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Democracy Under Stress

Changing Perspectives on Democracy,
Governance and Their Measurement



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Czech Academy of Sciences

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7. Good Democracies Need “Good” Citizens: Citizen Dispositions and the Study of Democratic Quality⁶⁵

Quinton Mayne and Brigitte Geissel

“...the health and stability of a modern democracy depends not only on the justice of its ‘basic structure’ but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens”

Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman (1994: 352)

1. Introduction

Large-scale, cross-national indices of democratic quality have traditionally paid little systematic attention to citizens as a constitutive component of democratic quality. In earlier work we challenged this orthodoxy by highlighting the importance of citizens as central to the conceptualization of democratic quality (Mayne and Geissel 2016). Specifically, we argued that democratic quality consists of two necessary, but independently insufficient, components. The “institutional component,” which includes the institutional and structural opportunities that allow for democratic rule, has long dominated research on democratic quality. The “citizen component,” which to date has received scant consideration by scholars of democratic quality, refers to the ways in which citizens “can and do breathe life into existing institutional opportunities for democratic rule.”⁶⁶

In addition to establishing the significance of citizens for the conceptualization of democratic quality, we follow recent developments in the field of quality-of-democracy research (Coppedge et al. 2011) by emphasizing the importance of a model-driven approach. We show how three different models of democracy – which have stood at the centre of debates about democratic quality in recent decades – place different demands on citizens

⁶⁵ This chapter is a revised and abridged version of an article submitted for publication in *Politics & Governance*.

⁶⁶ This should not be confused with quality-of-democracy research that takes citizens into account using data on public assessments of political actors and institutions (see, e.g., Logan and Mattes 2012, Pickel, Breustedt and Smolka 2016). Mass evaluations of the functioning of democratic institutions are conceptually distinct from what we refer to here as the citizen component of democratic quality.

as much as they do on institutions. We argue that the different demands placed on citizens by competing models of democracy fall into three broad categories of citizen dispositions. This includes citizens' *democratic commitments*, their *political capacities*, and the rates and types of *political participation* that they undertake.

The principal goal of this chapter is to provide a solid analytic foundation and conceptual framework to incorporate data on the citizen component of democratic quality in future empirical research. We do this by building on our previous work in three ways. First, we provide a more fine-grained and structured conceptualization of democratic commitments, political capacities, and political participation. Second, we address the question of congruence or "fit" between the institutional and citizen components of democratic quality, distinguishing between temporally static and dynamic forms of inter-component congruence. Third, we present and develop the idea that inter-dispositional consistency – i.e., the consistency of democratic commitments, political capacities, and political participation with the same model of democracy, is an important aspect of democratic quality.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first section deals with the issue of conceptualizing the core dispositions that comprise the citizen component of democratic quality. The second section addresses the concept of congruence between institutions and citizens as an indicator of democratic quality, highlighting the importance of thinking about inter-component congruence both in static terms and as a dynamic process of mutual adjustment. The third section examines the issue of inter-dispositional model consistency. The chapter ends with a discussion of the significant limitations of existing international survey programs as sources of data for measuring the citizen component of democratic quality.

2. Citizen Dispositions

Providing a fully elaborated account of the three core dispositions that comprise the citizen component of democratic quality is crucial for locating and developing appropriate empirical indicators. There is no 'one size fits all' understanding of these core dispositions. Different models or ontologies of democracy conceive of democratic commitments, political capacity, and political participation in different ways. After defining in more detail the conceptual content of each citizen disposition, we show how three key models of democracy understand each one. The three models in question, which have dominated academic and policy debates about democratic quality over the past quarter century, are: minimal-elitism – epitomized by the work of Joseph Schumpeter (1950) and E. E. Schattschneider (1975); liberal-pluralism, defined and developed perhaps most famously in the work of Robert

Dahl (1971: 1989); and participatory democracy, championed by scholars such as Carole Pateman (1970) and Benjamin Barber (1984).

