**Understanding the Democratic Deficit:
Linking Structures of Democracy to the Construction of the Citizen**

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the conceptual components of quantitative democratic health assessments, with a focus placed on understanding low levels of political engagement. It argues that existing measures of democratic health tend to rely on two broad dimensions of measurement – the functioning of democratic institutions, and the political attitudes and behaviours of individual citizens. While these are shown to be indispensable, it is also maintained that the structural relationships connecting institutions and individuals together must be examined if we are to make sense of the democratic deficit. The decision to disengage from politics is not made in a vacuum; rather, citizens are constructed through their concrete interactions with the political sphere. By taking the structural openness of a political system into account, it is argued that democracy researchers will come closer to understanding the formative influences underlying mass, cross-cultural political disengagement.

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1. Introduction: Two Views of the Democratic Deficit

Democracy is in trouble, and has been for some time. In Canada, the Spicer Commission (1991) found widespread citizen dissatisfaction with the way democracy works, and the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Finance (Lortie, 1991) found that many Canadians believe their political institutions to be unresponsive to their views and interests. Public opinion data regularly shows a citizenry that places little confidence in politicians, and which feels dissatisfied with the functioning of its democratic institutions (Howe and Northrup, 2000; Pammett and Leduc, 2003). “In recent years, discontent with the state of Canada’s democracy as a whole has permeated published reports, magazines, books and newspapers” (CIW, 2010, p. 21). Voter turnout has been declining steadily (Cutler and Mathews, 2005; Blais and Lowen, 2009), and as time goes by, we are witnessing ever greater levels of disengagement from the political sphere.

This democratic malaise is not limited to Canada - similar findings have been reported in other countries, from the United States, to Finland, to the United Kingdom (Wattenberg 2007; Wass 2007; Clarke et al. 2004). Many books have been written on the subject (including Ben Berger’s *Attention Deficit Democracy* (2011) and Russell Dalton’s *The Good Citizen* (2007)), just as many studies have been spurred on by the recognition of a cross-cultural democratic slump that only seems to be increasing in potency (such as *The Everyday Democracy Index* and the *UK Audit of Political Engagement*). It is not a contested claim to state that most Western, liberal democracies are experiencing widespread citizen disengagement from democratic processes and institutions, whether cognitively, as citizens become less interested in, less knowledgeable about, and less inspired by, the political processes that govern their lives, or

whether physically, as citizens cease to turn up to the polls, turn away from political parties, and retreat into their atomistic bubbles of individual living.

This decline in democratic engagement will be, from here on out, referred to as a democratic deficit, although the use of the term here is a contested one. The democratic deficit is often conceptualized as existing on behalf of the public, meaning that, because a democracy requires an attentive and engaged public to deliberate and debate the issues, and because citizens are generally not living up to this standard, we are experiencing a deficit - citizens are not providing the levels of engagement that a healthy democracy requires. Berger best represents this view, which he discusses at length in *Attention Deficit Democracy* (2011). But an alternate definition has the potential to shift the locus of responsibility from citizens to the governments they interact with. The democratic deficit could just as easily represent the gap between what citizens believe their political system should be ideally and what it is in actuality. This shifts the blame for such a deficit from the public to the political reality they confront daily, drawing attention to the ways governments fall short when dealing with their citizens, rather than the ways citizens fall short when dealing with their governments.

As previous research has shown (Bastedo et. al, 2011; Skidmore and Bound, 2008), citizens do not have any trouble understanding what democracy means as an ideal, nor do they disagree with its central tenets. Rather, I argue their disengagement arises from the incongruity between what they have been promised and what they have experienced. It is not simply that disengaged citizens are lazy, cynical, dumb or apathetic, as a primary condition. On the contrary, among those who turn out to vote the least (youth) education levels and non-traditional forms of political activism are on the rise (Dalton, 2007). The fact that citizens are disengaging from

formal politics in such large numbers, across such a wide range of cultural circumstances, implies that they are reacting to a similar set of structural conditions. Rather than view the democratic deficit as the public's inability or unwillingness to get involved in politics, here the term will be used to describe the gap between the public's expectations for democracy and their lived experiences of it. It is this second gap which gives rise to the first – people disengage, not because of something defective within them internally, but because they aren't receiving the satisfaction that democratic participation has promised to bring.

Several democratic health assessments will be reviewed in the following thesis, and of these, at least four identify the democratic deficit as a central research question. *The Everyday Democracy Index* begins its Executive Summary with the following paragraph:

“Over the last few years there has been much discussion of the ‘democratic deficit’ in European countries. Many Europeans share a collective disappointment with democratic *institutions* and are pessimistic about the future of society as a whole. They are less likely to vote, join political parties, or trust their elected representatives than they were 30 years ago. On the other hand, their commitment to democratic *values* and their desire to shape the decisions that affect their lives – to be ‘authors of their own scripts’ – has never been stronger” (Skidmore and Bound, 2008).

These themes persist throughout, as the authors attempt to dissect why some countries experience greater engagement deficits than others. *The UK Audit of Political Engagement 7 (2010)* has a similar focus. The report “breaks the public down into eight distinct groups based on what we know of their political knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and level and nature of engagement. It then seeks to identify where electoral turnout might be boosted” (Hansard Society, 2010, p. 2). The *Canadian Index of Wellbeing: Democratic Engagement* likewise focuses on levels of public engagement as one of its three main branches, asking about “citizen

participation in political activities, expression of political views, and attention to developing political knowledge” (CIW, 2008, p. 17). Finally, *Samara’s Democracy Index* (which will dominate the latter half of this work), explicitly places the democratic deficit at its center. Its preliminary focus group research spoke to citizens who self-identified as disengaged, asking why they had disengaged from politics and what could motivate them to return (Bastedo et. al., 2011). But as I will show, existing democracy assessments, while partially providing the means to explain our current democratic deficit, also leave much to be desired.

Explanations of the democratic deficit have typically clustered around a few key themes, most of which tie into generational value shifts of one kind or another. Neil Nevitte (1996) discussed the “decline of deference,” arguing that citizens today are less deferential to authority than their parents may have been, and are less likely to accept decisions made by elites without their input. Russell Dalton (2007) argued that the model of the “good citizen” has changed over time. Where once the good citizen was dutiful, performing their civic duties and fulfilling their civic responsibilities as a matter of principle, the new model of a good citizen is one that is actualizing, attempting to find their own values and express them through direct political action, such as protesting or boycotts. Robert Putnam (2000) popularized the concept of social capital, arguing that citizens are less likely to participate in politics because they are less likely to participate in social organizations of any kind, and therefore, as citizens turn from social pursuits to individualistic endeavors, politics becomes something foreign to them.

Some of the quantitative studies reviewed in the following paper have come to similar conclusions. For example, the *Everyday Democracy Index* concluded that, in order to increase formal democratic participation, political communities should increase the informal democracies

of everyday life (2008, p.127), mirroring Putnam's argument that, by increasing social capital and participation within empowering social groups, formal democracy will be enriched as well. The *UK Audit of Political Engagement* views the re-engagement of the citizenry as, essentially, a persuasive media campaign. Its authors "see the process of engagement as a form of journey starting with awareness, then interest, through trial and acceptance to repeated use, then loyalty and finally advocacy or recommendation to others" (Hansard Society, 2009, p. 50).

These explanations are valuable and informative, but they also focus on the citizen as the primary cause of the democratic deficit. They ask, what happened to the public? They used to be so interested in politics, they used to come out and vote all the time, but now they don't. Why? What changed in them? And more importantly, how can we change them back? There is nothing wrong with this perspective, it is necessary, but it must also be complemented by its opposite. Why have political systems stagnated in their structure, just as citizens and technologies evolved around them? If citizens have become more individualistic, more self-actualizing, more post-materialist, and perhaps even more cynical, why have democratic governments not adapted? Where citizens demand more participation and interaction with the processes of government deliberation (Graham and Phillips, 1997; Mendelsohn and Parkin, 2001), how have governments responded? Yes, citizens have changed, but how have governments changed along with them?

In order to more fully address both views of the deficit, rather than solely the first, I argue that future assessments should maintain their focus on institutional functioning and the individual attitudes and behaviours of the citizen (which together make up the large majority of survey indicators that currently exist), but also add another dimension. How do governments attempt to open up in a structurally inclusive and systematic fashion, allowing the input of *all*

citizens to be considering equally in decision-making between elections? This means focusing on how political systems create and maintain horizontal, structural openings to the public, the kind of openings that allow for direct, extra-electoral participation by individuals. While we have thus far sought to understand the democratic deficit by looking at the citizenry in isolation, we cannot make sense of their actions without also understanding the structures they must interact *with*, as the form of these structures and their modes of participation influences the subsequent behaviours and attitudes of those dealing with them.

In essence, my argument is that existing assessments of democratic health focus too heavily on *representative* democracy as an ideal structure for political decision-making, allowing more participatory models to go unexplored. The question of democratic structure has direct consequences for understanding the democratic deficit and mass political disengagement, due to the *phenomenological distance* that can be produced by highly mediated forms of political participation. Within a representative democracy, citizens that try to exert their political will must do so through mediated channels, whether that means contacting a representative to act on their behalf, producing a media campaign to attract the attention of policy makers, or engaging in social activism in order to break into mainstream political consciousness. The effects of their activities remain distant from them, and although their political opinions may have been taken into consideration during deliberation, without being able to take part in a more direct sense, they may never know that this was the case. In a situation where routes to political participation are long and winding, even if policy outcomes correlate with actual public opinion, citizens will feel the distance. They will watch the input signals they send out relayed to the end of their sight, until they disappear on the horizon, their effects forgotten.

This psychological dimension is central to my thesis. Citizens that do not *feel*, in a very direct and immediate sense, that their attempts to influence the political sphere are efficacious will be conditioned over time to disengage from it as a natural response to such conditions. Although a political system may be democratic in the sense that it attempts to respond to the preferences of the public, and may in fact do so effectively, the way in which it connects citizens to central decision-making processes is of the utmost importance to the psychological construction of the citizen. I would even go so far as to say that the structure of this process is more important to democratic engagement than any actual policy outcomes. Where governments have opened themselves up, allowing more direct forms of participation such as referendums, citizen initiatives, or even direct democracy of one form or another, citizens will *feel* closer to the functioning of their political system (assuming this is done in a sincere and meaningful way), because that system becomes something tangible to them, something lived and experiential. Where governments remain sealed, relegating the citizen to the role of consumer, receiver and spectator, then we should not be surprised to find a lack of engagement – this is precisely what such a structure demands. Therefore, assessments and indexes must go beyond electoral participation and to ask about the total experience of being a citizen, including the routes, channels and opportunities available to those seeking direct interactions with government deliberation.

The following thesis proceeds in three parts. The first discusses democracy as it has traditionally been measured, setting the stage for the following two sections. It begins with a brief definition of democracy, and then turns to civil liberties and political rights, the rule of law and absence of corruption, the conflicted role of political representatives, the internal democracy

of political parties, and the democratic functions of the news media. In each of these sections, example indicators will be used to help show how the concepts have been measured in existing research. The indicators come from the following sources:

- Freedom in the World 2011
- Nations in Transit 2012
- Corruption Perceptions Index 2011
- The Handbook for European Union Election Observation
- The Electoral Democracy Index
- The Index of Electoral Malpractice
- The UK Audit of Political Engagement
- The Institute for Research on Public Policy
- The Press Freedom Index
- The Media Sustainability Index

It should be noted that the indicators included are there to serve as examples of the underlying concepts, not to be an exhaustive enumeration of all possible indicators. The purpose of this chapter is primarily to discuss the normative role of the citizen within the traditional, representative democracy, and to delineate the topics that will be dealt with moving forward.

The second section turns to the issue of democratic structure. Here I argue that we should view democracy as a continuum, one that goes from representative to participatory to deliberative democracy, with each type of structure including the public in different ways. A representative democracy implies a model of the citizen as a consumer of politics, who is receptive and participates primarily through elections. As we move across the continuum from representative to deliberative structures of democracy, the role that the public plays becomes more direct. Their presence within the process of policy production increases and more is demanded of them by political institutions. These different structures are not neutral. Instead, they have effects on the citizenry, influencing how citizens view themselves in relation to their

governments, and how best they see fit to exert their political will. This section also provides some potential routes for researchers seeking to assess the openness of such structures. The concept of *structural openness* refers to an institution's horizontal openings to the public, the kind that attempt to pull the public into deliberative processing, and which promote extra-electoral forms of participation.

Finally, the third chapter turns to the question of the public itself, showing that:

- 1) Citizens have changed – they now desire a more participatory role in deliberation processes than in the past, and they are less satisfied with traditional democratic institutions and actors;
- 2) Existing attempts to measure citizen engagement have focused narrowly on the citizen's themselves (ie. knowledge, interest, demographics) without asking about the rationales behind their choices;
- 3) Existing measures of participation focus almost exclusively on electoral, social forms of participation at the expense of more direct, individualized, extra-electoral forms; and finally
- 4) Research shows that direct participation experiences may serve to increase a citizen's levels of political information and mobilization.

Taken together, this chapter shows that democratic disengagement cannot be understood outside of its political context. Citizens that demand a more participatory role, and who have become disenchanted with the electoral contest, may be disengaging as a rational choice. If the structure of the representative democracy no longer fits with the modern, actualizing citizen and their preferred forms of participation, then assuming it as a base premise obscures the causal role it plays in the formation of individual-level political attitudes, in particular, disengagement.

To conclude this introductory chapter, there are two possible sources for democratic deficit we are now witnessing. The first is what democratic assessments have looked at thus far – citizens themselves. Political disengagement might occur because citizens are less deferential to authority than they have been in the past, because their values and interests are changing,

because they have withdrawn from social life, because they do not feel like government is the place to solve their problems, because they are apathetic, cynical, or lazy, or because they simply have better things to do. But there is also another potential source – governments themselves. Political disengagement might occur because governments exclude the public from participation within its functioning, and because they do not offer citizens something meaningful to engage *with*. Citizens may feel like political outsiders because they objectively *are* outsiders of the political system, interacting with a sealed process of deliberation through mediation and proxy rather than actually taking part in a personally meaningful way. Ignoring the types of participation experiences that are offered to citizens by government ignores an important and determining factor in both the construction of the citizen and the fostering of mass political disengagement.

While the democratic deficit can be viewed, on the one hand, as a changing citizenry that is becoming increasingly distant from formal politics for its own internal reasons, on the other hand, it could just as easily represent a political structure that refuses to evolve along with the citizens it governs, and so pushes them away through its rigidity. Assessments of democratic health have thus far favoured the first view at the expense of the second, but by adding indicators that measure opportunities for direct, extra-electoral political participation (ie. structural openness), I argue that democracy researchers can come closer to understanding political disengagement in all of its facets.

2. Traditional Democracy

Before getting too deep into a discussion of democratic institutions and their empirical indicators, it is important to understand exactly what we are talking about. Democracy as a concept goes back thousands of years, countless books have been written on the subject, and there is no lack of conceptual debate about what the term means. But here, in order to simplify a complex matter and get on with the issues at hand, allow me to provide a distilled definition which strips the concept to its bare essentials.

Democracy can first be broken down into two main forms of existence: the institutional and the ideological. As David Beetham states:

“As an ideal, [democracy] expresses two very simple principles: first, that the members of any group or association should have the determining influence and control over its rules and policies, through their participation in deliberations about the common interest; second, that in doing so they should treat each other, and be treated, as equals...At the level of the modern state these democratic principles are only realized through a complex set of institutions and practices” (Beetham, 2006).

All societies require institutions of one form or another to allow the expression of political power and to chart the course for collective action, but it is the ideologies which that infused their initial design, and which push forward new modifications and alterations, that serve as their primary distinguishing characteristics. That is to say, it is the ideological dimension of democracy that truly separates it from other political systems. Its institutions are simply the attempts made to build that idea into objective reality, to pull it out of the mind and put it in practice. To borrow from Plato, we could say that political institutions are like the imperfect copies of a universal Form, built with its image in mind, but always only approximating it to

some degree, and never instantiating it perfectly. In order to assess the health of a democracy, we hold our democratic institutions up to the perfect ideal democracy, in order to see how well we have done in giving it life.

In Beetham's definition we see the two main ideological cores of democracy. First, "that the members of any group or association should have the determining influence and control over its rules and policies," meaning that those who are subject to the decisions of the group are also co-participants in the production of those decision. This we can call *liberty*, or freedom, and it shall be discussed in more detail shortly. The second core of democracy is *equality*, such that members of a co-determining political community "should treat each other, and be treated, as equals." The end goal of democracy is therefore the creation and maintenance of a society made up of citizens who are both 1) free to exert their will socially, and 2) whose levels of influence are relatively equal to one another. Stated more succinctly, Robert Dahl (1971) has defined the ideal of democracy as the "egalitarian distribution of power over collective decision-making among citizens" (as cited in Knutsen, 2010, p.112).

These ideals can only be given life through the institutions designed to produce such an outcome. Therefore traditional measures of democratic health have focused largely on institutional functioning to ensure that the methods we use to secure democracy actually produce the desired results. These institutions fall mainly into five categories: the law, elections, representatives, political parties, and the news media. A sixth category can be added, which although not strictly institutional in nature, is none the less essential to the ideal of democracy – the public (which will be dealt with in the final chapter). Together these six categories reflect most of the indicators that make up existing assessments of democratic health. That is not to say

that this is an exhaustive treatment of *all* such survey indicators, nor does the following touch on *all* relevant institutions (eg. courts are left out). Rather, the purpose of the following chapter is to provide an overview of the basic, representative democracy, while allowing room for a philosophical discussion on the normative role of citizens within its structure.

2.1 The Law

To begin, basic political rights and freedoms ensure that all citizens are autonomous and powerful to some degree, which is a necessary precondition for any democratic society. Their origins stem, in a philosophical sense, from the concepts of property rights and individual liberty developed by Enlightenment thinkers. Whereas animals, livestock, land, material products, ideas, and all forms of matter and non-matter can be owned, human beings cannot. The physical bodies of each citizen, the contents of their minds, and the actions they take part in can be thought of as forms of property which cannot be taken away (unless they are infringing on the rights of others).

“To properly understand political power and trace its origins, we must consider the state that all people are in naturally. That is a state of perfect freedom of acting and disposing of their own possessions and persons as they think fit within the bounds of the law of nature. People in this state do not have to ask permission to act or depend on the will of others to arrange matters on their behalf... It is evident that all human beings – as creatures belonging to the same species and rank and born indiscriminately with all the same natural advantages and faculties – are equal amongst themselves” (Locke, 1689).

According to the liberal philosophies of thinkers such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, James Madison, and John Stuart Mill (as well as many others), this form of autonomy or self-ownership is a good in itself that is valued without reference to underlying principles. Rather, it

is simply an initial claim of value, stating that there is something about human beings that must be respected in itself and for itself. This proclamation of the inherent value of human freedom is the most basic first principle of democracy, even though historically it has not always been put into practice. Because we are all free in our “natural state,” political systems that dominate rather than give precedence to liberty are considered illegitimate.

This principle is present in the founding documents of most modern, democratic states and its initialization often precedes further legal development. Two concepts arise from its recognition: civil liberties and political rights. The former is a negative version of freedom (the absence of an oppressive force), whereas the latter is positive (the power to act). Civil liberties ensure freedom of the individual, and then political rights extend this autonomy into the public/social sphere. *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) provides an example of how civil liberties and political rights have been coded into law. It includes civil liberties such as the freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. In terms of political rights it states that “every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein” (s3, 1982). While other democratic countries may have coded these concepts differently, at their root is the recognition of a common liberty and equality for all.

It is not hard to see how the legal codification and enforcement of civil liberties contributes to a democratic political community. In fact, their recognition is so firmly embedded within the concept of democracy that it is hard to speak about it without referring to them. To remove civil liberties from a nation would almost immediately render it undemocratic – some

individuals would be subjugated or dominated by others, would not be able to speak their minds, would not be able to associate with whom they please, and so on. This immediately renders an egalitarian distribution of political power impossible. Similarly, without political rights, citizens may be autonomous in matters relating to their direct person, but their wills are not extended into the larger social environment they take part in, and the forces that shape it. While exclusion from these matters is not a limitation of personal freedom in the same way as, say, arbitrary detention is, political decision-making still constructs the boundaries and structures that shape social life, and so it also helps construct the kinds of lives that people will live. By extending a form of social power to every person within the political community, democracy attempts to secure individual liberty through social agency.

John Locke argued for individual liberty as an intrinsic good by referring to the state of nature, but others have made arguments from the perspective of individual wellbeing. As Hannah Arendt (1963) put it:

“The basic assumption of the ward system, whether Jefferson knew it or not, was that no one could be happy without his share in public happiness, that no one could be called free without his experience in public freedom, and that no one could be called either happy or free without participating, and having a share, in public power” (as cited in Berger, 2011, p.52).

While I am personally inclined to agree with her, others (such as Alexis de Tocqueville) have made arguments stemming from more instrumental perspectives, wherein individual liberty is seen as a good due to its capacity for producing or bringing about other things, such a balance between individual and collective interests (Berger, 2001, p.85). Whether as an intrinsic or instrumental good, individual liberty rests at the core of democracy, and the recognition of civil liberties and political rights, both legally and in practice, forms the base of any democratic state.

Some relevant example indicators come from *Freedom in the World 2011* (we'll refer to it as FHI – The Freedom House Index), an annual report produced by Freedom House whose purpose is to compare countries on a scale of political freedom. Although this index does not measure democracy per se, at least in the sense that it excludes many relevant factors and focuses almost exclusively on a few key variables relating to law, order and elections, it does reflect a common solution to the problem of measuring something as complex as democracy through empirical means. Many of its indicators are similar to those of The Economist Intelligence Unit's *Democracy Index*, or the World Bank's *Worldwide Governance Indicators*. Indexes such as these focus on making international comparisons between countries with vastly differing political systems, levels of economic development, etc., and therefore, before looking at higher-level requirements for democracy such as a thriving civic culture or a demographically representative legislature, these indexes look at the base requirements.

Table 1 – The Law: Civil Liberties and Political Rights

Freedom in the World 2011	
Civil Liberties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private? • Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination? • Is there open and free private discussion? • Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion? • Do citizens enjoy freedom of travel or choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education? • Do citizens have the right to own property and establish private businesses?
Political Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice? • Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group? • Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

Turning to the rule of law more generally, researchers can “not equate constitutional or other legal guarantees of rights with the on-the-ground fulfillment of these rights” (Freedom House, 2011). Legal rights and freedoms mean nothing if they are not acknowledged by those in power, be they government officials, politicians, police officers, or in essence, any representative of the state. Therefore, we must also assess the rule of law in a nation, in order to find out how well these legal doctrines are applied in practice. Are rights and liberties coded into foundational documents respected and upheld? Do individuals experience these rights and liberties directly, in their own lives, or do they merely appear as distant illusions?

In a broader sense, the rule of law applies to all aspects of the political system, going beyond the enforcement of basic rights and freedoms. For example, governmental corruption can come in terms of bribery, nepotism, the misappropriation of public funds, election rigging, and at its most extreme, violent military action against unarmed citizens. Rule-breaking behaviour by those in power, while not always harmful to individual liberty in a direct and obvious sense, renders the political system undemocratic and therefore impinges on the rights of citizens indirectly. For example, Médard (1996) claims that African politics is characterized by neo-patrimonialism, where real political action occurs in a “patron-client” fashion rather than formal institutions. This creates heavy imbalances of political power. Similarly, Sidel (1999) claims that the politics in the Philippines are defined by “bossism” and elections are abused. “Generally, when elites manipulate democratic practices, neglect the rule of law, and undermine ordinary citizens’ rights by corrupt practices, formal democratic institutions and rights are rendered ineffective. These examples indicate the benefit of incorporating ‘quality considerations,’ such as lack of corruption, into operationalizations of democracy” (Knutsen, 2010, p.113). Without

these conditions, political rights and freedoms do not ensure the liberty of the individual, and institutional attempts at democracy are undermined at every step by behaviour that invalidates their rules and structuring influence.

