Chapter 1

The puzzling phenomenon of critical citizens

The third wave of democratization represents a remarkable historical era. During the late twentieth century, human rights strengthened in all parts of the globe. Freedom House estimate that the number of liberal democracies doubled from the early-1970s until 2000. [1] During the last decade, however, progress slowed to a sluggish and uncertain pace.[2] It is premature and unduly pessimistic to claim that a 'reverse' wave or 'democratic recession' is occurring, as some observers believe.[3] Yet multiple challenges continue to limit further progress in democratization. Fragile electoral democracies have been undermined by inconclusive or disputed election results, partisan strife and recurrent political scandals, and military coups.[4] These issues, always difficult, have been compounded in recent years by the aftermath of the global financial crisis, which generated worsening economic conditions, falling employment and wages, and the largest decline in world trade for eighty years.[5] Even before this downturn, in the world's poorest societies, democratic governance faced particularly severe obstacles in delivering basic public services to their citizens. The U.N. documents enduring and deeply-entrenched poverty for the bottom billion in the least developed nations, raising doubts about whether the world can achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, as planned.[6] In fragile or post-crisis societies, the struggle to reduce conflict, build sustainable peace, and strengthen the capacity and legitimacy of democratically-elected states cannot be underestimated.[7] In this complex and difficult environment, it would be naïve to assume that the third wave era of democratization continues to advance steadily. It has become even more vital to understand the conditions which underpin regime change, as well as the underlying processes leading towards the advance and consolidation of democratic governance.

An important issue arising from these developments concerns the state of public support for the principles and practices of democratic governance. For more than half a century, scholars and pundits have debated what ordinary people think and feel about their government. Conventional wisdom suggests that in recent decades citizens in the United States and Western Europe have grown more distrustful of politicians, detached from parties, and doubtful about public sector institutions, although simultaneously continuing to endorse democratic ideals and rejecting authoritarianism.[8] A chorus of commentators has drawn attention to problems perceived to be facing American democracy, whether arising from eroding social capital (Putnam), low or falling voting turnout (Teixiera), popular discontent (Craig) and voter anger (Tolchin), declining party loyalties (Aldrich), lack of trust in government (Nye, Zelikow and King), negative news about public affairs (Patterson), or mistrust of Congress (Hibbing and

Theiss-Morse).[9] A similar litany of concerns about the state of representative democracy echoes in Western Europe, where it is claimed that people hate politics (Hay), party identification has weakened (Franklin et al, Dalton and Wattenberg) and party membership has steadily plummeted (Mair and Biezen), while electoral turnout has fallen (Franklin), although in Europe the jury still remains out concerning contemporary trends in social capital.[10] Russell Dalton provides the most comprehensive and thorough comparison of the cross-national survey evidence, suggesting that established democracies have experienced growing public discontent with parties, parliaments, and governments.[11] Reflecting upon these indicators, theorists have speculated gloomily about the 'winter of democracy' (Hermet), the era of 'post-democracy' (Crouch), as well as the 'death of democracy' (Keane).[12] In short, the consensus heard in popular commentary and much scholarly research commonly depicts the general public in Western countries as increasingly disenchanted with government and politicians, even hostile and angry.[13] The burgeoning body of cross-national data about public opinion which is rapidly expanding in scope and reach -- in Latin America as well as Post-Communist states, in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as Asia and the Middle East – allows us to investigate whether similar sentiments are expressed among many citizens around the globe.[14]

The central concern driving such popular debate is that growing public disaffection with politics and government, even if not a 'crisis', still represent a major threat to the quality of representative democracy. Such developments are widely believed to have serious implications if, as suspected, they undermine civic engagement and mass participation, limit the public policy agenda, and raise fundamental challenges to the legitimacy of the state.[15] Due to these concerns, scholars and policymakers have debated practical ways to revitalize connections between citizens and the state.[16] Popular strategies include expanding opportunities for public engagement, for example through experimenting with citizen assemblies and juries, popular referenda and petitions, social audits, participatory budgeting, public consultation, and deliberative polls. Governments have also sought to strengthen transparency and accountability, such as through more open decision-making processes and the expansion of monitoring and regulatory agencies. Related innovations have sought to utilize the deployment of digital communication and information technologies in governance, designed for online delivery of more accessible information, for convenient and efficient public service transactions, and for interactive feedback to policymakers. Countries have also considered more radical constitutional changes, including reforms to electoral systems and processes, the decentralization of governance, and the devolution of decision-making to local communities, in the attempt to bring decision-making closer

to the people. Yet it remains unclear whether any of these panaceas will actually achieve their desired long-term objectives, particularly if the central problem has been exaggerated and misdiagnosed.

Given the amount of attention devoted to these issues, is there anything new to say? Perhaps surprisingly, there is a lot. This book lays out a series of reasons to question the conventional wisdom. Firstly, we demonstrate that the available empirical evidence across a wide range of indicators does not indicate steadily growing public disillusionment with politics and government in most countries during the third wave era; instead indicators of system support display significant fluctuations over time. Enduring contrasts in confidence and trust in government can be found among relatively similar West European states, such as those observed between Italy and Norway, or Belgium and the Netherlands. Even in the United States – where perhaps most concern has been expressed about political cynicism and voter anger – in fact support for government has both risen and fallen over time, and contrasting trends in public confidence are evident among the major branches of the federal government. After comparing multiple measures, this study focuses most attention upon the core idea of '*critical citizens*', conceptualized in this book, most simply, as those who understand the basic characteristics of liberal democracy, who aspire to democracy as the ideal form of government, yet who remain skeptical when evaluating how democratically their own country is being governed. The concept of critical citizens therefore uses a equilibrium market model which emphasizes the balance between the *demand* for democracy (measured by how much people value democracy and reject autocratic alternatives) and its perceived *supply* (monitored by public perceptions of the performance of democratic governance). Any major disparity between supply and demand lies at the heart of any public disaffection with their regime. If public opinion is grounded in an accurate awareness of the basic principles and procedures of liberal democracy, then any disparities could well have important consequences for political behavior, for processes of democratization, and ultimately for regime stability.

