1   The Problem of Anti-Politics

The term 'anti-politics' has been used for at least five decades to describe various phenomena. In the first half of this chapter, we situate anti-politics in relation to associated concepts like political alienation, the crisis of democracy, withdrawal of political support, political disaffection, post-politics, depoliticisation, and populism. We conceptualise anti-politics as negative sentiment towards the activities and institutions of formal politics, arguing that it should not be confused with certain other phenomena: healthy scepticism, on which democracy is founded; apathy, where citizens are not so much disaffected as indifferent; a changing party system, where citizens are simply changing their allegiance from older parties to newer parties; or a crisis for democracy, where negative sentiment is directed at not only formal politics but also the idea of democracy itself.

In the second half of the chapter, we address the question of why anti-politics matters. We show that anti-politics is associated with non-participation, non-compliance, and support for populism. We argue that anti-politics makes government more difficult – at a time when societies face numerous problems appropriate for governmental action. Finally, we defend the lens of anti-politics against some common critiques and alternative lenses. The most important of these is the 'democratisation' lens. We draw on existing studies to demonstrate how little empirical support exists for the position that negativity towards formal politics is currently being compensated for by positivity towards informal politics. Even if this was the case, we argue, some important functions performed by formal politics would still be at risk – from the interest aggregation performed by parties for policy-makers to the political opportunity structures provided by formal politics to social movements.

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Situating Anti-Politics

A Short History of the Term 'Anti-Politics'

Negativity towards formal politics is not new, and neither is concern about it. There is a need, therefore, to define anti-politics and to situate it both conceptually and historically. Bernard Crick (1962) was one of the first scholars to use the term 'anti-politics'. Writing from the United Kingdom (UK) when democracy in Europe still seemed to be threatened by fascism and communism, he defined politics as those activities necessary for government in plural societies: tolerating, canvassing, listening, discussing, conciliating. This politics was threatened by anti-politics: negativity towards politics because it is messy, mundane, inconclusive, and so unsatisfactory. For Crick, such negativity came especially from certain groups he sensed at the time. It came from advocates of ideology, for whom the ends of a final, perfect, stable society justify the means of totalitarianism. It came from advocates of direct democracy, for whom the tyranny of the majority is preferable to the mediation and compromise of political democracy. And it came from advocates – or at least practitioners – of scientism, for whom social problems are technical in character and soluble, therefore, by rational and objective engineers.

We return to Crick's definitions later, but first we consider writing on anti-politics and related phenomena since Crick. In the 1960s and 1970s, researchers in the United States (USA) perceived a seemingly new 'political alienation' among American citizens. Drawing on Seeman (1959), Ada Finifter (1970) disaggregated this alienation into four categories. 'Powerlessness' describes the feeling that citizens are unable to influence the actions of government. 'Meaningless' describes the feeling that political choices are illegible and political decisions are unpredictable. 'Normlessness' describes the feeling that politicians violate the norms meant to govern political relations. Last but not least, 'isolation' describes the rejection of those norms by citizens themselves. Other influential studies of the period disaggregated political alienation into 'political efficacy', or the feeling that citizens can have an impact on the political process, and 'political trust', defined as the basic evaluative feeling that citizens have towards government (Miller 1974a). Alternatively, they located political alienation at one end of a continuum, with the other end representing allegiance, or closeness, or attachment to the principles and institutions of the system (Citrin et al. 1975).

By the mid-1970s, some commentators on both sides of the Atlantic were writing of a 'crisis of democracy'. From a British perspective, Anthony King (1975) noted that politicians were no longer thought to be wise.

Parties were no longer thought to be responsible. The administration was no longer thought to be efficient. And all this was because the nature of problems had changed and the business of government had become harder. Governments now held themselves responsible for a greater range of matters (because they believed the electorate would ultimately hold them responsible). This was the problem of 'great expectations'. The other main problem identified by King was 'intractability' – the increasing dependency of government on other actors (from trade unions to oil exporters) that weakened its grasp on complex societal problems. What were the consequences of all this? One consequence was 'governmental overload' – when government becomes over-worked and fails, leading to mass dissatisfaction with politics. What was the solution? It was devolution of power and responsibility to reduce the reach of government and, in turn, to lower citizens' expectations.

