Chapter 1

Democratic hopes and fears

Are contemporary democratic states experiencing a major legitimacy crisis? Does the public lack trust in government and confidence in the political process? Has public skepticism spread upwards to corrode citizens’ evaluations about the performance of democracy? Many think so. Since the early-1990s, a host of scholars of American public opinion have detected signs of a rising tide of popular discontent and voter anger (Dionne, Craig, Tolchin, Wood), as well as deep mistrust of government (Nye, Zelikow and King, Hetherington), where the U.S. Congress is held in especially low regard (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse). These observations are commonly coupled with behavioral indicators of civic engagement, notably low or falling voting turnout (Teixiera, Wattenberg), eroding social capital (Putnam), and declining party loyalties (Aldrich), weakening connections between citizens and the state. Commentators point to multiple signs of contemporary discontent with American democracy, from voter anger against incumbents of both major parties and the outbreak of Tea Party populist rebellion to public frustration with gridlock and divisive partisanship in D.C.

During the last decade, similar anxieties have infected other post-industrial societies. In Western Europe, it is claimed that people hate politics (Hay), political parties have lost loyal voters (Franklin et al, Dalton and Wattenberg) as well as grassroots members (Mair and Biezen), while electoral turnout has fallen (Franklin), and public disaffection has spread (Torcal and Montero, Dogan, Andrain and Smith). Support for populist and radical right parties is seen as another symptom of the rejection of mainstream European politics. Reflecting upon the broader meaning of these entails, haruspices have even speculated gloomily about the ‘winter of democracy’ (Hermet), the era of ‘post-democracy’ (Crouch), as well as the ‘death of democracy’ (Keane). The most comprehensive and thorough diagnosis of the cross-national survey evidence, by Russell Dalton, concludes, more cautiously, that citizens in advanced industrial societies remain staunchly committed to democratic principles although they have gradually become more distrustful of politicians, detached from parties, and doubtful about public sector institutions. Signs of parallel developments elsewhere in the world remain more mixed. If long established democracies are in trouble, however, and if these problems spread, this may contribute towards what some observers have identified as a global democratic recession.

To be sure, the picture should not be exaggerated or overblown, as anxiety about public trust in government usually ebbs and flows over the years. Not all commentators share a common interpretation of the available indicators, by any means; indeed a long-standing debate about their meaning remains unresolved after more than four decades. Nevertheless the prevailing view suggests that, for reasons which continue to remain unclear, political disaffection has worsened in recent decades, with significant consequences for democratic governance.

The central argument

Why another book about these issues? Is there anything new to say? Perhaps surprisingly, a lot. This book lays out a series of reasons, backed by systematic survey evidence drawn from more than fifty countries worldwide, which challenge the conventional diagnosis, reframe the debate, and recalibrate the evidence about citizen’s attitudes towards democratic governance. There is no question that the conventional ‘crisis of democratic legitimacy’ thesis needs revising. Four claims lie at the heart of this book.

Firstly, public support for the political system has not eroded consistently across a wide range of countries around the world – including in established democracies. Nationalism maintains
identification with the nation-state, confidence in government does not decline uniformly, while popular support for authorities fluctuates among states. Yet, in many countries today, satisfaction with the performance of democracy diverges from public aspirations. It has long been thought that regimes are more likely to endure and flourish where a balanced equilibrium exists between citizens’ aspirations for democracy (measured by how much people value democratic ideals and reject autocratic alternatives) and its perceived supply (monitored by public satisfaction with the democratic performance of their own country).²¹

