

# Searching for a New Paradigm: Collective Settings

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This report resulted from a collaboration between four authors at More in Common and the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University: Dan Vallone, Hahrie Han, Emily Campbell, and Isak Tranvik. The entire team developed and shared the ideas reflected in this report collaboratively, but specific people took leadership in authoring particular sections, as indicated in the table of contents. We also thank Kate Carney and Alexandra Dildine for their participation in the collaboration. Finally, we would like to thank Lumina Foundation and the New Pluralists for their support of this work.

# Executive Summary

Dan Vallone and Hahrie Han

## Searching for A New Paradigm

Paradigms guide action. Particularly in moments of crisis, those paradigms—or cohered sets of assumptions about ourselves, each other, and the world around us—shape the intentions we develop, the solutions we imagine, and, ultimately, the actions we choose. What happens when the paradigms we carry are limited or, worse, wrong? This report seeks to recover an underappreciated paradigm—focused on collective settings—for guiding efforts to revitalize American democracy.

Focusing on something as abstract as a paradigm might seem misguided in this moment when American democracy seems to be teetering on a precipice, with one foot on solid ground and the other swinging into the abyss. But history tells us this is precisely the moment when we must examine our core assumptions about how to best strengthen democracy. Consider this story that Dan heard when he was in the Army about a misguided US effort in Afghanistan. A new American unit had deployed to a village in a mountainous province in eastern Afghanistan eager to “win hearts and minds.” Reducing public support for the Taliban and other insurgents, they believed, depended on improving the material lives of Afghans. Immediately, the Americans noticed the arduous, daily journey women from the village had to make up and down the mountainous terrain to retrieve water from the valley. The solution seemed clear: Build a well. The Afghans could have more control over their water supply and save considerable time.

The Americans went to work, sure that the well would gain widespread acclaim. Ribbons were cut, photos taken, and inaugural buckets drawn from the well. By the next day, however, an enormous pile of rocks filled the well. Certain that the Taliban was trying to sabotage their efforts, the American soldiers removed the rocks and cleaned up the well. But the next day, the rocks were back. And the next day. And the next.

Finally, the soldiers convinced a villager to reveal the culprit: It was not the Taliban, but the local Afghan women. Why would the women jeopardize efforts to make their lives easier? As the Americans soon learned, the long, arduous walk to the river was the only time when the women were free of men, allowed to talk and interact without male supervision. The women valued this autonomy, camaraderie, and social connection far more than the efficiencies gained from the well. The Americans had been so sure that increased control over water was a universal desire that they never thought to ask the people what they wanted. Instead of advancing their cause, the well had failed to benefit the Afghans and inadvertently undermined American efforts to build a strong relationship with the villagers.

This story illustrates the way our paradigms implicitly or explicitly shape the solutions we develop to solve problems. The American soldiers acted like the man who lost his keys and looked for them under a streetlight. When a passerby asks him if he’s sure he lost the keys near the light, the man says, “No, but this is where the light is.” Paradigms are like the streetlights in this story: As much as they illuminate possibilities for change, they also constrain where we look. The wrong paradigm leads us to misread situations, overlook opportunities, and pursue the wrong solutions. This is true in war, and it’s true today with American democracy.

The need to strengthen American democracy is clear. Close to three in five Americans express dissatisfaction with the way democracy is functioning.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the crisis, philanthropists have more than tripled funding for reform efforts since 2010 (from approximately \$750 million to \$2.5 billion in 2020)<sup>3</sup>—but we still seem to be dangling over the precipice.

Perhaps the democracy field needs another paradigm.

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Although it is impossible to stuff a rich, complex ecosystem of democracy reformers into two buckets, a very crude characterization might identify two dominant (and worthy!) paradigms: (1) institutional reform efforts and (2) individual, psycho-social interventions. The first argues that by improving the rules that govern how democracy (especially elections) work, we can reshape incentives and thereby reduce polarization and strengthen democracy. Advocates argue that redistricting reform or electoral reforms like ranked-choice voting can improve politics by making candidates and parties more responsive to a broad population. The second paradigm seeks behavioral interventions that address people’s tribal psychology, increase inter-group contact, reduce bias, foster healthier media habits, and, ultimately, reduce polarization and strengthen democracy. Both are foundationally important paradigms for building a healthy, pluralistic democracy, and we applaud—and have gratefully partnered with—both.

But our two organizations came together three years ago with a shared sense that these two paradigms, by themselves, were insufficient. As much as we might achieve with what we find under these two streetlights, we must also cast light into areas currently obscured by darkness.

In particular, both paradigms presume a more stable and predictable world than currently exists. Both institutional and behavioral reform efforts usually start by defining desired outcomes—reducing affective polarization, for example—then work backward to identify interventions that demonstrate quantitative improvements on those outcomes. People and communities become objects to be treated by appropriate dosages of these interventions. But what if we live in a world in which intervention *x* does not always lead to outcome *y*?

In a dynamic, uncertain world, we need new paradigms. Berkeley professor David Teece is a management scholar who has devoted his career to studying why some firms are better than others at succeeding in dynamic market environments. The firms that succeed are not those that only have the best, most efficient processes for doing things that are predictable, such as managing their supply chains, developing marketing campaigns, or building effective human-resources systems. Instead, successful firms differentiate themselves by their capability to respond thoughtfully and nimbly to contingency. As Teece says, they not only do the right thing, they do the right thing at the right time. Firms that operate in stable markets can sometimes succeed without building such capabilities, but those in dynamic markets fail without them.

Twenty-first century American society is in a moment of economic, demographic, and technological flux that mirrors such dynamic markets, but our paradigms are still made for a more constant world. Building the capabilities we need to respond to a dynamic world necessitates flipping the model for designing “interventions” on its head. Instead of working backward from an outcome we define, we must instead seek paradigms that assume people are subjects designing their own futures, can provide guidance in an uncertain world, and develop capabilities that prepare for us a future we cannot predict. Particularly in a pluralistic society, we contend that doing so depends on equipping people and communities of all kinds to become architects of their own futures. Anyone concerned with strengthening American democracy must admit that we don’t always know what they will need or who will be deciding, so our task now is to strengthen the processes and capabilities that enable *all* people to engage productively in building the world they need.

## Hiding in Plain Sight: A Paradigm of Collective Settings

Isak Tranvik’s essay cited in this report synthesizes theoretical, historical, and empirical research to shine a light on such a paradigm for making democracy work: collective settings. His argument is not that it is a new paradigm but instead one that has quietly asserted itself throughout history. Emily B. Campbell conducted a series of case studies to describe how collective settings play out relative to behavioral and institutional approaches (see Appendix A for a description of her methodology). Her studies of electoral reform in Alaska, the behavioral interventions of Braver Angels of Central Texas, and the “everyday democracy” of Blue Mountain Forest Partners in Oregon draw on 47 original interviews and hundreds of hours in the field and

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highlight the strengths and challenges of each respective approach. Our goal here is to make them more visible so that we can, with intention, address 21st-century deficiencies in how they are designed and distributed across the country.

From the earliest days of American democracy, Americans have been gathering with each other across lines of difference in self-governing, Tocquevillian “schools of democracy” to solve public problems. Imagine neighbors coming together to provide mutual aid during the coronavirus pandemic or a community seeking solutions for a shortage of high-quality childcare. Tranvik describes these efforts as “everyday democracy.” People join these efforts not because they are concerned about democracy per se but instead to solve concrete problems in their lives. In both cases, groups in the community will have distinct interests and goals, leading to important debates about the design and implementation of mutual aid or new childcare facilities. As they work together to hammer out solutions, people learn the hard and soft skills of democracy; they gain appreciation for the negotiations necessary to any effort to solve shared problems; they access a sense of agency often absent with interventionist approaches; and they build relationships and understandings of each other that become a resource for the future.

Understanding the value and ubiquity of such efforts reframes the question of reforming democracy from “How do we get people to do a thing?” to “How do we equip people to become the kind of people who do what needs to be done?”<sup>4</sup> Unlike existing paradigms, this approach focuses on the importance of collective experience instead of individual incentives, and prioritizes reforms that build (evidence-based) capabilities for responding to contingency instead of those that yield immediate effects on democratic outcomes. Rigorous measurement still matters, but it redefines *what* we should measure, not *whether* we should measure. This report argues that shaping the social and collective contexts within which people naturally gather can, in certain instances, be more effective than creating interventions that act solely at the individual or institutional level.

We contend that where we see such efforts succeed, it is neither random nor simply the result of a single charismatic leader or group. Tranvik’s essay and Campbell’s cases identify a set of common design features that such settings share, which increase the probability of cultivating the dynamic capabilities needed to make democracy work: (1) shared governance structures designed to engage participation across a wide group of stakeholders and make transparent power-sharing agreements, (2) institutionalized mechanisms for accountability so that all those affected have a chance to co-create solutions, (3) public relationships that embrace difference, and (4) a celebration of open-endedness and experimentation.

We are not arguing that these are a panacea or a replacement for institutional and behavioral efforts. Instead, we are simply arguing that they are too often overlooked because they do not fit our current approaches to designing reform. Yet, when we turn the light on, we observe that there are healthy collective settings hidden in plain sight across the country. But much still needs to be done. Such settings are far too few, too thin, too under-resourced, and too detached from the main engines of civil society at the local, regional, and national level—and even where such settings exist, many ignore the design features that enable such settings to work. These are the design and distribution deficiencies. Paying attention to the infrastructure that makes such settings possible is the task of the entire democracy ecosystem.

## Implications and Action Steps

Business and military organizations have long recognized the need to invest in organizational design. Consider the resources devoted to designing remote or hybrid teams in corporate America or team design and leadership in the military. Yet, on a relative basis, the democracy ecosystem underinvests in organizational design as a vector for reform and engagement. Researchers, philanthropists, and leaders in civil society, business, and government can all play a role in changing this mentality to drive adoption of collective settings.

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### For Researchers

We need much more (widely disseminated) research to help us better understand multiple themes:

- Distribution gaps: Where do well-designed collective settings exist, or not? How are they distributed across off-line and online settings?
- Design features: What are the design features that influence whether collective settings cultivate healthy democratic capabilities?
- Return on investment: What measures can we use to examine the impacts of collective settings? What measurement and evaluation frameworks enable philanthropists and practitioners to maintain rigor even when designing for uncertainty?

### For Philanthropy

Collective settings need both funding and philanthropic organizing:

- Address distribution concerns: New funding opportunities can invest in creating well-designed collective settings in areas where such settings are rare or absent.
- Shift incentives to emphasize designing for contingency: Funding opportunities can emphasize metrics that focus on the cultivation of dynamic democratic capabilities at both the individual and organizational levels.
- Empower learning: Resourcing the connective tissue between research and practice, and cultivating fellowships and other human networks to share lessons learned can strengthen the field.
- Nurture the philanthropic community: Funding communities organized vertically (bringing local, state, and national funders together) and horizontally (across ideological, geographic, demographic, and issue-based difference) can coordinate resources and mitigate against unnecessary politicization.

### For Civil Society, Business, and Government

Civil society leaders can cultivate collective settings in their work and communities. Likewise, the state and markets each play a crucial role in creating settings (like the workplace) where people interact with each other. All three sectors impact the design and distribution of settings.

- Invest in design: Thinking intentionally about the design features of self-governing communities (governance practices, accountability, learning systems) can make collective settings more likely.
- Consider distribution: Local and regional groups across civil society, business, and government can consider working together to identify and fill gaps in access to well-designed collective settings.

### Conclusion

This report seeks to re-articulate a long-standing paradigm for making democracy work that has, we believe, gotten lost in the attention economy that drives much of American politics. Investing in the design and distribution of civic infrastructure may not be the approach that garners the viral attention that often drives action, but it is necessary for preparing our people and our communities for the inevitable uncertainties that we will face in the future. By investing in collective settings, we hope to develop the muscles for democracy that people and communities will need to seek, identify, and implement shared solutions that do not accept the world as it is but instead create the world they need.