2.1. Democratic commitments

The basic notion that democratic commitments are a necessary component of the proper functioning of democracy finds support in a long line of writing. As John Stuart Mill (2009: 7) noted, “the people for whom the (democratic) form of government is intended must be willing to accept it.” Democratic commitments refer to the political beliefs, values, principles, and norms that citizens hold dear. They are a combination of both cognitive and affective orientations, which provide citizens with a lens through which to understand and judge the political world. In the past quarter-century a sizeable body of empirical research has emerged on how citizens understand democracy (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005, Canache 2012, Carrión 2008, Dalton, Sin and Jou 2007, Fuchs and Roller 2006, Miller, Hesli and Reisinger 1997, Silveira and Heinrich 2017, Thomassen 1995). It has only been in recent years that a small but growing body of literature has appeared on the more specific question of which democratic values and principles citizens actually endorse (Carlin 2017, Carlin and Singer 2011, Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta 2016, Geissel 2016, Schedler and Sarsfield 2007).

The concept of democratic commitment operates at two levels: at a general level in the form of citizens’ broad preference for democracy over non-democratic forms of political organization; and at a more specific level in terms of citizens’ support for particular principles and values. The idea that a citizenry’s general democratic commitment relates to the functioning or quality of a democracy finds clear support in early work on democratic consolidation as well as more recent debates on the issue of democratic deconsolidation.⁶⁷ The basic contention here is that democratic quality is, in part, a function of (a) the proportion of citizens broadly committed to democracy, and (b) how unwavering citizens’ democratic commitments are in the face of mobilization efforts by anti-democratic forces, economic misfortune, and electoral losses.

The study of democratic quality requires going beyond an assessment of citizens’ broad commitment to democracy to understand how committed citizens are to key democratic principles. This is important for two reasons. First, it enables researchers to identify whether a broad commitment to

⁶⁷ As Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan note, “a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion, even in the midst of major economic problems and deep dissatisfaction with incumbents, holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life” (Linz and Stepan 1996: 16, see also Diamond 1999: 69).

democracy is in fact nominal and without meaningful content. Second, given that different models of democracy set store by different types of political values, a structured, theory-driven approach requires clarity on how the model(s) of democracy underpinning one's assessment interpret core democratic principles, such as equal inclusion, in different ways, or even accommodate different democratic principles. To gain analytic purchase on the varied democratic commitments prized by different models of democracy, we propose that scholars focus on patterns of value beliefs related to two fundamental questions that pertain to the functioning of democracy. First, *who* gets to decide? Second, *how* are decisions to be made?

The question of *who* gets to decide is first and foremost about what citizens consider to be the proper role of elected politicians in democratic decision-making. A helpful way of thinking about this issue is in terms of the checks and balances that different models of democracy expect citizens to support. As such, the question of who gets to decide concerns the power of elected politicians relative to other "political" actors, including the judiciary, civil service, and subnational authorities. It also concerns checking and balancing among different classes of politician, most notably between the executive and legislature. Finally, the question of who gets to decide is crucially linked to what citizens see as their own role, acting individually or collectively, in democratic decision making.

The second question of how decisions are to be made relates to citizens' settled opinions on how core democratic principles should be instantiated in the processes and structures that guide political decision making. This fundamentally concerns not just the formal rules but also the institutionalized norms of encounter and exchange between elected politicians and other social actors, including organized civil society and ordinary citizens. What is key here is that different models of democracy demand, explicitly and implicitly, different value commitments from citizens when it comes to how democratic decision-making processes should take place. As a result, judgements of a country's democratic quality will vary greatly depending on the model used to carry out the assessment. This becomes clear by looking at the democratic commitments expected of citizens by three models of democracy that have long dominated debates on democratic quality (a summary of which is available in Table 1).

The minimal-elitist account of democracy envisages citizens to be committed to forms of decision-making dominated by parties, elected politicians, and the government of the day, with few checks and balances. Citizens are expected to willingly accept their own voluntary "retirement" (to borrow the words of Schumpeter (1950: 295)) from political life between elections. As to the question of how decisions are to be made, high-quality minimal-elitist democracy is predicated on the expectation that citizens will be

tolerant of political differences and supportive of robust competition between those differences at the ballot box. However, once votes are cast, minimal-elitism expects citizens to support winner-take-all majoritarianism, which necessarily implies that (even perennial) electoral losers accept their political marginality.