Part I presents the book’s central argument focusing upon the concept of ‘democratic deficits’. The notion of a ‘democratic deficit’ first arose in debates about the legitimacy of the European Union. The core decision-making institutions in the EU have been regarded by some commentators as falling well short of the standards of democratic accountability and transparency which exists at national-level within each of the member states.²² The original idea judged the legitimacy of decision-making processes within the European Union against the democratic standards of European nation states. But this useful concept is not confined to this context; it can be applied more widely to any object where the perceived democratic performance fails to meet public expectations, whether concerning a specific public sector agency or institution, the collective regime or constitutional arrangements governing the nation-state, or the agencies of global governance and multilateral organizations, including the United Nations.²³ The idea of a democratic deficit also builds upon work developed more than a decade ago which first identified the phenomenon of ‘critical citizens’.²⁴ This group of citizens aspires to democracy as their ideal form of government, yet at the same time they remain deeply skeptical when evaluating how democracy works in their own country. This book can be seen as the direct descendent of the earlier study, although it seeks to update and expand the evidence, reframe the analysis, and refine the diagnosis.

[Figure 1.1 about here]

What explains the size and distribution of democratic deficits in different states worldwide, and thus why satisfaction with the way that democracy works fails to match citizens’ aspirations for democracy? The extensive research literature focused on satisfaction with democracy and trust in government has proposed a long shopping list of potential causes, whether ad hoc explanations (including the impact of particular historical events) or else more systematic generalizations. The number of rival hypothesis can prove daunting; a recent study in the Netherlands, for example, identified ten distinct propositions which were thought to account for falling public confidence and trust in the Dutch government.²⁵ In the United States, the events during the late 1960s and 1970s are commonly cited, from the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, to stagflation, malaise, the energy crisis and urban riots.²⁶ The long list of potential causes can be whittled down and integrated into the more comprehensive, parsimonious, and coherent general theory to explain why satisfaction with the perceived democratic performance of any regime diverges from public aspirations, as illustrated schematically in Figure 1.1. This leads to the third core claim at the heart of the book: The most plausible potential explanations for the democratic deficit claim that this phenomenon arises from some combination of growing public expectations, negative news, and failing government performance. Each of the inter-related components generates certain logical general propositions which can be tested against the empirical evidence.

- **Demand-side theories** focus upon enduring cultural shifts among the mass citizenry.
  - Societal modernization theories attribute rising democratic aspirations to long-term processes of human development, especially growing levels of literacy, education, and cognitive skills, leading to emancipative values. If correct, then the public living in affluent,
post-industrial societies, especially the younger generation and better-educated sectors, should display the strongest endorsement for democratic values.

- Alternative theories of social capital predict that a long-term erosion of social trust and community networks has undermined faith in democratic governance.

- **Intermediary accounts** emphasize the role of political communications in how people learn about democracy and regime performance.

  - Cognitive theories regard the mass media as one of the primary agencies for learning about democracy, alongside education and the legacy of historical political traditions.
  
  - Theories of priming and framing suggest that the news media shape public perceptions of government performance. If true, stronger disenchantment with the way democratic governance works should be linked with negative news and scandal coverage about politics, government and public affairs.

- **Supply-side theories**, by contrast, lay the blame for public dissatisfaction with either the process or the policy performance of democratic governments, as well as with the institutional arrangements.

  - **Process** accounts emphasize that rational citizens have the capacity to judge how democracy works in their own country; it follows that public satisfaction should reflect the quality of democratic governance existing in different countries.

  - **Policy** performance explanations emphasize public dissatisfaction with the capacity of governments to manage the delivery of public goods and services. If true, democratic deficits should relate to perceptual and/or aggregate indicators of policy outputs and outcomes.

  - Lastly, **structural** accounts emphasize that democratic deficits are conditioned by the constitutional arrangements in any state, especially by power-sharing arrangements. If correct, satisfaction with democracy should prove greater among electoral winners than losers, as well as being minimized in countries with power-concentrating regimes.

These components have often been treated separately by sub-disciplines in the fragmented and scattered research literature. A more satisfactory and integrated understanding arises where these are understood as building blocks in a sequential process. In a loose market model, mass culture reflects the demand-side, communications is the connective information environment, and government performance represents the supply-side of the equation. In short, democratic deficits may arise from complex interactions involving rising hopes, negative news, and fears about failing performance. The logical arguments, and the empirical evidence supporting each of these explanations, and how they fit together like pieces of a complex jigsaw puzzle, deserve careful scrutiny and systematic examination.