# Collective Settings: The Civic Infrastructure of Everyday Democracy

LITERATURE REVIEW

By Isak Tranvik

## Introduction

American politics appear to be broken. What might those concerned about the future of the United States do?

Many argue that “pluralism”—sometimes described “as a way of being and acting with others across difference”<sup>5</sup>—is key to political renewal. Americans, in short, need to (re-)learn how to live and work with those with whom they have seemingly little in common.

As a result, scholars have conducted extensive research into the micro- and macro-level foundations of enmity and distrust. Those who focus on the micro-level hone in on the psychological roots of affective polarization,<sup>6</sup> theorized as a primary driver of divisiveness. Many propose healing fractured relationships via facilitated conversations, structured retreats, etc.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars concentrating on the macro level examine structural or institutional causes of anti-pluralism more broadly, like election rules and procedures, changes to media, or economic inequality.<sup>8</sup> Conse-

quently, most push for policy changes that they believe would help alleviate affective partisanship, including but not limited to reforming voting processes, campaign financing, districting procedures, and wealth redistribution.<sup>9</sup>

In this report, we intend to suggest an approach that has loomed large in the history of the United States: What we call “everyday democracy.”

In this report, we intend to contribute to these important conversations on pluralism and American politics by suggesting an approach that has loomed large in the history of the United States: What we call “everyday democracy.”

For better or worse, our generation is not the first to grapple with democratic dysfunction. American politics has been in crisis more often than not. Emerging after a horrific revolution and, more immediately, Shay’s Rebellion, democracy in

America was born on the brink. Age did not necessarily bring repose. From slavery to the Civil War, from “Indian” removal to the Gilded Age, from the Chinese Exclusion Acts to Jim Crow, American politics—and, obviously, the lives of many living in the United States—has been perpetually under threat.

This does not diminish the seriousness of the current moment. Rather, it suggests that, on the one hand, democracy's impending demise has been foretold many times. And, more importantly, those who are correctly concerned about the future of American politics have an abundance of examples to draw from.

In particular, previous crises reveal a critical wellspring of hope: people—elites and ordinary people alike—working together across difference to solve public problems. From abolitionists harboring fugitive slaves to the Black workers leaving plantations, from Dakota peoples creating communities amid genocidal displacement to Scandinavian farmers establishing grain co-ops, from women winning the right to vote to factory workers gaining workplace protections, from beauticians running Citizenship Schools in the Jim Crow South to migrant farmers challenging wage theft in California, one can tell the story of democracy in America as an ongoing project of *everyday democracy*.<sup>10</sup>

This tradition has been pivotal in moments of crisis,<sup>11</sup> like those mentioned above. But we contend that everyday democracy is also what builds and sustains neighborhoods and towns, cities and states. Such

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significant but decidedly unspectacular efforts, in other words, enabled the development of a universal preschool program in Cincinnati,<sup>12</sup> grain co-ops in the Red River Valley,<sup>13</sup> the Nehemiah Homes in Brooklyn,<sup>14</sup> and public schools in Manchester.<sup>15</sup>

These less dramatic instances of everyday democracy rarely garner the same sort of attention as macro- and micro-level reforms. Everyday democracy is too small, too slow, and too unsexy to make for a viral tweet or a breaking headline. It is also too difficult and too frustrating to make for a compelling human-interest story. The diffuse nature of everyday democracy does not help matters; it is usually invisible to those focused on legislative politics

and it operates just beyond the purview of scholars and practitioners interested in individual attitudes and beliefs. Although everyday democracy might be noticed when one stumbles across it in one's neighborhood or when it seems to suddenly burst on the national scene, it does not come from nowhere.

Indeed, everyday democracy is more than an ephemeral and episodic occurrence that only arises in times of crisis or by accident. Rather, the central claim of this report is that robust and well-designed civic infrastructure is critical to catalyzing and sustaining everyday democracy. More specifically, we think that *collective settings*, the sites or spaces from which any non-governmental public action emerges, are key to everyday democracy, pluralism, and political renewal, more generally.

Consider, for instance, a neighborhood association. Insofar as it is established by a local community or group, such a meeting can function as a collective setting. It facilitates public action without exercising de jure political power. It is also not organized (only) to benefit individuals; a neighborhood is more than the sum of its parts. Like all collective settings, a neighborhood association is located squarely within the meso-level of democracy.<sup>16</sup>

Religious institutions, secondary schools, colleges and universities, and various kinds of voluntary associations—as well as smaller sites within them—can also serve as collective settings. Yet we want to stress that collective settings are not reducible to any particular type of group (e.g., voluntary) or “sphere” (e.g., public or civil). In our view, almost any physical or even digital space *can* function as a collective setting. A backyard potluck, a front porch, a Reddit forum, or a bus stop outside a distribution center may be collective settings. The same is true for an office at a small business or the break room at a large corporation. The size and location of the setting is less important than the fact that it is the site from which public action emerges.



## Case Study 1: Braver Angels

(See Appendix A for a description of the methodology behind these comparative case studies.)

By Emily B. Campbell

On a sunny Saturday morning in late April in Austin, Texas, a group of people gathered at the Dispute Resolution Center in a large strip-mall for a Braver Angels’ “Red/Blue Workshop.” Greeted with coffee, donuts, and kolaches—the Texan version of an oversized pig in a blanket—each participant arrived, pausing at the welcome table replete with flyers, books, and a sign-in sheet to retrieve a handwritten name tag scribed in red or blue, a shorthand signifier for their respective political affiliation. Two trained facilitators began the morning with introductions. Each participant offered their name, reason for coming, and hopes for the workshop. A common thread tied participants together: a deep concern for the internal divisions and strife threatening America. One young man quipped, “I don’t want to catch ideological rabies.” Another woman confessed, “I live in a bubble.” The facilitators proceeded with ground rules: Talk about politics without trying to convince anyone and only represent yourself.

The workshop began with Reds and Blues gathering with others who shared their political views to generate a list of stereotypes about their own political group. Each group listed the stereotypes on a large notepad with markers and then discussed each one. Participants highlighted any falsehoods and related corrections and any kernels of truth that a stereotype held. A reporter from each group then summarized their discussion to the full group. Participants then broke into Red/Blue pairs to discuss what they’d learned about the other side and any points of common ground they discovered.

Selected individuals from each side stood in the center of a circle for the second exercise to discuss the questions: Why do you think your side’s values and policies are good for the country? What reservations do you have about your side’s political positions? Afterward, pairs of Reds and Blues teamed up to discuss their impressions, again noting what they learned and any sites of commonality.

Participants each shared what they’d gained from the workshop to close the three-hour session. A palpable sense of goodwill emerged as participants expressed feeling “more hopeful” and that “common ground was shared.” In a follow-up interview, Charles, a Democrat and retired music technician, explained the value of participation: “I think they [the polarized media] whip up our negative emotions, and when we get the chance to actually see each other face-to-face and talk about things, we realize that we have more in common than we realized.”<sup>1</sup>

### Braver Angels

Founded in 2016 to counter affective polarization, Braver Angels (BA) has over 11,000 members nationally.<sup>2</sup> The

premise of the BA model is that if people sit down together, build tools for civil discourse, and come to see people before politics, affective polarization will diminish and a revitalized, civil culture can emerge.<sup>3</sup> From March 2020 to February 2021, BA hosted 443 unique workshops, the cornerstone of their work.<sup>4</sup> In April 2023, I attended two workshops with the Central Texas Alliance: a Red/Blue Workshop in Austin and a Depolarizing Within Workshop in New Braunfels. In addition to reviewing existing research about BA, I interviewed 12 participants and two alliance leaders and reviewed summaries of participant questionnaires.<sup>5</sup>

### Strengths: Democracy through Relationship

All interviewees reported participating in BA to grow their capacity to speak to those with divergent political views. Some had strained relationships with family and friends because of the caustic political climate. One 54-year-old woman, a Democrat, described being caught in the middle of her ultra-conservative 88-year-old parents and her 20-year-old daughter, who is a lesbian.<sup>6</sup> She hoped BA would give her skills to manage the conflict. A 30-year-old conservative woman had grown disenchanted with leftist ideals and moved to the political right in recent years—losing friends over her change. She sought BA for its cathartic, therapeutic attributes, noting it felt like a “safe space” to talk about her political views and experiences.<sup>7</sup>

People also reported coming to BA because of general concerns for the United States. Chris, a 60-year-old “Red,” explained, “There’s just so much divide and a lot of hate. It worries me about the future of our country. I have an 18-year-old son, soon to be 19, and I worry about his future.” He continued, explaining that people need to realize “it’s not ‘they.’ There is no ‘they.’ There’s only ‘we.’ ‘They’ are us.”

In questionnaires completed directly after the workshops, participants reported feeling more prepared to engage the other side, had identified more commonalities across the aisle, and were more curious to learn from members of the other party.<sup>8</sup> Research on the attitudinal durability of such workshops remains inconclusive.<sup>9</sup>

### Challenges: Demography, Durability

Workshop participants expressed a desire to connect with a more diverse group of people. Jane, a 30-year-old conservative woman, reflected, “There aren’t enough Black and Brown people, not enough Asian, not enough.... The racial diversity, the cultural, ethnic diversity is not there... [T]hat’s very limiting. And it usually sometimes does turn into white folks arguing about what’s best for Black and Brown communities.”<sup>10</sup>

BA is whiter, older, more educated, and more liberal than the general population (69 percent of participants identify as liberal).<sup>11</sup> The organization has established a Red Caucus for conservatives and an Angels of Color Caucus for people of color to try to remedy such disparities.

Those willing to participate in BA often are not those who

are most polarized. Charles, a Democrat, said, “The people who are extremists or very fixed in their views, rigidly fixed, are unlikely to join a group like this because it’s going to feel uncomfortable, I think. I found the people there quite willing to participate and be vulnerable and share their points of view in a respectful way.”<sup>12</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Personal interview, May 5, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Lilliana Mason, “Losing Common Ground: Social Sorting and Polarization,” *The Forum* 16, no. 1 (2018): 47–66, <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2018-0004>; Rachel Hartman et al., “Interventions to Reduce Partisan Animosity,” *Nature Human Behaviour* 6, no. 9 (2022): 1194–1205.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Baron et al., “Can Americans Depolarize? Assessing the Effects of Reciprocal Group Reflection on Partisan Polarization,” *OSF Preprints* (2021), DOI: 10.31219/osf.io/3x7z8; Rachel Hartman, “Moral Curiosity: The Desire to Learn About Others’ Moral Values” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2022); John Wood Jr., “Conceptualizing Civic Renaissance as Social Movement,” *The Good Society* 29, no. 1–2 (2021): 1–15; Francesca Gino, Julia A. Minson, and Jeff Huizinga, “Braver Angels: A Grassroots Effort to Depolarize American Politics,” Harvard Business School Case 920-054, March 2020; Nathan Bomey, *Bridge Builders: Bringing People Together in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge, UK, and Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2021); John Fletcher, “Braver Angels: Performing Comity in a Polarized Era,” in *Theatre and Human Flourishing*, ed. Harvey Young (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2023), 57–C3.P92; Jennifer Hall-Witt, “Guest columnist Jennifer Hall-Witt: Learning to Listen in Braver Angels,” *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, August 23, 2021; Matthew Levendusky, *Our Common Bonds: Using What Americans Share to Help Bridge the Partisan Divide*, Chicago Studies in American Politics, eds. Susan Herbst, Lawrence R. Jacobs, Adam J. Berinsky, and Frances Lee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023); Bailey M. Oliver-Blackburn and April Chatham-Carpenter, “‘But I Don’t Know If I Want to Talk to You’: Strategies to Foster Conversational Receptiveness Across the United States’ Political Divide,” *Journal of Applied Communication Research* (2022): 55–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2022.2093122>; David Hagmann, Julia A. Minson, and Catherine H. Tinsley,

“Personal Narratives Build Trust Across Ideological Divides,” *OSF Preprints* (2021), DOI:10.31219/osf.io/sw7nz.

