging each other seemed to be coded in the very DNA of New Orleanians. But how does one grapple with obsolete DNA coding?

As a middle manager with virtually no power inside city hall's bureaucracy, I could do little to change this culture. To be sure, I often felt completely powerless. However, my training as an organizer taught me to build relationships, which I did within city hall and in the community. I strategized and sought opportunities where the office could work with other departments directly, and I instructed my team to build direct relationships with our nearly 200 neighborhood associations across the city. Of

course, I also began my singular campaign to convince the mayor that the city needed a guiding framework for public participation.

In doing my work, I tried to stay clear of hot-button issues that could derail the efforts of the NEO. Such issues could potentially make the very idea of public participation seem caustic—and subsequently make it an untouchable area for government attention. For example, during my time in city hall, a local nonprofit was promoting a community-based citizen participation plan for land use. The mayor was not interested in the structural model being offered by the nonprofit, which resulted in tense relations between city hall and people who supported the community-based land-use plan. The concepts behind effective public participation, which I championed, are applicable when addressing a broad range of public problems, including land use, public health, and transportation, to name a few. However, because land-use decision-making structures were a hot topic, dialogue between residents and government was difficult. Many residents were already focused in on specific structural recommendations (such as the creation of decentralized, district-based land-use agencies) and saw such structural changes as solutions to deeper engagement problems. Advocates invested in a structural answer to public participation challenges came to believe that simply changing to nongovernment structures would solve the communication disconnect. The Neighborhood Engagement Office, on the other hand, was trying to encourage attention to the deeper conversation about how we should engage each other and what that conversation should look like. Although the structural recommendations were important, building relationships was even more important so we could work together over time to address the many problems we faced.

Despite a charged environment, I moved ahead with shifting public partici-

pation conversations away from specific structural solutions and toward dialogue between government and residents that would ultimately help address a myriad of problems the city faced. By fall 2011, an opportunity to apply effective public participation concepts in government presented itself.

A frustrated capital projects unit, seeing our office as a technical support service, asked us to help them with what seemed to them a never-ending barrage of community confrontation. This department was responsible for moving public capital projects (playgrounds, fire stations, recreation centers) from predesign to construction. In 2011, the department had nearly 200 projects on its agenda. Their mandate was to complete all projects before the mayor's first four-year term ended in 2014. However, many projects were stalled because of community discontent.

Our office was able to diagnose that community distrust and government participation practices were at the heart of the issues that plagued the situation. Despite the department's willingness to hear from the community on its projects, it consistently experienced emotionally charged and unfriendly meetings with the general public. We took the opportunity to address the distrust as a symptom of faulty participation practices. We designed an improved public participation plan that was specific to their decision-making process, trained the staff, and informed neighborhood leaders, all with the intention of changing how residents and government workers engaged with each other. The plan allowed our office to educate both sides on effective public participation, as well as implement practices that yielded positive benefits.

Unlike the heated meetings the capital projects department previously experienced, the department was able to quickly build trust with the community it served, giving our office immediate proof that old habits and practices could

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change with buy-in to shared language and understanding. Success with this department provided leverage for other similar efforts, and more important, it enabled our office to move forward with a plan to bring the concepts and language of effective public participation forward in a broader sense.

I used this leverage to my advantage and developed the City of New Orleans Neighborhood Participation Plan (City NPP) by April 2012, which served as a guide for using effective public participation practices, with the hope of yielding culture change in public engagement. Published in November 2012, the New Orleans City NPP was nothing more than a concept-defining document designed to guide both the community's and city hall's use and understanding of effective public participation practices.

Each time the mayor spoke of leveling the playing field for neighborhoods so they could build partnerships with local government, I felt that this could only happen if both sides did a better job of hearing and understanding each other. Unfortunately, not unlike many cities, government-speak and community-speak

do not align well. Neither party hears the other, and neither party fully comprehends the context informing each other's language and claims. In order to arrive at effective public participation, common understanding must first be established. But even this is not enough if done only on a case-by-case basis. What will suffice is an intentional, consistent effort.

