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Vitalizing democracy through participation

A Vital Moment

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1. A Vital Moment:

In the United States, two decades of participatory innovation have brought new modes of citizenship, a new president and new concerns about the future of democracy

In the aftermath of the 2010 midterm elections, the future of citizenship and participation in American democracy seems both bright with possibilities and plagued by doubts. Two decades of innovation at the local level have produced a new cadre of public officials, practitioner organizations and other leaders who are versed in successful tactics and techniques for engaging citizens.¹ (Two American cities, Portsmouth, N.H., and Hampton, Va., have been named to the list of seven finalists for the prestigious Mohn Prize for “Vitalizing Democracy.”)² The extraordinary development of online technologies has given ordinary people new ways to make connections, gain information and compel the accountability of public officials.³ During the 2008 election, Barack Obama talked more dramatically and relentlessly about citizenship and democratic change than any other presidential hopeful in recent memory, and his campaign exemplified many best practices in citizen participation.⁴ A new generation of young voters has emerged with the skills and determination to remake the political process.⁵ In terms of sheer activity and ambition, democratic governance in America has reached a fever pitch.

And yet the state of democratic governance and participation in the United States remains muddled and disorganized. The ideals and tactics that propelled Obama’s candidacy have not been built into the way his administration governs, and the 2010 midterm elections delivered a stinging rebuke to the president. Most of the successful participation initiatives remain local efforts, and most have been temporary projects that provide only brief glimpses of what a more sustained, deliberative democracy might look like. And the cause of online “transparency,” perhaps the one reform priority to have gained any traction, is being promoted without much sense of how it complements the others.⁶ American democracy reformers do not have a shared vision of the kind of citizenship or type of democracy they are trying to uphold and institutionalize.

2. “Countervailing power” in America: New citizen attitudes and capacities

The proliferation of participation initiatives, and perhaps also the confusion as to the definition of citizenship, is propelled by larger changes in what ordinary Americans want and can do. Citizens are more vocal, diverse, skilled and skeptical than their predecessors of 20, 50 or 100 years ago. They have less time for public life, but they bring more knowledge and talent to the table. They feel more entitled to the services and protection of government, and yet have less faith that government will be able to deliver on those promises. They are less connected to community affairs, and yet they seem better able to find (often through the Internet) the information, allies and resources they need to affect an issue or decision they care about. These new attitudes and capacities are becoming more evident in national elections and policymaking processes, but at the local level it has been clear for some time that citizens are better at governing, and less willing to be governed, than ever before.⁷

In addition to anecdotal stories of conflict and participatory experimentation at the local level, scholarly research and public opinion data confirm that changes are afoot in American political culture. Numerous polls have charted citizens’ changing attitudes toward authority, as well as the

erosion of their trust in government.⁸ Daniel Yankelovich, who inspired many people to rethink their views about citizenship with his 1991 book, *Coming to Public Judgment*, now argues that, “In recent years, the public’s willingness to accept the authority of experts and elites has sharply declined. The public does not want to scrap representative democracy and move wholesale towards radical populism, but there will be no return to the earlier habits of deference to authority and elites.”⁹ A number of studies have confirmed that there is “overwhelming support for laws and policies that would support greater citizen engagement.”¹⁰

For public officials, the new state of citizenship is a two-edged sword. People are more willing to contribute productively to public decision-making – and are also more willing and able to disrupt it. Local officials in particular will often speak of the “usual suspects” who speak out at meetings of the city council, school board or planning commission; citizens respond by criticizing the “decide and defend” tactics of public officials. No matter whose side you are on in these debates, the most obvious conclusions to draw are that policy-making processes have degenerated, and that no one is satisfied.

This diffuse, decentralized and yet powerful shift is the main impetus behind civic change in the United States. Democracy scholars Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright have argued that some kind of “countervailing power” is necessary to provoke leaders into providing meaningful participation opportunities for ordinary people.¹¹ In other countries, this countervailing power may be provided by a new political party, a scandal that cripples the current political leadership or an active social movement. But in the United States, it is the “usual suspects” at public hearings and school board meetings who are the face of countervailing power.

3. Riding the tide of civic change

All kinds of leaders – not just elected officials, but anyone with any kind of constituency or membership-based organization – have had to adjust to these shifts, and to all the new tensions and opportunities they bring. A number of common adaptations have developed, often separately from one another.

