

Letting Foundation

# CONNECTIONS

Summer/Fall 2005



## June Board Summary

**A**t the Kettering Foundation's spring board meeting this past June, trustees and staff explored different options for Kettering's international research, listening to the remarks of three longtime research partners about the challenges of exporting democracy. They were Daniel Yankelovich, founder of Public Agenda and former Kettering board member; Ramon Daubon, Vice President for Programs at the Inter-American Foundation; and Randa Slim, the executive director of the Institute for Sustained Dialogue.

Debate over the current U.S. policy of imposing democratic reform by force in places like Iraq has divided not only politicians and policymakers in Washington, Yankelovich noted in his opening remarks, but also citizens in much of the rest of the country. Elections alone, he cautioned, are not a cure-all for political instability or social injustice. Hitler, he pointed out, was democratically elected in Germany, while more recent elections in the Arab World in places like Algeria and southern Lebanon have brought hard-line fundamentalists to power—hardly the result U.S. or European interests had hoped for.

Current efforts to promote the spread of democracy, however, have created a number of interesting opportunities for both exploring insights from the foundation's past work and focusing the direction of future research: 1) that elections alone do not make a democracy; 2) that true democracy requires the work of both officials and citizens; 3) that public deliberation can help get citizens from *me* to *we*; 4) and finally, that we must find ways to translate citizen deliberation into action.

While Yankelovich's comments focused on the importance of citizen work to creating an effective democracy, Daubon's remarks addressed the link between democratic life and economic growth.

For the past 35 years, the Inter-American Foundation has been working on the issue in Latin America. "What we've come to learn, is that without an undergirth of a democratic way of concertation, of learning to talk and make decisions together, economics doesn't work," Daubon said. Democracy he suggested, is really a capacity to talk, identify what's important, consider alternatives, and make decisions. It is done in many places, he added, but seldom in Latin America where there is both a rigid



class structure and a strong tradition of authoritarian rule.

"The culture cannot be taught. It has to be learned, and it is learned by experiencing it," Daubon explained. Working in small, often poor communities, Daubon's foundation has been in the business of engaging citizens in defining economic goals and projects. The idea has been enthusiastically embraced not only by grass-

roots organizations, but also by an unexpected ally—business interests who see it as a powerful economic tool. To date, some 53 corporate sponsors have been involved. They see the work as not only improving the region's economy, but also its political stability. Kettering's research in civil economics, Daubon pointed out, laid the groundwork for this new approach.

Business interests, interestingly enough, also played a role in Randa Slim's discussion of political reform efforts in the Middle East. Since 9/11, she noted, a host of foundations and government agencies, ranging from USAID to the United Nations, have tried to promote the spread of democracy in the Middle East, but have met with little, if any, success. Most have little, if any, understanding of Islam, she said. As a result they are seen as trying to import something entirely alien to the region. Secondly, their efforts are largely mechanistic: they focus on voting and multiparty elections and the like.

Locals are interested in a far more fundamental conversation. Broad-based coalitions of Islamicists, nationalists, civic activists, and business interests have emerged in places like Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, Slim explained, and they are engaged in a dialogue about both citizenship and public life. Business interests are critical, she added, because they can provide a moderating influence to help resolve conflicts between the old and new. They also have a great deal of credibility—something most governments in the region and outside interests lack.

Kettering Foundation president David Mathews concluded the meeting by noting that the Kettering Foundation's understanding of democracy as a culture rather than a process could be valuable in a wider study of these kinds of problems. At the same time, research with international partners could provide valuable insights into a number of other areas of Kettering's research about the role of both citizens and institutions in a democracy.

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# Promoting the Spread of Democracy: The Public's Thinking



By John Doble and Carol Selton

In *Coming to Public Judgment*, Daniel Yankelovich draws a distinction between people's top-of-the-head opinions and their considered, worked-through judgments. Poll results, Yankelovich writes, are often mistakenly thought to be people's final judgments, as opposed to their initial opinions.

Evidence of Yankelovich's distinction can be seen in comparing poll and forum results on the promotion of democracy, the subject of the "Americans' Role in the World" forums held in 2003 and 2004. In post-forum questionnaires, participants strongly endorsed the promotion of democracy—for example, a resounding 83 percent agreed that American "support of emerging democracies will, in the long run, enhance our own national security." Furthermore, majorities of 60 percent or higher believed that "working to spread and maintain democracy in other countries will increase stability in the world" and that Americans "should help citizens of other countries develop stable democracies." Recent national surveys echo these findings. Taken in isolation, these findings appear to demonstrate that Americans endorse this country's vigorous promotion of democracy across the globe.

But a different impression emerges when one listens to participants in the "Americans' Role" forums. Most participants focused on one aspect: Should the United States "impose" democracy on other countries through the use of force? This question was answered with a resounding "no." An Air Force serviceman in Panama City,

Florida, said, "We can't force our values on other people." Participants in Carroll County, Maryland, said the idea amounted to "cultural imperialism." A man in Austin, Texas, said, "I'm comfortable with *promoting* the spread of democracy as long as it doesn't mean foist."

Participants gave varying reasons for their views. Many worried about the costs of military intervention, in particular, the loss of life among service personnel and foreign civilians. Others expressed concern about offending foreigners' cultural sensitivities. Some talked about the need for international approval; others said that, since the United States is far from perfect, it would be hypocritical for it to impose its system elsewhere.