My strategy then, very early on, was to have city hall and the community intentionally embrace a common language of effective public participation. Only through this intentional work could a culture of mutually beneficial dialogue and practice grow. Without it, the same patterns of deep distrust that had stymied city growth and development in previous decades would remain active, no matter the number of participation, transparency, or accountability initiatives installed. Today, I've returned to my work as a community advocate. I have higher hopes for both sides learning to work together. There's still a long way to go, but at least we've begun to talk with each other.

Lucas Díaz is a PhD fellow in the City, Culture, and Community program at Tulane University. He now works in the community as a researcher and community developer, focusing on inclusive public life practices in everyday civic experiences. He can be reached at ldiaz5@tulane.edu.

Democracy
in the
Balance

The Complex Dynamics of the Arab World Make Outcomes Far from Certain

Ziad Majed

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The Arab Network for the Study of Democracy, founded in July 2007, gathers researchers and civil society activists from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen. After working for three years on deliberative democracy forums, the network started in early 2011 publishing papers and studies on Arab revolutions and is currently preparing for a regional conference in Tunisia to assess four years of political transitions and conflicts in different Arab countries.

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions when it comes to the Arab revolutions. First, although there are many similarities in their causes and their slogans, the revolutions differ in their paths, their temporary outcomes, and in the specifics of the driving political and social forces behind them. Second, the immediate and direct effects of the revolutions (and counterrevolutions) are as yet unfinished, while the indirect effects will remain influential for years to come.

Still, we can probably identify conclusions on three different levels, almost four years after the start of the transformative movement in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen, and subsequent interactions with some of the social movements in Jordan, Morocco, and other nations.

The First Level:
What Prompted Millions of People to Launch Massive Uprisings and Revolutions in the Past Four Years?

There are numerous factors that can be studied by sociologists, political scientists, and economists, including those related to the predominance of authoritarianism, coupled with corruption that in the past decade rose to the level of debauchery and became a provocation to citizens. The popular outrage pushed them up to and beyond their limits, breaking the spell of complacency and quietude.

Rising literacy rates and levels of education in Arab societies lead to a new generation with the necessary tools of rebellion against systems to which their people (like their parents) had surrendered. The tools of these rebellions included both connections and communication with the world through the Internet as well as a growing sense of individual identity that awakened self-consciousness and dignity.

Additionally there are the effects associated with economic changes in the last two decades, which marginalized the agricultural and industrial sectors and polarized the workforce in favor of new service and commercial sectors. These changes may be necessary to keep pace with global economic developments, but they have been insufficient to create plentiful job opportunities or to extend benefits that compensate for the losses of the families previously involved in traditional sectors.

The Arab world has also witnessed demographic shifts generally over the last two decades, in terms of the slowdown of population growth, declining fertility rates, and a rising age of marriage. This has meant more space for the new generation to become politically active, unhampered by the premature and heavy social burdens to the same extent that earlier generations had been weighed down.

The expansion of cities and residential areas to allow immediate geographic contiguity between human blocs has meant the sharing of spatial characteristics, even if the people come from different backgrounds or origins.

And social networking sites have made possible the expansion of Internet-based networks in the region (and steadily increased the number of users), making access to media and information nearly boundless and enabling citizens to engage in dialogue and construct political stances together. As soon as the revolutions began, the difference between the virtual world and the real world became minimal. The virtual itself turned into a means of real mobilization, a space to meet and rise up, allowing all kinds of creativity. Social networks enabled the public expression of accumulated frustrations on one hand and the yearned for freedom and dignity on the other.

The Second Level: What Did the Revolutions Accomplish?

Since the recent revolutions, many Arab societies have regained their relationship to politics and to political time, and citizens both as individuals and groups have regained in more than one country their rights of expression. This is something that most Arabs have not seen since the 1960s.

The media, citizen activism, statements by intellectuals, questions from politicians (including elected officials), social networking sites, and political talk shows have all begun to participate in monitoring and following political life, statements, and actions and to encourage the formation of public opinion and a new relationship to politics. None of this sort of accountability was allowed under one-party regimes, a controlled or directed media, and rubber-stamp parliaments.

Equally important are the return of free elections and the return of competition between different political powers. The Tunisia example shows a revival of political competitiveness that—if firmly established—can by itself be a model in the region.