Driven by constant experimentation, primarily at the local level, American participation initiatives have coalesced around four main principles:

- 1) The most successful initiatives assemble a large and diverse “critical mass” of citizens (or in relatively rare cases, a smaller, demographically representative set of people, intended to serve as a proxy for the larger population). To achieve this kind of mass participation, organizers map out and connect with a wide variety of organizations and networks, weaving together the strands of a large web of existing relationships, so that potential participants are recruited by people they already know and trust.
- 2) They involve those citizens in structured, facilitated small-group discussions, interspersed with large forums designed to amplify shared conclusions and prompt a move from talk to action. These have traditionally been face-to-face meetings, but are increasingly being held online, and other online tools are being used to inform and complement them.
- 3) They give the participants in these meetings the opportunity to compare values and experiences, and to consider a range of views and policy options. This is the “deliberative” heart of participation work: allowing people holding different opinions to decide together what they think should be done about a public issue.

4) The initiatives are intended to produce tangible actions and outcomes. There is some variation here: Some efforts focus on applying citizen input to policy and planning decisions, while others also seek to effect change at other levels, including changes within organizations and institutions, the initiation of actions driven by small groups of people, work by individual volunteerism or simply changes in attitude and behavior.

Despite the fact that the Mohn Prize finalists represent very different cultures and political systems, in far corners of the globe, each of the seven projects – in Portsmouth; Hampton; La Plata, Argentina; Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Geraldton, Australia; and the province of British Columbia in Canada – embodies these four democratic principles.¹²

But though widespread, these four principles aren't well-known. This is partly because of the great variety of ponderous, poorly defined terms being used to describe participation initiatives in the United States and elsewhere. "Participation" is actually one of the least-used of these; others include "public engagement," "democratic governance," "citizen involvement," "deliberative democracy," "civic engagement," "citizen-centered work," "public work" and "public deliberation."¹³ The advocates, practitioners, researchers and local leaders who use these terms rarely define them clearly – and when you examine the projects and initiatives they uphold as illustrations of what they mean, you usually find the same four characteristics listed above.

Meanwhile, many innovators in this field are local leaders who don't identify with any of these terms; they are often simply unaware of them, and unaware that there is a larger field of practice. In their attempts to engage citizens in more productive ways, they essentially reinvent the wheel – and the four characteristics above represent the wheel they usually reinvent.

The development of online technologies has added new momentum and new complexity to this picture. Reporting on a recent meeting with experts in online engagement, Chris Gates of Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement has said that, "Embedded in the DNA of these tools are two principles: transparency and democracy. The problem is that everyone wants to use the tools, but they're not comfortable with the DNA that comes along with them. As soon as you start using these tools, your organization has to become more transparent and small 'd' democratic. If you want to use these tools, you have to be comfortable with volunteers, taxpayers, etc., setting the priorities of the institution."¹⁴

Finally, as the practice of "community organizing" has diversified and evolved over the last 30 years, these four characteristics are increasingly apparent in that work as well.¹⁵ Some observers would even flip this script; they argue that "participation" is simply a variety or descendent of community organizing. Regardless of who claims credit for the terms and philosophies, it is important to recognize that the increasing use of these principles is being driven mainly by expediency: Community organizers, just like other local leaders, have found that in some situations, projects following these four principles help them accomplish their goals.

4. The participatory tactics of the Obama campaign

In his 2008 presidential bid, Barack Obama used campaign tactics that reflected some of the same successful principles evident in these participation initiatives. This is no accident: Obama was educated in the same community organizing tradition that has influenced the broader evolution of democratic governance and local politics. His campaign speeches were full of civic language. "I won't just ask for your vote as a candidate; I will ask for your service and your active citizenship

when I am president of the United States,” Obama said while campaigning in Iowa. “This will not be a call issued in one speech or program; this will be a cause of my presidency.”

In addition to the rhetoric, the organizing tactics used by the campaign mirrored some of the main principles evident in successful participation initiatives:

- **Placing strong emphasis on proactive, network-based recruitment.** In the United States, political campaigns have traditionally relied on television advertising and media relations as a primary means of reaching voters. Like its predecessors, the Obama campaign spent huge amounts of money on TV ads, but it also deployed an unprecedented number of organizers – estimated at more than 3 million – to reach people directly, both face-to-face and online. Just like their counterparts in the participation field, these organizers mapped community networks, targeting particular groups to reach out to, creating connections to leaders in those networks, and supporting those leaders as they reached out to their constituents.

