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Abstract and Keywords

This article examines the debates on political behaviour that are most visible in scholarly literature. These debates can be found throughout this book. The debates on mass belief systems and communication are first examined, followed by modernization and democratization of political culture. Political participation and the importance of public opinion are also considered.

Keywords: political behaviour, mass belief systems, communication, modernization, democratization, political culture, political participation, public opinion

ONE might claim that the wellspring of politics flows from the attitudes and behaviors of the ordinary citizen, and that the institutions of a democratic political process should be structured to respond to the citizenry. This claim has stimulated debates about the abilities of the public and the quality of citizen participation that began with Aristotle and Socrates and continue in the pages of contemporary political science journals.

The continuation of these debates over centuries might suggest that research has made little progress in addressing these questions. We will argue, however, that in the past generation the field of comparative political behavior has made tremendous progress in describing the attitudes and behavior of publics, and the citizens' role within the political process. We summarize the current debates in six areas of political behavior: the sophistication of mass publics, modernization processes, political values, voting choice, political participation, and representation.

The expanding collection of public opinion data is one of the major accomplishments in comparative political behavior over the past several decades (see Kittilson chapter; Heath, Fisher, and Smith 2005). *The Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba 1963) marked a dramatic step forward in comparative research by studying the publics in five nations; for a considerable period such cross-national studies remained quite rare. Today, in addition to ad hoc comparative surveys, several institutionalized or (p. 4) semi-institutionalized cross-national surveys are repeated regularly, some with a near-global scope. The European Commission sponsors the Eurobarometer surveys in the member states of the European Union. A New Europe Barometer, Latinobarometer, Afrobarometer, East Asian Barometer, and Asiabarometer survey citizens in these regions. Separate research consortiums regularly conduct the European Values Study (EVS), the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), the European Social Survey (ESS), and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The largest number of nations is included in the World Values Surveys (WVS), conducted in four waves since 1981 with a fifth wave launched in 2005–7. In short, over the past few decades comparative political behavior has become a very "data-rich" field of research.

A second theme is the transformation of political behavior that has occurred simultaneously with the rapid expansion of empirical knowledge. Political behavior in advanced industrial democracies has shifted in fundamental ways during the latter half of the twentieth century. A dramatic process of social and political modernization has also transformed much of the developing world. The Third Wave of democratization has reformed the political

systems and the citizenry in the new democracies of central and eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

These new developments provide distinctive opportunities to test old theories, expand the boundaries of knowledge, and develop new theories. We normally observe political systems in a state of equilibrium, when stability and incremental change dominate our findings. Now we can examine questions of political change and adaptation that often go to the heart of theoretical interests, but which we could seldom observe directly in earlier times.

This essay summarizes some of the debates that are currently most visible in the scholarly literature and which preoccupy many of the articles in this Handbook.

1 Mass Belief Systems and Communication

One of the enduring debates of political behavior research involves basic questions about the public's political abilities—the public's level of knowledge, understanding, and interest in political matters. For voters to make meaningful decisions, they must understand the options the polity faces. Citizens must have a sufficient knowledge of the workings of the political system if they intend to influence and control the actions of their representatives. Almond and Verba (1963), for example, considered cognition important in defining a political culture, and Dahl (1989, 307–08) stressed the quality of the political debate as a precondition to arrive at what he has called "enlightened understanding."

(p. 5)

Debates about the political abilities of the public remain one of the major controversies in political behavior research as discussed in several of this volume's chapters. The early empirical surveys found that the public's political sophistication fell short of theoretical ideal (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Butler and Stokes 1969). For most citizens, political interest and involvement barely seemed to extend beyond casting an occasional vote in national elections. Furthermore, people apparently brought very little understanding to their participation in politics. It was not clear that voting decisions were based on rational evaluations of candidates, parties, and their issue positions.

This image of the uninformed and unsophisticated voter began to reshape the view of the citizenry and democratic politics. Some experts argued that if the bulk of the public is unsophisticated, it is better for democracy that people remain politically uninvolved. And if this was beneficial to democracy, other scholars were anxious to argue the pitfalls of too excessive political mobilization and the benefits of political order in less developed nations (Huntington 1968).

This debate has continued until the present, as summarized in the chapter by Kuklinski and Peyton. A revisionist approach argues that contemporary publics have greater political sophistication than early research presumed, because either measurement was flawed or sophistication has increased as a consequence of social modernization. Other researchers argued that the sophistication of voters is significantly affected by the political environment, and the initial studies of the American public in the quiet 1950s discounted the public's engagement. This contextual explanation of political sophistication was further supported by cross-national studies indicating that sophistication varies sharply across nations, with the relatively non-ideological American system displaying one of the least ideological publics (Klingemann 1979; Stacy and Segura 1997). Moreover, research on information cues argues that the sophistication citizens need to come to a meaningful choice in politics are heavily overstated. Quite naturally, citizens economize their investment in the information they need to come to meaningful decisions and most of them are able to optimize this investment in ways that keep democracies working (Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). People in western democracies now live in an information rich environment.

