



In Defense of Democracy



On January 6, 2021, for the first time in the history of the United States,

we witnessed an attempt to prevent the peaceful transfer of presidential power. A congressional investigation revealed that the attack on the US Capitol resulted from efforts by the outgoing president to remain in power after the vote of the people had gone against him. He sowed distrust in the integrity of the vote counts of the states he did not carry, against all credible evidence to the contrary, and encouraged violence to prevent the certification of the election results in favor of his opponent. This was a new experience for the people of the United States—and a threat to democracies worldwide.

January 6 sent shockwaves throughout the nation and the world, exposing vulnerabilities in our democratic institutions and the dangerous consequences of disinformation, polarization, and eroded trust. Continuing efforts to spread a false “stop the steal” narrative and change election administration systems, aimed at facilitating future partisan subversion of legitimate election outcomes, show us that this dangerous moment has not passed.

These events remind us of democracy’s fragility and serve as a warning that even well-established systems of democratic governance are vulnerable to leaders who eschew the rule of law and take a win-at-all-costs approach to retaining power. A campaign in defense of democracy to meet these threats is essential.

In Defense of Democracy is the manifestation of our collective belief that the needs of democracy have changed since we first began this work in the early 1980s, and that we must also change.



Sharon L. Davies

President & CEO

Charles F. Kettering Foundation



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Our Vision

We envision a world of thriving democracies where the rights of all are protected and people fulfill their civic responsibilities.

Our Mission

The Charles F. Kettering Foundation advances inclusive democracies by fostering citizen engagement, promoting government accountability, and countering authoritarianism.

Our Guiding Beliefs and Values

Democratic Integrity

We believe in the rule of law and that all people have the right to free and fair elections, accountable leadership, and the peaceful transfer of power.

Civic Responsibility

We believe that people have a responsibility to participate in their communities and to make demands of their governments for the common good.

Belonging

We believe that democracy must embrace the full diversity of life experiences, beliefs, and voices of all.

Justice

We believe that all people have a right to fair and equitable treatment by institutions and systems of governance.

Trustworthiness

We believe that democracy requires civic and governmental institutions that are honest, transparent, and accountable.

How We Do Our Work

The Kettering Foundation advances inclusive democracies by empowering people to build and preserve resilient democratic systems. We do this through:

Research

We are dedicated to producing, translating, and providing unwavering support to research initiatives that drive the advancement and defense of democracy.

Narrative Making

We create trustworthy narratives that inspire the public to embrace and defend democracy.

Communication

We employ a wide range of communication strategies and tactics to promote broad public understanding of democracy and threats to it.

Innovation

We continually search for new, responsive, and impactful ways to advance and defend democracy.

Partnerships

We build and cultivate alliances to strengthen commitment to democracy worldwide.

The Kettering Foundation has established five focus areas:

**Defending Inclusive Democracy | Information for a Democratic Society
Democracy and Community | Democracy and the Arts | Democracy around the Globe**

Defending Inclusive Democracy

In this moment of worldwide democratic decline and rising authoritarianism, democracy requires a robust defense. Some of the forces at play are intentionally fragmenting our society instead of unifying it. This focus area is about strengthening the public's commitment to democracy and increasing its ability to recognize anti-democratic threats and willingness to act in democracy's defense.



Defend inclusive democracy by raising awareness of and responding to its greatest threats.

STRATEGIES

- Promote public understanding of and commitment to democratic principles and values.
- Defend the rights of all citizens to participate in local, state, and national elections and have their votes count.
- Build social awareness of structural barriers and inequities that undermine belonging and limit collective action and citizen participation.

Information for a Democratic Society

A robust and independent information landscape grounded in truth and accuracy plays a critical role in ensuring the transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making that underpin democracy. The public relies upon trusted sources of information to be knowledgeable about local, national, and global issues to participate meaningfully in public affairs. The foundation develops and elevates resources that affirm the power of the people to govern themselves and combats misinformation, disinformation, and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions.



Provide the public with information to heighten awareness of the needs of democracy and to enable the public to recognize authoritarian threats.

STRATEGIES

- Promote public awareness of the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship.
- Produce trusted, nonpartisan research and analysis supportive of democracy.
- Counter anti-democratic campaigns and practices that diminish the critical democratic role of K-12 and higher education.
- Promote the importance of fact-based journalism and the role of a free and independent press in a democratic society.

Democracy and Community

Democracy relies on healthy, inclusive communities where all are able to participate in shaping their future, yet many communities are fractured. The work of this focus area will amplify individual and community voices, promote mutuality, encourage collective action, and enhance democratic engagement.



Strengthen community voices, mutuality, and collective action for greater citizen engagement and influence over local problem-solving and government.

STRATEGIES

Support local projects where people work together to improve their communities and experience the benefits of collaboration firsthand.

Build social awareness of structural barriers and inequities that undermine the sense of community and limit collective action and citizen participation.

Strengthen mechanisms for people to influence local government.

Democracy and the Arts

The arts can help people understand, affirm, and advance core democratic values, including individual freedom, mutual responsibility, fairness, belonging, and trust in each other and in the integrity of our public institutions. The foundation utilizes the unique power of the arts to advance inclusive democracy.



Integrate the unique power of the arts into the Kettering Foundation's work locally, nationally, and internationally.

STRATEGIES

Leverage the unique power of the arts to advance the foundation's work.

Foster citizen engagement, support democratic ideals and practices, and expose threats to democracy through the arts.

Create art that advances democracy at the local, national, and international levels.

Increase the reach and impact of artistic endeavors that affirm and advance democracy.

Democracy around the Globe

In a time of democratic erosion around the globe, people's desire for political rights and civil liberties persists. Democracy requires interconnected champions to support their efforts. The foundation works with strategic partners around the world to protect rights, empower communities, amplify marginalized voices, and counter the influence of authoritarian regimes.



Strengthen an international community of partners to promote and defend inclusive democracies around the globe.

STRATEGIES

Identify key democratic threats and elevate promising initiatives to respond to those threats.

Foster a community of international partners focused on advancing inclusive democracies and countering authoritarian pressures. Support the initiatives of partners and other mobilization efforts to respond to democratic threats.

Document and share knowledge, global insights, experiences, and research to improve efforts to advance inclusive democracy and counter authoritarianism.

OUR HISTORY

The Charles F. Kettering Foundation is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, operating foundation engaged in research for the improvement of society. Founded in 1927 by Charles F. Kettering, best known for inventing the automobile self-starter, the foundation carries on his legacy of rigorous research and his steadfast belief that progress and a better future are attainable through change and innovation.

At its start, the Kettering Foundation was broadly committed to the advancement of human knowledge, the progress of the arts and sciences, and the endowment of public, educational, and other charitable projects. Since that time, the foundation has undergone two major changes in how it does its work: In the late 1960s, Kettering shifted from being a grant-making foundation to an operating foundation. In the 1980s, the foundation decided to center all its research and programming on the project of strengthening democracy, both in the US and around the globe, with a special emphasis on the role of the citizen in democracy. Over the course of more than four decades, Kettering earned a distinguished reputation in the field of deliberative democracy, guided by the belief that democratic societies advance through mechanisms and rights that foster citizen engagement.

Now, under the leadership of Sharon L. Davies and working against the backdrop of rapidly evolving global threats to democracy, Kettering is widening its aperture. A broader focus will enable the foundation to tackle the most pressing challenges to democracy today and contribute to a future where citizens are informed and engaged in shaping their collective future.



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