DEMOCRACY'S

CAN A DEMOCRACY FUNCTION IF ITS CITIZENS DON'T TRUST their government? Are America's public institutions able to fulfill even the most basic of their responsibilities? What are the chances for improvement when the politicians who aspire to lead government campaign by attacking it? Do current concerns about our civic life reflect temporary changes—in generational attitudes, in the economy and communications technologies—or a fundamental challenge to the nation's constitutional structure?

These issues engage not only the electorate but also elected officials, administrators, journalists, and scholars of public policy. The latter include faculty members at the Kennedy School of Government, who are examining many of these questions in a multidisciplinary project called Visions of Governance for the Twenty-First Century. *Harvard Magazine* asked participants in that project, and in other realms of public life, to discuss the outlook for democracy during a conversation held April 6 at the Kennedy School, in a conference room overlooking the eponymous park and the Charles River. Participants included:

Mary Jo Bane, M.A.T. '66, Ed.D. '72, Thornton Bradshaw professor of public policy and management, and formerly assistant secretary for children and families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1993-1996);

Adam Clymer '58, Washington correspondent of the *New York Times*, where he was previously political editor, director of polling, and Washington editor; and author of *Edward M. Kennedy: A Biography*, forthcoming from Morrow;

Richard G. Darman '64, M.B.A. '67, public service professor at the Kennedy School and senior adviser of the Carlyle Group; former director, U.S. Office of Management and Budget (1989-1993); and author of *Who's In Control? Polar Politics and the Sensible Center* (1996);

Elaine Kamarck, executive director of the Visions of Governance project, lecturer in public policy, coeditor of *democracy.com? Governance in a Networked World*, and former senior policy adviser, Office of the Vice President (1993-1997);

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S PROSPECTS

A *HARVARD MAGAZINE* ROUNDTABLE

Joseph S. Nye Jr., Ph.D. '64, dean and Don K. Price professor of public policy at the Kennedy School, formerly assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs (1993-1995), and coeditor of *Why People Don't Trust Government* (1997); and

Anthony A. Williams, J.D.-M.P.P. '87, mayor of the District of Columbia, where he was previously chief financial officer (1995-1998).

Edited excerpts of the discussion, which was moderated by *Harvard Magazine*, follow.

MODERATOR: Several of you have done polling work, or have been out in the electorate, or have been involved in making policy. From your experience, how do people view government today, how has that changed, and why?

NYE: One of the things that struck us as we started our project Visions of Governance for the Twenty-First Century was the decline of trust in government, particularly in the federal government, over the past 30 years. In 1964, three-quarters of the people said that they had a great deal of confidence in the federal government. That declined after the early seventies and went back up to about 44 percent under the first Reagan administration. It then went back down, in the second Reagan administration, to about 25 percent, and it has limped along at that level ever since, at about a third of what it was in the sixties. So there is clearly a difference in the way people answer poll questions about their confidence in government, particularly at the federal level. State and local government do a little better, but not dramatically.

We try to present various explanations in our book *Why People Don't Trust Government.* To some extent, the decline reflects Vietnam and Watergate as triggering events, but the fact that opinion stays down for several decades afterward indicates that what's involved is more than just those events. And it is not just government—many other institutions have suffered a similar decline. Many people have said this is a loss of authority for all institutions, not just in America but throughout Western society. This is not just an American phenomenon.

BANE: When I talk with our students about what they want to do, they say they want to do good for the world, they want to make a difference, they want to improve the lives of the citizens—and they do *not* want to work for government, as best I can tell. They want to work for smaller organizations where they can have more control and more ability to do things on their own. They are aspiring to do things that I believe we need government to do, and yet they say that they would prefer to be operating in other kinds of institutions.

CLYMER: As Joe suggested, it's not by any means just Vietnam and Watergate, although I think those had a tremendous impact on my business—on the skepticism, to put the nicer word on it, with which an awful lot of the press treats an awful lot of what government does. The press was being lied to about major issues by the president or, if not by the president, by his authority, for several years. But there are other factors, too. I think most reporters in Washington think that, except when Bill Clinton talks about race or when Al Gore talks about the environment, 80 percent of what they talk about is what their polls tell them it's useful to talk about. Polling makes politicians more electable and less effective at governing, because you don't get a sense that they really believe in what they say.

> **"Our students say they want to do good for the world, they want to make a difference, they want to improve the lives of the citizens—and they do *not* want to work for the government."**

The Performance Deficit

KAMARCK: I agree that Vietnam in particular had a horrible effect on the relationship between the press and the government. We are still suffering from that. The assumption is that somehow the government is always trying to fool you, and that if you are in the government, you are trying to pull the wool over somebody's eyes. But a lot of what happens in government is straightforward: the government is doing its work, and doing it relatively well, yet that's not reported. What is always reported is the dysfunction or the problems.

While that gap was developing, another phenomenon was taking hold. I often refer to it as the performance deficit in government: while the world was changing, and the private sector was changing, the government was pretty much standing still. If you go back to the fifties and early sixties, when trust in government was high, your experience as an individual interacting with the government was likely to be similar to your experience interacting with a bank, a department store, or a private insurance company. You had to go to businesses or government agencies during certain hours. Both used paper-based systems, and so on.