In contrast, other research claims that political information and engagement remains limited in western democracies (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1991; Wattenberg 2006). Some scholars claim that the situation is actually deteriorating, and modernization atomizes and alienates citizens, and further disengages them from politics (Putnam 2000). Indeed, one recent book argues that people are disinterested in politics and just do not want to be bothered with the responsibilities of democratic citizenship (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002).

In short, one school of research argues the glass is half empty, and going down—the opposite school argues the

glass is half full, and going up. This political science prestidigitation in action—to have both things happen at once—is often based on analyses of the same public opinion surveys. As many of the chapters in this volume demonstrate, the resolution of this question has fundamental implications for how (p. 6) we think about political behavior and the citizens' role in the democratic process. For instance, if one thinks that the instruments of referenda and initiatives should be strictly limited or expanded, heavily depends on one's view of the citizens' civic competence (Kriesi 2005).

In this introduction, we want to suggest a different way of thinking about this question. Previous research often reaches different conclusions because it asks different questions, and has different standards of evaluating available evidence. Rather than asking if voters meet the ideal expectations of democratic theorists, which has often been the implicit standard, it might be more productive to observe that people are regularly making political choices and ask how these choices are actually made. Bowler and Donovan (1998: 30 f.) aptly put it this way: "Voters, to use an analogy, may know very little about the workings of the internal combustion engine, but they do know how to drive. And while we might say that early voting studies focused on voter ignorance of the engine, the newer studies pay more attention to the ability to drive." Thus, many of the chapters in this volume (such as Mutz, Huckfeldt, and Sniderman and Levendusky) ask the pragmatic question of how people make life decisions—including who to vote for in the next election or in a referendum. The answer is often that they use information shortcuts, cues, emotions, heuristics and other methods to reach reasonable choices, and reasonable choices when structured by institutions and cumulated across the electorate lead to democratic choice (Surowiecki 2004).

This continuing debate is a source of vitality in political behavior research, because it focuses attention on the question of what democracy expects of its citizens and whether these expectations are met. In addition, this debate has reshaped our understanding of how people actually make their political choices (e.g. Popkin 1991; Zaller 1992; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). The lofty ideals of classic democratic theory presumed a rational decision-making process by a fully informed electorate. Even given more positive judgments about the political sophistication of contemporary electorates, most voters (and even some political scientists) still fall short of the standards of classic democratic theory. However, we now understand that this maximalist definition of the prerequisites for informed decision making is unnecessary. Instead, we should look at whether citizens can manage the complexities of politics and make reasonable decisions given their political interests and positions. Empirical research is emphasizing a satisficing approach to decision making in which models ask what are the pragmatic ways that individuals actually make their political choices.

2 Modernization and Democratization

One of the most powerful social science concepts to emerge in political behavior research—and one central to the study of citizen attitudes and behavior—is the concept of political culture. Almond and Verba's (1963) seminal study, *The Civic (p. 7) Culture*, contended that the institutions and patterns of action in a political system are closely linked to the political culture of the nation. The culture, in turn, is shaped by the historical, economic and social conditions of a nation. Cultural studies are especially important in the study of democratization, as analysts try to identify the cultural requisites of democracy (Almond and Verba 1963; Eckstein 1966; Pye and Verba 1965).

Despite the heuristic and interpretive power of the concept of political culture, there are recurring questions about the precision and predictive power of the concept (Laitin 1995). Kaase (1983), for instance, said that measuring political culture is like "trying to nail jello to the wall." That is, the concept lacked precision and often became a subjective, stereotypic description of a nation rather than an empirically measurable concept. Some analysts saw political culture in virtually every feature of political life, others viewed it merely as a residual category that explained what remained unexplainable by other means. Even more problematic was the uneven evidence of culture's causal effect.

Several recent studies have prompted a renaissance of political culture research and the link between modernization and political behavior. Inglehart demonstrated the congruence between broad political attitudes and democratic stability for twenty-two nations in the 1981 World Values Survey (Inglehart 1990). Putnam's (1993) study of regional governments in Italy provided even more impressive testimony in support of cultural theory. Putnam demonstrated that the cultural traditions of a region—roughly contrasting the cooperative political style of the North to the more hierarchic tradition of the South—were a potent predictor of the performance of

contemporary governments. These studies generated counter findings, and a new research debate emerged (e.g. Inglehart 1997; Reisinger 1995; Jackman and Miller 1996).

Moreover, the democratization wave of the 1990s focused attention on the nexus between modernization and political culture. To what extent did political change in central and eastern Europe arise from gradual changes in the political culture? More important politically, to what extent can the prospects for democracy be judged by their public's support for democratic politics? Public opinion surveys probed Russian public opinion on this issue, finding surprisingly high levels of support for basic democratic principles in the former Soviet Union (Miller, Reistinger, and Hesli 1993; Gibson, Duch, and Tedin 1992; Zimmerman 2002). Researchers mapped the political culture of other central and eastern European nations, examining the role of political culture in prompting the transitions and the consolidation of democracy (Rose, Haerpfer, and Mishler 1998; Rohrschneider 1999; Klingemann, Fuchs, and Zielonka 2006). Rather than the apathy or hostility that greeted democracy after transitions from right-wing authoritarian states, the cultural legacy of communism in central and eastern Europe appears to be much different. Several of the chapters in this book map these differences and the research issues that still remain.