<sup>4</sup> Braver Angels, *Braver Angels 2020-2021 Report: Depolarizing During the Pandemic*, 2022, <https://braverangels.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BA-2020-2021-Report-Extended-1.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> My approach to recruitment at the events was to solicit people to voluntarily sign up to be contacted for an interview after a brief introduction facilitated by the leaders of the workshops. Interviewees included three “Reds” and nine “Blues” and lasted from 25 minutes to 1.5 hours. See Methodology section of this report.

<sup>6</sup> Personal interview, May 9, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interview, May 5, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Braver Angels Central Texas, “Evaluative Survey,” internal document shared with researcher, April 30, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Hannah Baron et al., “Can Americans Depolarize?”; Fred Duong et al., “Outgroup Testimonials and Ingroup Validation Strengthen the Effects of Perception Gap Interventions on Affective Polarization: Evidence for a Large-Scale Experiment,” preprint, *PsyArXiv*, dated May 16, 2023, DOI:10.31234/osf.io/atguq.

<sup>10</sup> Personal interview, May 5, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Eighty-eight percent of participants identify as White though they make up 64 percent of the US population. BA is older: 73 percent are over age 50 compared to America’s median age of 38. Women also outnumber men, accounting for 68 percent of participants. In terms of educational attainment—the new fault line in American inequality—a whopping 65 percent had post-graduate degrees and just 1 percent had only a high school education; Braver Angels, *Braver Angels 2020-2021 Report*.

<sup>12</sup> Personal interview, May 5, 2023.

To state the obvious, not all collective settings catalyze everyday democracy. Just like any piece of infrastructure, collective settings enable certain kinds of action (and inhibit others).<sup>17</sup> And because everyday democracy has been eclipsed by macro- and micro-level approaches to political renewal, the infrastructure that supports it tends to be in despair, designed for something other than everyday democracy, or altogether neglected. This creates a vicious cycle: the (anti-pluralist) public action that emerges from crumbling or poorly designed collective settings seems to affirm that everyday democracy is a thing of the past.

In what follows, however, we contend that the reports of everyday democracy's death are greatly exaggerated. Everyday democracy is not so much gone as it is diminished. And our view is that rebuilding and repairing the civic infrastructure that helps catalyze it can breathe new life into this venerable tradition—as well as American politics.

What are the characteristics of the kinds of collective settings that help catalyze everyday democracy? As we discuss in much greater detail below, we conclude that such collective settings typically have at least four mutually reinforcing components:

1. They are designed for directly participatory governance: They enable practitioners of everyday democracy to share power.
2. They institutionalize accountability: All who share power also share accountability.
3. They embrace difference: Public relationships are critical to everyday democracy.
4. They celebrate open-endedness: They enable experimentation.

We conclude with a call to support efforts to rebuild or repair collective settings along these lines.

A backyard potluck, a front porch, a Reddit forum, or a bus stop outside a distribution center may be collective settings.

## Everyday Democracy, Pluralism, and Civic Infrastructure

Before turning to collective settings, a bit more must be said about everyday democracy and the ways that it cultivates a pluralistic public culture. In what follows, then, we draw on the findings of scholars and practitioners who have examined how what we call “everyday democracy” works,<sup>18</sup> who engages in it (and why),<sup>19</sup> and why it is important for pluralistic political communities.<sup>20</sup> To start, we think that Jane McAlevey is correct when she writes, albeit in a slightly different context, there are “no shortcuts” in politics: The people are critical to flourishing political communities.<sup>21</sup> The *demos*, in other words, cannot be saved from itself. It need not be, either. We believe people have the capacity to solve the public problems that matter to them. These capacities are often hidden or latent. But sometimes they are on full display.

As noted above, we contend that such displays are best understood as instances of everyday democracy.<sup>22</sup> So, what, precisely, is everyday democracy?

First and foremost, it is problem-driven. Everyday democracy foregrounds the particular problems of particular people living in particular places rather than a set of models to be implemented or outcomes to be realized.

Second, everyday democracy is underpinned by robust commitment to the term “open.” *Open* signifies the type of *problem* foregrounded—namely, problems that are not private.<sup>23</sup> It characterizes the nature of the *process* itself, as well; participants co-create solutions. *Open* also points to the *group of people* who solve public problems; all affected by a problem can contribute to or contest a solution.<sup>24</sup> And finally, *open* denotes the standing of the *solution*. Solutions are always provisional; new groups can and must revisit and revise previous attempts to solve problems.

At the most fundamental level, everyday democracy is characterized by ongoing co-creation; it happens here,<sup>25</sup> regularly,<sup>26</sup> instead of at a preassigned polling place once every few years or a one-time workshop facilitated by outside experts. The hallmark of everyday democracy, in other words, is people—non-elites and elites alike—making and re-making public things together wherever they are.

Just as most players in a jazz ensemble solo at some point, each participant in everyday democracy has the chance to meaningfully contribute.

A metaphor might be helpful. Everyday democracy is more like jazz than playing a set piece of music. Most obviously, one cannot play jazz alone. Everyday democracy, too, is always done with others. And, like jazz, everyday democracy is also improvisational. Because it is not animated by a preconceived plan, nobody knows in advance exactly how things will turn out. Each session looks dif-

ferent from those that preceded it because participants adjust and adapt their approach as they go. This, in turn, requires participants to be in a sustained dialogue with an array of interests—hence the jazz-like call-and-response nature of everyday democracy.

Indeed, in everyday democracy, conflict and dissonance are not failures to be immediately and permanently resolved. They are an integral and irreducible part of ongoing efforts to co-create common worlds. Everyday democracy, then, is less an uninterrupted harmony than a clashing and even cacophonous collaboration.

Just as most players in a jazz ensemble solo at some point, each participant in everyday democracy has the chance to meaningfully contribute—to step from the background to the center of the stage. The spotlight, in other words, is shared, at least some of the time. And, of course, although a performance or session might conclude, jazz continues. The same is true of everyday democracy. It begins again wherever people attempt to address new public problems with a robust commitment to openness.

## Everyday Democracy in Comparative Context

Although we do not think everyday democracy is entirely distinct, comparing and contrasting it with other approaches to public action will help clarify what sets everyday democracy apart.

	Everyday democracy	Policy reforms	Behavioral depolarization interventions
<b>Primary activity</b>	Civic co-creation	Advocacy, interest group bargaining	Facilitated contact and deliberation
<b>Key decision-makers</b>	People embedded in the community (or setting) where the problem is being experienced	Policymakers and advocates	Experts designing the interventions
<b>Site(s) of activity</b>	Collective settings where people already gather (recreational groups, churches, neighborhood associations, etc.)	Policymaking arenas, including legislatures, agencies, courts, etc.	Invited workshops, curated experiences, trainings
<b>Theory of change for promoting democracy</b>	People develop skills, habits, motivations, and imaginative horizons for shared action	Institutions incentivize compromise and negotiation (instead of divisiveness and distrust)	Individuals adopt “pro-pluralistic” attitudes and beliefs
<b>Sources of pluralism</b>	A byproduct of everyday democracy	Institutional changes that shape individual behaviors	The system works better when individuals adopt pluralistic attitudes and beliefs
<b>Proposed intervention</b>	Resource and support well-designed civic infrastructure (meso-level)	Change public policy (macro level)	Support efforts to heal individual relationships (micro-level)
<b>Lasting impact</b>	Creates capacity for future public problem-solving	More efficient institutions	Healthier individuals

Figure A: Comparing Everyday Democracy to Other Approaches to Democracy Reform

As noted above, many have argued that macro-level policy reforms are important. We do not disagree. But as figure A illustrates, everyday democracy can be distinguished from this approach insofar as it is not carried out by elites making backroom bargains. Nor is everyday democracy dedicated toward influencing the policy decisions hashed out behind closed doors. On the one hand, public action cannot be reduced to a zero-sum struggle over the distribution of scarce resources. People can co-create new things of public value, including but not limited to material goods. On the other hand, ordinary people have as much claim to the structures that shape their lives as elected officials or state bureaucrats. Moreover, they do not need to be saved from themselves; they can learn how to work together across difference without the intervention of representatives or bureaucrats. Everyday

People need to practice sharing power to experience the concrete benefits (and challenges) of engaging with those who have distinct interests.

democracy, then, foregrounds the ways that non-elites—often working with elites—struggle over scarce resources, yes, but also address their own (public) problems as they see fit, often far from traditional centers of power and often in ways that elites may not have anticipated.

Advocates of micro-level depolarization interventions usually foreground the importance of dialogue. Conversation can help unsettle stereotypes and, as a result, help partisans recognize that their opponents are real people. These are obviously worthy endeavors. Yet everyday democracy is not focused only on deliberation. People need to practice sharing power to experience the concrete benefits

(and challenges) of engaging with those who have distinct interests. This is especially true given that talk can be cheap; people often say one thing while doing another. Everyday democracy links speech and action. As such, it helps people learn that trade-offs, negotiation, and compromise—i.e., sharing power—are part and parcel of public life. When solving public problems, one must come to terms with the reality that one does not always get one's way. Sometimes, in other words, one loses.<sup>28</sup> This is not a salutary truth,<sup>29</sup> yet it is critically important that those living in contemporary democracies understand it.<sup>30</sup>

If the goal is mutual understanding, in contrast, loss is easier to avoid. More dialogue, presumably, leads to better understanding. To be sure, there might be disagreement. Yet theoretical disagreement seems distinct from concrete failure to achieve one's goals. Not only can the deliberators avoid loss sometimes entailed in solving public problems across difference, they also avoid developing the resilience that democracy demands.

To be sure, deliberation is a critical component of everyday democracy. As noted above, practitioners of every democracy are always engaged in conversation with a wide array of interests. And because everyday democracy emerges in response to particular problems, the conversations that unfold take place between those who might not normally sign up for a deliberative assembly advertised by academics or advocates. Along with democratic resilience, then, practitioners of everyday democracy also pick up the skills, habits, and empathy that quality deliberation can generate.<sup>31</sup>

That said, everyday democracy only teaches these lessons when participants perceive that they can meaningfully contribute to solving the problems that affect them. Acceptance of (relative) uncertainty over outcomes is contingent upon (relative) certainty over the problem-solving process. This is what makes civic infrastructure so important.<sup>32</sup>

We examine the civic infrastructure that helps catalyze everyday democracy in short order. But we must note here that lessons about power sharing and loss/resilience are lessons about pluralism. There are many ways to define pluralism. Some seem to think it is a set of attitudes or beliefs about the dignity and worth of others—or the affective “other.” Some argue that it is “a way of being and acting in community together.”<sup>33</sup> Still others understand it as a way of life.<sup>34</sup> And some insist that broader social forces cannot be neglected in debates about pluralism; political and/or economic institutions, they suggest, are the primary sources of power sharing or the structural inequalities that inhibit it.<sup>35</sup>

While we are not committed to a particular definition, we think that action is critical to each of them. This is part of the reason that everyday democracy helps cultivate it, albeit indirectly. As noted above, partaking in everyday democracy reveals that defeat is not necessarily due to hypocrisy, hatred, or corruption. Different people value different things and, as a consequence, not all interests can be realized simultaneously.

The ongoing and iterative nature of everyday democracy can do more than merely demystify one's opponents; it can also help cultivate durable public relationships across difference—relationships that can be transformative, at least in the long run. Indeed, we think everyday democracy can even change the structural conditions that some contend generate and sustain enmity and distrust. Small-scale efforts to solve public problems have, at times, precipitated broader change.<sup>36</sup> It is worth reiterating, though, that even if a pluralistic public culture is a byproduct of everyday democracy, pluralism is not the primary goal. Everyday democracy is first and foremost geared toward solving public problems.