When America's private sector began to change—to be more customer-friendly and responsive, and better able to tailor responses to you—the government didn't change. So if you fast-forward 30 years, and certainly by the end of the eighties, you have a very responsive, adaptive private sector that is always anxious to meet you halfway, and to fulfill your needs for the right price. But the public sector is still pretty much on the one-size-fits-all model: do things on our schedule, on paper, between nine and five. The disjuncture between what people see in the private sector and in the public sector has contributed to the growing distrust in government. In response, people in government have tried to focus on these issues of performance, which are very real—and that will be very important if we are ever to get out of this cycle of distrust.

WILLIAMS: I speak from a very ambiguous position, in that I was elected because people didn't trust the performance of the District's government—so they elected a career bureaucrat. That's a very ironic statement by the voters, maybe because they didn't trust elected officials to move the government forward, and they wanted someone who knew what he was doing, who knew government organization. You have governments now trying to move into the next century, with state-of-the-art systems and approaches. Yet in the District, we not only were not using 1950s approaches, we had slid back to the turn of the century in many cases—that's how bad things were. Half the human-services network in the city was under federal receivership. So people wanted a change.

There was also frustration, a lack of confidence in local government, in that voters didn't believe elected officials were ready to make any difficult choices. Where was the strategy for labor? Where was the strategy for introducing competition into the government? Where was the strategy for putting the healthcare system on a footing that is really relevant to the next century and that actually gives patients a choice of where they receive their healthcare? Where was the real strategy for education? These things weren't there. In the first few voting, people voiced that concern.

Demarketing Government

MODERATOR: Between these problems of performance and trust, is the legitimacy of government in question? Is becoming irrelevant? Is there a sense that the people don't want the government they have?

NYE: In the 1970s, there was a school of writing that focused on the crisis in democracy. The argument was that democratic governments were overburdened, so people were losing confidence in *democracy*. That's really not what we are dealing with now. In fact, in polls, when you ask questions about whether people like democracy, 80 or 90 percent answer yes. But if you ask Americans, "Is your country the best country?" 80 or 90 percent say yes. If you ask whether our American institutions are the best in the world, you get the American democracy are the best in the world, you get these very high affirmative levels. So, at a high level of abstraction, we are not in a crisis of democracy.

But there is a loss of confidence in institutions. Here, too, there is an interesting puzzle about performance—the point that Elaine made—and what people experience. When you ask people a question like "Do you have confidence in the federal bureaucracy?" two-thirds say no; but if you ask, "Have you had a bad experience personally with the federal bureaucracy?" only one-third say yes. So there is a missing factor—what sociologists call a mediated experience. What's at work here is not people's direct experience of poor services, but their perception that the smart money, the conventional wisdom, is that government is the gang that can't shoot straight.

Part of that comes from the demarketing of government. For the record o

the last 25 years, politicians have run against government. They have run against Washington. Money buys television time, which works best with negative ads, and the extreme message of the ads tends to make the middle drop out. In those ads, people always knock government, or denigrate it. At the same time, as Adam said, the press—for good reasons and also for less good ones, such as the shortening of the news cycle and the pressure of money on management, at least in television—has become much more cynical in the way it covers government, and much more involved in the story. You could argue that the combination of those two things leads to a demarketing of government, which would explain why there is a gap between what people say they have experienced and what they believe about government.

CLYMER: The issue isn't that people lack belief in the legitimacy of government. Rather, there isn't much clarity about its purpose. You don't have a sense of why national leaders want to be president—other than for their résumés, or from simple ambition. I don't know why Lamar Alexander wants to be president. I don't think ill of him, and I have read why he says he wants to be president, but I still don't *know* why he wants to be president, and he is far more articulate about what he wants to do than Elizabeth Dole or George Bush at this point. Clinton gave us some sense that he wanted to be president to get us national healthcare. At least that's what we thought after the first few months. That was a colossal failure, and everybody else has tried to avoid offering anything very clear as a purpose.

DARMAN: It is quite an important point that people are not affirmatively inspired by government. If they are not inspired, they are more inclined to entertain second-order complaints. Certainly people don't like to wait in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles, a common interaction with government. But how much they complain about things like that is not the only measure.

"The issue isn't that people lack belief in the legitimacy of government. Rather, there isn't much clarity about its purpose. You don't have a sense of why national leaders want to be president—other than for their résumés, or from simple ambition."

ADAM CLYMER

In the abstract, people are able to rail against government, but I think most are knowingly ambivalent—and maybe not even ambivalent, but tilted toward government. If you ask how many people are ready to have Social Security benefits reduced, how many are ready to have Medicare coverage cut back, how many want less national defense, fewer police, less investment in highways, less investment in education, less investment in biomedical research, you won't find too many people raising their hands. When you add it all up, you have a federal budget that is at least $1.8 trillion. But the sad thing is that large as it is in dollars, it seems small in its vision. It is uninspiring.

If we then ask, how is it that we are still, practically speaking, *for* government, but not inspired by it, we have to treat seriously the record of failures from the Kennedy assassination through the present, and contrast that with the sense people had coming out of World War II. World War II was an enormous collective undertaking by government for essentially noble causes, and it was successful. Success breeds confidence in the possibility of future success. Kennedy was able to talk credibly about exploring the stars, eradicating disease, and so on down the list from his inaugural, and people didn't laugh at him. People thought, "We have won World War II, we are a global superpower, we are experiencing economic growth, we enjoy enormous technological advances—if we put our minds to meeting great challenges, collectively, we can do it." As Joe was suggesting, if you then take assassination, Vietnam, failures of the Great Society, Watergate, the oil shock, stagflation, the deficit and debt build-up of the 1980s, and so on, people see a highly visible record of failure to deliver on promises. That discourages the possibility of inspiration.

