



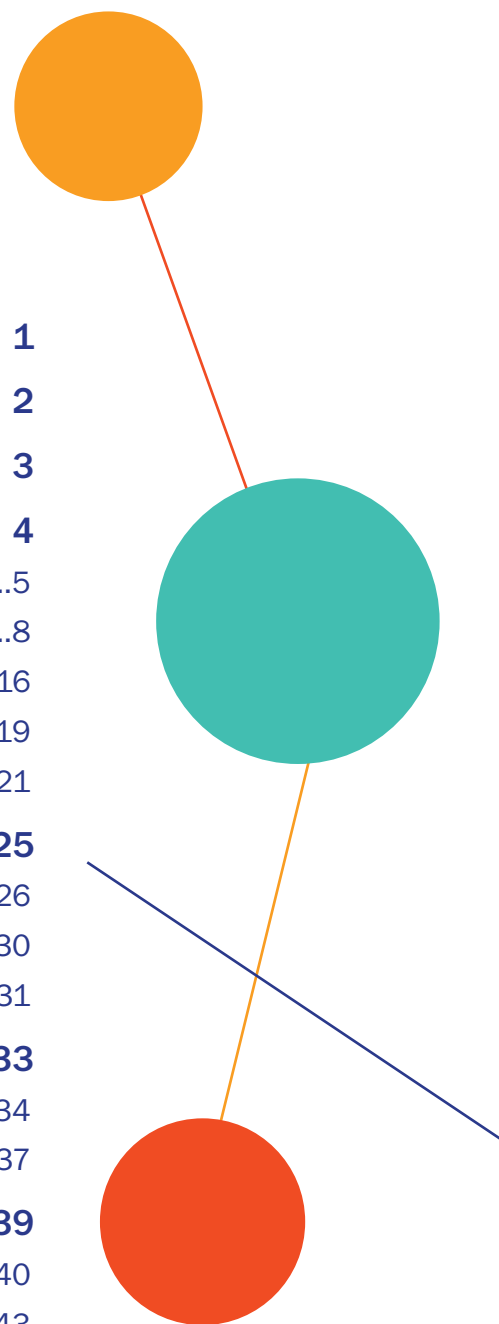
RESOLUTE

In Our Stand for Democracy

The Charles F. Kettering Foundation
2025 Annual Report

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Letter from the President and CEO

Across 2025, the Charles F. Kettering Foundation did its work in the United States and around the globe in a new atmosphere of threats, fear, and capitulation. After Donald Trump returned to power in late January 2025, civil society organizations found themselves tested by a whirlwind of anti-democratic actions by the new administration—disdain for separation of power; violations of due process protections; executive orders challenging bedrock rights; revoked promises of federal funding across higher education; mass firings of civil servants; the appointment of loyalists to cabinet positions; assaults on science, history, and the arts; attacks on speech and a free press; and more—developments so rapid and far-reaching that even scholars of authoritarianism were stunned by their pace.

Despite this volatile context, the foundation remained committed and focused on advancing democracy with clarity, courage, and an understanding of the value of coalition. We call these the three Cs.

Respecting clarity, democracy experts warned that the United States is no longer fairly considered a full democracy and is at best a form of competitive authoritarianism. The foundation understood that if we minimized that reality, we risked moving too slowly in democracy's defense. Thus, throughout the year, through our research, convenings, and public voice, we dared to name the forces threatening our democracy and partnered with individuals, communities, and organizations working to meet them.

We started a Research Fellows program, bringing on board three of the nation's leading democracy scholars as go-to subject matter experts. We launched a multiyear Kettering-Gallup Democracy for All Project, an annual survey of how Americans experience democracy with a special effort to include hard-to-reach members of underrepresented groups.

We opened a new office in Washington, DC, and purposefully grew our staff there.

Respecting courage, we understood that authoritarians stifle public criticism of their aims and tactics by deploying threats and fear against all who stand up to them. No sector in the US was safe from the use of those weapons in 2025. Falling like dominoes, even deeply resourced institutions acquiesced to the administration's demands when threatened with revoked federal funding, the denial of access to federal buildings, the threat of federal investigation, and indictment and prosecution, among other challenges. In this environment, the foundation emphasized courage as a *sine qua non* of democracy's defense. We modeled it through our intentionally public-facing work and by lifting up the work of courageous leaders with the launch of our inaugural Kettering Democracy Prize.

Authoritarians depend on social division and isolation for their success—they see unity as a failure, not a goal. They work to divide communities by creating winners and losers, victims and scapegoats, those who belong and those who don't. In a thriving democracy, by contrast, inclusion and fairness for all is paramount. The power of the people lies in their numbers, provided they act in coalition. Thus, the foundation trumpeted the need for coalition throughout the year, stressing that no one organization can defeat today's allied anti-democratic forces alone. We must be in collective action and collective defense together.

We have not yet defeated the forces that threaten democracy worldwide, but we are determined to be a part of the forces that do so. Looking ahead to 2026, we pledge to play our part. I am proud to work alongside such a dedicated group of colleagues and an inspiring group of partners who are also committed to this fight.



Sharon L. Davies
President and CEO





OUR VISION

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

OUR MISSION

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

OUR GUIDING BELIEFS AND VALUES

Democratic Integrity

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

Civic Responsibility

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

Belonging

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

Justice

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

Trustworthiness

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

Year Two of Our Strategic Plan

This was the second year of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation's strategic plan, [In Defense of Democracy](#), and it unfolded at a time when the stakes for democracy could not be higher. In the United States in 2025, we saw intensified efforts to concentrate power in the executive branch, to turn public institutions into partisan weapons, and to roll back long-standing civil and human rights. Around the world, more people live in authoritarian or backsliding contexts than robust democracies—more than at any time in recent decades.

In this environment, our strategic plan served as an anchor, grounding us in our commitments to speak plainly and publicly about what is at stake in this moment of crisis and to build durable networks with others who share our vision of a democracy that works for everyone. These commitments led the foundation to intensify its communications work, deepen collaborations, and continue to increase its visibility as an outspoken advocate for inclusive democracy.


We deepened our programs in alignment with this direction. In [Defending Inclusive Democracy](#), we worked with organizations that put civil and human rights at the center of their agendas. Through [Democracy and the Arts](#), we partnered with artists and cultural institutions as they pushed back against censorship and told inclusive stories about who belongs in our democracy. Work with local partners in [Democracy and Community](#) showed how democracy is the work that happens daily in communities, while coalition and convening work in [Democracy around the Globe](#) created

cross-border learning spaces that brought lessons from other countries into conversation with challenges in the United States.

We also invested in cultivating and sharing knowledge through [Information for a Democratic Society](#). Fellows across the foundation brought careful analysis to the public. In collaboration with Gallup, we launched the Democracy for All Project, our national survey on democracy. It offers a clearer picture of how Americans experience democracy today, while also revealing broad agreement on core democratic principles. Despite the perception that democracy is not performing as it should, the consensus is that it remains the best form of government.

The programs, partnerships, and research we advanced this year strengthened the foundation's role as a trusted voice, resource, and collaborator for those working to protect democratic principles and progress toward a more inclusive and accountable future.





FOCUS

AREAS

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

Defending Inclusive Democracy


In 2025, the global surge of authoritarianism that has reshaped political landscapes around the world is taking deeper root in the United States. We are witnessing an accelerated erosion of democratic norms and the weakening of coequal governance—from executive overreach and the deployment of federal agents and military forces into civilian spaces to attacks on LGBTQ+ rights, the circumventing of judicial authority, and the dismantling of protections for historically marginalized groups. Increasingly, elected leaders are exploiting democratic norms and institutions, undermining the very values they were designed to uphold.

Across the US, trust in democracy is faltering, particularly among communities that have long been excluded and marginalized. Defending and reimagining democracy is not optional: It is urgent, necessary, and long overdue. Amid this volatile context, the [Defending Inclusive Democracy](#) focus area continued to confront threats to democracy by catalyzing bold, inclusive, and collective action.

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference

During the [Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference](#), the foundation hosted the session, [Reimagining the Future of Democracy: Working to Build an Inclusive Future](#), featuring leading voices in democracy and civil rights: Joy-Ann Reid, Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, and Maya Wiley.

KF Senior Program Officer Damien Connors opened the session with a quote he encountered while traveling: “Those who dream beautiful dreams, fight better.”



“Those who dream
beautiful dreams,
fight better.”

This set the tone for a powerful conversation centered on the necessity of imagination and collective resolve in building a democracy that actively addresses historical injustice and embraces inclusion as a guiding principle.

Panelists stressed that defending democracy requires more than technical reform. It demands a radical reimagining of power, one rooted in justice and upheld by multiracial coalitions committed to lasting change.

Wiley spotlighted how legal and institutional erosion—from restrictive Supreme Court rulings to unchecked corporate influence—has deepened inequality, particularly in Black communities. She emphasized the need to rethink power by strengthening coalitions and investing in policy rooted in lived experience.

Barber broadened the conversation, calling attention to the systemic roots of authoritarianism and the ways it inflicts political violence through neglect and indifference. “Violence is denying education. Violence is denying health care. Violence is denying living wages,” he said. “Even an apathetic attitude that refuses to address these forms of violence is a form of political violence.”

Barber’s remarks clarified how authoritarianism undermines democracy not only through overt force but also through policy decisions—and inaction—that devalue human dignity and deny basic rights.

Kettering President and CEO, Sharon L. Davies, closed the session with a resonant charge: “We must not walk away unchanged. Democracy needs all of us, not only to defend it but to reimagine it.”

This session affirmed the foundation’s strategic investment in community-based leadership, lived expertise, and cross-sector collaboration as essential approaches to advancing a more inclusive, responsive democracy.

Howard University: Policy Innovation for Equity and Inclusion

In partnership with Howard University’s [Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy Center](#), the foundation is supporting the creation of a Public Policy Consortium aimed at strengthening the policy research capacity of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and advancing the work of the Quad Caucus, a coalition of Native American, Hispanic, Asian, and Black state legislators.

The initiative seeks to:

- address critical policy gaps affecting historically marginalized communities;
- provide equity-centered research support to underresourced state legislators; and
- engage students through advocacy training, writing competitions, and campus-based teach-ins.

This partnership reflects a long-term investment in intergenerational leadership and community-driven policymaking, ensuring that public policy is informed by the lived experiences and aspirations of those most affected by systemic inequities.



Civil Society Exchange: Learning Across Borders to Defend Democracy

In partnership with [Conectas](#), the [Horizons Project](#), and other strategic collaborators, the foundation is coleading a civil society exchange aimed at strengthening cross-border learning. Coconvened with the Democracy around the Globe focus area, this initiative is designed to strengthen transnational learning on resisting authoritarianism and defending human rights.

As democratic backsliding intensifies worldwide, this exchange provides a space for frontline actors to

- engage in dialogue and collaborative workshops, and
- explore strategies to counter repression, disinformation, racism, and state violence.

Building on virtual engagements, Kettering fellowships, and prior convenings (such as the 22nd Initiative's 22nd Century Conference), the exchange bridges digital and in-person organizing. It facilitates shared methodologies, joint learning, and solidarity building, recognizing that the future of inclusive democracy depends on both local action and global coordination.