The rule of law and absence of corruption are also common indicators among researchers seeking to make inclusive, international comparisons. Inglehart and Welzel constructed the *Effective Democracy Index* (EDI) in order to overcome (what they perceived to be) a lack of quality considerations in the FHI. Their argument was that the FHI only measured legal codifications of civil liberties and political rights without analyzing how well these were enacted and enforced in practice (Knutsen, 2010, p.112). Of course, the FHI does already include such measures (eg. “Is the government free from pervasive corruption?”), but their general point remains valid despite the redundancy in their chosen indicators. Without measures of 1) corruption amongst public officials and 2) the rule of law in society more generally, there is no telling how much individual liberty is experienced by the common citizen at ground level.

In order to attain a measure of corruption, Inglehart and Welzel turned to Transparency International’s *Corruptions Perceptions Index*. The index draws on assessments and business opinion surveys carried out by a range of independent institutions. “The surveys and assessments used to compile the index include questions relating to the bribery of public officials, kickbacks in public procurement, embezzlement of public funds, and questions that probe the strength and effectiveness of public-sector anti-corruption efforts” (Transparency International, 2011, np). Although these measures focus mostly on economic corruption (Knutsen, 2010, p.116), and do not look at issues of the law in a wider scope (as the examples from the FHI do, as shown below), their indicators still represent a fairly strong operationalization of the concepts.

Table 2 – The Law: Lack of Corruption and the Rule of Law

Corruption Perceptions Index 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are public officeholders who abuse their positions prosecuted or penalized? • Are there clear procedures and accountability governing the allocation and use of public funds? • Are public funds misappropriated by ministers/public officials for private or party political purposes? • Is there a tradition of a payment of bribes to secure contracts and gain favours? • Are there adequate laws requiring financial disclosure and disallowing conflict of interest? <p>Do whistle-blowers, anti-corruption activists, investigators, and journalists enjoy legal protections that make them feel secure about reporting cases of bribery and corruption?</p>
Freedom in the World 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the government free from pervasive corruption? • Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency? • Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control? • Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?

To summarize, civil liberties, political rights, the rule of law and a lack of corruption are necessary prerequisites to democratic governance. Without a citizenry that is free to make its own decisions, free to participate in their own governance, and free from entrenched power interests bending the rules for their own benefit, no amount democracy can occur. Individual liberty stands at the core of democracy, and this is why such measures the above often used in international comparative research. Although individual liberty is not identical with democracy (it is a necessary condition but not a sufficient one), it is so closely tied with popular control over decision making that it is often asked to stand in for it as a marker.

2.2 Elections

In order to determine if an election is democratic in terms of procedure, a minimum of five features must be evaluated. It must be free and fair, it must be competitive, it must be

inclusive, the positions being elected for must be meaningful, and the allocation of seats based on the results must not produce inequalities. These requirements are an extension of democracy's attempt to give social expression to individual free will. Every person (inclusivity) must be allowed a choice (competitiveness) that is respected (free and fair), and which contributes to the governance of their community (meaningful positions) through a balanced and equitable system (allocation of seats). Note that many of these requirements tend to overlap with the political rights and freedoms discussed in the previous section. Elections are so important to traditional conceptualizations of democracy that political rights were created mainly to ensure all citizens can participate in them equally. Examples of indicators relating to the procedural quality of elections come from the FHI (which have already seen) as well as the *Handbook for European Union Election Observation* (European Commission, 2008). Further examples of election indicators discussed in this section come from the *Electoral Democracy Index* (as reference in Munck, 2009), as well as the *Index of Electoral Malpractice* (Birch, 2009).

A free and fair election is one in which voters are free from coercion in deciding their votes, and where the votes are tabulated without any tampering. The *Electoral Democracy Index* includes this feature and defines it as the right of citizens "to cast a vote free of pressures and to have that vote counted accurately" (Munck, 2009, p.55). In December of 2011, the Russian legislative elections faced controversy over this issue. Numerous reports of electoral fraud were made by competing political parties, citizen journalists, independent observers, and international organizations. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) stated that the election "did not provide the conditions for fair electoral competition," and that "the quality of the process deteriorated considerably during the count, which was characterized by frequent

procedural violations and instances of apparent manipulation, including several serious indications of ballot box stuffing” (2011, p.2). In 2007, the Kenyan elections faced similar charges: “Koki Muli, co-chairwoman of the Kenya Election Domestic Observation Forum, said she was in the room on Sunday when the election commission was presented with dozens of suspicious tally sheets — some missing signatures, others missing stamps.... In some areas, more people voted for the president than there were registered voters” (Gettleman, 2007). If an election is not “free and fair” then it cannot contribute to the democratic ideal, as the first principle of individual free will (making a choice) cannot occur. Either it will be denied directly through force, be it physical violence or something more subtle, or it will be denied procedurally, as occurs when fake votes are included or real votes are discarded. The following table provides some example indicators for determining whether or not an election was free and fair:

Table 3 – Elections: Free and Fair

Freedom in the World 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the electoral laws and framework fair? • Are the people’s political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?
Handbook for European Union Election Observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the domestic legal framework provide a sound basis for the conduct of elections in accordance with international standards, including guarantees of fundamental freedoms and political rights? • Are there verifiable instances of violence, intimidation or harassment, or the incitement of such acts? Are such incidents promptly, consistently and effectively addressed? • Are law-enforcement agencies acting in an impartial, restrained, professional and appropriate manner? • Have any candidates or their supporters been detained or arrested? Are any candidates, or persons who were likely to be candidates, in exile? • Have any candidates, party activists, political activists, civil society representatives, electoral officials, observers, media representatives or voters been the victim of election-related violence? • Have government workers, students or others been forced or instructed to participate in campaign activities in support of ruling parties or incumbents? • Are the military involved in politics?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do polling officials conduct voting efficiently, impartially and in accordance with the law? • Are appropriate steps taken to guarantee the integrity of the ballot and to prevent fraud? • Is there evidence that the integrity of the ballot has been compromised through error and/or fraud? • Is the counting of votes and recording of results honest and accurate? Is the results process undertaken in a prompt and fully transparent manner? Can the process be fully observed by party/candidate agents and by domestic or international observers?
Index of Electoral Malpractice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the electoral authorities demonstrate political independence and impartiality? • Did the counting, tabulation and reporting of results proceed in accordance with the law? • Was vote-buying observed? • Were there reports of voters being intimidated or coerced? • Were there reports of candidates or party activists being intimidated or coerced, or having their campaign activities unlawfully obstructed?

Secondly, elections must be inclusive in terms of participation. This requirement extends to both the degree of suffrage (legally and in practice), as well as the ability to run for office. Historically, almost all “democratic” countries have restricted electoral participation in some sense. Although codified rights and freedoms extend to all citizens, the definition of this group has been restricted based on race, religion, property-ownership, profession, gender, age, and so on, whereas the group of potential candidates for office has been even more restricted. Yet, within a democratic political community, any restriction, on any group, whether in terms of voting or running, must be thoroughly analyzed and defended as absolutely necessary, as all those who are governed must have a say in their governance. This democratic maxim of maximum inclusiveness should be taken literally, with few exceptions.

For example, let us think about voter age restrictions. Restricting a sixteen-year-old from the democratic process in Canada is no different than restricting women or African Americans from voting – it is a broad, stereotyped and systematic denial of a political right based solely on group membership. They are seen as “unfit” to make political decision, just as women and non-

whites used to be, ignoring intragroup differences and making a judgment based on demographic factors. Although some 15 year-olds may be more politically aware and educated than some 45 year-olds, they are almost universally denied the right to vote (perhaps this is part of the reason why youth rarely turn out to vote even once they do turn 18?). The following table provides some examples indicators for assessing the inclusivity of an election process.

Table 4 – Elections: Inclusivity

Freedom in the World 2011
Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?
Handbook for European Union Election Observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the electoral system guarantee equality of suffrage? • Are there any legal provisions which directly or indirectly discriminate against particular individuals or groups? • Is universal and non-discriminatory suffrage provided for by law? • Are women and men registered in numbers proportional to their share of the population? • Are minorities registered in numbers proportional to their share of the population? • Are all candidates, political parties and political groups able to exercise their right to stand? • Is the ability to run as a candidate restricted by any discriminatory practices?
Is there an equal right and opportunity, both in law and in practice, for persons belonging to minorities to participate in the electoral process as voters, candidates, political party activists, and electoral administrators?
Index of Electoral Malpractice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were major contestants banned or did they have their applications to contest the elections refused/obstructed in (evident) violation of the law? • Were significant sections of the citizenry refused registration or mis-registered in (evident) violation of the law?

Third, while elections must be as inclusive as possible if they are to contribute to an egalitarian distribution of political power, inclusiveness on its own is not enough – without competition an inclusive election is meaningless. Although any adult in Canada can vote, and can officially run for political office, what is important to democracy is how this influences “the populace’s opportunities for exerting actual influence in public decision-making, and the distribution of these opportunities among citizens” (Knutsen, 2010, p.111). If you are a voter with only one choice, or if your choices are mirror images of one another, then what ability do

you have to exert influence on public decision-making? And if you can run for office but cannot win, or can have no political effect if you do win, then what does that success really mean?

Without competition participation means nothing. In the former case, voters are placing a vote purely as a token gesture, as there is no real choice between alternatives. And in the latter case, there is no competition because the imbalances of power are too great. Elections require competition in terms of both the variety of choices for voters, and equality of the playing field for candidates.

This latter requirement is an aspect that has often been overlooked in existing assessments of democracy. What are the barriers to running for office? Is there an even playing field for newcomers? If a group of voters are dissatisfied with their current options, can they become the solution they can't find on the ballot? This is where we see the interdependencies of inclusive participation and egalitarian competition. When confronted with a lack of electoral competition, voter participation will decline as it ceases to be meaningful. Without different options there is simply no way to make a choice between them. This means that where barriers to running for office are high, competition will be low, and voter-participation will reflect that. But if barriers to running for political office are low, then voters will be able to *create* the competition they were missing, reinvigorating voter participation in the process. Competition will increase as it becomes easier to get involved, and this will pull voter participation up with it as more choices become available. Therefore, *barriers to running for office* should not be overlooked in future indexes (this will come up again later in a discussion on political parties).

The following table provides some example indicators for assessing an election in terms of competition or contestation:

Table 5 – Elections: Competition

Freedom in the World 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic possibility for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?
Handbook for European Union Election Observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is a broad range of opinions represented by existing candidates/political parties to ensure the voters have a genuine choice? Are all political groups equally able to form political parties, and are all citizens equally able to join the political party of their choice? Are regulations on campaign financing, including limits on spending, being implemented and enforced in a consistent, impartial and effective manner?
Index of Electoral Malpractice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were the regulations governing the use of campaign resources observed?

Fourth, the positions that are up for election form an integral part of whether or not an election furthers the aims of democracy (Munck, 2009, p.56). As the political power of an office increases, so too does the importance of its being determined through elections. Are offices in the national executive and legislature decided through elections? And what important offices *aren't* decided through elections?

“The concept of democracy seems inextricably linked with the notion of access to power, and, it is crucial to note, the set of government offices that are filled through elections has varied independently of the extent to which elections were contested and inclusive. Thus, the importance of Offices suggests that indices that have included only the attributes of contestation and/or participation have omitted an important attribute” (Munck, 2009, p.20)

In Canada, we elect representatives to the House of Commons, but not the Senate. As the Senate is not elected, we must ask how much political power it wields in practice. If it is not particularly powerful but acts more as a vestigial ornament, then the fact that its members are appointed is less of a challenge to democracy. But if it executes its political will to a great degree, then we must question how this influences an egalitarian distribution of political power. Some have argued for “a shift from the appointed Senate to an elected body to make it more inclusive,” as “it seems safe to say that the move from a Senate appointed by the prime minister to one elected

by the voters of Canada would mark an immediate leap forward in participatory democracy” (Smith, 2004, p. 29-30). As a general rule, the more centralized power is within a particular office or set of offices, the more important it is that these are open to elections, otherwise structural inequalities can become cemented over time, or else unelected offices can become distant from the population in some other fashion. There are far fewer indicators relating to this component of electoral quality, but here are some examples:

Table 6 – Elections: Offices

Freedom in the World 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? • Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?
Handbook for European Union Election Observation
Have elected officials been duly installed in office?
Electoral Democracy Index
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the country's main political offices (ie., the national executive and legislature) filled through elections and are the winners of elections allowed both to assume office and serve their full term in office (cited in Munck, 2009, p.58)

The final requirement for a democratic election is a technical issue requiring some normative considerations – how are votes translated into seats? This process is algorithmic, and requires a mathematical function to convert vote inputs to seat outputs. Must a candidate receive a majority of votes to be elected, or simply the highest number of votes (eg. first-past-the-post)? Are voters able to give one vote only, or can they rank candidates in terms of preference (eg. party-list system)? Do votes happen only once, or are they conducted in multiple rounds (eg. top-two runoff)? Questions such as these are not idle; they contribute to the democratic value of an election in a fundamental way.

Discussions of voting systems and the allocation of seats could easily engulf this paper, so I will avoid an in-depth discussion, and instead merely graze across the surface in passing.

Voting systems can be analyzed using a set of mathematical criteria, but there is no hard and fast method to determine which is objectively better. In *A Difficulty in the Concept of Social Welfare* (1950) Kenneth Arrow “showed the impossibility of aggregating individual fixed and well-defined preferences to a determinate, well-defined collective preference, when the number of individuals and issue dimensions increase sufficiently” (Knutson, 2009, p. 110). Choices must be made when translating individual votes into an outcome, as not all the important voting criteria can occur at once – they are mutually contradictory. These choices have consequences.

“A number of consequences of electoral systems have been identified, among them the effects on proportionality, on numbers of parties, and on the representation of women and minorities... In addition to the *systemic* effects of electoral systems... there has been increasing interest in the *strategic* effects of electoral systems, in terms of both how voters use them (for example, tactical and ticket-splitting) and how parties are affected by them (for example, variations in campaign style)” (Farrell, 2001, p.153)

Therefore analyzing the impact of voting systems on the ideal of an egalitarian distribution of political power is a crucial aspect of any democratic health assessment. The *Handbook for European Union Election Observation* prompts observers to monitor electoral systems in this way, asking, “In a proportional electoral system, does the formula for seat allocation risk creating disproportionate results due to a high legal threshold?” (2008, p. 34). Attempts have also been made to quantify the disproportionality of various electoral systems by looking at “the degree of deviation from proportionality in the allocation of seats to parties or groupings which participated in an election” (Asmar, 2011, p.41). Two prominent examples of such measures are the Gallagher Index and the Loosemore-Hanby Index (Asmar, 2011, p. 41), but there is still no consensus on a universal measure.

To summarize, when attempting to assess a nation's democratic health, one must take the quality of elections into consideration. They must be free and open, so that every vote is counted accurately and there are no pressures on citizens aside from their own free will. They must also allow maximally-inclusive participation, in terms of both voting and running for office. Elections must be competitive in terms of variety, so that there are many choices, and also competitive in terms of equality, so that no candidate holds an extreme structural advantage. The offices that are filled through election must be meaningful (as the degree of power centralization within an office increases, so too does the importance that its holder be electorally determined). And finally, the algorithms that transform votes into final seats should be analyzed in terms of their contribution to an egalitarian distribution of political power. While there are yet further considerations to be taken into account during the evaluation of electoral quality (such as the activities of the "election management body," for example) (European Commission, 2008, p.35), the above categorizations cover the main elements.

2.3 Representatives

If most existing assessments of democracy tend to focus on electoral politics, that is because representative democracies are still defined by power centralizations, and the primary method of public input into these centralized locations for the exercise of political power comes through the selection of representatives. That is to say, within the structure of representative democracy, political power is still concentrated in a small subset of the population, and therefore, in order to render this structure democratic, the individuals that populate its offices must be subject to popular control and scrutiny.

In its most basic formulation, “political representation is the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives ‘present’ in the public policy making processes” (Dovi, 2011). This occurs primarily through the activities of elected representatives, who stand in for the interests of their constituents during government deliberation. “Within the institutions of government it is the representative body through which the will of the people finds expression, in which their diversity is manifested, and in which the differences between them are debated and negotiated” (Beetham, 2006, Ch. 1). This can be contrasted with direct democracy, where all citizens represent themselves at the level of the political community. Representation complicates the goal of democracy, as it “introduces third parties... who mediate between the law and the preferences of citizens” (Rehfeld, 2009, p. 214). This mediation is, in essence, a centralization of the political power of the many into the hands of a few, and therefore political representation plays one of the most important roles in determining the degree of political power experienced by each citizen.

Unfortunately, the concept of representation is not as simple as merely reflecting the voices, opinions, and perspectives of citizens. Rather, it contains “multiple and competing dimensions” which conflict with one another and provide “standards that are mutually incompatible” (Dovi, 2011). In this section, we first discuss the conflicted roles that representatives must play – they must simultaneously reflect the political will of their constituents while reasoning independently on the best course of action. We then discuss how the quality of representatives can be measured in light of this conflict, arguing that their role as reflectors of their constituency should be preferred above their independent reasoning role. Most importantly, we discuss the normative role of citizens within a representative democracy, and

ask about how representatives can either contribute to, or detract from, the democratic goal of an egalitarian distribution of political power. Note that this section deals with representation in terms of political representatives specifically, and does not address the broader concept of representation within the political sphere as a whole, as this is a distributed property arising from the cooperation of all the components discussed in this chapter acting together.

The classic debate over the relationship of representatives to the will of their constituents goes back to Edmund Burke and James Madison (or at least we will use these two as caricature stand-ins for arguments with much longer life spans). Burke argued for representatives as “trustees” whom we appoint to act in our best interests, but not to follow our orders, whereas Madison argued for representatives as “delegates” whom we appoint simply to be a mouthpiece, like a repeater echoing our own words (Dovi, 2011). “Delegate conceptions of representation require representatives to follow their constituent's preferences, while trustee conceptions require representatives to follow their own judgment about the proper course of action” (Dovi, 2011). Here the deciding factor is to what degree representatives should be independent of their constituents.

Burke believed they required a degree of independence, so that they could reason and apply their own judgment without being subjugated to the masses. Thus, in cases where constituents had conflicting opinions, or where they were uncertain of their own interests, an enlightened representative could elevate the debate and do what is best for the people. In contrast, Madison believed the role of representatives was to reproduce the will of the people exactly. The individual will of the representative was irrelevant; they simply submitted and served the will of their constituents. While this could potentially mean less than ideal decisions

are made, it also ensures that representatives respect the political voice of the people, and that private interests and personal feelings do not bias their actions.

In the case of representatives as trustees, the public is protected from itself and is lifted up by someone they have elected to better their conditions; the main threat to democracy here is the unqualified public. In the case of representatives as delegates, the public is protected from the representative, and the abuses of centralized power; the main threat to democracy here is the self-interested representative. In both cases we are seeing a different reaction to the same set of circumstances – an independent representative can either benefit the political community (similar to the way an enlightened monarch can bypass bureaucracy to achieve positive results more effectively) or can distort the public will and focus on private, self-interested goals.

This debate has much in common with a 20th century debate between Walter Lippman and John Dewey, who debated the role of the citizen within democracy. Lippmann (1922/1997) argued that the public did not have the ability or the will to understand the great issues in societal governance, and so he wanted an empowered but enlightened group of experts to inform government decision making. Dewey rejected this pessimism about the public, and believed an over-reliance on experts risked excluding the public from decisions that affected them, which would decrease the ability of government to adequately respond to their needs and interests, as these could be most accurately expressed by the public itself (1927/1954). Both debates share a common theme relating the ability of the public to participate meaningfully in the political sphere to a normative claim about the degree of power centralization necessary within a democratic society.

In the view of Lippmann and Burke, arriving at the objective interests of society (ie. the common good) is the end goal of democracy. Democratic communities employ an egalitarian distribution of power as a means to achieving this end, and if the public is not competent enough to deliver a good society, then we have found justification for increasing the centralization of political power, whether through Burke's trustees or Lippmann's elites. But it also possible that an egalitarian distribution of power is desirable in itself, and that what those in positions of power term "objective interests" must be defined collectively and equally by all members of a political community (as Dewey would argue). Therefore one's normative conceptualization of the role of representatives is directly related to one's assessment of 1) the ability of the public to meaningfully participate in politics, and 2) whether or not democracy aims at egalitarian distribution of power as an end in itself (an intrinsic good) or simply as a means to obtaining the social good (an instrumental good). If the public is unable to participate meaningfully in politics, and the purpose of democracy is to achieve the best social conditions, then independent representatives and the power centralizations they embody are justified. But if the public can participate meaningfully *or* if self-governance is a good in itself, then these same things are now seen as potential threats to democracy.

Because these questions have never been answered conclusively, the role of the representative in the modern democratic state is an inherently conflicted one. Representatives are overloaded in terms of function. On the one hand, they are acting as proxies for citizens who cannot take part themselves, and so they must accurately and pluralistically reflect the interests of their constituency. On the other, they are supposed to apply their independent reason to solve problems relating to the objective interests of both their constituency and the nation as a whole.

“The main tensions described by the trustee/delegate distinction apply to political representatives on account of their taking on the role of *decision makers* rather than on their account of their being representatives per se” (Rehfeld, 2009, p.215). How should they manage these conflicting demands? And as researchers attempting to measure democracy, which view of the representative should we favour?

Some have argued that “empirical scholars by and large tend to treat representation with artificial precision, reducing ‘representation’ to the idea of ‘responsiveness’ or ‘correspondence itself’” (Rehfeld, 2009, p. 216). This perspective falls most closely in line with the delegate model, as the measurement of a representative becomes how closely the representative’s actions “correspond to the public opinion of his or her constituents” (Rehfeld, 2009, p.216). The critique of this model is that it reduces a complex situation into something one-dimensional.

Representatives are not simply there to follow the will of their constituents at all times.

Sometimes issues that are important to the nation may require them to act against their constituent wishes, or other moral conflicts may require the representative to act independently.

“Reducing ‘political representative’ to this single measure leads to some surprising results. Representatives, for example, who vote for a just law, that, say, upholds minority rights, would be bad representatives if their constituents wanted to deprive the minority group of those rights... I believe most of us would want to say there is more going: the representative was unresponsive but not necessarily a bad representative for doing the right thing” (Rehfeld, 2009, p.216).

Here, the objective interests of the political community as a whole are used as the justification for removing political agency from a part of it, mirroring the traditional defense of representatives as trustees. A constituency that would like to violate the civil liberties of other citizens is advocating an undemocratic act, a “tyranny of the majority” (Adams, 1788), which

therefore requires the political will of those constituents to be ignored in order to serve the greater good. Existing empirical measures overlook the fact that trustee representatives sometimes contribute to democracy.

Rehfeld states that “we must always justify and explain cases in which law deviates from citizen preferences” (2009, p. 214), and hence his revision of the concept of representation is an attempt to allow the trustee and delegate models to co-exist. Generally, representatives should be delegates, but there are also justification and explanations that allow them to act as trustees on occasion. For example,

“deviations may be justified for familiar reasons: citizens often have no formed views on what the law should be; their preferences may be incoherent at the individual or collective levels, their preferences may not conform to their true interests and will change over time, or their preferences may be trumped by more important principles of justice (including, but not limited to, the protection of minority rights)” (Rehfeld, 2009, p.214)

Note that these examples stem from arguments about 1) the ability of the public to participate meaningfully in politics and 2) the importance of their objective interests to democracy. These justifications allow the legitimation of both trustee and delegate forms of representation by asking about contextual factors. Unfortunately, this poses a significant problem for quantitative researchers. The measure of a good representative is no longer something that can be determined universally, as it requires a fairly in-depth understanding of each case individually. There are a large number of situational variables involved, not to mention the subjective interpretations and perspectives necessary for evaluating such cases. In essence, it requires a more qualitative approach.

But just because we cannot achieve the exact precision we would like does not mean we should not attempt the best approximation we can. Generally speaking, which role of the representative is more valuable to the democratic goal of an egalitarian distribution of power *most of the time*? Which type of representative presents a greater threat to democracy in a probabilistic sense? Would we rather have 80% of our representatives be trustees, or 80% be delegates? Which would be the more democratic community? I will answer this question, first, with a philosophical argument, and second, with reference to empirical research.