CLYMER: But in that first decade you cite, there were at least three stunning government accomplishments. We did in fact land a man on the moon in 1969. Medicare relieved the poverty of the elderly in a dramatic way, which certainly was obvious by the end of the decade. And the 1964 and '65 Civil Rights and Voting

Rights Acts made tremendous differences. Did they all get washed away by Vietnam?

DARMAN: All true, but you referred earlier to the rise of a rather adversarial press, so we probably need more than a fair share of successes to counterbalance the failures, since the failures seem to have higher entertainment value. I wish they didn't, but they do.

You could add to the list some more recent successes. Desert Storm was viewed as a heroic success by the public, not unlike the landing of man on the moon. After the moon landing, people used to say, "If you can land a man on the moon, why can't you (pick your problem of interest)," and after Desert Storm, we saw some of the same. The public was saying, "If you could win the war in the desert, why can't we do something more in Detroit?"

"It may be that the people in that generation represented a high-water mark of trust, of enthusiasm for the idea that government is able to do things, and that we are now back to a more normal American skepticism and cynicism about authority and government."

ELAINE KAMARCK

There are two important answers to that. One: in the case of World War II, Apollo, and Desert Storm, society was prepared to allocate whatever resources it took to get the job done. But our society now prefers to try to get things from government on the cheap. Second: we had the technology to meet the earlier challenges, or the capacity to develop the technology to meet them. But for a lot of today's major problems, like educating the disadvantaged, we don't invest adequately in developing the appropriate technology. We don't help ourselves learn to meet the commitments we might otherwise aspire to.

BANE: Is it not the case that confidence in state and local government is much greater than confidence in the federal government? Surely when people in a lot of places are asked about their governors or their mayors, there is a good deal of confidence and a feeling that things are happening—and, indeed, possibly they are. That is another interesting contrast.

NYE: State government scores 10 points higher in the polls than federal government, and local government, depending on the area, in general scores another 5 to 10 points higher, but that is still much lower than it once was. The trend line is down for all levels of government.

Going back to Dick's point, there are some other successes in government. The air we breathe and the waters in our rivers are a lot cleaner than they were. There really has been a success there, but it is not very dramatic on television. Or look at old age and poverty. A major sector of the population has been relieved of a major fear: about being poor in their old age. That's another enormous success, but people tend to take it for granted. It's as if they ask only, "What have you done for me lately?"

The (Un)Inspired American?

KAMARCK: There really is a perception problem here. One of the most interesting polling findings from the 1996 campaign was that when Bob Dole promised his tax cut, it fell like a lead balloon. The reason was not necessarily that people didn't want a tax cut, but that they didn't believe it would happen. There has been a tendency among people polled in the last decade to be very, very skeptical and cynical about politicians with big ideas. There is also a lot of skepticism when you say the government has accomplished something—made elderly people better off financially, made the rivers cleaner, et cetera. You get the same incredible skeptical reaction, and this may be a cultural phenomenon.

One theory about this is that it is a sort of postmodern mindset—we don't trust authority figures anytime about anything. There is something truly American about this: always wanting to be our own judge, not taking anybody's word for something, an independent streak.

In fact, you have to wonder whether the reason we are having these kinds of discussions is because the unique experience was the experience of the generation who lived through the Depression and World War II, and who have been leaving the electorate. (Somebody once accused me of saying that that was the

best euphemism I ever heard of for dying.) It may be that the people in that generation represented a high-water mark of trust, of enthusiasm for the idea that government is able to do things, and that we are now back to a more normal American skepticism and cynicism about authority and government.

Remember that because modern polling and a lot of modern social science coincidentally began at the crest of that Second World War generation, we may actually be looking at a construct of social science, as opposed to something that is actually significant in American history.

CLYMER: One piece of our sense of the difference in past elections and our connection to their outcomes is the fact that there were a great many more newspapers then, compared to now. When I was growing up in New York City, there were eight papers, from *PM* on the left to the *Daily Mirror* and the *Journal American* on the right, and it was a lot easier for people who cared about politics to buy a newspaper that was very close to their view of the world. If you go back to the twenties, there were a dozen or 15 papers, and their coverage of elections seemed perfectly reasonable to their readers. Sometimes the bad guy won, but you heard your arguments, even if you got only your one newspaper. Now, very few mass-circulation media try to appeal to a particular political point of view. Rupert Murdoch's newspapers may be the only one.

DARMAN: I am not at all sure that declining trust in government is generational. Young people were overwhelmingly inspired by two presidents in the post-World War II period: John F. Kennedy—who comes to mind for everyone, of course—but also Ronald Reagan. If you look at actual voting behavior, young people were among Reagan's strongest supporters. These two figures had a certain inspirational quality. I wonder, how much of a test have we really had in the current generation? Where are our inspirational leaders? If we had a few inspirational leaders who were out there trying, but falling flat on their faces, I would have more confidence in your proposition.

Is America skeptical as a culture? I would say, "Yes, but..." As often, it is ambivalent here, too. America was founded in part to build the city upon a hill. In different ways, Kennedy and Reagan echoed that theme, and a lot of people found it inspiring. We want the vision of the idealistic, near-perfect city, at the same time as we are a very skeptical, practical people. The question is, is there a leader around who has an inspirational vision that can also seem plausibly practical?

