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First, we would like to thank the contributors for allowing us to include their work in *Imperfect Democracies*. All our contributors have been conscientious and responsive to our many requests, and, as a result, they have made our editorial work easy.

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IMPERFECT DEMOCRACIES
Take a look at nearly every attempt to rank countries according to their democratic credentials and one finds that both Canada and the United States consistently place among the most democratic countries in the world. World Audit’s democracy ranking places Canada in eighth place and the United States in fifteenth, for example, and Global Democracy places the United States in twelfth place and Canada in fifteenth.³ Freedom House and Transparency International give similarly positive ratings. By international standards, in other words, one would be hard pressed to complain about the “democraticness,” or, more elegantly, the quality of democracy in either of these countries. Despite ongoing contestation about the results of the 2000 American presidential race, about district boundaries and campaign finance in the United States, or large gaps between votes and seats won in Canada, or perhaps excessive partisanship in both countries, few seriously consider the democratic institutions and practices of these countries to be in real jeopardy. They are imperfect, as the title of our volume suggests, but they are not at risk of being overthrown or even seriously undermined.

Yet there is a paradox here. Even as both countries are confident in their status as democracies, voices expressing concern about the quality of Canadian and American democracy have become louder and more insistent.² It is increasingly proclaimed that they suffer from “a democratic deficit” and that this deficit raises questions about the legitimacy and effectiveness of their
democratic institutions. There is increasingly, it seems, a gap between the theory and ideal of democracy and its gritty, messy practice in both countries. Ideally democracies are characterized by the collective self-determination of their citizens, with the latter feeling that they have the opportunity to control, or at least to influence, the direction of public policy. This, for many, means more than the opportunity to vote in free and fair elections. It also suggests inclusion and representation (everyone has a voice); political equality (everyone’s voice counts equally); citizen engagement in community political life; and effectiveness, responsiveness, and accountability on the part of elected governments. Yet citizens report an ever-increasing dissatisfaction with their democratic institutions along all these dimensions. This dissatisfaction is reflected in well known, and frequently reported, statistics showing the decline of trust in political leaders and the decline in confidence in the effectiveness of democratic institutions. Citizens are increasingly confident not in their ability but, rather, in their inability to influence the political direction of their country. They are no longer, we might say, confident in the “quality” of their democracies. Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam’s volume *Disaffected Democracy* observes, for example, a “disillusionment” with their governments among both Canadians and Americans as well as increases in reports of political alienation; and Richard Nadeau and Thierry Giasson observe increasing reports of “democratic malaise” among Canadians. These reports are by no means unique. In *Imperfect Democracies*, we compare and contrast the democratic deficit debates in Canada and the United States. But we also hope to contribute to a wider comparative discussion that will help to clarify the concept of the democratic deficit: how we measure it, how we assess its dimensions, and what kinds of solutions might be implemented to remedy it.

It is of course difficult to say, concretely, what is meant by the quality of democracy, and it is by no means clear how we might measure it. In part, the difficulty stems from the awareness that all democracies will be “imperfect” in some sense. Although, according to Ian Shapiro, “democrats expect much of democracy, in reality, democracy often disappoints. Both in its operation and its consequences it fails to live up to the promise people associate with it ... At best we can perhaps say that the democratic ideal lives in adaptive tension with the political realities in most so-called democracies.” In other words, it is a mistake to believe that democracy will live up to its ideal in the first place. At best, we can say that the extent to which a democracy meets its ideal “is a matter of degree: of the extent to which democratic principles and mediating values are realised in practice ... for the
moment, it is sufficient to emphasise that democracy is a continuum, and that it is always a work in progress.”

These complications suggest the deep challenge in offering a clear definition of democratic quality. We follow Jorge Vargas Cullell in assessing the quality of a democracy by “the extent to which political life and institutional performance in a country (or part of it) with a democratic regime coincide with the democratic aspirations of its citizens.” We refer to the gap between the reality of democratic life and citizens’ aspirations as the “democratic deficit.” In so far as Canadians and Americans demand more responsiveness from their democratic institutions, and in so far as they feel themselves incapable of exercising political control over them, we have reason to worry about the quality of democratic practice and its associated democratic deficit. As the contributors to this volume illustrate, however, we also have reason to be optimistic: there are multiple possible solutions to the democratic deficit, and we can be hopeful that they will be implemented.