An equally rich series of studies is emerging for Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other developing regions. Despite the potential effects of conservative Confucian traditions and the government's hesitant support for democracy in many nations, the cultural foundations of democracy also are well-developed in many Asian societies (p. 8) (Dalton and Shin 2006). Perhaps the most exciting evidence comes from studies of the People's Republic of China. Even in this hostile environment, there is surprising support for an array of democratic principles (Tang 2005; Shin in this volume). Similarly, the Afrobarometer studies provide the first systematic comparisons of public opinion on this continent, and the nature of political behavior in these developing nations (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2004). The Latinobarometers examine the political culture across Latin America (Lagos 1997). The breadth of support for democracy visible across a range of international survey projects—even in less than hospitable environments—is a surprising finding from this new wave of research, and suggests that the aspirations for freedom, equality, and democratic rights is a common human value. One might question whether these opinions are sufficiently ingrained to constitute an enduring political culture in many developing nations, but even abstract endorsements of democratic norms are a positive sign about the prospects for democratic reform (van Beek 2005).

This research has also stimulated new debates on the broad course of human development. On the one hand, new versions of the social modernization thesis suggest a common pattern of social and political change as nations develop economically. This is most clearly seen in the chapters by Inglehart and Welzel in this volume and their joint book (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). On the other hand, others claim that historical experiences and national traditions produce different patterns of cultural development and distinct cultural regions—which may produce new sources of regional conflict (see Inogouchi in this volume). While this debate is ongoing, its very existence illustrates how the broadening of systematic opinion research to developing nations has renewed old debates about the courses and consequences of political culture.

As questions about political culture have grown in relevance for the democratizing nations, important cultural changes have also emerged within the advanced industrial democracies. Inglehart's (1977, 1990) thesis of postmaterial value change maintains that the socioeconomic forces transforming western industrial societies are creating a new phase of human development. As affluent democracies have addressed many of the traditional "material" social goals, such as economic well-being and security, other political values are increasing attention toward new "postmaterial" goals of self-expression, personal freedom, social equality, self-fulfillment, and improving the quality of life. Inglehart's postmaterial thesis has gained considerable attention because of its potentially broad relevance to the politics of advanced industrial societies, although this thesis has also generated much scholarly debate (van Deth and Scarborough 1995).

Other studies examine whether a key element of a democratic political culture is changing in advanced industrial democracies: citizen orientations toward government. Almond and Verba (1963) maintained that democracy was based on a supportive public that endorsed a democratic system even in times of tumult. In the United States and many west European democracies, however, citizens are now less trustful of politicians, political parties and democratic institutions (Dalton 2004; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Norris 1999; Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997). When coupled with evidence of changing orientations toward partisan politics and changing (p. 9) patterns of political participation (see below), this suggests that the ideals of a democratic political culture are changing among western publics.

In summary, the study of modernization and democratization illustrates the two themes of this book. First, research has made great progress in developing the empirical evidence that describes the political values for most nations in the world. Where once scientific empirical evidence of citizen orientations was quite thin and primarily limited to the large western democracies, we now have rich evidence of how citizens think and act across nearly the entire globe. The growing empirical evidence has also reinforced the importance of key theoretical concepts that were developed during the early behavioral revolution. For example, Eckstein's (1966) concept of cultural congruence has provided a valuable framework for examining the interaction between citizen values and political processes. We now have a much richer and sounder theoretical and empirical knowledge about what are the significant attributes of a political culture (Fuchs in this volume).

Second, as the empirical evidence has grown, it is also apparent that we are living through a period of substantial political change—in both the advanced industrial democracies and the developing nations. This pattern presents several challenges for researchers. Normally, political institutions and the basic principles of a regime are constant; thus it is difficult to study the interaction between institutional and cultural change. However, the recent shifts in regime form in many nations create new opportunities to study the relationship between culture and institutional choices—and how congruence is established. Changing political norms enable us to study political culture as a dynamic process. Attempts to test theories of cultural change or theories on the non-political origins of political culture are fertile research fields during this unusual period of political change.

Finally, the democratization process and changing democratic expectations in the West raise other questions. There is not just one "civic culture" that is congruent with the working of a democratic system. Experience suggests that there are a variety of democratic cultures, as well as ways to define culture, that require mapping and further study. Just as the institutionalists have drawn our attention to the variations in the structure of the democratic politics and the implications of these differences (Rhodes, Binder and Rockman 2006), we need to develop a comparable understanding of how citizen norms can create and sustain alternative democratic forms (Fuchs and Klingemann 2002).