KAMARCK: My point is actually that Americans think of *themselves* as the leaders because, despite the distrust and negative information about government, one thing stands out in the civic-activism studies: Americans believe as strongly as ever that they can take action under their own power in their own communities to fix something. What I am asserting is that what is uniquely American is *not* that we are not idealistic, but that we are skeptical about leaders and about authority. What we like is democracy with a very small "d," where individuals actually do things in communities. For instance, what we see in local government is a breaking down of political parties, of political machines, in cities, but—at the same time—all sorts of variants on civic action in cities all around the country that are really quasi-political. One of the things that people who study these endeavors find out is that if you suggest to the people involved in them that they are involved in politics, they yell, "Oh, no, this isn't politics!" In their eyes, they are involved in something that is good for the community. It's their own empowerment, and that's what I mean by a uniquely American belief in the ability to do it yourself—that you don't have to be under anyone else's leadership.

CLYMER: That might be true historically. I want to emphasize something we touched on before. It's a great mistake to date changes in American politics to the first Michigan election study, in 1948, when they began asking people if they thought government was doing its job.

KAMARCK: Which is frankly what we tend to do, because that's where our data come from.

CLYMER: That's part of the trouble with political science becoming so numbers-conscious. I am willing to guess—I suppose you could confirm it with historical research—that in the twenties, it was a big deal for a high-school student to meet a member of Congress, much more so than it would be today. Meeting the mayor would be a bigger deal for more of them than today. I am writing a book about a leader in the U.S. Senate. Most people don't know anything about how the Senate works, and aren't interested in it, and don't get interested in it in high school, whereas I think good students probably used to.

"But our society now prefers to try to get things from government on the cheap. For a lot of today's major problems, like educating the disadvantaged, we don't invest adequately in developing the appropriate technology. We don't help ourselves learn to meet the commitments we might otherwise aspire to."

Adapting to New Political Eras

NYE: We don't have polling data for earlier periods, but we do have historians who at least give us impressions. There's an argument made that the end of the twentieth century is a lot like the end of the nineteenth century. We were undergoing major transformations in the economy and in the society then. A century ago, we went through a transformation to an industrial society that was heavily urbanized rather than rural, with people working in factories. In the early stages, a great deal of discontent accompanied that, a great deal of the "malaise" that Jimmy Carter made famous. But the Progressive movement, which was bipartisan, led to changes in the function of government, to deal with an economy that had become national in scope. We got the antitrust laws, the first regulation of the economy through the Federal Reserve System, the predecessor to the Food and Drug Administration, and so forth. You had real discontent, and then the pendulum swung back. Some people would argue that now, as we are going from an industrial age to an information age, the

economy is going through this again, and as we see the change in the private sector, we should not be surprised if we subsequently see, somewhat more slowly, a political reaction, a movement to make government change and adapt.

MODERATOR: Are you starting to see any of those changes? What are the responses to dissatisfaction with performance and changes in attitude toward government? Are functions being shed by central government? Are people doing more things directly in their communities?

NYE: Look at Indianapolis, for example, where Mayor Steve Goldsmith has expanded the role of the private sector, essentially by contracting out public services like garbage collection. These are significant changes. There is also an argument that nonprofit organizations will play a large role in delivery of government services. So we might be seeing much more of the things that we used to think were necessarily functions of government shared more among government, nonprofits, and the private sector.

WILLIAMS: I definitely see that happening in the District of Columbia. There is an appetite for looking at different ways for government to perform its business. One impediment, though, is the mistrust not just of government, but of authority in general. I am not sure whether it is skepticism, or vanity politics, or exalted individualism, or something else, but everyone wants to be involved. No one wants to *make* a decision, but everyone wants to have a check on decisions. Everybody worships process and pays very, very little attention to actual product. That's the situation you find sometimes, and you actually wish for the situation of 40, 50, or 60 years ago when there were political machines—when you could build an organization and it actually produced some outcome. One thing about Ronald Reagan's administration—there was an organization there, and outcomes were produced, whether you liked them or not. There is something to be said for that.

Networked Government

KAMARCK: Government organizations are, in fact, adapting for a variety of reasons, from changes in public trust to changes in technology. I see three emerging forms of government. One is entrepreneurial government, or enterprise management. The best example is New Zealand, where you have a fairly radical experiment in essentially privatizing the whole government, or taking government entities and having them run on private-sector management principles, not government principles.

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ANTHONY A. WILLIAMS

The second area is what a couple of people have called networked government. In the international arena, you see the formation of networks among subunits of government—environmental protection agencies talking to environmental protection agencies, bank regulators talking to bank regulators—giving rise to an emerging system of global governance, but without a global government. Domestically, as Joe suggested, you see government more and more often at the center of a network that can include government agencies, for-profit and not-for-profit entities, and religious agencies—as in the case of the new welfare reform. In this environment, the government is not a synoptic entity. It does not do the whole job itself anymore, but rather directs and coordinates the activities of other kinds of organizations.

Third, you see the creation of "social-goods markets," systems authorized by government to further public purposes. The first was the market for sulfur-dioxide emissions as a way of achieving environmental goals. The concept is bouncing around. For example, the voucher movement in education is based on the premise that you can actually create a market in public education.

What all these efforts have in common is a search for new organizational forms that somehow continue to fulfill the purposes of government, but do them in twenty-first-century ways, using newer technology and so on.

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I think a lot of what has been going on in politics recently is a confusion over means and ends. Dick said it before—there actually aren't huge debates over the *ends* of politics. People think that the government should do something about securing clean air and water, and basic health, but there is terrific conflict over the means to those ends. So part of what is going on in governments now is an attempt to adapt, to find some new means that maybe are not quite as distressing to the citizenry as the old ones.