Strategic Collaborations and Sponsorships

To broaden the reach and impact of its mission, the foundation is deepening relationships with other key partners, including:

- [The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference](#)—Supporting faith-based organizing for social and racial justice.
- [Native Son](#)—Elevating the voices and civic leadership of Black gay men.
- [The 22nd Century Initiative](#)—Cultivating intersectional and intergenerational leadership for the future of democracy.
- [Future Caucus](#)—Advancing bipartisan, next-generation political leadership in state legislatures.

These collaborations reflect a deliberate strategy: to invest in civic spaces where inclusive democracy is both under threat and being powerfully reimaged.

Democracy does not defend itself. Without bold, collective action, we risk ceding hard-won rights and freedoms to authoritarian forces. But we are equally clear that this is a fight for truth, dignity, shared power, and justice.



Information for a Democratic Society

In 2025, actions of the executive branch severely weakened democratic norms and institutions in the United States. *The Context* podcast, the *From Many, We* blog series, and *The Stakes* video interview series worked together to provide trusted, nonpartisan analysis to help the public make sense of these actions and the implications to the everyday lives of citizens. Across audio, text, and video, these three platforms gave reliable information about the needs of democracy, highlighted efforts to hold governments accountable, and helped people recognize attacks on key democratic institutions and other authoritarian threats, affirming the role of informed citizens in defending inclusive democracy.



The Context

[The Context](#), Kettering's podcast, is a key component in furthering the foundation's goal of informing, educating, and engaging the public to advance inclusive democracies and counter authoritarianism. Published every other week, the long-form interview show serves as a platform for the distribution of big ideas from voices within the foundation's network and beyond, including important perspectives on democracy from a unique mix of journalists, activists, writers, religious leaders, policy advocates, historians, lawyers, and national and community-level organizers. *The Context* allows the foundation to reach key audiences where they are, in a format they are hungry for.

This was a big year for the show:

- We grew our audience and kept their attention. The number of monthly listeners in audio downloads more than doubled, and our listen-through rate held steady at well above industry average.
- We increased our reach exponentially by publishing short, shareable, thoughtfully edited video clips on social media. This allowed us to reach those who never listen to full episodes with concise pro-democracy messages.
- Thanks to a partnership with WYSO, southwest Ohio's public radio station, we brought the podcast to terrestrial airwaves—several episodes were broadcast on the [Think Twice](#) program.
- We joined [The Democracy Group](#), a collaborative network of nonpartisan democracy-themed podcasts coordinated by the McCourtney Institute for Democracy at Penn State University. This collaboration provides opportunities for like-minded shows to amplify one another's messages through cross-promotions and for shared learning related to production best practices.
- We did our first feed swap—where podcasts exchange episodes—with [Disrupting Peace](#), a podcast from the World Peace Foundation.

Throughout 2025, *The Context* has become a more polished product, one that is created with more intentional and streamlined production practices. We have been more systematic and forward-thinking about what topics to cover and whose voices to lift up.

The show continued to feature Kettering fellows and other high-profile names connected with the foundation, while also diversifying the range of topics and guests included on the show. This helped to broaden the show's appeal beyond the mostly academic tone of the first year, though we've also continued to feature academic researchers who can shed light on our current precarious political moment.

Several episodes had outstanding engagement from our audience this year, including political scientist [Jeffrey Winters](#), who described oligarchs' control over the American political system, and political strategist and Kettering Senior Fellow [Sarah Longwell](#), who joined us for a two-part episode focused on defending democracy during an era when democracy itself has become a partisan issue.

Topics have included:

- The rise of Christian nationalism
- The forces influencing Supreme Court decisions
- The history and impact of US deportation policies
- Lessons from around the globe for fighting democratic backsliding
- The essential role of public education in democracy
- The historical legacies of slavery and racial discrimination
- Expanding and protecting voting rights
- The psychology of polarization
- Authoritarian threats to American democracy and how to fight back



The Context by the Numbers

27

episodes published

2

episodes aired on WYSO,
Dayton's local public
radio station

>2x

growth in monthly
downloads (over 2024)

4,000

listener hours logged
on YouTube alone

Guests on *The Context*

Kettering Affiliated



William J. Barber II
Kettering Senior Fellow



Sharon L. Davies
Kettering President and CEO



Erica Frantz
Kettering Research Fellow



Steven Levitsky
Kettering Senior Fellow



Sarah Longwell
Kettering Senior Fellow



Gábor Scheiring
Charles F. Kettering
Global Fellow



Deva Woodly
Kettering Research Fellow

Beyond Our Network



Annette Gordon-Reed
Historian and Pulitzer
Prize winner



Daniel Hunter
Antiauthoritarian organizer



Sean Morales-Doyle
Director, Brennan Center for
Justice Voting Rights and
Elections Democracy Program



Diane Ravitch
Former assistant secretary,
US Department of Education



Chase Strangio
Codirector of the LGBT &
HIV Project, American Civil
Liberties Union



Ece Temelkuran
Turkish author and
democracy activist



Arlo Washington
Equity-focused entrepreneur
and star of an Academy Award-
nominated short documentary



From Many, We

2025 was not only a difficult year for American democracy, but also a year of resistance and emerging opportunities. As a forum for thought leaders to analyze threats to democracy while developing inclusive understandings of democracy, the foundation's [From Many, We](#) blog series reflected the urgency of the moment.

Challenges Facing Democracy

A key imperative of *From Many, We* was to raise awareness around the administration's expansion of executive power and politicization of the government. Concerns raised around [Project 2025](#) and plans to [politicize the civil service](#) played out immediately in the early actions of the administration. In "[The New Authoritarianism](#)" (republished from *The Atlantic*), KF Senior Fellow Steven Levitsky became one of the first to declare that, rather than a full or flawed democracy, the United States was now on the verge of "competitive authoritarianism," in which a party comes to power through elections but uses its power to suppress opposition while changing rules and norms to tilt the playing field in its favor. Levitsky called upon civil society institutions—universities, foundations, and the press—to act in solidarity in support of a robust opposition to the coming attacks. Similarly, Daniel Tirrell's "[The Dismantling of USAID](#)" showed the impact of the administration's massive cuts to USAID, while Kettering's Collette McDonough offered the [firing of the National Archivist](#) as an example of the administration's misuse of power.

Contributors also raised concerns that the administration's maximalist tactics appeared to be in service of an exclusionary cultural agenda—the opposite of inclusive democracy. A consistent pattern in the administration's policies was the attacking of vulnerable groups and rolling back the nation's progress in addressing racial segregation and inequality. Kettering's Alex Lovit observed that the common theme across the administration's agenda was a concerted attack on the [fundamental value of diversity](#). KF Senior Fellow Johnnetta Betsch Cole [noted](#) the administration's targeting of diversity, equity, and inclusion; immigrants; and LGBTQ+ rights echoed backlash to social change in previous eras of American history.

The administration's exclusionary ideology also had a religious dimension, as noted in KF Research Fellow Andrew Whitehead's posts on [Christian nationalism](#). He [argues](#) that Christian nationalism is not just an attempt to institutionalize Christianity as a state religion, but rather to establish a "particular expression" of Christianity that reinforces traditional hierarchies. This was felt most acutely by the trans community, a frequent subject of the administration's attacks. Erin Reed, a transgender journalist, drew parallels from the administration's [literal erasures of the trans community](#) from government websites to the burning of trans books prior to the Holocaust: "Trans and queer people were the canaries in the coal mine of atrocity."

Building Resistance and Renewing Hope

Just as imperative as raising awareness around the administration's expansion of executive power, the posts in *From Many, We* did not leave readers with despair. As panic took hold across the civil sector, democracy activist Yelena Litvinov stressed the need for proactive communication, sober risk assessment, and [solidarity across organizations and sectors](#), while Erin Reed advised [against compliance](#) with the administration's anti-trans agenda. As the administration escalated implementation of its agenda, a resistance movement took hold. Media scholar Subramaniam Vincent observed that news headlines were beginning to show [signs of resistance](#) and a refusal to amplify the administration's narratives on issues like tariffs.

Moreover, a consistent theme throughout the series was that a better future is possible and already starting to emerge. Solidarity stands out as an important theme. As Johnnetta Betsch Cole wrote in her [call to action](#), "Justice is not selective. Our fight must be intersectional to defend the rights of immigrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and all racial minorities." Similarly, Brian Epps of Sojourners stressed the importance of [pro-democracy solidarity](#) in countering anti-diversity ideologies. As a protest movement took form, KF Research Fellow Deva Woodly argued that the geographical dispersion of the movement could bode well for long-term [democratic organizing](#) beyond typical mobilization through social media, while Daniel Tirrell similarly highlighted [international examples](#) starting with community-based organizing and relationship-building. Democracy is in crisis, but to the contributors of *From Many, We*, countering authoritarianism is about much more than defending the status quo. Resistance is just the first step toward a better future rooted in solidarity.



The Stakes

[The Stakes](#) is a dynamic video interview series featuring newsmakers and leaders from a range of fields, hosted by Brad Rourke, chief external affairs officer and director of DC operations.

2025 was a pivotal year as the administration of President Trump moved with unprecedented speed and ferocity to dismantle and undermine many of the institutions and norms that had defined American democracy. Through a series of 15 episodes published throughout 2025, *The Stakes* responded by exploring these actions in depth and offered hope for potential paths forward out of autocracy.

The Rule of Law in America

Kettering Senior Fellow J. Michael Luttig, former US Court of Appeals judge and conservative legal scholar, issued a stark warning: The United States may have little left of its constitutional democracy by the 2026 midterms. Drawing from his [article](#) in *The Atlantic*, Luttig argued that the first 100 days of President Trump's second term constitute an unprecedented legal and institutional assault.

How Political Rhetoric Breeds Violence

Minnesota State Senator Zaynab Mohamed and University of Massachusetts political scientist Alex Theodoridis explored the link between rhetoric and violence in politics. They discussed how dehumanizing language and false narratives can radicalize ordinary citizens and how elite silence allows threats and attacks to grow. Mohamed, who was on the hit list of the individual who murdered Minnesota Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband and injured Senator John Hoffman, shared her own experiences facing violent threats as one of the youngest Muslim women elected to office. Theodoridis explained the social psychology that makes citizens vulnerable to demagoguery.

The Budget as a Moral Document

As a federal budget that slashes health care, guts Medicaid, and sidelines working families advances, Kettering Senior Fellow Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II, president of Repairers of the Breach and founding director of the Center for Public Theology and Public Policy at Yale Divinity School, laid bare the moral stakes at play. This episode was taped as Barber brought Moral Mondays to Washington, DC—a monthly public reckoning with the budget as a moral document. He was later arrested for peacefully protesting in the Capitol.

Snapshots in Courage: Johnnetta Betsch Cole on Cultural Leaders Standing Up

As autocratic pressure mounts against diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in public institutions, including museums, Kettering Senior Fellow Johnnetta Betsch Cole, an iconic arts and education leader, highlights three exemplary figures showing moral clarity and courage:

- Lonnie G. Bunch III, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, remaining firm in defense of inclusive exhibitions
- Christine Anagnos, executive director of the Association of Art Museum Directors, providing museum leaders with the tools and information they need to respond to growing threats
- Laura Lott, former administrator of the National Gallery of Art, who resigned after it dismantled its belonging and inclusion program under federal pressure

Cole reminds us that “courage is the most important virtue,” quoting her late colleague Maya Angelou.