This is part of the reason why we think everyday democracy is promising: It seems better equipped to respond to concerns about sustainability than other approaches. Because it is self-organized, one need not constantly advocate on behalf of distant representatives and political institutions or rely on outside sponsors for convenings. The same is true with scale, at least in theory: There is no reason why people cannot adopt and adapt everyday democracy as they see fit. With a few instruments, a lot of practice, and a commitment to making music, anyone can play jazz. The same is true of everyday democracy. And partisan gridlock is less of an issue (at least in comparison with approaches that target formal political institutions) given everyday democracy operates largely outside the domain of government.

With a few instruments, a lot of practice, and a commitment to making music, anyone can play jazz. The same is true of everyday democracy.

## Collective Settings as Civic Infrastructure

Although anyone can do everyday democracy, it does not simply happen. Most importantly for our purposes here, it requires infrastructure, especially if it is to be more than an ephemeral and episodic occurrence. To switch metaphors for a moment, just as urban planners attempting to reduce car traffic understand the importance of alternative transportation infrastructure, proponents of everyday democracy must recognize that their efforts are in large part contingent upon the quality of available *civic infrastructure*. Describing the many benefits of cycling or offering biking classes, for instance, will not necessarily persuade people to ride their bike more often; bikes need to be readily available, bike lanes built and maintained, adequate traffic regulations enforced, etc. Goodwill and positive attitudes are not enough.

Everyday democracy is no different. Like any other repeated activity undertaken by a broad range of people across time and space, it requires infrastructure. We are especially interested in one critically important piece of this civic infrastructure: collective settings.

Again, part of the reason we think everyday democracy merits more attention is that collective settings are ubiquitous, even if this vital piece of civic infrastructure suffers from disrepair, poor design, or outright neglect for the reasons described above. So, alongside institutional reforms and efforts to nudge individuals into new attitudes or beliefs, we think more attention should be paid to rebuilding or repairing already existing civic infrastructure that helps people work together across difference to solve public problems.

That said, not all collective settings generate the kind of open-ended co-creation we call everyday democracy. Neighborhood associations, for instance, are often notoriously exclusionary. And they are not unique; many collective settings are explicitly anti-pluralist. Collective settings, in other words, do

not necessarily help catalyze everyday democracy—or a pluralistic public culture, more generally. But they have in the past and we think that they can in the future.

The matter of demand is more complicated. While we believe that people are interested in solving their public problems, macro- and micro-level solutions to public problems are increasingly dominant, leaving little space or even apparent need for everyday democracy and the collective settings that help catalyze it.<sup>37</sup> More concerningly, whereas macro- and micro-level approaches often promise significant benefits with relatively minimal costs, everyday democracy is nothing if not difficult. The outcome, of course, is also far from certain. It is hard to convince people to pour time and energy into something that may not bear any fruit. Evidence suggests, though, that participating in everyday democracy helps people develop a sense of agency and empowerment that, in turn, makes it more likely that they will continue to participate in the future.<sup>38</sup>

## Collective Settings for Co-Creation

### **What kinds of collective settings help people work together across difference to address public problems?**

Perhaps nobody has done more to answer this question than political economist and Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom. Through her detailed study of forests, fisheries, and other types of “common-pool resources,” Ostrom demonstrated that people around the world have developed ways to solve public problems without relying on coercive state power or interventions facilitated by outside experts.<sup>39</sup> Although she does not use the term, we think these are examples of everyday democracy, and civic infrastructure was critical to them.

Not every collective setting features the design principles we highlight below. Nor is it the case that civic infrastructure alone is sufficient for everyday democracy. Rather, our review of the existing literature suggests that the following four design principles are critical components of the civic infrastructure that helps cultivate everyday democracy.

### **Designing for Participatory Governance**

First and foremost is Ostrom’s finding regarding the importance of directly participatory governance.<sup>40</sup> Participants are active co-creators at each level or stage of the process. Some are regular participants in meetings to determine the allocation of goods. Some supervise resource use. Some adjudicate disputes. And so on. In essence, designing for direct participation enables people to exercise concrete rather than symbolic power; or in Ostrom’s words, resource-users are “authorized” to “make and modify” decision rules as well as monitor enforcement of them.<sup>41</sup> In short, participants share power.

Directly participatory governance, then, cannot be reduced to “voice” or representation. Participants were not merely afforded a chance to express their view in something like a forum. Nor can representatives claim to act on behalf of everyone. Moreover, it is worth underlining here that participants are not given an opportunity to weigh in on a preconceived plan created by experts. In fact, they are not *given* anything. Participants co-create, implement, and enforce their own efforts.

Formal political authorities can be partners in this undertaking—and Ostrom refers to such arrangements as examples of “polycentric governance.”<sup>42</sup> But formal political authorities may not be invited to partner with participants. The decision rests with the participants. The participants, in other words, determine how power is delegated. Power, then, flows outward *from* participants instead of downward to them (from official authorities).



## Case Study 2: Alaskan Voting Reforms

(See Appendix A for a description of the methodology behind these comparative case studies.)

By **Emily B. Campbell**

### Rank Choice Voting

Rank choice voting (RCV) allows voters to rank candidates instead of voting for only one candidate. Proponents of RCV argue it increases competition, offers voters more choice, enhances the representativeness of candidates, and prevents vote-splitting.<sup>1</sup> Because RCV forces politicians to campaign for second-choice votes, candidates are incentivized to moderate, work across party lines, and seek voters outside their base.<sup>2</sup> RCV is lauded for bringing more people, especially apathetic and politically disengaged voters, into the process.<sup>3</sup>

Empirical research on its impact remains unclear, however. Some research finds RCV can reward populist candidates with crossover appeal and that it has mixed effects on voter satisfaction.<sup>4</sup> Those skeptical of RCV characterize it as confusing for voters, though research shows voters learn the system relatively quickly.<sup>5</sup> Some experimental research finds RCV increases overall faith in the electoral system by enhancing voter perceptions about fairness.<sup>6</sup> Its impact for candidates of color is unclear,<sup>7</sup> and its influence on policy outcomes and political culture remains undetermined.<sup>8</sup>

### RCV in Alaska

In 2020, Alaskans approved Ballot Measure 2, which adopted an open primary for state and federal elections and a “top four” RCV system for general elections. In the primary, all registered voters select one candidate from a ballot that lists all candidates regardless of party affiliation.<sup>9</sup> The top four candidates then advance to the general election, in which voters rank their choices in order of preference. If a candidate garners a majority of the vote, they win. If no candidate receives the majority of the votes, the last-place candidate is eliminated. For those who top-ranked the eliminated candidate, their second choices are then tallied with other candidates while those who only voted for the last-place candidate have their ballots eliminated. This process continues until a candidate achieves a majority to win the election.

Alaska’s first use of the new system came unexpectedly in the summer of 2022 after the untimely death of Rep. Don Young, a Republican. Forty-eight candidates entered the special election.<sup>10</sup> The open primary yielded four candidates: Democrat Mary Peltola, Republican Sarah Palin, Republican Nick Begich, and independent Al Gross. Gross dropped out of the race, citing challenges running as an independent, and endorsed Peltola. Because the first round of tallying votes in the general election did not produce a majority winner, Republican Nick Begich was

the first candidate eliminated. When his votes were reallocated, Peltola defeated Palin by a 3 percent margin and became the first Alaska Native congressperson in US history. Peltola beat Palin again in the November midterms.

In the 2022 November midterms, two other candidates with crossover appeal won: Republican Cathy Giessel in the state senate and incumbent Republican Lisa Murkowski in the US Senate. Overall, the 2022 midterms were the most competitive race in five election cycles.<sup>11</sup> Voter turnout was lower than 2018, however, with only 48 percent of eligible voters participating compared to 52 percent. Thirty-five percent of eligible voters turned out in the primaries, tying with 2014 for the highest turnout in 20 years.<sup>12</sup> To further understand the on-the-ground impact of these reforms, I conducted 16 original, semi-structured interviews in Alaska in spring 2023, during the first post-RCV legislative session.<sup>13</sup>

### Strengths: Cross-Party Coalition Emerges

In 2022, centrist Giessel took back her seat in the Alaska Senate after losing it in 2020 over criticism for collaborating with Democrats. On her victory, Sen. Bill Wielechowski, Democrat and Chair of the Rules Committee, remarked:

I don’t know that she would’ve won without rank choice voting. It would’ve been a Republican seat, but their opponent was a guy who was much more conservative than she.... I don’t know if we would have a bipartisan majority without her; it’s definitely moderated the Senate in that regard.<sup>14</sup>

Just two days after the election ended, the Alaska Senate formed a bipartisan coalition for the first time in a decade with 17 of its 20 members signing on. Giessel, the Senate majority leader, made cross-partisanship central to her governance. She explained, “When you are making public policy, it requires all hands, all thoughts, all opinions... I’ve worked with all sides, and I’ve found that’s the only way to really get good policy done.”<sup>15</sup>

### Challenges: A Partisan Reform?

Alaska’s reforms have been met by considerable detractors. There is a grassroots effort to collect enough signatures to repeal the reform run by Alaskans for Honest Elections, who claim that RCV hurt Republicans at the polls.<sup>16</sup> In interviews, seven out of eight Republicans—all but Giessel—expressed negative opinions about RCV, ranging from doubt to outright disdain. Many character

ized the ballots as confusing and worried that they depressed turnout.<sup>17</sup> Some questioned the value of rewarding centrism and characterized the reforms as incentivizing spinelessness. For example, Rep. Stanley Wright, a Repub-

lican, explained, “You get candidates that are kind of not one way or the other, kind of the middle of the road.... It’s more of a chameleon in the room, who just says whatever, just to get that vote.”<sup>18</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jerry McBeath, “Alaska Electoral Reform: The Top 4 Primary and Ranked-choice-voting,” *California Journal of Politics and Policy* 15, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.5070/P2cjpg15160079>.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Reilly, “Electoral Systems for Divided Societies,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 156–70.

<sup>3</sup> Audrey Brittingham, “Ranked Choice Voting: How Voters Have Responded to a Failing Political System,” *Indiana Journal of Law & Social Equality* 9 (2021): 259–80.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Atkinson, Edward B. Foley, and Scott Ganz, “Beyond the Spoiler Effect: Can Rank Choice Voting Solve the Problem of Political Polarization?” *University of Illinois Law Review*, forthcoming, last revised: August 24, 2023, available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4411173> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4411173>; Joseph Cerrone and Cynthia McClintock, “Ranked-choice Voting, Runoff, and Democracy: Insights from Maine and Other US States” (2021), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3769409>; Lindsay Nielson, “Ranked Choice Voting and Attitudes Toward Democracy in the United States: Results from a Survey Experiment,” *Politics & Policy* 45, no. 4 (2017): 535–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12212>.

<sup>5</sup> Of all demographic groups, older individuals report finding RCV voting more difficult, though it does not impact their participation or successful completion of ballots. See: Joseph A. Coll, “Demographic Disparities Using Ranked-choice Voting? Ranking Difficulty, Under-voting, and the 2020 Democratic Primary,” *Politics and Governance* 9, no. 2 (2021): 293–305, DOI:10.17645/pag.v9i2.3913.

<sup>6</sup> Sean Fischer, Amber Lee, and Yphtach Lelkes, “Electoral Systems and Political Attitudes: Experimental Evidence” (2021), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3803603>.

<sup>7</sup> Melody Crowder-Meyer, Shana Kushner Gadarian, and Jessica Trounstein, “Ranking Candidates in Local Elections: Neither Panacea nor Catastrophe for Candidates of Color,” *Journal of Experimental Political Science* (2023): 1–18, doi:10.1017/XPS.2023.6.

<sup>8</sup> Lee Drutman and Maresa Strano, *What We Know About Ranked-Choice Voting* (Washington, DC: New America, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Prior to the reform, the Republican party ran a partially closed or classic closed primary that allowed all registered voters but Democrats to participate. See: Jerry McBeath, “Alaska Electoral Reform.”

<sup>10</sup> Jane C. Timm, “Alaska’s New Voting System Has Sarah Palin Facing Santa Claus for Congress,” *NBC News*, June 11, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2022-election/alaskas-new-voting-system-sarah-palin-facing-santa-claus-congress-rcna32441>.