BANE: Part of the distrust of government may actually be distrust of large bureaucratic institutions and the slowness and rigidity with which they operate. Part of what you see in the transformation of the private sector is the breaking down of large bureaucratic, factory-like organizations and the development of more decentralized organizations and networks, of entrepreneurship, and so on. You are seeing the same things in government, especially at the state and local level—things being done by networks of folks and by little organizations springing up to do this or that specific function. That is another piece of an overall transformation of the way we do things.

CLYMER: You are onto something there. Probably the big institution that most Americans have had an unpleasant experience with in the last 30 days is their health-insurance company or provider—those big, old-fashioned bureaucracies.

WILLIAMS: Health insurance, though, is seen as efficient by one definition, in terms of processing transactions, but it's also seen as limiting consumer choice, and that's why people are upset. With government, you are going to see more state and local individuality, more unique character on the service end, but much more networking collaboration on the back-office end. In 20 or 30 years, you will have governments all teaming together, doing payroll together, doing processing together, because these are things that you can ramp up to a huge level and do much more economically and efficiently and to the citizen, the consumer, it doesn't make any difference.

"Part of the distrust of government may actually be distrust of large bureaucratic institutions. The transformation of the private sector is the breaking down of large bureaucratic, factory-like organizations. You are seeing the same things in government, especially at the state and local level."

MARY JO BANE

CLYMER: It does when they make a mistake in the payroll, on your paycheck, and it becomes a lot harder to find the person to check with.

WILLIAMS: That's true, but it is happening all the time now in the private sector, and all the time in government. That's the way the world is going.

DARMAN: The most interesting domestic test case for movement toward more responsive organizations and more market-like performance would be education, because education essentially—I know it is controversial to say this—has not yet experienced very much of the Industrial Revolution, or the Technological Revolution, or the Information Revolution. It has been essentially immune. There have been add-on technologies, but it is still extraordinarily labor-intensive and extraordinarily non-innovative. We could see radical transformation of the means of production if you could let a market operate at adequate scale in the field of education. But the political opposition to a fair test of vouchers, for example, is, and long has been, enormous. The voucher idea is not new. It was shared by left and right back in the sixties. But it is only now beginning to get modest trials.

BANE: I wrote about it in the late 1960s. Education, though, is that interesting case where, when pollsters ask people about the state of education and the state of schools, they say, "It's terrible." But parents don't have the sense that the education their own kids are getting is so bad.

DARMAN: Some functions that government performs—like education—are among those that people care the most about, that they are the most sensitive to. But this can make market-oriented innovation more difficult. For a market-oriented system to work well, it has to be risk-taking. And it is understandable that parents hesitate to take risks when what is at stake is their chil-

dren and their children's life prospects. If you tell them, "We have a theory that a market-based system is really going to be great," parents are naturally risk-averse—the political system isn't entirely irrational here.

So I contend that a role for government is to foster the experimentation necessary to begin to show that some of these things that seem like wide-eyed dreams or ideological schemes do or do not have practical merit. As a society, we have been extremely reluctant to invest in serious, well-structured domestic-policy experimentation. If an idea is good enough to go with for a dollar, then everybody wants it. We like to leap to full-scale, and then underfund at full-scale. We don't like to go about things in the way that the private sector might—with a pilot operation and then an intermediate scale, and then alternative models and testing empirical evidence, and then ultimately full-scale. Our political system doesn't have the incentive or the patience for it.

WILLIAMS: The public is very, very risk-averse and that definitely feeds into the system. That's why you get a lot of opposition to experimentation and new initiatives. Maybe it does makes more sense to try and start with a small-scale pilot and then ramp it up based on experience as opposed to trying to solve everything all at once, which does foster frustration and alienation when you have the inevitable spectacular flop. There is something to be said for that.

"One could imagine that the Internet has the effect of even further weakening institutions, so that the party structure declines even further than it has, and you wind up with a plebiscitary type of democracy. You could wind up with a very 'thin' democracy. Madison's deliberative democracy, which still pervades our culture and our institutions, could be weakened further."

JOSEPH S. NYE JR.

Democracy.com?

NYE: We have talked a fair amount about the output side of government, what government does, but we also ought to talk a little bit about the input side—the political process and how we get those who govern us. In our Visions of Governance project, we're asking to what degree information technology will change the input side of government. Will that have anything to do with confidence and how people react? As a hypothesis, you could make an argument that for the last three or four decades we have been under the malign influence of television.

In the 1952 campaign, Dwight Eisenhower still spoke from the back of trains that pulled into stations, but by 1960, in the Kennedy-Nixon debate, television had taken over. Television has several effects. It is a very expensive medium. It turns campaigning toward mass marketing rather retail politics, and the most effective advertisements on television are indeed negative advertisements—part of that demarketing effect we talked about. All this tends to breed a sense of cynicism in the body politic, both because of the negativity and because of the huge amounts of money that have to be raised, and it also...

WILLIAMS: Undercuts party structures.

NYE: Yes. Now you could make a greatly oversimplified argument that—not in the next electoral cycle, but one or two after that—perhaps the Internet would dethrone television as the king of politics: that the ability to make interactive contact with very large numbers of people, to recruit volunteers, to get donations in small amounts at very low cost could completely transform the input side of government. If that occurs, would it in fact restore a sense of confidence?