Episodes of *The Stakes*

- January 6 in Context—Political Violence, Attacks on Democracy, and Scapegoating the Vulnerable with Alan Jenkins and Alex Theodoridis
- Alexander Vindman on Authoritarianism vs. Democracy
- Inside the Diverse Coalition Defending Democracy in the Courts with Skye Perryman
- Snapshots in Courage: Johnnetta Betsch Cole on Cultural Leaders Standing Up
- William J. Barber II on the Budget as a Moral Document
- Sharon L. Davies on Courage, Faith, and Freedom
- J. Michael Luttig on the End of Rule of Law in America
- Jaco Roets on White South African Refugees
- In Ukraine: Building Civic Life Amid War with Peter Levine and Maureen O'Connor
- How Political Rhetoric Breeds Violence with Zaynab Mohamad and Alexander Theodoridis
- Reclaiming Democracy from the Ground Up with Deva Woodly
- Christian Nationalism and the Assault on American Freedoms with Ilyse Hogue and Andrew Whitehead
- We're Not Powerless Over Political Violence in the US with Shannon Hiller
- The Age of the Strongman with Erica Frantz
- Kelley Robinson: Telling the Inclusive American Story

Democracy and Community

While sometimes it can seem like everything in the world is going wrong, one of the exciting parts of democracy and community work is the focus on cocreating healthier communities, hopeful futures, and a stronger democracy even amid struggle and loss. The four pillars of the Democracy and Community focus area work together to support individual and community voices, while encouraging collective action and enhancing democratic engagement.

Hope in Hard Times

The first pillar of our Democracy and Community focus area is the [Dayton Democracy Fellowship](#). Each year, we select a diverse cohort of 15 Dayton Democracy Fellows—people engaged in transforming their communities and strengthening democracy in Dayton.

Fellows work in many different areas. For instance, Robbie Brandon and Robert Mackey II of the grassroots nonprofit Sunlight Village bought a church in West Dayton, which they are turning into a hub to support and empower young people. In another part of town, Dayton Public School teacher Kevin O'Donnell and his students partnered with Larry Hayden and the Dayton Tenant Union to develop voter information guides. Through these efforts and many others, the Dayton Democracy Fellows are supporting local projects where people transform their communities and experience the benefits of working together to build a stronger democracy.

Nothing Big Ever Starts Big

Our work always starts at the local, grassroots level. We take seriously Kettering Foundation Research Fellow [Deva Woodly's](#) reminder that “connection and sustained relationship over time is what gives social movements the most power.” In addition to an emphasis on local, place-based work, there is an emphasis on connection, trust, and sustained relationships.





Our Time. Our Place. Our People.—the second pillar of our Democracy and Community focus area—is focused on the power of place and role of relationships in strengthening mechanisms for people to influence government and build social awareness of structural barriers that undermine community and limit collective action. Led by our 2024 Dayton Democracy Fellows Destiny Brown and Dee Wooding in partnership with Dayton neighbors and organizations, it focuses on cocreating sustainable pathways to democratic engagement for those whose voices have often been silenced or ignored.

Too often, outsiders show up in disinvested neighborhoods prior to an election to “mobilize people to vote.” As one Dayton neighbor shared, “I am thinking to myself, ‘Where have you been all year? Where are you going to be after your big election? Don’t just show up here and ask for my vote and then go do your own thing the rest of the year. No thank you, ma’am.’ So I don’t answer the door when they come around.” Rather than election cycle-driven engagement, the Our Time. Our Place. Our People. Effort focuses on neighbors and community members cocreating networks of support, a sense of belonging, and accessible on-ramps to deeper political engagement year-round.

Collapse as Opportunity

It can be painful to experience and witness the ways that democracy isn’t working for most people. The Democracy and Community focus area creates space for processing the frustration and loss that so many are experiencing in this moment. Yet, as old systems fail, it presents the chance to reimagine and build what a truly inclusive democracy could look like.

This is the focus of the annual [Dayton Democracy Summit](#), the third pillar of our work. The summit brings together more than 300 place-based movement-makers from around the Dayton region. Together we celebrate, dream, and learn together. The theme of the plenary panel, [Creating Hope in Hard Times: Building Our Shared Future](#), was woven through the community-led workshops that took place throughout the day. For the second year in a row, we welcomed Kettering Foundation Senior Fellow Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II as the powerful [keynote speaker](#). The Dayton Democracy Summit is an annual opportunity to reaffirm our hope in what can be and strengthen connections between those creating more democratic and inclusive communities.

Doing Together, Learning Together

The work of democracy and community is demanding. Often, those doing on-the-ground work don't have time to slow down, reflect, and share about what they are learning. The Democracy and Community Research Collaborative (DCRC), our fourth pillar, was created in 2025 to address some of these challenges. This pillar focuses on research, learning, and narrative change.

The DCRC provides time, space, and resources to capture the learning and stories that emerge from the work of building stronger movements for inclusive democracy. We hold weekly drop-in meetings, where community partners, journalists, and scholars collaborate on our writing, research, and narrative change efforts. There is an emphasis on telling the stories of inclusive democracy and community in new and creative ways, including in outlets such as [Teen Vogue](#), [The Guardian](#), and the [Dayton Daily News](#). It has also been featured on the foundation's [blog](#), as well as by more specialized venues such as [The Better Life Lab at New America](#) and the popular Substack, [It Doesn't Have to Be This Hard](#).

2025 Dayton Democracy Fellows

- David Bodary, Sinclair College
- Robbie Brandon, Sunlight Village
- Hannah Brown, NCCJ: Nurturing Community, Cultivating Justice
- Tara Campbell, Dayton United for Human Rights
- Te'Jal Cartwright, Lore Storytelling
- Jamaal Durr, Dayton Art Institute
- Mary Evans, WYSO and The Journalism Lab
- Erica Fields, Learn to Earn Dayton
- Larry Hayden, Dayton Tenant Union
- Nick Hrkman, *Dayton Daily News* and The Journalism Lab
- Robert Mackey II, Sunlight Village
- Lake Miller, NCCJ: Nurturing Community, Cultivating Justice
- Kevin O'Donnell, Meadowdale Career Technology Center
- Mike Squire, City of Dayton
- Ashley Wright, Fitz Center for Leadership in Community, University of Dayton

Democracy and the Arts

The focus of Democracy and the Arts going into 2025, affirming and advancing inclusive democracy, was threatened in ways that were shocking—if not surprising—as the year progressed. The efforts to suppress what the current administration describes as “[improper ideologies](#)” and “[objectionable art](#)” threaten basic democratic rights and norms, including the freedom to express ideas without being intimidated and having access to an accurate account of US history. The considerable effort to control what is displayed in our public and private museums, created by artists and writers, taught in schools and universities, and accessible in our libraries and media demonstrates the power of the arts and humanities.

Several initiatives throughout 2025 reflect the Kettering Foundation’s recognition of the role the arts play in preserving and reimagining an inclusive democracy, as well as our response to challenges to inclusive democracy—and especially free speech.

Visual Voices

In early 2025, the Democracy and the Arts team partnered with Dayton artist and community organizer Willis “Bing” Davis on an exhibition and companion events to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1964 Dayton address. Selected Ohio visual artists responded to Dr. King’s observation that “[we’ve come a long, long way, but we have a long, long way to go.](#)” The exhibition—[Visual Voices](#)—at the EboNia Gallery and the Black Palette Art Gallery in Dayton was originally planned for six weeks but was extended to three months at the community’s request so student and civic groups could tour the galleries through the end of Black History Month.

[Visual Voices: Storytelling Through Poetry](#) was curated by Sierra Leone, the foundation’s inaugural artist-in-residence and the current City of Dayton Poet Laureate. Seven spoken-word artists created twelve ekphrastic poems in response to works in the exhibition and then performed them to a standing-room-only audience in the gallery. Two publications, the exhibition catalog and an anthology of poems, were published by the foundation and distributed to gallery visitors, libraries, museums, and archives in Ohio and beyond.



PBS NewsHour's CANVAS

The engagement with the PBS *NewsHour* CANVAS team continued through the [Art in Action](#) segments. While in 2024 the theme was more generally the role of the arts in democracy, the focus sharpened in 2025 to reflect this politically and culturally fraught time. Beginning in April, as concerns about freedom of expression intensified, the series began to target the role of art in freedom of expression and speech, including tensions over expressions of diversity of life experiences, beliefs, and voices at this moment. This included federal and state actions as well as funding cuts to arts organizations large and small. *NewsHour* Senior Art Correspondent Jeffrey Brown and the two *NewsHour* anchors interviewed leading thinkers, curators, historians, individual artists, and others for their perspectives amid the rising debate over how to represent the American experience and whose history should be included.

The multiplatform *Art in Action* series included 10 long-form broadcast features, digital online articles, and high school lesson plans. Written and video documentation of these *Art in Action* segments are available on the *NewsHour* website and used by the foundation in its programmatic work advancing inclusive democracy and countering authoritarianism.

Art in Action Convening

Democracy and the Arts convened a gathering of artists, democracy advocates, academics, and community organizers from across the country on October 23. Held at the foundation's DC office, the purpose was to address the threats to free speech now facing our nation and develop actions for addressing these challenges. Forty participants, along with Kettering staff, explored how to:

- counter or deflect threats to artistic freedom and inclusive democracy;
- resist censorship, including the impulse to self-censor; and
- build solidarity in the face of these threats.

The team from the Center for Artistic Activism facilitated afternoon breakout sessions to develop ideas for impactful, creative projects to counter authoritarian threats to free speech and creative expression. The energy activated at the convening provided a foundation for long-term partnerships with artists and arts organizations across the country, to build solidarity, and generated ideas for projects in 2026.



Democracy around the Globe

In 2025, the Democracy around the Globe team continued its charge of fostering a community of international partners focused on advancing inclusive democracies and countering authoritarian pressures. The work took on added urgency as democratic backsliding became increasingly pronounced in the United States and elsewhere. Autocracies now outnumber democracies around the world, according to the V-Dem Institute's 2025 [Democracy Report](#), and liberal democracies are the least common form of government today. Equally troubling, Freedom House [reports](#) that globally, freedom continued to decline for the 19th consecutive year.

Given these trends, the global team leaned into opportunities to encourage transnational learning, solidarity, and cooperation among scholars, practitioners, and activists working to protect and advance democracy in their own contexts. From collaboration with the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) and a new cohort of global fellows to launching the *Resilience & Resistance* blog series, the team worked to develop avenues for cross-border learning and exchange.

The Charles F. Kettering Global Fellowship

The 2025 [global fellows](#) were identified for their important scholarship, their leadership, and the democracy initiatives they have spearheaded, which have proven critical to this moment. The fellows contributed writing and participated as speakers in several of this year's convenings, while also serving more broadly as thought partners and collaborators.