The philosophical: An absolute dictator could consistently make decisions that are in the best interest of the people he or she rules over, and although their objective interests may be taken care of, the equal expression of individual liberty within the social sphere will not have occurred. Could anyone consider Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* to be an example of a democratic state? Or could anyone siding with Fyodor Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" also believe in democracy? It would be more democratic to allow the population to make its own bad decisions than to make a good decision for them, especially considering the relativity of what constitutes a 'good vs. bad' decision, and the subjectivity inherent in the assessment of what constitutes an 'objective interest.' An egalitarian distribution of political power stemming from the liberty of the free individual is the defining feature of democracy, not the common good and objective interests. Furthermore, those that argue for independent representatives at the expense of popular authority are essentially arguing against the value of democracy itself, as a normative ideal for society. They must rely on the premises that 1) objective interests are more important to democracy than an egalitarian distribution of political power and 2) that the public's political opinions are not always the best way to achieve these interests. But if we don't care about self-

governance for its own sake, and the people are not competent enough to rule themselves, then why are we trying to achieve a democratic state in the first place? Philosophically and conceptually speaking, when representatives act as trustees they are *temporarily suspending* democracy in order to achieve the social good through the centralization of political power. Therefore, we should usually prefer delegates, most of the time, although there are clear reasons to justify independent representatives, where necessary.

The empirical: Research on public attitudes about political representatives shows that their role as reflectors of the local constituency should ideally trump any other priority, in line with a delegate view of representatives. In the *UK Audit of Political Engagement 7* (Hansard Society, 2010), respondents were asked what they feel are the most important ways MPs *should* spend their time (Q23). The most common answer was “representing the views of local people in the House of Commons” at 46%, which beat out “representing the UK’s national interests” at 41% (p.127). This was also supported by qualitative interviews, where “there was almost universal agreement among [the participants] that MPs should spend more time in their constituency than in Parliament. They wanted their MP to focus on listening to and helping local people, to be a community ‘champion’ for the local area” (p. 39). Yet, when asked how MPs *actually* spend their time, 50% of participants responded “furthering personal and career interests” even though only 3% believe they should be spending their time doing this (p.38). This reflects the Madisonian threat to democracy – the self-interested representative abusing their powerful role. “The next most common activities that people assume MPs do is ‘represent the views of their political party’ (37%) and ‘present their views through the media’ (32%). Again, both of these are low priorities in terms of what the public would like MPs to spend their

time on” (p.38). This suggests that the delegate role of representatives is more important to the public, as the independent representative is perceived to be the main threat. This has potential consequences for public engagement, as a public that feels their representatives do not reflect their interests may become alienated or even hostile towards the political system, feeling that they have been cut out.

Therefore, as a general rule, we should prefer representatives whose actions correspond with the political will of their constituents; we should prefer delegates to trustees. Although in practice justifications can be made that allow a representative to act independently from their constituents, these are exceptions that require a defence, not the everyday norm. In order to argue for independent representatives, one must argue against the ideal of democracy itself, essentially asking for a suspension of an egalitarian distribution of political power in exchange for a social good that the public cannot deliver. While this is necessary at times, in most cases, representatives that bypass the will of their constituency to act independently are denying the political voice of their constituents. In this way, representatives can be seen to pose a potential threat to democratic health.

Existing empirical measures of the quality of representatives tend to fall in line with the delegate model I have just defended, preferring to assess representatives based on the correspondence of their actions to the will of their constituency. Some indicators (such as the ones just mentioned above) do this by first asking citizens what role they believe their representatives should play ideally, and follow up by asking respondents believe their representatives are fulfilling those roles. Similarly, other indicators ask whether representatives are motivated by their own personal gain, or if they are genuinely concerned with upholding the

interests of their constituents. The survey indicators from the *UK Audit of Political Engagement* 7 and *Samara's Democracy Index* both provide good examples of how representatives can be assessed in survey research:

Table 7 – Representatives

UK Audit of Political Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way MPs in general are doing their job? • Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way your MP is doing his/her job? • In general, what do you think motivates most people who try to become MPs? Which of the following is the... [Most important; First or second most important; First, second or third most important] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For their own personal gain ○ To help people in their local area ○ To help the country as a whole ○ To help their political party ○ None of these • Which TWO or THREE, if any, do you feel are the most important ways that MPs should spend their time? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Representing the views of local people in the House of Commons ○ Representing the UK's national interests ○ Debating important issues in the House of Commons ○ Holding the government to account ○ Dealing with the problems of individual constituents ○ Participating in local public meetings and events ○ Communicating with constituents on the doorstep or by telephone ○ Making laws ○ Representing the views of their political party ○ Presenting their views through the media ○ Furthering personal and career interests ○ Other ○ None of these ○ Don't know • Which TWO or THREE, if any, do you feel that MPs spend most of their time doing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Furthering personal and career interests ○ Representing the views of their political party ○ Presenting their views through the media ○ Debating important issues in the House of Commons ○ Making laws ○ Dealing with the problems of individual constituents ○ Participating in local public meetings and events ○ Representing the views of local people in the House of Commons ○ Representing the UK's national interests ○ Holding the government to account ○ Communicating with constituents on the doorstep or by telephone ○ Other ○ None of these

- Don't know

Samara's Democracy Index

- How important do you think each activity should be to Members of Parliament?
Please rank order the activities from 1 (least important) to 7 (most important)
 - Putting constituents' interests ahead of their own
 - Representing the views of their political party
 - Staying in touch with constituents and local groups
 - Dealing with the problems of individual constituents
 - Debating and voting on important issues in the House of Commons
 - Holding the government to account
 - Representing the views of their constituents
- Now please rate the performance of Members of Parliament on each of the following
Sliding scale from 0 (extremely low score) to 10 (extremely high score)
 - Putting constituents' interests ahead of their own
 - Representing the views of their political party
 - Staying in touch with constituents and local groups
 - Dealing with the problems of individual constituents
 - Debating and voting on important issues in the House of Commons
 - Holding the government to account
 - Representing the views of their constituents

Other, non-survey measures look at the correspondence between citizen preferences and representatives actions. Soroka, Penner and Blidook's *Constituency Influence in Parliament* compares the responses made by Members of Parliament in Canada during Question period (over 43,000 oral questions from 1983 to 2004) with data on "constituency level demographics and electoral outcomes" (2009, p.564) in order to determine how well representatives reflect the views of their constituency. Other similar studies look at citizen preferences compared to the roll call votes of representatives (Stone, 1979), or compare the votes of representatives to subsequent citizen votes in a referendum on the same bill (Crane, 1960).

Each of these assessments recognizes the fact that representatives can either promote the democratic ideals of liberty and equality by empowering their citizens, or can use their elite position to empower themselves and their friends, denying citizens their political voice in the process. In their role as mediators and gatekeepers of political authority and the formal processes

of government deliberation, representatives can have a significant impact on the perceptions, behaviours and attitudes of the citizenry.

2.4 Political Parties

Political parties will be dealt with only briefly. There currently exist few empirical indicators to assess their internal functioning, and for the most part, as long as citizens are free to create and join political parties without interference from the State, quantitative researchers attempting to assess the health of a democracy have tended to leave their internal politics alone. More qualitative approaches do look at political parties in more detail (Cross, 2005), but survey research and index construction have generally ignored their internal dynamics, even though the political party is a dominant mediating force standing between citizens and their governance.

For example, the *Electoral Democracy Index* has chosen to ignore how political parties promote members internally by claiming that it is not a “necessary condition of electoral democracy” (Munck, 2009, p. 56), even though: 1) the candidates of most elections in the modern, representative democracy are chosen by a pre-selection phase occurring within the party, and 2) different candidate selection methods have distinct consequences for a country’s politics (Hazan, 2002, p. 108-109). If some citizens have little to no chance of rising up within any of the major parties (for whatever reason), then they are politically less powerful than those who *can* rise up within a party. Although these excluded citizens can always create their own party, or run as independents, this presents a very high barrier to entry, as individuals enter into a highly structured playing field already defined by inequalities. In order to compete with established political parties, newcomers must create an organization, mobilize supporters, raise large amounts of capital, and dedicate extensive time, effort and resources to building a political

brand. For citizens with full-time jobs and limited resources, the effort required to compete with established political parties essentially renders electoral participation of this sort impractical or impossible. “Virtually every single Member of Parliament in Canada arrives under the banner of a political party; rarely are ‘independent’ MPs elected” (Samara Canada, 2011, p. 16). By treating parties as black boxes, and ignoring their internal dynamics, researchers allow important democratic procedures to go unchecked and unmonitored.

While dominant political parties can discourage potential candidates from entering into the electoral contest through their sheer size and resources, they can also enforce a sort of internal hegemony amongst their members. Political parties add even more strain to the conflicted role that representatives play in democratic functioning, as those representatives must now take into consideration the goals of the party, as well as their own independent reason and the will of their constituents. In this way, the political party stands as yet another potentially centralizing force in the modern, representative democracy.

In 2010-11, Samara Canada released a series of reports exploring political leadership in Canada, *The MP Exit Interview Reports*. The third report in the series, “*It’s My Party*”: *Parliamentary Dysfunction Reconsidered*, asked about how MPs spent their time in Parliament, and examined their relationship with their political parties. Although there have been many explanations for the perceived dysfunction of the Canadian parliament, when Samara asked Members of Parliament what they thought, they answered that it was “the way political parties manage themselves, their members and their work that really drives the contemporary dysfunction facing Canadian politics” (Samara Canada, 2011, p.2). MPs articulated that the

greatest frustrations of their political careers were related to their own political parties, whose leadership was often viewed as “opaque, arbitrary and even unprofessional” (p.3).

From these interviews, a picture emerges in which the internal hierarchy of authority and control within the major Canadian political party is based on a top-down, almost corporate, organizational model, as opposed to an egalitarian, decentralized, and distributed form of decision-making called for by democratic theory. As Samara put it, “the uneasy relationship between the MPs and the management of their political parties resembled the relationship between the local owner of a national franchise and its corporate management” (Samara Canada, 2011, p.3). This painting of the political party is at great odds with the ideals of democracy. Here, a small subset of the party (“leadership” or “management”) is allowed to exact its control from a central location, pushing the party in a particular direction based on their own elite status within the organization, rather than allowing all the voices of party members to be given an equal say in controlling its direction. “The Canadian parliamentary system has a tradition of strict party discipline, meaning that for the majority of votes in the House of Commons, MPs vote with their political party. Party leaders enforce this discipline so they can be as certain as possible about whether legislation will pass a vote” (Samara Canada, 2011, p.9). This is the case both when representatives disagree with their party on a personal level, and when its decisions come into conflict with the will of their constituents (p.19).

This type of enforced obedience represents a concentration/centralization of political power, where the voices of constituent members, and even of their representatives themselves, are bypassed in order to follow the will of a small, elite group. In an organizational context, representatives are not fully free to make their own choices, nor are they treated as equals (which

are the two cornerstones of democracy – liberty and equality). Instead, a bureaucratic hierarchy of top-down control allows leaders to enforce and discipline its lower-level members.

“One Conservative MP recounted an instance where the governing party replaced all of its members before an amendment vote. ‘We had members of the committee listening to witnesses and coming up with agreements on amendments. On the day of the vote, the whip substituted every member of the committee on the government side. They’re out and a new bunch of guys are in, whose only qualification is that they will vote the way they’re told” (Samara Canada, 2011, p. 19).

This shows that the internal dynamics of political parties cannot be ignored when attempting to assess democratic health. In some countries, political representatives are first employees of a political brand – following leadership directions and fitting into a larger organization with its own demands – and only secondly are they free public servants attempting to bring about the public good. Some representatives “spoke of seemingly juvenile punishments for actions—or even opinions—that they believed to be acceptable” (Samara Canada, 2011, p. 19), but if democracies are defined by liberty and equality, then who is that with the authority to do the punishing? A democratic organization would allow all opinions to exist side-by-side, regardless of their conformity to the official point of view (if such a thing could be said to exist), and there would not be a central, dominating leadership to exact control over its subordinates.

These interviews show that, in Canada, instead of popular, pluralistic control over the policy agenda, we may potentially be witnessing a handful of elite organizations vying against one another for control. This could be more accurately described as an oligarchy than a democracy, and therefore examining internal party politics should be a main focus for empirical democracy researchers. The concentration of political power within such a small number of elite

organizations represents a potentially great threat to evenly distributed, popular control over the policy agenda and its outcomes.

A few items to consider are included here:

Table 8 – Political Parties

Institute for Research on Public Policy (2000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We would have better laws if members of parliament were able to vote for what people in their riding thought was best rather than having to vote the same way as their party” (Survey question: agree → disagree)
Handbook for European Union Election Observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do political parties practice internal democracy and act in a transparent manner?
Intraparty Democracy Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How inclusive/centralized are main decision-making processes? • Is there a central leadership group or is authority decentralized? • Are dissenting or divergent opinions accepted and respected? • Who determines membership eligibility? Is any citizen eligible to join? • How are candidates determined? Do party leaders need to select or pre-approve candidates? • How are party policies determined? Is the process open to all members equally?

2.5 Media and the News

In a broad sense, the media provide a location for the construction and negotiation of social meaning, allowing public problems to be defined, actors to be assigned responsibility, and evaluations to be made about outcomes. They also allow individuals to understand themselves in relation to the wider culture and society they take part in, binding us together into “imagined communities” with shared fates and concerns. The media “help shape our perception of the world,” and act as a “social glue” connecting us together ritually (Straw et. al., 2011, p.242). In this way, the communications media help produce publics, politics, and policies both directly and indirectly, by acting as a space within which society can be represented to itself.

In relation to the political sphere specifically, “the media are an increasingly important and autonomous force” influencing “political outcomes... the fate of legislative decisions,

bureaucratic infighting, and individual political advancement or failure” (Schudson, 2002, p.250; p.264). This is because they act as the stage upon which this drama is played out. Candidates running for election are presented to the electorate through the media, while journalists, political experts, and citizens voice their opinions and evaluate their options in front of an audience. As Tocqueville put it in *Democracy in America*, the press “affords a means of intercourse between those who hear and address each other without ever coming into immediate contact” (1876, p.238). Citizens become informed about the operations of government and the current political debates by consuming media in one form or another. They learn about the actions of their representatives, and form political opinions and attitudes based on the material available to them through these channels. Similarly, political institutions, organizations and officials react to the representation of public opinion in the media, and alter their functioning and policies in relation to popular demand as it is reconstructed symbolically.

The importance of a free and pluralistic news media to the aims of democracy can be linked back to one of the civil liberties discussed earlier, namely, free speech. Political life is a fundamentally communication-based affair, steeped in discussion, debate, rhetoric, persuasion and argumentation. In order for citizens to influence political decision-making, they must be free to make their opinions known publicly, and they must be provided with accurate information with which to form preferences and arguments. Lacking either of these two conditions, citizens may be unable to express themselves politically, or may be unable to react to changing political realities. In the following section, we will first discuss the ideal functions of the political news media within a democracy. These are grouped into four categories – 1) providing a diversity of perspectives, 2) reflecting public opinion, 3) informing citizens on political matters, and 4)

keeping check on those in power (Graber, 2003, p. 143). Second, we will discuss the issue of ownership and its potential consequences for the functions just mentioned.

The first function of the news media within a democratic state is to provide a diversity of perspectives (Graber, 2003, p. 143), and this goal can be linked back to the two ideological cores of democracy discussed earlier – liberty and equality. Increased informational diversity contributes to individual liberty by providing more materials for citizens to use in the formation and solidification of their political opinions and preferences. Although audiences do not passively accept communication messages without critical thought, the messages they consume as a part of their diet do contribute to the content of their minds. Media messages often serve as the basic materials spurring on or catalyzing the process of attitude formation, and a more diverse set of messages allows more variety in the reconstructions of meaning that are possible. A diversity of perspectives is also important to the ideal of equality, as groups whose voices are ignored, or worse, systematically denied, are unable to spread political arguments, opinions and preferences to a wider audience. This reduces their ability to secure popular support, and therefore, it reduces their ability to be effective politically.

A second function of the news media within democracy is their ability to reflect public opinion, especially to policy makers (Graber, 2003, p. 145). Until recently, the average individual was excluded from the production of mass media messages, mainly due to the capital intensive nature of such enterprises. Newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and so on, are all expensive to create and maintain, requiring an organization of employees, as well as the physical hardware necessary for production and distribution. Therefore the news media are “expected to give voice to public opinion so that the government will know where majorities and

minorities stand” (Graber, 2003, p.144). It is within this mainstream media space that much political agenda setting occurs today. As anyone who has worked in government can tell you, there is no faster way to get those at the top moving than to show them negative media coverage of their work, which they will perceive to be a reflection of public opinion. Ideally, journalism should be “capable of standing as spokesperson for civil society,” (Schudson, 2002, p.250) and in many ways it is already treated as though it does this accurately, despite the arguments of others who claim that the ability of the news media to stand in for public opinion is a “myth that has little relation to political realities” (Graber, 2003, p. 144).

A third function of the news media within a democracy is its ability to provide accurate political information to citizens. An informed citizenry is indispensable to democratic functioning, as a citizenry that does not know what its government is doing will have little opportunity to change it – they will not even know what needs to be changed. “If the press fails to alert people to information that they need to judge major aspects of the political scene, citizens’ capacity to influence public officials suffers” (Graber, 2003, p.146). The Knight Commission (2009) argues that “information is as vital to the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets, good schools, and public health” (p.xiii), and Samara’s report *Occupiers and Legislators* states that citizens “look to the media for information that can help them make judgments about important political issues facing their lives and communities. In turn, political leaders, government actors, and citizen activists depend on the media to communicate their messages to the broader public” (Occupiers and Legislators, 2012, p.9). Providing political information to the public is an essential, if not the dominant, function of the news media.

The fourth and final function of the news media within democracy is their role as watchdogs, or as the “fourth estate.”

“The belief that the press has a distinct role alongside and separate from government can be traced back to the 18th-century concept of the Fourth Estate... This term, coined by British politician Edmund Burke, describes the media’s role as a de facto branch of government that reports on the affairs of Parliament. More recently, the ‘fourth estate’ has come to refer to a press that sits apart from a given country’s legislative, executive, and judicial branches, serving as a further means to balance the system of governance” (Straw et. al., 2011p. 247).

This role of the news media can be related back to the Madisonian threat we discussed earlier – the self-interested representatives (or political parties) pursuing their private interests through the exercise of public power. The news media should act as a check on this power by badgering, hounding, bothering, investigating, and otherwise relentlessly critiquing, the activities of public officials and institutions. In this way they should act as a check on militarism, empire, and the exercise of central power detached from popular authority (Robert McChesney in Stein & Schejter, 2009, p.315). In theory, the media should play a functional role in diffusing the centralized power of government by serving as caretakers of public authority, and bringing it to bear on political representatives and institutions. Unfortunately it is unlikely that the media actually plays this role in practice. According to Schudson, the watchdog role of the press “is not a very good approximation of the role that the news media have historically played—anywhere. The news media have always been a more important forum for communication among elites (and some elites more than others) than with the general population” (Schudson, 2002, p.264). According to Graber, the media lack the “ability, resources, inclination, and mandate to perform oversight functions. In reality, their powers are very limited... the media usually wait for leaks

and tips before delving into questionable political activities, rather than checking the activities of politicians routinely” (Graber, 2003, p. 147). Although the role of the press as a fourth estate may be nothing more than a myth, it is nonetheless an important component of democratic theory.

In international, comparative research, these four functions of the news media in democracy are typically measured by looking at the economic conditions of news production (namely issues of ownership and regulation), but national studies focused on a particular country can take a finer grained approach, assessing their functioning more directly. For example, Samara's report *Occupiers and Legislators* asks, “Does the news media fail to provide the public with enough information about issues that affect their daily lives?” and, “Do stories overly focus on political games or government processes at the expense of issues?” (Samara Canada, 2012, p.3). In order to answer these questions, Samara analyzed news coverage of two major news stories from the fall of 2012 (coverage of the legislative agenda and the Occupy protests) allowing them to compare institutional and grassroots politics. Using data from the Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship at McGill University (7,594 stories from 42 major daily newspapers and 6 national television programs), the group examined the tone of the stories, their informational content, and the focus (whether on government legislation specifically or other, more peripheral issues such as political games, bureaucratic process, etc.). Findings show that, in Canada at least, “contrary to popular belief, political news coverage is not overtly or routinely negative” (Samara Canada, 2012, p.8). Unfortunately, the informational content of stories did not fare as well – “concerns about the lack of information in news are justified. Canadian news consumers must sift through many stories to find the information they seek” (Samara Canada,

2012, p.11). Luckily, legislative issues did make up a fair portion of the coverage, compared with partisan quibbling and superficial topics (Samara Canada, 2012, p.12).

Because assessments such as this are difficult to do in a comparative context, researchers attempting to assess the quality of the news media across a range of different countries tend to look at the economic conditions of production, based on their potential consequences for consumers of news (although other indicators are taken into consideration as well). Who owns, as well as who regulates, the major media outlets has an impact on their ability to perform the four functions just mentioned, including matters relating to the censorship of content, the harassment of journalists, the coverage of controversial topics, and the presence of oppositional/dissenting opinions. This dimension is typically assessed using a “public vs. private,” or “state vs. free enterprise,” dichotomy of media ownership. Some have argued for public control over communication as a public resource free from the exploitative control of commercial capitalism (Barney, 2005, p.33), whereas others argue that private control and competition can expand the number of perspectives in order to allow a sort of democratic control through the voting process of consumption (Waisbord, 2000). Unfortunately, “the link between ownership of news organizations and the character of news coverage is not easy to determine - and it grows more difficult by the day as public and commercial systems of ownership mix and blend and intersect in a growing variety of ways (Schudson, 2002, p. 251).

Generally speaking, while “both state and market limit free expression... public criticism of state policy is invariably easier in liberal societies with privately owned news outlets than in authoritarian societies with either state or private ownership” (Schudson, 2002, p.253). This is evident when looking at countries where the media are tightly controlled by the State. For

example, in China “after Tiananmen Square, the government tightened controls on the media, closed down three leading publications whose coverage it judged too sympathetic to the protesters, replaced editors at other newspapers, and required all news organizations to engage in self-criticism” (Schudson, 2002, p.252). This meant that the news media became 1) less diverse, restricting the materials available to citizens for the formation of political opinions, 2) could no longer reflect public opinion accurately, 3) could no longer provide all relevant political information to citizens and 4) could obviously not perform its watchdog function. State control over the media in this case served to restrict the political power of citizens while concentrating it in the hands of the dominant political establishment. Evidence suggests “that the absence of commercial organizations, or their total domination by the state, is the worst-case scenario. In Latin America, for instance, government officials benefited more from state-controlled media than did the public” (Schudson, p.252).

The alternative to state ownership of the media is private ownership, although this too is not without its critics.

“In publicly owned broadcasting, the main threat is that of government or dominant party control, which excludes critical, oppositional or alternative perspectives on government policy. With regard to the privately owned sector, the chief threat comes from monopolistic or oligopolistic ownership, where pluralism is threatened by a combination of populism on one side and the protection of the interests of the wealthy and privileged on the other” (Beetham, 2006).

Media consolidation and conglomeration under private-ownership models are viewed as threats to media diversity and democratic functioning as the owners of such media are typically quite wealthy, and the fear is that their shared economic class translates into shared political preferences (at least in certain policy areas). Similarly, a focus on profits and the bottom-line

may push news production towards tabloids, gossip, sensationalism, and other forms of yellow journalism. As the argument goes, shared political preferences, and an organizational focus on profit, as opposed to democratic engagement, makes such news outlets unsuitable for fulfilling their ideal democratic functions (McChesney, 2000). There is considerable “debate as to whether news outlets dependent on advertising revenues and broad circulation for profit can truly foster and sustain democratic participation, or represent the diversity of contemporary society in a manner that allows all citizens a voice” (Straw et. al., 2011, p.248).

In response to this, a mixed system, including both private and public forms of ownership, potentially allows us to avoid the pitfalls of each. While the private/enterprise vs. public/state dichotomy has held up well historically (ie. comparing the US. to the USSR during the Cold War), there are also cases where public-owned media can serve to combat the ills of a private system, inverting the relationship just mentioned. For example, The Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act, passed in 1932, “established the principle that the spectrum for broadcast communication is a public resource, the exploitation of which ought to be regulated by public authorities in service of the public interest” (Barney, 2005, p.33). This created a dual-model of media ownership, allowing private enterprise to supply most news, but then be supplemented by public sources. Similarly, in developing countries state media can provide an escape from the influx of foreign media: “to many Westerners, the involvement of government in the organization and production of media immediately raises the specter of censorship and state domination... However, in many developing nations, government involvement with local media represented the only way to ensure the existence of an alternative to Western media conglomerates” (Croteau et al., 2012, p.341).