KAMARCK: We all went into the 1998 campaign looking for the Web candidate—for the John F. Kennedy of the Internet. After the campaign, we had Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura's webmaster here for a conference. He said, "We didn't get elected because of the Web, but we couldn't have gotten elected without it," because they were able to build a financial and support infra-

structure on the Internet so quickly—an organization that did for them what political parties did for the other candidates.

In office, Governor Ventura is trying to figure out how he can use the Internet to communicate with citizens on legislative initiatives in real time, to build support and have dialogue. It's not surprising that an independent or third-party candidate has to do this, because they don't have the infrastructure, but I think the breakthrough here is the potential to build essentially overnight what you used to need decades to build—that's where the real power comes.

The Internet also empowers the individual politically. Somebody said television is such a "kick-back" medium—you just lie back and watch—but these Internet sites, if they're good, drag you in. They make you answer a poll, or write a question. They try to get you communicating with them, and that is a much higher level of involvement and engagement. So the optimists—and there are pessimists—see this as having the potential for creating a new kind of politics.

CLYMER: It would dethrone television.

KAMARCK: My guess is, it is never going to dethrone TV. But because you can interact, it has the potential to get more people involved in a more meaningful way than television ever does. Television is probably always going to have to drive you to the Internet, to tell you what the website address is, and who the candidate is, and so on. But perhaps the Internet will counter TV, or maybe equal it.

DARMAN: One way in which I think television fit Joe's description of malign influence is that it encouraged the polarization of our politics, which people seem not to like. TV is essentially an entertainment medium. Its producers and news editors probably correctly concluded that moderate personalities have low entertainment value, and more extreme, more absurd posturers have higher entertainment value. Unfortunately, with television exposure went the presumption of power, and the presumption of power created the reality of power. So power was transferred, to a considerable degree, from the middle to the extremes by the entertainment orientation of television.

As you and Joe were talking about the Internet as a possible salvation for our politics, or at least as a source of change, I was trying to think whether there is a chance that the Internet will encourage more moderation—which might encourage something else I said I favor, a sort of practical visionary quality. And then you tell me, Elaine, that the first significant success is Jesse Ventura. So I guess I have to rethink whether Jesse Ventura may be an affirmation of moderate rationality.

KAMARCK: So far, the Internet is not having much success in making extreme parties very popular. In the early days of the Internet, the assumption was that, because of the ease of access, it was going to be a hotbed of extreme parties, right and left. But content still matters.

The Jesse Ventura story is that the Internet allowed them to convey enough about the guy that people liked, that he managed to get his message out and convince people, apart from the television war—which I agree does tend to paint people in extremes. Ironically, in 1998, most of the political websites were sponsored by Democrats or Republicans. There weren't a lot by "crazy" parties.

WILLIAMS: Were they positive, or were they like the TV ads?

KAMARCK: They were very positive, for both parties—very positive, very serious, very substantive. They were an issue-advocate's dream. Almost all these sites had more issue papers than you could possibly read. Cyberspace allows you to do that, because you don't have the space or time constraints of television and other media. The Internet let candidates put out their biographies, their healthcare plans, their plan for this and that.

CLYMER: But do you also put out, on the home page, something jazzy that tells users the other guy is a rotten bum?

KAMARCK: Surprisingly, very few people did.

"They were an issue-advocate's dream. Almost all these sites had more issue papers than you could possibly read. The Internet let candidates put out their biographies, their healthcare plans, their plan for this and that."

CLYMER: Do you think that may develop? Negative advertising wasn't the first kind of TV advertising.

KAMARCK: Right. That is actually one of the questions that our study left open—whether the absence, or virtual absence, of negative advertising was a function of this being the first time out, or whether there was something about the medium that encouraged people to put a positive spin out there. I don't know.

CLYMER: Because I remember a time when it was said that negative advertising may be all right in a U.S. Senate race, but nobody would think of doing it in a presidential election because the presidency is above that. That time has long since passed.

NYE: We have to be careful. I will, against my own hypothesis, say that you can draw up a negative scenario as well. One could imagine that the Internet has the effect of even further weakening institutions, so that the party structure declines even further than it has, and you wind up with a plebiscitary type of democracy. That is, there is the temptation to do plebiscites, either quasi-polls or even government-stimulated ones, and you wind up with a lot of the excesses we now attribute to public-opinion polling, but now they're incorporated in the political system.

You could wind up with a very "thin" democracy. Madison's deliberative democracy, which still pervades our culture and our institutions, could be weakened further. I don't think we can just be sanguine.

Actually, I expect we will wind up with something we find with the advent of most new technologies: a layering effect. Just as television didn't destroy the radio, but put it into a certain niche, the Internet will put television in a different niche. People who are really issue-oriented may go to the websites and read all the issue papers. But there will still be a large number of people who don't want to read anything and for whom television plays an important political role. It will still be expensive for candidates to use, and it will still have the same effects on campaigns.

Communities of Faith

KAMARCK: Turning from emerging technologies to some of the oldest institutions, I wonder about the new interest in religion and social-service delivery. Some of this has been prompted by welfare

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reform, but it seems that there is new interest in what the proper relationship is between religious institutions and government.

BANE: We do seem to be in the midst of a kind of religious revival, as evidenced by a variety of anecdotes and by data on affiliations with religious institutions and churches. In terms of the role of churches and religious institutions in public programs, I think service delivery is not the most important thing. Catholic Charities is going to be very good at contracting with government, but the small, locally based religious institutions are less likely to be part of that. However, they may be part of community networks that are likely to grow up, participating more on a voluntary basis than on a contract basis—providing mentors and tutors and opportunities to take care of kids.