Imperfect Democracies brings together Canadian and American scholars to compare and contrast the democratic deficit and to evaluate recommended solutions. Those versed in the politics of both countries know that there are tremendous similarities in their democratic systems and in the ways in which their citizens interpret the working of their politics. Both fall squarely into the category of liberal democracies. We offer a most similar systems comparison in that we compare two advanced liberal democracies. Yet the specific concerns expressed in the two countries are in many ways distinct: while Canadians have traditionally been concerned with executive dominance and the unrepresentative nature of the electoral system (in which votes do not translate, proportionally, into seats), Americans have paid more attention to the role of special interests and money in political life. That said, there is much to be gained by a sustained comparison of democratic practice, and the democratic deficits, in both countries. In this volume, the contributors focus on three questions in particular:

- Why are we talking about a democratic deficit in the first place? Why, in other words, are Canadians and Americans expressing concern about the quality of their respective democracies? And why are they doing so now?
- What is the location of the deficit? In what ways, specifically, are the Canadian and American democracies falling short? In what ways can we “measure” the extent of the democratic deficit?
• What can we do to mitigate the deficit? What moves, if any, have already been made to reform it? Are the reforms “cautious” or “aggressive”? Are there parallels in the ways that Canadians and Americans have proposed to reform the deficit? Does either country suggest unique mechanisms by which to reform it? What can each country learn from the experiences of the other?

The inspiration for Imperfect Democracies lies in recent efforts to generate an effective system for auditing democratic practice. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has developed a comprehensive methodology to allow for context-specific democratic audits. Led by Professor David Beetham, it is perhaps best known for its audits of many developing countries and for its Democratic Assessment Questionnaire, designed to help citizens assess their own country’s democratic performance. It is as relevant to advanced democracies like those considered here as it is to newly formed democracies. A democratic audit, writes Beetham, “is undertaken as a domestic project by citizens of the country being assessed, as part of an internal debate about the character of its political institutions and public life.” By allowing the citizens who are auditing their own democracy to have input into the precise aspects of democracy that matter to them – in large part by enabling them not only to shape the questions that drive the audit but also to select what they consider the most important from among those developed by IDEA – the democratic audit permits citizens to “differentiate between those aspects of a country’s life which are more satisfactory from a democratic point of view and those which give cause for concern.”

This strategy allows democracy assessors to confront an obstacle that challenges all attempts to evaluate democratic practice: there is more than one – indeed, there are many more than one – democratic ideal. As any scholar of democracy knows, for example, an emphasis on a minimalist democracy suggests a commitment to one set of ideals (competitive elections and formal equality, as exemplified by Robert Dahl’s concept of polyarchy); a commitment to more participatory democracy suggests an alternative set of ideals (political participation and civic education); and a commitment to representative democracy suggests a commitment to yet another set of ideals (adequate representation and effective accountability). Fully deliberative democracy that replaces competitive, representative, majoritarian democracy with reasoned discussion leading to consensual decisions sets an ever higher and more difficult standard.
democracies are not infinite, of course, but they are sufficiently numerous and varied that we run the risk of evaluating a country – in which citizens are committed to the ideals of participatory democracy – as democratic (i.e., as not suffering from a deficit) when their institutions only satisfy the minimum requirements. A democratic audit – by allowing citizens to define their own democratic priorities – overcomes this risk by offering a way to audit a country that is consistent with the democratic aspirations of its own citizens. Note that the claim is not that there are no defining features of democratic institutions: to be democratic in the first place, democratic institutions must protect the basic political equality of all citizens – that is, their right to participate in the institutions that produce the legislation that governs their lives. The claim is simply that the specific institutions that protect the political equality of citizens can vary tremendously in form.

Thus, before we can measure the quality of a democracy, we must recognize that “every democratic country must make an inherently value-laden choice about what kind of democracy it wishes to be.”\textsuperscript{16} Democracies must be able to choose the criteria for judgment that best suits them: they can focus on whether their country is performing better or worse in comparison to, for example, neighbouring countries, or they can assess their own democratic practice over time with a view to evaluating whether the trend is towards enhanced or reduced democracy. The quality of democracy can thus be evaluated against some ideal standard (are we as good as we could be?), comparatively (are we better or worse than others?), or over time (are we getting better or worse?). Additionally, we must recognize that the instantiation of some democratic ideals may be incompatible with the instantiation of others. We must therefore adopt a “pluralist notion of democratic quality,” according to which “there are not only dense linkages but also trade-offs and tensions among the various dimensions of democratic quality; and democracies will differ in the normative weights they place on various dimensions (for example, freedom versus responsiveness; or majority rule versus minority rights). There is no objective way of deriving a single framework of democratic quality, right and true for all societies.”\textsuperscript{17} This is also true of Canada and the United States: we should not assume that when their citizens call for greater democracy, they are necessarily calling for the same thing either within the two countries or between them.

Many countries, not least of which is Canada, have recently engaged in democratic audits inspired directly or indirectly by IDEA’s pioneering work.\textsuperscript{18} The Canadian Democratic Audit, led by Professor William Cross, wished to respond, in particular, to the dissatisfaction Canadians express with their
political system. Voter participation in Canada has dropped; Canadians believe their political representatives are increasingly unresponsive to their needs and demands; and they are increasingly dissatisfied with the performance of their democratic institutions. In response, the Canadian Audit engaged in a full-scale review of Canada’s central political institutions in an attempt to identify more clearly the source of Canadian malaise and to offer specific suggestions for reform. Cross describes the purposes of the Canadian Audit as follows: “to examine the way Canadian democracy functions, to listen to what others have to say about the operation of Canadian democracy, to assess its strengths and weaknesses, to consider where there are opportunities for advancement, and to evaluate potential reforms.” The audit produced nine volumes, each of which focuses on a specific institution, and the authors of many of these volumes contribute their analyses to this book.