3 Debates on Political Behavior

One of the central roles of citizens in democracies and other political systems is to make decisions about political matters. In democracies, this involves decisions about which parties or candidates to support in an election, as well as decisions about (p. 10) which issue positions to hold, how to participate in politics, and so forth. In other political systems, the choices are different, but the task of making a choice remains. In an authoritarian system, the choice might be between making an openly affirmative statement to a government declaration, remaining silent about it or subtly or even openly criticizing it. In any case, citizens make choices when political issues are brought to their attention, whether in an autocratic or democratic system.

In democratic systems electoral choices are at the center of the political process. Thus, the study of electoral choice has quite naturally been a core theme in political behavior research, and past research has produced dramatic advances in our knowledge about how voters reach their decisions. Early electoral research presumed that many voters were ill prepared to deal with the complexities of politics; thus voters relied on shortcuts—such as group cues or affective partisan loyalties—to simplify political decision making and guide their individual behavior (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). This approach also stressed the underlying stability of party competition because people supposedly based their political decisions on enduring social cleavages, and stable party-voter alignments were a focus of research.

During the 1980s, this model of stable cleavage-based or partisanship-based voting first came under challenge. Within a decade the dominant question changed from explaining the persistence of electoral politics to explaining electoral change (Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984). Decreases in class and religious divisions were a first prominent indicator that electoral politics was changing. Franklin and his colleagues (1992) found that a set of social characteristics (including social class, education, income, religiosity, region, and gender) had a decreasing impact on partisan preferences in western democracies over time. Nieuwbeerta (1995) similarly found a general erosion of class voting across twenty democracies. Franklin concluded with the new "conventional wisdom" of comparative electoral research: "One thing that has by now become quite apparent is that almost all of the countries we have studied show a decline…in the ability of social cleavages to structure individual voting choice"

(Franklin et al. 1992: 385).

One of the major findings from the last generation of electoral research holds that social position no longer determines political positions as it did when social alignments were solidly frozen (see the chapters by Knutsen, and Esmer & Pettersson in this volume; cf. Evans 1999; Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 2001). In many western democracies, the declining influence of group cleavages on electoral choice is paralleled by a weakening of affective party attachment that was the basis of the Michigan model of electoral choice. In nearly all the advanced industrial democracies for which long-term survey data are now available, partisan ties have weakened over the past generation (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Similarly, there has been a decrease in party-line voting and an increase in partisan volatility, split-ticket voting, and other phenomena showing that fewer citizens are voting according to a party line or group-determined lines (Thomassen 2005).

The decline of long-term predispositions based on social position or partisanship should shift the basis of electoral behavior research to short-term factors, such as (p. 11) candidate image and issue opinions (see chapters by Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, and Deegan-Krause). Thus, recent research is focusing on whether the new electoral order includes a shift toward candidate-centered voting choice (McAllister in this volume; Wattenberg 1991; Aarts, Blais, and Schmitt 2005). Furthermore, there are signs of a growing personalization of political campaigns in western democracies: photo opportunities, personalized interviews, walkabouts, and televised candidate debates are becoming standard electoral fare.

The decline in long-term influences on the vote also increases the potential for issue voting (Franklin et al. 1992; Evans and Norris 1999; Dalton 2006). While there appears to be a consensus that issue voting has become more important, there is less consensus on a theoretical framework for understanding the role of issues in contemporary political behavior. A large part of the literature continues to work within the social-psychological approach, examining how specific issues affect party choice in specific elections, or how issue beliefs are formed. Other scholars focus on the systemic level, examining how aggregate electoral outcomes can be predicted by the issue stances of the parties. In a sense, this part of the research literature reminds us of the story of the blind men and the elephant: several different research groups are making progress in explaining their part of the pachyderm, but there is not a holistic vision of the role of issues for contemporary electoral choice.

For advanced industrial democracies, the increase in candidate and issue voting has an uncertain potential for the nature of the democratic electoral process. It is unclear whether these changes will improve or weaken the "quality" of the democratic process and the representation of the public's political interests. Public opinion is becoming more fluid and less predictable. This uncertainty forces parties and candidates to be more sensitive to public opinion, at least the opinions of those who vote. Motivated issue voters are more likely to have their voices heard, even if they are not accepted. Furthermore, the ability of politicians to have unmediated communications with voters can strengthen the link between politicians and the people. To some extent, the individualization of electoral choice revives earlier images of the informed voter that we once found in classic democratic theory: if voters rely less on group cues, they base their choices more on their own judgment. Models of rational choice that seemed to rest on implausible assumptions in previous times have thus gained in credibility.