The 2025 cohort of CFK Global Fellows included:

Koketso Moeti, South African civic activist who works at the intersection of governance, communication, and people power, and is the founding executive director of [amandla.mobi](#)

Chris Njeri Muriithi, Kenyan LGBTQ+ activist and founder of [Bold Network Africa](#), a firm committed to telling real, inspiring stories of queer people in Africa to help demystify stereotypes and encourage acceptance on the continent and around the world

Flávia Pellegrino, executive director of [Pacto pela Democracia](#), a coalition of more than 200 Brazilian organizations from across the ideological spectrum that works to defend and reinvigorate democracy in Brazil

Gábor Scheiring, Hungarian scholar, assistant professor of comparative politics at Georgetown University in Qatar, and author of [The Retreat of Liberal Democracy](#)

Ivan Vejvoda, Serbian senior researcher at the [Austrian Institute for International Affairs](#), former permanent fellow and head of Europe's Future's project, and key figure in the democratic opposition movement in Yugoslavia during the 1990s



Resilience & Resistance and INTERCONNECTED

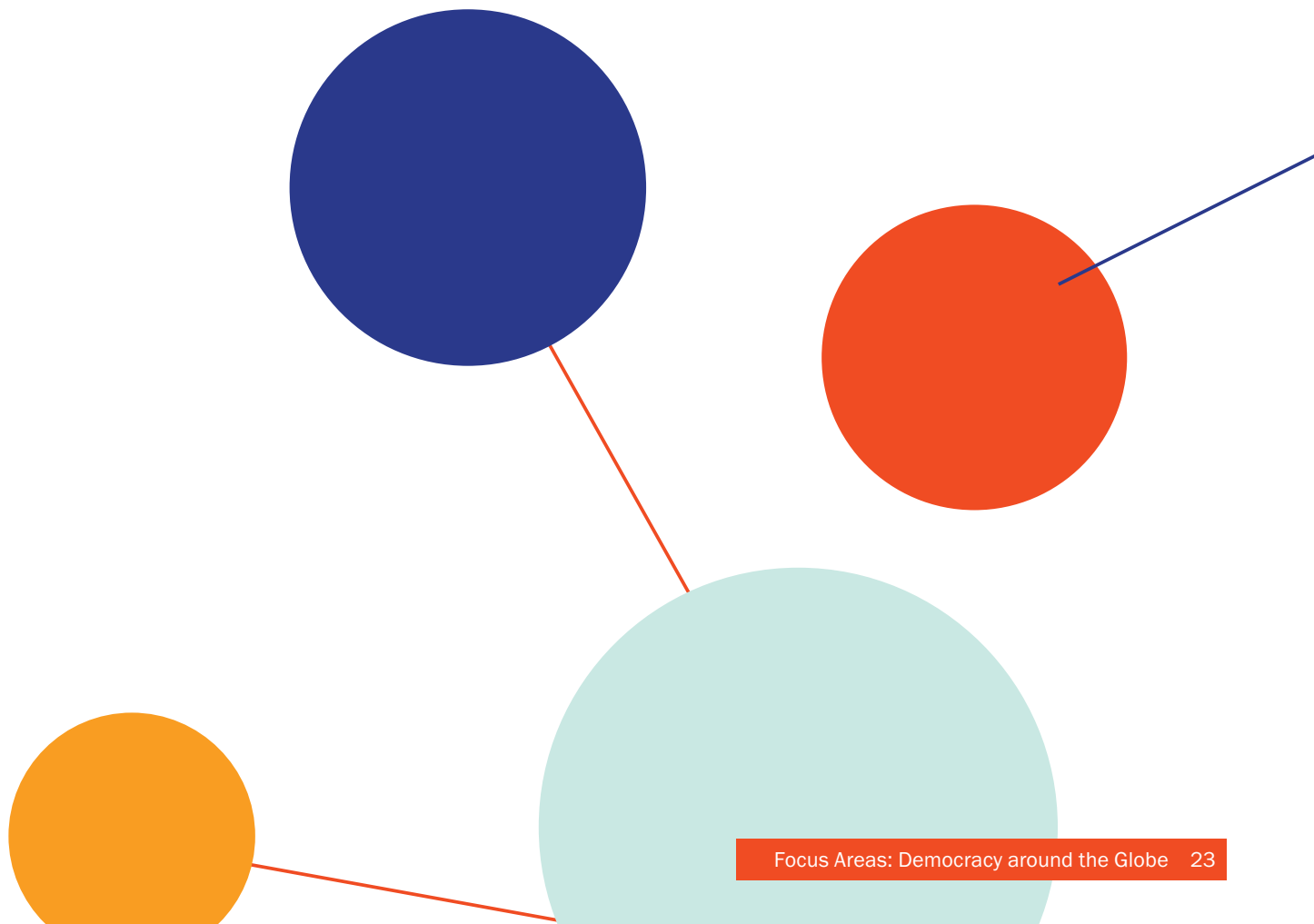
The global team launched the [Resilience & Resistance](#) blog series in 2025, which features the insights of thought leaders and practitioners who are working to expand and support inclusive democracies around the globe. The global fellows each authored one or more pieces for the series. Other authors included democracy scholars and practitioners from the larger Kettering global network and beyond. Blog topics ranged from the women's rights movement in Argentina to countering disinformation campaigns in Romania, from the importance of academic freedom to a powerful protest by Māori women wrapped in red blankets on Waitangi Day.

Like the blog series, *INTERCONNECTED*, the Democracy around the Globe monthly newsletter, shares news of growing anti-democratic trends and successful efforts to counter those trends. It also serves as a conduit for partners and network members to share information and remain connected.

Global Democracy Coalition

The Kettering Foundation joined the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) at the end of 2024. This year the global team collaborated with the GDC and other coalition partners and organized the [Democracy Talks webinar series](#) in the spring to foster cross-sector collaboration and exchange as the global democracy ecosystem and democracy more broadly face heightened challenges.

The global team also collaborated with the GDC's #KeepDemocracyAlive social media advocacy campaign. Two 2025 global fellows were interviewed for the campaign's *Thank You Democracy Podcast*, as well as another of Kettering's former international fellows. The team also sponsored two side events with the GDC at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit in May and one side event at the Open Government Partnership Global Summit in October.



Global Convenings

Throughout 2025, the global team convened groups large and small, online and in-person, in strategy sessions, exchanges, and panel discussions. These exchanges explored how to support the emergence of inclusive democratic narratives, develop pro-democracy coalitions and alliances, and foster democratic resilience.

Kettering's Democracy around the Globe focus area and its Defending Inclusive Democracy focus area collaborated with the [Horizons Project](#) and the Brazil-based [Conectas Direitos Humanos](#) on an exchange held in São Paulo, Brazil, that focused on strengthening strategic relationships among US and Brazilian civil society organizations. The exchange explored common threats facing democracy in both countries and opportunities to foster mutual learning in the defense of democracy and human rights.

The global fellows were featured panelists alongside some of Kettering's senior fellows and other foundation partners during the foundation's first [Kettering Global Conversation on Democracy: Solidarity across Borders](#). The foundation was also a headline sponsor at this year's Athens Democracy Forum, where its session, "[Bending the Arc of Democracy](#)," included a dynamic and inspiring panel discussion among the foundation's global fellows, concluding in a powerful call to action by Kettering President and CEO Sharon L. Davies. The Athens session highlighted the urgent need for transnational coalitions and solidarity at a critical time for democracy around the world.



The graphic features four large, overlapping circles on an orange background with a halftone dot pattern. A white circle is at the top left, a red circle is at the top right, a teal circle is at the bottom left, and a dark blue circle is at the bottom right. The word "RESEARCH" is centered in the middle of the composition.

RESEARCH

- **Democracy for All Project**
- **Freedom House**
- **Research Fellows**

Democracy for All Project

According to [research by Gallup](#), only 34 percent of Americans believe democracy is working well. With public support in decline, experts believe American democracy is becoming [more autocratic than democratic](#). [Disinformation](#) is sowing chaos, distrust of institutions, and hate. The divisions are so deep that many citizens now support [political violence](#). A public conversation is desperately needed to understand and reverse this widespread dissatisfaction. [The Democracy for All Project](#), a partnership of the Kettering Foundation and Gallup Inc., aims to catalyze and inform that conversation with a national annual survey and research initiative. With a more nuanced and holistic understanding of how Americans perceive and experience democracy, the foundation hopes to identify new areas of common ground and opportunities to strengthen citizens' commitment to democracy.

To advance the field on these questions, the foundation partnered with Gallup, with its unparalleled expertise in survey design and administration and reputation for nonpartisanship. Following an [announcement](#) of the partnership in January 2025, the survey team engaged in conversations with an [advisory group of national civic leaders and experts](#) to determine key priorities for the study.

A key goal of the survey is to elevate diverse voices while finding opportunities for common ground. The Democracy for All Project is committed to a best-in-class large sample size—more than 20,000 Americans—sufficient to account for the multidimensionality of people's identities and experiences with democracy. Using a large, nationally representative sample, the survey allows unprecedented insight into the view of different population groups, including those that have been hardest to reach and measure,

such as low income and rural communities. In addition to demographic characteristics, the large sample allows for sorting based on anything from social media usage to loneliness.

Moreover, the survey aims to capture the deeper emotional and cultural drivers behind how people experience and engage with democracy today, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the surface trend of declining commitment to democracy. The survey takes a holistic approach to gauge how citizens' sense of well-being might be affecting their faith in democracy, asking citizens about everything from trust in key institutions to whether they feel valued or satisfied with food and housing in their communities.

Additionally, the survey focuses on critical questions of national culture and identity, such as attitudes toward racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. America's future as an inclusive, multiracial, pluralistic democracy hinges on a national consensus on these issues, yet they are among the most controversial in national politics. The Democracy for All Project allows researchers to link attitudes toward diversity and social change to traditional measures such as trust and political polarization, which remain relevant but do not tell the full story.

An inaugural report published in November 2025, *Is Democracy Working?*, finds that a strong majority of Americans agree that democracy is the best form of government, but a slight majority believe it is performing poorly.

Some key findings include:

- **Americans are broadly committed to democracy.** Two-thirds say it is the best form of government. This includes a majority of every age group and income bracket. Only 1 in 10 disagree.
- **Americans also agree on many democratic values and principles.** They reject political violence, want to limit the power of the wealthy, and believe in compromise. Perhaps most surprising, they agree that religious and racial diversity makes the nation stronger.
- **However, democracy's performance is concerning to most Americans.** Just over half rate it poorly or very poorly, with only 24 percent saying it is doing well. Few Americans say any of the major institutions are working well.
- **Americans distrust leaders' commitment to democracy.** Only 27 percent agree their leaders are committed to a strong democracy. (Forty-nine percent agree their fellow Americans are committed to democracy while only 23 percent disagree).
- **Commitment to democracy and perception of its performance are both linked to income, life evaluation, party attachment, and satisfaction with local services.** Those with lower incomes, who are struggling in life, detached from politics, and dissatisfied with local services are much less committed to democracy and see it performing poorly.
- **The role of age.** Commitment to democracy is lowest among young adults. A majority (53 percent) of young people believe democracy is the best form of government, but that is the smallest share of any age group.

The data suggest that democracy advocates prioritize efforts to strengthen the performance of institutions, especially for low income and marginalized groups, and the engagement of young people in democracy. The data also suggest Americans' commitment to democracy would benefit from media and leadership attention to democratic norms and areas of common ground.

A longitudinal approach—and a five-year minimum commitment by the two organizations—will allow the study to show changes over time on these questions. Data will be open access and available to outside researchers for further study and analysis.

In 2026, experts in the foundation's network will sort through the data, reflect on its implications, and share analyses.





Kettering and the Council on Foreign Relations hosted a dinner during the NATO Parliamentary Assembly spring session in Dayton. A panel discussion reflected on the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords.



Kettering held a private conversation among democracy leaders to address the current threats to democracy and develop ways to coordinate efforts.

Kettering 2025

Moments That Marked Our Year



Kettering pledged two years of financial support to Freedom House for its flagship report, *Freedom in the World*.



On International Day of Democracy, Kettering hosted a reception to celebrate the opening of its new Washington, DC, office.