The Third Level: The Most Prominent Challenges Facing Most Arab States Today

As is confirmed day after day, these significant changes do not negate the incredible number of difficulties and challenges that continue to hinder democratic transformation in the various Arab cases and threaten to make it extremely costly on more than one level. These countries face five main challenges:

> **Rising literacy rates and levels of education in Arab societies lead to a new generation with the necessary tools of rebellion against systems to which their people (like their parents) had surrendered. The tools of these rebellions included both connections and communication with the world through the Internet as well as a growing sense of individual identity that awakened self-consciousness and dignity.**

1) Violence, Counterrevolutions, and Military Struggles

In Syria, the intensity of the repression by the regime and of the fighting has reached an unprecedented level of barbarism. With hundreds of thousands of people killed and millions displaced, the political transition appears impossible without an international peace plan.

In Libya and Yemen, struggles for power erupted between different political and tribal forces, and new authorities appear so far incapable of reaching compromises and power sharing formulas.

As for Egypt, the army—with the support of many sectors of the society—

Ultimately, the Arab world today seems to be in the midst of a thorny path, where problems emerge and are compounded. While new struggles continue to arise out of the transformations, so do relative successes and achievements.

led a military coup against the elected Muslim Brotherhood government, and imposed "anti-terrorist laws" in an attempt to restrict gained political freedoms. Future developments will show whether new political dynamics will emerge and allow for next elections in the country to create a new balance of power.

2) The Adaptation of the Currents of Political Islam to the Parameters of Democracy

For the first time since the emergence of Islamic political parties in the first half of the 20th century, some of them have come to power through the ballot box, such as in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt (until the coup). This poses major challenges, including 1) the capacity of these Islamic parties to deal with the messiness of everyday politics in isolation from the

"sacred" and 2) the test of the abilities of the secular forces to both deal with these parties and impose a balance of power that allows Islamic parties to test their programs in power while respecting democratic principles. The issue of "political Islam" and democratic transition is an open question. While the Egyptian scenario appears to be a failure, the Tunisian one is seen as a relative success. This Islamist-secular coexistence will be tested in November 2014 elections.

3) The Building of Democratic Institutions

One of the most prominent challenges in Arab countries today is building democratic institutions in accordance with key principles: separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, and professionalization of the police and security services, as well as making the military subject to elected civilian authorities.

Of course, all of this is easier said than done. There is no doubt that dealing with institutional difficulties like those connected with reforming public and municipal administrations and services will be time consuming and demand experience that is lacking or limited on the ground today.

4) Economic Growth

In societies distinguished by their need to create hundreds of thousands of jobs each year to absorb the influx of new job seekers, focusing on reforming economic policies, organizing productive sectors, and confronting high rates of unemployment should be of a high degree of importance. Because it is difficult to discuss the major changes needed without taking into account the regional and international contexts, it can be said that

developing new bases for economic cooperation among the Arab countries on the one hand, and between near and far states on the other, is the great challenge now and in the future.

5) Human Rights and Equality

The Arab revolutions have been characterized by the wide participation of women and civil society activists, as well as by slogans calling for freedom and both individual and collective dignity. However, the translation of slogans and aspirations into lived reality is another matter and remains a stumbling block. The ongoing challenges to draft legislation and move toward practices that accord rights to women, guarantee equality of citizens before the law, and protect human rights according to international conventions have been exponentially difficult as a result of the long-extant problems and obstacles accumulated over a lengthy period, in addition to the dominating patriarchal structures.

Hard Transitions

Ultimately, the Arab world today seems to be in the midst of a thorny path, where problems emerge and are compounded. While new struggles continue to arise out of the transformations, so do relative successes and achievements.

It is likely that the coming months and years will witness shifts that reflect the emerging balances of power in most of these countries. At the same time, developments in the region as a whole will lead to new, further changes and challenges. But these coming transformations await a more detailed assessment and additional conclusions at a later date.

Twenty Years Later, Democracy Still Struggles to Take Root in South Africa

Ivor Jenkins

It's hard to think that a mere 20 years ago South Africans were in the midst of forging a new society when they voted for the first time on April 27, 1994.