Because it is not easy to make inferences about the quality of a country's news media based solely on the economics of media production, most assessments and indexes tend to ask other questions as well, though the economics of production usually play an important role. *The Press Freedom Index*, *Freedom in the World 2011*, *The European Handbook Election Observation*, *Nations In Transit 2012*, and the *Media Sustainability Index* all provide some example indicators pertaining to the democratic quality of the news media:

Table 9 – The News Media

Press Freedom Index
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the government control the state-owned media's editorial policies? • Are all the media subjected to systematic censorship before publication? And if so, identify the government entity or level of government that exercises this prior censorship function • Do the media do regular investigative reporting on sensitive subjects (such as environmental degradation, human rights violations, corruption, political opposition and minorities)? • Are there privately-owned TV stations in your country? If so, are they free to determine their own editorial policies? • Are there privately-owned radio stations in your country? If so, are they free to determine their own editorial policies? • Are there privately-owned printing and distribution companies? • Do opposition parties have access to the state-owned media? • Are there serious threats to media diversity, above all as a result of media ownership being concentrated in few hands? • Have the authorities exercised direct or indirect control over Internet service providers or mobile phone operators with the aim of disconnecting the Internet or slowing it down? <p>Are there cases of access to websites being blocked by filtering or websites being closed down by the authorities?</p>
Freedom in the World 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression? (<i>Note: In cases where the media are state-controlled but offer pluralistic points of view, the survey gives the system credit.</i>)
European Handbook Election Observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a pluralistic and independent media environment, which provides access to a broad range of political opinion? • Is the media able to work freely and operate without prior censorship (including self-censorship), intimidation, obstruction or interference? • Does the media provide sufficient information to enable voters to make an informed choice on the election through news reports, analysis and debates? Is this information provided in a fair, balanced and impartial manner? • Do the public media operate independently of the government? <p>Is ownership of private media outlets concentrated in a few owners in a manner that could lead to biased or unbalanced coverage of the election?</p>

Nations in Transit 2012

- Are the media's editorial independence and news-gathering functions free of interference from the government or private owners?
- Does the public enjoy a diverse selection of print and electronic sources of information, at both the national and local level, that represent a range of political viewpoints?
- Are the majority of print and electronic media privately owned and free of excess ownership concentration?
Does society enjoy free access to and use of the Internet, is diversity of opinion available through online sources, and does government make no attempt to control the Internet?

Media Sustainability Index

- Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- State of public media reflects the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.

Finally, it should be noted that the ideal functions of the news media within a democracy were established at a time when it was inconceivable for millions of individuals to stay in direct contact with one another regardless of their geographic location or the time of day.

Communication today is global and instantaneous, but in the past, both citizens and governments needed to turn to newspapers to find out what the other was doing. Public opinion was expressed primarily through the news media, and governments would pay attention to it in order to understand what the public wanted. Similarly, political events and happenings were covered by news outlets, and that's how citizens could monitor what their governments were doing.

Although this is no longer the case, and it is now technically possible for governments and their publics to be directly connected to one another, the news media still plays a central role in politics due to its evolutionarily-central roots. At a time when the concept of a public sphere was first being born, the news media provided a space for all of societies' actors to interact with one another, and hence served as the space within which much of politics occurred. It still plays this role today. Although this is no longer an physical necessity – technological progress has lifted

the time and space limitations on communication which necessitated citizen and government dependence upon 3rd-party organizations – social practice and the actions of the majority usually lag behind the actions of those pushing society forward. Therefore the mainstream news media still play a central role in constructing political reality, and in determining the health of democracy.

2.6 Summary

As we have seen thus far, traditional measures of democracy focus on the role of mediating institutions within the representative democracy. Each of these institutions can either function properly – meaning that they will relay the political will of each citizen onto the next step in the journey towards the deliberative arena – or they can be dysfunctional – meaning that citizen inputs will be dropped, distortions will be produced, and power will become more centralized. During an election, a lack of inclusivity and competition will result in the denial of the political opinions of some citizens (those who cannot take part or whose votes have become meaningless), while also amplifying the weight given to others (those who can vote or who currently hold power). Similarly, when representatives follow the party line, or act according to their own reasoning at the expense of the will of their constituencies, they are acting based on the preferences of a few rather than the preferences of the larger population whose opinions they are tasked with forwarding. And when a highly conglomerated news media ignores issues that would be considered unprofitable to its owners, especially issues affecting a large portion of the population, political discourse is shifted in a particular direction, amplifying the voices of some while reducing the voices of others. In all cases, the institutions of representative democracy can either serve as good mediators, transparently and accurately forwarding the political preferences

of the citizenry to policy deliberation, or they can serve as bad mediators, altering the traffic that flows through them, amplifying some of it, dropping other parts, and inserting their own influence when they should remain neutral. A diagram may help to clarify:

Figure 1 – Flow of Citizen Preferences in Representative Democracies

Here each rectangle can either 1) maintain the integrity of public preference input signals/data, or 2) distort, alter and modify such signals/data. An institution that does the first comes closest to instantiating the ideal of democracy in practice. An institution that does the second falls away from the ideals of democracy and becomes something else.

But... this is only how *representative* democracies function. While the above linkages connect publics to their governments through indirect, mediated channels, other structures of democracy find different ways of connecting the population to its main decision making

processes. These different structural relationships (between governments and publics) contribute causally to the attitudes and behaviours of the average citizen, who must alter their thinking and behaviour in relation to the political environment they find themselves in. Just as the Arctic tundra promotes thick fur coats, savannahs promote speedy limbs, and marshlands promote amphibious respiration, representative democracies promote a certain kind of citizenship. Other structures promote different kinds of citizenship. While the effects of the environment on the individual are never fatally deterministic, the environment always plays a role.

3. Structures of Democracy

Although the traditional measures of democracy just covered do provide a way to assess democratic health, they also do so within a fairly minimalist framework. Joseph Schumpeter provided what is perhaps one of the most prominent examples of a minimalist definition (similar to the views of Lippmann discussed earlier), arguing that democracy is an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (1976, p. 269). Here politics is seen as a power struggle between competing groups vying for control, and the best outcomes rise to the top through the competition of alternatives – a sort of free market approach to social governance. The role of the citizen is as a “consumer” of politics, whose primary input into the political system is to select the option most appealing to them. Rather than participating in deliberation on policy issues, citizens are expected to pay a degree of attention to the issues, and vote for the representatives that best reflect their views. If a representative does good work, they show their support by voting for them, or if they are unhappy with the decisions being made, they vote for someone else. In the minimalist view, the political will of the citizen is expressed through a binary approval-disapproval signal. Schumpeter would argue for “less rather than more political engagement” because he believed that most citizens “will always lack the insider perspective required to master relevant issues,” and therefore it is dangerous to ask too much of citizens as they “can understand and attend to so little” (Berger, 2011, p.41).

John Dewey was opposed to this version of democracy, and instead argued that citizens and publics needed to take a more direct role in determining their own fate.

“Among liberal intellectuals of the twentieth century, Dewey was the most important advocate of participatory democracy, that is, of the belief that democracy, as an ethical ideal, calls upon men and women to build communities in which the necessary opportunities and resources are available for every individual to realize fully his or her particular capacities and powers through participation in political, social, and cultural life” (Westbrook, 1991, p. xiv–xv).

This version of democracy represents a more maximalist view, wherein publics are called into being through negative externalities that organize them into a group with shared interests, and who then mobilize in concert to exert their political will. For Dewey, public issues could only accurately be understood and expressed by those affected by them, and therefore he believed the average citizen should play a more direct role in political decision-making. His belief in the education and improvement of the common citizen contrasted with the pessimism put forth by thinkers like Schumpeter and Lippmann; he would have liked to see citizens doing far more politically than simply voting periodically. Dewey was opposed to a “minimalist view of democracy that is confined exclusively to voting, reliance on experts and elites, or some adversarial view of politics. He resists all such accounts as primary descriptions of democracy” (Rogers, 2010, p.3). Instead, Dewey’s vision of democracy “does not exclusively refer to specific institutional arrangements and political procedures.” For him “democracy implies an *ethos* that ‘extends to matters of the mind, heart, and spirit’ (Rogers, 2010, p. 4).

At its core, the difference between a minimalist and a maximalist definition of democracy comes down to a normative claim about the role of the public in political decision-making. Whereas the minimalist version defines democracy as the freedom to choose between alternatives, a maximalist version defines it as the power to *create* new alternatives collectively. In the former, the public is passive and receptive of politics. In the latter, the public is active and

participatory, co-producing politics rather than simply witnessing it from afar. A minimalist definition of democracy assigns the public the role of determining its representatives, meaning that their political participation is based firmly within the electoral contest. A maximalist definition includes this dimension, but also assigns them a more meaningful role in policy deliberation.

It is this latter conceptualization of democracy that is taken up and defended throughout this essay. While the benefits of a minimalist definition to empirical research are “analytical stringency, precision, and clarity” (Knutsen, 2010, p.110), measuring this kind of democracy also allows us to fall prey to the “fallacy of electoralism” (Knutsen, 2010, p.111). Equating free elections “with political equality and popular control over collective decision-making is in its strictest sense is problematic” (Knutsen, 2010, p.113), especially when assessing levels of citizen engagement. Instead, we should be looking at how individual citizens are able to bring their influence to bear on government policy and decision-making *between* elections, so that citizens are not seen as standing outside of the sphere of policy production, relegated only to the role of consumers, but are rather planted firmly within it.

3.1 Conceptualization

Stopping to think for a moment about the structure of representative democracy, we see that it is in fact defined by *two layers of decision-making*. The first is the selection of representatives. This process includes all citizens as active participants, who deliberate on their options, either in groups or individually, and then place their votes come election time, with each being counted equally. This decision-making process was Robert Dahl’s main concern when he defined democracy as *participation* and *contestation* (1971), and it is also what is being

measured by the concepts and indicators discussed in the previous chapter. But, there is also a second layer. After representatives are selected, policy decisions and legislation are debated and created in a central location by a small group of representatives distant from the average citizen. Representative governments that are transparent allow citizens to look into this decision-making process, but are nonetheless divorced from the direct experience of individual citizens. “The representative model simply requires citizens to choose their representative, whether councillor, member of the legislative assembly or Member of Parliament. The representatives, in turn, are responsible for policy and overseeing the administration of government. The active role of the public is largely excluded from most policy decisions” (CIW, 2010, p. 22). A minimalist conceptualization of democracy would state that a fully democratic first layer of decision-making transfers popular legitimacy to the second layer. But a more maximalist conceptualization would argue that citizens need to take part in both.

In order to make sense of the democratic deficit and mass disengagement, I argue that researchers should view democracy as a continuum that runs between those two poles. On the one side stands representative democracies and a minimalist citizen role, and on the other, deliberative democracies and a maximalist citizen role.

Figure 2 – Continuum of Democratic Structure

As we move from left to right, from a representative to a deliberative democracy, the “presence” of citizens within the second layer of decision-making (the policy determination layer) increases, the structure of government in relation to the public becomes more open and interconnected, and overall levels of democracy increase.

“Studies have come to view democratic engagement on a continuum from representative to participatory to deliberative democracy. Representative democracy, or passive citizenship, rests on the assumption that citizens themselves are not able (or perhaps willing) to become involved in the policy arena, and select representatives to look after their interests... Participatory democracy or active citizenship assumes that citizens can and do want to participate in the discussions and decision-making concerning social and political issues... Deliberative democratic theorists argue that legitimate law making can only rise from public deliberation of the citizenry” (CIW, 2010, p. 19-20).

In keeping with Dewey, as well as other academics such as Benjamin Barber (who argued for a more participatory democracy in *Strong Democracy*, 1984), it is my position that direct, deliberative, one-layer political structures are more democratic than indirect, representative, two-layer systems, as they allow an increased “presence” of the public in decision-making, and also reduce the number of mediators responsible for assessing public opinion and relaying it to the proper outlets. As Carole Pateman argued in her book *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970), an active, participatory public more fully captures the essence of early democratic theorists such as Rousseau and J.S. Mill than does Schumpeter’s revision of “classical democracy” into the representative, “citizen-as-consumer” model that currently dominates conceptions of democracy around the globe.

Allow us to consider the relationship between representation and participation. When someone is represented, they are “being *made* present” in a distant, indirect way, through

institutional layers of mediation. The citizen votes for the representative, who then speaks on their behalf, or contacts the news media in order to relay their preferences more visible to government. This demands engagement with the electoral contest, but not much more. The central processes of decision-making still occur in a concentrated location distant from the average citizen. Yet, when someone is participating in politics outside of elections, they are “*being present*” in deliberation in a much more literal sense. A citizen that participates in policy production expresses their political voice for themselves, reflecting a much more substantive form of engagement. Representation is like a *weaker* version of participation – it is participation through proxy. Or alternatively, participation is a *stronger* version of representation – participation is “self-representation.” The concepts of representation and participation both exist on one continuum of “presence,” where the former is *indirect presence* and the latter is *direct presence*. As democratic structures move from representative to deliberative, the presence of the public within those institutions is increased and the role of mediators (such as representatives, political parties, and the news media) is decreased.

In order to determine the structure of democracy (ie. where a political system stands in the continuum shown above), researchers must turn to the horizontal linkages that connect publics to governments between elections. These structures can then be assessed on a continuous scale from “closed” to “open,” where a fully closed system excludes citizens from witnessing what goes on during policy deliberation, and excludes them from making any input into the process (aside from contact with representatives). In contrast, a fully open system would allow citizens to both view what goes on in the policy making arena, and to take part in its functioning. This independent variable could aptly be titled *structural openness*. Representative democratic

structures would rate low on a scale of structural openness, whereas deliberative, direct democracies would rate highly.

3.2 Operationalization

Some studies have attempted to operationalize similar concepts with differing levels of success. For example, Henrik Christensen (2011) “examines how institutional openness affects a broad range of political activities in-between elections in 18 European established democracies,” in order to test the hypothesis that “institutional openness promotes participation within the system whereas closed institutions sustain participation outside the system in protest and new social movements” (p.1). Christensen then constructs an index of *institutional openness* using five indicators (p.5-6):

- effective electoral threshold
- concentration of power within the executive vs. the legislature
- minister vs. mandarin political career paths
- corporatist vs. pluralist system of interest mediation
- proportion of local and regional spending in relation to the total spending

Without going into the specifics of these indicators, it is plain to see from the outset that none of these relate to citizen participation per se. Christensen is measuring *internal, vertical* institutional structure, rather than *external, horizontal* openings. He discusses elections, the relationship of the branches of government to one another, the role that high-level politicians play, the systems of interest mediation employed, and the distribution of budgetary funds. These measures pertain to the internal structure of political institutions, with how its pieces are designed and how they relate to one another. But when we discuss structural openness, we should be looking at how political institutions open up to the rest of society. Regardless of how

concentrated power is within the executive vs. the legislature, or how local spending is related to regional spending, in the representative democracy the role of the citizen is still restricted to occasional voting and a spectator's position. What matters more are their opportunities to participate in a more substantial way.

The indicators presented in *The Canadian Index of Wellbeing: Democratic Engagement* (CIW) (2010) are similarly underwhelming. The CIW recently undertook a review of 887 academic articles relating to the concept of democratic engagement. One dimension of this concept asks about individual citizens, including their levels of political interest, knowledge, and volunteer rates, among others. This was shown to be by far the best developed in the literature, and it reflects the first view of the democratic deficit which focuses on individual citizens (CIW, 2010, p. 62). The second relates to the efforts that governments undertake in order to engage their citizens (a concept they call *government democratic engagement*) an area which was shown to be significantly underdeveloped (p.50). For this dimension, the authors question the ways in which “governments build relationships, trust, shared responsibility and participation opportunities with citizens” (p.ii). This concept has much in common with the concept of structural openness, as it asks how governments attempt to engage the public directly, and how they allow citizens to play a more meaningful role in politics between elections.

Initially, it seemed that the authors would turn to extra-electoral participation in order to measure this concept:

“Public participation or public consultation is widely recognized as one method of extending democratic efficacy beyond the basic franchise of electoral systems and representative government. Public consultation is a process of informing citizens on policy, project or conceptual issues and incorporating public response to the issues in the decision-making process. This process can be seen as a democratic enhancement that has risen in recognition that the development of

policy and programming is too important for society to be guided by electoral systems alone” (CIW, 2010, p. 44).

They similarly identified efforts undertaken by governments to engage citizens in a more substantial way than typically offered through electoral politics, stating that “significant attempts are being made by every level of government to transform how citizens are engaged in the governance of society. From coast to coast to coast, government policies, procedures, and practices have been revamped to respond to the growing discontent with government” (CIW, p. 2010, 50). They site public hearings, forums, and municipal planning meetings as example of such changes (CIW, 2010, p. 48).

Unfortunately, the government democratic engagement indicators selected did not match up with the conceptual discussion that preceded them:

Table 10 - Government Democratic Engagement

Theme/Concept	Indicator
Engagement	Ratio of registered to eligible voters
	Representation of women in parliament
Legitimacy	How much do you agree with the following statements: I don't think the government cares much about what people like me think
	On the whole are you very satisfied or not satisfied with the way democracy work in Canada
Satisfaction	Have the policies of the Federal government made you BETTER off, or haven't they made much difference?
Trust	How much confidence do you have in Federal Parliament?

Notice that these do not refer to the efforts of governments to include citizens within decision-making, even though they identified a few such projects earlier in their review. Rather, they focus on the perceptions and opinions of citizens without asking about the activities of government or the participation opportunities for citizens in any concrete, objective sense. Despite claiming that the concept of “government democratic engagement focuses on the efforts governments are taking to remove barriers and create access to engagement in democracy”

(CIW, 2010, p.50), their indicators do not actually address such efforts.

Luckily, others researchers have fared better in their attempts to operationalize the role governments can play in engaging their citizens outside of elections. For example, Barankay, Sciarini and Trechsel, in their article *Institutional Openness and the use of Referendums and Popular Initiatives: Evidence from Swiss Cantons* (2003) employ some relevant indicators for us to draw from. In Switzerland, citizens may bring forward initiatives to amend or veto laws and bills passed by the parliament, and these initiatives require a certain number of signatures to be collected within a certain time period in order to be considered valid. The authors have chosen to operationalize the concept of institutional openness by looking at two factors related to these initiatives: “first, the number of signatures that have to be collected to force a vote and, second, the period during which these signatures have to be gathered” (2003, p. 2). As the number of signatures required decreases, and the time period increases, institutional openness increases because it becomes easier for citizens to bring their initiatives to parliament. This provides a good example of how to operationalize the concept of institutional openness. The concept must be measured with explicit reference to the average citizen and the common channels of political interaction available to them. Such measures will allow researchers to place a political system on the “continuum of democratic structure” shown above.

3.3 Indicators

Although there are most likely a plethora of unexplored avenues for assessing structural openness, I have identified a few possible routes that could be taken by researchers seeking to construct indicators. These can be broken down into two dimensions. The first relates to transparency and the ability of the public to “see” what is going on in the sphere of policy

deliberation. Although a transparent government does not necessarily allow citizens to participate in the second-layer of decision making (deliberation), it does increase the “presence” of the public. We will call this *read-access* to government deliberation, though it is more commonly referred to as governmental transparency. The second relates to *write-access*, or inputs, and the ability of the public to “speak” directly to, or within, this sphere. This is more important to structural openness, as it assigns citizens a substantive role within the second-layer of decision making. A political system that allows all citizens read-access to deliberation, but restricts write-access to an elite group, falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum of democratic structure. A political system that allows both read- and write-access falls more on the right side of the scale, closer to a deliberative democracy.

First, the concept of read-access can be operationalized by looking at:

- Physical access to deliberative proceedings (for both individuals and the media),
- The quality and types of information provided by government to the public,
- Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation and its practical deployment, and
- The use of diverse media platforms for the delivery of information to the constituency (Beetham, 2006, Ch.3).

Each of these points asks about how visible the operations of government are, and how easy it is for individuals seeking political information to find it. “Governmental transparency can be defined as the ability to find out what is going on inside a public sector organization through avenues such as open meetings, access to records, the proactive posting of information on Web sites, whistle-blower protections, and even illegally leaked information” (Piotrowski and Van Ryan, 2007, p.308). Transparency allows an increased presence of the public in two ways: 1) by providing citizens with the information they need to participate in politics in a meaningful way (subsidizing the news media’s role as a provider of political information), and 2) by allowing

citizens to hold their representatives and political institutions to account. While there are large swaths of literature devoted to the question of governmental transparency, a single example or two should suffice for elucidating the key concepts.

In Piotrowski and Van Ryan's article *Citizen Attitudes Towards Transparency in Local Government* (2007), the authors "develop several indices to measure citizens' demand for local governmental transparency and to identify its correlates" (p. 306). While these are not "objective" measures in the sense that they do not assess how well government actually performs, but only what citizens desire ideally, they nonetheless touch on some main transparency concerns:

Table 11 – Governmental Transparency (Read-Access)

Do you think ordinary citizens should, or should not, have access to . . . Responses: 1 = <i>definitely should not</i> to 5 = <i>definitely should</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records of government contracts, including should the amount and who got the contracts • Records of local government officials' expense accounts • City or town budgets or financial statements • City or town land use or planning documents • Transcripts of city or town council meetings • Local campaign finance records including who gave how much to particular candidates • Employment records, including salary and benefits, of local school officials
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements . . . Responses: 1 = <i>definitely should not</i> to 5 = <i>definitely should</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's important to be able to get any document you want from government • Citizens have a right to know about everything government does • Every citizen should have complete access to information about their government • Government records belong to the people not to the government • Transparency is the key to fighting government corruption • Public hearings are essential for good government • Public access to records is crucial to the functioning of good government • Governments naturally like to keep secrets from citizens • Citizen requests for government documents are just a big distraction for government workers • It is nobody's business who gives what to a campaign • Sometimes it is better not to know too much about what is going in government

In terms of some more objective indicators, Alt, Lassen, and Skilling (2002) examine how the levels of fiscal transparency correlate with government approval ratings, and Heald (2003)

performs a similar analysis. Other studies have examined the quality of freedom of information legislation from a qualitative perspective, assessing its functioning in both theory and practice (Roberts 2000; Bunker and Davis, 1998; Janisch, 1982). By looking at levels of governmental transparency, researchers can begin to place a political system on the continuum of democratic structure displayed above. Increased transparency allows an increased presence of the public within decision-making, and ensures that the structures of power that determine legislation do not operate in a sealed, secretive compartment.

Moving onto the second (and more important) dimension of structural openness, the concept of write-access can be operationalized by looking at the following activities:

Table 12 – Direct Participation Opportunities (Write-Access)

Indicator	Inclusivity	Cost
Representative samples: public opinion polls and focus groups	Low	Medium
Consultations with NGOs	Low	Medium
Public hearings, meetings and open houses	Medium	Medium
Open calls for citizen input	High	Medium
Citizen initiatives	High	High
Referendums	High	Low
E-Democracy	High	Low

These indicators have been ranked according to the inclusivity of participation they allow, and the costs to citizens associated with performing them. Those with high inclusivity and low costs should count more towards a measure of structural openness, whereas those with lower levels of inclusivity and higher costs are less effective at linking governments and publics. For example, while public opinion polls and focus groups do allow governments to assess public opinion between elections in order to take citizen preferences into consideration during the policy deliberation process, only a small portion of the population actually takes part in such activities directly. Most are represented indirectly by demographic criteria such as socioeconomic status, age, religion, and so on. The cost to those who do take part is not high, but citizens must still

take time out of their lives to take part, and must fit into a schedule defined by someone else. This stands in contrast to something like e-democracy or referendums, where all citizens may take part if and when they choose, with varying degrees of intensity. Forms of extra-electoral participation that allow citizens a high level of control and autonomy, and that are open and inclusive to the entire population, provide evidence of a structurally open political system that attempts to fuse its functioning with the publics it governs.