The terms “democratic deficit” and “democratic audit” do not appear to be as widely used in American political discourse as they are in Canadian political discourse. But the issues and concerns reflected in the Canadian debate abound in the United States as well – in political argument, in popular and scholarly literature, in the work of NGOs from Common Cause to MoveOn.org, and, perhaps most obviously, in the Obama administration’s Open Government Initiative, about which he wrote the following: “My administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in Government.” Whether the Obama administration meets these goals or not, Obama’s public avowal of them suggests recognition that citizens believe that democracy is, in important ways, failing them.

The Uniqueness of Our Approach

Imperfect Democracies evaluates the Canadian and American democracies, and the nature of their respective democratic deficits, in comparative perspective. It includes contributions from Canadian and American scholars who focus on a set of democratic institutions – the executive, the legislative, and the electoral system – in order to evaluate the ways in which these institutions do or do not live up to democratic ideals of popular sovereignty and political equality. One of our contributors, Pippa Norris, observes that, in global comparative focus, there seems to be little to complain about, democratically, in the United States and Canada. Many – if not most – countries in the world are doing worse, democratically speaking, in comparison to
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them. Yet, as William Cross notes in some remarks on the results produced by the Canadian Democratic Audit, “it is hard to know what to make of the knowledge that Canada is 100 places ahead of Chad” according to standard checklist models of democracy assessment (and readers who wondered whether in fact Canada’s ranking – fifteenth – by Global Democracy suggested room for improvement rather than democratic satisfaction might feel the same). By comparing two mature democracies, then, we can generate many helpful insights into the nature of the democratic deficit and how citizens perceive it.

On the one hand, there are significant institutional differences between Canada and the United States. Canada has a strong though increasingly fragmented multi-party system, characterized by strong party discipline; the American two-party system is much looser. Canada has a strong tradition of executive dominance; in the United States, power tends to shift between strong executives (the “imperial presidency”) and a strong Congress (the “imperial Congress”), but, compared to Canada’s, the American legislature is far more powerful. Authority tends to be more concentrated in Canada and more dispersed in the United States. The United States is a presidential/congressional system; Canada is a parliamentary/cabinet system based on the British Westminster model. The United States is a national federation centred in Washington; Canada is a highly regional, decentralized, and multinational federation. American political culture is deeply inspired by its revolutionary history and the resulting emphasis on liberty, individualism, and limited government. Canada has a more conservative tradition, with a greater emphasis on collective values and “peace order and good government.” These and other cultural and institutional differences (not to mention the status of the United States as a hegemonic power in the world and Canada as a middle power) suggest that the issues raised, the discourse within which they are debated, and the institutions that are singled out for reform are likely to differ between the two countries. For example, faced with powerful cabinets and first ministers, Canadian reformers often seek to enhance the role of Parliament and parliamentarians – more “free votes,” better-staffed committees, fixed terms for Parliament, and so on. Faced with widely dispersed authority, multiple veto points associated with checks and balances, and “divided government,” Americans have often argued for more disciplined and responsible parties.

Yet similarities also emerge when we focus on citizens and their perceptions of the qualities of their respective democracies. In both countries, citizens express dissatisfaction with the quality of their democratic
institutions. As we note above, Canadians and Americans both report decreased trust in their political representatives and decreased confidence in their political institutions. Both countries employ majoritarian political systems, which maximize the number of losers in any given election and therefore tend to generate more disaffection than do systems of proportional representation.24

Several contributors to *Imperfect Democracies* wonder whether the shared, negative attitudes towards the effectiveness of their democratic institutions result from a trend that plagues other Western democratic countries as well.25 Perhaps we need to consider, they suggest, that democratic citizens of mature democracies in general – Canada and the United States included – have become more demanding. It may well be that it is their rising expectations about what democracy ought to provide, rather than the emergence of new weaknesses in their democratic institutions, that is driving dissatisfaction among democratic citizens. As Pippa Norris notes, citizens are increasingly critical of their democratic institutions, even as it remains unclear whether this new critical attitude emerges from rising expectations or reduced democratic performance in response, for example, to globalizing trends that move certain decisions from the domestic, democratic environment to transnational environments.26 It is not clear whether the problem is citizens’ increasing expectations, or the declining performance of existing institutions and elites, or both. Thus, we must assess whether the democratic deficit should be seen primarily as a *citizen deficit* (citizens are unengaged, uninformed, and uninterested) or as an *institutional deficit* (political institutions are non-inclusive, unresponsive, unaccountable, etc.). Reform proposals will, obviously, differ depending on the diagnosis along both these dimensions; the former might call for better civic education, for example, and the latter for the reform of institutions. Which element of the deficit is most important will shape the proposals for reform.