Nevertheless the catalysts driving the critical citizen syndrome continue to prove puzzling. What causes any disparities between supply and demand? Some explanations of this general phenomenon focus upon long-term cultural shifts and value change, generating rising public demands for democracy. Others blame negative political news, or limits on state capacity, for poor perceptions of the performance of democracy. Still others emphasize disparities between electoral winner and losers arising from constitutional arrangements. These alternative theories deserve careful scrutiny.

Moreover, the implications of critical citizens are far from simple and obvious. Again, we need to reexamine the evidence. In the process, we can also challenge the prevailing normative assumptions in

the debate, which are rarely questioned, or even explicitly justified. Satisfaction with democracy and trust in government, where this implies flabby complacency about public affairs and automatic deference to the authorities, is hardly a desirable or appropriate response towards public affairs for democrats -- especially in many states worldwide where governments are incompetent, dishonest, or worse. By contrast, vigilant and alert citizens who are skeptical about those in power, who demand rigorous standards of government performance, and who are aware of the political rules of the game, can be seen as vital for democracy's future around the globe.

This book seeks to understand the trends, causes, and consequences of the critical citizen syndrome, integrating knowledge into a comprehensive theoretical framework which challenges the conventional wisdom. To demonstrate and buttress the central argument, empirical evidence is derived from more than fifty countries worldwide. The remainder of this chapter clarifies the core thesis in more detail and then summarizes the roadmap for the rest of the book.

The idea of critical citizens

A long tradition of political thinkers as diverse as Artistotle, Montesquieu, and de Tocqueville has sought to understand the underlying roots of how political cultures vary among different societies. The empirical foundation for this body of comparative literature was created in *The Civic Culture* by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963).[17] Previously a few other cross-national attitudinal surveys had been deployed, notably William Buchanan and Hadley Cantril's 9-country *How Nations See Each Other (1953)*, sponsored by UNESCO, sociological surveys of social stratification, and USIA surveys of attitudes towards international affairs.[18] The civic culture survey, conducted in 1959/60, laid the groundwork for the comparative study of public opinion and subsequent cross-national survey research as a distinctive sub-field in political science open to empirical investigation. This ground-breaking study presented an ambitious theory of the cognitive, affective and evaluative orientations among the mass population, developing concepts which remain central in contemporary political science.

The Civic Culture served as the inspiration for a long series of cross-national public opinion surveys. As the earliest academic voting studies, the American National Election Surveys are commonly regarded as canonical, not least because they now facilitate analysis of more than a half-century of public opinion trends. Following trends in globalization, the spread of democracy, and the expansion of market research, the geographic scope of cross-national surveys grew considerably in the early-1980s and 1990s to facilitate comparison of citizens' political and social attitudes in a wide range of states worldwide. [19] The series of datasets available to document time-series trends and cross-national

comparisons includes the Euro-barometer and related EU surveys (which started in 1970), the European Election Study (1979), the European Values Survey and the World Values Survey (1981), the International Social Survey Programme (1985), the Global-Barometers (including regional surveys conducted in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Arab states, and Asia (1990 and various), the Comparative National Elections Project (1990), the European Voter and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (1995), the European Social Survey (2002), the Transatlantic Trends survey (2002), the Pew Global Attitudes project (2002), World Public Opinion, and the Gallup World Poll (2005). Numerous survey datasets are also available for detailed case-studies of trends in public opinion within particular countries, including the long series of academic national election studies, general social surveys, and commercial public opinion polls.

To examine the evidence, a decade ago, I edited a volume, *Critical Citizens*. [20] This brought together a network of international scholars to consider the global state of public support for democratic governance in the late-twentieth century. David Easton's seminal insights into the conceptual framework of political support provided the classic starting point for the study. [21] Drawing upon these ideas, the earlier book understood the idea of 'political support' broadly as a multidimensional phenomenon ranging from the most diffuse to the most specific levels. Hence this notion was conceived to include five components:

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

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

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

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

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

Critical Citizens scrutinized a wide range of survey indicators for evidence concerning each of these dimensions, including global, regional and national comparisons of public opinion from the 1960s until the mid-1990s. The volume brought together experts on diverse countries and regions, utilizing different datasets and surveys, as well as scholars drawn from multiple theoretical perspectives and disciplines. Despite the multiplicity of viewpoints, based on the survey evidence, a common

understanding quickly emerged about the most appropriate interpretation of trends. The collaborative volume concluded that citizens in many countries had proved increasingly skeptical about the actual workings of the core institutions of representative democracy, notably political parties, parliaments, and governments. At the same time, however, public aspirations towards democratic ideals, values, and principles, or the demand for democracy, proved almost universal around the globe. The tensions between unwavering support for democratic principles but skeptical evaluations about democratic practices, was interpreted in the book as the rise of 'critical citizens'. Subsequent studies have understood this phenomenon, with perhaps an excess of alliteration, as 'disaffected', 'dissatisfied', or 'disenchanted' democrats.[22]

Building on the earlier book, this book deepens and expands the analysis of critical citizens. After providing a general overview of a wide range of indicators of system support, we focus on comparing disparities in the supply and demand for democracy.