High-quality liberal-pluralist democracies are also home to citizenries that support elected politicians as the primary decision-makers. However, in contrast to the minimal-elitist account, “good” liberal-pluralist citizens are expected to be committed to the idea that politicians are checked and balanced in important ways, for example by constitutional protections and judicial oversight, or by divisions of power between the executive and legislature. The basic idea here is that liberal-pluralist citizens regard democratic decision making as involving a broad set of elected *and* unelected elites. A corollary of this is that citizens are expected to embrace their own role in democratic decision-making as largely mediated: on the one hand, by the parties and politicians they elect, and on the other hand, by the interest organizations who speak on their behalf. As for the kinds of democratic decision-making citizens are supposed to support, liberal-pluralists expect citizens to accept or even welcome that public policy will be influenced by processes of consultation and lobbying, involving politically independent intermediary organizations and associations. By extension, the “good” liberal-pluralist citizen is expected to see negotiation and compromise among elites of different political persuasions as a natural and proper part of the democratic process.⁶⁸

The participatory model of democracy is distinct from minimal-elitism and liberal-pluralism in that it expects citizens to support unmediated forms of mass popular involvement in democratic decision-making. This might include support for direct democratic mechanisms (such as referendums and initiatives) as well as participatory innovations (such as participatory budgeting and citizen juries) that give citizens some decision-making powers. While the participatory model of democracy sets great store by the idea that final decision-making powers should lie with citizens themselves, in at least certain issue or policy areas, it also demands that where elected politicians retain decision-making powers they should undertake continuous processes of consultation with citizens between elections. This is one of the chief differences between participatory democracy and minimal-elitism and liberal-pluralism when it comes to the question of “how” decisions should be made. Minimal-elitist citizens are expected to oppose forms of direct citizen engagement between elections, while liberal-pluralist citizens are

68 Significant variations exist within the liberal-pluralist understanding of democracy, which includes so-called consensus democracy (Lijphart 1999). The liberal-pluralist understanding of democracy is characterized mainly in terms of the proper role of unelected organized interests in democratic decision making (Table 1).

Table 1. The citizen component

Core Dispositions	Key elements	The “good” citizen according to:		
		<i>Minimal-elitist model</i>	<i>Liberal-pluralist model</i>	<i>Participatory model</i>
1. Democratic commitments	Commitment regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who gets to decide? • How decisions should be made? 	Committed to decision making dominated by parties and elected politicians, with few checks and balances.	Committed to electoral democracy where politicians are checked and balanced and intermediary organizations play important role.	Committed to unmediated forms of mass popular involvement in democratic decision making and idea that politicians should actively consult citizens between elections.
2. Political capacities	Capacity to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know • choose • influence 	Capable of <i>selecting into</i> their values, preferences, and interests based on menu of options provided to them by political elites in lead up to elections.	Capable of enlightened understanding of their own interests and sufficiently tuned into politics to be able to identify and support, if need be, organizations that can defend their values and interests.	Possessing skills and knowledge that enable them to cooperate, communicate, and deliberate with fellow citizens and political elites.
3. Political participation	Participation that is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electoral vs. non-electoral • Mediated vs. direct • Other-regarding 	Pay sufficient attention to politics during election campaign to avoid being duped and turn out to vote, if interests at stake.	No duty to participate actively in politics, but ideally occasionally undertakes mainly mediated forms of participation.	Directly and actively involved in politics on an ongoing basis, with emphasis on other-regarding and public-oriented political activities.

expected to be primarily supportive of elected politicians' engagement with organized interests (speaking on citizens' behalf) rather than with citizens themselves. By contrast, the "good" participatory citizen is expected to be committed to the idea that politicians proactively and directly engage with citizens on an ongoing basis.

2.2. Political capacity

Existing cross-national indices of democratic quality rarely include indicators aimed at capturing levels of political capacity among citizenries.⁶⁹ This stands in contrast to the clear statements on the importance of political capacity made by democratic theorists of all stripes. It also runs counter to everyday intuition about the nature of democracy, powerfully expressed in recent years by political commentators across the globe who worry about citizens' incapacity to resist misinformation. Finally, the absence of direct measures of political capacity from existing quality-of-democracy indices runs counter to the large body of empirical research that has been inspired by, and engages directly with, debates on political capacity found in different accounts of democracy. In fact, over the past half-century, the study of political capacity and its implications for democratic performance has been a central concern within the field of political behaviour. Scholars have addressed the question of political capacity from a variety of angles, mainly using data from single countries and often looking at multiple types of political capacity at once. Key questions that have animated this body of research include: are citizens able to maintain internally-consistent and ideologically-structured beliefs? How politically knowledgeable and civically literate are citizens? Do citizens interrogate their own beliefs by finding and accurately processing new or unbiased sources of political information? How capable are citizens of voting for politicians and parties that will best represent their values and interests?⁷⁰