As readers will see, the authors draw strikingly different conclusions about the circumstances that ought to be held responsible for causing the perception of a deficit. Yet there is one broad observation that can be made: a comparison between Canada and the United States illustrates no clear democratic winner. In a three-way comparison of a variety of democratic institutions in Canada, the United States, and Mexico, Robert Pastor observes that “the United States nearly always comes in third place.” But we find in this book that there are dimensions along which Canada is more democratic and others along which the United States is more democratic. And there are yet others along which they fare similarly. For example, although
consensus among our contributors suggests that the Canadian electoral process is superior to the American process (particularly since the election officer in Canada is non-partisan), both countries do seem to be facing declines in political participation. In the ongoing competition between Canada and the United States (which often seems more vivid on the Canadian side), there seems to be no broad winner in the race to have the highest-quality democracy. The smugness sometimes voiced by commentators on both sides of the border is unjustified.

In addition to its comparative structure, Imperfect Democracies offers another distinctive feature – namely, a focus on both institutional and normative questions. Our analysis of institutions and practices is predicated on a normative commitment to the value of democracy. In Ian Shapiro's words, whereas “it might be going too far to say that democracy is all things to all people ... it is fair to say that there is a strong propensity to associate democracy with a wide array of activities and outcomes that people value.” In this volume, we display a commitment to the normative superiority of democracy, even as we recognize that certain institutions are better able to deliver democratic goods than are others. Thus, we heed the warning, which opens a recent evaluation of Latin American democracies, to guard “against the temptation of drawing false conclusions from the correct observation that democracy's normative superiority is a sufficient argument to justify its existence.” A normative commitment to democracy, as well as the awareness that, however democratic the institutions, improvements will always be required, underpins this volume. Any democracy – the Canadian and the American models included – can more or less instantiate democratic ideals, and the purpose of Imperfect Democracies is to clarify the ways in which these ideals remain uninstantiated and, then, to consider some solutions.

It is the widespread perception among citizens, to which we have already referred several times in this introduction, that, however mature their democracies, they are failing their citizens in important ways. It is the institutions that, it seems, succeed or fail with regard to delivering democratic goods – yet it is the citizens who are able to provide feedback with respect to whether these goods are being delivered. We rely on citizens’ responses to signal dimensions about which we, as committed democrats, should be worried. In other words, there is an important relationship between citizens’ subjective opinions with respect to democracy and the ways in which the institutions function in practice, and we need to pay attention to this relationship (even if, as Pippa Norris, Neil Nevitte, and Stephen White would have it, the difficulty is rising expectations and not newly failing institutions).
What matters, we might say following Patti Tamara Lenard and Daniel Munro, is the salience of the democratic deficit. It may be that democratic institutions do fail (perhaps necessarily so) to live up to ideal democratic values, but what matters is how salient this deficit is to the citizens who must live and interact, politically and socially, in an imperfect democracy.

Of course, historically, political participation – especially in democracies – has nearly always been imbued with a normative status. From Ancient Greek democratic theory through to contemporary accounts of the normative status of democratic theory, political participation is nearly always viewed as a moral good, in which citizens are morally obligated to engage or are at least praised for doing so. Although in practice we may no longer view political participation as a moral good that should be prized above other possible human activities, many of us continue to believe that voting is a civic duty.

We would be remiss if we did not observe – with Neil Nevitte and Stephen White – the considerable controversy, especially in American political science, concerning whether the evidence does indeed reveal a decline in overall political participation. Even as this debate remains unresolved, however, there is a consequence to reports of declining satisfaction in democratic institutions even if it is true that political participation has remained relatively constant over time. This is the concern that occupies, for example, Russell J. Dalton in *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices*, in which he worries that the consequences of decreased satisfaction are that democratic institutions may well suffer with respect to the willingness of citizens to comply (relatively) voluntarily with democratic legislation. He writes:

> Democratic polities are based on the presumption that citizens will voluntarily comply with the laws. If political distrust increases, this may lower voluntary compliance in areas such as tax laws and acceptance of government regulation ... These examples highlight a general feature of democracy: democracy functions with minimal coercive force because of the legitimacy of the system and the voluntary compliance of the public. Declining feelings of political trust and political support can undermine this relationship, and thus the workings of democratic government.

In other words, even if citizens continue to participate in political activity, their willingness to comply with burdensome democratic legislation may decline enough to threaten the ability of political actors to implement democratic legislation with the expectation of compliance.
The solutions proposed in *Imperfect Democracies* recognize not only the danger that undemocratic institutions will increasingly shut citizens out (formally or informally) from the democratic process but also the danger that this will threaten legitimate democratic institutions, which are essential to protecting the trust that underpins widespread voluntary compliance with democratic legislation. These dangers may encourage, at best, a dissatisfaction with democratic political performance and, at worst, a more general disaffection that suggests that the legitimacy of the democratic system is in peril.  