The demand for democracy springs from values. The idea that values are the heart of a democratic culture has long historical roots, which can be traced back to thinkers such as Montesquieu, de Tocqueville, and Bryce. 'Values' are conceptualized here as the importance which citizens attach to living in a democracy and the rejection of autocratic alternatives; for some, democracy is so powerful and attractive a notion that they are willing to risk everything, even their freedom and security, in its furtherance. For others, where there is a trade-off with democracy, it is more important to have strong political leaders who promise to improve living standards for the poor, maintain security and stability, and protect again foreign threats, or who draw legitimacy from traditional sources of spiritual or inherited authority rather than the ballot box. Therefore values help to identify whether citizens care about democracy or whether they are largely indifferent.

The supply of democracy reflects the perceived democratic performance of government. Values also provide a benchmark against which citizens can judge how well their own country is being governed. Surveys commonly ask people to evaluate multiple aspects of government performance. In some places, citizens report widespread satisfaction, for example believing that their state is effective when expanding the economy and reducing poverty, delivering public goods and services, and respecting democratic processes, justice, and human rights. In others, people believe that corruption is endemic throughout the public sector, most politicians are thieves and scoundrels, state institutions are ineffective, and the legitimacy of the governing authorities is questionable.

As with evaluations about other complex issues, however, citizen's judgments may always prove well or ill-informed. Expectations about what democracy can deliver may be grossly inflated, leading to unduly harsh evaluations of the government's record. Alternatively the public may express satisfaction with the democratic performance of the government, due to fear of repression, a sense of ethnic loyalty, or feelings of national pride, irrespective of whether political leaders actually trample over political rights and civil liberties. Previous research on critical citizens, including my own, has commonly suffered from focusing too heavily upon analyzing the content and structure of values and attitudes towards democratic governance, such as confidence and trust in political institutions, paying too little attention to processes of cognitive awareness and learning which shape how citizens perceive government performance. Enlightened judgments about the performance of democracy require political knowledge, representing the factual information which citizens use to interpret the world. People's beliefs about many political facts may be accurate but they are often commonly found to be erroneous. In the United States, for example, a long series of surveys have demonstrated widespread American ignorance about many political events, domestic and foreign policy issues, current social and economic conditions, people and parties, and the institutions of governance.[23] Lack of awareness about the basic principles, practices, and processes of democracy has been documented even in affluent and well-educated post-industrial societies. Limited knowledge can be expected to be especially common in states lacking historical experience of democracy, in societies with limited access to information from the independent news media, as well as among the less interested, less educated, and illiterate sectors of the population. Any rational and enlightened evaluations of the supply of democratic governance requires at least a minimal knowledge of how liberal democracy works.

In emphasizing how citizen's orientation towards their regime combines the components of knowledge, values, and judgments we return to the classic framework at the heart of the Almond and Verba's original Civic Culture. This focused upon "(1) '*cognitive orientations*', that is, knowledge and beliefs about the political system… (2) '*affective orientations*' or feelings about the political system…and (3) '*evaluational orientations*,' the judgments and opinions…that typically involve the combination of value standards and criteria with information and feelings."[24] Enlightened knowledge about democracy is measured here by the capacity to identify accurately a few of the basic procedures and principles, or rules of the game, of liberal democracy. Democracy is an abstract and complex idea, and the meaning continues to be contested among experts. Public perceptions of the quality of democratic governance can and often do differ from those provided by the standard indicators used in social science, such as the expert evaluations of the state of civil liberties and political rights in each nation estimated by

Freedom House or Polity V's autocracy-democracy index. Even ill-informed public perceptions are meaningful for those holding these beliefs, providing the social construction of reality. But critical citizens need to demonstrate at least some minimal cognitive awareness about the basic procedural characteristics and core institutions of liberal democracy if they are to make enlightened judgments about both the quality of democratic performance and the importance of democracy as the ideal regime for governing their own country.

[Figure 1.1 about here]

To summarize, therefore, as illustrated by the ideal types depicted in figure 1.1, the notion of *critical* citizens emphasizes those who are characterized by: (i) an enlightened understanding of the procedural characteristics of liberal democracy; (ii) who regard living in a democratic state as important; yet who also (iii) remain dissatisfied with the performance of democracy in their own country. Understanding critical citizens provides powerful fresh insights into mass political behavior and the underlying role of ordinary people in processes of regime change, democratic consolidation, and political reform.

Roadmap of the book

Part I: Theoretical framework

The first section of the book clarifies the core concepts, the central theoretical argument, and the primary sources of evidence and methodology. Ideas such as 'political trust', 'democratic values', and 'systems support' are far from simple. Their measurement through cross-national surveys is not straightforward. The thoughtful interpretation of their underlying meaning is even more complicated. Scholars have long debated how best to understand public attitudes towards government. For example, do the available indicators concerning trust and confidence in political institutions reflect a relatively superficial and healthy skepticism about the performance of politicians and the normal ups-and-downs in popular fortunes expected of any party in government? Or alternatively do signs suggest more deep-rooted loss of citizen's trust in all public officials, lack of faith in core institutions of representative democracy, and ambivalence about fundamental democratic principles? Another important issue which remains unresolved concerns the relationship between support for democratic ideals and practices. In particular, will public faith in democratic values gradually spread downwards to encourage trust and confidence in the core institutions of representative democracy? Or instead, will skepticism about the way that democratic states work eventually diffuse upwards to corrode and undermine approval of

democratic principles? Or, alternatively, it may be that these ambivalent tensions between ideals and practices will persist in parallel.

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

Chapter 3 outlines the technical detail about this study, including the sources of evidence, the comparative framework, the methods of analysis, and the classification of regimes used throughout the study. The use of standard regression models which combine individual and macro-level variables can produce misleading results which exaggerate the statistical significance of any contextual effects.[25] Hence multilevel models are utilized for this study, as the most appropriate technique for analyzing both individual and aggregate data.