<sup>11</sup> Ryan Williamson, *Evaluating the Effects of the Top-Four System in Alaska* (Washington, DC: R Street Institute, January 31, 2023), [https://www.rstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/REALFINAL\\_policy-short-no-122-no-embargo.pdf](https://www.rstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/REALFINAL_policy-short-no-122-no-embargo.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Leven, “Setting the Record Straight on Voter Turnout in Alaska,” *Unite America*, April 24, 2023, <https://www.uniteamerica.org/news-article/setting-the-record-straight-on-voter-turnout-in-alaska>.

<sup>13</sup> A total of 16 interviews were conducted by phone and in Juneau: 12 with elected officials and their staff and four with experts. In terms of party makeup, eight Republicans and four Democrats, either elected officials or their staff, were interviewed in addition to four interviews with policy experts and journalists. All interviewees agreed to go “on the record” and as such are quoted directly. For recruitment, all members of the state senate and house were contacted by email requesting an interview. Other experts were identified in the literature and contacted by email.

<sup>14</sup> In person interview, April 11, 2023.

<sup>15</sup> In person interview, April 11, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Ryan Williamson, *Evaluating the Effects of the Top-Four System in Alaska*; Benjamin Reilly, David Lublin, and Glenn Wright, “Alaska’s New Electoral System: Countering Polarization or ‘Crooked as Hell’?,” *California Journal of Politics and Policy* 15, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.5070/P2cjpg15160081>.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Waxman, “Ranked-choice Voting Is Not the Solution,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, November 3, 2016, <https://democracy-journal.org/arguments/ranked-choice-voting-is-not-the-solution/>.

<sup>18</sup> In person interview, April 13, 2023.

There are many other ways to design collective settings for participatory power sharing.<sup>43</sup> For Mark R. Warren and organizers trained in the Industrial Areas Foundation, it looks like an ongoing practice of one-to-ones, caucus meetings, and large group accountability sessions.<sup>44</sup> Labor organizers like Jane McAlevey stress the importance of ensuring that rank-and-file workers have seats at the negotiating table.<sup>45</sup> Management has picked up on the importance of power sharing, too; the organizational theorist Peter Senge, among others, has long pushed for more inclusive management structures, at least within certain parts of firms.<sup>46</sup> Details aside, designing for directly participatory governance ensures that the problem-solving process is open. More than mere observers or passive bystanders, participants share power by co-creating solutions to public problems.

### **Designing for Accountability (for All Affected)**

Along with the exercise of power, of course, comes accountability. While the language of accountability seems to have been lost with the proliferation of nonprofits, philanthropies, and other private organizations that operate at some remove from those directly affected by a public problem, it is a critically important component of everyday democracy. The collective settings that help catalyze everyday democracy, then, are explicitly designed to ensure that the participants who exercise power are accountable to all affected by their actions. This means that co-creators not only share power, they also share accountability.

Directly participatory governance alleviates many of the traditional concerns about *vertical* accountability by closing the gap between so-called principals and the agents who represent them. Practitioners of everyday democracy make resource-use rules, for instance, as well as monitor adherence to them and sanction rule-breaking, participants identify public problems as well as demand reports that detail what has (and has not) been done to address them, and co-creators elect leaders to serve on special committees and refuse to reelect them when they do not or cannot deliver. In essence, practitioners of everyday democracy are both principals and agents. This “convergence,” to use Mark E. Warren’s helpful term, mitigates the likelihood that one group of principals acts in ways that harm some distinct group of agents.<sup>47</sup>

Yet not everyone affected by a public problem can or will directly participate in the problem-solving process. Some, in other words, will be on the sidelines. Hence the importance of well-known mechanisms for accountability like transparent decision-making processes, public reports of results, and, of course, elections for leadership positions.

Identifying and including potential participants is relatively straightforward when the public problem involves a natural resource (resource-users), labor dispute (collective bargaining unit), or firm’s expansion (management).<sup>48</sup> But in everyday democracy, constituencies are not always as clearly defined because it is not immediately clear who is affected by a problem.<sup>49</sup> This means that creating (and re-creating) principals or constituencies is often part of the project. On the one hand, this means that participants must be *responsible* as well as *responsive* to those affected by their actions.<sup>50</sup> Whereas the latter term assumes a stable set of interests, the former recognizes the constantly shifting terrain upon which practitioners of everyday democracy operate. On the other hand, a different kind of accountability problem can emerge in everyday democracy: voluntary or self-selecting participants must be accountable to those who are not actively participating. If not, if some people affected by the problem are excluded (either *de facto* or *de jure*) from the problem-solving process, everyday democracy can devolve into something else—something more unintentionally exclusionary and perhaps even explicitly anti-pluralist. Things done in someone else’s name are often of little benefit to them, and, worse, recipients of the action have no easy way of registering their opposition.

Yet not everyone affected by a public problem can or will directly participate in the problem-solving process. Some, in other words, will be on the sidelines.

Besides the mechanisms for accountability mentioned above, we have identified another way that collective settings can increase accountability: designing collective settings with porous boundaries. Political theorist and community organizer Romand Coles has stressed the necessity of physical movement in communities increasingly segregated by race, class, and partisan ideology.<sup>51</sup> Movement can not only help unsettle existing hierarchies within a group of public problem-solvers (everyone has to get off their own turf), it increases the likelihood that group members will encounter potential participants that otherwise would not contribute or new problems that might go unaddressed. Coles's insights are not necessarily novel. As Marshall Ganz notes, physical movement—like a march—have long been critical to everyday democracy.<sup>52</sup> This is less because they raise awareness or visibility for a particular cause as much as they present an occasion to establish new connections<sup>53</sup> and rekindle old ones. Beyond literal movement, recruiting via canvassing, one-to-ones, or public meetings can help institutionalize porous boundaries. And personal connections are, of course, critical. As organizers have long insisted and social scientists have confirmed, it is much more difficult to turn down an invitation from a familiar acquaintance than an anonymous door-knocker, much less a form email or text. All this movement decreases the likelihood that one group of well-intentioned and highly motivated participants can claim to act for everyone affected by a public problem and, at the same time, lowers barriers to entry for new participants.<sup>54</sup>

It is much more difficult to turn down an invitation from a familiar acquaintance than an anonymous door-knocker, much less a form email or text.

## Designing for Difference

Porous boundaries are also likely to increase the diversity of participants. This means that collective settings must also be designed for difference. But beyond the fact that it is inevitable, diversity is also critical to building durable solutions to public problems.

How to design collective settings to ensure that diverse individuals can partake in everyday democracy? Heterogeneous groups (or groups of groups) are difficult to cultivate and even harder to sustain.<sup>55</sup> Members of diverse groups, for instance, often end up working with people whose views they find misguided or even offensive. Lamentably, sustained contact does not inevitably alleviate animosity.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, those with whom one disagrees are not necessarily *deserving* of moral respect. In everyday democracy, diversity can be a *pragmatic* rather than moral commitment. It can even be understood as a necessary evil, at least early on; necessary in order to build and sustain the kind of group needed to effectively address a public problem but evil insofar it requires making (temporary) alliances with those whom one would prefer to avoid, often for very good reasons.<sup>57</sup>

To return, though, to the question at hand: Public relationships are critical to sustaining the diverse groups that partake in everyday democracy.<sup>58</sup> The modifier *public* signifies a relationship that is neither grounded in affinity or affection nor nakedly instrumental. Public relationships are distinct, then, from both friendships and economic transactions. As Hannah Arendt puts it, public relationships are characterized by shared interests in something “which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together.”<sup>59</sup> For us, this thing that binds people together is a public problem. Unlike most friendships, then, public relationships are not built on shared backgrounds or values. And whereas market exchanges often involve the same goal—individual gain/profit—the agents do not hold anything in common. Public relationships, in contrast, are characterized by iterative and self-directed interactions of people working toward a concrete common goal.

Face-to-face gatherings have long been considered critical for building public relationships.<sup>60</sup> But face-to-face gatherings are not enough; public relationships also require some distance from the hierarchies embedded in market and state formations. Scholars like Robert Putnam and Jürgen Habermas, among others, contend that a vibrant “civil society” or “public sphere” is the space where citizens develop such relationships.<sup>61</sup> Defined by the (relative) absence of formal economic and state institutions, non-market or non-state settings enable actors to associate and communicate as (relative) equals rather than consumers/producers or rulers/ruled. The sociologist Eric Klinenberg argues that more

## Case Study 3: The Blue Mountain Forest Partners

(See Appendix A for a description of the methodology behind these comparative case studies.)

By Emily B. Campbell

The Blue Mountain Forest Partners (BMFP) is an unlikely coalition working to ensure the vitality and sustainability of Malheur National Forest in Oregon and the rural communities who call the forest home. Established in 2006, this “diverse group of stakeholders” unites around a process that is “locally-supported, incentives-driven and that relies on the power of solutions that integrate the environmental, economic and social needs of communities.”<sup>1</sup> Composed of once-feuding entities, the BMFP now has over 30 participating organizations.<sup>2</sup> To understand the BMFP, I spent one week in John Day, Oregon, attending all partnership events. I formally interviewed 16 people.<sup>3</sup>

### BMFP’s Origins

The partnership began with informal meetings between Boyd Britton, the Grant County Commissioner, and Susan Jane Brown, a successful Portland-based environmental lawyer who’d been instrumental in shutting down logging in Oregon since the 1990s. Brown described the first meetings as “very difficult” and having “a lot of anger and baggage” on both sides.<sup>4</sup> Of her motivations, she explained: “The reason folks like me came to the table was because we were starting to see an increase in the extent and severity of wildfires, and those fires were burning up a lot of that habitat that we managed to save in the late ’90s.”<sup>5</sup> Leaving the forest untouched, coupled with fire-suppression, had created an ecological disaster.<sup>6</sup> In order to restore health, the forest required thinning—and a mill to process removed lumber.<sup>7</sup> Informal talks to understand shared interests lasted three years.

In 2012, the last mill in the area was threatened with closure due to inactivity. This threat drew more people into the partnership. As BMFP board member Zack Williams said, it was “desperation” that brought people to the table.<sup>8</sup> Five generations of his family had worked in ranching and lumber in Grant County. The mill closing would have ended his livelihood and forced him to move his young family. He explained, “It would’ve decimated the economy and it just killed the community.”<sup>9</sup> The partnership worked alongside Brown to keep the mill open, gaining trust, and a hard-won sense that working together has payoffs.

