

CANADIAN DEMOCRACY FROM THE GROUND UP PERCEPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

Edited by Elisabeth Gidengil and Heather Bastedo



UBCPress · Vancouver · Toronto

Sample Material © 2014 UBC Press

© UBC Press 2014

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Canadian democracy from the ground up: perceptions and performance /
edited by Elisabeth Gidengil and Heather Bastedo.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-0-7748-2825-3 (bound). – ISBN 978-0-7748-2827-7 (pdf). –

ISBN 978-0-7748-2828-4 (epub)

1. Political participation – Canada – Public opinion. 2. Democracy – Canada
– Public opinion. 3. Canada – Politics and government – 2006- – Public opinion.
4. Public opinion – Canada. I. Gidengil, Elisabeth, author, editor II. Bastedo,
Heather, author, editor

JL186.5.C32 2014

323'.0420971

C2014-902905-5

C2014-902906-3

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

We also acknowledge the contribution of the Samara Foundation.

UBC Press
The University of British Columbia
2029 West Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2
www.ubcpress.ca

Sample Material © 2014 UBC Press

Contents

Foreword / vii

MICHAEL MACMILLAN and ALISON LOAT

Acknowledgments / xi

Introduction / 3

ELISABETH GIDENGIL and HEATHER BASTEDO

1 Attitudes toward Democratic Norms and Practices:
Canada in Comparative Perspective / 22

LAWRENCE LEDUC and JON H. PAMMETT

2 Canadians' Evaluations of MPs: Performance Matters / 41

NICK RUDERMAN

3 Repertoire-Building or Elite-Challenging?
Understanding Political Engagement in Canada / 62

MICHAEL A. PAINTER-MAIN

4 Outsiders: Agency and the Non-Engaged / 83

HEATHER BASTEDO, WAYNE CHU, and JANE HILDERMAN

5 Social Media and Political Inequality / 102

QUINN ALBAUGH and CHRISTOPHER WADDELL

Sample Material © 2014 UBC Press

- 6** The Story behind the Story: Evaluating the Content of Political News / 125
HEATHER BASTEDO, QUINN ALBAUGH, and ALEX MARLAND
- 7** Social Media and Agenda Setting / 148
WAYNE CHU and FRED FLETCHER
- 8** Representing Canadians: Is the 41st Parliament Still a Vertical Mosaic? / 171
LIVIANNA TOSSUTTI and JANE HILDERMAN
- 9** MPs on the Home Front: How Constituency Characteristics Influence Representational Approaches / 194
MUNROE EAGLES, ROYCE KOOP, and ALISON LOAT
- 10** Democratic Responsiveness in the House of Commons / 213
KELLY BLIDOOK
- 11** A Tale of Two Perspectives: Election Promises and Government Actions in Canada / 231
FRANÇOIS PÉTRY
- Conclusion: Taking Stock of Canadian Democracy from the Ground Up / 253
ELISABETH GIDENGIL and HEATHER BASTEDO
- Appendix: Samara 2012 Citizens' Survey Methodology / 273
- Contributors / 294
- Index / 297

Foreword

When Samara was created in 2009, we had little idea that the organization would be a part of an ambitious collaboration among academics and UBC Press that has brought this book to fruition. But it is from small seeds that big ideas grow – fitting in that Samara is named for the winged “helicopter” seed that falls from maple trees.

Samara’s research and educational programming began with the initiation of Canada’s first-ever series of exit interviews with nearly eighty former members of Parliament. As citizens elected to represent and serve Canadians, they offered a wealth of information and frontline political experience that had been untapped previously. Our findings from this project, shared through four public reports released by Samara, have animated a broad public discussion on the role of MPs, their relationships to political parties, and how to improve Parliament. A 2014 Random House book, *Tragedy in the Commons: Former Members of Parliament Speak Out about Canada’s Failing Democracy*, continues to bring forward the voices and experiences of MPs.

Through the *Samara Democracy Reports* series, Samara’s research agenda has expanded beyond the MP exit interviews while continuing to shine new light on Canada’s democratic system. With the Samara 2012 Citizens’ Survey, we regularly capture Canadians’ shifting perceptions of politics and monitor civic and political participation. We have also analyzed the content

of Hansard – the transcript of Parliamentary debates – as well as news coverage by print and television of Canadian politics.

The data collected for these projects culminate in Samara's annual index, which measures the relationship between citizens and politics. These data also serve as the foundation of this book. Readers will explore analyses of public opinion data, parliamentary debate, media coverage, #cdnpoli tweets, and MPs' interviews in the subsequent chapters, which feature many emerging and leading scholars.

We are delighted that academics who provided us with guidance and advice on our work are now using these data to advance the field of Canadian political science and bring forward a new resource for students and researchers. Canada benefits from more bright minds thinking about our political renewal, because the stakes have seldom been higher.