Part II: Diagnosis

Building upon this foundation, Part II of the book then applies the conceptual framework of systems support to diagnose trends over time and to understand public opinion in comparative perspective. Since the mid-twentieth century, an extensive literature has compared attitudes towards the political system in Anglo-American and West European democracies.[26] Popular and scholarly commentators frequently assert that in recent decades these societies have experienced a gradual erosion of trust in politicians, confidence in the institutions of representative democracy, and satisfaction with the performance of democratic governance.[27] Before plunging straight into explanations, these assumptions are carefully scrutinized to establish whether systematic survey evidence supports these generalizations in Western Europe and the United States, as well as across a

diverse range of contemporary regimes and developing societies in many parts of the world. Far from the steady and uniform erosion across all indicators of systems support, as commonly depicted in popular headlines, the book demonstrates that in fact many countries have experienced trendless fluctuations over time. Enduring contrasts in political culture are also evident even among relatively similar post-industrial economies and long-standing democratic states. These persistent differences highlight the need for considerable caution when seeking to generalize more widely to the state of public opinion towards government in diverse countries worldwide.

Chapter 4 explores the available survey evidence in the United States and Western Europe to see whether the public has become increasingly skeptical about politicians and institutions in established democracies, as so commonly assumed. The longest series of trend data is also available in these countries. Evidence from the American National Election Study (ANES) has measured trust in politicians and government since 1958 while the American General Social Survey (GSS) has monitored confidence in the leaders of public and private sector institutions since the early-1970s. The analysis of trends strongly indicate the need for caution, avoiding unduly alarmist and 'chicken little' predictions of democratic 'crisis', 'death' or other similarly sensationalist headlines, as well as the pervasive declinist assumptions. The evidence establishes that American trust in government has fallen during the last half century, but there are strong fluctuations in trust and confidence over time, not a uniform linear decline. The trend evidence indicates that Americans distinguish among the branches of government, with a trend of relatively low and eroding public trust in Congress, (as well as in private sector banks and major companies), but with trendless fluctuations in trust in the executive and judicial branches. Comparable evidence for institutional trust is available from the regular EuroBarometer surveys in European Union member states during the last decade. The results of the analysis of this data presented in chapter 4 demonstrate European trends which are usually far from consistent, linear, or uniform; instead dynamic movements in public opinion often fluctuate erratically over time, like a drunken sailor stumbling uphill and downhill.[28] The chapter concludes that the standard interpretation of ever-growing public disenchantment with politics and government in established democracies is crude, over-simple and misleading, requiring significant revision. Instead satisfactory explanations need to account for the complex dynamics, and the persistent cross-national variations, in the multidimensional concept of system support.

The longest series of longitudinal data available from representative surveys concerns established democracies. Many other countries worldwide lack time-series surveys over an extended

period, but in these cases contemporary attitudes towards democracy can be compared. **Chapter 5** examines the contemporary evidence elsewhere in the world, drawing upon the World Values Survey. The comparisons focus on indicators of system support ranging from the specific to the most diffuse, including confidence in public sector institutions, evaluations of democratic performance, support for democratic values and rejection of autocratic forms of government, and feelings of nationalism. Cultures are expected to display the enduring imprint of each society's accumulated historical political experiences and traditions, as well as to reflect the type of contemporary regime in power. Moreover democratic orientations and feelings of government legitimacy are expected gradually to strengthen over the years among citizens living within younger democracies. We therefore analyze how far attitudes vary systematically according to each society's historical experience of democratization and the contemporary type of regime in power, as well as by comparing trends over a quarter century among a group of liberal democracies.

The evidence clearly demonstrates that historical experience of democracy strengthens democratic cultures; people living in states which have been democracies for decades, or even centuries, are *significantly more likely to endorse democratic attitudes*, *to emphasize the importance of living in a democracy*, and *to rate the democratic performance of their government more positively*. Enduring historical experiences imprint these attitudes and values in a national culture far more strongly than the contemporary level of democratization, suggesting that current democratic cultures lag behind democratic regime transitions. This is hardly surprising, given what we know about other deep-rooted and durable social values acquired from socializations processes in early childhood and youth, such as those concerning the importance of religiosity, social tolerance, and attitudes towards the roles of men and women. In a similar way, democratic values evolve incrementally over time, especially for the less educated and those who pay little attention to political news, rather than being transformed overnight when one regime falls and another taken its place. The slow pace of cultural shifts was also demonstrated by the longitudinal trends in system support, notably the enduring impact of the experience of World War II, now more than half a century ago, on contemporary feelings of nationalism in Japan and Germany. These continue to contrast sharply with levels of national pride expressed in allied powers, such as the United States and Britain.

The fact that democratic values endure for many decades suggests that these orientations are meaningful and lasting. By contrast, public opinion towards policy issues, political events and leaders has commonly been observed to shift and vacillate fairly rapidly, proving less consistent over a series of

surveys, and proving relatively sensitive in response to even minor changes in question framing, elite cues, and media coverage. Although democratic values seem more enduring, at the same time the results observed in certain specific cases, particularly in autocracies such as China and Viet Nam which lack any direct experience of this form of governance, mean that we need to explore further the cognitive basis of judgments about regime performance and what people mean when they stress the importance of democracy. **Chapter 6** analyzes knowledge about democratic governance. Several alternative theoretical interpretations of this issue are identified, including the skeptical, relativistic, instrumental, and procedural perspectives. A battery of survey items concerning the essential characteristics of democracy are analyzed to see whether a common meaning of this concept is demonstrated by the public living in different cultural regions and under diverse types of regime. The analysis of cognitive judgments about the meaning of democracy, derived from comparing the 5th wave of the World Values Survey (2005-7) in 55 societies, lets us examine the degree of agreement around the world about the principles and procedures underlying this form of governance. Lending further confidence to the conclusions reached in chapter 5, the evidence demonstrates that *longer historical experience of democratic governance in any society significantly strengthens an enlightened knowledge of democratic procedures*. Far from proving randomly distributed and meaningless, contemporary awareness of the essential characteristics of liberal democracy can be predicted fairly accurately today based on a country's past form of governance. Moreover an enlightened awareness of the characteristics of liberal democracy also improves with greater education and, to a lesser extent, with regular use of the news media. This evidence suggests that democratic values are meaningful, as well as proving durable, since they are grounded in a lifetime's experience of how governments work. In younger democracies, however, contemporary public opinion lags behind regime change. On this basis, **Chapter 7** then operationalizes the notion of critical citizens, -- including values, judgments, and knowledge – a process which allows us to examine the distribution of this phenomenon across and within countries around the world.