The discussion was dominated by the current U.S. military action in Iraq. Although participants reached common ground on many aspects, Iraq proved divisive and, at times, polarizing. Some saw the war as necessary, saying that democratizing Iraq would reduce the threat of terrorism, that the war was an ethical response to a tyrant who had massacred countless innocents. Others disagreed, saying that democratizing Iraq was unrealistic, that it was being waged without international sanction, and that it was diverting resources from combating the real threat, Al Qaeda.

When discussions went further—that is, beyond the question of imposing democracy by force—most participants favored the United States taking pro-democracy steps. One view was that U.S.

leaders should speak out in support of democratic values. In a forum in New Orleans, Louisiana, people supported Secretary of State Powell's criticism of Russia for closing down newspapers critical of the government. One man commented, "I do think we have a right to say, 'you're doing it wrong and we don't like it, Mr. Putin.'" Many believed that democracy could be promoted through an exchange of ideas. One New Jersey man stated, "If we know about other countries and they know about us, they'll know we're not out to hurt them." A woman from New Orleans noted the long-term benefits of "the many people from other countries who come here and get educated. . . . They take it back to their countries and start programs there."

Travel and educational exchanges also drew strong support at the 2003 National Issues Convention in Philadelphia. Several participants commented that Americans are too isolated and know little about other peoples and cultures. Some favored working directly with citizens and citizen groups, saying "we've got to start with the grassroots and work up, [because] we're not going to succeed by [military] might." In forums on terrorism in 2002–2003, people expressed the desire for increased understanding of other nations, especially in the Middle East.

As a rule, however, when people talked about democracy, they thought only in terms of an American style of democracy, with similar procedures and institutions. People's conception of democracy was

mostly mechanical, including a constitution and bill of rights, checks and balances, and the separation of powers. Few people thought about democracy in terms of public deliberation in which citizens of other nations, as forum participants were doing, attend public forums to consider issues affecting their lives, community, and country.

Many participants expressed misgivings about the long-term consequences of U.S. ties to non-democratic countries. One man in a Memphis, Tennessee, forum said, "It's like Iran—we propped up the Shah of Iran for a long time. . . . And [when] the [Ayatollah] took over, we were on the outs." Participants were divided on this point: in questionnaires completed after the "Americans' Role" forums, 42 percent favored and 48 percent opposed the United States cutting ties with foreign dictators.

In the forums on terrorism, people discussed the reasons for Arab and Muslim enmity toward the United States. Many said Middle-Eastern rage stems from U.S. support for unpopular governments that act contrary to the interests of their people. A man in a Missoula, Montana, forum said anti-American feelings are a result of the United States being "so closely aligned with dictatorial governments who could care less about religious freedoms, women's rights, and other things the American people strongly believe in."

Despite concerns about imposing democracy, broad agreement existed that the United States should promote human rights around the globe. In Lafayette, Indiana, people were concerned about the rights of Afghani women; students at Hofstra University and Virginia Tech discussed civil liberties and the rights of women and children; and in Overland Park, Kansas, people focused on genocide. An Englewood, New Jersey, woman said, "We need to support [people] when [their] human rights are being violated."

People at an "Americans' Role" forum in Philadelphia favored using force to prevent genocide or in humanitarian emergencies. Some argued that the United States should draw a line; a New Jersey woman said, "As long as they're not killing their people, dismembering their people . . . [we should] let them run their own country."

Overall, these findings suggest that participants are of mixed opinions and have not completed the working through necessary to a considered judgment. Although they favor promoting democracy and believe this could promote stability throughout the world, most were opposed to using force to accomplish that end. At the same time, participants

assigned a high priority to safeguarding human rights; many were willing, especially with international support, to intervene militarily to prevent genocide.

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## The International Civil Society Consortium: The Case for Continuous Deliberation

By Ileana Marin

"**W**e live in a time when many Americans have retreated from politics and public life, and many civic-minded organizations and public leaders seek to reengage them," Richard Harwood writes in his article "The Engagement Path." These words could easily have become the succinct motto for what many of us—formally or not so formally affiliated with nongovernmental organizations, universities, and other types of institutes all over the world—are struggling with.

And when I write "many of us," I have in mind the international network that, simply to have an appropriate denomination, we refer to as the International Civil Society Consortium for Public Deliberation ([www.icscpd.org](http://www.icscpd.org)). At last count, this network included 250 international partners representing NGOs, universities, and individuals from Eastern and Central Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America, Asia, and the United States. Despite its obviously heterogeneous character, this international network, created over a number of years, is very strong.

This expanding group draws strength from a special link, the main thread of which is the body of ideas that stand behind the larger concept of deliberative democracy. The group's members continuously seek better ways to communicate and collaborate among themselves. It would be wrong to conclude that this network is too loose, given the great encounters that have occurred over the past years.

The Kettering Foundation (KF) has been the more or less "invisible entity" that, in many circumstances, made possible and then perfected this special link. However, through their work, the members from this impressive number of institutions have mingled before and after their connections via KF. Many of them have been using a deliberative democratic approach in their work for a long time. One of the best parts of KF's role probably has been helping people give a name to the techniques they've been using and frame them in a more structured manner. Furthermore, KF has encouraged an appreciation of the contacts they have developed inside a network created, at times, in a rather ad-hoc manner.

The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is a research foundation—not a grant-giving foundation—rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Its founder, Charles F. Kettering, holder of more than 200 patents, is best known for his invention of the automobile self-starter. He was interested, above all, in seeking practical answers to “the problems behind the problems.”

The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now is to study what helps democracy work as it should. Six major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required to strengthen public life.

Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research corporation supported by a \$250 million endowment. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation’s Web site at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

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