Our country faces a great number of challenges in the twenty-first century – from environmental sustainability to economic prosperity and effective health care delivery, to name but a few. Most of the money spent in these areas is a direct result of decisions that our governments and politicians make. Getting right the process by which these decisions are made is critical to ensuring Canadians' quality of life.

In other countries, citizens risk their lives to live in a society in which they have a voice in their government and the ability to influence the decisions made there. Here we have come to take democracy for granted. Voting trends are but one indicator among many: Canadians are checking out of their democracy, full stop.

The challenges that Canada faces are legion, and the solutions are anything but clear. One thing we do know, however, is that if we are to have a fighting chance at building a country defined by progress and strength we must have a political culture that is inclusive, robust, and engaging. Reconnecting Canadians to politics is the foundational step in this process. We know too few of the reasons why Canadians have disengaged, and what to do about it, but we could know more.

Samara's goal is to provide the research and programs necessary to rebuild our democratic culture and to spark the conversations and actions needed to improve political and civic engagement.

We look forward to this book inspiring new ways of thinking of these challenges, sparking these conversations and actions, for researchers and students, for years to come.

We would like to thank the team at UBC Press, in particular Emily Andrew, and the anonymous peer reviewers for their commitment to making this

book the best that it could be. Without the vision and dedication of the volume editors, Elisabeth Gidengil and Heather Bastedo, this book would not have been possible. And thank you to the number of academic contributors from across Canada's universities (and one American university) for sharing their knowledge and thoughtful analyses in the pages that follow.

We would also like to acknowledge the MacMillan Family Foundation, the Aurea Foundation, Bennett Jones, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and numerous individual donors for their contributions to Samara allowing our work to grow. Please visit <http://www.samaracanada.com> for copies of our reports and further information on the donors, volunteers, staff, and partners who make Samara's work possible.

Michael MacMillan
Co-Founder and Chair
Samara

Alison Loat
Co-Founder and Executive Director
Samara



Introduction

ELISABETH GIDENGIL and HEATHER BASTEDO

Popular commentary and academic discourse alike have been preoccupied with the health of democracy not just in Canada but also across post-industrial democracies (see, e.g., Berger 2011; Cross 2010; LeDuc, Niemi, and Norris 2010; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Verba 1999). They speak of the “democratic deficit” and “disaffected democracies.” By international standards, of course, Canada would qualify as a healthy democracy. Canada regularly receives the maximum score on global assessments of political rights, civil liberties, and overall quality of democracy (see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/canada> and <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/Canada.2010.pdf>), and Canada is one of only 21 of 164 countries to receive a score of zero on the State Fragility Index, designed to capture a state’s capacity “to manage conflict; make and implement public policy; and deliver essential services and its systemic resilience in maintaining system coherence, cohesion, and quality of life; responding effectively to challenges and crises, and sustaining progressive development” (Marshall and Cole 2011, 36). However, this is hardly a cause for congratulation or complacency. These indices are blunt instruments when it comes to assessing the health of long-established democracies, telling us little about differences in the relative performance of countries within the top-ranking category (see Coppedge et al. 2011). As we will see in Chapter 1, compared with citizens in a number of other post-industrial democracies, Canadians

are not particularly satisfied with the way that democracy works in their country, and a majority consider Canada to be less than fully democratic.

Our goal in this book is to probe Canadians' perceptions of politics and politicians and to assess the performance of Parliament and the media in light of those perceptions. To do so, we draw on novel data that have been collected for the express purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of democratic practice in twenty-first-century Canada. We do not pretend to offer a comprehensive assessment. Indeed, it is doubtful that any book could do justice to the manifold ways in which such a multifaceted phenomenon as democracy operates. Instead, we focus on three key aspects of Canadian democracy: citizens, Parliament, and the media.

Citizens are at the core of democracy. There can be no democracy without the *demos*. Any assessment of the health of Canadian democracy must necessarily consider the extent to which citizens actually participate in the country's political life. It must determine who participates and how and, more importantly, who does not participate and why. Canada, of course, is a representative democracy. Citizens only occasionally have the opportunity to make decisions on public policy. Instead, they elect representatives to govern on their behalf. Accordingly, the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives is an important concern in any representative democracy. We need to ask how satisfied Canadians are with the way that their interests are represented and how they rate the performance of their members of Parliament (MPs). We also have to understand how these perceptions play into their overall satisfaction with the way that democracy works in Canada. At the same time, we need to consider how these perceptions comport with MPs' actual behaviour and their conceptions of their role. Finally, we have to recognize the critical role played by the media in mediating representation in modern democracies. How the media choose to frame politics and politicians influences citizens' perceptions of the political process, their evaluations of their elected representatives, and possibly their propensity to participate in politics. The media are also a key source of information that can affect whether, when, and how citizens choose to act politically.