Some studies have employed indicators such as those just mentioned in order to examine their effects on citizen levels of knowledge, interest, and participation. Donovan, Tolbert and Smith (2009) assess the impact of initiatives and referendum awareness levels on political mobilization, using as their independent variable/indicator: "From what you have heard or read, will voters in your state this November be voting on any ballot initiatives, referendum, state constitutional amendments, or not?"(p.104). Other studies have also looked at levels of awareness and interest in ballot initiatives in the United States (Lacey, 2005; Smith, 2001; Tolbert et. al, 2001), and at levels of support for referendums (Bowler et. al, 2007; Mendelsohn and Cutler, 2000), correlating these variables with subsequent levels of mobilization. Some studies have even assessed deliberative democracy in action. For example, Grogan and Gusmano (2005) examine "Connecticut's effort to put public deliberation to work in Medicaid policy-making" (p. 126). Although these studies are not all quantitative in nature, they do provide a sense of direction for researchers attempting to measure the structural openness of a political system.

3.4 Summary

How do these structural issues relate back to the question of the democratic deficit and

declining levels of citizen engagement? The structures of democracy play a causal role in the formation of the citizenry's political attitudes. Different structural relationships between governments and their publics rest on different normative claims about the public's role in decision making, and these are internalized by citizens. Representative systems imply a minimalist view of citizen participation, relegating them to the role of spectators and consumers through its ideologies and its practical implementations. More deliberative and participatory systems rest on the claim that a true democracy can only arise from public debate and meaningful public interactions with the policy and legislative spheres. In either case, citizens will come to internalize their roles within those systems over time, learning about what it means to be a citizen, what is expected of them, and what actions are legitimate, based on their concrete experiences with political institutions.

In order to examine this concept, variables of *structural openness* must be constructed, taking into account the two dimensions of read- and write-access. Contemporary literature on 1) governmental transparency, and 2) extra-electoral participation, both provide potential avenues for the construction of such measures. This means asking about freedom of information legislation, the use of media by representatives and political institutions, efforts taken to implement e-democracy and forms of digital interaction with politics, the use of citizen initiatives and referendums, and any and all attempts made by governments to engage the citizenry in a meaningful way. Without such measures of structural openness, existing assessments of democratic health may draw some problematic conclusions. They focus so exclusively on the individual citizen that the causes of political disengagement could not be seen to come from anywhere else.

Terms like “political cynicism” are commonly used to describe those who agree with the statement “people like me do not have much say over what the government does” (Elections Canada, 2003;), but this places the onus of responsibility for disengagement on the citizen, rather than addressing the ways in which they came to be cynical. Citizens who distrust politicians, or who feel ineffective in the political sphere, or who do not feel satisfied with government more generally, could hold those attitudes for a variety of reasons; perhaps they lack education, perhaps they are unconcerned with political matters as a personal choice, or perhaps they have grown up in a socioeconomic environment that fostered those attitudes from a young age. It becomes very easy to rationalize away such perceptions when they are the sole measure of democratic health, as there is no way of telling if a citizen holds this attitude for their own internal reasons, or as a reaction to objective political reality they confront in the course of living their lives. This allows researchers to speak about disengaged citizens as though they are the problem (“Stop being so cynical!”), when perhaps their opinions are perfectly valid and reasonable, derived from experience and concrete interactions with government (“Stop giving me so many reasons to be cynical!”).

The final chapter, to which we now turn, discusses the potential impact of the democratic structure of representative democracy on the psychology of the modern, actualizing citizen. In so doing, it attempts to bring the effects of political structure on citizen attitudes and behaviours out into the light. Because most assessments of democratic health to date tend to do so within the framework of representative democracy explained in the first part of this paper, they also potentially obscure the cause of the democratic deficit. Government fosters political learning among citizens through its policies, programs, services, and through the very structure of its

institutions. Yet measures of democratic health rarely turned to such matters in a substantial way. “The lively debates over civic engagement have focused, to date, too exclusively on social determinants of participation. It is time to ‘bring the state back in’ to the study of civic life” (Mettler, 2002, p.362).

4. The Experience of Citizenship

A main theme of this essay so far has been the normative role citizens play within a democracy. We have seen that different structures of democracy attempt to incorporate the public in different ways, some requiring only minimal engagement, whereas others ask them to play a more active and participatory role. Arguments that seek to justify the exclusion of citizens within the deliberative arena tend to rely on the claim that citizens are either unwilling or incapable of taking part. But what does the evidence show? If citizens are both willing and capable of participating more directly in policy-making, then it becomes harder to justify political structures which seal them out.

In *Who Governs? Who Should Govern?: Political Authority and Legitimacy in Canada in the 21st Century* (2003), Grace Skogstad states that “there is evidence of a domestic cultural shift that includes a desire on the part of Canadians for a more direct role in policy making” (p. 956), and she refers to this widespread sentiment as the “clamour for participatory democracy” (p. 963). Richard Nadeau, in *Satisfaction with Democracy: The Canadian Paradox* (2002), states that “the citizens of Western democracies have evolved over the last decades, and Canadians have not escaped this change. The political culture of these new citizens thus involves increased demands for participation and consultation and a growing scepticism of political actors and institutions” (p. 43). Survey research supports these claims, showing that Canadians “want to have more substantial interactions with the government than using a little pencil every four years or so to put an ‘X’ on a piece of paper. Citizens want online consultations between the government and citizens (67%) and direct engagement between citizens and parliamentary committees (65%)” (Turcotte, 2007, p.16-17). International survey research corroborates these

findings, showing that demands for more participatory forms of democracy are not limited to the Canadian context (Bowler et. al., 2007, p. 352).

This increased demand for participation opportunities has been linked to an increasingly critical stance towards democratic institutions and actors. Recent research has shown that demands for participatory democracy are negatively correlated with levels of satisfaction and trust in government institutions (Bowler et. al, 2007). Neil Nevitte made a similar claim in *The Decline of Deference* (1996), arguing that there are two central themes necessary to understanding contemporary disengagement: 1) “the erosion of institutional authority” and 2) “the rise of citizen intervention in politics” (p. 51). Just as citizens have begun to lose confidence and trust in the democratic institutions, they have also begun to demand for more control over political decision-making. Both of these shifts may be attributed to the wider social changes that have moulded the average citizen over the course of the 20th century.

Today, “publics in every advanced industrial state have levels of education that far surpass those of preceding generations” (Nevitte, 1996, p.50), and increases in individual liberty have allowed them more control over the conditions of their lives than previous generations (Turcotte, 2007, p.2; Skidmore and Bound, 2008, p. 21). As the argument goes, this makes them far less likely to accept the closed political structures of the past.

“The institutions that mobilized mass political participation the late nineteenth and early twentieth century - labour, union, church and mass political party- were hierarchical organizations in which a smaller number of leaders or bosses led masses of disciplined troops. These institutions were effective in bringing large numbers of newly enfranchised citizens to the polls in an era when universal compulsory education had just taken root and the average citizen had a low level of political skills. But while these elite-directed organizations could mobilize large numbers, they produced only a relatively low level of participation, rarely going beyond mere voting. By itself, voting is not necessarily a very effective way

for citizens to exert their control over national decisions” (Inglehart, Nevitte and Basanez, 1996, p. 85).

As time passed and society shifted and changed, citizens became increasingly capable of taking part in substantive political discussions on the issues, and therefore became less satisfied with traditional forms of participation. “With the expansion of education, and with the information explosion, the once-large skill gap between leaders and publics has narrowed,” in the process creating a new citizenry who “hankers for newer modes of participation” (Nevitte, 1996, p. 55). Bowler and Donovan (1998) provide evidence to support the claim that citizens are political competent, showing they are surprisingly good at making informed and reasonable political decisions in a direct participation context (see *Demanding Choices: Opinion, Voting, and Direct Democracy*).

The existing literature implies that it is the increased cognitive capabilities of the average citizen, combined with value-shifts stemming from increased personal liberty, that gives rise to both increased criticism of existing democratic structures, and the desire for a greater inclusion within the sphere of policy production. While the arguments for such changes in the citizenry are overwhelming (Inglehart, 1990; Nevitte, 1996; Budge, 1996; Inglehart, 1999; Norris, 1999; Dalton, Burklin and Drummond, 2001; Donovan and Karp, 2006; Dalton, 2007), less clear are the actions governments have taken to respond. “Being better educated, more conscious of their competence, and more interested in politics, voters now wish to take a more active and determining role in government decisions that affect them. These new demands for participation seem unlikely to be met through traditional channels of democratic participation and interest representation” (Nadeau, 2002, p.54). If the contemporary citizen is both willing and capable of taking part in politics in a more substantive way, then why are levels of disengagement so high?

Between August and October of 2011, Samara Canada set out to understand contemporary political disengagement in Canada through a series of focus groups designed to uncover the emic perspectives of those who have disengaged. Rather than seeing them from without, in a detached sort of way, as people who have chosen to disengage simply because they do not care about politics, who do not care about paying attention to events and issues, and who cannot be bothered to put in the effort to vote and take part, these focus groups were seeking the underlying rationale of those who have dropped out. “Participants in seven of these groups self-identified as less interested in politics and most did not vote (the disengaged). We also spoke to an eighth group of politically engaged Canadians for comparison purposes” (Bastedo et. al., 2011, p.3). This allowed them to challenge some common assumptions about disengagement, moving away from questions of *who* is disengaged (in terms of demographics) in order to ask *why* they are disengaged. Many assume that “disengaged people are simply apathetic, disinterested, or generally ignorant about politics” and that “the disengaged are lacking in some key attribute of citizenship” (p. 2). Therefore attempts to re-invigorate engagement often focus on creating the ideal citizen, typically through increasing opportunities for political education and the delivery of political information (Pammett and Leduc, 2003, p.2; Hansard Society, 2010; Berger, 2011, Ch. 6). If only citizens would put in the effort to improve themselves, to fit better into the mould of the dutiful citizen, then perhaps they would not be so distanced from the functioning of politics.

It is difficult to reconcile this view with the fact that citizens today are, in general, more educated than their predecessors, have access to far more information, desire more direct participation opportunities, and continue to express dissatisfaction with their political system.

Samara's focus group research refuted the citizen-centered approaches to disengagement which focused heavily on the choices of the individual without asking about the context within which those decisions are made. They found that the explanation for disengagement was not as simple as labeling the public an Athenian demos, ignorantly fulfilling their selfish urges in private isolation, unconcerned with the functioning of the greater society. Instead, they found that it was concrete interactions with the political sphere that underpinned the choice to disengage. From this perspective, a public that is both willing to take part, and which may be able to do so effectively, is taught to stay away from politics through its direct interactions with government.

In Samara's focus groups, both engaged and disengaged groups felt that accomplishing anything within the political sphere required great effort (Bastedo et. al., 2011, p.16), and those who chose to disengage had learned through their experiences with politics that engagement was futile:

“Contrary to the notion that the disengaged are apathetic, we found that those less likely to participate were neither disinterested in nor uninformed about the system. Instead we found that their disdain for politics was driven by an intuitive understanding of how the political system functions and their previous interactions with it. Indeed, their dislike of politics seemed closely related to their perception of a gap between what politics is and what democracy should be... The disappointment people feel with respect to politics may therefore be caused by a disconnect between democratic *expectations* and political *reality*” (p. 3)

This means that, although the role of the citizen has often been restricted based on claims about their unwillingness and inability to take part, it may actually be the political reality they confront daily that conditions their decision to disengage. Citizens have been told a lot of things about what democracy is and how it works, having been spoon-fed idealistic democratic rhetoric from a young age, including rhetoric that proclaims the glory of the democracy they live in, and their

ability to make a difference in it. Unfortunately, their lived experiences have clashed with the vision they were offered as children, and they've concluded that political realities simply do not match up with the ideals they were sold back when they were more naive. An increasingly critical, individualistic and autonomous citizenry concludes that there is a gap between what democracy is supposed to be and what it actually is in practice. While the democratic citizens of the early 20th century might criticize today's youth for their lack of deference, the actualizing citizen of today might respond by calling into question their mindless faith in unfounded myths.

"One rural Canadian described democracy as a 'sham,' ... Another woman in Montreal felt that 'the word democracy is sort of like an illusion, a front man—publicity, advertisement, optimistic.' For her, the idea of democracy is 'all air ... it's a dream' (Bastedo et. al., 2011, p.8). We cannot treat claims like this as simple delusions, as the rationalizations made after disengagement has occurred in order to justify irresponsibility and the inability to be a "good citizen." We should also consider the possibility that this is straightforward political reality, at least for some citizens. This shifts the blame for disengagement away from lazy and uninformed citizens to the closed structures of democracy they encounter.

"While it is certainly true that - for a variety of reasons - some people tend to feel powerless politically while others do not, such attitudes unfortunately tell us little about the actual conditions existing in society... it is time for social scientists to again 'rediscover' Marx's idea of alienation, but this time retain his original perception of it as an objective social condition rather than a subjective personal attitude" (Olsen, 1982, p.3-4).

As Olsen went on to argue in *Participatory Pluralism: Political Participation in the United States and Sweden*, it is possible that "large portions of the population in all modern societies are in reality largely or totally powerless in relation to the political system" (p.3-4). Were this to be

the case, democratic disengagement could no longer be conceptualized as some internal defect spreading amongst the population, and youth in particular, but would rather have to be viewed as the obvious and most rational choice for a person to make when faced with such a situation.

Newer generations of citizens are both willing and capable of taking part in democratic decision-making, but the representative structures of democracy define them as consumers, spectators and receivers of politics. Through their experiences they learn that they are barred from taking part in actual policy deliberation, and that effecting political change is a difficult, time-consuming, haphazard process, with no guarantee of results. Taking part in politics rarely means being engaged in an empowering and constructive debate, or working together with others to come to a solution. In the modern representative democracy, citizens learn over time, through their personal experiences, that taking part really just means spectating, that participating really just means voting, and that making a difference really just means having the loudest voice in the mainstream media, hoping that those in power do something about it. “The disengaged... viewed themselves as passive observers of politics—not by choice, but simply by virtue of their place as outsiders” (Bastedo et. al., 2011, p.10). It may be that disengaged citizens are outsiders first as a structural reality, and only secondly as their attitudes come to reflect this. This means there is no need to “devise elaborate social-psychological models in an attempt to explain what is in fact straightforward social reality. Most members of modern societies are relatively powerless, and attitudes of alienation merely reflect reality” (Olsen, 1982, p.11).

Samara’s focus group findings, while stopping just short of claiming that most citizens are in fact politically powerless, do support the idea that objective political reality influences the political attitudes of disengaged citizens:

“Declining political engagement is, at least in part, due to concrete experiences with politics. Indeed, participants’ answers belie the notion that the Canadian public is not knowledgeable or sophisticated enough to understand how their political system works. Rather, the people we spoke to are keenly aware of the forces that affect politics. Our evidence shows that the political system, including the bureaucracy that supports it, has failed many Canadians in clear and tangible ways” (Bastedo et. al., 2011, p. 3-4).

We should therefore ask how closed or open the system is, how easily citizens are able to make their preferences known, and most importantly, what common channels are available to citizens seeking to exert their political power. The modern citizen wants to take part in politics in a more direct way, is more capable of doing so than past generations, and is less likely to trust others to do it on their behalf. If this view of the citizen is combined with a closed structure of political deliberation, wherein citizens can only interact with deliberation processes through a long and winding path of mediating institutions, then disengagement ceases to be a mystery. The democratic structure simply does not provide anything meaningful to engage *with*, and so promotes disengagement through its lack of structural openings.

Attempts to understand the democratic deficit must take into consideration the malleability, dynamism and variability of the heterogeneous group we call the public, including the forces that shape them, because “the standard argument that public involvement is unnecessary because citizens are apathetic and would not bother to participate if invited, is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain” (Graham and Phillips, 1997, p.263). Rather than view disengagement as a subjective attitude held primarily due to personal agency, we must also consider the possibility that attitudes of disengagement accurately reflect objective political reality and the lessons its structure teaches.

4.1 Learning from Experience

Existing research shows that citizens do, in fact, construct many of their political opinions and evaluations based on concrete experiences with political institutions, and that experiences with a single department, branch or institution will often be used as the basis to generalize about government as a whole (Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Pierson, 1993; Verba et. al., 1995; Soss, 1999; Mettler, 2002; Mettler and Soss, 2004; Mettler, 2007; Bastedo et. al., 2011). Individuals confront government in many locations, whether while doing their taxes, attempting to take advantage of public day care, or voting during election time, and each of these confrontations is taken as a piece of information about how government works. For those not directly acquainted with the political sphere in their daily lives, learning about government comes through those sporadic experiences that are available, wherever they might be found. These direct experiences contribute to the construction of mental schemas, meaning that the concept of “government” is, for most citizens, an aggregated and reductive summary of a wide range of disconnected interactions with the political world, combined together into a stereotyped representation of actual reality. “In the eyes of clients, government is a single system” and citizens “rarely sorted these institutions into neat administrative and political categories” (Soss, 1999, p.367). As Samara found, “people are most aware of their personal environment and experience. Their perspective on how politics functions generally cannot be separated from how they experience politics personally” (Bastedo et. al., 2011, p.13). We can therefore treat government policy, programs, and services as equal sites for citizens to interact directly and personally with politics, and therefore as potential locations for them to construct their mental concept of “my government.”

Through these interactions, citizens learn the roles they are assigned to play, the groups they are a part of, the responsibilities and powers of those who are in charge, the forms of participation and interaction that are legitimate, and the efficacy of that system as a whole. For example, policy outputs “through features of their design... may shape beneficiaries’ subjective experience of what it means to be a citizen, giving them a sense of their role, place, and value within the polity; they may affect the formation of political identity among individuals and groups; and they may unify or stratify society and the political community in new and different ways” (Mettler, 2002, p.352). Although citizens standing in line at a government service kiosk may simply be looking for answers to questions about a particular program they wish to apply for, or for more information about a service they might be interested in taking advantage of, the responses they receive tell them much more than that. They convey information about the nature of the relationship between themselves and their government, about how their government views them and how it thinks best to treat them. Similarly, they can impact subsequent political participation and mobilization. Policies and services “structure political participation itself, influencing the extent of individual or group mobilization and the form that mass participation takes” (Mettler and Soss, 2004, p. 63). A few studies exemplify the effects of citizens’ interactions with government on subsequent political attitudes.

In *When Effect Becomes Cause: Policy Feedback and Political Change* (1993), Paul Pierson reviews a set of academic works which reflect upon the relationship between government outputs, in terms of policy, and the structure of the political process itself, including the behaviours and attitudes of political actors. Of the literature reviewed by Pierson, two sources concern us here. First, Pierson reviews Theda Skocpol’s *Protecting Soldiers and*

Mothers (1992), in which Skocpol discusses the effects of government policy upon “social groups and their political goals and capabilities” (p. 599). With reference to the Civil War pensions, Skocpol shows that the introduction of such a resource helped construct a social group (veterans) who became mobilized in order to maintain access to those resources. The policy definition of a group worthy of such benefits helped construct a public, both through the interpretive effects of such an act on their cognition, and through the physical resources conferred upon them. Through policy, a new public was called into being, similar to the way that Dewey’s publics were constructed by negative externalities pressing upon them, though in this case, the externalities are positive in nature.

Secondly, Pierson also reviews *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) by Paul Kennedy, one chapter of which is devoted to European conflicts from 1660 to 1815, specifically examining the struggles between Britain and France (p.620). Kennedy argues that the tax system of Britain contained more indirect, invisible taxes than that of France, whose taxes were more explicit and obvious to citizens. This allowed the government of Britain to amass more wealth through the collection of taxes than France, as citizens were less opposed to the taxation measures, and less likely to try and avoid them (p.621). Here, the structure of the policy influenced the cognition and behaviours of the electorate, sending signals that “influence individuals' perceptions about what their interests are, whether their representatives are protecting those interests, who their allies might be, and what political strategies are promising” (p. 621).

These two studies help show that “structural constraints on individual actions, especially those emanating from government, are important sources of political behaviour” (Pierson, 1993,

p. 597). In particular, the cognitive/interpretive effects of government policies and services help shape the political attitudes of the citizens affected by them. The construction of publics through policy was also the focus of Schneider and Ingram's *Social Construction of Target Populations* (1993), which argued that constructions of social groups often "become embedded in policy as messages that are absorbed by citizens and affect their orientations and participation" (p. 334).

Other research has focused less on the effects of policy, and has turned instead to the question of how direct participation within specific government services contributes to attitude formation. In *Voice and Equality* (1995) Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady "discovered that beneficiaries of a wide range of non-means-tested social programs –including veterans' benefits, Social Security, Medicare, and student loans – became active in related political issues by joining organizations, contacting officials, or making contributions to campaigns" (Mettler, 2007, p. 644). Similarly, receivers of means-tested benefits tended to participate at higher levels than demographically identical citizens who did not, and parents with school-aged children, "presumably mobilized to push for better public schools," were likewise more active than their childless counterparts (Mettler, 2007, p. 644).

Another study to the same effect was conducted by Suzanne Mettler (2002), in which she evaluated the use of the G.I. Bill by veterans in the United States. The G.I. Bill allowed returning soldiers access to free education, and those that took advantage of it "became significantly more active in a wide range of civic organizations and political activities and groups" (Mettler, 2007, p. 647). The reasons for this are multiple, but they can in generally be explained by the interpretive effects of such a policy (although resource effects play a role as well). Some G.I. Bill users felt grateful for the resources they had received, which they considered generous and life-

transforming, and hence a 'reciprocity thesis' helps explain "why some veterans, especially those who spent the greatest number of years using the G.I. Bill, became more active in public life" (Mettler, 2007, p. 647). A stronger interpretive effect was found among veterans who came from less privileged beginnings. "Through the standardized, routinized procedures used in program delivery, veterans who had grown up in low to moderate socio-economic backgrounds experienced inclusion in the political community as respected first-class citizens" (Mettler, 2007, p. 647). This type of treatment was much different than what they grown up experiencing, and it "contrasted sharply with their views of targeted programs for the poor... which they understood as bearers of stigma. They responded to G.I. Bill usage by becoming far more active in public life than their demographic profiles would lead us to predict" (Mettler, 2007, p. 647).

Finally, in *Unwanted Claims: The Politics of Participation in the U.S. Welfare System* (2002), Joe Soss compared two different types of welfare recipient in the United State, those with Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and those participating with Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Due to differences in program implementation (eg. AFDC is means tested, SSDI is not), participants in each system were treated quite differently. Recipients of SSDI "encountered a program featuring bureaucratic routines that were ultimately responsive to their demands" and "the experience bolstered their external political efficacy" (p.62). In contrast, AFDC recipients "met with a directive and threatening program, and took away negative lessons about government's responsiveness to people like them" (Mettler and Soss, 2004, p. 62). Through their program experiences, each came to view agency decision-making and their roles as participants differently.

AFDC recipients found it difficult to make their voices heard, and were treated as lucky outsiders being granted a gift outside their control. “AFDC clients come to see agency decision making as an autonomous process, unconstrained by rules and unresponsive to client demands... [and] their low status makes the assertion of grievances both futile and unwise” (Soss, 1999, p.367). These beliefs were “strong enough to make clients retreat from decision-making processes that have the most profound and immediate consequences for their family” (Soss, 1999, p.367). SSDI clients experienced an almost opposite set of circumstances, and learned that voicing their complaints and concerns would be met positively. As a result “SSDI clients expect to be effective if they persevere in advancing legitimate claims” (Soss, 1999, p.367). Most importantly, these experiences were correlated with subsequent political attitudes. Recipients of SSDI “concluded that the political system generally is open and democratic,” whereas AFDC recipients “extrapolated from their experiences that government pays little heed to people like them” (Mettler, 2007, p. 645). In either case, citizens learned lessons about how citizens and governments relate, lessons which held wider political consequences.

In all of the above cases, citizen interactions with government, wherever they occurred, served as learning experiences for citizens constructing their mental schemas. Most citizens do not distinguish one government agency from another, or even deliberation processes from program and service delivery. For most people government is “synonymous with politics. Thus a negative experience in accessing government services or receiving poor service from the office of a Member of Parliament [are] equally likely to shape an individual’s negative perception of the political system” (Bastedo et. al, 2011, p.17). Each new experience fits its way into the existing schema and alters it accordingly.

Research of this nature shows that citizens are not irreducible primaries who either engage or disengage for their own internal reasons, which are determined in isolation. Instead, they are constructed by the political reality that surrounds them, whether through policy or the implementation of services, as they combine their own free will and agency with the structural pressures of their environment.