At the same time, there is a potential dark side to these new patterns in electoral politics. The rise of single-issue politics handicaps a society's ability to deal with political issues that transcend specific interests and the negotiation of trade-offs. In addition, elites who cater to issue publics can leave the electorally inactive disenfranchised. Too great an interest in a single issue, or too much emphasis on recent performance, can produce a narrow definition of rationality that is as harmful to democracy as "frozen" social cleavages. In addition, direct unmediated contact between politicians and citizens opens the potential for demagoguery and political extremism. Both extreme right-wing and left-wing political movements probably benefit from this new political environment, at least in the short term. At the same time as the electorate is less stable on the basis of established party alignments, it is also more susceptible to potential media manipulation.

(p. 12)

In summary, comparative electoral studies have made major advances in our understanding of political behavior. This has in no way settled old debates. It has invigorated them. But they take place on a firmer base of evidence. This is another area in which research began with limited empirical evidence—national election studies were still quite rare in the 1960s and comparable cross-national analyses were exceedingly rare. Today, this literature on

electoral behavior represents one of the largest fields of political behavior research. Moreover, as the empirical evidence has accumulated, it has become more apparent that the nature of electoral behavior is changing in advanced industrial democracies. The current research challenge is to define the nature of the new electoral order that is emerging.

3.1 Electoral Choice in Emerging Democracies

There is an apparent similarity between the portrait of voting choice we have just described and the situation in emerging democracies in central and eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Emerging party systems are unlikely to rest on stable group-based cleavages, especially when the democratic transition has occurred quite rapidly, as in central and eastern Europe. Thus, studies of new democracies in Latin America and central and eastern Europe emphasize the high level of electoral volatility and fluidity in these party systems (Berglund, Hellén, and Aarebrot 1998; Mainwaring 1999; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007). Similarly, new electorates are unlikely to have long-term party attachments that might guide their behavior. Thus, with the exception of important socio-cultural cleavages, such as ethnicity, electoral choice in many new democracies may involve the same short-term factors —candidate images and issue positions—that are emphasized in the electoral politics of advanced industrial democracies (e.g. Colton 2000; Rose, White, and McAllister 1997; Barnes and Simon 1998; Tucker 2005; Deegan-Krause in this volume). Indeed, there is a seeming preoccupation with the issue of economic voting in these transitional systems, and less attention to full models of electoral choice (for positive examples see Tworzecki 2003; Tucker 2002).

The new democratic systems of central and eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, for instance, face the task of developing a relatively stable and institutionalized basis of party competition. Without more structure, it is difficult for citizens to learn about the policy choices available to them, and translate this into meaningful electoral choices. Without more structure, it is difficult to ensure accountability in the democratic process. This situation presents the unique opportunity to study this process to examine how new party attachments take root, the relationships between social groups and parties form, party images develop, and citizens learn the process of representative democracy. However, the creation of party systems in the world of global television, greater knowledge about electoral politics (from the elite and public levels), and fundamentally different electorates are unlikely to follow the pattern of earlier democratization periods. Thus, a major question is whether new democracies will develop a system of liberal-democratic responsible party government and electoral choice, and what are the consequences if they do not.

(p. 13)

To answer these questions will require a dynamic perspective on the processes of electoral change. It is frankly too soon to determine how political scientists will respond to these challenges. There has already been an impressive development to improve the empirical base of research in these new democracies—a development that took decades in most of the western democracies. There are many encouraging signs and impressive empirical studies emanating from central and eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America but the evolutionary process is still uncertain.

4 Political Participation

Democratic or not, all polities expect some public involvement in the political process, if only to obey political orders. Thus, one section of the Handbook focuses on political activity. Democracy, however, expects more active involvement than a non-democratic order because democracy is designed to aggregate public preferences into binding collective decisions. Necessarily this requires an active citizenry, because it is through interest articulation, information, and deliberation that public preferences can be identified, shaped and transformed into collective decisions that are considered as legitimate. Autocratic regimes also engage the public in the political process, although this primarily served as a means to indoctrinate the public to conform to decisions that elites have made. But even the control capacities of autocratic regimes are limited so that it has to somehow address what the citizenry wants and needs.

The major empirical advance in this field has documented the levels of participation across nations and highlighted distinctions between different modes of political action. Verba and his colleagues (Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978;

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) demonstrated that various forms of action differ in their political implications, and in the factors that stimulate individuals to act. This was extended by others to include the growth of unconventional political action that occurred since the 1960s (Barnes, Kaase, et al. 1979; Jennings, van Deth, et al. 1990). This theoretical framework of participation modes is the common foundation of participation research.

Having identified the modes of action, researchers sought to explain patterns of participation. This was once an area intensely debated by rationalist and social-psychological theories of political behavior. The rationalist approach framed decisions to participate in simple cost-benefit terms, best represented in Olson's (1965) *Logic of Collective Action*. The charm of parsimony made this an attractive theoretical approach, but this parsimony created oversimplifications, false research paradoxes and actually limited our understanding of citizen action. More productive is the social-psychological model that stresses the influence of personal resources, attitudes, and institutional structures in explaining patterns of action (e.g. Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

(p. 14)

For the past several years, the most intense debate has focused on whether the level of political participation is systematically changing in western democracies. As supporting evidence, the longstanding "paradox of participation" has noted that turnout in the United States has decreased since the 1960s, even though educational levels and the affluence of the nation have dramatically increased (Brody 1978; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Putnam (2000) provocatively argued that declining turnout is part of a broader trend that has us "bowling alone." Putnam claimed that social engagement is dropping in advanced industrial societies as a result of societal changes, such as changing labor patterns among women, rising television usage, urban sprawl, and the decline of traditional social institutions. These trends have supposedly led to a decline in social capital—the skills and values that facilitate democratic participation—and thereby to declines in the citizenry's participation in politics.