We cannot hope to understand these interconnections among citizens, Parliament, and the media without taking account of the forces shaping Canadian democracy in the twenty-first century. Rapid technological change, globalization, and a shrinking state are posing challenges for contemporary democracies, but they are also opening up new opportunities for political

voice. An assessment of Canadian democracy that limited itself to voting in elections, the behaviour of MPs, and the traditional broadcast and print media would provide a very partial picture. Accordingly, this volume goes beyond the formal political structures and elections to consider how Canadians express their political voice on a day-to-day basis as well, and it asks how they are using new communication technologies to gather and exchange information about politics.

We use three criteria to evaluate these different facets of Canadian democracy in the twenty-first century: participation, inclusiveness, and responsiveness. All three are essential to democratic health. Healthy democracies require an active, engaged citizenry. In a representative democracy, the most basic political act is voting, but voting in elections reflects a minimal conception of political participation. It is important to look beyond the ballot box to consider other ways of participating in politics (Barber 1984; Berger 2011; Pateman 1970). However, simply looking at how many citizens participate in this or that political activity is not enough. We need to know who participates – and, more importantly, who does not. Healthy democracies are inclusive. They enable a wide range of voices to be heard. If certain groups in society are systematically underrepresented in politics, then that society can hardly be considered fully democratic. Finally, healthy democracies are responsive. As we will see, responsiveness can be achieved in different ways and using different means, but the different understandings all share the premise that elected representatives must take account of the needs and wants of the represented.

These three criteria also informed the Canadian Democratic Audit series, published between 2004 and 2006, particularly the capstone volume, *Auditing Canadian Democracy* (Cross 2010). However, our starting point is the citizen, whereas the audit series mostly adopts an institutional approach. As such, the audit series provides a useful complement to this book by describing and evaluating the larger institutional context within which citizens act.

Participation

Participation is defined here as involvement in political processes and taking action on issues of concern. Possible actions include, but are not limited to, voting, belonging to a political party, working on an election campaign, contacting an elected representative, signing petitions, working with groups to affect political outcomes, joining in product boycotts, taking part in demonstrations, and seeking and exchanging political information online.

The extent to which citizens exercise their right to vote in elections is often taken as the benchmark for assessing the health of a representative democracy. Elections are the linchpin of representative democracy, serving as essential mechanisms for ensuring that representatives are held accountable to those who elected them. Elections also serve as an opportunity for citizens to exercise democratic citizenship. As Savigny (2008, 41) observes, “voting is one of the most expressive functions of citizenship and [as] such to be a voter entails and is inherently interlinked with understandings of what it means to be a citizen.” This is why elections are often seen as a litmus test of the health and vitality of a representative democracy. From this perspective, there is certainly cause for concern about the state of Canadian democracy. Turnout in federal elections has plummeted to historic lows over the past two decades, falling from 75.3 percent in 1988 to 61.1 percent in 2011 and as low as 58.8 percent in 2008.

Electoral participation is declining, but citizens are finding novel ways of expressing their political opinions and exerting political influence. Technological change is transforming Canadians’ political action repertoires. New communication technologies are facilitating novel forms of political engagement. Social-networking services such as Facebook and Google+, micro-blogging services such as Twitter, chat rooms, online petitions, and so on are providing novel avenues for disseminating information about politics and rapidly expanding the opportunities for participating in politics.

These new forms of political action highlight the need to take a more expansive approach to understanding what constitutes political participation. The targets of political action are not limited to governments, nor are the sites of political action confined to formal political structures.

Globalization and individualization are influencing how people participate in politics in post-industrial democracies. Some citizens are not simply eschewing formal participation structures such as political parties and interest groups in favour of looser, less bureaucratic, non-hierarchical forms of political expression. Rather, their political activity is more sporadic, waxing and waning as they recognize some concrete day-to-day problem in need of a solution.

Henrik Bang and Eva Sørensen (1999, 338), for example, have identified what they call “everyday makers” (see also Li and Marsh 2008). These are citizens who engage in the “small politics’ of day-to-day life” rather than the “big politics” of formal political organizations and voluntary associations. Their focus is typically on local problems, and their involvement is short term. Everyday makers favour a bottom-up approach, either working alone

or with others as part of an ad hoc network. They might vote in elections, but they lack confidence in the effectiveness of governments. Indeed, it is often “concrete experience with the government failures” that leads everyday makers to act (336).

In a somewhat similar vein, Ulrich Beck (1997, 63) has described a process of “subpoliticization.” His notion of subpolitics recognizes that politics is not confined to traditional political arenas but also takes place in the supermarket and the shopping mall. He urges us “to recognize the political moments in everyday life.” Subpolitics has emerged in response to the recognition of limits of formal politics in an increasingly globalized world and the inability of governments to manage the new challenges and risks associated with the activities of states and multinational corporations.