Kettering hosted a panel and reception during the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference.

More than 300 participants joined the second annual Dayton Democracy Summit to learn, be inspired, and be encouraged in cultivating democracy in community.



Kettering and Gallup launched the Democracy for All Project, a survey and research initiative.



Kettering presented the inaugural Kettering Democracy Prize to recipients Judith Browne Dianis and Alexei Navalny (posthumously) at an event in Washington, DC.

91.3 WYSO

ONE SMALL STEP
powered by StoryCorps

WYSO and StoryCorps' One Small Step initiative invites people with different political beliefs to connect through respectful conversation. Kettering, the exclusive sponsor, joined WYSO at a live event featuring recorded conversations that will also air on WYSO.

Freedom House

In early 2025, the US administration slashed foreign aid funding and dismantled USAID. The sudden, haphazard, and sweeping changes had a profound impact on democracy efforts around the world. Freedom House was one of many organizations severely impacted. It was forced to terminate [more than 80 percent of its programs](#) and activities in more than 140 countries. The cuts came at a precarious time for democracy, as the world has seen 19 consecutive years of declining global freedom and alarming levels of democratic erosion in the US and globally.

In this climate and given the importance of trusted, nonpartisan research to track freedom in the United States and around the world, the foundation decided that it was critical to step up. The foundation pledged a total of \$500,000 over two years to support Freedom House's flagship [Freedom in the World](#) report in 2025 and 2026.

Founded in 1941, Freedom House was the first US organization dedicated to the "support and defense of democracy around the world." Ever since its founding, it has enjoyed bipartisan support. Beginning in 1973, its flagship publication, *Freedom in the World*, has taken stock of political rights and civil liberties around the world. The report provides numerical ratings for 195 countries and 13 territories, for a total of 208. The assessment covers seven key areas: the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, the functioning of the government, freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, the rule of law, and individual rights and personal autonomy. This annual report is regularly cited by leaders in government, business, and the media.

The foundation's support enables Freedom House to continue producing its important *Freedom in the World* report in these perilous times. Its trusted, nonpartisan analysis of the state of freedom in the US and around the world is an essential reference, especially in today's climate of contested facts and institutional distrust.

"At a time when authoritarianism is spreading, the funding needed to produce this indispensable annual report has been put at risk. The Kettering Foundation is grateful for Freedom House's leadership and is proud to help it ensure that our communities have the information they need to confront authoritarianism and promote freedom," said Kettering President and CEO Sharon L. Davies.

The foundation is looking forward to this partnership with Freedom House, drawing on their expertise and scholarship as we focus on our mission of advancing inclusive democracies around the globe.



Research Fellows

At a time when the information environment is increasingly polluted by toxic discourse, generative AI, and nefarious actors, reliable and publicly visible expertise is urgently needed to inform national conversations on democracy. This year, the foundation launched a new [Research Fellows program](#) to position experts on inclusive democracy as trustworthy sources of critical information. Research fellows are leading scholars, practitioners, and public intellectuals who produce timely, high-impact research that informs and advances inclusive democracy. Through the fellowships, they work with the foundation to make their work accessible to both academic and nonexpert audiences.

The 2025 cohort of Research Fellows includes:



Erica Frantz

Erica Frantz, associate professor of political science at Michigan State University; expert on authoritarian politics, democratic backsliding, and the dynamics of political change; and author of *The Origins of Elected Strongmen*, coauthored with Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Joseph Wright



Andrew L. Whitehead

Andrew L. Whitehead, professor of sociology at Indiana University Indianapolis; one of the foremost scholars of Christian nationalism in the United States; and author of *American Idolatry: How Christian Nationalism Betrays the Gospel and Threatens the Church*

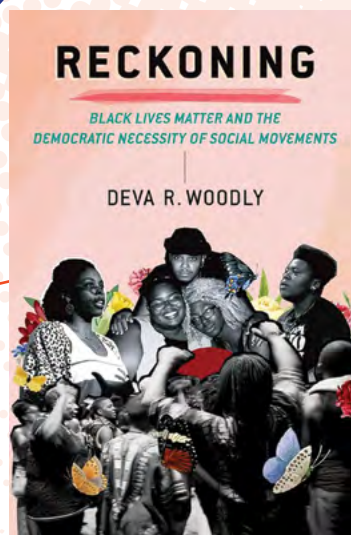
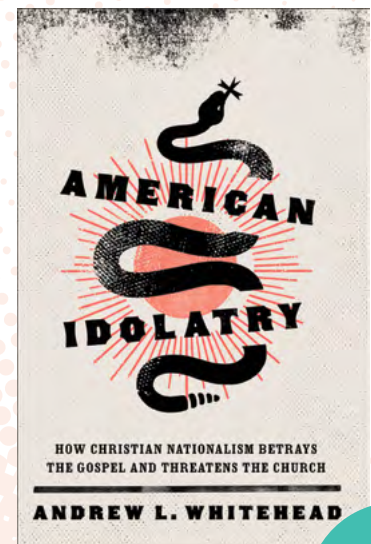


Deva Woodly

Deva Woodly, professor of political science at Brown University, a leading scholar of social movements, race and imagination, media and communication, and political understandings of economics; and author of the award-winning book *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*

Through individually designed nonresident fellowships, these subject-matter experts develop their public profiles by making media appearances, engaging on social media, and writing for public audiences. They also adapt complex, technical research for a broader audience, producing content for the foundation's podcasts and blog series. The foundation ensures that fellows' research contributes to public discourse by amplifying their work, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamics shaping democratic systems.

Each member of the cohort focuses on a critical issue facing American and global democracy, including the rise of personalist authoritarianism in the United States and around the world, the religious dynamics of American authoritarianism, and the social movement strategies that are most effective in resisting authoritarianism and advancing democracy. On *The Context* podcast, Erica Frantz focused on trends toward [personalist authoritarianism](#) in the US; in a series of pieces, Deva Woodyly argued that the No Kings protests represent a new form of [locally based democratic organizing](#); while Andrew Whitehead authored a series of blog posts introducing the [elements of Christian nationalism](#) and its manifold [threats to American democracy](#). Taken together, their research provides a comprehensive picture of the most urgent threats to democracy, while also generating constructive solutions to reengage citizens in civic life.





SENIOR AND NAMED FELLOWS AND AWARDS

- **Senior and Named Fellows**
- **Kettering Democracy Prize**

Senior and Named Fellows

This year, the Kettering Foundation's senior and named fellows showed up everywhere democracy was being tested. This bipartisan group of distinguished leaders spans civil society, journalism, higher education, law, public health, the arts, advocacy, and faith communities, and is united by a deep commitment to advancing inclusive democratic principles. On many front lines, they helped the public see this moment more clearly and understand the stakes.

The foundation's fellows challenged autocratic practices, spoke out against attacks on the rule of law, identified patterns of evolving threats, advocated for the rights of vulnerable communities, and challenged the rapid expansion of executive power. In a year when we saw clear signs of democratic erosion, they modeled what it means to lead with courage. They stepped forward when silence might have been easier and used their platforms to call individuals and institutions into the work of safeguarding a more inclusive and accountable democracy.

Senior Fellows

The Kettering Foundation's [senior fellows](#) brought their deep expertise and steadfast commitment to advancing inclusive democratic principles to all of their work throughout 2025.

[William J. Barber II](#), through his movement building, is mobilizing civil society by bringing together faith leaders, community advocates, and people from all walks of life to confront moral injustices.

[Johnnetta Betsch Cole](#) challenged people to consider not only the processes of elections but also the deeper moral commitments necessary for a democracy that reflects all its people.

[James Comey](#) exhibited great courage in the wake of intense political pressure and scrutiny. His steadfastness emphasized that our justice system must be nonpartisan and rooted in truth, transparency, and trust—one where outcomes don't depend on one's identity, wealth, or political connections.

[Neal Katyal](#) argued high-profile constitutional law cases against expansive executive overreach.

[María Teresa Kumar](#) advocated vigorously for accountability in immigration enforcement and voter rights while highlighting civic engagement as a driver of equitable solutions.

[Steven Levitsky](#) published influential op-eds, charting the steady dismantling of democratic norms and how institutions and citizens alike must resist complicity. He also advocated against targeted attacks on higher education.

[Sarah Longwell](#) used public dialogue and focus groups to reveal why beliefs persist and to identify issues that drive voter behavior. By elevating personal stories of those harmed by policies, she's building a movement linking lived experience to democratic accountability.

[J. Michael Luttig](#), through op-eds, essays, interviews, and coalition work with bipartisan judges, underscored that an independent judiciary is democracy's last line of defense.

Chris Matthews hosted weekly live discussions with leading voices on democracy, offering timely insights and elevating public awareness on pressing issues.

Maureen O'Connor, drawing on her work in Ukraine to select judiciary candidates, spotlighted efforts to build civic unity even in conflict zones. She emphasized that civic courage grows when individuals unite to meet challenges at every level.

David Pepper, with the second edition of his book *Saving Democracy*, offered a practical road map for confronting threats to democracy at the state and local level and addressed how citizens can play a vital role in sustaining democratic life.

Kelley Robinson is mobilizing the LGBTQ+ community by lifting up the voices of those directly impacted by policy and discrimination. Her work transforms personal stories into a powerful collective call for justice, equality, and democratic renewal.

Alexander Vindman brought into sharp focus the global stakes for democracy. At Politics and Prose in Washington, DC, Vindman and Kettering President and CEO Sharon L. Davies sat down for a conversation about his latest book, *The Folly of Realism*, exploring his insights on democracy and America's role in the world.

Christine Todd Whitman continued her commitment to safeguarding free elections and upholding the rule of law, contributing her voice alongside other former officials through the filing of amicus briefs.



Named Fellows

Joy Harjo, who serves as Kettering's Ruth Yellowhawk Fellow, brought a profound democratic resonance to our work. From the release of *Washing My Mother's Body: A Ceremony for Grief* to the publication of her poem "[Overwhelm](#)" in *The New Yorker*, she gave voice to experiences of loss, memory, and resilience that connect individual stories to the collective human condition. Her public readings, residencies, and keynotes—many rooted in community and cultural spaces—affirmed poetry as a civic act, one that bridges personal healing with shared responsibility. The national honors she received in 2025, including the Denise Levertov Award and the Smithsonian's Portrait of a Nation Award, underscore her role as a cultural leader whose art advances democracy by insisting that diverse voices, histories, and spiritual traditions belong at the center of America's story.

Kettering David Mathews Democracy Fellow **Kathleen Sebelius** used her national platform in 2025 to defend the integrity of US public health institutions. She warned against [politicizing science](#), particularly in leadership appointments and vaccine policy, and cautioned that deep cuts to Medicaid and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would devastate state budgets, rural communities, and vulnerable families. In bipartisan forums, she emphasized that states rely on federal partnership to deliver essential services, and she urged vigilance in safeguarding the credibility of institutions like HHS and the CDC.

Judy Woodruff is Kettering's Katherine W. Fanning Fellow in Journalism and Democracy. In 2025, through her PBS *NewsHour* series "[America at a Crossroads](#)," she continued to explore the forces dividing Americans and the courageous work of individuals and communities striving to repair the nation's civic fabric. Through reporting across the country and abroad, Woodruff highlighted the lived experiences of everyday people, the consequences of polarization, and the creative strategies being developed to restore trust and common purpose.