- **Using a variety of interactive meeting types and formats to reach a variety of people.** Obama campaigners used a wide variety of formats for these interactions, including house parties, Facebook groups, phone calls, online chats and door-knocking campaigns. Most of these formats are interactive, allowing participants to talk with one other, and with representatives of the campaign itself, about a wide range of topics. The extensive use of online tools, with their inherently “democratic DNA,” was probably a key factor in disseminating authority and initiative throughout the campaign infrastructure.

- **Giving people different ways to take action.** Traditionally, American presidential campaigns have focused on convincing people to contribute money and to vote. The Obama campaign was intent on giving people more ways to act on behalf of the campaign – from encouraging online networking to soliciting comments on the candidate’s policy positions to recruiting campaign volunteers in a much more proactive way. For the first time, unpaid supporters did more than just stuff envelopes and canvass voters, the most menial campaign tasks; many Obama volunteers took on highly sophisticated technological jobs, and some of them managed teams that included scores or even hundreds of other volunteers.

It is worth pointing out that these tactics may not be inherently progressive or left-leaning; the Republican Party adopted some of the same ideas for its 2010 midterm campaign strategy. In the recent election in the United Kingdom, both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party used some of these tactics, and both parties tried to portray themselves as the champions of democratic decentralization and citizen control. Prime Minister David Cameron’s vision of a “Big Society” could be considered the most developed conservative prescription for democratic governance.¹⁶

Of course, the key civic tactic not used by the Obama campaign was public deliberation: putting a range of arguments or policy options on the table and allowing people to decide what they think. This omission makes sense; it was a political campaign, after all, and the conventional wisdom is that you win campaigns by persuading people that your views on policy issues are superior to those of your opponent. But while public deliberation may have questionable value as a campaign ploy, it is more critical when you are actually trying to govern. Just like their counterparts at the local level, federal officials need ways to get people on different sides of an issue to talk with one another (not just complain to their elected representatives), to explore arguments they may not have fully considered and to find areas where they have common ground. Some observers have argued that Obama tried to create a deliberative relationship with his opponents in Congress;¹⁷ in

any case, public deliberation has not been implemented as part of the president's relationship with the American public.

5. What kind of citizenship does the White House want?

The confusion and unexplored questions about the Obama administration's approach to governance have been evident from the beginning. Soon after the 2008 election, tensions arose around the fate of Obama for America, the campaign's vast infrastructure of organizers and volunteers (and the massive database of email addresses they built). Amidst strident objections from people like Marshall Ganz, the longtime community organizer who helped direct the campaign, Obama for America was renamed Organizing for America (OfA) and incorporated into the Democratic Party.¹⁸

This shift in the mission of OfA reflected one vision of active citizenship: At least some leaders within the White House saw participation activities primarily as a vehicle for encouraging citizens to support the president's legislative agenda. Hal Saunders, founder of the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue, has argued that, "The Obama administration may be failing to distinguish between 1) *mobilizing* support in an election or for a president's programs and 2) *creating spaces where citizens can discover* their capacities to 'rebuild America one neighborhood at a time.'"¹⁹

There is intense debate as to whether this strategy has been effective as a means for promoting the president's agenda, but even the most ardent supporters of OfA admit that the number of people involved in OfA activities has dropped dramatically since the election.

This discussion reveals a fundamental ambivalence about whether the ultimate goal of civic engagement is advocacy, deliberation, or some complex combination of the two. Is the purpose of participation to compel policymakers to produce more equitable policies? Or is the purpose of participation to create more equitable policy-making processes (and, ultimately, more equitable policies)? The inability of Organizing for America to define its role, President Obama's struggle to push his policy agenda, and the growth of the Tea Party are all related to this unresolved question about the relationship between citizens and government.²⁰

While the fate of OfA was being debated in the months after the election, another set of administration staffers was experimenting with online tools to solicit ideas for how the president should govern. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) initiated an online brainstorming session aimed at producing a "Citizen's Briefing Book," engaging thousands of people in developing and prioritizing policy proposals. The effort generated negative publicity when the two policy ideas with the most votes turned out to be the legalization of marijuana and a request for an investigation into whether Obama had in fact been born abroad (which would make him ineligible to serve as president). In each case, activists for these relatively narrow causes had been able to mobilize large numbers of online voters for their proposals.