The study of social capital and the changes in the patterns of participation in contemporary democracies has been one of the most fertile areas of research for the past decade, as described in several chapters in this volume. On the one side is clear cross-national evidence of declining turnout in advanced industrial democracies (Blais 2000; Wattenberg 2002; Franklin 2004). Other measures of partisan activity, such as party membership, also show clear downward trends in most nations (Scarrow 2000). This might be seen as part of a more general downturn in civic engagement because church attendance, union membership, and the engagement in several types of traditional voluntary associations and collective activities are declining. On the other side is a growing body of evidence that new forms of civic and political action—such as contacting, direct action, contentious politics, self-help groups, local initiatives, donations—are counterbalancing the decline in electoral participation and other traditional forms of civic engagement (Zukin et al. 2006; Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2004; Cain, Dalton, and Scarrow 2003; Costa and Kahn 2001). In addition, social group membership and the formation of social capital seem to be increasing in many advanced industrial democracies, making the US an atypical case (Stolle in this volume; Putnam 2002). Moreover, modernization processes seem to change the ways in which people interact and engage in the public sphere, transforming the character of social capital instead of eliminating it altogether: loyalist forms of elite-guided engagement go down but spontaneous forms of self-driven engagement go up (Norris 2002; chapters by Rucht and Koopmans in this volume).

This controversy touches the very vitality of the democratic process, and the resolution of the controversy is as yet unclear. The evidence of decreasing group involvement of the old type and declining social capital of the traditional form is strongest for the United States, but this might not indicate a general erosion of civic engagement and social capital. It might simply reflect a transformation of the ways in which citizens relate to each other and their communities. If one includes new forms of interaction and engagement, participation levels and the various methods of political action are generally expanding in most advanced industrial societies—even while participation in the traditional form of party membership and electoral (p. 15) politics is decreasing. New forms of engagement and participation expand political participation beyond the boundaries of what it was conventionally viewed to be. These tendencies reflect a great flexibility of democracies, allowing forms of participation to adapt to changing societal conditions. The new style of citizen participation places more control over political activity in the hands of the citizenry as well as increasing public pressure on political elites.

However, the expanding repertoire of action also may raise potential problems. For example, the changing nature

of political participation can increase inequalities in political involvement, which would bias the democratic process in ways that conflict with the ideal of "one (wo)man one vote" (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Cain, Dalton, and Scarrow 2003; Parry, Moyser, and Day 1992). New forms of direct action are even more dependent on the skills and resources represented by social status, and thus may increase the participation gap between lower-status groups and higher-status individuals. These new forms of participation also create new challenges for aggregating diverse political demands into coherent government policy. Ironically, overall increases in political involvement may mask a growing social-status bias in citizen participation and influence, which runs counter to democratic ideals.

The challenge for established democracies is to expand further the opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process and meaningfully structure the decisions affecting their lives. To meet this challenge means ensuring an equality of political rights and opportunities that will be even more difficult to guarantee with these new participation forms. However, a socially biased use of expanded political opportunities should not blame the opportunities but should blame the policies that fail to alleviate the social bias, such as unequal access to education and other social benefits that influence the citizens' resources to participate in politics.

4.1 Participation in Emerging Democracies

The questions involving political participation are obviously different in emerging democracies and non-democratic nations. In new democracies the challenge is to engage the citizenry in meaningful participation after years of ritualized engagement or actual prohibitions on participation. In some cases this experience is a mirror-image of old democracies: in old democracies citizens are moving from conventional to unconventional politics, in new democracies citizens often toppled authoritarian regimes by revolutionary upheavals and have now to learn the routines of conventional participation.

Election turnout was often fairly high in the immediate post-transition elections in Eastern Europe, but has subsequently declined in most nations. Similarly, party activity has atrophied as democratic institutions have developed (Barnes and Simon 1998; van Biezen 2003). And while there was a popular lore claiming that a robust underground civil society prompted the democratization trend in eastern Europe, post-transition research finds that social engagement is now limited (p. 16) (Howard 2003). Many east Europeans had engaged in unconventional politics during the democratic transitions of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but these forms of action diminished after the transition in a kind of "post-honeymoon" effect (Inglehart and Catterberg 2003). Consequently, eastern Europe still faces the challenge of integrating citizens into democratic politics and nurturing an understanding of the democratic process.