Part III: Explaining the critical citizen syndrome

Part III of the book then focuses upon analysis: how do we explain the critical citizen syndrome? The research community continues to debate the underlying root causes of any political mistrust or disaffection. Hence cultural theories emphasize the role of long-term social developments transforming the political values, social trust and civil skills of individual citizens (on the demand-side). Communication theories highlight patterns of increasingly negative coverage of public affairs by the

news media (as the key intermediary agency). Institutional accounts focus upon the declining trustworthiness of politicians, a growing failure of government performance to meet public expectations for public goods and services, and the distribution of winners and losers arising from constitutional structures (on the supply-side). This book examines a wide range of empirical data, using multilevel models, to analyze the strength of each of these potential explanations. Each part of the puzzle is usually treated separately in the research literature, with survey analysts focusing upon public opinion, communication scholars looking at the news media, policy analysts monitoring government performance, and institutionalists examining power-sharing structures. Instead, the general theory developed in this study seeks to integrate these approaches into a more coherent framework where citizens, media, and governments are seen to interact as the central actors.

Deepening our understanding of the critical citizen syndrome is an important part of this study. It is even more challenging to disentangle the multiple alternative explanations surrounding this phenomenon. The number of rival hypothesis in the extensive literature on system support can prove daunting, for example a recent study in the Netherlands identified ten distinct propositions which were thought to account for falling public confidence and trust in the Dutch government. [29] This part of the book outlines selected rival theories to account for the distribution of critical citizens and then analyses a range of individual and aggregate data, and selected case-studies, to test these arguments against the empirical evidence.

Today the core idea of critical citizens is now far from novel, but many puzzles remains about how to explain this phenomenon, along with uncertainty about the potential consequences. The most common cultural account of any changes in attitudes towards democratic governance emphasizes long-term developments among citizens, on the 'demand-side', whether changes in social capital (Putnam), the expansion in cognitive and civic skills associated with rising educational levels and societal modernization (Dalton), and/or generational shifts towards self-expression values in post-industrial societies (Inglehart and Welzel).[30] Strong challenges to these arguments have emerged, however, from a range of 'supply-side' theories, emphasizing that public opinion is responding more rationally to the institutional context, whether in terms of declining probity and standards of public life, the failing performance of the state, and the uneven distribution of partisan 'winners' and 'losers' arising from institutional structures.[31] The role of the news media as the intermediary channel of information between citizens and the state is another common factor in popular explanations. It has proved far more difficult to arrive at an accepted consensus about the causes of this phenomenon, still less a clear

understanding of potential consequences. It is thus timely for this study to revisit some of the original questions raised by the earlier volume. This book focuses on evaluating some of the most plausible types of explanations, -- emphasizing the role of culture, probity, performance, and structure. Each of these generate a series of testable propositions open to scrutiny by the empirical evidence, as outlined schematically in Figure 1.2, and discussed in detail throughout this section of the book.

[Figure 1.2 about here]

Chapter 8 examines the main *cultural* theories of this phenomenon. Perhaps the most common approach theorizes that citizens' orientations towards government have evolved over time, whether in terms of their cultural values and orientations towards authority (Inglehart), their levels of social trust and networks (Putnam), or their reservoir of cognitive and civic skills (Dalton).[32] These developments are believed to occur in response to long-term processes of societal modernization, human development, and generational change, with theories emphasizing the '*demand*' side of the equation. Even if the state does not alter, in this perspective, cultural accounts emphasize that citizens have altered their social psychological orientations over recent decades, becoming more informed, less deferential, and more demanding in their expectations about the performance of incumbent officials and state agencies. If these accounts are correct, then we should be able to establish strong links at individual level between democratic orientations and the distribution of social values, social capital, and educational skills. Moreover at aggregate level, democratic knowledge, values and satisfaction should be predictable by levels of societal modernization, using indicators of human development, education and literacy, and the distribution of the mass media.

Although mainstream in the research literature, cultural accounts have come under growing pressure in recent years from alternative supply-side perspectives which emphasize the role, performance, and structure of the state.[33] **Chapter 9** analyzes the empirical evidence surrounding *probity* theories, highlighting the role of scandals, corruption, and deteriorating standards of public life.[34] In this view, any erosion of confidence in government and disenchantment with incumbent politicians can be attributed to the impact of well-publicized cases of scandals or corruption, which are widely thought to tarnish the reputation of the legislative, executive or judicial branches of government, making public officials less trustworthy.[35] Despite the appeal of this account, and the recent expansion of research into the causes and consequences of corruption, little systematic cross-national and time-series evidence has demonstrated a clear connection between incidents of scandals and corruption, on the one hand, and changes in levels of political trust, on the other.[36] Moreover we also need to

disentangle the separate components underlying this explanation, since political trust could have fallen in recent years because of: (i) a decline over time in the actual behavior of public officials, notably through the growing frequency or severity of actual incidents of scandal and corruption; (ii) rising public expectations about the appropriate ethical standards governing sexual and financial behavior in public life; and/or (iii) growing coverage by the news media in reporting these types of stories. Cross-national evidence is lacking for media coverage of scandal in all the countries under comparison, but we can turn to detailed case-studies in Germany, Britain and the United States, comparing content analysis of the media coverage of political scandals since the early to mid-1990s with annual trends in institutional confidence and evaluations of democratic performance.