The OSTP was also influential in crafting the president's Open Government Directive, issued on his first day in office, which charged all federal agencies with implementing new strategies for "transparency, participation and collaboration." The agencies are just beginning to implement these plans, but so far the idea of transparency, achieved mainly by making large amounts of government data available online, has been the main focus of activity.

These online participation efforts embody a somewhat different vision of citizenship: the citizen as a consumer and analyst of online data, who then uses that information to formulate new proposals for how government should function.²¹

A third conception of citizenship evident in the White House is the vision of the citizen as volunteer. Soon after taking office, the president signed the Kennedy Serve America Act, which tripled the size of AmeriCorps and provided opportunities for 250,000 Americans – mostly young people – to serve for one year as volunteers in various charitable causes. Peter Levine, a strong supporter of the bill, has also pointed out some of its limitations: “We need to find ways to encourage deliberation, problem-solving, the creation of public goods and other roles for citizens that go beyond service.”²²

These three visions of citizenship – as legislative supporter, as online data-consumer and as volunteer – are being advanced by three different sets of people within the Obama administration, and their formulas for democracy reform rarely seem to intersect. One reason for the success of the Obama campaign may have been that it offered all three opportunities for active citizenship, combined in the same structure and the same experience. Without that holistic appeal, the administration has lost much of the power of its message about democracy, and much of the civic momentum it generated during the campaign. The electoral power of the administration has waned as well: Many of the Democratic Party’s 2010 congressional candidates downplayed their links to the president in their campaigns.

6. Three promising examples and one damaging failure

As democracy reformers cast about for ways to recapture the civic momentum of 2008, there are several particularly interesting participation initiatives that can provide ideas and hope. Two of these projects demonstrate new possibilities for “scaling up” participatory strategies to the state and federal levels; the third illustrates the power of a more sustained structure for engaging people from all walks of life.

The “Horizons” project is one of the largest and most successful participation initiatives to emerge in the last five years – and yet it has passed almost completely under the national radar. Initiated by the Northwest Area Foundation in 2005, it was intended to help residents of high-poverty rural communities in seven states (Washington, Montana, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa) build civic participation and leadership skills. In partnership with Everyday Democracy and the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, the foundation helped these small towns follow a sequence of deliberative public engagement, a structured community leadership program and a broad-based action planning phase. To date, 284 small towns, with poverty rates between 10 percent and 78 percent, have been part of Horizons, with thousands of residents participating. Most of those communities show sustained results stemming from the participatory program, including more inclusive decision-making processes, participants who won election to public office and a wide variety of citizen-driven activities. Evaluator Diane Morehouse reports that,

When asked to name the “most significant continuing activity,” [respondents] could seldom confine themselves to one, and named 77 activities they considered significant, including community gardens and farmer’s markets, parks, trails (one with a \$1.2 million grant), and recreational opportunities, community and community resource centers, scholarships for low income children and families for daycare, after school programming and recreation, including Boys and Girls’ clubs, car repair and home maintenance programs, and in (at least) five communities, the establishment of community foundations.²³

Poverty reduction plans are being implemented in over half of the communities. It is too soon, in most cases, to begin evaluating the impact of the gains in leadership and participation on economic vitality, but Horizons has already shown that residents of rural, low-income communities can be engaged productively in deliberation and problem-solving. As a poverty reduction effort, the early returns on Horizons are encouraging; as a governance reform, the initiative has already had a significant impact.