The challenges of citizen participation are, of course, even greater in non-democratic nations. The advance of survey research has provided some unique insights into participation patterns in these environments. Shi's study of political participation in Beijing (1997), for example, found that there was much more extensive public involvement than expected. Furthermore, political participation can occur in more varied forms in political systems where citizen input is not tolerated and encouraged through institutionalized channels (also see Jennings 1997). Similarly, Bratton and his colleagues (2004) find a surprisingly robust range of political activity across a set of African nations. If this occurs in these two settings, then we might expect a greater role for the citizen even in transitional political systems.

The desire to participate in the decisions affecting one's life is common across the globe, but political institutions can shape whether these desires are expressed and how (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Possessing the skills and resources to be politically active is an equally important factor. Research is now identifying how these two forces combine to shape the patterns of citizen action.

5 Does Public Opinion Matter

Another section of this Handbook addresses the topic of the impact of public opinion on policy makers and governments—which is the ultimate question in the study of public opinion within a democracy. To what extent do the views of policy makers and the outputs of government policy reflect the preferences that the public itself prefers?

The indirect effect of public opinion in a democracy, mediated through representative institutions, has created questions about the congruence of mass–elite outcomes, and the factors that affect this intermediation process. However, systematically studying this process has had a difficult research history, despite the theoretical and political importance of the topic.

The first empirical study of representation was the famous Miller–Stokes study of representation in America (Miller and Stokes 1963). This model and research approach were soon expanded to a host of other advanced industrial democracies (Barnes 1977; Converse and Pierce 1986; Thomassen 1994). This research examined some of the most important questions in research on democracy, but the findings (p. 17) were limited. The theoretical model developed in the United States did not travel well to other democracies. In addition, the resources required to conduct parallel studies of the citizenry and political elites were exceptional. Thus, in the fifty years since the original Miller–Stokes study, their full research project has not been replicated in the United States.

Other studies in the United States have examined elements of the representation process; for instance, comparing the congruence between mass and elite opinions in the aggregate or the dynamics of mass opinion change (Erikson, McKuen, and Stimson 2002; Stimson 2004). Researchers have also examined the congruence between public policy preferences and the outcomes of government (Page and Shapiro 1992). Gradually, this research has also spread to other western democracies, often adopted to national institutions or the structure of representation (Miller et al. 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). One important branch of this approach compares programmatic profiles of political parties and political preferences of their followers. Most of the findings produced thus far seem to indicate that in terms of left–right orientations parties have not lost their capacity to represent and mobilize citizen support for public policies (Klingemann et al. 1994; Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006).

The contributions in this Handbook engage these important research questions. Wlezien and Soroka examine the congruence between mass policy preferences and the policy outputs of government. Blondel and Müeller-Rommel review the research on political elites, and their perspectives of mass politics, political representation, and their role within the democratic process. Weßels summarizes the collective findings of the series of representation studies that have been conducted to date, and provides an insightful cross-national comparison of how institutions shape the representation process. Stimson's chapter adds a broader view of what we have learned, and the research questions that remain.

In one sense, this represents one of the areas with the greatest theoretical and empirical potential to understand the functioning of the democratic process through the mass–elite relationship. But it also remains one of the most challenging areas to study and compare across nations. But gradually we are developing a better understanding of how the democratic process actually functions, which yields a positive view of the vitality of the process.

6 Changing Publics: A Conclusion

We have just lived through what are arguably the most significant political events of our lifetimes: the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the global democratization wave of the 1990s. As advanced industrial societies are evolving into a new form of democratic politics, we are witnessing the initial development of democracy in a (p. 18) new set of nations. The democratization waves in central and eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa touch at the very core of many of our most basic questions about the nature of citizen politics and the working of the political process. Normally we study democratic systems that are roughly at equilibrium and speculate on how this equilibrium was created (or how it changes in minor ways). Moreover, during the earlier waves of democratic transition the tools of empirical social science were not available to study political behavior directly. The current democratization wave thus provides a virtually unique opportunity to address questions on identity formation, the creation of political cultures (and possibly how cultural inheritances are changed), the establishment of an initial calculus of voting, and the dynamic processes linking political norms and behavior. These questions represent some of the fundamental research issues of our time. The answers will not only explain what has occurred during this democratization wave, but may aid us in better understanding the basic principles of how citizens function within the political process. There has never been a richer opportunity to study the choices of citizens across regime forms and between old and new democracies. The conditions to arrive at a theory of how citizens come to political choices depending on different political settings, and how these choices affect the settings has never been better than today.

In each of these areas discussed in this chapter, research can be described in two terms. First, there has been a fundamental expansion of our empirical knowledge over the past generation of research. Until quite recently, a single national survey provided the basis for discussing the characteristics of citizen behavior; and such evidence was frequently limited to the larger advanced industrial democracies. Indeed, there were large parts of the world where our understanding of the citizenry, their attitudes, and behavior were based solely on the insights of political observers—which can be as fallible as the observer. Contemporary comparative research is now more likely to draw on cross-national and cross-temporal comparisons. Research has developed the foundations for the scientific study of the topic.