Kettering Democracy Prize

To honor those who exhibit courageous leadership in advancing inclusive democracy, in 2025, the Charles F. Kettering Foundation created a new award: the [Kettering Democracy Prize](#). It celebrates uncommon courage and commitment to democracy in a time of rising authoritarianism and threats to the rights of citizens. Nominations for the prize came from leaders from across the political spectrum and were evaluated by an independent panel of experts. The winners were selected from the top finalists by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation's board of directors.

The inaugural award was given to the late Russian opposition leader [Alexei Navalny](#) and to American lawyer and civil rights icon [Judith Browne Dianis](#) at a [ceremony](#) at the Rubell Museum in Washington, DC, on November 18, 2025. Each laureate received the Kettering Democracy Prize medal and a \$100,000 cash award.

Laureate Alexei Navalny

Navalny was an international symbol of courage who ceaselessly championed democracy and challenged Russian President Vladimir Putin's authoritarian rule. During his lifetime, he exposed corruption within the Russian government and galvanized the Russian public both to protest fraudulent election results and demonstrate against corruption. He endured multiple arrests and violent attacks, including a near-fatal poisoning in 2020 that was orchestrated by the Russian state. After his monthslong recovery in Germany, he returned to Russia in January 2021 and was immediately arrested. His imprisonment in an Arctic penal colony, under increasingly brutal

and inhumane conditions, sparked international outrage and widespread Russian protests. Navalny's death was announced on February 16, 2024, and the Kremlin's refusal to permit an independent autopsy deepened the belief that he was murdered.

Speaking of the significance of Navalny's life and legacy, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, professor of history and Italian studies at New York University and author of *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present*, marveled that Navalny was a lawyer, organizer, opposition politician, and anti-corruption activist whose activities encompassed almost every form of nonviolent resistance. "Navalny helped people to see a future for themselves in Russia and ways of taking action that they had not imagined," she said.

Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, accepted the prize on her husband's behalf. A human rights activist who has taken up her husband's mantle as opposition leader and now faces arrest herself if she returns to Russia, Navalnaya announced that the full amount of the Kettering Democracy Prize will be used to start the Navalny Foundation, which will be dedicated to preserving Navalny's memory and continuing his mission. "One of the most important missions for Alexei was involving the citizens of our country in politics and raising the level of political participation. . . . What Putin considers a crime was the work of Alexei's life. Therefore, the Navalny Foundation will support various initiatives aimed at increasing civic participation in politics."

Laureate Judith Browne Dianis

Dianis was the executive director of the nonprofit Advancement Project from 1999 to October 2025, where, through litigation, advocacy, and strategic communications, she ensured that communities were heard on Election Day and beyond. Her groundbreaking work includes pioneering litigation to enforce the Motor Voter Law, representing Black voters in Florida in the contested 2000 presidential election, restoring voting rights of people with felonies, and challenging underresourced polling places in communities of color to eliminate what became known as the time tax. Melissa Murray, Frederick I. and Grace Stokes Professor of Law at New York University and cohost of the podcast *Strict Scrutiny*, introduced Dianis. “Judith’s work recalls that of Alexei Navalny, who . . . inspired people to imagine a different future for themselves. . . . I can’t think of a better way to describe the work that Judith has done in education, in policing, and in voting rights than to think about the ways in which she has helped those who have been marginalized and disenfranchised imagine and hope for a different future for themselves in this messy and imperfect democracy.”

In her acceptance, Dianis reflected, “Democracy in the United States has never been perfect. In fact, many would say it is far from being a true democracy because it is a democracy for some, not all.” Despite this, she said, “The people who’ve been excluded have believed. We have believed in We the People. . . . They, and I, have a righteous, unwavering belief in this democracy.”

Speaking of the prize’s laureates, Kettering President and CEO Sharon L. Davies said, “Winners of the Kettering Democracy Prize are those who value democracy over the consequences that may flow from their decisions to promote and defend it. The Charles F. Kettering Foundation is honored to pay tribute to their inspiring examples.”





IMPACT FOR DEMOCRACY

- **External Affairs**
- **Kettering Global Conversation on Democracy**
- **Staff at Conferences**
- **Strategic Communications**
- **Communications for Democratic Innovation**

External Affairs

In 2025, the Charles F. Kettering Foundation's work in external affairs centered on fostering collaborative spaces and strengthening partnerships to advance inclusive democracy. Through the opening of a new Washington, DC, office and a robust schedule of convenings and sponsorships, the foundation actively engaged with leaders across the democracy and philanthropy fields.

The Foundation's DC Office: A Hub for Democratic Collaboration

In September, the foundation officially opened the doors to its new Washington, DC office, designed to become a hub and gathering point for critical conversations on inclusive democracy. The opening reception, held on September 15, the International Day of Democracy, underscored that commitment and featured participants from across the democracy field, including partners from Freedom House and Kettering senior fellows. The new office provides a space for collaboration across all the foundation's focus areas, connecting national policy debates with global perspectives.

Strengthening Inclusive Democracy through Partnerships and Convenings

Throughout 2025, the foundation convened, sponsored, and cohosted a number of events across the democracy and philanthropy fields. The following events highlight an active, productive year.

In April, at Campus Compact's national conference, [Compact25](#), the foundation hosted a plenary panel titled "The Role of Higher Education in an Inclusive Democracy." Moderated by KF Chief External Affairs Officer and Director of



DC Operations Brad Rourke, the panel featured KF Senior Fellow David Pepper, Executive Director of The Andrew Goodman Foundation Rashawn Davis, and Cofounder and Executive Director of the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition Clarissa Unger. Before an audience of more than 700 civic leaders and educators, the panel explored the mounting threats to civil society, the role of higher education in shaping democratic culture, and the need for courage in institutional leadership.

In June, the foundation hosted an off-the-record briefing with the Metropolitan Group for leaders throughout the democracy field focused on new, deeply researched findings into what pro-democracy messages are salient and convincing. This convening was a precursor to the release of a widely disseminated tool kit backed by technical support for groups to use it most effectively.

In July, the foundation hosted a strategy retreat for Keep Our Republic's [Article III Coalition](#), a new, bipartisan group of retired federal judges appointed by presidents—from the Reagan administration to the Obama administration—who are devoted to defending the rule of law in American democracy. This formative meeting, attended by more than 20 judges, allowed the group to establish plans and strategies for the upcoming year.

During the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, in September, Kettering hosted a reception honoring civil rights icon Sherrilyn Ifill for her tireless work on behalf of inclusive democracy. In November, Kettering hosted the annual member meeting for Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE), where pro-democracy funders gathered to chart a course for shared initiatives and explore ways to further organize the field.

Emerging Issues Meetings: Addressing Today's Threats

Kettering's Emerging Issues luncheon series continued throughout 2025 and expanded its footprint. These private, Chatham House Rule discussions focus on the most pressing challenges facing inclusive democracy and feature leaders from the DC policy and democracy communities, including congressional chiefs of staff, think tanks, advocacy and organizing leaders, scholars, and others. These luncheons have brought together more than 200 participants since they began in 2018.

In October, Kettering's newly opened Washington, DC, office hosted the fiftieth Emerging Issues meeting. The event gathered an expanded group of leaders who reflected on the progress achieved since the meetings' inception. They also shared critical thoughts and concerns as the world faces an unpredictable future.

In 2025, for the first time, the foundation convened Emerging Issues-style meetings that included cross sections of international leaders. These side events were held during key international conferences, including the June Brussels Forum and the October Athens Democracy Forum.



A selection of events and initiatives supported by the Kettering Foundation in 2025

- [2025 Imagining Community Symposium: Creating Brave Spaces for Civic Engagement](#)
- [22nd Century Initiative Conference: Forging a People-Powered Democracy](#)
- [Alliance of Democracies Copenhagen Democracy Summit 2025](#)
- [Athens Democracy Forum](#)
- [Better Brothers Los Angeles 11th Annual Truth Awards](#)
- [Big Ideas for Defending Democracy Book Clubs at Dayton Metro Library](#)
- [Brennan Center for Justice Brennan Legacy Awards](#)
- [Campus Compact Annual Conference Compact25](#)
- [Congressional Black Caucus Foundation 54th Annual Legislative Conference](#)
- [Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting](#)
- [Dayton Literary Peace Prize 2025 Awards](#)
- [Dayton Performing Arts Alliance Reception and Concert, *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* by Joel Thompson](#)
- [Dayton Porchfest](#)
- [Human Race Theater Certified Human Night](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign National Dinner](#)
- [Innovation for Equity 4th Annual Black Education Forum](#)
- [Levitt Pavilion Dayton Pride Concert](#)
- [Levitt Pavilion Juneteenth Celebration Concert](#)
- [Keep Our Republic Article III Coalition Retreat](#)
- [Native Son Awards](#)
- [National Conference of Artists National Convention](#)
- [National Constitution Center Liberty Medal Ceremony](#)
- [NATO Parliamentary Assembly Spring Session Dinner](#)
- [Philanthropy Ohio Policy Summit](#)
- [Rising Organizers DC Organizing Festival](#)
- [Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery's 2025 Portrait of a Nation Gala](#)
- [United Negro College Fund Dayton Mayor's Luncheon](#)
- [United Negro College Fund 2025 Gala Noir](#)
- [United Philanthropy Forum Annual Foundations on the Hill 2025](#)

Kettering Global Conversation on Democracy

As threats to democracy in the United States escalate and democratic backsliding continues around the globe, the foundation expanded the Kettering Conversation on Democracy series and held the first [Kettering Global Conversation on Democracy: Solidarity across Borders](#). The event featured the foundation's 2025 global fellows in conversation with senior fellows and other foundation partners. It provided a dynamic forum to learn from leading democracy scholars, practitioners, and activists and explored cross-cutting democratic challenges facing countries around the world.

The solidarity across borders focus offered both a framing for the day and a collective call to action—a call to recognize shared challenges and an opportunity to learn from and support each other in the shared quest for more inclusive, resilient democracies.

In her [welcoming remarks](#), KF Senior Program Officer for Democracy around the Globe Paloma Dallas underscored this point. She said that the challenge today is not only to defend democracy but also to reimagine it and work together to build thriving, inclusive democracies for all.

Ivan Vejvoda, CFK global fellow and now senior researcher at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, gave a [keynote address](#) in which he called for regaining the democratic imagination. He drew on lessons from history, including his own experience in Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists.

Panels

Democracy vs. Autocracy

- Steven Levitsky, Kettering senior fellow, David Rockefeller Professor of Latin American Studies at Harvard University, and coauthor of *How Democracies Die* and *Tyranny of the Minority*
- Gábor Scheiring, CFK global fellow, Hungarian scholar, and author of *The Retreat of Liberal Democracy*
- Moderator: Maria J. Stephan, colead and chief organizer, The Horizons Project, and coauthor of *Why Civil Resistance Works*

Organizing across Borders

- Elyssa Feder, executive director, Rising Organizers
- Flávia Pellegrino, CFK global fellow and executive director of Brazil's Pacto pela Democracia

Building Inclusive Democracy

- María Teresa Kumar, Kettering senior fellow and president, Voto Latino and Voto Latino Foundation
- Keketso Moeti, CFK global fellow, South African civic activist, and founder of amandla.mobi
- Chris Muriithi, CFK global fellow, Kenyan LGBTQ+ activist, and founder of Bold Network Africa

In dark times there is the danger of cynicism and losing hope, he said. Solidarity is extremely important, he continued, noting that our struggles are connected.