A more recent and high-profile example of deliberative citizen participation is “Our Budget, Our Economy” (OBOE), a national effort initiated by several major foundations and implemented by AmericaSpeaks. More than 3,500 people took part, some of them in 19 large town hall meetings and others in 38 smaller community conversations. All of the deliberations took place on June 26, 2010. Participants were asked to consider a range of options related to cutting spending and raising revenues, all with the aim of reducing the nation’s long-term deficit by \$1.2 trillion in 2025. Almost 60 percent of the tables engaged in the discussions across the nation were able to meet this target. At the end of the day, 91 percent of the participants said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the tone and quality of the discussion.²⁴

Because it was much more visible than most participation initiatives, “Our Budget, Our Economy” generated a much higher level of commentary and criticism from both right and left. Many conservatives claimed it was an attempt by liberal funders such as the Kellogg Foundation to press for higher taxes and cuts in defense spending; many progressives accused the conservative Peterson Foundation, another of the funders, of using the event to advocate cuts in Social Security and Medicare. The discussion materials, however, were produced with the assistance of a broad range of political organizations, and the majority of the participants considered the options to be framed and weighted in a nonpartisan way.²⁵

It remains to be seen whether and how “Our Budget, Our Economy” will have an impact on the national policy debate on the budget deficit. Because it was focused on a single, daunting federal policy issue – in contrast to the broader poverty reduction frame of Horizons, for example, which encouraged a wider variety of action efforts – the success of OBOE will be measured mainly in terms of how Congress responds. In that sense, it is a much riskier, more ambitious effort than “Horizons” or any of the local participation initiatives. But OBOE has already demonstrated that the democratic strategies used at the local level can be “scaled up” to incorporate large, diverse numbers of citizen voices in federal policy-making.

A very different kind of example is represented by the Jane Addams School for Democracy, based in the West Side neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota. The West Side has been called the “Ellis Island of the Midwest” for its role in the history of immigration in the region. The current wave of immigrants in the neighborhood includes large numbers of Hmong, Latinos and Somalis. The Jane Addams School (JAS), which is a partnership between the neighborhood, the University of Minnesota and the College of St. Catherine, connects recent immigrants with college students, high school students and other local residents in ongoing “learning circles” and learning pairs. Two straightforward goals of these activities are to help people learn about each other’s languages and cultures, and help them attain the knowledge and English skills they need to pass the U.S. citizenship exam. However, the discussions have led to a number of other projects and outcomes as participants have compared experiences and generated ideas for improving the neighborhood.²⁶ The learning circles are organized according to language (at least four languages are spoken at the school in any one evening), with English translation in each circle. Bilingual college students serve as language translators and cultural interpreters, allowing people to discuss issues of concern in their native languages. A part of each session is devoted to a more formal cultural

exchange where participants discuss current issues, explain cultural traditions, or engage in storytelling. “Valuing the knowledge resources that come from all cultures is key to the Jane Addams School philosophy,” says Nan Kari, one of the school’s founders.²⁷ “Students and other non-immigrants learn about their own cultures, and new immigrants teach college and high school participants lessons that are not offered in the academic setting.”

The JAS meetings are a model of sustained participation: They have taken place every other week for the last 10 years. Hundreds of participants in the neighborhood learning circles have since passed the federal citizenship exam.²⁸ Participants have also created a community farming project, a mural, a parent involvement partnership with the local schools, a health project and an annual community-wide celebration known as the West Side Freedom Festival. And even though most of the emphasis of the circles is on improving the local situation, JAS participants have not stopped there. Concerned about human rights abuses in Laos, they successfully petitioned the Minnesota legislature to pass a resolution urging Congress to negotiate with the Laotian government for more humane treatment of the Hmong population. Participants also acted on their concerns over the way the U.S. citizenship test is administered. They forged a partnership with the regional director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), who agreed to allow English-speaking partners to accompany Hmong applicants during the citizenship exam and interview.

Unlike “Our Budget, Our Economy,” and in a more structured way than “Horizons,” the Jane Addams School offers a model of sustained participation, relying as much on social and cultural ties as on the political problems and controversies of the moment.