Another alternative account concerns *performance* theories, examined in **Chapter 10**, focused on gaps between public expectations, the workings of democratic processes, and state delivery of public goods and services. [37] Theories of political economy emphasize how government performance in managing the economy drives confidence in government and trust in political leaders.[38] But output performance also encompasses foreign policy, such as how the state handles an international crisis or the outbreak of armed conflict, as well as issues of social justice and welfare. In the United States, rally-round-the-flag effects are commonly evident following the outbreak of wars.[39] The events of 9/11, for example, generated a sharp temporary spike in American confidence in government. [40] Moreover beyond policy output and outcomes, perceptions of procedural fairness in how decision-making process work may also play a role in how much people are willing to trust the authorities.[41]

The performance thesis can also be disaggregated into different components, according to the key actors. On the demand-side, the dynamics of support may reflect the public's overall evaluation of the performance of political leaders and, more generally, perceptions of the capacity of the administration to manage the delivery of public goods and services. This account emphasizes rising expectations which citizens bring to the role of government, such as whether the public believe that health care, employment, and welfare should be the primary responsibility of the state, the non-profit sector, or the market. The public may also hope for improvements in broader dimensions of the political performance of the regime, for example in terms of the state's record in respecting freedom of expression, opportunities for voice and participation, human rights, and rule of law.[42] On the supply-side, the capacity of the state to deliver public goods and services may have gradually diminished, for example due to the 'shrinking state', where powers which used to be the responsibility of the national executive and legislature have been transferred to the non-profit and private sectors, as well as to both

local and global levels of governance. Moreover in many of the world's least developed countries which have moved towards democracy and strengthened human rights, such as Benin, Mali and Ghana, the capacity of the state to delivery basic services, such as schooling, clean water and health care, remains extremely limited. In this context, the failure of democracy to deliver a better life for citizens, despite populist promises made by politicians at election time, may gradually encourage disillusionment with this form of governance. Lastly, many performance accounts emphasize the importance of key intermediaries connecting citizens and the state. The news media may be expected to play a particularly important role in this process by priming citizens about which issues are important, such as the role of foreign affairs, social problems or economic issues, as well as by framing whether the performance of the government on these issues is perceived positively or negatively.[43] Irrespective of the actual policy performance of the state, negative news, or excessive attention to government failures, may encourage public disillusionment with perceived performance.

Chapter 11 scrutinizes *institutional* theories, emphasizing the role of power-sharing democratic structures.[44] This thesis suggests that the pattern of winners and losers from the political system is structured by the constitutional arrangements, meaning the core institutions of state and the rules of the game, both written and unwritten. Some citizens win, others lose. Some parties and groups are mobilized into power, others are mobilized out. Over a long period of time, this accumulated experience can be expected to shape general orientations towards the political regime. At the simplest level, if citizens feel that the rules of the game allow the party they endorse to be elected to power, they are more likely to feel that representative institutions are responsive to their needs, so that they can trust the political system. On the other hand, if they feel that the party they prefer persistently loses, over successive elections, they are more likely to feel that their voice is excluded from the decision-making process, producing generalized dissatisfaction with political institutions. Over time, where constitutional arrangements succeed in channeling popular demands into government outcomes, then we would expect this to be reflected in diffuse support for the political process. The structure of power-sharing and power-concentrating democratic institutions can be compared – along with levels of institutional confidence among partisan winners and losers within each context.

There is therefore greater scholarly consensus in the research literature surrounding the diagnosis of trends than their explanation. Often separate studies focus on one of the theoretical dimensions with partial empirical tests, without controlling for the full range of explanatory factors, or examining whether the effects of models are robust when utilizing alternative dependent variables. A

more comprehensive general theory provides a more satisfactory and complete way of understanding this phenomenon. Multilevel analysis with evidence derived from surveys of public opinion, aggregate indicators of government performance, and media coverage of public affairs, helps to determine the most plausible causes for the rise of critical citizens.

Part IV: The consequences of the critical citizen syndrome

Part IV of the book focuses upon *prognosis* about the likely consequences of this phenomenon. What is the impact of critical citizens – and why does this matter – including for political activism, for the contemporary challenges of governance in contemporary societies, and for democratic transitions and consolidation? Cultural theories suggests that attitudes towards the state are important for citizen's behavior – but even more so for governance and for regime stability. After considering the evidence concerning these claims, the conclusion summarizes the major findings about critical citizens and considers their broader theoretical and policy implications.

There are ambivalent interpretations about the potential consequences of the critical citizen syndrome both for political behavior at individual-level and also for democratic governance in the nation-state. On the one hand, the tensions between ideals and practices can be regarded in a positive light, if the spread of democratic principles and aspirations around the world will eventually spread downwards to strengthen public confidence and generalized trust in the workings of representative institutions essential for democratic governance. Critical citizens may be a force for radical reform in the world, fuelling popular demands that states with poor human rights records come to resemble democratic principles more fully. A degree of skepticism about government authorities can be regarded as a healthy for democracy; classical liberal political theory was founded on the need for vigilance about the potential abuse of power by the state. These ideas led the framers of the U.S. constitution to establish a set of institutions explicitly designed to limit government power.[45] The critical citizens are more commonly regarded as problematic, however, triggering alarm bells that prolonged and deep disenchantment with the performance of particular political leaders, lack of confidence with governing parties, and disillusionment with core representative institutions will eventually spread upwards to corrode faith in democracy itself, like dry rot weakening the foundations from below, with the capacity to undermine popular support for fragile democratic states. Carefully identifying the consequences of the critical citizen syndrome, while avoiding alarmist 'chicken little' headlines, is therefore important for many reasons.