Though it is important to note that most research in this area has to date focused on the United States, the findings of existing research on political capacity are sobering. Citizens report low levels of political knowledge. They systematically seek out and accept information that confirms their

69 An exception is the Democracy Ranking (Campbell 2008), which includes measures of secondary-school and university enrolment aimed at capturing the availability of "knowledge" in a society. The EIU's Democracy Index includes data on levels of adult literacy and the share of the population that follows politics in the news.

70 See, for example, Andersen, Tilley and Heath 2005, Arnold 2012, Barabas and Jerit 2009, Bartels 1996, Achen and Bartels 2016, Campbell et al. 1980, Converse 1964, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Lau et al. 2014, Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen 2012, Lodge and Taber 2013, Lupia 2016, Milner 2002, Mutz 2006, Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996, Page and Shapiro 1992, Rapeli 2014.

pre-existing beliefs. And they rely heavily on partisan cues and heuristics provided by party elites, but those partisan attachments often lack ideological coherence.

The debates and divisions that exist among empirical political scientists regarding how much, and what kinds, of political capacity are required of citizens for democracy to function well is reflective of important conceptual or ontological disagreements about what makes a (high-quality) democracy a (high-quality) democracy. The point is not that some models of democracy are indifferent to the issue of political capacity, while others put political capacity centre stage. Rather, all major models of democracy clearly identify political capacity as important for the functioning of democracy; they differ significantly however in their understanding of what types and levels of political capacity matter for high-quality democracy.

How exactly then do different models of democracy understand the concept of political capacity? To answer this question, we propose that scholars of democratic quality focus on how models of democracy conceive of the following three types of political capacity. The first is the capacity of citizens to understand or know their own values, preferences, and interests that they wish to see realized through the democratic process. The second is the capacity of citizens to identify and select elites who will defend and advance those values, preferences, and interests. The third and final capacity is the capacity to influence political elites and the agendas they pursue. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to these three core democratic capacities as the *capacity to know*, the *capacity to choose*, and *capacity to influence*. (For a summary of how these three capacities are understood by three key models of democracy, see Table 1.)

Let us first turn to the capacity to know. How do our three key models of democracy conceive of this capacity? For advocates of minimal-elitist democracy, little is expected of citizens by way of capacity for independent thought to determine their personal values and interests. Schumpeter famously argued that citizens are “incapable of action other than a stampede” (1950: 283); what is important about this statement is that the low levels of political capacity associated with stampede-like cognition and affect are seen as in no way undermining a country’s quality of democracy. For minimal-elitists, citizens need only be capable of *selecting into* their values, preferences, and interests based on the menu of options provided to them by political elites during the short window of robust public debate that periodically occurs prior to elections. That said, as Schumpeter points out, for minimal-elitist democracy to work well, citizens must be on “an *intellectual* and moral level high enough to be proof against the offerings of the crook and the crank” (1950: 294, emphasis added). This suggests that the “good” citizen for minimal-elitists is able to process the content of pre-election

public debate in ways that allow her to identify and resist the siren call of misleading and false information.

Liberal-pluralist and participatory models of democracy are more demanding of citizens in terms of their “capacity to know” their own values and interests. Both models share an expectation that citizens should have the capacity to arrive at what Tocqueville described as “self-interest rightly understood” or what Dahl refers to as “enlightened understanding.” In *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989: 111–112), Dahl writes that “to know what it wants, and what is best, the people must be enlightened.” To achieve such enlightenment, Dahl argues that citizens must acquire “an understanding of means and ends, of one’s interests and the expected consequences of policies for interests, not only for oneself but for all other relevant persons as well.”⁷¹ Dahl’s definition of self-interest forms part of a broader discussion regarding the need for a free and competitive media environment. The implication of this is that citizens are expected to be capable of finding and processing information that has been made readily intelligible by a well-functioning media. At the same time, given that citizens are expected to be able to weigh the consequences of their values and interests on those of fellow citizens, it is important to recognize that liberal-pluralists’ and participatory democrats’ expectations regarding citizens’ “capacity to know” are still fairly taxing, from a cognitive and affective point of view.