“Democracies, and the citizenries that stand at their center, are not natural phenomena; they are made and sustained through politics. Government policies can play a crucial role in this process, shaping the things publics believe and want, the ways citizens view themselves and others, and how they understand and act toward the political system” (Mettler and Soss, 2004, p.55)

Samara’s focus group research, discussed in *The Real Outsiders* (2011), provides support for the results of the studies just cited, finding that engaged citizens had attempted to interact with their government and succeeded to some degree, whereas disengaged citizens had not had positive experiences of this nature. Through their personal experience, the disengaged “had learned to accept powerlessness – a lesson that became deeply ingrained,” while “the engaged told stories of interacting with the political system and experiencing relatively positive outcomes” (Bastedo et. al., 2011, p.13).

The following indicators from Samara represent an attempt to include the lessons of policy feedback research into assessments of democratic health:

Table 13 – Use and Evaluation of Programs and Services

Q10. Please indicate which of the following federal government programs you have used over the last five years. Check all the programs used.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment benefits (EI) • Parental or maternity leave (EI) • Labour training or retraining program • Social assistance payments • Paid time off work to care for another person (EI Compassionate Care benefit) • Old age security (OAS) pension • National Child Tax Benefit • Immigration assistance

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Childcare Benefit • Disability Benefits • Veterans' Benefits • Student Benefits (work study, student loans) • Programs for small businesses • NONE
Q11.[If at least one program used] Please indicate whether you have had any contact (face-to-face, by telephone, online or by mail) with a government office about [INSERT PROGRAM][THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMS]?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment Insurance benefits (EI) • Parental or maternity leave (EI) • Labour training or retraining program • Social assistance payments • Paid time off work for to care for another person (EI Compassionate Care benefit) • Old age security (OAS) pension • National Child Tax Benefit • Immigration assistance • Universal Childcare Benefit • Disability Benefits • Veterans' Benefits • Student Benefits (work study, student loans) • Programs for small businesses
Q12.[If at least one contact] How would you describe your contact? Responses: <i>Very positive; Somewhat positive; Somewhat negative; Very negative</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment Insurance benefits (EI) • Parental or maternity leave (EI) • Labour training or retraining program • Social assistance payments • Paid time off work to care for another person (EI Compassionate Care benefit) • Old age security (OAS) pension • National Child Tax Benefit • Immigration assistance • Universal Childcare Benefit • Disability Benefits • Veterans' Benefits • Student Benefits (Work Study, Student loans) • Programs for small businesses

It should be noted that these indicators focus primarily on citizen participation with government in their role as clients and consumers. But the lessons of political learning and policy feedback research can also be applied to other, more explicitly political forms of participation, which we will turn to shortly. Before turning to the forms of participation available to the average citizen

in the modern, representative democracy, it is important to understand how participation experiences are cognitively evaluated by disengaged (or disengaging) citizens.

4.2 Rational Choices

Typically, survey research on political attitudes has focused on the role of knowledge and interest as independent variables, and findings have been unsurprising as a result. For example, one study found that “the decision to vote or not to vote is strongly shaped by one’s degree of interest and information” (Blais and Lowen, 2011, p.10). The authors thusly conclude that the average voter is “both interested in and informed about politics. The average non-voter is not. Demographically, the average voter likely lives in a wealthier household and is more likely to be born in Canada. All other factors do not help us distinguish voters from non-voters” (Blais and Lowen, 2011, p. 11). In cases such as this, knowledge and interest are being treated as primary conditions which precede participation and active engagement, and therefore, the source of disengagement lies within the individual, who must put in the time and work required for meaningful participation. This reflects the first and dominant view of the democratic deficit, a citizen-centered approach which focuses on the public’s deficiencies.

“According to many people, we are faced with a situation where people just do not care, do not pay attention, are lazy, or do not find the political scene exciting enough. A variation of this explanation is that people see non-voters as simply interested in other things, giving political participation a low priority. Or perhaps it is because those choosing not to vote have not bothered to get the information required to cast a meaningful vote” (Pammett and Leduc, 2003, p. 8).

Unfortunately this tells us almost nothing about the actual determinants of political participation. Why do some people become cognitively and physical engaged, whereas other do not? Instead, we should ask about political knowledge, interest and engagement as *dependent* variables, as

factors that are influenced by concrete citizen experiences. It is not difficult for the modern citizen to become informed and interested in almost any topic they so desire. The Internet provides access to every kind of information imaginable, and a simple Google search of the Canadian political system would produce more information than any one person could possibly digest. Many citizens also devote extraordinary amounts of time to non-political pursuits, including hobbies, sports, leisure activities, entertainment, volunteering, and so forth. Yet, studies have found that administrative factors such as a lack of time, and too many other commitments, are often cited as reasons preventing citizens from becoming politically engaged (Pammett and Leduc, 2003, p.1). This is not a complete answer, as it begs the question: under what conditions would citizens *make time* for politics? Why do citizens participate in these other, non-political activities, and yet turn away from politics? Why do so many citizens become impassioned about a wide range of seemingly mundane activities, some requiring enormous outputs of time and attention, and yet ignore the large-scale decisions that impact their daily lives?

The answer to this lies in a rational-choice model of political behavior, and its relation to changing conceptions of citizenship. In his book *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), Anthony Downs argued that citizens generally behave as “utility-maximizers,” meaning that their political behaviour can be viewed as a rationally formed decision based on perceptions of costs and rewards. “In the context of elections, politicians are depicted as entrepreneurs selling policies for votes. Individual voters estimate to what extent the potential rewards from the act of voting outweigh the effort required to obtain information and to vote” (Turcotte, 2007, p.8). In the context of political participation and engagement more generally, knowledge and interest can

be seen as costs that are only invested in assuming that they will achieve a satisfying result. That is to say, the effort that a citizen puts into following politics, and actively participating with its institutions, has to be worth it.

Of course, not all citizens view political participation and engagement in this way and in the past this was not the primary lens through which citizens assessed political participation. Russell Dalton's *The Good Citizen* (2007) documents a generational shift in concepts of citizenship, with younger generations placing less importance on civic duty than the generations before. Civic duty is "the feeling that participation is to be valued for its own sake, or for its contribution to the overall health of the polity, and does not need to be justified on instrumental grounds" (Pammett and Leduc, 2003, p.38). Dalton argues that younger citizens are more instrumental when deciding how much they want to participate, feeling that a sense of duty is not a good enough reason to expend so much effort.

"Dutiful citizens take their civic responsibility seriously and adhere very strictly to the status quo system of party politics and elections to do so... Youth, on the other hand, fit better under the profile of actualizing citizens, who don't see citizenship as an inherited immutable duty to be followed to the letter. Rather, they pick and choose which causes they care about and are willing to pursue avenues they think will get the fastest results. Actualizing citizens will circumvent party politics entirely if they think this will be more effective" (Van Hamel, 2001, p.8).

Generational shifts in the normative view of citizenship, moving from dutiful citizens – participating in politics without questioning its utility – to actualizing citizens – participating only if it provides them with some kind of result or reward – imply that the rational-choice framework is becoming increasingly important to understanding the political attitudes and behaviours of the modern citizen. The dutiful citizens of the past participated simply for the sake

of participating, believing in the myth of democracy even when they didn't necessarily feel it on a personal level. But the actualizing citizens of today demand more; they demand efficacy and a felt sense of power for the attention and energy they expend. If these are not forthcoming, then the costs associated with increasing political knowledge, interest, and engagement will be seen as too high, and therefore ceded to other more satisfying endeavours.

By referring back to the findings of political feedback and political learning research, we can hypothesize that a citizen's degree of knowledge, interest, engagement, participation and so on (ie. the attention and energy they put into politics), are conditioned by their concrete experiences with politics and government, in whatever form they may take. This means that the following knowledge indicators should perhaps be viewed as dependent variables influenced by past participation experiences, rather than independent variables influencing future participation (although it is likely that the chain of causation oscillates back and forth between the two).

Table 14 – Political Knowledge/Information

<p>Q13. Do you happen to remember the name of the Member of Parliament (MP) who CURRENTLY represents your riding?</p> <p>Write in: _____</p>
<p>Q14b. Which of the following parties is in favour of tax cuts for people with high incomes? Q15b. Which of the following parties is in favour of funding public daycare? Q16b. Which of the following parties is in favour of producing oil from the Alberta oil sands? Q17b. Which of the following parties is in favour of decreased spending on the military?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloc Québécois • Conservative • Green • Liberal • NDP • Other • None • Don't know.

Q18. Did the federal government vote to cancel the long gun registry?
Q19. Has the federal government signed the Kyoto Protocol?
Q20. Is the federal government considering raising the age for receiving an Old Age Security pension to 67?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes; • No; • Don't Know
Q51. Does Canada have:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Supreme Court • An elected Senate
Q50 Which party is the official opposition party in Parliament?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloc Québécois • The Conservatives • The Greens • Liberals • NDP
Q42. How well informed do you feel about politics?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very well informed • Quite well informed • Not very well informed • Not informed at all

Citizens who have learned through experiences that their actions are efficacious, and that political institutions and representatives will be responsive to their efforts, are the ones more likely to know the answers to questions such as these.

Turning then to the independent variables, we can hypothesize that attitudes of *external efficacy* should potentially predict the levels of knowledge above. Citizens who do not feel effective in the political sphere can feel this way for one of two reasons: 1) because they feel something is lacking in themselves, or 2) because they feel something is lacking in their political system. The first would attribute low participation levels to internal, subjective competencies. The second attributes it to low responsiveness and openness on behalf of their political system. “Political efficacy refers to the belief that one has the capacity to understand and influence political decision making (internal efficacy) and that government is responsive to citizens

(external efficacy)” (O’Neill, 2007, p.13). A citizen with high internal efficacy but low external efficacy will feel confident that they have what it takes to be effective with government, but will not necessarily feel that government will respond in kind. And a citizen that does not feel the government will respond to their attempts to engage will not be inclined to bolster their own sense of internal efficacy by accumulating knowledge. “Increases in cognitive mobilization have not been matched by increasing levels of engagement, in part because young adults do not believe that their participation is likely to be either effective or satisfying” (O’Neill, 2007, p.24).

In Samara’s focus group research few people “associated their disengagement with apathy or a lack of general political knowledge. On the contrary, those who indicated that the political system is too difficult and complicated to navigate placed the blame squarely on the system for being *intentionally* convoluted, designed to keep them out” (Bastedo et. al, 2011, p.16). In this case, attitudes of external efficacy were identified as the causal variables, not the levels of internal efficacy, political knowledge and political interest that are so often used as predictors of engagement. Furthermore, these feelings of low external efficacy are not simply perceptual aberrations unreflective of reality. They are tied to concrete experiences.

“Many people become disengaged through the lessons they absorbed from earlier attempts to participate. Many were initially interested in participating, but withdrew over time. We heard from our focus groups that participation in the political system should be made easier...Citizens who feel powerless will not be inclined to participate again. Similarly, those who feel that the system has never made an attempt to engage with them are unlikely to participate at all” (Bastedo et. al., 2011, p.19-20).

Here, we see that evaluations of external efficacy, produced through concrete interactions with political reality, provide a rationale for disengagement as the unresponsive system devalues the effort required for participation. The objective political reality that citizens confront conditions

their subsequent likelihood to disengage.

The following two indicators attempt to measure what citizens expect from their political system, and what they have witnessed in reality. It is likely that disengaged citizens will report a greater discrepancy between their expectations and the results than will more engaged citizens.

Table 15 – Expectations and Perceived Results

<p>Q2. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is “not at all important” and 10 is “very important” Please indicate how important it is to you PERSONALLY that:</p> <p>Responses: <i>sliding scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Canadian government treats all Canadians equally • People are free to express unpopular views in public • Those elected to parliament keep most of their promises • Politicians are held accountable for their actions • Political parties discuss the issues that matter to me • Politicians pay attention to what Canadians think • Political decisions are made in the interest of most Canadians • Parliament is representative of Canadian society • Most government officials are honest • Government programs are managed efficiently • There is very little corruption in politics • Political parties in Canada offer true alternatives
<p>Q3. Using a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is “extremely low score” and 10 is “extremely high score” Now please rate Canada’s performance on each of the following:</p> <p>Responses: <i>sliding scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Canadian government treats all Canadians equally • People are free to express unpopular views in public • Those elected to parliament keep most of their promises • Politicians are held accountable for their actions • Political parties discuss the issues that matter to me • Politicians pay attention to what Canadians think • Political decisions are made in the interest of most Canadians • Parliament is representative of Canadian society • Most government officials are honest • Government programs are managed efficiently • There is very little corruption in politics • Political parties in Canada offer true alternatives

Where citizens rate their expectations high and the perceived results low in a particular area of importance to them, we are likely to find a decreased engagement in politics.

Samara also asks questions about citizenship, which as we saw earlier, in part determines

the importance of a rational-choice approach to political engagement and participation. But these indicators also go further, asking about post-materialist values, respect for the law, and autonomy/independence vs. collectivism/solidarity, all of which have been related to shifting conceptions of citizenship from dutiful to actualizing (Dalton, 2007).

Table 16 – Types of Citizenship

<p>Q4. Here are some different opinions about what it takes to be a good citizen. In your opinion, how important is it to:</p> <p>Responses: <i>sliding scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote in elections • Pay your taxes • Develop your own opinions independently of other people's • Always obey the laws • Be actively involved in clubs and community organizations • Stay well-informed about what is happening in politics • Show solidarity with people in Canada who are worse off than yourself • Show solidarity with people in the rest of the world who are worse off than yourself • Be prepared to break the law when your conscience requires it • Never try to get a government benefit that you're not entitled to • Act on problems yourself, without expecting the government to solve them • Put others' interests ahead of your own • Try to persuade other people about your view on a political issue • Try to actively influence politics • Choose environmentally friendly products even if they are not the best and/or cheapest
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Finally, we can also turn to indicators that reflect both internal and external forms of political efficacy. The following questions ask about how responsive citizens perceive government to be, how powerful interest groups are, how much faith citizens place in politicians generally, how politically competent they feel, and other related questions. They also ask citizens about what they perceive to be the most effective means of achieving political change.

Table 17 – Political Efficacy

<p>Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:</p> <p>Responses: <i>5-point scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree)</i></p> <p>Q27. It seems like government is run for the benefit of a few big interests</p> <p>Q28. Politicians are out of touch with life in the real world</p> <p>Q29. It's difficult for me to figure out what is going on in politics</p> <p>Q30. I feel that I have a great deal of control over my life</p> <p>Q31. It seems like politicians only care about themselves</p>

Q32. Candidates for public office are interested only in people's votes, not their opinions
Q33. If you disagreed with a federal government policy, which of the following actions do you think would be the MOST effective in getting the policy changed? Please choose one only
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact your Member of Parliament • Join a political party • Sign a petition • Join an interest group or advocacy group • Start a Facebook group • Take part in a demonstration • Nothing would be effective
Q34b. [If an action is chosen] How likely would you be to [INSERT ACTION]?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very likely • Likely • Somewhat likely • Not at all likely

Citizens that answer in the affirmative to questions like “it seems like government is run for the benefit of a few big interests” or “it seems like politicians only care about themselves” will be unlikely to put in the effort required to attain political information. Their low levels of external efficacy devalue any effort they would have otherwise put in.

To conclude this section, the relationship between 1) knowledge, interest, and participation (ie. political engagement), and 2) external efficacy, responsiveness and satisfaction (ie. experiences with political reality), is not as straightforward as a citizen-centered model would imply. Participation experiences, as confrontations with objective political reality, and the feelings of external efficacy and satisfaction that arise from them, may serve as foundational variables influencing later levels of engagement. This implies that attempts to re-invigorate the electorate which focus on civics education and increasing the availability of political information may not be as effective as their proponents believe.

Ben Berger states that “proponents of increased political engagement can rely on strategies such as political education, media campaigns, and material incentives to encourage voluntary,

widespread political attention and activity” (2010, p, 123). But such strategies rely on producing incentives for behaviours that would not be chosen rationally without them. They focus on decreasing the costs of accessing sources of political knowledge, but without changing the forms of participation that allow that knowledge to be used. It is the deployment and use of that knowledge that gives it value, and if it cannot be effective at producing change, then it what purpose does accumulating it serve? Instead of educational solutions to disengagement, we should be turning to the practical use of knowledge within a participatory context. First citizens participate; they want to change something. Then they learn about politics while trying to make that change. If they succeed, then they might be satisfied and continue to engage. If they fail, then they may be dissatisfied and they will disengage. Governments should not demand more knowledge of them, and push more information at them, but should simply make their participation experiences both cheaper and more satisfying. Learning happens most easily when someone is playing the game of politics for themselves.

Today, most kids can pick up a new video game, knowing nothing at all about it from the outset, and then, through trial, error, and experimentation, may become a master of its toolsets, manipulating its environment according to their will and constructing themselves as powerful participants within its context. Starting to play such a game is a rational choice to make. It costs almost nothing to start, and the potential rewards are meaningful and personally satisfying. Yet few would play the game if they were first required to spend years watching other people play it, researching how it works and monitoring the best strategies, only to find out in the end that they cannot play without being voted in by their peers. If all you can do is watch how others play the game, and try to convince them to do what you would like them to do, then why even bother

paying attention in the first place? All that you'll get in return is the experience of watching others have all the fun, and of course, the disappointment and frustrations that come from watching them make all the bad choices you wouldn't have made. When the forms of political participation are of this variety, disengagement simply makes the most sense. Who wants to watch a game forever knowing that it will never be their turn to play?

4.3 Forms of Participation

Thus far we have seen that citizens' expectations of, and experiences with, government policies, programs and services can have a direct impact on their subsequent attitudes about politics as a whole. Some citizens, who had found their experiences to be negative, were likely to project the lessons learned there onto the wider political sphere, thus believing that they would be unable to effect political change regardless of their efforts. In contrast, citizens who had positive experiences, defined by a sense of empowerment and control, were more likely to feel a sense of positivity and hopefulness in relation to politics more generally. These citizens felt that they could make a difference while those who'd experienced a negative interaction did not. This field of research shows that, in many ways, political attitudes are shaped by concrete experiences with real institutions; they do not simply arise from primary subjective impressions, but are conditioned by interactions between citizens and their government.

Unfortunately, the policy feedback and political learning studies looked at earlier focused solely on the role of citizens as customers, clients and consumers of politics, and did not assess the ways in which citizens' explicitly *political* participation contributes to their political attitudes. How do citizens interact with their government as *producers* of politics, as co-participants in decision-making, rather than as simple consumers of services? What forms of

political participation are available to citizens in a sense that allows them to act as inputs? And how do these forms of political participation condition their political attitudes? These are important questions, as a citizen who is viewed solely as a consumer is really no citizen at all.

“As customers of government, we come first. Assuming we are satisfied that our personal transactions with government have been characterized by efficient and polite, even friendly, communication, we should be satisfied. But, the empowerment of customers does little to enhance their political empowerment as citizens. When dissatisfied with the quality of service received, the logical act for government customers is to complain to the provider (since exit from the use of government services may be difficult or impossible). This kind of voice by individuals, however, does not promote social solidarity or collective action”
(Graham and Phillips, 1997, p.263-4)

Although consumers can dictate the actions of producers in some ways, such as when they complain about low quality service, or when they buy a lot of a particular product, and in so doing influence which product will be manufactured in the coming quarter, these forms of input can be described as external at best. The consumer does not design the product, does not decide how it is produced, where it is produced, what it is made of, who is employed, or where the profits go. The consumer is necessarily external to production, and if this is the primary way that governments deal with their citizens, then it is no surprise that many of them feel like outsiders. No one goes to a mall and believes that they are the ones responsible for what they find there. They simply consume from amongst the options presented to them, concluding that all of this had come from somewhere else, somewhere distant from themselves. The same is true of a citizen going to visit a government service kiosk. This kiosk was not put there by them; they had nothing whatsoever to do with it. And so they view themselves as relatively passive receivers, if these are their only points of contact. “Sustained focus on citizens as customers ultimately represents a perilous course for governments... Restoring trust in government and building a new

social union necessitate putting citizens, not merely customers, at the heart of the practice of public administration” (Graham and Phillips, 1997, p.255-7).

Luckily, there are ways for citizens to interact with their governments in a meaningful way that treats their inputs as valuable, and which allow them to partially steer the course of politics, rather than merely go along for the ride. I have split these types of activity into three groups, each reflecting a different structural relationship of the public to the formal institutions of government. The first is traditional participation with the institutions of representative democracy, meaning things like voting, contacting representatives, donating to political parties, or volunteering to help out with a political campaign. Although this form of participation is formalized and institutional, it also reflects a closed form of government deliberation, in which citizens attempt to get their favored representatives into office, but do not provide much more input than that. Here “participation” really just means “spectating and commenting.” This form of participation is not really about playing the game, it’s about watching others play the game and then discussing what they do. This form of citizen participation is very close to the “citizen as consumer” model, because here, political deliberation is something phenomenologically distant from their experience, and citizens merely impact politics from the outside by selecting their representatives with a vote (much in the same way that they select the products in their mall by buying the products they like). This is engagement with a spectacle, with a *representation* of political deliberation, but not with the actual deliberation itself. Citizens consume politics as an image, and react in relation to this pseudo-environment, but are not directly familiar with its referent.

The second form of participation is also an accepted and traditional aspect of the representative democracy, but in a structural sense, it is external to the political system itself. This form of participation has been referred to by many names, although civic or social engagement comes closest to what I am referring to. In this form of participation, citizens form groups based around shared interests of one kind or another, and they attempt to impact government policy and decision-making by propagating their message in the media, encouraging others to join their cause, and showing politicians that their cause is a popular one that many citizens care about. Such groups are an informal but necessary part of any representative democracy, and that is why concepts like social capital have often been associated with democratic health (Putnam, 2000). Unfortunately, they are also structurally distinct from the political system itself, in terms of their organization and operation, and thus they produce a phenomenological distance between their members and the political system, as its members must attempt to effect political change by convincing their representatives that their cause is a worthy one, rather than being able to do something about it themselves, directly, in a systematically inclusive sense. In this form of participation, citizens may *suggest* that their representatives act in a particular way, but they cannot *demand* it.

Finally, there is a form of participation that is both rare and highly desirable – the direct participation of individual citizens within their political system, in a formally sanctioned, systematic, and inclusive way. This is the kind of participation that assigns citizens the role of game-players, not just game-watchers. Referendums and citizen's initiatives are examples of this form of participation, and there is even evidence to support the idea that direct participation of this sort increases more traditional types of engagement (see section 4.5 *The Effects of Structural*

Openness). This type of participation is structurally fused with government, which is horizontally open and porous to the public, rather than sealed. It is this form of participation holds the most promise for re-invigorating a disengaged public.

In order to discuss each type of citizen participation and their effects on the formation of political attitudes, indicators taken from *Samara's Democracy Index* will be used as examples of the underlying concepts.

4.3.1 Traditional Participation

Traditionally, the primary way for citizens to interact with their government has been through elections, voting and representatives. This is the minimalist form of participation idolized by Schumpeter and Lippmann and its assumptions underlie most existing research, as already discussed. "Citizens, in this view, are background actors in politics; they exert an indirect influence on public policy through their efforts to select, support, and sway elected representatives" (Mettler and Soss, 2004, p.55). These types of participation are measured by Samara's survey as follows:

Table 18 – Traditional Political Participation

Q35. In the last 5 years, have you: Responses: Yes; No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voted in an election • Belonged to a political party • Donated money to a political party or candidate • Volunteered in an election campaign • Tried to persuade someone to vote
Q36. In the last 12 months, have you: Responses: Never; Once; More than once
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended a political meeting • Contacted an elected official

For the actualizing citizen weighing the possible benefits of expending attention and energy on politics, this form of participation is fairly unsatisfying. In electoral participation, citizens merely

watch what is going on, vote for their preferred choice, and then wait to see what happens.

“Democratic theory has traditionally encouraged ‘low quality citizen action by making a fetish out of only one form of political participation – voting’” (Olsen, 1982, p.19). Although votes are binding and they do produce real political change that comes directly from the public, the feeling of satisfaction citizens receive is often far from edifying.

The reason for this lack of satisfaction is that traditional forms of participation are centered entirely on the first-layer of decision-making (ie. the selection of representatives), while allocating almost no binding power over policy production (ie. the second layer) to the average citizen. Even where citizens are engaged with the election, discussing policy amongst themselves and following the debates closely, their increased levels of engagement do not necessarily have a direct or visible impact on the actual production of policy. The uninformed voter standing next to the informed voter at the polls still exerts an equal influence on policy outcomes, which are produced in a distant location, far away from both of them. This means that accumulating an excess of political information, while perhaps enjoyable to some for its own sake, does not necessarily translate into an increased control over policy outcomes. It does not hold much instrumental value.