Political consumerism is clearly a subpolitical phenomenon (Beck 1997; Holzer and Sørensen 2003). Dietlind Stolle and Michele Micheletti (2006, 48) define political consumerism as “a consumer’s choice of producers and products based on a variety of ethical and political considerations.” Political consumerism can target government actions and practices. An example would be the refusal of some Americans to purchase French cheeses and wines to protest the refusal of France to join the Iraq War. More typically, though, the goal of political consumers is to effect change in corporate and market practices to which they object on the grounds of justice, fairness, or the collective good. These “citizen consumers” convey political messages through their purchasing decisions.

Of course, the mere fact that people buy fair-trade or eco-labelled products does not automatically make them political consumers. To qualify as political consumers, they must choose to buy these products for ethical or environmental reasons (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005). Some might question whether boycotting and buycotting should be considered political acts. After all, they do not necessarily target the state or take place within formal political arenas. Should we consider such activities political even though they occur outside those arenas? Both boycotts and buycotts seek to effect socio-political change via the market rather than through formal political structures. Wielding purchasing power to induce powerful corporations to change their policies and practices is arguably as political an act as casting a vote. Indeed, Beck (1997) has likened the act of purchasing a product to casting a vote. Where elections occur relatively infrequently, though, political consumerism can be practised on a weekly or even daily basis. As such, it might well produce a greater sense of empowerment than marking a ballot paper (Scullion 2008). As Margaret Scammell (2003, 119) observes,

“empowered consumers investing citizenship considerations into their everyday purchase decisions ... are citizen-like to the extent that the goal of satisfaction of personal wants is tempered with wider social awareness, with a concern for impact on the public, increasingly global, realm.”

Our approach to political participation is expansive. The objective is to capture the different ways in which citizens can voice their political needs and preferences, from voting in federal elections to signing petitions, to engaging in political consumerism, to taking part in demonstrations, and to using social-networking sites and micro-blogging services.

Inclusiveness

Our second criterion for evaluating Canadian democracy in the twenty-first century is inclusiveness. It concerns the degree to which the system allows different voices to be considered in political decision-making processes. Democracy rests fundamentally on the principle of political equality. This principle is embodied in elections: every eligible citizen has the right to vote, and every vote counts equally. But in practice, socio-economic disadvantage and other forms of social inequality translate into unequal participation. Unequal participation has profound implications for the inclusiveness, the responsiveness, and ultimately the very legitimacy of our democratic system. Effective democracies require active, engaged citizens. Understanding the factors that encourage or impede political engagement is a key goal of this book.

In evaluating inclusiveness, we focus on the impact of six social background characteristics on whether – and how – Canadians participate in politics: income, education, age, gender, country of birth, and ethno-racial background. Differences in education and income are at the core of resource models of political participation. Education has been described as “the single most potent predictor of an adult’s political activity” (Verba, Schlozman, and Burns 2005, 110). There are a number of reasons why education matters. It cultivates the cognitive skills needed to understand the complexities of politics and to gather information about public affairs. It nurtures a sense of civic duty and norms of community involvement. It makes people more attractive as network members. People with large social networks are more likely to be recruited into political activities and to be exposed to conversations about politics. Education also fosters public-speaking skills and provides the basic literacy skills required to write a letter or send an email to an elected official. Most importantly, education typically

paves the way for higher-paid employment. Being politically active requires time, energy, and money. These resources are harder to come by for people struggling to make ends meet. Moreover, the daily grind of poverty can foster the perception that the political system is unresponsive.

Age is also an important factor to consider. On the one hand, there are possible life-cycle effects on political participation. What transpires in formal political arenas, for example, can assume greater relevance when people marry, become parents, and maybe purchase a home. They are likely to put down roots in the community and to be concerned about matters such as taxes, services, and health care. On the other hand, there are possible generational differences. They relate to formative experiences that differ from one generation to the next. Ronald Inglehart (1990), for example, has argued that generational change is associated with a shift from materialist to post-materialist values. These value shifts have enhanced the importance of self-actualization, fuelling frustration with hierarchically organized bureaucratic institutions and a desire for more autonomous forms of involvement (see Nevitte 1996).

There are reasons to expect gender to influence patterns of participation as well. Formal political arenas remain male dominated, and gender-differentiated media coverage helps to perpetuate the perception that politics is a masculine domain (Everitt and Gidengil 2003). At the same time, many women find themselves facing a double day of full-time employment outside the home and caregiving activities within the home, leaving little time or energy for other pursuits. Women's social networks tend to be smaller and more homogeneous than men's (Gidengil et al. 2006). This can influence the sorts of political information to which they are exposed and whether and how they are mobilized to be politically active.

It is also important to consider country of birth. Since the 1960s, Canada has experienced major changes in both the extent of immigration and the diversity of immigrant flows. The changing composition of immigration flows raises fundamental questions about the challenges faced by newcomers from diverse political backgrounds in adapting to an unfamiliar political system. The increasingly diverse origins of new citizens mean that immigrants nowadays bring with them a wide variety of political, economic, and cultural experiences as well as diverse religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds. This has practical consequences for the ways in which they seek to practise democratic citizenship. Many of the newcomers are from countries with very different political cultures. This is especially true of those

who have experienced only authoritarianism in their countries of origin. Bilodeau (2008), for example, has shown that experiences of political repression can influence newcomers' conception of democracy and limit the channels through which newcomers voice demands to public officials.