When it comes to citizens’ capacity to choose political elites who will defend and pursue their interests, minimal-elitist, liberal-pluralist, and participatory models of democracy have much in common. None of them requires citizens to be extraordinary information sleuths or indeed policy wonks; rather, they expect citizens to be capable of taking full advantage of elite-provided sources of structured information in order to choose leaders without, as Schattschneider (1975: 134) puts it, being duped by demagogues. The models diverge, however, along two dimensions: first, in terms of the range of elite actors that citizens are expected to select; and second, in terms of the period of time over which citizens are expected to select elites.

For minimal-elitists, the “good” citizen need only be able to tune into politics in short bursts at election time. Using information shortcuts generated by the process of political competition during the campaign period, citizens are expected to have the political wherewithal to select candidates and parties who will best serve their values and interests. For liberal-pluralists (see Galston 1988: 1283) and participatory democrats, citizens are

71 For in-depth discussions of the capacities expected of the “good” liberal citizen, see Galston (1988: especially 1283–1285) and Macedo (1990: especially 265–273). For the capacities required of the “good” participatory citizen, see the discussion of “strong democratic talk” in Barber (1984: 178–198).

also expected to be able to make sense of available information to select candidates and parties at election time. In addition, they must be sufficiently tuned into politics on an ongoing basis to be able to identify and support organizations and associations that will defend their values and interests (“rightly understood”), as and when the need arises, by applying pressure on elected politicians between elections.

Finally, what do the three models have to say about citizens’ capacity to influence? Minimal-elitists expect citizens to influence politics and policy making indirectly through their vote choices and certainly not between elections, when “good” citizens are supposed to desist from “back-seat driving” (Schumpeter 1950: 295). Liberal-pluralist and participatory democrats expect citizens to influence elites through forms of exit but also through voice, to borrow the words of Albert Hirschman. To influence elites via voice requires citizens to possess not just certain types and levels of cognitive capacity but expressive and organizational capacities too. This includes the ability to identify whom to target and, if need be, the capacity to work with others to influence them. For participatory democrats, who argue that high-quality democracies provide wide-ranging opportunities for citizens to get involved in shaping public policy (sometimes even deciding it for themselves), it is particularly important that citizens possess skills and knowledge that enable them to cooperate, communicate, and deliberate with fellow citizens and political elites alike (see Barber 1984: 154).

2.3. Political participation

One of the few citizen-related indicators that routinely appears in existing cross-national quality-of-democracy indices is turnout in national elections (see Bühlmann et al. 2013, EIU 2012, Levine and Molina 2011, Vanhanen 1997).⁷² This clearly points to a scholarly consensus that political participation is a core conceptual component of democratic quality. High-quality democracy cannot simply be understood in terms of the existence of particular kinds of democratic institutions, the most incontrovertible of which are free and fair elections; it is also defined by whether citizens actually turn out to vote in those elections. All major models of democracy set great store by electoral participation. They differ significantly though in the importance they attach to other forms of political participation.

⁷² Existing quality-of-democracy indices also routinely include other participation-related indicators. The Democracy Barometer, for example, includes data on reported rates of petitioning and demonstrations; Levine and Molina (2011) include data on the share of citizens who report having worked for a candidate or party; the EIU incorporates information on membership of political parties and political non-governmental organizations as well as participation in demonstrations.

Over the years, normative disagreements among democratic theorists and political philosophers have inspired and echo similar debates among scholars of political behaviour. In fact, the question of what types of political participation are required for democracy to function well lies at the heart of a founding study in the field of political behaviour. In *The Civic Culture*, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba famously examine patterns of political participation in Britain, Germany, Italy, Mexico, and the United States and come to the conclusion that democracies are best served by citizens who “balance” political activity and involvement with forms of passivity, that “‘manage’ or keep in place” participatory inclinations (Almond and Verba 1989: 30). In the half-century since the publication of *The Civic Culture*, patterns of popular political participation have of course changed greatly. However, the question of how active citizens should be, and what forms political activity should take, for democracy to function well remains central to the study of political behaviour.⁷³

To capture how different models of democracy conceive of political participation, we propose that scholars of democratic quality pay particular attention to how much weight is attached to: (1) participation focused on elections versus acts of political participation that occur between elections; (2) mediated forms of political participation where citizens seek to make their voices heard and/or influence politics through organized civil society versus direct forms of political action and participation; and (3) the extent to which political participation is “other-regarding” or public-oriented. (See Table 1 for a summary of the discussion below.)