Three Themes

As we note earlier, our contributors engage with the democratic deficit in Canada and the United States along three dimensions: the sources of the democratic deficit, its location, and possible reforms.

The Sources of the Democratic Deficit

We wonder whether we should attribute these declining positive evaluations of democratic institutions to an increase in citizen expectations or to an increasing inability of democratic institutions to keep up with the demands of citizens. Why, when “democratic values have been snowballing through so much of the world,” is it that “many of the Western countries that spawned those values are confronting failings of democratic legitimacy”?  

In her chapter, Pippa Norris questions the benefits of focusing on the democratic deficit in Canada and the United States. Both countries, she notes, are consistently at the top of rankings of democratic countries. Norris compares and contrasts many of the methods by which we rank countries according to their democratic credentials – some of which employ minimalist standards and others of which employ more demanding standards – and observes that, whatever the methodology, the central indicators employed tend to correlate with one another. A country that is ranked as highly democratic by one standard is likely to be ranked as highly democratic by the others. These indicators, Norris suggests, can be valuable in providing a preliminary analysis of democratic health. But, she observes, for the most democratic of countries – including Canada and the United States – we reach a kind of “ceiling” effect, after which we must turn to more detailed analyses of a country’s democratic health.

In their contribution, Neil Nevitte and Stephen White ask whether the 2005-6 World Values Survey is able to shed light on the disjuncture between our entrenched democratic institutions and our perception that they are
not functioning effectively. Their results reveal, unsurprisingly, that Canadians and Americans are strongly committed to democracy, even as they express differing views with respect to its central components. In particular, Americans are less likely to believe that distributive equality is a core democratic value, even as low-income Americans express a higher than average dissatisfaction with the results of their democratic institutions. Nevitte and White speculate about the possible causes of this dissatisfaction – the unrepresentativeness of political actors, worries that democracies are unable to deal with the proliferation of citizen-driven demands – and observe that a dominant effect has to do with one’s sense of what democracy is meant to provide. That is, one’s own ideal of democracy shapes how one responds to the type of democracy on offer. Paradoxically, moreover, they find that those who are dissatisfied with their democracy are more rather than less likely to be engaged in political activity.

In other words, dissatisfied democrats cannot be counted on to disengage from political activity (and so we do not have an adequate explanation of the reasons for decreasing voter turnout and political participation more generally), even as they continue to express doubt about the effectiveness of the institutions with which they engage. In some sense, we might even say that dissatisfied democrats are our ideal democratic citizens: they are informed, aware, and politically active. They engage the political system because they believe that we can do better. These are citizens who are empowered by high levels of education as well as by competence with new technologies that speed the flow of information and facilitate political participation. These dissatisfied democrats, however, must be distinguished from those we term “disaffected.” Disaffected citizens have disengaged from political activity. These are citizens who believe their governments have been effectively disempowered by the forces of globalization and the now pervasive neoliberal ideology, both of which appear to weaken the capacity of government to act to protect the interests of citizens. Additionally, they no longer believe that they can influence the political process in a meaningful way. Especially among the lower classes, disaffection is exacerbated by stagnating or declining incomes, increased inequality, and the erosion of the welfare state.

Locating the Democratic Deficit
One obvious place to look for a democratic deficit is in the electoral system since the vote (combined with competitive elections, of course, because turnout numbers without supporting democratic institutions are meaningless,
as Norris observes) is perhaps the sine qua non of democratic politics. In Canada, especially, complaints are regularly made about the failure of votes to translate into seats. For example, recently, Sujit Choudry and Michael Pal made headlines with research that suggested that visible minority votes were especially diluted in Canada as a result of the indirectly representative nature of the Canadian electoral system.34

Challenges abound in both Canadian and American electoral systems. Michael McDonald’s contribution assesses the challenges posed by the “two-tier” voting process in the United States. Unlike in most electoral democracies, where the government is responsible for maintaining updated voter lists, Americans are officially required to register in advance of voting day. Many Americans are effectively disenfranchised by the complicated rules, and early deadlines, that attend registration. Making voting more “convenient,” suggests McDonald, is not a “cure-all” for the ills that face democratic politics in the United States; but data suggest that it would increase voter participation by a noticeable margin. The challenges to easing the process of voting, however, are frequently mired in partisan politics.