South Africa managed to ride the "third wave" of democratization that swept the world in the 1990s, which started with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Civil society organizations and South Africa's mass democratic movement were instrumental in helping to forge a new post-apartheid order.

This culminated in the adoption of the final constitution in 1996, a document by and for the people. The South African constitution-making process was one that was truly participatory, not a top-down process but one that sought the views of ordinary citizens as well as those with legal and other expertise. The constitution was, like the transition, both home grown and bold for it included not only civil and political rights but also socioeconomic rights, such as the right to health care, housing, education, water, and a clean environment. In "legal speak," these rights are justiciable yet subject to a limitation clause. While citizens are able to sue for the implementation of these rights, the constitution limits such implementation to what is "reasonably justifiable."

And so started an important, fresh, and radically new era for South Africans, namely the entrenchment of the rule of law and a culture of justification. Apartheid had seen the unfettered abuse of state power in virtually every sense. The new constitution set out clearly and deliberately what the founding values of the South African state were to be, values including "transparency, accountability, and openness."

Daunting Challenges Remain

Yet, even as South Africans look back at 20 remarkable years, 5 free and fair elections, and the passage of power from one elected leader (of the same party, the ruling African National Congress, the ANC) to another, which included the "recall" of President Thabo Mbeki by his party, the challenges that lay before them remain stark. During its 2014 election campaign, the government and the ANC trumpeted

Twenty Years Later, Democracy Still Struggles

their "good story to tell"—and indeed, there have been multiple successes. Over the past 20 years, ordinary South Africans have experienced change: more than 3.3 million houses were built, benefitting more than 16 million people; close to 12 million people now have access to electricity; and 92 percent of people now have access to potable water. Similarly, the government has implemented a social security scheme, which benefits about 16 million South Africans. Considerable gains have also been achieved in health care, with about 2.4 million South Africans receiving free anti-retroviral treatment.

And yet, South Africa is the most unequal society in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.63. Its unemployment rate, at 25.2 percent, is unsustainable. In addition, the fragile social compact that was wrought in the late 1990s and that was so crucial for building trust between the old regime and the ANC seems to be fraying at the edges as increased social protests and unrest in the mining sector continue unabated. No longer able to invoke the "Madiba Magic" that set us on the path to democracy, our debates are often un-nuanced, and we seem to be talking past each other. In recent years, the government has adopted a National Development Plan (NDP), which is meant to provide a menu of options for future development, economic policy, and social cohesion. Yet, ironically, it is a document contested specifically by trade unions who distrusted the process and deem it a "neo-liberal instrument." And so the divisions remain stark. Even so, in the recent

election, the ANC returned to power with 62 percent of the vote.

In recent years, there have been increasing concerns about the tendency of the government to clamp down on access to information, citing "state security" as a legitimate reason to withhold information from ordinary citizens. There are fears that the Protection of State Information Bill (POSIB), aimed at classifying state information, will be used by government to put pressure on investigative journalists and whistle-blowers. However, South Africa has not yet reached that point. Its courts remain robust defenders of the rights of ordinary citizens, and the media has been relentless in investigating corruption in government and ensuring that this information reaches South Africans.

Thus, the picture of South Africa remains decidedly mixed; not all good news, but not all bad either.

Mostly, though, the deep work of building a democratic society happens outside of the grand narrative of national politics that is dominated by political party squabbles and infighting.

Increasingly, there have been calls for a new "social compact" to be forged on the way forward as South Africa grapples with the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment, and perhaps the biggest chestnut of all, inequality. In addition, given their past, race and class still coincide, and one is more likely to be black and poor than white and poor.

South African civil society has increasingly felt the pressure over

the past 20 years as it has battled to find its voice. The Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (Idasa) was founded in 1987, and unfortunately closed its doors in March of 2013. Idasa was originally created by its founding leaders, and then opposition party members in the white apartheid parliament, with the purpose to connect ordinary South African citizens with the real leaders of the country, who at that stage were banned and in exile. These two founder members branded the then white apartheid parliament as "white men talking to themselves, with no relevance for the majority citizens of the country" and they walked out of parliament to start Idasa.