Similarly, citizens interacting with a closed structure of democracy do not have the opportunity to debate issues during policy deliberation, or to make these ideas known to the legislature, and therefore complex opinions on complex political issues are also of little instrumental value. Instead, the accumulation of political information and the debates citizens have amongst themselves are external to the formal political structure. They are superfluous to it, mere epiphenomena, like the discussions of last night’s hockey game, or the most recent

blockbuster film. The only real purpose they serve is to allow the selection of the preferred representatives (or the purchasing of the preferred hockey jersey, or the preferred movie ticket), as well as allowing citizens to convince others to vote in the same way. But engaging in such activities does not mean one is engaging in politics substantively, on the same level as representatives, as players rather than spectators.

Traditional forms of participation only require engagement with the election as a publicity event, or as a spectacle.

“Spectacles have always been part of politics. Indeed, some spectacles have been instrumental in dramatizing public problems, mobilizing individuals to collective action, and inspiring personal sacrifice. One can think of the guerilla theater of the American Revolution that inspired people to leave the sidelines and join the fray, helping to write the script of history with their involvement... A similar sense of spectacle-as-participatory-experience motivated the elements of play, street theater, and counter-culture during the anti-war movement of the 1960s... The problem, I think, lies not in political spectacles, per se, but in the proliferation of a kind of spectacle that disconnects its audience from the power to participate actively and write the script of the spectacle itself” (Bennett, 1992, p. 403).

The political spectacle that surrounds elections and voting in the modern era helps produce passivity, as citizens have little input into its production, and they have traditionally had very few avenues for impacting its contours and contents (although with the rising importance of social media, we are slowly seeing this begin to change). Until recently, citizens merely watched debates, but did not get to partake, and even today, the citizen questions submitted to a live debate through Twitter or Facebook are filtered and selected, so that little in the way of an inclusive citizen voice enters into the discourse. Although a more democratic communications environment (defined by decentralized, citizen production) does change this situation somewhat, as citizens can now impact the media coverage of elections in a much more substantial way, we

have yet to see this make a real dent in the corporate media's level of centralized control over the staging of politics. Unfortunately, the common citizen does not have the same level of access to politicians as the established, capital-intensive media do, and neither do they have an easy way into this closed club. Debates occur on the dominant television networks, hosted by famous journalists or well-known public figures, and little in the way of inclusive public voice makes its way into the conversation. As a result, "most of these spectacles relegate citizens to spectator roles, leaving a residue of powerlessness after the drama and entertainment of the moment have faded" (Bennett, 1992, p. 402).

Some have argued that news coverage of debates and other electoral publicity events tends to converge on questions of who is winning, and who is doing the best to sell themselves to the audience, rather than actually engaging with the content of what is discussed. "What is missing from our political discourse is rich and vibrant concept of *argument*, of public deliberation in which 'a widening tradition of free speech renders interests articulate, prioritizes actions, and engages active audiences'" (Zarefsky, 1992, p.114). This is especially evident when looking at television coverage.

"Debates have great potential for focusing the audience's attention, for identifying issues, and for inviting deliberation. Sadly, however, this potential is largely unrealized. The debates have been formatted for television – the confrontation with reporter-questioners adds dramatic conflict and the short time limits respond to audiences' limited attention span. But these same conventions thwart sustained discussion of serious issues; they encourage one-liners and canned mini-speeches. The focus in political debates is on winning by not losing, or by cleverly coring a hit against the opponent. The questions are: Were there any major gaffes or blunders? Were there any great one-liners or sound bites? If not, the debates are dismissed as inconsequential" (Zarefsky, 1992, p. 412).

Many citizens have turned away from these mediatized political events because they already

know exactly what's going to happen. They know the amount of work that goes into producing the exact right image for each candidate, and they know that the candidates will rarely say anything that goes off script. As a genre, the mediatized political event has become stale and predictable. "The audience for debates has declined, and besides their lack of novelty one reason must be a widespread anticipation that not much will happen" (Zarefsky, 1992, p.413). Citizens have already heard the vague promises from representatives, accompanied by only a general skeleton of an action plan that they know will be thrown out once the votes are tallied. Citizens know the "serious issues won't be discussed, the statements of the candidates can't be trusted, and politicians are all the same anyway" (Zarefsky, 1992, p.413).

Overall, we see that participation in elections and campaigns is, in essence, no different than other kinds of engagement with media products, at least in a phenomenological sense. Citizens pay attention to something that is delivered to them from somewhere far away, something which comes into their life after being produced by a distant source. They rarely, if ever, get to present their own thoughts, opinions and perspectives to a mass audience, at least in a form that is structurally interior to this spectacle. At best, they are outside commentators speaking amongst themselves. Their contributions and inputs into the sphere of policy deliberation are limited to their votes and the mobilization they can muster by convincing others to vote with them.

In a very real sense, and all hyperbole aside, interacting with a closed system of political deliberation is essentially the same as interacting with the television show *American Idol*. The forms of participation that the audience engages in are identical: voting, campaigning, persuading, cheering, and debating with those with opposing views. The audience does not get to

stand on stage or sing, but they do get to choose who wins. They influence the outcomes, not through taking part themselves, but by supporting those who do. “Within traditional forms of political participation, ‘people are cued electronically, and called on to do little more than vote’ (Bennett, 1992, p.404), and this “spectator engagement” is not very empowering or satisfying the actualizing citizen accustomed to two-way flows of communication and interactive, networked participation.

“Murray Edelman (1988) has argued that politics in the United States, and elsewhere, has developed consistently into the kinds of media spectacle involving one-way communication that marginalizes audiences from power. With the growing imperative in the news business for drama, and the growing technologies of public relations and media management at the service of politics, the stage has been set for more and more news and public affairs programming with the capacity to excite public interest in the short run, without offering much more outlet for political action and personal involvement than ordinary entertainment programming” (Bennett, 1992, p.403).

Engaging with traditional, electoral politics means engaging in a competition that you do not actually get to play, and which isn’t always novel or entertaining. Even when the spectacle is informative and gripping, it is still at best a captivating spectacle to be watched, and never a game to be played. Within the closed, representative structure of democracy, citizens that see themselves as outsiders are not bad citizens, they are just reacting the way things are.

The following Samara indicators all relate to engagement with the electoral spectacle. The first questions allow respondents to select an issue that is of importance to them, and then assess to what degree they believe this issue to be present in the news media. This allows an assessment of the “indirect presence of the public” within representative democracy.

Table 19 – Issue Representation

**Q5. Which of the following political issues is the most important to you personally?
Please choose one only:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Secondary Education • The Economy • Health Care • Elderly Care • The Environment • Childcare • Taxes • Crime • Immigration • Jobs • Pensions • Government debt/deficit • Canada's standing in the world • Defence • Foreign Aid • Other [if they pick other, they are not prompted to next question]
Q6a. The political issue that is most important to me was not on the list
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes/No
Q6b. [If no] what political issue is most important to you?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Open ended]
Q7. Who is most likely to do something about [INSERT ISSUE]?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of Parliament • Members of the Provincial Legislature • Local government leaders • The Media • The leader of my religious community • Interest Groups (e.g. Greenpeace; Canadian Taxpayers Federation) • International Organizations (e.g. United Nations) • Protestors • Unions • Business leaders • Friends and family
Q8. In general, how satisfied are you with the way the media cover [INSERT ISSUE]?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very satisfied • Fairly satisfied • Not very satisfied • Not satisfied at all
Q9. In general, how satisfied are you with the way the government in Ottawa deals with [INSERT ISSUE]?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very satisfied • Fairly satisfied • Not very satisfied • Not satisfied at all

Assuming that the citizen's issue of choice receives adequate coverage in all of these locations, we can say that they are represented. To return to the video game analogy, well-represented citizens will be glad to see the players taking on the missions they think should come first, even though they cannot play for themselves.

Thankfully Samara has also gone further, asking to what extent respondents have participated within the communications environment as producers. Currently this amounts to little more than outsider conversations about the mainstream media spectacle, but perhaps over time these could be modified to reflect a shifting communications environment moving towards more democratic forms of production. As citizens gain more control over the media environment through their use of new information and communications technologies, the mainstream media's level of top-down control over the spectacle may loosen, and more active and participatory forms of spectacles may seethe up from below (think #OccupyWallSt). As Darin Barney stated in his book on communication technologies (written for the *Canadian Democratic Audit Series*), those who have benefited the most from new information and communications technologies have been those that are "either formally external to the institutional operation of power... or otherwise political marginalized" (Barney, p.144), meaning that indicators like the following will become increasingly important over time.

Table 20 – Media Production

<p>Q40. [If YES to Do Q38. Do you have a profile on a social networking site?] Have you done the following things on [INSERT SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE] in the last 12 months?</p> <p>Responses: Yes; No</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulated, (re)posted or embedded political information or content? • Indicated your support for/opposition to a politician or political issue?
<p>Q41. In the last 12 months, have you:</p> <p>Responses: A few times a week; A few times a month; Once or twice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in an online discussion group about a political or societal issue • Blogged about a political issue

The next set of example indicators ask about the respondent's engagement with the political media spectacle, in terms of their consumption of news, as receivers, and their satisfaction with political media coverage. Note question 47, which allows respondents to compare more democratically produced communication to the corporate-owned media.

Table 21 – News Consumption and Evaluation of Media Outlets

<p>Q44. Generally speaking, how many days in a week do you: Responses: <i>sliding scale from 0 to 7 days</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch the news on TV • Read the news in the newspaper • Listen to the news on the radio • Read the news on the internet
<p>Q45. How good a job do you think the print and broadcast (hard copy or online) media do in: Responses: <i>sliding scale from 0 (extremely bad job) to 10 (extremely good job)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposing abuses of power by the government and other powerful institutions • Reporting the story behind the headlines • Analyzing important events • Reporting on government actions • Providing a Canadian perspective on world events
<p>Q46. How often do you get news about politics from the following websites? Responses: <i>Often; Sometimes; Never</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly on the website of a newspaper or a television or radio network (e.g. CBC, CTV) • Through links posted on social networking sites (like Facebook or Twitter) • On websites run by political groups (political parties, advocacy groups, etc.) • From alternative news sites (e.g. Huffington Post, The Mark) • Political blogs
<p>Q47. How good a job do new media (e.g. social networking sites, blogs or alternative news sites) do in? Responses: <i>sliding scale from 0 (extremely bad job) to 10 (extremely good job)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposing abuses of power by the government and other powerful institutions • Reporting the story behind the headlines • Analyzing important events • Reporting on government actions • Providing a Canadian perspective on world events • Covering political issues not reported by the mainstream media
<p>Q48. How interested are you in: Responses: <i>sliding scale from 0 (not at all interested) to 10 (extremely interested)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News about my community

- News about local or municipal politics
- News about provincial politics
- News about federal politics
- International news
- Sports or Entertainment

All of the indicators just mentioned, when taken together, build a picture of political participation that is primarily indirect, and which reflects a sealed process of deliberation, as opposed to an open one. This is not to say that Samara is somehow biased towards this form of participation, but rather, their focus on these indicators is likely a reaction to objective political reality, wherein citizens participate in democracy primarily as spectators and consumers, as a normative prescription. If participation is what teaches citizens about their relationship to government, then this type of participation teaches them that they are outsiders as a brute fact, as an initial feature of the system's design.

Where elections and voting for representatives are the sole forms of citizen input into the political system, we vote for people we have never met based on the images on our television sets. Public influence makes its way into political outcomes through its presence in media representations, as well as a few key activities like voting, contacting representatives, and opinion polls. Yet citizens do not stand within the halls of government and contribute directly to the outcomes that are produced there. Those activities are sealed to them. This means that, within the representative democracy, the disengaged citizen who views him or herself as an outsider is essentially correct. Only elected representatives and top government officials could truly be called political insiders in a two-layered structure of democracy, as they are the only ones you could call players of the game. The rest of us only watch, critique, and guide the playing that they do.

4.3.2 External Participation

Aside from traditional forms of participation, democracy scholars have also asked questions about the informal political processes that take place in society at large. Concepts like social engagement, civic engagement, and social capital have long played a key role in both democratic theory and assessments of democratic health, and this is due primarily to their ability to 1) train citizens to take part in formal democracy, and 2) create shared, public problems out of private, individual concerns. Citizens who are more engaged with their communities, with each other, and with the wider world that we all inhabit, are typically viewed as higher quality citizens than those who are not. That is to say, they are more likely to vote, more likely to take part in politics, and more likely to be concerned with producing positive social change (Putnam, 2000). Atomistic individualism is therefore seen as a potentially threatening force within the representative democracy, as social and civic engagement perform two essential functions that cannot be done without. The first function relates to the educative effects of social engagement, wherein social interactions of all kinds help teach skills like consensus building and group problem solving. The second relates to the political effects of civic engagement, which entails the creation of interest-based publics working together in order to express their shared political preferences. The following section will discuss both of these functions in turn before addressing the ways in which different types of external, informal (or “non-traditional”) political participation may influence the decision to disengage from the political sphere.

First, social engagement provides citizens with a set of skills and experiences that teaches them about democracy more generally, and their place in it. Youth “extracurricular programs help build social capital (reciprocal trust and goodwill) and self-efficacy in young teens, which

translate into engagement later. Research suggests that it is the egalitarian, team-based nature of extracurricular activities that makes them beneficial for youth” (Van Hamel, 2011, p.4).

Participation in community projects and social organizations provides citizens with a social orientation towards problem solving, one which focuses on forming consensus in spite of diverging opinions. Group interactions that grant citizens “real influence over issues that are crucial to the quality of life and justice in their communities,” allow them to learn about power relationships, about how to think critically and argue their perspective persuasively, and to speak the language of politics in order to get things done – “in these learning environments, identity and agency are thus intertwined” (Goldman et al., 2008, p.186). Social engagement of this form is not inherently political, but it provides a training ground for citizens who may then move into the explicitly political sphere.

“Social engagement means activity and attention relating to social groups, dynamics, and norms. It can include myriad involvements ranging from Putnam’s bowling leagues to parenting groups to friendship circles, all of which are often categorized as civic engagement although they have no obvious connection to citizenship or the polis” (Berger, 2011, p.5).

This form of engagement is measured by the following Samara indicators, which asks about types of social activity that are not explicitly linked to politics:

Table 23 – Social Engagement

Q36. In the last 12 months, have you:
Responses: <i>Never; Once; More than once</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Done voluntary work • Worked with others on a community issue
Q37. Have you been active in any of the following groups or organisations in the past year?
Responses: <i>Yes; No</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union • Business or professional association • Religious group • Local organization that helps people e.g. a food bank, meals-on-wheels • Sports organization or recreation group

- Arts or hobby group
- School group or parents' group e.g. PTA, or a baby-sitting circle
- Seniors' group
- Ethnic or immigrant social organization
- Women's group
- Environmental group
- Neighbourhood, civic or community group
- Any other type of group or organization

Q43. Citizenship scorecard for Canada.

Responses: sliding scale from 0 (extremely low) to 10 (extremely high)

Now please rate Canadians' performance on each of the following. Canadians:

- Are informed about politics.
- Are welcoming to newcomers and immigrants
- Help the poor and disadvantaged
- Act on problems themselves, without expecting the government to solve them
- Treat others fairly.
- Do not accept bribes.
- Take responsibility for themselves
- Do their fair share to hold government accountable
- Are tolerant of different ways of life
- Feel they have a duty to vote
- Can be trusted

Although these measures do relate to the health of a democracy, as social connections such as these help teach citizens to work towards common solutions and build consensus and so forth, they are also completely disconnected from the formal political system and therefore researchers should be cautious in relying on them too heavily. For example, the *Everyday Democracy Index* asks questions about relationships in the workplace (p.97) and relationships of patients to their doctors (p.89). While the concepts they look at are theoretically related to democracy, in the sense that similar values are put into practice in both situations, they also have no impact whatsoever on the populations' opportunities for expressing their control over policy outcomes. Thus in a case like this, too strong of a focus on social engagement may pull us away from understanding democratic health, rather than closer.

The second, and more important, function of social groups within the representative

democracy is to allow citizen interests to act as inputs to the political system by aggregating the formerly disconnected views of many dispersed citizens into a central location, thus allowing representatives and policy makers to see them more easily. Well defined social groups and organizations are more “capable of generating moral and political demands on the state, especially on the national government,” than an individual alone (Schudson, 2006, p. 594). Social organizations are therefore an informal but necessary aspect of the representative democracy, as they serve to reduce the true complexity of public opinion into something manageable and easy to understand. They allow a group of individuals to become more powerful and visible by acting together to influence the political spectacles represented in the media, and therefore the representations of the public that decision makers take into consideration during deliberation.

Another way to put it is to think in terms of the distinction made by Marx between a “class in itself” and a “class for itself” (Parrillo, 2008, p.134), although here we are taking the word “class” out of its original economic context in order to apply it more broadly to shared interests of one form or another. The “class in itself” is a group of individuals connected by their objective conditions, but not consciously aware of their shared interests, and therefore unable to voice those interests politically. Isolated citizens that are unhappy with a particular policy, but do not discuss it one another, will be objectively linked through their shared concern, but, because they cannot see their connection to one another, will be limited in their ability to present their concern to government. Their problems will be thought of as personal problems, rather than political problems. In contrast, the “class for itself” has become aware of the common connections that link its members, and can thus explicitly make claims against the state. In this

way social organizations and groups serve to politicize individual concerns by making them into shared, public concerns, which are then presented to political deliberation for consideration.

These two functions of the social group within democracy can be discussed using two different terms: social engagement and civic engagement. While the definitions put forth here may not align with all their existing uses in the literature, hopefully they serve their purpose by allowing us to talk about two different kinds of social activity and their relationship to formal structures of democracy. Social engagement may be valued for its educational potential, as it trains citizen to act democratically within a group. Civic engagement may be valued for its ability to crystallize and express the political preferences of individuals through the creation of a visible public movement. This second kind of social activity is oriented towards producing political or community-based change specifically, and so relates more closely to the domain of the polity. Although both forms of social life help construct political reality, it is civic engagement that matters most here, as this is a form of engagement wherein citizens who are structurally severed from the formal institutions of political power attempt to make their voices heard within the sealed deliberation process. The following diagram provides a quick overview of how social and civic engagement relate to the formal structures of democracy.

Figure 3 – Relation of Social Groups to Political Structure

Unfortunately, the distinction between civic engagement, (as an external form of participation), and political engagement (as an internal form of participation), is not always given as much attention as it deserves. In his book *Attention Deficit Democracy* (2011) Ben Berger argued that we should do away with the term civic engagement by splitting it into its political, social and moral components. In this reconceptualization, what I just referred to as civic engagement – meaning social groups oriented towards specifically political change – would simply be subsumed under the term “political engagement” (p. 40). Berger defines political engagement as any “activity that is intended to or has the consequences of affecting, either directly or indirectly, government action” (2011, p.40). He would therefore describe the Occupy Wall Street movement as a type political engagement, just as voting or volunteering to help with a political campaign are considered political engagement. For Berger, protests and boycotts stand on the same level as contributing to a political party. This view is arguably implied by much of the existing empirical measures of non-traditional political participation.

Table 24 – Non-Traditional Participation

Q36. In the last 12 months, have you: Responses: <i>Never; Once; More than once</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed a petition • Boycotted or bought products for environmental reasons • Boycotted or bought products for ethical or political reasons • Attended a political meeting • Donated money to a political or societal cause • Taken part in a protest or demonstration
Q37. Have you been active in any of the following groups or organisations in the past year? Responses: <i>Yes; No</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political action/activist group

These forms of participation are usually taken as positive markers of democracy, such that citizens who boycott products are seen as being politically active, and those who take part in a political action group are similarly engaged in politics (Dalton, 2007).

Unfortunately, what both Berger and the measures just cited ignore is that activities such as these represent a much different kind of experience for those who take part in them than do formal, institutional and sanctioned forms of participation. A protestor is not participating in politics internally, within the government. Rather they are hounding the political institutions from the outside, battering down their doors in an attempt to get in. A citizen organizing a boycott or petition, is taking the initiative to act on their own, rather than turning first to political deliberation and debate. They may be engaging with politics, but they are doing so as outsiders, structurally speaking.

Therefore it is problematic to look at participation in the following terms – “the [Canadian Election Study] asked respondents to indicate how many of various political activities they have engaged in, namely signing a petition, participating in a boycott, attending a lawful demonstration, joining an illegal protest, or occupying a building or factory” (Blais and Lowen,

2011, p.9). If we are to call these types of activities (including activities that are explicitly illegal) “political engagement,” just as we call voting and engagement with electoral politics “political engagement,” (as Berger would have us do) then we are to obscure the relationships between citizen activities and the formal institutions of government. Instead, we should retain the concept of civic engagement as something separate from political engagement due to the structural relationships between civic organizations and formal political processes.

To reiterate, *civic engagement* occurs when social groups and the public attempt to impact political outcomes through organizations disconnected from the formal political sphere, whereas *political engagement* is a formally legitimated type of engagement directly connected to the structure of political institutions. Civic engagement and *non-traditional* political participation (ie. protesting, boycotting, sit-ins, etc.) are not equal to political engagement and *traditional* political participation (ie. voting, volunteering on a campaign, contributing financial to a political party, etc.), in terms of their impact on the experience of being a citizen. One represents a public that is structurally and formally internal to its government, where they make their opinions known to government directly, in an approved and systematically inclusive way. The other represents a public that is disconnected from its government as a structural fact, and who must increase their share of media coverage and popular support in order to impact deliberation from the outside.

In this second form of participation citizens learn that, in order to be effective politically, and in order for government to be responsive to their needs, they cannot rely on the formal channels, and instead must often bypass them completely. In this way, otherwise unresponsive institutions and actors will be forced to listen to messages that may have been ignored if

submitted through the traditional channels, which actualizing citizens believe to be unresponsive. “Actualizing citizens are more inclined towards forms of direct political action, including consumer activism and volunteering, and are less interested in voting,” and they also “have high levels of mistrust for traditional institutions such as politics and the media” (Draper, 2009, p.11-12).

While forms of external political participation such as protesting, boycotting, signing and petitions, and so forth, do show that the population is not lethargic and desires to be a part of their own governance, on the other hand, they also shows that these groups are not able to take part in politics directly, in an approved and formally defined way. Youth may be turning to such activities in order to take part in the political world, but this does not mean they wouldn't prefer a more legitimate way to do so.

“The literature concurs in stating that anyone below the age of 30 has experienced more control over more aspects of their daily lives than any previous generation. These young people want to control what they do and how they do it, what they watch and when, what they listen to and how, and they embrace this new empowerment with all the speed new technology allows it to be delivered. What are also there for everyone to see, if they still care to look, are the stodginess of democratic political systems and their unwillingness to adapt to the reality of the empowered young citizen. Once firmly ensconced in power, politicians only reluctantly embrace democratic reforms aimed to increase the degree to which citizens can participate in deciding what their own government does” (Turcotte, 2007, p.2)

The lessons fostered by these external participation experiences teach citizens that they are outsiders struggling to be heard. While they may sometimes be successful, and will therefore conclude that politics is not a complete waste of time – becoming more engaged rather than less so – there is still fostered a firm sense of disconnection between the public will and the operations of government institutions.

Finally, it should be noted that the *costs* of civic engagement and non-traditional political activity, in terms of attention and energy, are relatively high, whereas the *rewards* are inconsistent at best, and non-existent at worst. In the more traditional forms of civic engagement (meaning chapter-based, official organizations), one must join a group or club and maintain the commitments and obligations necessary for membership. One must participate in the activities of the group, learn about how it works, and operate within its rules and structure. In newer, less-hierarchical, networked forms of engagement, individuals must still make the effort involved to find like-minded people, communicate with them, organize plans and activities, and in many cases, physically attend rallies and protests. Both of these groups must then maintain high levels of mobilization long enough for their representatives to take notice and act.