As John Courtney notes, one significant advantage of Canada’s electoral system is its commitment to a nonpartisan election administration (though he is circumspect about its capacity to be effective in all national environments). In his chapter, Courtney traces the progress of electoral reform in Canada, one element of which is the adoption of a fully nonpartisan national election administration. Courtney suggests a variety of reasons why Canadians have been motivated to implement electoral reform in the past: progressively more tolerant social values, successful advocacy group campaigns, dissatisfaction with brazen electoral manipulation, and so on. Electoral reform in Canada is on the agenda again, but it bears little resemblance to previous movements for reform. Unlike in the past, present-day demands for electoral reform emerge from the confluence of many different events: front-burner elections (elections that signal major shifts in the party system), provincial attempts to modify electoral systems, evidence that other democratic countries (New Zealand, Scotland, Italy, etc.) can change their electoral system, and, of course, heightened concerns about a democratic deficit. Of special importance, writes Courtney, is that present debates about electoral reform are bringing to the fore the various ways in which citizens understand the role of elections and their individual status as voters. As voters, they are making increased demands on a democratic system that may require electoral reform (i.e., changes in how votes are distributed
among parties, changes in the representative relationship between citizens and their representatives, etc.) in order for them to be met.

Debates about electoral reform involve not only the very important question of the relationship between the vote and the eventual outcome in terms of representatives (and their representativeness) but also the rules surrounding electoral campaigns. The worry here is that these rules restrict all but the most wealthy from running for office, that they permit far too much special-interest input into electoral campaigns (especially by way of donations), and that the campaigns themselves do not adhere to the democratic principles of equality and popular control.

With respect to campaign finance reform, Canada and the United States offer especially interesting comparative insights. Both countries engaged in reforms in the 1970s and are presently again engaging in reforms, and both implemented these reforms to deal with perceived corruption and unfairness – that is, to ensure that inequality in the market did not replicate itself in the public sphere. Both sets of reforms (in both countries) aimed to increase the transparency of the electoral system more generally, and the most recent reforms emphasize redressing the imbalance between large collective donations and smaller donors so as to increase the political participation of the latter. While Canadians express anxiety about the result of the process (and so measure success in terms of political output), Americans express anxiety about the front end of the process.35

While Lisa Young emphasizes the relatively benign role of political finance in Canadian politics and the relative unimportance of these issues in Canada, Robert Boatright emphasizes how campaign finance reform debates in the United States are framed around the trust and confidence they might (re)engender in the American democratic system. According to Young, recent changes in campaign finance rules render them better able to meet democratic ideals (although recently one of these incentives – that parties would be financially rewarded for the overall number of citizens who voted for them, regardless of their electoral success more generally – has recently been revoked). On the other hand, Boatright expresses scepticism concerning the “evidence” that suggests a relationship between reformed campaign finance regulations and increases in political trust (though the impact of the Supreme Court’s recent decision to allow unlimited corporate donations has already become evident in the unregulated role of multi-million-dollar PACs). He does observe, though, that it may be useful to view campaign contributions as an important form of political participation and that, if we do, then there are a range of options we might employ to encourage political
participation of this kind: tax credits for campaign contributions (which exist in Canada), matching funds, and so on. Canada has made more fundamental reforms to election finance than has the United States (including stricter contribution limits and limits on third-party advertising), in part because of court decisions that stress individual freedom of speech in the United States and collective values of fairness in Canada.

In democratic political theory, there has been a decided move towards evaluating the extent to which one’s vote does or does not translate into genuine political influence, or voice. As we see in the next section, in which we outline the suggested reforms, there has been a move away from a minimalist, and even a strictly representative, democracy towards more participatory and deliberative forms of democracy. These latter forms, it is suggested, are better able to meet the spirit of the democratic ideals to which we are committed. However, the debates about electoral reform suggest that the question of vote is not itself resolved.36

Patti Tamara Lenard and Daniel Munro suggest that one locus of the democratic deficit lies in the failure of Canada and the United States to extend the franchise to non-citizen permanent residents. In these tremendously diverse countries, the proportion of non-citizen residents, with the legal right to abode and who are on the path to citizenship, is high. Yet there is a variety of reasons to worry that the process by which these individuals attain citizenship, and thereby the right to vote, is such that many will remain without the franchise for many years. According to Lenard and Munro, if we believe that voting is among the most important ways in which one can ensure that one’s interests are taken into account in the political environment, we ought to consider extending the right to vote to permanent residents, at least at the local level (where their interests are affected in a direct and clear way). Although the salience of the democratic deficit as it relates to the inability of permanent residents to vote is relatively low (moreover, the primary concern of non-citizen residents is not the right to vote but, rather, their relatively low socio-economic status) and, therefore, not necessarily worth working towards given other priorities, Lenard and Munro note that liberal democratic principle leans towards extending the vote to permanent residents, at least at the municipal level.

How then do votes translate into representation in the legislature? David Docherty offers a comparative evaluation of the extent to which American and Canadian legislatures live up to the democratic ideals they are meant to embody. In his estimation, the Canadian legislature has much work to do to persuade Canadians of its relevance (especially given the history of executive
dominance in Canada). For Docherty, the adversarial nature of the Canadian legislature is such that it undercuts the confidence Canadians might have in it. Even as we deem Question Period to be a success – it is an effective system of oversight and scrutiny – we must recognize that it serves, in part, to undermine the legislature’s work. There are tremendous obstacles to reforming the legislature in Canada – for example, party discipline is getting stronger and campaigns have become much more leader-centred – but we need to focus on solutions. Docherty advocates enlarging the House of Commons and establishing more powerful committees, even as he notes that the American system contains both of these and that the result is not reassuring, at least with regard to resolving the democratic deficit.