In the opening panel, [Democracy vs. Autocracy](#), Maria J. Stephan moderated a timely conversation between Gábor Scheiring and Steven Levitsky on rising authoritarianism and what can be learned from experiences in the US and Hungary. They explored questions on how democracies can become resistant to authoritarian actors and what can be learned from pro-democracy movements that have successfully pushed back against authoritarian actors.

[Organizing across Borders](#), the second panel, was moderated by KF Chief External Affairs Officer Brad Rourke. The discussion explored how to build coalitions and alliances—not just within countries, but across borders. Elyssa Feder and Flávia Pellegrino discussed the role of coalitions and alliances, what is needed to build them, and what obstacles can stand in the way.

Paloma Dallas moderated the third and final panel, [Building Inclusive Democracy](#). It explored the challenge behind not simply preserving the democracies we've had, but reimagining and constructing new ones that center belonging, accountability, and participation for all. Koketso Moeti, Chris Muriithi, and María Teresa Kumar discussed threats to inclusion, inspiring initiatives, and what it means to build a democracy that doesn't just tolerate difference but embraces it—and why this is important for everyone.

In her closing remarks, KF President and CEO Sharon L. Davies reflected on the gravity of the moment, noting that those in the US are facing the fight of a lifetime. Resistance to autocratic threats must match the urgency of this moment. She concluded by affirming the Kettering Foundation's commitment to continue facilitating public and private convenings and by directly inviting participants to join sustained collaborative efforts. Guests were then invited to a private dinner and off-the-record exchange between Davies and Freedom House President Gerardo Berthin.

The following day consisted of invitation-only strategy sessions with partners to explore how to foster thriving, inclusive multiracial democracies; advance inclusive democratic narratives; develop pro-democracy coalitions and alliances; and counter authoritarianism and build democratic resilience.

Kettering published a [report](#) about the event that identified key themes and important recommendations, some of which are highlighted on the next page.



Key Themes

- Contemporary authoritarian threats operate through elected governments that maintain democratic facades while systematically capturing institutions, deploying fear-based politics, and securing international business cooperation. A key indicator of democratic erosion is when legal opposition activities incur a cost through harassment and retaliation.
- Effective organizing prioritizes collective action, cross-ideological collaboration, and durable resistance infrastructure. International cooperation thrives on mutual learning, rather than one-directional expertise transfer.
- Demographic change makes inclusive democracy a strategic necessity. Authentic narratives and cultural roots counter exclusionary politics, and universal design shows inclusion benefits for all. Successful resistance requires cross-sector collaboration, historical awareness, and a refusal to trade away rights.

Important Recommendations

- Elite resistance must reject accommodation and accept that defending democracy requires sacrificing privilege.
- Long-term success means countering immediate threats while transforming institutions to reduce the inequality and political alienation that fuel authoritarianism.
- Global democratic crises demand coordinated responses that link local mobilization with economic and political pressure on enablers.
- Democratic movements should build knowledge-sharing networks, foster cross-border coalitions, and recognize that local democracy underpins global stability.
- Today's challenges pose grave threats but also are opportunities for renewal. Success depends on sustained collective action, global solidarity, and inclusive, principled democratic institutions.

Staff at Conferences

Throughout 2025, Kettering's staff participated in more than 40 conferences. Staff were also panelists or presenters at numerous conference sessions.

- 116th NAACP National [Convention](#)
- 22nd Century Initiative [Conference](#): Forging a People-Powered Democracy
- 2025 Annual National [Conference](#) on Citizenship: Building Civic Resilience*
- 2025 Convening of [The Democracy Group](#)
- 2025 Imagining Community [Symposium](#): Creating Brave Spaces for Civic Engagement*
- 2025 International City and County Management Association (ICMA) Annual [Conference](#)*
- 2025 Social Equity Leadership [Conference](#)
- Alliance of Democracies Copenhagen Democracy [Summit](#) 2025
- American Academy of Psychotherapists 70th Annual Institute and [Conference](#)*
- American Evaluation Association [Evaluation25](#)
- Americans for the Arts Annual Convention AFTACON 2025
- Aspen Digital [Roundtable](#): Between Tech, Democracy, and Marginalized Communities
- Aspen Ideas [Festival](#)
- Aspen Institute Congressional Program [Conference](#)
- Association of African American Museums 47th Annual [Conference](#)
- Association for Political Theory [Conference](#)
- Athens Democracy [Forum](#)
- [Bedrock](#) Safeguarding Democracy by Disrupting Hate Summit
- Campus Compact Annual Conference [Compact25](#)*
- Clinton Global Initiative [Annual Meeting](#)
- The Communications Network [ComNet25](#)
- Congressional Black Caucus Foundation 54th Annual Legislative [Conference](#)
- Council on Foundations Leading Locally [2025](#)
- German Marshall Fund Brussels [Forum](#) 2025
- [Howard University](#) Summer of Democracy Teach-In*
- Innovation For Equity 4th Annual Black Education [Forum](#)
- [Invest in Louisiana](#) Policy Conference*
- Institute for Humane Studies [Summit](#) on Trust and Democracy
- Institute for the Study of Modern Authoritarianism Liberalism for the 21st Century [Convening](#)
- Journalism Protection [Initiative](#)
- Midwest Strategic [Summit](#)*
- More Equitable Democracy Lift Every Voice Portland and Electoral Justice Initiative [Summit](#)
- National [Caucus](#) of Native American State Legislators
- National Conference of Artists [National Convention](#)*
- Open Government Partnership Global [Summit](#)
- Philanthropy Ohio [Philanthropy Forward '25](#)*
- Podcast [Movement](#) 2025
- Public Relations Society of America [ICON](#) 2025
- Resonate Podcast [Festival](#)
- Semafor World Economy [Summit](#) 2025
- UN Permanent [Forum](#) on People of African Descent*
- United Philanthropy Forum [Foundations on the Hill](#) 2025
- Vision & Justice [Now](#)



Strategic Communications

In 2025, the Charles F. Kettering Foundation's communications team built on the momentum of 2024. It was a year characterized by collaboration, expansion, and deepening relationships. We continued to make strides with our brand identity, [website](#) development, social media engagement, and media collaboration. We also further developed our collaborative relationships within the foundation, ensuring that we are working with our program and external affairs colleagues to uplift and share initiatives across all areas of the foundation's portfolio.

Expanding Our Media Footprint

Recognizing the importance and value of public media, we entered into a collaborative relationship with WYSO, southwest Ohio's NPR affiliate. Kettering is the exclusive sponsor of the [One Small Step](#) initiative at WYSO. Established by the nonprofit StoryCorps, One Small Step is a groundbreaking program designed to foster dialogue and understanding among people with differing viewpoints. Through personal storytelling, the initiative aims to bridge divides and cultivate empathy within communities. This initiative brings strangers with different political beliefs together to have a conversation—not to debate politics, but to simply get to know each other as people.

WYSO also regularly shared Kettering content on its *Think Twice* program, airing episodes of our podcast, [The Context](#), and programming from events, including the Dayton Democracy Summit and sessions at the [Imagining Community symposium](#). Kettering expanded its local audience in other ways. The *Dayton Daily News* and *Dayton Business Journal* covered many of the foundation's collaborations with other organizations, such as the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance and Dayton Contemporary Dance Company. They also covered the foundation's news, such as Edwin C. Moses being appointed to our [board](#). We also began promoting the foundation in the Dayton International Airport, providing a warm welcome to all who visit our hometown.

Kettering collaborated with *The Fulcrum*, which republished articles from our [From Many, We](#) blog series, [Resilience & Resistance](#) blog series, and articles about our 2025 [Dayton Democracy Fellows](#), among others. We also broadened our national and international audience, with Kettering's work covered in media outlets that included *AP News*, *CNN*, *National Review*, *The New York Times International Edition*, and *The Washington Post*.

From Broadening Reach to Building Relationships

In 2025, the foundation's online community grew not only in size but also in trust and depth. Our social media followers became active participants across every focus area and initiative. Many shared gratitude, describing the foundation as “holding the fort of democracy promotion despite unprecedented challenges” and “a leader in researching and reporting on topics shrouded in misinformation and hate.” Others thanked us for “standing up while so many crumble” and for creating space to “build community.” People are turning to the foundation for information as well as steadiness and integrity during uncertain times.

Our partnerships and events deepened this engagement. One Dayton Democracy Summit attendee shared, “We need three more days.” A participant at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference reception reflected that they felt “inspired and grounded.” Another highlighted the foundation's commitment to connecting civic learning and the arts: “The Kettering Foundation gets it. Democracy needs the arts and humanities.”

Some voices went further, turning reflection into action. “Do what you can, where you can,” one urged. Another shared, “I’m still finding ways to have conversations with people who see the world differently.” Our work is reaching real people affected by the state of our democracy and helping them feel seen, supported, and advocated for.



Communications for Democratic Innovation



+94%

Over 2024

Kettering Website Views



+112%

Over 2024

User Engagement on the Website

Website

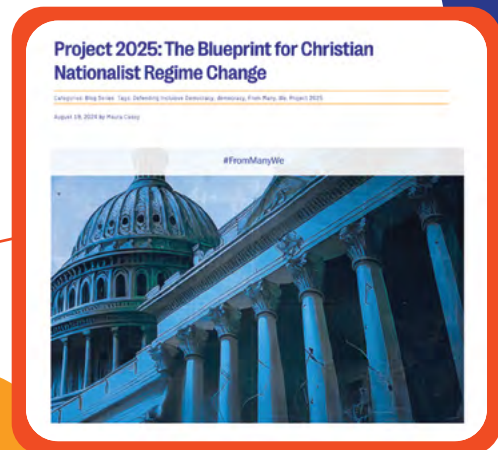
This year, [our website](#) became a trusted home for people searching for clarity, truth, and guidance in a time when democracy felt increasingly fragile. Visitors came looking for nonpartisan explanations, practical steps, and hope. They returned to pieces that helped them understand the threats facing inclusive democracy, and they did so in large numbers. Our Project 2025 [analysis](#), published in 2024, drew more than 30,000 new visitors in 2025 as people across social media cited it as an early warning others had missed. Other high-impact blog posts, including “[Do Not Comply: A Lesson from the Last Three Months of Anti-Trans Attacks](#)” and “[Feeling Paralyzed, Helpless, or Hopeless? 10 Things Everyday People Can Do](#),” became essential guides for readers trying to make sense of rapidly shifting realities.

While we remained focused on identifying and offering grounded explanations of threats to inclusive democracy, we also provided people with the tools they needed to respond to them. Global audiences affirmed this by engaging with our content from across continents, recognizing that the challenges facing American democracy carry implications far beyond our borders.

Project 2025: The Blueprint for Christian Nationalist Regime Change

This blog post offered one of the clearest early explanations of a rapidly escalating threat, giving people the context they needed to understand and share what Project 2025 would mean for democracy.

31K+ views 👁



Do Not Comply: A Lesson from the Last Three Months of Anti-Trans Attacks

This blog post resonated because it named the danger of anticipatory obedience and helped readers recognize how overcompliance was accelerating harm, giving language and clarity to what many were seeing in their own communities.

7.5K+ views 👁



Feeling Paralyzed, Helpless, or Hopeless? 10 Things Everyday People Can Do

This blog post provided a sense of possibility with simple, concrete actions that made participation and hope feel within reach again.