Lastly, why does this phenomenon matter? Rather than supporting blasé assumptions that no serious implications follow, or alternatively presenting exaggerated claims that the sky is falling, the fourth and final claim in the book suggests that the **democratic deficit has important consequences** - including for political activism, for allegiant forms of political behavior and rule of law, and ultimately for processes of democratization.

Debate continues about these issues. The most sanguine and positive interpretation suggests that any symptoms of disaffection reflect the run-of-the-mill mid-term blues and public disgruntlement directed against specific politicians and parties, resolved periodically in democracies through the ballot box. On the positive side of the equation, citizen dissatisfaction may also spark progressive reform movements, catalyze citizen activism, and thus serve ultimately to strengthen processes of democratization in all societies. Some emphasize that any loss of public confidence and trust in government has not actually contributed towards regime instability.
More commonly, however, commentators regard opinion polls as the canary in the coal mine where signs point towards pervasive doubts towards the role and powers of government, sentiments which, it is feared, can slide into deep-rooted popular aversion and hostility towards all things political. A leaking reservoir of political trust is seen as tying policy-makers hands and limiting voluntary compliance with government authority. Dissatisfaction with democratic performance is also usually regarded, at least implicitly, as an important cause of civic disengagement, encouraging an erosion of conventional participation among citizens. At worst, fragile regimes lacking a broad and deep foundation of legitimacy among the mass public are widely believed to face serious risk of instability and even breakdown.

Accordingly this book seeks to understand the causes and consequences of the democratic deficit, integrating prior knowledge into a theoretical framework which challenges conventional assumptions and provides a more complete diagnosis and prognosis. The remainder of this chapter clarifies the core argument and provides a roadmap to guide readers through the rest of the book.

Roadmap of the book

Part I: Theoretical framework

The first section of the book clarifies the core concepts, the central theoretical argument, and the primary sources of evidence and multi-level methods of analysis. Scholars have long debated how best to understand public attitudes towards government. For example, do the available indicators concerning trust and confidence in political institutions reflect a relatively superficial and healthy skepticism about the performance of politicians and the normal ups-and-downs in popular fortunes expected of any party in government? Or alternatively do signs suggest more deep-rooted loss of citizen’s trust in all public officials, lack of faith in core institutions of representative democracy, and ambivalence about fundamental democratic principles? Another important issue which remains unresolved concerns the relationship between support for democratic ideals and practices. In particular, will public faith in democratic values gradually spread downwards to encourage trust and confidence in the core institutions of representative democracy? Or instead, will skepticism about the way that democratic states work eventually diffuse upwards to corrode and undermine approval of democratic principles? Or, alternatively, it may be that these ambivalent tensions between ideals and practices will persist in parallel. There is nothing particularly novel about these concerns; after all, the post-World War II era is commonly assumed to be the halcyon era of trust in the federal government in Washington D.C. yet one of the first studies of U.S. public opinion documented ambivalent attitudes during the late-1950s, concluding that American citizens: “tend to expect the worst in politics but hope for the best”. Following the turbulent street protests, urban riots, and rise of new social movements during the 1960s and early-1970s, a major report for the Trilateral Commission warned that a legitimacy crisis was undermining Western democracies. The latest angst is thus only the most recent of a long series of similar waves of concern which have moved in and out of intellectual fashion over the years.

To explore these issues, Chapter 2 unpacks the core concepts. The traditional foundation for understanding how citizens orientate themselves towards the nation state, its agencies and actors rests on the idea of ‘system support’, originally developed by David Easton in the 1960s. Critical Citizens expanded the Eastonian conceptual framework to distinguish five dimensions of system support and the updated survey evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that these distinctions continue to prove robust. Building upon these ideas, the chapter clarifies and operationalizes the concept of democratic deficits. This chapter also outlines the reasons why certain behavioral indicators adopted by other studies to monitor political support are rejected as inappropriate here, including evidence concerning partisan dealignment and declining party membership, behavioral indicators of civic
engagement such as voting turnout or campaign activism, and measures of social capital, including associational membership and inter-personal trust. Behavioral factors are a vital part of any comprehensive understanding of democratic citizenship and civic engagement. But social psychological attitudes and values are treated here as analytically distinct from any acts flowing from these orientations.