We also pay particular attention to visible minorities. Canadian society is still permeated by racial biases. They are evident, for example, in the workplace. Visible minorities tend to earn lower incomes, "entirely consistent with the presence of taste-based racial discrimination in Canadian labour markets" (Skuterud 2010, 878). The dampening effect of such racialized experiences on political involvement can be reinforced by the underrepresentation of visible minorities in politics as both candidates and MPs (Black 2011).

How these various social background characteristics influence political participation can well vary depending on the type of political activity. Different activities might require different resources. For example, it has been argued that political consumerism has low barriers to entry. Dietlind Stolle and Michele Micheletti (2006, 65) have suggested that political consumerism "makes politics tangible ... [It] is also characterized more by low-threshold everyday involvement in a familiar sphere, which implies a more network-oriented and individualized form of political participation." Moreover, the market is closer to people's day-to-day lives. As a result, they argue, political consumerism is both accessible and attractive to people who might feel marginalized within more formal political structures, such as women and members of minority groups. Participating in a boycott of a product or service does not necessarily entail additional costs for the consumer, though consumers might incur costs if they choose to engage in a boycott since goods that have been produced according to higher environmental or ethical standards might well be costlier.

The emergence of new information technologies raises more questions about inclusiveness. The fundamental question is whether these technologies will be able to overcome problems of unequal political participation. Are they diminishing the inequalities that have traditionally characterized other forms of political action? Are these technologies drawing hitherto marginalized groups into the ranks of the active citizenry or simply expanding the political action repertoires of affluent Canadians? Are they fostering citizen engagement or diverting citizens' attention from public life? Answers to these questions have profound implications for the health of Canadian democracy.

Responsiveness

Our third criterion for evaluating the health of Canadian democracy is responsiveness. Canada is a representative democracy. Citizens typically do not get to choose which policies are adopted. Elected representatives govern on their behalf. Accordingly, it is important to examine how responsive these representatives are to citizens' opinions and policy preferences. Responsiveness refers to the capacity of a political system to respond to the needs and wants of its citizens as well as to the ability of its citizens to hold their elected representatives to account.

Hanna Pitkin (1967) distinguished four different approaches to understanding the meaning of representation: "symbolic," "formalistic," "descriptive," and "substantive." "Symbolic representation" is based on the perceived congruence or affinity in values between representatives and those whom they represent (see Bastedo 2012). According to Pitkin, just as a country's flag represents or *stands* as a symbol of the country, so too a representative stands for or embodies the ideals of the represented. The implications of symbolic representation for responsiveness are not altogether clear. As Pitkin observes, symbolic representation "involves no rational, objective, justifiable connection between what represents and what is represented" (110). Rather, the critical test is an "existential one" (102). The other three approaches to representation speak more directly to achieving responsiveness, though each has different implications for *how* responsiveness is achieved.

From a formalistic perspective, elected representatives have strong incentives to be responsive for the simple reason that they want to be re-elected. This understanding of representation focuses on the formal arrangements whereby representatives are elected. Elections not only enable citizens to authorize a direction for the future but also allow them to pass judgment on the decisions of the past. Accountability is the mechanism that in principle, at least, fosters responsiveness. However, as Lawrence LeDuc and Jon Pammett show in their chapter, Canadians do not give Canadian democracy high marks when it comes to holding politicians accountable for their actions.

This lack of satisfaction with the way that democracy works in Canada might have its roots in a lack of what Pitkin (1967) termed "descriptive representation." Descriptive representation is a function of the extent to which elected representatives resemble those whom they represent. It is achieved when the composition of a legislature mirrors that of the electorate. From

the perspective of descriptive representation, the assurance of responsiveness lies in the characteristics of those who are elected. In this conception, representation consists of “standing for” others by virtue of some resemblance between the elected representatives and those whom they represent.

Descriptive representation is preoccupied with *who* governs. “Substantive” representation, on the other hand, focuses on *what* governments actually do. As its name suggests, this approach is concerned with the substantive content of representation. It focuses on what elected representatives do and not simply on who they are or what they symbolize. From the perspective of substantive representation, elected representatives are responsive to the extent that they *act for* and in the interests of those who elected them. Substantive representation is much harder to measure than descriptive representation. This is not simply because of the obvious reason that it is no longer just a matter of counting heads. The difficulty in assessing this form of representation stems from the ambiguity of the notion of “acting for” others. Acting for the represented could be interpreted to mean that representatives should feel bound by the wishes and opinions of their constituents. In other words, they should act as delegates who do their constituents’ bidding. On the other hand, it could be argued that representatives should act as trustees, doing not necessarily what their constituents want but what they believe to be in their constituents’ best interests. Debates about the appropriate role of representatives hinge on the meaning of responsiveness: whether representatives should be responsive to the expressed wishes of their constituents or to their real needs (see Birch 1971, 109-12; Pennock 1968).