### Participatory Governance

The partnership is built on the mutual understanding that working together is the only path forward. As one US Forest Service member said after a public meeting, “We either do something, or we do nothing and it all burns.”<sup>10</sup> At a field trip, speaking to the group’s approach to a recent project, Executive Director Mark Webb asked reflexively, “What can we do that meets everybody’s needs?”<sup>11</sup>

The work of BMFP is guided by a number of ratified bylaws

and operations procedures. Guiding all processes is an ethos of mutual respect, civil communication, transparency, and openness to each other’s perspectives to innovate mutually beneficial solutions.<sup>12</sup> All voting members must sign the Declaration of Commitment that promises to honor established agreements and to advance the BMFP mission.<sup>13</sup> The BMFP uses a “consensus minus one” model for decision-making to ensure that decisions are made collectively without allowing one dissident to stymie the entire process.<sup>14</sup> Voting members can also “stand aside” so as not to block the motion.<sup>15</sup> When voting, members can express degrees of support including: “I agree with this decision and will publicly support it,” “I agree with this decision but will refrain from publicly supporting it,” and “I can live with this decision (and will not disparage it in public).”<sup>16</sup>

The BMFP has established a “science-based zones of agreement” approach to forest restoration that is issue based rather than project based, allowing for efficiency that impacts much larger areas of the forest than a single grove of old growth pines.<sup>17</sup> The zones of agreement “memorialize the best available science” and provide detailed knowledge on the forest, wildlife, and forest treatments.<sup>18</sup>

### Experimentation

The collaborative has also an agreed upon a set of epistemological standards to guide its decision-making. They let the science lead, meaning partners will allow science (instead of their opinions) to adjudicate protracted conflict. With long-term science collaboration, a feedback loop of knowledge production has been established. Informal time also allows creativity to emerge, and leaving spaces traditionally associated with conflict is deeply beneficial. As Dave Hannibal, BMFP board member and base manager of Grayback Forestry Inc., explained, “When they sit and listen to the science itself, it helps move them to the middle. If you’re just told, ‘Well, you’re going to now do it the opposite way you’ve always done it before because we decided that’ versus hearing the science behind it. Once you hear the science behind it, it makes more sense.”<sup>19</sup>

Monthly field trips to monitor the progress and status of projects in the forest allow for informal discussions and a visceral reminder of their shared work.<sup>20</sup> Scientist James Johnston, an assistant professor in the College of Forestry at Oregon State University, explained, “[After] the field trip I always report my findings, [and] do presentations. I’m deeply embedded as a member, so a lot of this happens via informal interactions as well.”<sup>21</sup>

Hannibal explained the value of spending time in the forest together,

If we sit around a business table, [a] big old meeting table, and we're all sitting here in our positions, we're playing this game, where it's like, "Okay, I'm a logger and I want to cut trees" and "I'm an environmentalist and I want to save everything." We just get stuck in our positions. But when we're in the forest, now... it's green; the sun's shining. We're looking at trees and forest, and it's easier to come to the middle and it's easier to see the other people as the good human beings that they are rather than vilify them.<sup>22</sup>

## Challenges: Accountability (for All Affected)

Science does not necessarily produce clear-cut answers or provide a guidebook for how to manage the forest together. For those who do not understand highly-specialized science, the detailed and technical nature of the approach can be both confounding and alienating. This has the effect, whether intentional or not, of creating a group of highly educated, specialized collaborators to the detriment of broader citizen engagement.<sup>23</sup> Further equipping scientists with skills and resources for translational, civic science may foster broader trust and protect scientists doing vital, public work.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Mission and History," Blue Mountains Forest Partners, accessed February 19, 2023, <https://bluemountainsforestpartners.org/about/>; Blue Mountain Forest Partners, *Operations Manual: Organizational Structure, Communication, and Decision Making Process*, January 2010, available at <https://hooddriverswcd.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BMFP-Operations-Manual-September-22-2011.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Members come from the ranching industry, forestry and restoration industries, public natural resource management, the US Forest Service, environmental and conservation groups, research entities, and local, regional, tribal, and state governments. See Rebecca J. McLain, Kirsten Wright, and Lee Cerveney, *Who Is at the Forest Restoration Table? Final Report on the Blue Mountains Forest Stewardship Network, Phase 1*, prepared for the Pacific Northwest Research Station, US Forest Service, US Department of Agriculture, March 23, 2015; Mark Billings, Matthew Carroll, Travis Paveglio, and Kara Whitman, "'Us versus Them': Local Social Fragmentation and Its Potential Effects on Building Pathways to Adapting to Wildfire," *Fire* 4, no. 96 (2021); Matthew J. Reilly et al., "Cascadia Burning: The Historic, But Not Historically Unprecedented, 2020 Wildfires in the Pacific Northwest, USA," *Ecosphere* 13, no. 6 (2022): e4070; Jennifer Sitton, "The Effects of Forestry Regulations on Rural Communities and the Urban-Rural Divide in Oregon" (CMC Senior Theses, Claremont McKenna College, 2015), [http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmcc\\_theses/1069](http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmcc_theses/1069); Michael Paul Nelson et al., "Enhancing Public Trust in Federal Forest Management," in *People, Forests, and Change: Lessons from the Pacific Northwest*, eds. Deanna H. Olson and Beatrice Van Horne (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2017): 259–74,, [https://doi.org/10.5822/978-1-61091-768-1\\_18](https://doi.org/10.5822/978-1-61091-768-1_18); Jeff Mapes, review of *Toward One Oregon: Rural-Urban Interdependence and the Evolution of a State*, by Michael Hibbard, Ethan Seltzer, and Beth Emshoff, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 113, no. 1 (2012), 118–20, DOI:10.1353/ohq.2012.0066; Peter A. Walker and Patrick T. Hurley, *Planning Paradise: Politics and Visioning of Land Use in Oregon* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2011); Matthew S. Carroll et al., "A Response to 'Forty Years of Spotted Owls?' A Longitudinal Analysis of Logging Industry Job Losses," *Sociological Perspectives* 42, no. 2 (1999), 325–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389632>.

<sup>3</sup> I attended public meetings, board meetings, social events, and their hallmark field trip for a total of roughly 40 contact hours. Each day, I spoke with and interviewed members of the partnership, the US Forest Service, their scientific collaborators, and concerned, active citizens. Interviews ranged in duration from 45 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes. See Methodology section of this report.

<sup>4</sup> Phone interview, March 24, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Phone interview, March 24, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Though fire has been part of the landscape for millennia, and both Western science and Indigenous knowledge systems confirm controlled burns were part of indigenous practice for forest maintenance. European settlement put controlled burns to an end and embraced a fire-mitigation paradigm at odds with the ecological needs of the forest. See: Michelle M. Steen-Adams et al., "Traditional Knowledge of Fire Use by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs in the Eastside Cascades of Oregon," *Forest Ecology and Management* 450 (2019):

117405, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2019.06.002>; James D. Johnston et al., "Mechanical Thinning Without Prescribed Fire Moderates Wildfire Behavior in an Eastern Oregon, USA Ponderosa Pine Forest," *Forest Ecology and Management* 501 (2021): 119674, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2021.119674>.

<sup>7</sup> Jesse Antuma et al., *Restoring Forests and Communities: Lessons from the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program* (Missoula, MT: National Forest Foundation, 2014), <https://www.nationalforests.org/assets/pdfs/Best-Practice-Guiding-Principles-NFF.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Phone interview, March 24, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Phone interview, March 24, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Fieldnote, May 17, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Fieldnote, May 19, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Blue Mountain Forest Partners, *Operations Manual: Organizational Structure, Communication, and Decision Making Process*, January 2011.

<sup>13</sup> The BMFP takes the Declaration of Commitment very seriously and reserves the right to deny membership to people they believe are approaching the Partnership in bad faith.; Blue Mountain Forest Partners, *Declaration of Commitment*, accessed February 19, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Blue Mountain Forest Partners, *Bylaws of Blue Mountain Forest Partners*, October 19, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Blue Mountain Forest Partners, *Bylaws of Blue Mountain Forest Partners*.

<sup>16</sup> Blue Mountain Forest Partners, *Operations Manual*.

<sup>17</sup> McLain, Wright, and Cerveney, *Who Is at the Forest Restoration Table?*; Blue Mountain Forest Partners, "Zones of Agreement," accessed February 19, 2023 <https://bluemountainsforestpartners.org/work/zones-of-agreement/>.

<sup>18</sup> James Johnston, phone interview, May 30, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Phone interview, March 23, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Antuma et al., *Restoring Forests and Communities*.

<sup>21</sup> Phone interview, May 30, 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Phone interview, March 23, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Science is subject to debate within the field, and the science and scientists engaged with BMFP have not avoided criticism. From the environmental community, some have questioned the science used and characterized the scientists engaged with the partnership as "sell outs." On the other side, community members distrustful of federal overreach through the US Forest Service have accused scientists in the region of falsifying data for political ends. Though it is outside the scope of this study to determine whether these allegations are verifiable or hearsay, such challenges point to the hard path scientists must walk in polarized contexts. For collective settings that rely on scientific knowledge to inform their decision making, not translating science in a way that is accessible to nonspecialists risks alienating and deterring nonspecialists from the process.

public money ought to be devoted to building libraries, parks, and other spaces where diverse publics can engage on relatively equal footing.<sup>62</sup> Feminist historian Sara Evans and political theorist Harry Boyte argue the “free spaces,” small-scale settings characterized by the “absence of oversight from dominant groups,” are critical to public-relationship formation.<sup>63</sup> Freedom Movement participant Bob Moses, however, thinks that such sites are more tenuous than theorists like Evans and Boyte acknowledge. Hence his use of the term “crawlspaces,” semi-secret sites where people gather as relatively equals in the midst of entrenched hierarchies.<sup>64</sup> Regardless of the term used, scholars agree that in order to cultivate the public relationships critical to everyday democracy, collective settings must be designed to be relatively egalitarian. They disagree about the best way to open up these spaces—and keep them open.

## Designing for Experimentation

This brings us to another key design principle of collective settings that help catalyze everyday democracy: They enable experimentation. As noted above, everyday democracy is an iterative and open-ended affair—more like jazz than a set piece of music. Solutions, too, are contested and challenged, revisited and revised. There is always another performance, to continue the jazz metaphor. This does not necessarily mean that a prior decision was flawed; it means that changing circumstances or constituencies require updating an old solution or developing an entirely new one.

There are several ways to design collective settings for experimentation. Solutions to public problems must be visible to all affected by them, including those who are not initially part of the problem-solving process. This facilitates the formation of new publics who co-create new solutions to new public problems. Transparency also helps sustain participation by increasing trust in the problem-solving process as well as the problem-solvers.<sup>65</sup> Participants need to be able to see their fingerprints on solutions. This can be institutionalized by issuing meeting minutes, publishing reports, holding end-of-project meetings, etc.

Beyond transparency, we think there are (at least) two more dimensions of collective settings that bear directly on experimentation: faith and community. By faith, we do not mean traditional theological doctrine, much less any specific set of belief in “God” articulated by an organized religion.<sup>66</sup> Rather, we mean to capture the importance of designing collective settings to foster a shared commitment to the view that things *can* be different that they are.<sup>67</sup> Designing for this sort of faith, in other words, encourages participants to consider the difference between the world as it is and the world as it might be and what can be done to close that gap (even if only partially and temporarily).<sup>68</sup> Faith, in other words, can foster a motivation and a horizon for everyday democracy. Closely related to faith is community (beyond coalition). Twentieth-century Italian social theorist Antonio Gramsci argued that churches were the most powerful political organization. Indeed, he refused to distinguish between “church” and effective organizations, more generally.<sup>69</sup>

Conventional faith communities are underpinned by a rich set of social practices. These gatherings—from feasts and festivals to fasts and funerals and everything in between—help a group become more than the sum of its parts. Durkheim called this phenomenon “collective effervescence,” which he described as a sense of losing oneself in a broader community and, as a result, the emergence of a new “self.” While Durkheim is often associated with the study of traditional “religion,” social psychologists have found that collective effervescence can occur outside conventional faith communities.<sup>70</sup> Empirical social scientists are not the only ones interested in the affective dimension of collective settings. Writing in different contexts, Saidiya Hartman describes Black life as a “swarm” and Judith Butler details the embodied solidarity that emerges in assemblies.<sup>71</sup> Along with providing a sense of belonging, these sorts of gatherings help sustain the community after (inevitable) setbacks.

Solutions to public problems must be visible to all affected by them, including those who are not initially part of the problem-solving process.

## Conclusion

What does all this mean for those concerned about the future of American politics? How, in other words, to catalyze everyday democracy vis-à-vis collective settings? Although always attractive, macro-level interventions alone are both infeasible and unsuited for the task. First and foremost, large-scale political and economic institutions seem to be responsible for our current crisis, at least in part. As a result, it is not clear how or why they might suddenly be redeployed for pluralistic purposes. Moreover, the diffuse and decentralized nature of everyday democracy means that even if it were possible to implement macro-level interventions, it is not clear that such interventions can catalyze everyday democracy. While formal institutional reforms can make it more likely that people have time and space to act together, a more fine-grained approach is often appropriate. Because everyday democracy emerges in response to specific problems, it is often hyper-local, at least at first. Large-scale reforms meant to spark everyday democracy in one context might have the opposite effect in another.

Micro-level depolarization interventions, on the other hand, can open up possibilities for everyday democracy by targeting the individual attitudes and beliefs that generate divisiveness and distrust. But everyday democracy does not emerge from curated workshops or one-on-one dialogues, at least as currently constructed; these settings are not action-oriented.