To examine the comparative evidence, more than a decade ago, I edited a volume, Critical Citizens. This brought together a network of international scholars to consider the global state of public support for democratic governance in the late-twentieth century. David Easton’s seminal insights into the conceptual framework of political support provided the classic starting point for the study. Drawing upon these ideas, the earlier book understood the idea of ‘political support’ broadly as a multidimensional phenomenon ranging from the most diffuse to the most specific levels. Hence this notion was conceived to include five components:

(i) The most general and fundamental feelings of citizens towards belonging to the national community, exemplified by feelings of national pride and identity;

(ii) Support for general regime principles, including approval of democratic and autocratic attitudes and values;

(iii) Evaluations of the overall performance of the regime, exemplified by satisfaction with the workings of democracy;

(iv) Confidence in state institutions, notably government, parliaments, parties, the civil service, the courts, and the security forces; and

(v) Trust in elected and appointed office-holders, including politicians and leaders.

Critical Citizens scrutinized a wide range of survey indicators for evidence concerning each of these dimensions, including global, regional and national comparisons of public opinion from the 1960s until the mid-1990s. The volume brought together experts on diverse countries and regions, utilizing different datasets and surveys, as well as assembling scholars drawn from multiple theoretical perspectives and disciplines. Despite the multiplicity of viewpoints, based on the survey evidence, a common understanding quickly emerged about the most appropriate interpretation of trends. The collaborative volume concluded that citizens in many countries had proved increasingly skeptical about the actual workings of the core institutions of representative democracy, notably political parties, parliaments, and governments. At the same time, however, public aspirations towards democratic ideals, values, and principles, or the demand for democracy, proved almost universal around the globe. The tensions between unwavering support for democratic principles but skeptical evaluations about democratic practices, was interpreted in the book as the rise of ‘critical citizens’. Subsequent studies have understood this phenomenon, with perhaps an excess of alliteration, as ‘disaffected’, ‘dissatisfied’, or ‘disenchanted’ democrats. Each of these accounts, however, framed the central issue in terms of individual citizens. Reframing the phenomenon to understand how social-psychological orientations relate to the broader environmental context set by the news media and regime performance provides a more comprehensive account.

Building upon this foundation, this book updates the evidence by analyzing trends in citizens’ attitudes and orientations towards the nation-state, regime and authorities within established democracies, comparing the United States and Western Europe. Support for the political system continues to be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon ranging from the most generalized feelings of attachment and belonging to a nation-state, through confidence and trust in the regime and its institutions, down to specific approval of particular authorities and leaders. Trends over time are
established using survey indicators to relate this study to the broader research literature and to clear away some of the most pervasive myths. After providing a general overview of a wide range of indicators of system support, the book then focuses upon comparing disparities worldwide in the democratic deficit, understood to combine the components of values and judgments.

