

Global Youth Fellowship Summary
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Global Youth Fellow 2007-2008
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1. Summary: My Fellowship focused on public perceptions of democracy assistance activities supported by Canada and other donors. My Fellowship research sought to answer two questions:

(1) What do Canadian youth (18 to 35) think of Canada's role in supporting democracy in other countries?

(2) What do citizens in a developing country think of democracy assistance activities supported by donors?

2. Background: Democracy assistance or democracy support is a sub-field of international cooperation, through which donors provide financial support for activities that reinforce the capacity of developing countries' democratic institutions, such as parliaments, human rights commissions, and civil society organizations.

Democracy assistance has become an accepted, if controversial, component of development aid. While often well-intentioned, examples of successful democracy assistance initiatives are difficult to identify. Moreover, such initiatives are reportedly facing a growing backlash in developing countries, as the "democracy agenda" is often closely identified with "Western interests." Nevertheless, more funds are allocated to democracy assistance every year: current estimates of donor-support for democracy range from three to ten billion dollars per year. Canada spends almost \$500-million supporting democracy in other countries.

In July 2007, Parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development tabled a lengthy report on Canada's democracy support initiatives, following eighteen months of research. As part of its official response, the Government has promised to publicize a whole-of-government policy for democracy assistance. This policy statement was due in May 2008 but has yet to materialize.

In all the deliberations over how Canada or other donors support democracy, the individuals meant to benefit from this assistance, namely the citizens in those countries where these programs are implemented, are rarely if ever consulted. For instance, out of over thirty interviews conducted for Canada's parliamentary report on democracy assistance, only one was with an individual from a recipient country. This is not only ironic, but it threatens to condemn such initiatives to failure. Democracy needs to be built from the ground-up and led by the people in the countries where it is being established.

Equally ironic, the Canadians who pay for these programmes – namely tax-payers – are rarely if ever consulted on whether aid money should be spent supporting democracy abroad. Very little is known in Canada about whether Canadians want their tax-dollars spent on initiatives that may

not be successful and if there is indeed a backlash may in fact undermine Canadian interests abroad.

This Fellowship therefore focussed on learning more about what Canadians – and specifically Canadian “youth” (18 – 35 years old) – think of democracy assistance and what citizens in a developing country – specifically Indonesia – think of Canadians and other donors supporting their democracy. The objective of this research was and remains to influence the development of policy on democracy assistance initiatives to include more citizen input.

3. Activities conducted:

Date	Activities
August – December 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Background research and reading (e.g. online texts, academic journals, government documents) ➤ Identification of and meeting with mentor. ➤ Networking with key stakeholders (e.g. government officials, academics, aid practitioners)
October – November 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CANADA: Research and publication of background paper on evaluations of public service reform development initiatives for a project at Queen’s University’s Centre for the Study of Democracy that examined evaluations of democracy assistance initiatives.
January – February 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CANADA: Establish partnership and design research project with Apathy is Boring on engaging with Canadian youth on democracy assistance. ➤ INDONESIA: Design of research in Indonesia (e.g. drafting poll questions, negotiating with polling firm, identifying and hiring Indonesian assistant, identifying potential interviewees).
March - June 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CANADA: Implementation of project with Apathy is Boring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 404 offline surveys at 9 concerts across Canada (Toronto, Halifax, Montreal, Saskatoon, Edmonton). - 1484 online survey responses (Survey Monkey, Youth.gc.ca, Apathyisboring.com, Facebook). ➤ INDONESIA: Country visit to conduct research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 15 qualitative interviews (e.g. civil society leaders, parliamentarians, government officials) - Public opinion survey of 2,150 Indonesians by Lembaga Survey Indonesia (LSI), on the role of donors in supporting Indonesia’s democracy.
July – August 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ CANADA: Planning and participation (led by Apathy is Boring) in Governor General’s youth dialogue on democracy and international development, at the World Youth Congress in Quebec City on 13 August 2008. ➤ INDONESIA: Analysis of opinion survey data, drafting of opinion pieces for publication; preparation of outline for longer academic piece.
September 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Publication of opinion piece on Indonesian research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Embassy Magazine, Ottawa, 4 September 2008, p9. - The Jakarta Post, Indonesia, 19 September 2008, p5. - The Canberra Times, Australia, 22 September 2008, p17.
October –	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Writing (co-author) of academic piece on public opinion on democracy

December 2008	<p>assistance in a developing country.</p> <p>➤ Identification of possible knowledge sharing opportunities in Canada.</p>
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4. Summary of key results: The actual policy impact of the Fellowship to date remains to be identified in as much as the objective is to affect the long-term development of democracy assistance policy. Nevertheless, Fellowship activities have already led to important short-term results in various ways:

- (1) Research questions: The question of what citizens in developing countries think seems to be gaining traction in policy circles. For instance, one of two key policy-leaders on democracy assistance that I have been in regular contact referred to my questions in a recent publication, calling for more research on this subject.
- (2) Apathy is Boring: Apathy is Boring has been able to use the innovative methodology employed during the research sponsored designed through our partnership and sponsored by the Fellowship (i.e. online and offline polling of youth) to leverage further resources from Democracy 250, a Halifax based organization that is celebrating 250 years of parliamentary democracy in Canada, in order to reach out to Canadian youth on questions about Canadian democracy. This has also helped Apathy is Boring solidify its relationship with other key actors, including the Governor General. Apathy is Boring was able to use our research questions and experiences as the basis for the Governor General’s youth dialogue in Quebec City. This dialogue discussed the relationship between democracy and development at a session that featured four Canadian singers and songwriters and over 200 participants.
- (3) Poll findings in Indonesia: The public opinion survey of 2,150 people in late June using 15 questions that I drafted in consultation with public opinion experts in Canada, policy leaders on democracy assistance, and Indonesian experts, was the first time a poll had ever been done asking what citizens in a developing country thought of outsiders supporting their democracy. The poll findings offer a wealth of disaggregated data (i.e. by sex, age, religion, urban vs. rural, ethnicity, etc.), which forms the basis of opinion pieces (noted above), seminar presentations, and a longer academic article.
- (4) Within Rights & Democracy: The research is leading to reflections within the organization I work for about tracking opinion surveys in Canada as part of its institutional communications strategy as well as opinion surveys in developing countries as means towards obtaining baseline data and tracking the impact of programming.

5. Next steps: The main follow-up activities to the Fellowship are to make the most of the data gathered during the year. The survey results gathered in Canada and Indonesia are unique; such questions have never been asked before. My objectives are to continuing analyzing the data, sharing it with key stakeholders, and identifying opportunities to publicize the research. The research shows that the original hypothesis – that citizens’ opinions are important elements in the design and analysis of democracy assistance activities – is in fact true.