Yet, none of this attention or energy guarantees to have any effect at all on deliberation processes and outcomes. Sometimes, after a prolonged media campaign, a group may end up effecting some degree of political change. Other times, no amount of news coverage and popular support will result in a changed policy. In extreme cases, a group may even spend months camping outside, carrying signs with slogans and aggressively promoting its political messages in the media, all without much effect on subsequent policy outcomes. External forms of political participation do not guarantee results, and the rewards they offer are inconsistent, if they are there at all. Whereas political engagement allows citizens to make binding decisions that their representatives *must* follow, civic engagement has no such power. Civic engagement amounts to a *suggestion* being made to government, whereas political engagement allows the population to *demand* a particular course of action.

As a closing note, the democratic theorist's focus on social action also leaves many

citizens unable to effect change individually. Representative democracies that depend heavily on external social organizations in some ways marginalize the atomistic individual that chooses to stay home and watch TV rather than join a club. If the atomized citizen wishes to have an impact on political deliberation, they cannot present themselves directly to government, but must first put in the work required to build a social movement, or to join an organization of one form or another. They must invest in these high-cost endeavors in order to have even a small chance at being politically effective. In this way, the lone individual (of which there are increasing numbers) is rendered relatively powerless by a closed deliberative structure.

4.3.3 Internal Participation

We have just looked at the two main types of political participation that are measured by empirical research on democracy. Traditional participation comes in the form of engagement with electoral politics, voting, and the media spectacle, and this provides a citizen experience that is fairly unsatisfying, as citizens are reduced to passive observers of politics, consumers who watch and vote but do not produce. External, non-traditional participation comes in terms of engagement with social groups that attempt to impact political discourse and deliberation from the outside. These groups amplify their voice through collective effort in an attempt to make themselves heard within sealed deliberation chambers. This form of engagement is more satisfying to the actualizing citizen, but it likewise cannot impact deliberation directly and internally, and therefore fosters an experience of distance between citizens and their government. Both forms of participation imply an objective political reality defined by a closed process of deliberation, where citizens may only influence political outcomes indirectly through the election of representatives, the alteration of media representations, or the formation of social

groups and movements. Existing assessments of democratic health tend to operate within a representative democracy framework, meaning they do not take into consideration the continuum of democratic structure and the horizontal linkages that connect publics to governments between elections.

But if citizens learn about their role in democracy and their relationship to government based on concrete, personal interaction experiences, then we must ask what types of direct, individualized, and explicitly political, interactions are available to them. As was shown in the previous chapter, “there is no existing conceptual framework or set of indicators that measure... governments with respect to openness, transparency, effectiveness, fairness, equity, and accessibility” (CIW, 2010, p.62). Similarly, “despite contemporary concern over the decline of social capital and participation, we have not developed a systematic way of investigating the role that government plays in shaping citizens’ involvement” (Mettler, 2002, p.351). This is why I have argued for the creation of a “structural openness” variable, which could place a political system on the continuum of democratic structure. Open structures will promote engagement, whereas closed structures will discourage it.

An example of how such an indicator could be constructed in the Canadian context relates to the governments use of open, online consultations. In December of 2011, the Treasury board “launched an online consultation on Open Government and invited Canadians to participate” stating: “We want to hear from Canadians on how we can advance the Open Government initiative in Canada...The valuable input we receive will help us develop an action plan for the International Open Government Partnership, and help make the Government of Canada more accessible to Canadians” (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2011). This

represents an opening in the sealed structure of government deliberation, allowing individual citizens to submit their opinions and preferences directly. By including survey questions that ask whether or not a respondent has participated in something similar, and if so, how satisfying and rewarding they found the experience to be, we can begin to assess governments role in fostering disengagement, or in promoting engagement.

I personally participated in this initiative, and while I was glad for the opportunity to contribute my opinion directly to government, I never received any follow up communications – no e-mail about when a report would be released, where I could find more information, what other related projects were on the go, etc. I simply submitted my thoughts and that was all there was to it. There was no further contact between us. I’m not sure if anyone even read my submission. The resulting feeling was that, while I had been able to make my input, this was the only interaction the government wanted to have with me. “Thank you for the information, now please leave us alone. We will do with it as we please.” In contrast, I receive e-mails daily from a dozen companies I have no interest in, all of them attempting to build a relationship with me that results in an active engagement with their brand. Asking about direct participation experiences of this nature is a potentially fruitful avenue for understanding why citizens hold the political attitudes they do.

More objective indicators could assess the number of such offerings, the number of participants, and the extent of participation. Where the system of deliberation is closed, we should not be surprised to find high levels of mass disengagement. This state of affairs would be fostered by the structure of the system itself, as it provides little to engage *with*. And in contrast, where the structure is open and interactive, reaching out to citizens in order to bring them into its

functioning, levels of engagement will most likely be higher. There is already some evidence to support this claim, though further work in this area is necessary.

4.4 The Effects of Structural Openness

Theorists have long discussed the effects of direct participation experiences on the public, arguing that more substantive and deliberative forms of participation can serve to increase levels of political information, help catalyze the process of opinion formation, increase tolerance for conflicting view points, promote community-oriented thinking, and mobilize infrequent voters (Dewey, 1927; Bohman and Rehg, 1997; Benz and Stutzer, 2004; Grogan and Gusmano, 2005, p.128-129; Bowler et. al, 2007; Donovan et. al, 2009). Some of these hypotheses have been tested empirically, and findings have generally supported claims that direct participation experiences have an educative and mobilizing effect on the population.

Benz and Stutzer's *Are Voter's Better Informed When They Have a Larger Say in Politics?* (2004) analyzed survey data from the European Union and Switzerland, conducting two separate examinations, in order to "empirically test whether the level of voter information itself is dependent on the political system under which citizens lives" (p.32). First, the authors used Eurobarometer data from 1992 to 1997 in order to compare the occurrence of referendums with levels of political knowledge. "The results indicate that people in countries with a referendum are in fact 'objectively' better informed (according to ten questions about the EU in the 1996 Eurobarometer) as well as they feel 'subjectively' better informed about the EU after a referendum" (p. 32). Secondly, they look at the case of Switzerland, whose 26 cantons each vary in the degree of direct democracy employed. They again found that "citizens living in more direct democratic jurisdictions are objectively better informed about politics" (p. 32). These

effects were found to be nearly universal, as almost every referendum held in European countries between 1992 and 1997 had a positive effect on citizens' perceived levels of political information (there was only once exception – France 1992) (p.44). In addition, their results show that “political participation possibilities raise discussion intensity,” implying that referendums help provoke an engaging debate amongst citizens (p.32). Overall, they summarized their findings by stating that “voter information is to a substantial degree endogenous to the political institutions under which citizens live” (p. 55).

The authors also present two theoretical rationalizations for the results. The first relates to differences in the kind and quality of information that circulates during referendums. As opposed to an election, where much of the news coverage and public discussions centers on the electoral spectacle (ie. the candidates themselves, their blunders, their rhetoric, vague action plans, public relations, kissing babies, etc.), referendums demand a much more substantial kind of information. The information supplied by political institutions and leaders, as well as the information demanded by the public, both shift to a more issue-oriented, analytic point of view. On the supply side, government institutions, political parties, and interest groups are forced to provide concrete reasons showing why they are for or against a particular policy.

“It is often not enough to emphasize an ideological position, but specific information on the issue at stake has to be provided, and the arguments and information of the opponents have to be taken up and discussed... Compared to elections, referenda are less personalized, which favors the supply of issue related information. Moreover, it restricts the possibility of politicians to hide behind an image or a reputation which in representative democracies might secure them reelection. In a referendum campaign, politicians are repeatedly forced to explain their arguments for or against a concrete policy measure and cannot focus on one or two core aspects of their party program (which are often rather unspecific, like ‘improving the health care system’)” (p.33-34).

On the demand side, “citizens ask for more political information mainly because they frequently are involved in the (often intense) discussions taking place before a referendum” (p. 34). This increase in the demand for information brings us to the second theoretical argument they put forth – namely that referendums increase the value of political information for citizens.

Political information can take on a social value within the groups who value it highly, just as any form of cultural knowledge can be considered a commodity when placed in the proper social context. The information takes on value within the dynamics of the group, as those with more knowledge are ranked highly in comparison to those with little. During a referendum, the commodity value of political information is amplified due to the inclusive nature of the participation. Whether or not citizens want to participate, they are involved automatically, and this may spur on social processes which draw them in further.

“In discussions, ‘having an opinion’ is partly transformed into a private good, for two reasons. First, individuals consider it as a value per se to have an opinion... Second, not having a certain level of information excludes an individual from discussions, or is viewed negatively by others. This is especially the case when important political issues are to be decided and thus discussions are intense” (p.34)

This means that during a referendum, the accumulation of political information often becomes something valuable to the individual in a more selfish or personal way. For those who are not motivated by the prospect of exerting their political influence on their nation, there is always the motivation provided by the universal human desire to be accepted by the group. Referendums include the entire population in a direct way, and therefore, even those who would rather not get involved are somehow drawn into it by the rest, through their desire to appear socially adept and desirable. The costs of information are drawn down by the increased supply by governments, external organizations and other citizens, just as the benefits of accumulating information

increase due to rising social salience. The result is an increase in levels of political information and engagement triggered by a move towards increased structural openness by democratic institutions. Other empirical studies provide support for the argument that more direct forms of participation increase levels of political information among the citizenry (Mendelsohn and Cutler, 2000; Smith and Tolbert, 2004).

Turning to the question of mobilization, increases in direct participation opportunities have also been correlated with more traditional participation practices such as voting. Tolbert, Grummel and Smith (2001) used pooled time series data from all 50 U.S. States over a 26 year period (1970-1996) in order to compare the presence and usage of citizen initiatives to voter turnout during elections. Looking at presidential elections, their findings show that “states with frequent usage of the initiative process have higher turnout rates in presidential elections than states with low or no usage of the process” (p. 635). This study refutes previous findings (Smith, 2001) which showed that citizen initiatives increase turnout during midterm elections, but not during presidential elections. Rather, direct participation opportunities increase voter turnout in both (these previous studies looked only at whether or not states had the initiative process in place, not how much it was actually used).

Turning to midterm elections, this study corroborates previous findings showing that states with initiatives process have higher turnout rates than those without them (p. 637). States with frequently used initiative processes have turnout numbers that are, on average, 10% higher than non-initiative states during midterm elections, and 5% higher during presidential elections (p. 639). Overall, the authors conclude that “both the presence and usage of the initiative process

are related to higher citizen participation rates over time” (p. 644). This lends support to the argument that structural openness contributes to levels of citizen engagement.

Similar findings were reported by Robert Lacey (2005), who uses individual-level data taken from the National Election Studies of 1990-1996, as opposed to the aggregated data used by Tolbert, Grummel and Smith (2001). He links “individual-level characteristics (including socioeconomic and demographic controls and variables measuring political attitudes and social connectedness) from this dataset to certain state-level characteristics (including the key individual variable in this study, ballot question salience)” (p. 172). Findings show that higher ballot question salience is correlated to increased voter turnout numbers in midterm elections, when controlling for other factors (p. 173).

In *Political Engagement, Mobilization and Direct Democracy* (2009), Donovan, Tolbert and Smith look at *who* is being mobilized to vote by citizen initiatives. They “test whether ballot measures engage and mobilize people who do not fit the profile of regular voters” using data from the 2004 and 2006 elections. Findings show that:

“Different types of citizens report being engaged by ballot propositions in low versus high information elections. In the presidential election, partisans were the most aware of and interested in ballot measures. In the lower information 2006 midterm elections, it was independents and the lesser educated who were more likely to report being aware of and interested in ballot measures. Ballot measures appear to be more likely to engage peripheral voters than partisans in midterm elections” (p. 115).

This shows that increased structural openness and more opportunities for citizen participation may serve to re-engage citizens who have dropped out – those peripheral voters that do not become engaged by the flurry of media activity surrounding presidential elections, but who nonetheless want to contribute to their political community.

The above cited studies provide evidence for the claim that a structurally open political structure, one which allows citizens to participate directly between elections, can potentially engage citizens, both cognitively and physically, by providing information, learning experiences and reinforcing traditional avenues of participation. Of course, it still remains to be seen how more deliberative, distributed decision-making processes could affect the public's levels of engagement. While citizen initiatives provide a way for citizen's to make a direct input into political decision-making, they do not allow a fully engaged public to co-produce legally binding decisions through inclusive debate. More deliberative structural openings would arguably have a much more dramatic effect on levels of public engagement with politics.

4.5 Summary

What does all of this show? First, citizens are both capable of participating, and willing to participate, more directly in the political arena. Increases in education levels and shifts in value orientations have contributed to new normative model of citizenship, one in which rational choice theory plays a greater role than it had in the past. Citizens now want to take part without paying too highly for it. They want satisfying, meaningful political participation experiences, and they want them to come cheaply and easily. This is what they want as an ideal, as a set of expectations. Second, citizens construct their mental schemas of "government" and "politics" through confrontations with democratic institutions and actors. Whether interacting with a tax agency, welfare office, or their member of parliament, citizens take what they can from such experiences and add it to their evaluations of political reality. They construct their idea of "the way politics are" through personal experiences of this sort, comparing their expectations to the reality they've come to know directly. Third, the forms of participation that are offered to the

average citizen in the modern, representative democracy are far from engaging, as they assign citizens the role of receptive consumers or spectators. In order to impact political decision making, citizens must either pay attention to the competition being played on the media stage, in which only a few individuals actually take part as candidates, or they can attempt to secure media attention through activist measures of one sort or another. The structure that they confront teaches them that they are outsiders as a political reality, as an institutional feature of their design. They are an audience to politics, not players, and this does not match up with their expectations. Finally, existing research shows that more direct forms of participation can serve to increase levels of political information, and mobilize more citizens to vote. Structures that are more open, inclusive and participatory help teach citizens different lessons about the role they are supposed to play, lessons more conducive to the ideals of democracy.

Taken together, these arguments imply that a measure of structural openness is necessary to understanding the democratic deficit, because such a deficit may not exist on behalf of the citizenry, but rather on behalf of the closed democratic structures which offer citizens little to engage *with*. Engagement levels are low, not because citizens don't want to take part, or feel that they aren't smart enough. Engagement levels are low because citizens are denied the opportunity to engage in a meaningful way.

“Governments ought to focus the lens inward to consider how institutions and processes may no longer ‘speak’ to the youngest citizens and how they may even discourage their participation. For the cognitively mobilized, the formal processes and hierarchical organizations of representative politics provide little in the way of satisfying and results-oriented practices. Wherever possible, participatory decision-making structures ought to be adopted, fully supported and implemented. This necessarily involves the ceding of a measure of political power but brings with it a host of benefits in the form of an engaged, informed and involved citizenry” (O’Neill, 2007, p. iv).

Without asking questions about the structures of democracy, researchers will still have a good understanding of what citizens think, feel and do, but we won't understand the contexts that shaped those attitudes and behaviours from the earliest stages of development. We will have the species without the environment; the adaptations without the selection pressures; the subjective attitudes without the objective conditions; the political disengagement without the political reality. In order to make sense of widespread, cross-cultural disengagement from politics, we must take the structural openness of the political system into consideration.

5. Conclusion

In the first chapter, I laid out the traditional, representative democracy, and provided example indicators of how it has been measured in past assessments of democratic health. This included the law, elections, representatives, political parties, and the news media. The sixth important element – citizens themselves – was left until the final chapter, and this included concepts like political knowledge, interest, satisfaction, efficacy, and social and civic engagement. Together these concepts were shown to represent the majority of indicators present in many assessments of democratic health, with the first and final chapters corresponding respectively to the institutional and individual dimensions of the representative democracy.

The first chapter focused on institutions, showing that, by accurately reproducing and forwarding political preferences from the level of the average citizen to the sphere of policy deliberation, institutions could serve to include the political will of the public in the resultant policies that govern their lives. These mediating institutions were designed to reduce the complexity of millions upon millions of private opinions into something manageable, first by receiving the input of the citizenry (eg. through voting, conversations with representatives, activist media campaigns, etc.), and second by forwarding these inputs onto the next stage in their path towards the floors of policy production. Institutions that did this well, receiving input and forwarding it on with the least distortions produced, and the least reduction in complexity, were seen as contributing more to the democratic ideal than institutions which dropped the input signals of some citizens while amplifying the output signals of others. An election that did not include all citizens, or which was marked by fraud and tampering, or which allocated seats in an unfair manner, would be one which dropped the signals of some citizens while amplifying the

signals of others. Representatives who acted as trustees most of the time also dropped a portion of the input signals coming to them from the electorate, and instead amplified other signals which may have emerged from less democratic roots. Likewise, political parties that enforced strict discipline were shown as pushing a particular course of action from above, sometimes silencing the divergent opinions bubbling up from below. And because the news media construct the public stage upon which the entire game is played out, they can also drop or amplify the messages of different groups, whether through blatant censorship or a subtle, organizational bias. Each of these institutions is responsible in part for “representing” the public will to a centralized, concentrated group of decision-makers, who must act in accordance with the control signals they receive.

Individual measures of democratic health, which were the focus of the final chapter, included concepts like knowledge, interest, efficacy, satisfaction, trust, news consumption, political participation, and social and civic engagement. These question the quality of the citizenry, asking whether or not they are adequately informed and mobilized to serve as the basis for political legitimacy. Together these institutional and individual measures make up the large majority of the survey indicators being used to measure democratic health today.

My main argument throughout this thesis has been that, even with these two dimensions – the institutional and the individual – there was something missing from assessments of democratic health. We talked about how institutions functioned internally, and how citizens thought and behaved, but we never asked about the objective relationships and that linked and connected them together. The middle chapter was therefore an attempt to bridge these dimensions through the concepts of a *continuum of democratic structure* and the variable of

structural openness. Some versions of democracy are highly mediated and assign citizens a minimalist role. Their deliberation processes are structurally sealed from the public, and elections are the main mechanisms through which citizens exert their control over policy makers. Other structures may be more direct, asking citizens to play a much more substantial role, and providing extra-electoral avenues for the expression of their political power. These structures are not neutral in their effect on citizens – they help shape political consciousness by providing interactive learning experiences that are used as materials in the construction of a citizen's mental schemas. By focusing our institutional measures on representative democracies as a base premise, and ignoring the structural openings that allow citizens to participate outside of the electoral contest, we may be overlooking an important causal variable in the fomentation of mass disengagement – the overall structure of political reality.

Minimalist versions of democracy make normative claims about the public, stating that they are either too incompetent to take part in substantive political issues, or that they are unwilling and uninterested in doing so. This role of the public is reflected in the design of institutions and their deployment in practice. Yet these claims do not stand up to the evidence. Citizens want more extra-electoral participation opportunities, and their dissatisfaction with existing institutions and actors shows they think they can do an even better job than those who currently hold office. But because minimalist, representative democracy bar them from participating in the second layer of deliberation (they are only allowed to participate in the first layer – elections), citizens conclude that there is little point in expending the energy necessary for engagement.

What does “political engagement” *really* mean within a representative democratic structure? It either means being captivated by a spectacle that you cannot become a part of, or it means expending incredible amounts of time and energy on social activities that do not guarantee results; either you can become extremely interested in a video game you’ll never get to play, or you can group together with a bunch of likeminded individuals in order to bash your heads against the steel walls of government. In either case, your greatest hope is that someone inside will listen to you. That’s as good as it gets. At best, some representative or group of representatives will hear your calls and take up your cause. But for the actualizing, independent, autonomous, empowered, critical citizen of the modern day, without an opportunity to *actually play the game*, “political engagement” just seems like a whole lot of work for nothing. Under such circumstances disengagement becomes the most rational choice. In contrast, democratic structures that open up horizontally to the public, that seek public input as much as possible, and which allow citizens to stand on the same level as their representatives – these structures will promote engagement. Open democratic structures offer citizens something to engage *with*. This is why I have argued that we cannot understand the democratic deficit without asking about the structures of democracy.

Finally, as we draw to a close, it is important to consider the future. If a group of researchers went out today and surveyed a thousand Canadians, the odds are that very few of them would say they participate in direct consultations with government on a routine basis. Although avenues for direct participation do exist, many do not know about them, or else do not know how they can take part. Such practices are still relatively new, and the transition to a more open and participatory political structure comes slowly, through a process of trial and error. This

means that the above discussion may not seem as relevant today as it will many years down the road. Today governments are in a transition phase, negotiating between the closed structures of the past and the open ones of the future. *Canada's Action Plan on Open Government* was released just this year, in 2012, and it lays out a plan to “foster greater openness and accountability, to provide Canadians with more opportunities to learn about and participate in government, to drive innovation and economic opportunities for all Canadians and, at the same time, create a more cost-effective, efficient and responsive government” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 1). By increasing public access to political information, data sets, and deliberative processes, its goal is to open the structure of government to the public, creating extra-electoral linkages that bind its functioning with the citizens it seeks to represent. Other nations have made similar commitments, signing on to the Open Government Partnership, which has grown from its 8 founding governments (Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, United Kingdom, and the United States) to over 57 countries at the time of this writing (Open Government Partnership, 2012).

Although these attempts to increase structural openness will undoubtedly be put into action with differing levels of effectiveness and follow-through, modern democracies are aware of the mismatch between citizen expectations for democracy and the current political realities they confront. In order to maintain popular legitimacy, governments recognize that they must become more transparent and interactive (or that they must at least *appear* to be doing these things), and as time goes on, it will become easier to assess the results of such efforts. Structural openness is a variable that would have meant almost nothing 30 years ago, but which will mean a whole lot more 30 years from now.

This is especially true given the impetus of new information and communications technologies which annihilate space and time, allowing millions of geographically dispersed

individuals to come together in virtual co-presence in order to debate and discuss with one another. I will spare you the typical techno-utopian rhetoric which claims that the Internet will save democracy and usher in a Golden Age of peace, love and brotherhood. If history has taught us anything, it is that social change is gloriously unpredictable – every aspiring social engineer seeking the “final utopic revolution” eventually cradles their head in their hands, wondering how they lost control of a movement that seemed to be so firmly within their grasp. But regardless of how history plays itself out in the years to come, I can say with a complete sense of surety and definitiveness that citizens will become increasingly likely to demand a networked form of direct political participation.

Experiences with digital technology change what citizens expect from large-scale organizations and resource-heavy institutions, leading them to demand a different relationship with their government. For the digital native, structural openness is not an extra perk; it is an essential organizational requirement, the lack of which leads to frustration and disappointment. Similarly, physical presence is no longer an acceptable prerequisite to participation. If a citizen is asked to leave their bedroom or put on clothes in order to participate, this is already asking too much effort. Rewards systems are a must in order to reinforce behaviour (ie. participation and engagement), and these need not be substantial in order to be effective (eg. token economies, social praise). I will not go into the particular effects of experiences with digital technology on expectations of institutional interaction (see Prensky, 2001; The MacArthur Series on Digital Media and Learning, 2008; Tapscott, 2008; Shirky, 2010), but I will say that governments will not escape the drive towards cheaper, more effective, and more satisfying forms of social organization that can adapt easily, and which offer positive, empowering experiences to their

members. Large-scale, distributed decision-making is now a concept that many people (especially youth) are familiar with directly, having taken part in themselves. If citizens can already make decisions collectively, building new groups and relationships with people they have never met in real life, solving problems with them, collaborating on projects together, and all without leaving the comfort of their bed, then why would they not come to expect the same cheap, satisfying experience from a political system that claims to be democratic?

As Thomas Jefferson said many years ago (1816):

"I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors."

Since the inception of the representative democracy, a lot has changed. New discoveries have been made, new truths have been found, and manners and opinions have shifted. Democratic institutions must keep pace with these changes. This means becoming more structurally open, allowing more opportunities for direct, individualized participation, and allowing citizens to take part in politics in a more substantive way than the minimalist representative democracy allows.

In terms of the democratic deficit, while some have argued that disengaged citizens are themselves to blame, because they are not willing to change their attitudes and behaviours in order to fit into the traditional structures of democracy whose age far outstrips their own, one could respond by saying that it is the democratic structures which must adapt to their citizens. Far from reflecting an apathetic, lazy, self-indulgent citizenry, the democratic deficit could just as easily reflect a rigid relic of the past, stubbornly clinging onto its closed form as the ocean of

citizens surrounding it batters against its walls from without, wave after wave crashing upon its cloistered chamber in attempt to break through.

The political attitudes of the individual citizen should no longer be viewed as the result of agency and demographics alone, but must also be linked to the democratic structures they confront as an objective feature of their environment, and according to which their disengagement is but a response.

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