It is natural to focus on the institutions of representative government when considering responsiveness. However, this is a top-down way of approaching the question. We also need a bottom-up look. As Joe Soss (1999, 376) observed, “legislatures may host more dramatic political activities, but the police station, the motor vehicles office, and the Internal Revenue Service are more likely to supply citizens with lessons about government that ring with the truth of first-hand experience.” If we are to gain a fuller understanding of what drives Canadians’ perceptions of government responsiveness, we also need to pay attention to their everyday experiences with government. These experiences have important implications for people’s propensity to be politically active: “Public policy provides the basis for experiences of government-in-action far more regularly than do the activities that political scientists more commonly study, such as voting, contacting

public officials, and participating in protests or demonstrations” (Mettler and Soss 2004, 64).

Policies can be a source of resources for political action and can have mobilizing effects. For example, beneficiaries of government programs have an incentive to get involved in order to protect or expand their program benefits (Campbell 2003). However, much depends on the nature of their experiences in accessing these programs. If people have frustrating experiences, then they can be left with negative perceptions of both government responsiveness and their own capabilities as political actors. If disadvantaged groups have less satisfactory encounters with public programs, then the effect can be to deepen unequal participation in politics (Schneider and Ingram 1993).

As this discussion makes clear, participation, inclusiveness, and responsiveness are closely connected. For example, unequal participation can result in less responsiveness to the opinions of socially disadvantaged groups. A lack of responsiveness, in turn, can dampen participation. As Heather Savigny (2008, 41) observes, “if political wants are not satisfied through the formal political process, then there is no reason to assume the public will take part in that process.” Whether those who are disaffected with politics as practised in formal political arenas turn to other ways of expressing their political interests is one of the questions that this book addresses.

The Data

The chapters in this book present a series of novel findings about the state of Canadian democracy. They are all based on original data collected for the express purpose of evaluating Canadian democracy in the twenty-first century.

The data on citizens are drawn from two sources. The first is an online survey commissioned by Samara, a charitable organization that works to improve political participation in Canada. Samara’s Citizens’ Survey was conducted by Feedback Research Corporation under the direction of André Turcotte between 19 March and 2 April 2012. It was fielded across Canada with the exception of the territories. Participants were randomly selected from an online panel. A total of 1,915 Canadians completed the base survey, representing a response rate of 43.1 percent. After data cleaning, the effective sample size was 1,761 respondents (see the appendix at the end of this book for details of the methodology and survey questions).

The second source of data is a series of eight focus groups conducted in Hamilton, Mississauga, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver between

August and October 2011. The focus groups complement the survey by providing deeper insights into the reasons why some Canadians are not politically engaged. The groups ranged in size from five to nine participants. There were thirty-eight women and eighteen men. Obviously, the focus groups did not purport to be representative of the Canadian population. On the contrary, recruitment targeted specific subgroups: less-educated youth, lower-income Canadians, francophone women, English-speaking women, urban Aboriginal peoples, new Canadians, and rural Canadians. The participants in these seven groups were all politically unengaged (based on a screening interview). In order to provide a point of comparison, the eighth group consisted of politically engaged suburban residents. Further details of the composition and conduct of the focus groups can be found in Chapter 2. As Heather Bastedo and her colleagues show, talking to politically disengaged Canadians can provide vital insights into their attitudes toward politics and their opinions about how democracy should work.

The same belief in the value of sitting down and talking to people motivated our key source of data on MPs. Samara partnered with the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians to conduct comprehensive exit interviews with former MPs. The seventy-nine participants included cabinet ministers and a former prime minister as well as backbenchers. They were drawn from every region of Canada and every political party with seats in Parliament. Some had been defeated in the 2006, 2008, or 2011 election; others had chosen not to run again. Together, they provided unique insights into their conceptions of their role and the challenges that they face in representing their constituents, as Chapter 9 shows. A second source of data on Parliament consists of a computer-assisted content analysis of the words of all speakers in the House of Commons as recorded in Hansard during three four-week periods during the 2012 parliamentary calendar year. Spanning 54 of 135 sitting days, these three periods represent 40 percent of the time that the House was in session that year. Approximately 3.7 million words were analyzed using a topic dictionary adapted from the Policy Agenda Project (<http://www.policyagendas.org>). The purpose was to allow for a comparison between the policy priorities of Canadians as expressed in opinion polls and those of Parliament as expressed in debates.