Chapter 3 outlines the technical detail about this study, including the sources of evidence, the comparative framework, the methods of multilevel analysis, and the classification of regimes used throughout the study. The empirical foundation for the body of work comparing attitudes towards democracy was established by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s The Civic Culture.26 Previously only a few other cross-national attitudinal surveys had ever been deployed, notably William Buchanan and Hadley Cantri’s 9-country How Nations See Each Other (1953), sponsored by UNESCO, sociological surveys of social stratification, and USIA surveys of attitudes towards international affairs.27 The path-breaking civic culture survey, conducted in 1959/60, laid the groundwork for a long series of cross-national public opinion surveys. The series of American National Election Surveys are commonly regarded as canonical, not least because they now facilitate analysis of more than a half-century of public opinion trends in the United States. The geographic scope of cross-national surveys grew considerably in the early-1980s and 1990s to facilitate comparison of citizens’ political and social attitudes in a wide range of states worldwide. 28 This includes the Euro-barometer and related EU surveys (which started in 1970), the European Election Study (1979), the European Values Survey and the World Values Survey (1981), the International Social Survey Programme (1985), the Global-Barometers (including regional surveys conducted in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Arab states, and Asia (1990 and various), the Comparative National Elections Project (1990), the European Voter and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (1995), the European Social Survey (2002), the Transatlantic Trends survey (2002), the Pew Global Attitudes project (2002), World Public Opinion, and the Gallup World Poll (2005). Numerous survey datasets are also available for detailed case-studies of trends in public opinion within particular countries, including the extensive range of academic national election studies, general social surveys, and commercial public opinion polls.

Unfortunately despite the wealth of cross-national and time series survey evidence now available, much popular discourse continues to be based upon flimsy claims and piece-meal anecdotes. Many arguments rest upon real changes in citizen behavior, which have indeed occurred, where commentators immediately speculate about the motivations which lie behind these developments, rather than looking directly at public opinion. Some academic research, as well, exaggerates any selective evidence of ‘crisis’, in the fashionable attempt to be ‘policy-relevant’, while neglecting contrary indicators. Empirical analysis often rests unreflectively upon out-dated normative foundations. Scholars are often imprisoned by theoretical roots which can be traced back to the textbook conventions established during the 1950s, when Anglo-American democracies were once regarded as the paradigm for the world. This study draws upon the rich resources of the World Values Survey, especially the fifth wave conducted in 2005-7 and covering more than fifty societies. Until recently, more systematic research usually relied upon standard regression models which combine individual and macro-level variables, but it is now widely recognized that these can produce misleading results, particularly by exaggerating the statistical significance of any contextual effects.29 Hence multilevel regression models are utilized for this study, as the most appropriate technique for analyzing both individual (survey) and aggregate (national) data. At the same time, the analysis has the advantage that the interpretation of the results remains similar to any standard OLS regression models, depending upon the strength and significance of the coefficients.

Part II: Symptoms
To establish the general symptoms, and to clear away some pervasive myths and accumulated brushwood, Part II analyzes longitudinal trends and cross-national patterns in multiple indicators of system support. Using the expanded version of the conventional Eastonian conceptual framework, the study examines generalized support for the national community, approval of democratic regimes and rejection of autocratic principles, evaluations of democratic performance, confidence in public sector institutions, and approval of incumbent authorities.

Chapter 4 focuses on comparing system support in a range of established democracies. The U.S. analysis draws upon survey evidence in from the American National Election Study (ANES), which has measured trust in politicians and government since 1958, and from the American General Social Survey (GSS), which has monitored confidence in the leaders of public and private sector institutions since the early-1970s. The Euro-Barometer provides comparable time-series indicators for EU member states. The results challenge the claim that established democracies have experienced a rising tidal wave of political disillusionment or growing disaffection with government during the third wave era; instead confidence in public sector institutions ebbs and flows during these decades. Neighboring European Union member states, sharing relatively similar post-industrial economies, modern societies, and democratic institutions, display persistent and enduring contrasts in their political cultures, rather than any convergence. Even in the United States – where perhaps most concern has been expressed recently about the breakdown of civil discourse blamed on growing political cynicism, extreme ideological polarization, and ‘tea-party’ confrontations with elected representatives – in fact support for government institutions and leaders has both risen and fallen over time in recent decades. Far from confidence in political institutions being all of one piece, Americans differentiate among the major branches of the federal government. The standard interpretation of ever-growing public disenchantment with politics and government in established democracies is over-simple and misleading, requiring significant revision.