In our view, an alternative approach consists of rebuilding and repairing already existing collective settings so that they help catalyze everyday democracy, beginning, perhaps, with those to which one already belongs. This means advocating for design considerations, most importantly participatory governance, accountability to all affected, public relationships, and experimentation. What emerges from such settings might not be what anyone, much less an outside observer or funder, expects. Yet it may be what is most needed at that particular time and place. Moreover, the byproducts—not the least of which is a pluralistic public culture—make the investment worthwhile.

Everyday democracy is not a panacea, of course. Our intent in this report, however, has been to suggest that it merits more attention. Along with reforming political institutions and convening dialogues across difference, then, we think that those concerned about American politics might also work to identify instances of everyday democracy and work to build, sustain, and support the civic infrastructure that helps catalyze it.



# Appendix A

## Methods for a Comparative Case Study of American Democratic Revitalization

Emily B. Campbell, PhD

### Research Questions

What are the effects of various approaches—behavioral interventions, collective settings, or institutional reforms—in shaping people’s ability to work together across difference to solve public problems?

How do collective settings successfully enable everyday democracy that builds pluralism?

### Aim

This research seeks to understand how collective settings influence people’s ability to come together across lines of difference to solve public problems—in other words, people’s ability to engage in the core work of a functioning democracy. Through a set of case studies, the research seeks to compare the strengths and weaknesses of three types of approaches:

1. Behavioral-style approaches that bring people of divergent political persuasions into constructive dialogue
2. Institutional approaches that focus on things like electoral reforms
3. Collective settings that use plural, community-based coalition work to solve public problems

### Study Design

Methodologically, we use a qualitative, comparative case study approach. A case study approach is favorable as it allows for a detailed account of a given intervention by illuminating what people in the setting think and feel about their situation.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the case studies enable us to generate cross-cutting comparisons in service of understanding their strengths and weaknesses.

The cases studies fall across three major approaches:

1. Behavioral-style approaches that bring people of divergent political persuasions into constructive dialogue (n=1)
2. Institutional approaches that focus on things like electoral reforms (n=1)
3. Collective settings that use plural, community-based coalition work to solve public problems (n=1)

Selected cases were identified through a comprehensive review.

### Justification

Case studies have the empirical advantage of illuminating how a social process unfolds.<sup>73</sup> Qualitative case studies typically interview less than 40 participants given the in-depth nature of the approach. This allows for increased “validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings.”<sup>74</sup> Though not generalizable in the statistical sense, qualitative research that relies on a smaller number of in-depth interviews can be theory-generative. Moreover, as we are interested in thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and impact of respective interventions, interviews allow us to uncover participants’ meaning-making processes.<sup>75</sup>

**Data Collected by Case<sup>76</sup>**

<p><b>Braver Angels (BA)</b></p>	<p>14 interviews: 12 with participants and two with Alliance leaders</p> <p>Of the 12 participants interviewed: nine were “Blue” and three were “Red”; six men and six women; all white</p> <p>Attendance of two workshops in person</p> <p>In the two workshops, 1/20 and 2/15 were people of color. The workshops had more men than women, though nationally the organization skews female<sup>77</sup></p> <p>Recruitment: All participants of the two workshops were given the option to voluntarily participate in an interview</p> <p>Review of participant surveys from workshops</p> <p>Review of BA-produced reports and literature</p>
<p><b>Alaskan Voting Reforms</b></p>	<p>16 interviews: eight Republicans and four Democrats (either elected officials or staff)</p> <p>Four interviews with policy experts and journalists</p> <p>Recruitment: All members of the state senate and the house were contacted by email requesting an interview. Other experts were identified in the literature and contacted by email.</p>
<p><b>Blue Mountain Forest Partners (BMFP)</b></p>	<p>16 interviews: 12 with BMFP members, one with a member of the US Forest Service, and three with concerned citizens</p> <p>Attendance of three days of intensive meetings and informal social events</p> <p>Review of internal and publicly available documents</p> <p>Recruitment: All board members of BMFP were contacted by email requesting an interview. Concerned citizens were recruited in person at public meetings.</p>

**Institutional Review Board**

“Strengthening Democracy by Strengthening the Agora” was submitted to the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health’s Institutional Review Board for review on November 22, 2022. The study was approved on March 16, 2023 (IRB00023010).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Katherine Schaeffer, “On July Fourth, How Americans See Their Country and Their Democracy,” June 30, 2022, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/06/30/how-americans-see-their-country-and-their-democracy/>.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Stid, “Philanthropy and the Testing of Democracy in America,” April 20, 2023, *The Art of Association*, <https://www.theartofassociation.org/blog/pn7mn78cqsix7ttvrbch6pazkw3wzd>.

<sup>3</sup> As an example: David J. Teece, “Business Models and Dynamic Capabilities,” *Long Range Planning* 51, no. 1 (February 2018): 40–49, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0024630117302868>.

<sup>4</sup> Deva R. Woodly, *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> “Approach,” New Pluralists, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://newpluralists.org/approach/>.

<sup>6</sup> Affective polarization is understood in terms of affect and identity rather than political ideology. Affective polarization generates enmity and distrust in a way that ideological polarization need not; an affectively polarized public dislikes the “other side” in a two-party system by virtue of the fact that it is the other side. Whereas ideologically polarized political communities may be able to work together across difference on certain issues, affective polarization renders this impossible: Fellow citizens are either for or against “us.” See Shanto Iyengar et al., “The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129–46, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034>.

<sup>7</sup> Such interventions can take many forms. Nascent research suggests that providing partisans with accurate information about the “other side” reduces affective polarization, for example, Douglas J. Ahler and Gaurav Sood, “The Parties in Our Heads: Misperceptions About Party Composition and Their Consequences,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 3 (July 2018): 964–81, <https://doi.org/10.1086/697253>. Others have argued that emphasizing a common identity like “American” can reduce partisan animosity, for example, Matthew S. Levendusky, “Americans, not Partisans: Can Priming American National Identity Reduce Affective Polarization?,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 1 (January 2018): 59–70, <https://doi.org/10.1086/693987>. Perhaps most prominently, scholars have revisited intergroup contact theory to catalyze constructive engagement across difference, for example, Thomas F. Pettigrew et al., “Recent Advances in Intergroup Contact Theory,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 35, no. 3 (May 2011): 271–80. This often entails facilitating structured cross-partisan conversations or dialogues. Led by someone trained in counseling or mediation, these sessions bring “reds” and “blues” together for dialogue. They are meant to demystify members of the opposing part, and preliminary evidence suggests that they often succeed, for example, Nathan Bomey, *Bridge Builders: Bringing People Together in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Some argue that the American two-party system is largely to blame for affective polarization (see Lee Drutman, *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)). As parties have become more racially, religiously, educationally, and geographically homogenous, partisanship has become a “mega-identity” that shapes or even changes other identities (see Eli J. Finkel et al., “Political Sectarianism in America,” *Science* 370, no. 6516 (October 2020): 533–36, doi: 10.1126/science.abe1715; Lilliana Mason, “‘I Disrespectfully Agree’: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization,” *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1 (March 2014): 128–45, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12089>; and Lilliana Mason, “Losing Common Ground: Social Sorting and Polarization,” *The Forum* 16, no. 1 (2018): 47–66, <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2018-0004>). This effectively eliminates cross-cutting identities among co-partisans and, as a result, magnifies alleged differences between in- and outgroup members. Others argue that residential sorting or “social homophily” has created echo chambers that tend to increase polarization (see James G. Gimpel and Iris S. Hui, “Seeking Politically Compatible Neighbors? The Role of Neighborhood Partisan Composition in Residential Sorting,” *Political Geography* 48 (September 2015): 130–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2014.11.003>). Though these findings are debated, most agree that bipartisan families have become less common (see Jonathan Mummolo and Clayton Nall, “Why Partisans Do Not Sort: The Constraints on Political Segregation,” *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 1 (2017): 45–59). And still others suggest that increasing elite ideological divergence has contributed to affective polarization (Finkel et al., “Political Sectarianism in America,” 2020).

<sup>9</sup> On voting reform, see Daniel I. Weiner and Gareth Fowler, “The For the People Act: Separating Fact from Fiction,” May 13, 2021, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/people-act-separating-fact-fiction> and “How Ranked Choice Voting Works,” Alaskans for Better Elections, <https://www.alaskansforbetterelections.com/learn-more/ranked-choice-voting/>. On campaign finance, see Lawrence Norden and Daniel I. Weiner, “Corporations and Fixing Campaign Finance,” January 21, 2021, Brennan

Center for Justice at NYU Law, accessed August 1, 2023 <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/corporations-and-fixing-campaign-finance>. On redistricting, see Fair Vote: <https://fairvote.org/resources/redistricting/>. On wealth redistribution, see Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It*, Perspectives on Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Olúfemi O. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations*, Philosophy of Race (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022); and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Everyday democracy bears a family resemblance to John Dewey's "conjoint action," Hannah Arendt's "action-in-concert," and what Harry Boyte has called "public work" (see John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1927), Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) and Harry C. Boyte, "Constructive Politics as Public Work: Organizing the Literature," *Political Theory* 39, no. 5 (2011): 630–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009059171141374>). We also sometimes refer to everyday democracy as "civic co-creation."

<sup>11</sup> Following Romand Coles, among others, we use the term *tradition* here to signify an inheritance that is "passed on" or "handed over" from the Latin meaning of the root *traditio* (see Romand Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005)). As Coles notes, "pass on" and "hand over" have a double meaning (p. xii). To *pass on* can mark continuity, but it can also mark refusal. *Traditio* itself, then, harbors an indeterminacy—like everyday democracy. Understood this way, the public problem-solving *traditio* is an inheritance that opens up new possibilities, that binds as well as creates. We prefer the term tradition rather than a term like *culture* for precisely these reasons.

<sup>12</sup> Hahrie Han, Andrea Louise Campbell, and Elizabeth McKenna, "Civic Feedbacks: Linking Collective Action, Organizational Strategy, and Influence over Public Policy," *Perspectives on Politics* (2022): 1–15, doi:10.1017/S1537592722000986.

<sup>13</sup> Michael J. Lansing, *Insurgent Democracy* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Harry C. Boyte and Nancy N. Kari, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> See the website for Manchester Proud at <https://www.manchesterproud.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> It is, perhaps, easiest to define the meso-level negatively; it foregrounds the spaces in between formal political institutions (the macro) and individual relationships (the micro). The meso-level is not autonomous or self-contained, of course; formal political institutions and individual relationships always shape it. Yet focusing on institutions or individuals can obscure the fact that public life often unfolds elsewhere. Groups or publics shape our shared social world as much as institutions and individuals.

<sup>17</sup> More troublingly, much public action originating in collective settings have been profoundly anti-pluralist. The fact that ordinary people work together across difference, in other words, does not mean that their efforts cultivate a pluralistic public culture. White supremacy, understood as a way to unite ordinary people with disparate interests (British elites, poor Irish servants, and waves of European immigrants), immediately comes to mind. See, for instance, W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* rev. ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1935; New York: Routledge, 2017); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010). More generally, see how German civil society contributed to the collapse of the Weimar Republic and rise of Nazism in Sheri Berman, "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 401–29, doi:10.1353/wp.1997.0008.

<sup>18</sup> On strategy and tactics, see Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010); Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016). On norms and principles, see Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Elinor Ostrom, "Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems," *American Economic Review* 100, no. 3 (2010): 641–72. On culture and identity, see Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 283–305. On the affective dimension, see Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) and Daniel A. Yudkin et al., "Prosocial Correlates of Transformative Experiences at Secular Multi-Day Mass Gatherings," *Nature Communications* 13 (2022): 1–13.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How*

*They Fail*, (New York: Vintage, 1978); Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); Woodly, *Reckoning*, 2021; Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa, *Prisms of the People* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> See Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Gianpaolo Baiocchi, *Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2014); K. Sabeel Rahman, *Democracy Against Domination* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> McAlevey, *No Shortcuts*. This does not mean, of course, that one blindly defers to individual preferences nor ought to ignore political institutions.