The chapters on social media and the traditional print and broadcast media also draw on data collected as part of Samara's ongoing research activities. The social media data come from Twitter posts. Twitter is a free online social-networking and micro-blogging service. Users can send and

read messages of up to 140 characters. These messages are known as tweets. Hashtags, designated by the hash symbol (#), can be used to post on a particular topic. All tweets using the hashtag #cdnpoli, #canpoli, or #polcan posted between 15 October and 30 November 2011 were gathered, along with biographical and location information taken from users' account pages. A total of 943,000 individual tweets were collected. The print and broadcast media data consist of 2,806 newspaper articles published in forty-two daily newspapers between 1 September and 30 November 2011, along with transcripts of 174 television news stories broadcast on seven national programs over the same period. Further details can be found in Chapter 5.

These different datasets provide an unusually rich source of information on citizens, Parliament, and media in Canada. The chapters that follow draw extensively on these data to provide new insights into the practice of Canadian democracy in the twenty-first century.

The Book

The book begins with an assessment of Canadians' views with respect to democracy and the political process. Drawing on Samara's Citizens' Survey, Lawrence LeDuc and Jon Pammett examine in Chapter 1 Canadians' evaluations of the way that democracy works in Canada. They compare levels of satisfaction across time and examine how satisfaction with the way that democracy works in Canada compares with levels of satisfaction found in other established democracies. Their chapter explores some of the underlying drivers of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with current democratic norms and practices, and it offers some explanations of why Canada differs from patterns found in other countries regarding these issues.

In Chapter 2, Nick Ruderman draws on data from Samara's Citizens' Survey to take a more in-depth look at Canadians' perceptions of politicians and their motivations. How pervasive are the perceptions that politicians care only about themselves and that members of Parliament put their own interests ahead of those of their constituents? Are these perceptions mainly confined to the disaffected and the disadvantaged, or do they permeate a wide range of social strata? And to what extent do these perceptions shape patterns of political participation?

Chapter 3 explores Canadians' political action repertoires. Michael Painter-Main uses data from Samara's Citizens' Survey to assess competing claims about citizen engagement. He investigates the extent to which the profile of Canadians who participate in direct modes of political action such

as joining in political demonstrations, engaging in political consumerism, and signing petitions conforms to the elite-challenging or the repertoire-building perspective. In other words, are disaffected and disadvantaged Canadians abandoning traditional vehicles of political participation, such as voting or joining a political party, in favour of protest activities, or are the sorts of people who vote and join political parties simply broadening their political action repertoires? The chapter develops a classification of citizen types – those who limit their participation to the formal electoral and partisan venues, those who engage only in protest activities, those who do both, and those who do neither – and provides a socio-demographic and attitudinal profile of each type of citizen.

In Chapter 4, Heather Bastedo and her colleagues draw extensively on the Samara focus group discussions to offer some fascinating insights into the experiences that underlie a lack of political engagement. Their chapter highlights a paradox. Why are some Canadians so disaffected with *politics* yet continue to value *democracy*? The authors suggest that this disjuncture between positive norms and non-engagement can be explained by a disconnect between what people think politics *is* and what democracy *should be*. They also examine why these non-engaged Canadians perceive themselves to be “outsiders” when it comes to politics. Are they simply uninterested in politics, or does a lack of engagement result from their lived experiences with government? Why do the outsiders perceive politics to be largely irrelevant to their lives?

Chapter 5 assesses the potential of social media for citizen engagement and participation in politics. A long-standing concern in the literature on political engagement and political participation has been observed inequalities among different social groups, particularly based on income, education, age, and gender. The rise of the Internet has not eliminated these gaps. In fact, a growing literature documents the “digital divide” – a pattern of inequality in adoption and overall use of new technologies. In this chapter, Quinn Albaugh and Christopher Waddell argue that we should expect social media sites – as both tools for communication and means of political participation – to be subject to similar patterns of inequality. They draw a profile of political users of social media, highlighting their social background characteristics, their interest in politics, and their political activities. In addition to examining Canadians’ self-reported use of social media for political purposes, they use Samara’s database of tweets containing hashtags related to current political issues to examine how many of these accounts belong to elite actors, such as media organizations or

political parties, that have more resources than individual citizens. This chapter also examines the use of traditional print and broadcast media (hardcopy and online) and explores Canadians' assessments of the quality of coverage of politics in both traditional and alternative media.

The democratic role of the news media is to present information to the public, allowing citizens to make informed decisions. Three major factors are thought to influence the level of information presented to the public: the tone of news coverage, how news coverage is framed, and the medium itself. Critics charge that media coverage is unduly negative, uninformative, sensationalistic, and horse race-oriented. In Chapter 6, Heather Bastedo and her colleagues assess the empirical validity of these hypotheses with respect to the nature of televised and printed news coverage. Drawing on a content analysis of newspaper and television coverage of two major domestic political events in the fall of 2011, they examine the prevalence of negative news and strategic frames in newspaper and television coverage and determine whether these types of stories are related to the amount of information covered. Are stories that score high on information content more – or less – likely than low-information stories to have a strategic politics frame? And how does the level of information compare between newspaper articles and television stories?