What is fascinating here is that there is a clear democratic deficit in both the American and Canadian legislatures, but it takes diametrically opposite forms. In Canada, the problem is powerless and ineffective legislatures paralyzed by executive dominance and party discipline; in the United States, it is powerful legislatures with widely dispersed power and influence that can lead to gridlock, lowest common-denominator solutions, and undue influence for lobbyists and parochial interests. Here, as with debates about the electoral system, institutional differences between the two countries lead to quite distinct manifestations of the democratic deficit and, consequently, to quite different solutions.

Both Graham White (Canada) and Daniel Tichenor (the United States) continue this analysis, exploring the relationship between democracy and executive power. Here again the institutional differences, which are linked to historical political culture, are critical. From the beginning, the United States has been committed to limited government and has feared the concentration of power – hence, a strong system of checks and balances and the separation of powers are central to the American political system. Canada has traditionally been more committed to a strong, effective executive, played out in Westminster parliamentary government. As Tichenor notes in his introduction, “committed democrats like Thomas Paine have long viewed executive leadership with dread since it has a tendency to make citizens passive, dependent, and deferential – qualities decidedly ill-suited for self-government.” Recent debate in Canada has focused on the dominance of the prime minister and premiers (first minister government) and the weakening not only of parliaments but also of cabinets. Yet, in his chapter, Graham White questions the conventional wisdom of executive dominance in Canada, observing that there is far too little analysis to support this claim. There
is, White argues, no real benchmark by which to evaluate prime ministerial strength. But his analysis suggests that there is little evidence that the prime minister makes autocratic decisions as often as is claimed; rather, in general, decisions are made in a deliberative and, therefore, democratic manner among senior cabinet members rather than imposed from above. Even if there is a democratic deficit at the executive level, it is not as significant as has been claimed. Daniel Tichenor explores the exercise of prerogative powers by the presidency in the United States, with a view to exploring its compatibility with democracy. His assessment shows us that, historically, the dominant understanding of political representation has a tremendous influence on the perceived (legitimate) prerogatives of executive power. His timely chapter evaluates the relationship between concepts of political representation and the perceived role of executive leadership by comparing the actions of wartime presidents. He argues, in particular, that George W. Bush’s administration’s approach to executive leadership, criticized around the world, was in fact a logical outgrowth of historical developments in the trajectories of executive prerogatives in the United States.

This discussion also illustrates how debates about the democratic deficit can vary both between parties and over short periods of time. In the United States, the Nixon and Johnson presidencies led to a large literature condemning the “imperial presidency.” When Congress sought to rein in presidential power, another literature complained about the “imperial Congress,” which was frustrating decisive action on important issues. Parties out of power protest against executive power; once in office, they seek to protect it.

**Resolving the Democratic Deficit**

Earlier we introduced a distinction between cautious reforms and aggressive reforms. The cautious approach is incremental and recommends that “institutional change should be employed sparingly and only after careful reflection.” Because institutional change may well have unintended consequences, and because democratic institutions are necessarily interrelated such that a reform to one may well affect others, we must take care in advocating for change. The aggressive approach recommends “major changes,” and its advocates worry considerably less than do advocates of the cautious approach about unintended consequences. As Allan Tupper explains, “they have a longer-term perspective and ultimately want to change attitudes as a catalyst to major reforms.” This distinction allows us to capture the differences in the kinds of proposed institutional reforms. Here, we employ an
additional distinction between reform and innovation. The set of suggestions to resolve the democratic deficit that emerges from those working within a particular institution are characterized as reforms. As readers will see, the chapters in Part 2 (“Reforming the Institutions of Democratic Governance”) offer such suggestions. David Docherty argues, for example, for an enlarged House of Commons and increasingly powerful committees as a way to improve the likelihood that elected representatives will be able to do their constituents’ bidding; and Robert Boatright argues for tax credits for campaign contributions on the grounds that they may serve to increase political participation among poorer Americans.

However, our contributors do not restrict themselves to suggestions of the kind that demand the reform of existing institutions. Contributors to Part 3 (“New Directions for Deepening Democracy”) consider institutional innovation – that is, they suggest what Amy Lang and Mark Warren call “supplemental institutions” as a way of ameliorating the democratic deficit. They consider the recent attempt to institute electoral reform in British Columbia (later emulated by Ontario) by relying on a randomly selected citizens’ assembly to consider the merits of alternative electoral systems. The citizens’ assembly, they argue, can “supplement our received institutions in ways that redress democratic deficits.”

It was designed as a mechanism to inoculate the reform process against the vested interests of incumbent politicians and to give the final voice to the people through a referendum. The citizens’ assembly model is no “cure-all,” the authors concede, but they nevertheless conclude that it has “strengths in precisely those areas in which Canadian and American political institutions are weak ... inclusive representation, sustained deliberation focused on public interests, and accountability.”