<sup>22</sup> Again, Dewey looms large here, although we do not claim to be “Deweyans” in any meaningful sense; rather, Dewey’s insights about the importance of beginning with concrete problems and emphasis on the iterative and relational dimensions of problem solving informs our approach.

<sup>23</sup> To be sure, the boundary between public and private is contested, and rightly so. In this meaning of *open*, though, everyday democracy is oriented toward problems that cannot be addressed by individuals acting alone.

<sup>24</sup> Nobody is relegated to a passive role by virtue of their social, economic, or political status, including expertise (or lack thereof). That means, of course, that agents must share power.

<sup>25</sup> For a recent account of the importance of place, see Daniel Kemmis, “Finding Common Ground at a Montana Barn Raising,” *Barn Raiser*, April 6, 2023, <https://barnraisingmedia.com/barn-raising-montana-community-democracy-common-ground/>. See, also, Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (New York: Counterpoint Press, 2015) and Jedidiah Purdy-Smith, *This Land Is Our Land: The Struggle for a New Commonwealth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> In addition to Alexis de Tocqueville’s canonical *Democracy in America* (1835-1840), for a recent account of the importance of ongoing civic work, see Harry Boyte and Trygve Throntveit, “Putting the ‘Public’ Back in Public Works,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, May 27, 2021, <https://democracyjournal.org/arguments/putting-the-public-back-in-public-works/>.

<sup>27</sup> Among many others, the great Cornel West has used this metaphor (in conversation, of course); see Miriam Strube and Cornel West, “Pragmatism’s Tragicomic Jazzman: A Talk with Cornel West” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 58, no. 2 (2013): 291-301 as well as Harry C. Boyte, *Awakening Democracy through Public Work: Pedagogies of Empowerment* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Juliet Hooker forcefully argues that democratic politics has broken down when one group of people continually loses. When the burdens of trade-offs, negotiations, and compromise are not equally distributed, Hooker rightfully contends that marginalized groups—such as Black people in the United States—should refuse further loss and reject calls for continued sacrifice. Hooker says less about alternatives in such circumstances. As we discuss in more detail, we think everyday democracy is a promising path forward. This is not a matter of justice or fairness as much as a strategic necessity. See Juliet Hooker, “Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of US Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair,” *Political Theory* 44 no. 4 (2016): 448-69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591716640314>.

<sup>29</sup> Nor is it one that politicians running for office are keen to share. Sam Bagg and Isak Tranvik discuss the reasons that candidates running for office need not—and should not—tell such truths. The media has fewer justifications for neglecting these truths, although while candidates who fail to engage in some dirty tactics risk ceding political power to the least scrupulous candidates, media outlets only forgo advertising dollars to their competitors who promote lies and pedal fear. See Samuel Bagg and Isak Tranvik, “An Adversarial Ethics for Campaigns and Elections,” *Perspectives on Politics* 17 no. 4 (2019): 973-87.

<sup>30</sup> Allen, *Our Declaration*, 2014. In short, democracy requires forbearance. One must accept that one’s opponent can legitimately exercise power until the next round of the contest.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, James Fishkin et al., *Democracy When the People Are Thinking: Revitalizing Our Politics through Public Deliberation* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>32</sup> We should also note that, unlike resistance or avowedly agonistic forms of politics, everyday democracy is not necessarily adversarial (although it may be). Put otherwise, everyday democracy is an example of constructive politics. See Boyte, “Constructive Politics as Public Work,” 2011 and, more recently, Olúfemi O. Táiwò, *Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else)* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2022). To be sure, destruction or dismantling may be part of any world-building, to use Arendt’s term. But in everyday democracy, the emphasis is on the latter rather than the former.

- <sup>33</sup> “Approach,” New Pluralists, <https://newpluralists.org/approach/>.
- <sup>34</sup> William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991; Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- <sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume One; A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, rev. ed. (New York: Modern Library, 1906; Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2019).
- <sup>36</sup> Isak Tranvik, “Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg: Havel on Small-Scale Work and ‘Dissent,’” *Constellations* 29 no. 1 (2022): 80–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12563>.
- <sup>37</sup> On the limits of markets to address public problems, see Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*, Near Future Series (Brooklyn, New York: Zone Books, 2015). We are concerned, though, that many seem to think that state-centric *redistributive* schemes are the only viable alternative to market-centric approaches. Our goal here is to make visible another paradigm: everyday democracy.
- <sup>38</sup> Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 1970; Baiocchi, *Militants and Citizens*, 2005. Finally, it is not clear how many people are interested in pluralism, as such. A recent Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement survey on political terms reveals that there is a bipartisan consensus *against* the term *pluralism* (see “Analysis of Civic Language Perceptions,” Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement, October 18, 2022, <http://www.pacefunders.org/analysis-of-civic-language-perceptions/>). The term was viewed “positively” by less than 25 percent of survey respondents. Unsurprisingly, *unity* is much more popular, favored by around 75 percent of survey respondents. Demand seems to be a problem for other approaches, as well.
- <sup>39</sup> Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*. Subsequent studies have both validated and extended Ostrom’s findings. See, for instance, Eduardo S. Brondizio, Elinor Ostrom, and Oran R. Young, “Connectivity and the Governance of Multilevel Social-Ecological Systems: The Role of Social Capital,” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 34 (2009): 253–78; Keith Carlisle and Rebecca L. Gruby, “Polycentric Systems of Governance: A Theoretical Model for the Commons,” *Policy Studies Journal* 47, no. 4 (2019): 927–52.
- <sup>40</sup> Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*.
- <sup>41</sup> Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*.
- <sup>42</sup> Elinor Ostrom, “Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems,” *American Economic Review* 100, no. 3 (2010): 641–72.
- <sup>43</sup> See, for instance, Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*.
- <sup>44</sup> Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*.
- <sup>45</sup> McAlevey, *No Shortcuts*.
- <sup>46</sup> Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, and John Kania, “The Dawn of System Leadership,” *Essentials of Social Innovation* 13, no. 1 (2014): 27–33.
- <sup>47</sup> Warren, Mark E. “Accountability and democracy.” *The Oxford handbook of public accountability* (2014): 39–54.
- <sup>48</sup> We say “relatively” because we recognize that drawing boundaries can be difficult. Take a labor dispute, for instance: While workers are obviously most directly impacted, their families and communities are indirectly impacted by any labor dispute. Should they, then, be included in the problem-solving process? McAlevey thinks so (see *No Shortcuts*, 2016). But not all labor organizers share her view.
- <sup>49</sup> This is also the case in democratic politics, more broadly. See, for instance, the classic work on representation: Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967).
- <sup>50</sup> Lisa Disch, “Democratic Representation and the Constituency Paradox,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 3 (2012): 599–616.
- <sup>51</sup> Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*.
- <sup>52</sup> Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins*.
- <sup>53</sup> On the structure of these sorts of networks, see Damon Centola and Michael Macy, “Complex Contagions and the Weakness of Long Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 3 (2007): 702–34, <https://doi.org/10.1086/521848>. For how they apply to explicitly political work, see Peter Hedström, Rickard Sandell, and Charlotta Stern, “Mesolevel Networks and the Diffusion of Social Movements: The Case of the Swedish Social Democratic Party,” *American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 1 (2000): 145–72, <https://doi.org/10.1086/303109>.
- <sup>54</sup> There is a tension between renewal and the iterative nature of everyday democracy. The latter seems to require skills and knowledge that take time to develop whereas the former demands that inexperienced participants are continually brought into the process.

<sup>55</sup> For more detailed accounts of the mechanics of coalitions, see Thomas Wolff, “Community Coalition Building—Contemporary Practice and Research: Introduction,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 26 (2001): 165–72, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010314326787>; Cynthia Rayner and François Bonnici, *The Systems Work of Social Change: How to Harness Connection, Context, and Power to Cultivate Deep and Enduring Change* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>56</sup> We must also note that a commitment to coalition building does not entail assuming a posture of detached neutrality. Scholars like Deva Woodly and Mie Inouye have shown that even the most “anti-ideological” coalitions still adhere to a set of normative commitments: Woodly, *Reckoning*; Mie Inouye, “Starting with People Where They Are: Ella Baker’s Theory of Political Organizing.” *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 2 (2022): 533–46, doi:10.1017/S0003055421001015. Claiming to stay above the fray merely masks one’s underlying values and often reifies the status quo—only those who prefer the existing order (which, of course, is not value neutral) can claim objectivity in the face of criticism. A commitment to pluralism, then, means that coalition members hold their values loosely while being willing to work with those who have different moral visions or beliefs.

<sup>57</sup> In recent “Red for Ed” movements in Arizona, for example, Latinx teachers worked with colleagues who were explicitly anti-immigrant. In similar efforts in Oklahoma and West Virginia, people of color were bombarded with casual racism from white colleagues (see Samuel Bagg, *The Dispersion of Power: A Critical Realist Theory of Democracy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, forthcoming)). None of this is new; Black women in the Long Freedom Movement were the beating heart of groups struggling against patriarchy, both within the movement and outside it (see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003)). And, to state the obvious, none of this is fair or just (see Holly McCammon and Karen Campbell, “Allies on the Road to Victory: Coalition Formation Between the Suffragists and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2002): 231–51, <https://doi.org/10.17813/mai.q.7.3.p61v817914865qv>).

<sup>58</sup> See, among others, Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling* and McAleve, *No Shortcuts*.

<sup>59</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 182.

<sup>60</sup> See, for instance, Loren McArthur’s essay on organizing: “To Save Democracy, Fund Organizing,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 21, no. 2 (2023), 77–78, <https://doi.org/10.48558/ONT6-3V74>.

<sup>61</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 1; Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985). For a detailed overview of competing accounts of civil society, see Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

<sup>62</sup> Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life* (New York: Broadway Books, 2018)

<sup>63</sup> Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>64</sup> Robert P. Moses and Charles E. Cobb Jr., *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*.

<sup>66</sup> Few would deny that religious faith communities have long played key parts in the kinds of participatory and resilient coalitions that solve public problems. From spectacular efforts like those of the Civil Rights Era towards more ordinary projects involving affordable childcare in Cincinnati, people of faith—traditionally understood—have left an indelible mark on the public problem-solving tradition in the United States. Yet this dimension of public problem solving is often overlooked or outright ignored, particularly in Progressive circles or left-wing organizing.

<sup>67</sup> We use the term “faith” because we recognize that there are many reasons for apathy and despair. Acting publicly, then, can be construed as an act of faith—a leap into an unknown, of sorts. Matters of faith have long manifested in people solving public problems. See, for instance, Michael Gecan, *Going Public* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002). We also think that faith need not be associated with traditional religion.

<sup>68</sup> For an example of the ways that faith communities can work with secular organizations to address public problems, see Emily B. Campbell, “Contesting Deaths’ Despair: Local Public Religion, Radical Welcome and Community Health in the Overdose Crisis, Massachusetts, USA,” *Open Theology* 8, no. 1 (2022), 248–60, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0206>.

<sup>69</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks: Volume 2*, ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Yudkin et al., “Prosocial Correlates of Transformative Experiences.”

<sup>71</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2019); Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Mario Luis Small, “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’ On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-based Research,” *Ethnography* 10, no. 1 (2009): 5–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138108099586>.

<sup>73</sup> Mario Luis Small, “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’”; Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: SAGE Publications Inc., 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Mira Crouch and Heather McKenzie, “The Logic of Small Samples in Interview-based Qualitative Research,” *Social Science Information* 45, no. 4 (2006): 483–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018406069584>.

<sup>75</sup> Jeasik Cho, *Evaluating Qualitative Research* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> All data collected by Emily Campbell.

<sup>77</sup> Braver Angels, *Braver Angels 2020-2021 Report: Depolarizing During the Pandemic*, 2022, <https://braverangels.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BA-2020-2021-Report-Extended-1.pdf>.