We are also seeing a growth in young people's, and other people's, interest in community service. One of the interesting things about churches is that that's where the people are, really large numbers of people. Will the churches become participants in the political dialogue, providing forums for deliberation? Churches are among the few institutions I see that actually have the potential for providing forums for deliberation based on our values and our morals and our commitments—as a kind of counter to the market.

WILLIAMS: We are trying to create a partnership to support children, with the government putting up a substantial amount of new money, but doing it in the sense of a partnership with the communities, with a foundation sector in the churches. There is a widespread notion, which I share, that the partners may not function as a major locomotive to carry on what government has been doing, but certainly, as a complement, a faith community can play a role—and can provide culture and character-building, leadership-building, that government can't do.

BANE: I see more of a sense of the need for that, and a willingness, maybe, to be a little less nervous about the strictness of the separation between church and state, to enable more participation. And, of course, going back to the issue of education, that's going to be a huge set of questions when one even broaches the topic of more market and more competition.

WILLIAMS: In many of the District's congregations, 60 to 70 percent of the congregation members no longer live in the city, but they still worship in the city. If you can get these congregations invested back in the community, you are once again instilling role models that have been lost. At least that's the idea.

KAMARCK: This is an odd analogy to draw, but it seems as though the more global you get, the more high-tech and market-driven society becomes, the more you see this desire for rootedness, for tradition. For instance, we see the movement to the European Union, movement toward a supranational government; and yet, at the same time, you have vast separatist movements and a real revival of regionalism—northern Italy would like to get rid of southern Italy, and so on. You have a whole interest in region, culture, place-based identities. I don't know if you have ever seen the slogan on baseball caps, sponsored by local breweries, "Think globally, drink locally." That seems to capture something about these schizophrenic modern times.

MODERATOR: In light of the interest in churches and local social action we have discussed, is there any room for national discussions about values? Or is that inherently falling away from our national government and political discourse?

CLYMER: Perhaps this is the press's fault as much as anyone's, but we have come to define morality in our public leaders as largely related to private sexuality. The whole of the Bible is not made up of the Seventh Commandment. There is a lot about looking after the poor and the sick, and that doesn't seem to get considered a part of the scorecard. I am not arguing to rule out anything, but the scorecard on moral leadership seems to be narrower and to have fewer and fewer elements in public discussion. The Christian Coalition strikes me as an example of that failing.

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WILLIAMS: In my city, people *do* want a discussion of values and morality around the political center. They don't want to hear extremes, but they do want this discussion of values. There is a notion in my city that things are torn completely asunder, for example, along the lines of race, and that there needs to be some discussion on bringing everyone together. I am not sure how you are supposed to hold that discussion, but people seem to want it.

KAMARCK: I think that the press got very hung up on the Seventh Commandment. But the reaction of the American people throughout the past year was, in fact, much more balanced—people looked at the president in many ways, and didn't just focus on adultery.

BANE: One of the saddest pieces of fallout of this whole Clinton scandal, though, is the cynicism that grows from observing someone who talks such a good line in terms of commitments and values, and then behaves so badly and generates such mistrust. It is going to be quite hard to have a conversation about morals and values on the national level for a while. I think it is going to be much less hard to have at the local level, maybe even at the state level, because it will come up in many ways around issues such as how we bring our cities together. Even more than the city: Washington, for example, is a teeny part of a huge metropolitan area; and, by golly, you need that whole area, just as we do in Boston. You can't solve the problems of Boston in the city itself. How do we bring ourselves together? It has got to be around commitments to each other and commitments to community, not around narrow self-interest.

Institutions and Agendas

NYE: Adam commented earlier on the average citizen's lack of interest in knowing about the Senate. What was the effect of the recent impeachment on our government institutions? Were they further devalued, or is their status basically unchanged?

CLYMER: The House of Representatives has become even more polarized. The members are less interested in speaking with each other, or working together on pieces of legislation. A great many Democrats didn't want to go to the so-called reconciliation retreat in Hershey, Pennsylvania, in March, because they didn't want to be civil with Republicans who they thought had behaved in an atrocious way. The Senate by its own standards came out somewhat better, because the senators didn't display the same sort of bitterness in public—in part because its bizarre rules allowed it to debate the issue in private.

"People *do* want a discussion of values and morality around the political center. They don't want to hear extremes, but they do want this discussion of values."

But I don't think the institutions of Congress are in very good shape at all—it has been going steadily downhill since the late eighties. If the Senate is more functional, or less dysfunctional, than the House, even so there are fewer and fewer senators prepared to listen to what the guy they almost always vote against has to say on the chance this may be the one time this year he is right. The common wisdom is that the center is gone from the Senate. A center not so much in terms of political ideology, but a sense of a place that enabled Lauch Faircloth [then Republican senator from North Carolina] and Ted Kennedy to be the two principal sponsors on a church-burning bill—people who probably never voted alike on any bill that had opposition from more than 15 senators.

NYE: What about the net effect on the presidency, after this presidency is over?

CLYMER: The effect on Clinton's presidency is dreadful. I think he doesn't understand that. For the next guy, the office is pretty resilient. Ronald Reagan did not feel incapable of acting just because Jimmy Carter had been, in his view, a very weak president. Gerald Ford was president after Richard Nixon got run out of town. Conviction might have had a very serious effect on the institution, but I don't think the actual result did.