Ethan Leib and David Ponet also consider mechanisms through which citizens might have a more direct hand in policy formation or, at least, in consultations. They argue that most proposals to offer citizens a way to have more influence fail to consider the ways in which consulted citizens “represent” citizens at large. A focus on how “citizen representatives” are able to adequately represent the views of citizens more generally leads Leib and Ponet to consider lessons offered by the representative principles employed in American jury systems. Their evaluation of juries reveals several principles by which we can measure the representativeness of citizen representatives. In this way, they argue, the normative insights developed from within the field of representation theory can best be applied to new institutions,
like the citizens’ assembly, in such a way that citizen representatives are, in fact, genuinely representative of society at large.

It is of course not clear whether we need to turn to “supplemental” institutions or whether the democratic resources our received institutions can provide are sufficient to remedy the democratic deficit. One clear difference between these institutional reforms, however, and the institutional “supplements” that Lang and Warren recommend is their emphasis on citizens’ agency. The reforms we list above are tremendously important mechanisms by which we can improve certain key aspects of democratic practice: they serve to move us closer to meeting democratic ideals. They may serve, in particular, to alter citizens’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the democratic institutions under which they live. But their emphasis is mainly on institutional change and the impact this change will have on the effectiveness, and the perception of the effectiveness, of democratic institutions. What these supplemental institutions add is a focus on the agency of citizens. They take account of democratic citizens in their capacity as democratic actors and, in doing so, focus on empowering citizens to effect democratic change themselves rather than reducing them to the mere recipients of democratic change. Since the democratic deficit is reflected in citizens’ perceived lack of agency with respect to political influence, an emphasis on institutional change of the kind that generates a sense of agency may be the direction to pursue.

However, before enthusiastically proposing a radical course of action, it is worth observing the possibility that new “democracy-deepening” institutions may not have the desired effect if that effect is understood simply in terms of reversing trends in survey data that reveal dissatisfaction. It is possible that “asking for more opportunities for citizen input into the system may not be a panacea for perceived inadequacies of democratic governance.” One reason to think that we will not see the benefits of new and more democratic institutions in survey data involves the now frequently observed claim that citizens’ expectations of democratic governance have increased as democratic institutions have become more entrenched. For example, according to Dalton, “the same individuals who are critical of how politicians and political institutions are functioning today also have high aspirations for democratic process.” It may even be that citizens’ expectations have increased at a higher rate than have the capacities of democratic institutional performance to meet them. But these rising expectations may be cause to celebrate, rather than to worry about, the state of democratic
institutions. We should perhaps focus, at least in part, not on the fact that dissatisfied democrats are dissatisfied but, rather, on how they are now, more than ever, democrats. It may be that a “deepening commitment to democratic principles” is one of the central “factors contributing to the dissatisfaction with contemporary governments.” If this is so, then the solution to democratic dissatisfaction is – as our contributors suggest, and even if we are never rewarded with survey data reporting decreasing rather than increasing rates of dissatisfaction – after all, more democracy.

NOTES
1 See http://www.worldaudit.org/ and http://www.democracyranking.org/, respectively.
2 A quick Google search in June 2008 yielded 397,000 references to the “democratic deficit” in the United States, and 208,000 in Canada.
3 The term “democratic deficit” originated in the European Union, reflecting concern about the elitism and bureaucracy of community decision making as well as the weakness of the elected European Parliament.
12 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 22.
18 Examples include the Costa Rican Democratic Audit, which is evaluated in O’Donnell, Vargas Cullell, and Iazzetta, The Quality of Democracy; and the Australian Democratic Audit (http://www.arts.anu.edu.au/democraticaudit/).
21 Ibid.
26 Norris, Critical Citizens.
27 Shapiro and Hacker-Cordon, “Promises and Disappointments,” 2.
29 Not all accounts of democracy prize democratic political participation as a moral good, of course. The most commonly cited example of a democratic theorist who does not prize political participation as a good is Joseph Schumpeter, in his *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1950).


32 We owe the distinction between “disaffection” and “dissatisfaction” to Simone Chambers.


35 We owe this way of framing the debate about campaign finance reform to Robert Vipond.

36 We owe this way of articulating the distinction between “vote” and “voice” to Simone Chambers.

37 Tichenor, this volume, 207.

38 Tupper, “Auditing the Auditors,” 644. It is also worth noting that today, after years of failed discussion, Canadians are wary of debating constitutional reform. The bar to constitutional change is at least as high in the United States.

39 Ibid., 645.

40 Tupper employs the distinction to good effect to distinguish, for example, John Courtney’s reluctance to propose additional (significant) electoral reform from David Docherty’s attempts to revitalize the Canadian legislature.

41 Lang and Warren, this volume, 291.

42 Ibid., 299.

43 Anderson et al., *Losers’ Consent*, 189.