Many other exemplary participation initiatives and structures have been launched in the last five years, primarily at the local level but increasingly at the state and federal levels as well. Unfortunately, none of these efforts (even OBOE) have received nearly as much attention as the most misguided recent attempt to foster public participation: the town hall meetings held by members of Congress on health care reform in the summer of 2009. The congressional staffers and others who organized these events seem to have ignored all the lessons learned about how to effectively engage the public. The town hall meetings consisted mainly of presentations by the individual congressperson, followed by a question-and-answer session with attendees. Recruitment was done mainly through the mass media, which meant that organized groups like the Tea Party were able to pack the meetings with their followers. The interaction was mainly between angry participants and their elected officials, rather than between participants, and was not facilitated, reasoned, deliberative or productive – and in many cases, it wasn’t particularly polite either.²⁹

Since the “town hall meetings” were advertised as public participation (even though they didn’t fit any of the defining characteristics of successful engagement), their failure sullied the reputation of participation as a concept. Neither the public officials nor their constituents seem anxious to repeat the experience: In the summer of 2010, most members of Congress avoided meaningful interactions with their constituents, choosing instead to organize or attend events that allowed them to make an appearance without making themselves available for questions.³⁰ This more cautious approach certainly hasn’t strengthened the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives; it is possible that a more proactive, structured conversation with the public might have saved some members of Congress who lost their seats in the 2010 election.

7. Seizing the moment

The rapid development of citizen capacities and expectations, and the parallel development of techniques and technologies for reacting to, connecting and building on those capacities, is prompting a renegotiation of the relationship between the governing and the governed in American society. The greatest opportunity for improving this relationship may be to create a more coherent, compelling and united vision for democracy reform.

Some of this work is fundamentally local. Neighborhoods and communities are where the pressures exerted by ordinary citizens, and the opportunities to tap their talents and capacities, are being felt most strongly. The increasing use of online tools for engagement only enriches these possibilities; some of the most powerful innovations in online engagement are local or neighborhood forums that combine the convenience of the computer with the strength of face-to-face relationships.³¹ And local leaders are beginning to realize that dealing with the “countervailing power” of citizen voices is not the only reason to ramp up their participation efforts: Research such as the Knight Foundation’s “Soul of the Community” study shows a strong correlation between people’s attachment to community and the level of local economic growth and vitality.³²

Neighborhood and community leaders need to convene the groups and organizations that have been doing participation work – from local governments and school systems to nonprofits and grassroots associations – so they can learn from one another and plan out more holistic, citizen-centered approaches to local democracy. The recipes for participation that emerge from those sorts of meetings are likely to include both face-to-face and online elements, opportunities for action as well as deliberation, and chances to enjoy food, music, culture and conversation. “Sometimes you need a party rather than a meeting,” says Gloria Rubio-Cortés of the National Civic League. “And sometimes you need a combination of a party and a meeting.”³³

At the national level, there have been some admirable attempts to create a joint strategy for democracy reform, but none has yet been able to attract enough of the relevant players. The most notable attempt has been Strengthening Our Nation’s Democracy (SOND), a series of meetings that brought together experts and advocates of deliberative democracy, community organizing and electoral reform to develop a common set of priorities. (The SOND meetings were convened by *AmericaSpeaks*, Demos, Everyday Democracy and the Ash Institute at Harvard University). The SOND series produced a set of recommendations for both the Obama administration and the broader international democracy reform movement.³⁴

So far, however, neither SOND nor any other attempt to unify American democracy reformers has been able to break through, either on its own or by attracting the support of Congress, the Obama administration, or other national decision-makers. What may be needed is a more dramatic, succinct statement of the rights and responsibilities that democracy reform might offer to ordinary citizens. Here is one attempt to amalgamate characteristics of the main visions of citizenship being promoted by different reformers:

- 1) **The right and responsibility to participate** (meaningfully) in public decision-making processes.
- 2) **The right and responsibility to vote.**
- 3) **The right and responsibility to help set the agenda** in public arenas that allow people to bring their own concerns and priorities.
- 4) **The right and responsibility to organize** – in the neighborhood, community, workplace, faith institution, university and online.

- 5) **The right to public information** and the responsibility to use and analyze it fairly and thoroughly.
- 6) **The right and responsibility to serve** our communities, schools, and country.
- 7) **The right to civic education** and the responsibility to use those skills and capacities wisely and well.

These seven principles, phrased in the historic (and problematic) language of rights, represent just one way of describing meaningful democracy reform – one way to begin the discussion. It is a high-stakes conversation, which will influence the effectiveness of American policy-making and problem-solving as well as more high-profile events such as the 2012 presidential election.³⁵ But any attempt to describe the role of citizens in a participatory democracy, and any attempt to unify the democracy reformers, will have to pass one critical test: It will have to offer a vision of citizenship that is compelling to the citizens themselves. New arenas for democratic governance can only be built around the day-to-day interests, concerns and talents of ordinary people.