DARMAN: I don't think the public is so clearly cynical, either. Again, there is an element of ambivalence. People have demonstrated again and again their willingness to invest enormous hope in the prospects for renewal through a new presidency. Any new president at the time of his inaugural, and even in each State of the Union address, gets a chance to draw on a large reservoir of public hopefulness that happens to live in the same public body as the cynicism. So I come back to the proposition that, in the absence of credible visionary leaders, I am not sure how good a test we have of what "the public" really may feel about government, its potential, its promise.

CLYMER: The best illustration for Dick's point is Herblock's cartoon of January 20, 1969, where he gave Nixon a clean shave.

MODERATOR: Mary Jo Bane talked about people wanting to serve, but not necessarily in government. The polls indicate that people trust their institutions less than they did in the past, but Dick Darman has just said there is a reservoir of hopefulness about government. What policies or agenda for public action would you prescribe? What steps would invigorate the future of American governance?

CLYMER: I am not sure it is so much the particular prescription as the sense that this man or woman has one or two or three reasons that he or she wants to be president, or governor, or mayor, or to go to Congress. Ronald Reagan said he wanted to balance the budget, increase defense spending, and cut taxes. Two out of three isn't really bad for the major commitments of any public official, and those were his. I don't think it is an easy role for us to say, "Here's the one promise that a presidential candidate should make, and if he or she does, he or she deserves to get elected." But candidates ought to have *some*, and to have some that are taken seriously.

BANE: There are real differences at the national, state, and local levels. I think the fact that Mayor Williams got the snow plowed in Washington this year, and fixes the potholes, is enormously important for people's sense that government can work, things can happen. It is pretty boring to talk about performance in government in terms of potholes, but when Elaine mentioned the performance deficit as being a big part of the problem, then it really does matter what mayors and governors who are oriented toward the real functioning of those very important things are doing. It's a big deal. I think the press should cover it more.

CLYMER: It's not that plowing streets and fixing potholes doesn't get coverage. However, when Al Gore announces that the latest campaign initiative is to reduce commuters' time spent in traffic tie-ups, we report that he says it, but we are a little skeptical that it is presidential.

NYE: But the fact that Tony ran on the idea of making Washington a workable, livable city again is important, and the test will be whether he can do it. That does have an effect on how people see government.

KAMARCK: It's a cascading problem. The reason the federal government ranks at the bottom of the list of U.S. governments is that a lot of people just don't realize that what they are experiencing in their state, or locally, is actually made possible by money coming down from the federal government. To the extent that the federal government decides to get out of the way, and let the state and local governments innovate and focus on performance, as Tony has, that will start to have an impact on attitudes toward government in the minds of the people who answer these polls and don't make very many distinctions.

CLYMER: But remember your earlier point about how much cleaner the air and the water are, and how little impact that seems to have made on the public consciousness. Suppose Al Gore has policies that will reduce the amount of time people spend in traffic tie-ups by 50 percent, and he is president for eight years and accomplishes that. He won't get the credit for it, again, because it will have been gradual.

KAMARCK: It will be incremental.

CLYMER: Unless he uses the army to accomplish it.

KAMARCK: Yes, but that's a problem of coverage, as much as anything else.

CLYMER: Actually, I think you will find that there is plenty of coverage about the improvement of air and water, and nobody has paid any attention to it. You know, sometimes people knock us for not covering things. My favorite example, frankly, comes from the Reagan administration. People would always come up and say, "He doesn't know what he is talking about. Why don't you people expose him? Why don't you write that the story about the welfare mother is a figment of his imagination?" The fact is, we did—and nobody cared, or paid any attention, because they were focusing on him in a different way.

DARMAN: To take a slightly different angle on this question about an agenda for the future, I think it's interesting to ask, what is a big problem ahead that requires creative and constructive attention *in advance*, or else society is going to pay a price it should wish to avoid—because part of the answer to that kind of question requires leadership and education from public officials and others.

If we were to ask that question now, one thing I would put on the list would be adjusting to a radically increased, healthy life span. I think we have underattended to the extent to which we are on the verge of medical breakthroughs that may allow people to live well into their hundreds.

The potential implications are enormous, under virtually every heading. It means that the entire current retirement system is totally bankrupt—not even conceptually viable. One is driven immediately to the conclusion that there has to be an enormous increase in the amount of work by healthy older people. One is driven also to conclude that there has to be systematic reeducation for people who will, at age 50 or 55, have as many years of healthy work-life ahead of them as people getting a college degree had ahead of them a generation ago. And we will have to change our values—to move from a grudging respect for the elderly and a hope that the nursing home is above minimum standards, to a much more active engagement with and respect for older people.

Now I am only beginning to sketch what would turn out to be a very large agenda. It will turn out to be highly topical in a decade because the self-centered baby-boom generation will be reaching retirement age and will insist, as it has at every stage in its movement through time, that the political system focus on it and its needs at the moment. Right now, it thinks its needs are retirement income and adequate health insurance. What the baby-boom generation is going to discover is that, while those things are important, they are really very different from what is almost a social revolution required to accommodate the very large population that may be living an extra generation or two.

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RICHARD G. DARMAN

Anyhow, this issue has the virtue of not being conventionally politicized yet. So there is an opportunity for someone to step forward, to frame a vision and a potential consensus, and to rise to the level of being an inspiration. I would hope that this might be on some emergent politician's agenda.

NYE: I think what Dick points out is that many issues and many surprises await us. There is probably going to be a significant role for government and other forms of public service. So it's important that the institutions of this country have gone through ups and downs before, demonstrating that there may be more robustness in them than we sometimes think. ▽