There is probably the broadest consensus concerning the implications of critical citizens for political behavior at micro-level, examined in **Chapter 12**. It is widely assumed that negative orientations towards democratic governance will deter conventional political participation and civic engagement. Ever since Almond and Verba, an extensive body of evidence has examined how social psychological attitudes influence why and how citizens choose to engage in public affairs.[46] Hence positive feelings of political trust, internal efficacy, and institutional confidence in parties, legislatures and the government are widely assumed to strengthen conventional activism such as voting participation, party membership, and belonging to voluntary associations. Conversely, indicators such as falling voter turnout and declining party membership in established European democracies are commonly regarded as signs of citizen disenchantment or cynicism about politics.[47] Yet in fact the actual evidence linking the phenomenon of critical citizens with patterns of conventional activism is far from straightforward; disenchantment with the performance of democracy may depress conventional forms of participation, but it can also mobilize people, for example to support reform movements.[48]

Moreover political disaffection is commonly expected to affect protest politics, if lack of trust in the democratic process fosters unconventional activism, support for anti-state radical movements, and even occasional outbreaks of radical violence seeking to challenge state authorities.[49] Seminal work of Ted Robert Gurr in the early-1970s regarded violent acts as a rebellious expression of discontent with the conventional channels of representative democracy and the search for alternative ways to challenge the regime, including the propensity to engage in riots damaging property or people, and in non-violent direct protest actions such as the willingness to block traffic or to occupy buildings.[50] For Gurr, protest represents an avenue to channel and express deep-seated feelings of frustration, anger, and alienation, not just with particular leaders or public policy issues, but also with the political process and system. In the mid-1970s, similar views were echoed by Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki in the widely influential Trilateral report '*The Crisis of Democracy*' which regarded the May 1968 street uprisings and their subsequent reverberations as a serious threat to the stability of the Trilateral democracies.[51] Protest politics, the authors suggested, challenged established sources of authority.

Although this assumption remains a popular way to interpret demonstrations, the claim that disaffection with government motivates protect activism within established democracies receives little, if any, support from systematic empirical studies of the survey evidence. For example, the original 8-nation Political Action study failed to establish a significant association between protest potential and feelings of 'external efficacy', or beliefs in the responsiveness of the political system.[52] In the follow-up

study, Thomassen compared political attitudes in the Netherlands and West Germany and confirmed that support for the political regime was unrelated to protest potential.[53] One of the most detailed studies of those actually engaged in demonstrations in Belgium found that protesters were not significantly more critical of the political system, whether in terms of satisfaction with how democracy works, the responsiveness of government and politicians to social needs, or trust in government.[54] Outside of established democracies, however, in the light of recent popular 'color' uprisings directed against the authorities in the Georgia, Ukraine and Iran, the orientations of those engaged in protest politics, and the consequences of their actions for regime stability, may well differ.[55]

Perhaps most importantly, the critical citizen syndrome may also potentially have significant consequences at macro-level for governance, democratic reform movements, and ultimately for regime stability, all issues considered in **Chapter 13.** The growth of critical citizens may limit the state's capacity to govern effectively; Easton theorized that political trust affected the ability of democratic states to raise revenues, to gain public consent for public policies, to implement decisions, and to ensure voluntary compliance with its laws.[56] In particular, he argued that systems support was associated with the willingness of citizens to obey the law and pay taxes without the penalty of coercion, thereby facilitating effective government. Previous research has found that trust in government institutions was significantly associated with the reported willingness to obey the law voluntarily and to tax payment.[57] Feelings of legitimacy are expected to strengthen the belief that laws should be followed voluntarily.[58] The concept of regime legitimacy can be understood, in Seymour Martin Lipset words, as "the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate and proper ones for the society."[59] By contrast a crisis of legitimacy is likely to contribute towards pressures for either institutional reform or more radical regime change.

There may also be consequences for the type of political parties and public policies which the public is willing to support; Hetherington argues that declining political trust in America was associated with a conservative turn in public policy, with lack of confidence in the U.S. federal government reducing public support for progressive redistributive programs on issues such as poverty, racial equality and health care.[60] If people no longer feel that government policies are going to prove effective or well-administered, then this could encourage neoliberal attempts transfer many public services from the state to the non-profit or private sectors. Klingemann and Hofferbert found that in Germany, compared with satisfied democrats, dissatisfied democrats were more likely to either support the major opposition parties or else to withdraw by not voting.[61]

Moreover there are also plausible reasons why the quality of good governance may also be undermined.[62] People may be more willing to engage in illegal acts, to cheat on their taxes, or to use bribery and corruption, and thus to undermine rule of law in fragile states, if they have little confidence in the integrity and legitimacy of their government and public officials.[63] Good governance has proved an issue of growing concern for the international development community, particularly for countries such as Russia, Colombia and Mexico which are characterized by widespread tax avoidance, rampant crime and corruption, and ineffective law enforcement.