As Bastedo and her colleagues observe, technological changes are transforming the ways that journalists work. Wayne Chu and Fred Fletcher take up this question in Chapter 7. What interests them is whether social media have influenced the traditional agenda-setting role of the print and broadcast media by expanding the range of actors who influence the public agenda. Like Albaugh and Waddell, they focus on Twitter use. They examine whether newspaper and television news coverage picks up on topics being discussed in the “Twitter-verse.” They also take a closer look at who is positing and who is influencing the Twitter agenda. In doing so, they shed important light on how new information technologies are influencing agenda-setting dynamics and democratic discourse.

The next set of chapters addresses issues surrounding representation. Focusing on Parliament and the incumbent party, these chapters raise important questions about the responsiveness and inclusiveness of representative democracy in Canada as well as the representational role of MPs.

When asked whether Parliament is representative, Canadians give Canadian democracy lacklustre grades. Chapter 8 suggests that these mediocre ratings are warranted. As Livianna Tossutti and Jane Hilderman explain, the proportion of MPs from a number of societal groups has historically

lagged far behind their presence in the population. Using population benchmarks to assess the numerical representation of women, Aboriginals, immigrants, visible minorities, and young people, they examine whether the 41st Parliament came closer to reflecting the diversity of Canadian society. In contrast to previous studies that simply looked at the number of MPs from these groups, they also compare their appointment to positions of power (i.e., cabinet, shadow cabinet, House leaders and party whips, standing committee chairs) with their presence in their corresponding party caucus. This allows for a comprehensive assessment of the state of descriptive representation in Parliament.

Chapter 9 switches the focus to substantive representation. Munroe Eagles and his colleagues use Canada's first-ever comprehensive series of exit interviews with former parliamentarians to explore how MPs themselves view the relationship between representatives and represented and how their conceptions of their role are influenced by the type of constituency represented. These far-ranging interviews covered many aspects of concern to constituency representation, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the self-reported representational styles and activities of MPs as they relate to their constituents and constituencies. The result is a number of penetrating insights into the challenges that confront MPs as they perform their representational roles.

Kelly Blidook approaches the question of substantive representation from a different perspective in Chapter 10. He focuses on the relationship between the priorities of parliamentarians and the priorities of the Canadian public. Combining survey data with a content analysis of Question Period, Standing Order 31 Member Statements, and legislative debates, he evaluates the extent to which MPs' statements reflect the public's priorities and respond to changes in those priorities. His analyses suggest that the public's perception of a lack of responsiveness among MPs is somewhat at odds with the degree of congruence that he observes, at least when it comes to priorities.

Another widespread perception is that politicians fail to keep their promises. This is evident from the survey data analyzed by Nick Ruderman as well as the focus groups discussed by Heather Bastedo and her colleagues. In Chapter 11, François Pétry assesses whether this perception is warranted. He examines the extent to which the Conservative Party's 2011 campaign pledges were fulfilled during the party's first year in office. He compares specific pledges in the Conservative platform with the party's record in government based on a content analysis of laws and regulations, throne

speeches and budget speeches, and annual reports from government ministries and agencies. His analyses reveal that many Conservative campaign pledges were actually fulfilled, opening the way for a discussion of possible reasons why citizens' perceptions seem to be at odds with the objective record.

Taken together, these chapters underline the value of the book's "bottom-up" approach to understanding why so many Canadians are dissatisfied with the way that our democracy works. Rather than focusing on institutions, as so many other contributions have done, this book approaches the "democratic deficit" from the perspective of the Canadian public and assesses the performance of Parliament and media in light of Canadians' perceptions and expectations of politics and politicians. In doing so, a number of chapters also highlight the disjuncture between perceptions and performance. For example, governments do keep many of their election promises, and media coverage is not as negative as we are apt to believe. These are important findings that challenge conventional wisdom. The chapters on Twitter also break new ground. They provide completely new data on the use of social media by both elite political actors and ordinary Canadians and explore the reciprocal influence between social media and traditional print and broadcast media. Similarly, a good deal has been written about political apathy in Canada, but the Samara focus groups represent the first attempt to ask politically marginalized Canadians why they have turned their backs on politics.

The book ends with an overall assessment of the health of everyday Canadian democracy. The concluding chapter brings together the key findings and lays out their implications for the criteria of inclusiveness, responsiveness, and participation that define this evaluation of Canada's democratic health. It highlights both the strengths and the weaknesses, as revealed in the preceding chapters, pinpoints what is – and is not – working in Canadian democracy, and canvasses some possible ways of addressing the weaknesses while capitalizing on the strengths.

REFERENCES

- Bang, Henrik P., and Eva Sørensen. 1999. "The Everyday Maker: A New Challenge to Democratic Governance." *Administrative Theory and Praxis* 21(3): 325-41.
- Barber, Benjamin R. 1984. *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bastedo, Heather. 1997. "Subpolitics: Ecology and the Disintegration of Institutional Power." *Organization Environment* 10(2): 52-65.