For minimal-elitists, elections are the singular focus of citizen participation. The primary political act of the “good” citizen is therefore to turn out in periodic elections. To avoid political demagoguery, it can be assumed that minimal-elitists expect citizens to pay attention to politics during election campaign periods. This suggests that citizens should consume political news and engage in political discussions in the run-up to elections. Between elections, however, citizens are expected to engage in few, if any, political acts, leaving politics to politicians and parties.

For liberal-pluralists, citizens are under no duty to participate actively in politics (Galston 1988: 1284). That said, there is an expectation that they will turn out to vote, and when they do they will vote in line with their self-interest, rightly understood. In contrast to minimal-elitism, the liberal-pluralist model of democracy does not expect citizens to shy away from political participation between elections. The emphasis though is placed on forms of mediated political participation, most notably engagement with

⁷³ Considering recent debates see, for example, Dalton 2008, Fung 2004, Mutz 2006, Norris 2002, Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, Verba, Scholzman and Brady 1995.

organizations and associations, and by extension social movements, that will defend their interests and values in the political arena.

For participatory democrats, citizens are expected to be engaged in the electoral process in similar ways to the “good” liberal-pluralist citizen. However, whereas liberal-pluralists expect citizens to become involved in politics intermittently between elections, principally relying on intermediary organizations to defend their interests, the participatory model of democracy places a duty on citizens to be directly and actively involved in politics on an ongoing basis. As Barber (1984: 152) writes, “(participatory) democracy is the politics of amateurs, where every man is compelled to encounter every other man without the intermediary of expertise.” Finally, as these words suggest, participatory democrats also expect citizens to undertake political activities that are expressly other-regarding and public-oriented, aimed at moving beyond “competitive interest mongering” (Barber: 1984: 155).

3. Inter-component congruence between institutions and citizen dispositions

For democracy to function well, it doesn't just need good institutions, it also needs citizens who are willing and able to breathe life into those institutions. A version of this claim stands at the heart of classic studies of democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan 1996, Diamond 1999) as well as more recent debates about democratic deconsolidation (see, most notably, Foa and Mounk 2016, and critical responses to this work by Alexander and Welzel 2017, Inglehart 2016, Norris 2017 and Voeten 2017). The basic contention of this body of work is that democracy can be considered consolidated and stable when, among other things, democratic institutions are firmly established *and* citizens are meaningfully and unwaveringly supportive of democracy (as manifested in their commitment to core democratic principles and their actions to defend those principles at and beyond the ballot box).

In contrast to research on democratic consolidation, research on democratic quality has made little effort to conceptualize the relationship between institutions and citizens. The widespread inclusion of (national) electoral turnout data in existing cross-national quality-of-democracy indices points to an underlying academic consensus that citizens are conceptually constitutive of democratic quality. However, this same research has fallen short of giving any systematic conceptual consideration to how citizens matter for democratic quality beyond participation in periodic national elections. By extension, they have also failed to recognize the crucial issue that citizens matter in different ways depending on the model driving the assessment. The conceptual short shrift that researchers have given to citizens stands in marked contrast to the detailed and sophisticated discussions about how

and why different kinds of institutions and structures matter for democratic quality. In this section, we address the more general conceptual question of the relationship between the citizen and institutional components of democracy. Our goal here is to identify important considerations that can guide future empirical research.

We conceive of the relationship between institutions and citizens as it pertains to democratic quality in terms of congruence.⁷⁴ In earlier work we described the relationship between the citizen and institutional components of democratic quality as one of mutual dependence or mutual conditionality (2016: 636). Our basic contention is that institutions and citizens represent two sides of the same democracy coin. In concrete terms, this means that democratic quality is a function of the level of model-specific congruence between institutions and citizen dispositions. The more institutions and citizen dispositions are simultaneously congruent with the demands and expectations of the same model of democracy, the higher that country's quality of democracy, at least when judged from the viewpoint of the model in question.