Chapter 5 broadens the comparison by analyzing cross-national patterns of system support in more than fifty countries around the world. Most comparative survey analysis of trends in public opinion has focused upon the United States and Western Europe, in part because some of the longest time-series evidence is available in these societies. Today, however, it is possible to analyze survey evidence of contemporary attitudes towards politics and government in many global regions, including around fifty societies covering a wide range of developing societies and third-wave democracies. The evidence presented in this chapter, derived from the World Values Survey, compares indicators of system support ranging from the specific to the most diffuse, including confidence in public sector institutions, evaluations of democratic performance, support for democracy and rejection of autocratic forms of government, the saliency of democratic values, and feelings of nationalism.

Chapter 6 expands upon this foundation by documenting the time-series evidence available in eleven nations contained in the five successive waves of the World Values Survey conducted since the early-1980s. These cases include several countries which have experienced regime change during this period – including South Africa, South Korea, and Argentina - providing ‘before’ and ‘after’ natural experiments to monitor the impact of regime change and democratization on system support. This chapter also operationalizes the notion of the democratic deficit – and thus highlights the disparities which exist between democratic aspirations and democratic satisfaction – a process which allows us to document the size and distribution of this phenomenon across and within countries around the world.

Part III: Diagnosis
Building upon this foundation, the third part of the book diagnoses the causes of the democratic deficit. Chapter 7 examines the role of culture as the main demand-side explanation of this phenomenon. Modernization theories suggest that citizens’ orientations towards democratic governance have evolved over time, with rising aspirations fuelled by social structural changes in the spread of education in post-industrial societies, and thus citizen’s cognitive and civic skills, as well as in terms of their cultural values and orientations towards authority. These developments are believed to have occurred in response to long-term processes of societal modernization, human development, and generational change. Even if the state does not alter, in this perspective, cultural accounts contend that citizens have evolved in their social psychological orientations, becoming more informed, less deferential, and more demanding in their expectations about the democratic performance of government. If correct, then strong links should be evident at individual level between democratic orientations and the distribution of educational skills, as well as with the endorsement of post-material and self-expression values. Moreover at macro-level, democratic aspirations and satisfaction should be predictable by levels of societal modernization, using aggregate indicators of economic and human development. Alternative theories of social capital, associated with the seminal work of Robert Putnam, emphasize the importance of generalized interpersonal trust and associational networks on trust in government. If social capital accounts are right, then patterns of social trust and associational activism should help to account for the democratic deficit.

Chapter 8 focuses on understanding knowledge about democracy. The general public’s judgment can be based on a rational understanding of democracy, compared against standard ideas of liberal democracy. Alternatively, as with many other complex issues, such as rates of crime, the degree of global warming, or the size of the federal deficit, awareness about democracy may be incoherent, partial, biased, inflated, shallow, or factually erroneous. The book seeks to establish citizen’s knowledge and beliefs about democracy, as well as understanding their values and judgments. Awareness about how liberal democracy works is expected to be influenced by the historical political traditions within each state, as well as by access to the independent news media, and by levels of literacy and formal education. A battery of survey items concerning the essential characteristics of democracy are analyzed to see whether a common meaning of this concept is shared in different cultural regions. Evidence is derived from the 5th wave of the World Values Survey (2005-7) in more than fifty societies worldwide. Enlightened knowledge about democracy is defined in this book by the capacity to identify accurately a few of the basic procedures and principles, or rules of the game, which characterize liberal democracies. Democracy is an abstract and complex idea, and the meaning continues to be contested among experts. Even ill-informed public perceptions are meaningful for those holding these beliefs, providing the social construction of reality. But citizens need to demonstrate at least some minimal cognitive awareness about the basic procedural characteristics and core institutions of liberal democracy if they are to make rational and enlightened judgments about both the quality of democratic performance and the importance of democracy as the ideal regime for governing their own country. The evidence confirms that knowledge about the essential characteristics of liberal democracy is greatest in states with the longest historical experience of this form of governance, as well as being strengthened by education and access to the independent media. In younger democracies, however, contemporary public opinion lags behind processes of regime change.