Lastly, regime stability may also be affected. Congruence theory, developed by Eckstein, emphasizes that regimes which outlast famine as well as feast need to be founded upon people's beliefs in legitimate authority.[64] Where the attitudes of citizens are congruent with the type of regime, then Eckstein claims that the conditions exist for durable and long-lasting institutions. Hence autocracies are thought to be more stable where most citizens accept the legitimacy of this form of rule. Democratic regimes are also regarded as sustainable where the public expresses general confidence in the core institutions of representative governance, including parties, parliaments and executives, where they participate through conventional channels, and where many adhere to the principles of democratic governance. Countries where the demand for democracy outstrips supply are expected to provide the most favorable conditions for mobilizing mass reform movements, outbreaks of people power, pressures for constitutional change, and other grassroots challenges to regime legitimacy. Alternatively, where the supply of democratic governance runs ahead of popular demand, for example if imposed by the international community on fragile states such as Afghanistan and Iraq, then regimes in the early stages of transitioning from autocracy are expected to prove poorly consolidated and unstable, with the danger of reverting back to authoritarian rule. Any consequences for regime instability will probably be greatest in fragile multicultural communities, where secessionist movements and armed militia are challenging the nation-state in struggles for independence and self-governance. In Georgia and Ukraine, for example, Haerpfer argues that the collapse of popular support for the old regime contributed towards the 'color revolutions'.[65] Nancy Bermeo suggests that if ordinary people are not willing to stand up and defend representative institutions when these are under threat, then fragile democracies can be undermined.[66] Democratic breakdown can occur for diverse reasons, whether due to a military coup (such as in Thailand), the heady appeal of populist parties and the reassertion of executive power (as in Venezuela), thuggery, intimidation, and strong-man rule (as in Zimbabwe), or the more gradual erosion of human rights through a series of one-party manipulated electoral contests (as in Russia).

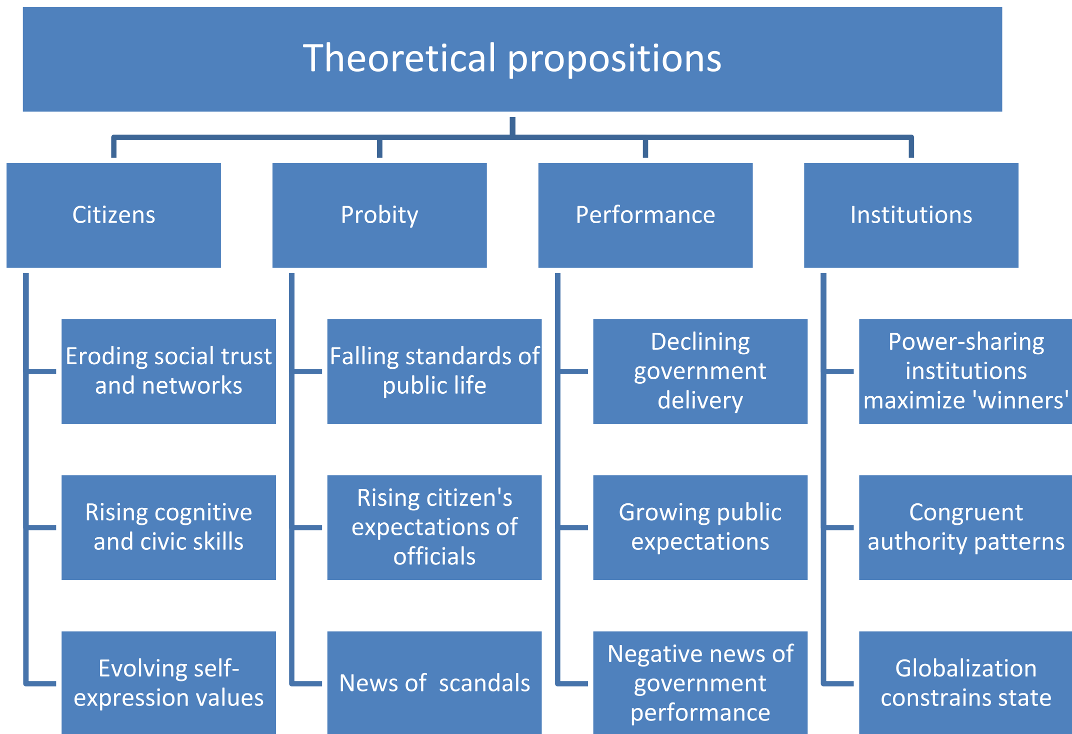
Alternatively, lack of congruence between democratic values and government performance may not matter; after all, there are many aspects of life where aspirations are out of kilter with experience. People may be able to juggle and balance these tensions quite easily, if they compartmentalize each dimension separately. It may be that the public is fundamentally ambivalent about politics; hoping for the best but expecting the worst. Ever since seminal work by Philip Converse, social psychologists have recognized multiple dimensions of public opinion where the public remains fundamentally ambivalent, with individuals holding contradictory attitudes, rather than displaying coherent and structured belief systems or consistent political ideologies. [67] Attitudes towards the nation state and representative democracy may simply fall into this well-established pattern. Indeed, this was the conclusion of Hyman and Sheatley, one of the first empirical studies of U.S. attitudes towards government in the mid-1950s.[68] If American public opinion is capable of displaying incoherent and contradictory attitudes towards democratic governance, after centuries of experience, it would be foolhardy to assume that a more systematic patterns of beliefs would be evident in, say, Mali, Ukraine, Afghanistan, or Indonesia.

For all these reasons, understanding the tensions between negative evaluations of government, and yet strong adherence to democratic values, has been a perennial issue in the social sciences, as well as a popular topic of debate among journalists, commentators and policymakers. In the conclusion, **Chapter 13** reviews the key findings throughout the volume and summarizes the implications for theories of cultural change, for citizens, and for democratic governance.

Figure 1.1: The components defining critical and indifferent citizens as ideal types

Components	Measured	Critical citizens	Indifferent citizens
Democratic Knowledge	Cognitive awareness of the basic procedures and principles of democracy	High awareness	Low awareness
Democratic Values	The importance of living in a democracy	High importance	Low importance
Democratic Evaluations	Satisfaction with the democratic performance of their own government	Low satisfaction	High satisfaction

Figure 1.2: Theoretical propositions explaining the phenomenon of critical citizens



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