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⁴ Peter Levine, “The Path Not Taken (So Far): Civic Engagement for Reform,” *The Huffington Post*, January 26, 2010.

⁵ James Youniss and Peter Levine, *Engaging Young People in Civic Life* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009).

⁶ “Open data is not enough to create the kind of participatory democracy that is a focus of the Gov 2.0 movement,” said Danah Boyd at the Gov 2.0 Expo. “When data comes out, people engage in new forms of spin, and seek to control the interpretation of the data that is exposed. Information is powerful, but interpretation is more powerful.” Quoted by Nick Judd, “Transparency is Not Enough,” *TechPresident*, May 26, 2010.

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¹⁵ See Kristina Smock, *Democracy in Action: Community Organizing and Urban Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) and Matt Leighninger, *Creating Spaces for Change: Working Toward a “Story of Now” in Civic Engagement* (Battle Creek, Michigan: Kellogg Foundation, 2010).

¹⁶ See Pete Peterson, “Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ and its Discontents,” *Front Porch Republic*, April 9, 2010.

¹⁷ See James Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Ganz was the primary architect of the “Camp Obama” workshops that Obama organizers went through when they joined the campaign. Ganz feels that much of this knowledge and resolve were lost in the transition from the campaign to the administration – he and Peter Dreier urged the president to revive “‘movement’ tactics, from leaflets, vigils and newspaper ads to nonviolent civil disobedience,” in the effort to pass health care reform legislation (Dreier and Ganz, “We Have the Hope. Now Where’s the Audacity?” *The Washington Post*, August 30, 2009).

¹⁹ *Creating Spaces for Change* (2010).

²⁰ Some would cite the growth of the Coffee Party as part of this picture as well. See Kate Zernicke, “Coffee Party, With a Taste for Civic Participation, Is Added to the Political Menu,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2010.

²¹ See Beth Noveck, *Wiki Government: How Technology Can Make Government Better, Democracy Stronger, and Citizens More Powerful* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).

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²³ Diane L. Morehouse, *Horizons Sustained Effects: A Report on Continuing Leadership and Poverty Reduction Activities and Outcomes in Horizons Alumni Communities* (Northwest Area Foundation, 2009).

²⁴ AmericaSpeaks, “Finding Common Ground on our Fiscal Future: Interim Report to Congress,” July 21, 2010.

²⁵ Archon Fung, “Public Deliberation: The Left Should Learn to Trust Americans,” *The Huffington Post*, June 28, 2010.

²⁶ See Nicholas Longo and John Wallace, “Creating Democratic Spaces: Jane Addams School for Democracy,” *CURA Reporter*, June 2000.

²⁷ “The Jane Addams School creates a non-hierarchical environment where everyone is both learner and teacher,” says Kari. There are children’s circles as well, which also provide “an environment where teaching and learning are reciprocal. This contrasts with the more typical models children experience in school or child care,” Kari says. Personal communication, June 17, 2005.

²⁸ Bob San, “Jane Addams School for Democracy Honors New U.S. Citizens,” *Hmong Times*, June 1, 2002.

²⁹ Josh Kraushaar and Lisa Lerer, “Health Care Town Hall Anger Rages On,” *Politico*, August 12, 2009.

³⁰ Jeff Zeleny, “Democrats Are Skipping Town Halls to Avoid Voter Rage,” *The New York Times*, June 6, 2010.

³¹ *Promising Practices in Online Engagement* (2009).

³² www.soulofthecommunity.org

³³ *Recentring Democracy around Citizens* (2010). See also Leighninger *The Promise and Challenge of Neighborhood Democracy: Lessons from the Intersection of Government and Community* (Austin, TX: Grassroots Grantmakers, 2009).

³⁴ AmericaSpeaks, Demos, Everyday Democracy, and the Ash Institute at Harvard University, *Working Together to Strengthen Our Nation’s Democracy: Ten Recommendations* (2009).

³⁵ The venerable historian Lawrence Goodwyn claims that “The election in 2012 is going to define the meaning of the American idea.” See

http://www.alternet.org/story/148582/lawrence_goodwyn%3A_the_great_predicament_facing_obama?page=entire