Chapter 9 examines the influence of the coverage provided by the news media in shaping public perceptions of politics and government. Theories of media framing suggest that public evaluations of democratic performance are often influenced by journalism. In particular, excessively negative news, and in particular extensive coverage of sexual scandals and financial corruption, are both widely believed to tarnish the reputation of the legislative, executive or judicial branches of government, leading to broader disillusionment with how democracy works. Despite the popular appeal of this
account, little cross-national evidence has demonstrated a systematic connection between news media coverage of scandals and corruption and subsequent levels of trust and confidence in government or satisfaction with democracy. Evidence is unavailable to examine media coverage in all the countries under comparison, but detailed case-studies can be analyzed in two established democracies with similar cultural roots but with different types of media environments and political systems—namely Britain and the United States. This chapter therefore uses longitudinal evidence, derived from annual content analysis of the media coverage of political scandals in recent decades, compared against public opinion trends in institutional confidence and satisfaction with democratic performance in these countries.

Chapter 10 turns to supply-side explanations emphasizing how satisfaction with democracy responds to the process and policy performance of governments, and to the institutional structure of regimes. Process accounts assume that citizens are capable of making informed and rational assessments about whether regimes meet standards of transparency, accountability, effectiveness, social justice, and participation. Alternative theories suggest that democratic satisfaction is a product of the government’s record and public policy performance, especially the government’s management of bread-and-butter economic issues, including growth, jobs, and prices. Output performance is not confined to the economy, however, since the government’s foreign policy record is also thought to be important, including how leaders handle an international crisis or the outbreak of armed conflict. Rally-round-the-flag effects, with a temporary burst of government popularity, are commonly registered in opinion polls following the outbreak of crisis or major wars. The shock of 9/11, for example, generated a sharp but short-lived spike in American confidence in the executive and Congress. Moreover beyond policy output and outcomes, process accounts suggest that perceptions of procedural fairness in how decision-making process work also shapes how much people are willing to trust the authorities, including the importance of issues of social justice and welfare. Theorists emphasize that the traditional scope and autonomy of the modern states has diminished due to processes of globalization, privatization, and deregulation. Moreover policy problems are thought to have become increasingly complex, while issue publics have simultaneously become more fragmented. For these reasons, policy performance may have gradually fallen over time.

In addition, another related strand of the research literature is provided by institutional theories which emphasize how power-sharing democratic regimes influence democratic satisfaction. This thesis suggests that the pattern of winners and losers from the political system is structured by the constitutional arrangements, meaning the core institutions of state and the rules of the game, both written and unwritten. Some citizens win, others lose. Some parties and groups are mobilized into power, others are mobilized out. Over a long period of time, this accumulated experience can be expected to shape general orientations towards the political regime. At the simplest level, if citizens feel that the rules of the game allow the party they endorse to be elected to power, they are more likely to feel that representative institutions are responsive to their needs, so that they can trust the political system. On the other hand, if they feel that the party they prefer persistently loses, over successive elections, they are more likely to feel that their voice is excluded from the decision-making process, producing generalized dissatisfaction with political institutions. Over time, where constitutional arrangements succeed in channeling popular demands into government outcomes, then we would expect this to be reflected in diffuse support for the political process. The structure of power-sharing and power-concentrating democratic institutions can be compared – along with levels of institutional confidence among partisan winners and losers within each context.

Part IV: Prognosis
Chapter 11 identifies the consequences of this phenomenon. What is the impact of any democratic deficit – and why does this matter – including for political activism, for the capacity of governments to ensure compliant behavior and rule of law, and for processes of democratization?