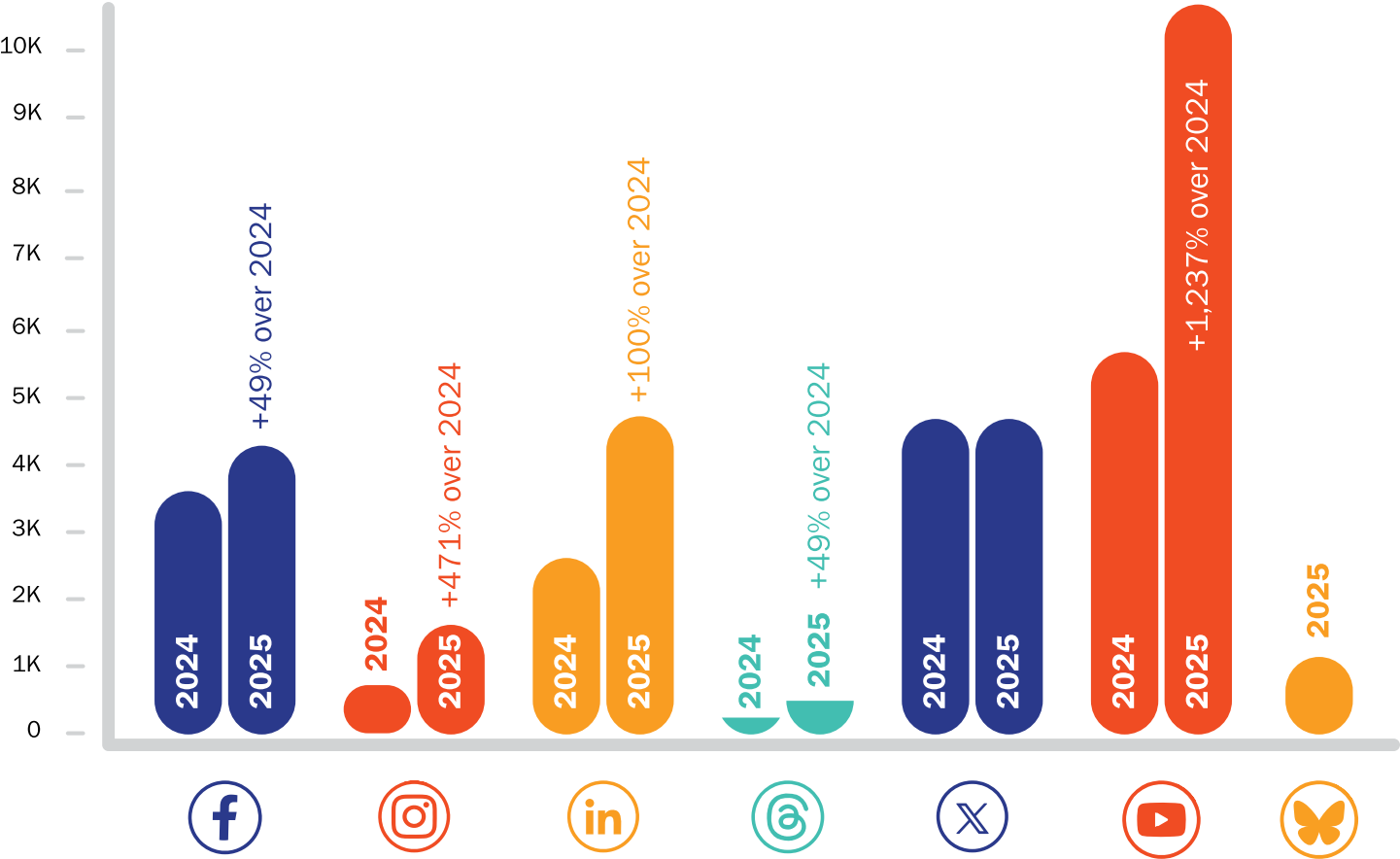
1.5K+ views 👁



Social Media Audience

Throughout 2025, Kettering’s communication efforts focused on maximizing our reach and diversifying our audiences. Our followers and subscribers grew across all platforms, with Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube seeing the most growth. The foundation joined Bluesky, ensuring our reach continued to grow in new spaces.

Net Audience Growth
8,239
+433% over 2024



Top 5 Impressions and Engagements

The most engaged posts of 2025 reflect Kettering’s growth in communications, from new communications vehicles to coverage of events.

Our top social media posts this year were notable not just because they went viral, but because they revealed what people were most eager to understand in a complex year for democracy. These moments of engagement offer insight into how people connect with and support the foundation’s work. Together, they show the points where audiences stopped their scroll to signal that our message mattered.

J. Michael Luttig on the End of Rule of Law in America (#TheStakes)

KF Senior Fellow Judge Luttig issues a stark warning: the United States may have little left of its constitutional democracy by the 2026 midterms in an episode of *The Stakes*.



The Urgency of Now: Inclusive Narratives in Africa (#ResilienceResistance)

CFK Global Fellow Chris Muriithi shows how storytelling protects LGBTQ+ Africans and strengthens democracy by challenging erasure and building empathy in the *Resilience & Resistance* blog series.



Artist-in-Residence Sierra Leone: Poetry is Democracy (#NationalPoetryMonth)

Celebrating Dayton, Ohio’s newest poet laureate and KF’s Artist-in-Residence Sierra Leone and the power of poetry to inspire empathy and strengthen our democracy during our National Poetry Month Campaign.



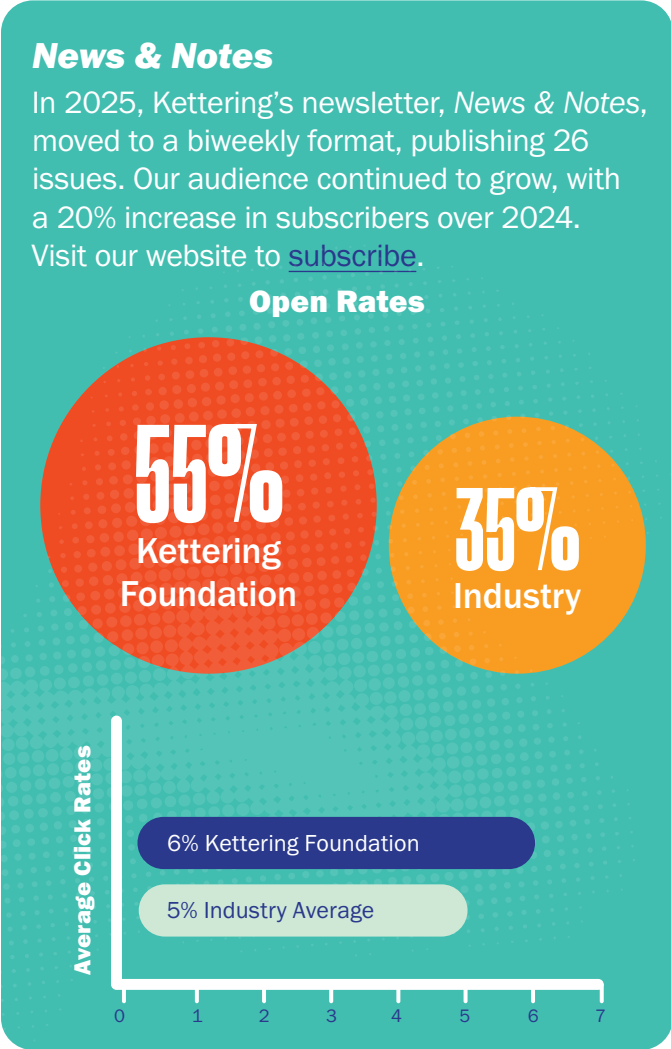
Sarah Longwell: To Defend Democracy, Stop Talking about “Democracy” (#TheContext)

KF Senior Fellow Sarah Longwell breaks down the difference between destruction and real leadership, urging us to focus on rebuilding America with purpose in part two of her episode on *The Context*.



Second Annual Dayton Democracy Summit (#DaytonDemocracySummit)

The Kettering Foundation completed a powerful day of connection and possibility at the Dayton Democracy Summit, celebrating everyone who showed up to strengthen democracy and keep the work moving forward.



Financial Snapshot

Assets

	2025	2024
Cash and Cash Equivalents	12,775,476	7,196,870
Investments	521,091,915	457,821,346
Dividends and Interest Receivable	648,074	270,059
Prepaid Expenses	144,106	376,304
Property and Equipment, Net	3,412,628	3,265,043
Operating Lease Right-of-Use Asset	7,290,817	152,166
Total Assets	\$545,363,016	\$469,081,788

Liabilities and Net Assets

Liabilities

	2025	2024
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	192,140	788,335
Accrued Compensation and Related Liabilities	72,225	72,726
Accrued Post Retirement Benefit Costs	4,244,592	4,244,592
Operating Lease Liability	7,320,975	164,125
Total Liabilities	\$11,829,932	\$5,269,778

Net Assets

Without Donor Restrictions	533,521,834	463,800,760
With Donor Restrictions	11,250	11,250
Total Net Assets	\$533,533,084	\$463,812,010
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$545,363,016	\$469,081,788

The financial information is preliminary and presented as of January 16, 2026.



Expenses

Program	2025	% of Program	% of Total
Defending Inclusive Democracy	409,624	4%	2%
Information for a Democratic Society	1,015,738	10%	5%
Democracy and Community	381,463	4%	2%
Democracy around the Globe	645,981	6%	3%
Democracy and the Arts	560,864	5%	3%
Program Support	3,090,499	31%	14%
Communications	469,580	5%	2%
Washington, DC	1,360,474	13%	6%
Strategic Initiatives	1,036,092	10%	5%
State and Local Governance	102,468	1%	0%
Research	1,131,372	11%	5%
Total Program Expenses	\$10,204,155		

General and Operating

Personnel and Directors	8,919,326	42%
Operations, Facilities and General	2,357,736	11%
Total Generating Operating Expenses	\$21,481,217	

The financial information is preliminary and presented as of January 16, 2026.

Charles F. Kettering Foundation Leadership

Senior Team

Tayo Clyburn, Chief Strategy Officer and Senior Advisor to the President

Sharon L. Davies, President and Chief Executive Officer

John R. Dedrick, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

Mindy LaBreck, Vice President for People and Culture

James Martin, Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer

Brad Rourke, Chief External Affairs Officer and Director of DC Operations

Board of Directors

Sharon L. Davies

Ed Dorn

Beverly Wade Hogan

Les Ihara Jr.

Peter Levine

Sherry Magill (Chair)

Hank Meijer

Suzanne Morse Moomaw

Edwin C. Moses

Roberto Saba

Editor: Sarah L. Murphy
Copy Editor: Amy Dragga
Director of Communications: Melinda Gilmore
Concept and Graphic Design: Big Bowl of Ideas (bboi.us)
Printing: Mosaic Printing

Resolute in Our Stand for Democracy: The Charles F. Kettering Foundation 2025 Annual Report
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The Charles F. Kettering Foundation, headquartered in Dayton, Ohio, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Founded in 1927 “to sponsor and carry out scientific research for the benefit of humanity,” the foundation is inspired by the innovativeness and ingenuity of its founder, the American inventor Charles F. Kettering. For the past four decades, the foundation’s research and programs have focused on the needs of democracy worldwide. Today, the organization is committing itself to advancing inclusive democracy by fostering citizen engagement, promoting government accountability, and countering authoritarianism.

www.kettering.org





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