Given that both the institutional and citizen components are necessary conditions of democratic quality, it is important to be clear about a key implication of our argument. If a country's political institutions and structures accord largely with the expectations of a particular model of democracy, but citizen dispositions in that same country do not, we simply cannot say that this country has a high-quality democracy. The same is true in reverse where citizen dispositions accord with a particular model of democracy, but political institutions and structures do not. How exactly inter-component incongruence would ultimately affect a country's overall democracy score is a question for future empirical research. The point we wish to make is that the value of one component must, in a non-negligible way, be contingent on the value of the other component. When considering this issue of mutual contingency, it is important to distinguish between two types of inter-component congruence: one static; the other dynamic.

When one thinks about democratic quality in terms of inter-component congruence, most likely one intuitively thinks about congruence at a single point in time. We refer to this as the static approach. However, over time political institutions change, as do citizen dispositions. From a long-term perspective, lowering a country's quality-of-democracy score for lack of inter-component congruence may be misleading when both institutions and citizen dispositions are mutually adjusting over time toward a new

74 From Almond and Verba (1989) to the work of Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2006), research on democratic consolidation and stability has also addressed the relationship between institutions and citizens from the perspective of congruence; see also Eckstein (1998) and Welzel and Klingemann (2011).

equilibrium. For this reason, it is crucial to make allowances for the inter-dependences and processes of mutual adjustment that may exist, to varying degrees, between the institutional and citizen components. A key analytic advantage of conceiving of inter-component congruence in both static and dynamic terms is that it allows us to distinguish between two sets of democracies. On the one hand, low-quality democracies where institutions and citizens are effectively more or less permanently out of sync with each other. And on the other hand, countries where institutions and citizen dispositions are slowly but surely moving in the same direction; and where the processes of mutual adjustment underpinning these changes are in fact a powerful positive indicator of the quality of democracy in those countries.

4. Inter-dispositional consistency

Over the years, scholars of political behaviour have studied how citizen dispositions relate to one another. One approach has been to examine the influence of certain kinds of democratic commitments on political participation. Recent work, by Åsa Bengtsson and Henrik Christensen (2016) and Sergiu Gherghina and Geissel (2017), finds clear associations between citizens' democratic "process preferences" and how they participate in politics. For example, citizens who support a participatory model of democracy are more likely to participate in politics, both at and beyond the ballot box.⁷⁵ A large body of research also exists on the question of how political capacities relate to political participation. Compared to the legion of studies that examines the impact of education (and often also income and political interest) – as broad proxies of political capacity – very little research has been done on how the cognitive, expressive, and organizational capacities specifically identified by different models of democracy relate to participation.⁷⁶ This is due in no small measure to the dearth of survey data, and especially cross-national survey data, aimed at capturing information on political capacity. As a result, we still know very little about how the varied citizen dispositions prized by minimal-elitist, liberal-pluralist, and participatory democracy "move" together.

Just as we ideally expect both the institutional and citizen components of democratic quality to be congruent with the model of democracy driving the assessment, we also expect – ideally – democratic commitments, political capacities, and political participation to be consistent with each other and

⁷⁵ Other research has come to similar conclusions: see, for example, Bolzendahl and Coffé 2013, Dalton 2008.

⁷⁶ A small body of work, mainly focused on the United States, does exist though on the relationship between political knowledge and political participation, see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Milner 2002, Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996, Verba, Scholzman and Brady 1995.