During the following years, after the unbanning of the exiled political movements, as an Idasa staff member, I was privileged to facilitate and participate in some of the intense and critical discussions that formed the basis of the transformation of a new democratic society. Idasa was the premier democracy institute and a leading voice in efforts to support and build democratic citizenship in South Africa. While our work was embedded in experience and within communities, we also were able to generate research of a high quality that was able to influence policy and the legislative process. As a "critical ally" to government, our work straddled the divide between citizens and the state. On any given day, Idasa staffers would be training local government councilors in one center and taking on government in parliament opposing legislation we believed infringed rights.

Idasa was an important and credible voice during the 1990s, brokering meetings

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1987 The Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (Idasa) was founded.

1989 Fall of the Berlin Wall

1994 1st non racial elections in post-apartheid South Africa. Citizens voted for the first time. Nelson Mandela was elected president.

1996 Adoption of the final constitution, a document by and for the people.

1999 2nd democratic election. Thabo Mbeki was elected president.

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between the ANC in exile and the Afrikaner government of the day. Its roots were therefore in dialogue and bringing people together to do what seemed simple but was so elusive in the late 1980s in South Africa, namely, talking. Ironically, as calls for a new "social compact" in South Africa increase, Idasa's demise has left a gaping hole in the landscape of organizations able to do the complex work of building trust in societies. This work is almost always about the behind-the-scenes work of building relationships across political and social divides. South Africa faces complex challenges, and many civil society organizations have shifted focus as donors have supported the implementation of socioeconomic rights, such as education and health care.

Needed: An Honest Broker

The donor rationale seems to be that the institutions of democracy are solid and settled and that deepening the culture of democracy within our democratic institutions is no longer necessary. The past years, though, have shown graphically how much political pressure our democratic institutions are under, whether it is parliament dealing with errant MPs, or the Public Protector, fast becoming a lone voice against graft and corruption, or electoral violence and pockets of intolerance, it is clear that our democratic culture is not yet fully entrenched. In fact, we have a long way to go to reach consensus on our collective constitutional values, and some in government and in pockets of our society have sought themselves to undermine our constitutional values by their conduct.

The demise of Idasa also showed the short-termism and short-sightedness of the donor community and the local business community, which was consistently unable to appreciate the value of civil society organizations and partnerships. What is needed now—more than any time since 1994—is an "honest broker" prepared to work on forging a new social compact across race, class, and other societal barriers.

But perhaps Larry Diamond's words from the January 2014 issue of the *Journal of Democracy* are an apt way to conclude. He suggests a new strategic approach for the donor community as well as South African civil society as we think again about the remaking of our society:

> I think that the international-assistance community also makes a mistake by abandoning civil society after the transition. . . . I have to call attention to the death of that country's [South Africa's] seminal institution in building a democratic civil society, IDASA. . . . Whatever other specific reasons may have been involved, its closure was due in significant part to the fact that international financial support for its work in South Africa simply dried up. People said, "Come on, it's South Africa,

an established democracy in a middle-income country; they don't need help. There are all these rich South African businessmen, many of them liberal, and they should support institutions like this." Well, these businessmen are all worried about offending the ANC by overtly

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supporting independent civil society institutions like IDASA, so they're not going to do so. So where is this kind of institution supposed to get funding? If we say, "Civil society doesn't need to be a priority anymore; let's focus just on political institutions," we risk harming both. Often the energy for institutional innovation and reform comes from civil society, and partnerships between civil society and political parties or between civil society and the state can yield significant benefits. It's very important not to lose sight of that.

Ivor Jenkins, formerly the chief operating officer of Idasa, is now the director of In Transformation Initiative (www.intransformation.org.za). He can be reached at ivor@intransformation.org.za.

3rd democratic election. Thabo Mbeki was re-elected president.

4th democratic election. Jacob Zuma was elected president.

Idasa closed its doors.

5th democratic election. Millions of South Africans — including hundreds of thousands of first-time "born free" voters— turned out for the landmark general election. Jacob Zuma was re-elected president.

2004   **2009**   **2013**   **2014**

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