Second, we have noted the ironic development that our expanding empirical evidence has occurred during a time when many basic features of citizen attitudes and behaviors are changing in ways that make modeling citizen politics more complex. In part, these trends reflect the tremendous social and political changes that have occurred in the world during the past generation. Modernization has transformed living conditions throughout the world, altered the skills and values of contemporary publics, and offered new technological advances that change the relationship between citizens and elites. Perhaps, this is the most interesting object worthy of study. For never before in history has the interaction between elites and people been shifted so much to the side of the people.

The global wave of democratization in the 1990s has dramatically increased the role of the citizenry in many of the new democracies in central and eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. This latter development makes our task as scholars of the citizen more relevant than ever before, but also more difficult. Even as our research skills and empirical evidence have expanded, the phenomena we study have been evolving—something that physicists and chemists do not have to deal with. (p. 19) These changes produce uncertainty about what new styles of political decision making, or what new forms of political participation are developing. In addition, the nature of citizen politics is becoming more complex—or through our research we are now realizing that greater complexity exists. This produces a real irony: even though we have greater scientific knowledge, our ability to predict and explain political behavior may actually be decreasing in some areas. For instance, we know much more about electoral behavior than we did in the 1950s, but simple socio-demographic models that were successful in predicting electoral behavior in the 1960s are much less potent in explaining contemporary voting behavior. So we have gained greater certainty about the uncertainty of voter decisions.

Finally, if we step back from the individual chapters and their findings, we see broad outlines of what we think are some of the most productive areas for future research. Several aspects of research design offer exciting potential for the future. For instance, most studies are derived from random surveys of individuals. This design focuses our attention on individuals as autonomous political actors and theories emphasizing the individualization of politics. However, people exist in a social, economic, and political context that also influences their political behavior. For example, limited political knowledge can be overcome by asking spouses, friends, or neighbors (Huckfeldt in this volume; Gunther, Montero, and Puhle 2006). Even more important, characteristics of the political context can alter the processes shaping citizen attitudes and behavior, such as exposure to supportive or dissonant information (Huckfeldt et al. 2004; Mutz 2006). Equally exciting are new research opportunities to study how the institutional structure of a polity interacts with citizen behavior (e.g. Anderson et al. 2005). Thus, studying this complex of social and political interactions should yield new insights into how political behavior is shaped.

Another innovation is the introduction of experiments and quasi-experiments to our research tools. For example, Sniderman's (Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman et al. 2000) experiments in studying racial attitudes and prejudice illustrate how experiments and creative questionnaire design can provide unobtrusive measures of sensitive topics. Such experiments also partially address one of the weaknesses of cross-section public opinion survey by providing leverage to study causality by manipulating choices presented to survey respondents, and analyzing how opinions change. This innovation has tremendous potential that should be utilized more in future research (Lau and Redlawsk 2006).

An even more dramatic sign of the development of political behavior research is the increasing complexity of research designs. Once, a single national sample was the basis of extensive research because such evidence was still rare. However, as our knowledge has increased and our theories have become more complex, this calls for more complex research designs. Election studies, for instance, need to study individuals in context, including multiple and converging data collections: social context, media content, party actions, and other elements of the total process. Doing more of what we did in the past—more questions, more surveys, larger sample sizes—is not

likely to generate the theoretical or empirical insights necessary to move the research (p. 20) field forward. Complex theories and complex processes require more complex research designs.

We also believe that research will engage a new set of theoretical issues as the field moves forward. It is more difficult to briefly outline the forefront for research, because theoretical questions are more diverse than the methodological innovations we have just outlined. However, several areas of potential inquiry stand out for their potential. While most research has focused on single nations, and typically western democracies, the global expansion of research means that issues of social modernization and cross-national development are likely to be especially fruitful areas of study. This is a case were we have been theory rich, and information poor—and now these theories will be tested, and undoubtedly new models developed in their place. Similarly, past theorizing has focused on explaining systems and behavior in equilibrium. Theories of political change seem an especially fruitful area for inquiry giving the dynamic nature of contemporary politics.

Finally, one should not forget that because of the sheer number of countries for which survey data are available, we are for the first time in the situation to move to the aggregate level of analyses, conducting statistically significant tests of the basic assumption underlying all research into mass belief systems: that variation in these belief systems has a true impact on a society's level of democracy. Aggregate-level analyses of the correlates of democracy was usually left to political economists who could more easily correlate socioeconomic indicators to levels of democracy. But we can now test their models against political culture, examining if socioeconomic factors or features of political culture have a stronger impact on democracy. As recent studies show (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), features of political culture have as strong an impact on levels of democracy as socioeconomic factors.

The goal of this Handbook is to introduce the readers to the research we have accumulated in each of these areas, and the research questions that remain. We came away from this project with tremendous respect for what has been achieved since the onset of modern comparative research. At the same time, answering one question generates new questions, and the essays in this Handbook are full of new areas for study that will deepen our knowledge in key areas of political behavior.

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