with the same model of democracy. In short, inter-dispositional consistency (or *intra*-component congruence) represents an important yardstick for evaluating democratic quality. Why does inter-dispositional consistency matter? It matters because, regardless of the model of democracy driving the assessment, the proper (high-quality) functioning of democracy depends on a particular mix and balance of commitments, capacities, and participation. For example, a high-quality participatory democracy is not just home to large numbers of citizens participating actively in politics, at and between elections, it is also home to large numbers of people who have the capacities to cooperate, communicate, and deliberate with fellow citizens. Similarly, minimal-elitists might only expect citizens to participate in periodic elections, but when they do, they are also expected to be able to use existing information shortcuts to avoid being misled or fooled by political elites vying for their votes.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that democratic quality depends not only on the form and functioning of democratic institutions but also on the dispositions of citizens.⁷⁷ To date, however, cross-national indices have focused predominantly on the institutional component of democratic quality. Over the years, measures of institutional quality have become increasingly multidimensional and conceptually sophisticated. The *Varieties of Democracy* program (Coppedge et al. 2011) has enriched this approach even further by making it possible to systematically evaluate democratic institutions according to different models of democracy. The same cannot be said of the citizen component of democratic quality. Cross-national indices commonly incorporate information on turnout rates in national elections, which points to an academic consensus that citizens are indeed a constitutive element of the concept of democratic quality. Few other citizen-related indicators are included in cross-national assessments of democratic quality, and when they are included it is often with little theoretical justification. The result is that citizens play conceptual second fiddle to institutions, and there is little or no recognition that different accounts of democracy demand and expect different kinds of citizen dispositions. Our aim is to challenge this orthodoxy by providing a structured account of the citizen component of democratic quality, with a focus on three models of democracy – minimal-elitism, liberal-pluralism, and participatory democracy.

⁷⁷ Democratic quality also depends on the dispositions of political elites, most obviously their commitment to democracy as well as their level of political competence (see, for example, Linz and Stepan 1996, Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2013).

The first section of the chapter provided a fine-grained conceptualization of what we argue are the three core dispositions that make up the citizen component of democratic quality – namely, democratic commitment, political capacity, and political participation. We made the case that commitment is not just about general support for democracy but also model-specific commitments related to who gets to decide and how decisions are to be made. We defined political capacity in terms of citizens’ ability to know, choose, and influence, identifying key differences in how the three models conceive of political capacity. Finally, to capture the kinds and levels of political participation the three models expect of citizens, we argued that scholars of democratic quality should focus on the weight attached to: election-focused participation versus participation between elections; mediated versus direct forms of political action; and “other-regarding” political participation that brings together citizens with divergent political viewpoints.

The remainder of the chapter dealt with two key issues that arise when considering citizens seriously. The first is the issue of “fit” between institutions and citizens, which we refer to as inter-component congruence. We made the case that any assessment of democratic quality must consider the extent to which both institutions and citizen dispositions are congruent with the same model of democracy. We further underscored the importance of distinguishing static congruence (where democratic quality is judged according to the level of inter-component congruence at a single point in time) and dynamic congruence (where democratic quality is judged according to long-term processes of mutual adjustment between institutions and citizen dispositions). The second issue that we addressed was that of inter-dispositional consistency. Ideally, we argued, democratic commitments, political capacities, and political participation should all be consistent with the same model of democracy.

The greatest challenge moving forward with the conceptualization of democratic quality presented in the preceding pages relates to data availability. In the process of writing this paper, we undertook a systematic and broad survey of existing cross-national surveys. This included the World Values Survey, the International Social Survey Programme, the European Social Survey, the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, the European Election Study, and the Latin American Public Opinion Project. In recent years the measurement of democratic commitments has improved greatly. Furthermore, the measurement of political participation is fairly strong, with information frequently being collected on a broad range of non-electoral forms of participation. That said, information is almost never collected directly on how “other-regarding” political participation is. Finally, we found that the measurement of political capacities is particularly weak. Cross-national surveys often ask citizens to self-report on their general sense of

political understanding or competence. Some surveys also gauge citizens' level of political knowledge, but developing cross-nationally commensurable measures of political knowledge has been challenging (see, for example, Gidengil et al. 2016). Overall though, unlike some surveys carried out in individual countries, to date no direct cross-national measures have been fielded aimed at directly capturing information on citizens' cognitive, expressive, and organizational capacities. This is not to underestimate the difficulty of developing valid and reliable empirical indicators of political capacity, but the lack of data in this area poses a real problem for quality-of-democracy research. As we have argued in this chapter, citizens' capacity to know, choose, and influence in the political arena is central to the functioning of democracy. By detailing how different models of democracy understand these three capacities in different ways, we have sought to provide a valuable foundation for developing new survey questions to fully incorporate the citizen component in future quality-of-democracy research.

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