The broadest consensus among scholars concerns the implications for citizen activism at micro-level. It is widely assumed that more critical evaluations of democratic governance will deter conventional forms of political participation and civic engagement. Ever since Almond and Verba, an extensive body of evidence has examined how social psychological attitudes influence why and how citizens choose to engage in public affairs.42 Hence positive feelings of political trust, internal efficacy, and institutional confidence in parties, legislatures and the government are widely assumed to strengthen conventional activism such as voting participation, party membership, and belonging to voluntary associations. Conversely, indicators such as falling voter turnout and declining party membership in established European democracies are commonly regarded as signs of citizen disenchantment or cynicism about politics.43 Moreover political disaffection is commonly expected to encourage protest politics, if lack of trust in the democratic process fosters unconventional activism, support for anti-state radical movements, and even occasional outbreaks of radical violence seeking to challenge state authorities.44

Yet in fact the actual evidence linking democratic orientations with patterns of political activism is far from straightforward; disenchantment with the performance of democracy may depress conventional forms of participation, but alternatively it may also mobilize people, for example to support reform movements.45 In Latin America, for example, Booth and Seligson report that citizens who are unhappy with their government’s performance do not drop out of politics or resort to protest politics. Rather, disaffected citizens in Latin America participate at high rates in conventional and alternative political arenas.46 There may also be implications for compliant behavior, including whether citizens voluntarily obey the law and respect government decisions, for example political trust has been found to encourage the willingness of citizens to pay taxes.47 Where they do, this should strengthen the capacity of the state and thus processes of rule of law.

Lastly this chapter also examines the significant consequences arising from this phenomenon for the broader processes of democratization and legitimacy. The concept of ‘regime legitimacy’ can be best understood, in Seymour Martin Lipset words, as "the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate and proper ones for the society."48 In countries which have recently transitioned from autocracy, in particular, any deep and enduring democratic deficit is often thought to undermine processes of regime consolidation; the new rulers cannot count on institutional inertia or the bonds of habitual support to maintain a deep reservoir of popular legitimacy and to deter elite challenges. The third wave of democratization represents a remarkable historical era. During the late twentieth century, human rights strengthened in all parts of the globe. Freedom House estimate that the number of liberal democracies doubled from the early-1970s until 2000.49 In the last decade, however, progress slowed to a sluggish and uncertain pace.50 Electoral democracies where progress once appeared promising – such as Kenya, Honduras, Afghanistan, Thailand, and Fiji - have been undermined and destabilized by diverse events, whether inconclusive or disputed election results, partisan strife, recurrent corruption scandals, internal conflicts, over-powerful executives, or coups d’états.51 Freedom House’s 2009 survey of democracy around the world noted further erosion: “According to the survey’s findings, 2009 marked the fourth consecutive year in which global freedom suffered a decline—the longest consecutive period of setbacks for freedom in the nearly 40-year history of the report. These declines were most pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa, although they also occurred in most other regions of the world. Furthermore, the erosion in freedom took place during a year marked by intensified repression against human rights
defenders and democracy activists by many of the world’s most powerful authoritarian regimes, including Russia and China.” The muscular democracy promotion initiatives advocated by the Bush administration, notably attempts at state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan, encouraged an active push-back among oil-rich emerging economies, including Russia, Venezuela, and China. Some observers suggest that a major ‘reverse’ wave or ‘democratic recession’ is underway. Moreover Huntington emphasized a cyclical historical pattern, noting that two previous long waves of democratization were followed by regressive eras. In marked contrast to the heady revolutions which occurred with one autocracy after another rapidly toppling around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, multiple challenges continue to limit further dramatic global advances in democratization. Accordingly this chapter evaluates how far cultural orientations provide insights into the underlying processes leading towards the advance and breakdown of democratic governance.

Finally the conclusion in Chapter 12 summarizes the major findings and considers their implications for revising theories about the legitimacy and stability of democratic regimes, and for the broader public policy agenda.
Figure 1.1: General model of democratic deficits

**DEMAND-SIDE:** Rising public aspirations for democracy, due to growing cognitive and civic skills and evolving self-expression values

**INTERMEDIARY:** Negative coverage of government and public affairs by the news media

**SUPPLY-SIDE:** Failure of democratic or policy performance of the state to match public expectations.

**DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT:** Disparities between the perceived democratic performance and public aspirations

**CONSEQUENCES:** For political activism, compliance with government, and democratization