Similar arguments were made by American commentators of the New Right (e.g. Crozier et al. 1975). They perceived a situation of rising affluence, welfare, education, and expectations, all translating into more and more demands on government, promises from government, unwieldy state agencies, and costly state programmes. They perceived a 'crisis of democracy'. Such crisis talk, however, gradually dissipated over the next couple of decades as Ronald Reagan set about rolling back the American state (like Margaret Thatcher in the UK), while a third wave of democratisation moved across Southern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe.

It took the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 – the bombing of a federal building in downtown Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, apparently motivated by hatred of the federal government – to remind some scholars that negative feeling among citizens towards the institutions of formal politics had never really gone away after the 1970s. Research once again began focusing on the problem of such negativity, this time encouraged by the availability of new international datasets. Much work in this field during the late 1990s and early 2000s was comparative in character and drew on the World Values and Eurobarometer surveys. The other notable characteristic of this wave of research was its conceptual focus on 'political support' – or, more accurately, citizens' withdrawal of political support.

Joseph Nye and colleagues (1997) considered support for the various political objects identified by Easton (1965, 1975) and found a growing mistrust across a range of countries regarding leaders, the electoral process, and institutions (Easton's objects of specific support), which they feared may lead down a slippery slope to mistrust of democracy and national community (Easton's objects of diffuse support). Pippa Norris

(1999) expanded Easton's framework or continuum from three main objects – political community, political regime, political authorities – to five: political community, regime principles, regime performance, regime institutions, and actors. With colleagues, across a range of countries, she found continued support for the most diffuse objects (political community and regime principles) but weakening support for the more specific (regime performance, institutions, and actors). She concluded that most countries face no crisis of democracy, in that most citizens continue to support democracy as an ideal form of government. But they do face a problem – or opportunity – of disaffected democrats: citizens dissatisfied with how democracy currently works in practice (and supportive, at least potentially, of democratic reforms). This situation of support for democracy in theory but disaffection with democracy in practice was later described by Norris (2011) as the 'democratic deficit' of our time.

Attempts to conceptualise, describe, and explain citizens' negative orientations to politics have continued and perhaps accelerated over the past decade or so. Under the heading of 'political disaffection', Torcal and Montero (2006) have studied critical attitudes towards politics and representative institutions, estrangement from politics and the public sphere, and critical evaluations of political institutions, their representatives, and the democratic political process. Some have gone so far as to write of 'post-democracy'. For Jacques Rancière (1999), post-democracy describes the present condition, which he sees characterised by consensus and the disavowal of politics (defined as the demand for equality by those without equality). Alongside others who write of 'post-politics' (Slavoj Žižek) or 'the post-political' (Chantel Mouffe), he notes the paradox of 'triumphant democracy' – the spread of representative democracy and the rise of participatory forms of governance – and political apathy for mainstream parties and politics, combined with insurrectional movements and mobilisations. For these authors, this paradox follows from the colonisation of contestation and agonistic engagement by technocratic mechanisms and consensual procedures. It follows from the reduction of political contradictions to policy problems for management by experts (see Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014).

The term 'post-democracy' is also used by Colin Crouch (2004). He describes a move away from the maximal ideal of democracy, where opportunities exist for the mass of ordinary people to participate, discuss, and shape the agenda of public life, to a situation of post-democracy where elections are tightly controlled spectacles, government is shaped in private by elites, and citizens are frustrated and disillusioned. Post-democracy, then, is where politicians continue to be anxious about their relations with citizens (so this is not quite non- or anti-democracy), but citizens have been reduced to the role of manipulated participants (so this is not quite democracy).

Table 1.1 *Three versions of anti-politics*

	Version 1	Version 2	Version 3
Definitions	Citizens' negativity towards the institutions of formal politics	Denigration of politics by populists	A political strategy of depoliticisation
Other overlapping concepts	Political alienation, withdrawal of political support, political disaffection	Populism	Depoliticisation, post-democracy, post-politics, the post-political
Commonly assumed relationships	A response to depoliticisation (Version 3) that is used to justify further depoliticisation. Fed on by populism (Version 2), which reinforces citizens' negativity by denigrating politics	Feeds on and reinforces citizens' negativity (Version 1). Can feed on depoliticisation (Version 3), where depoliticisation is perceived to produce governance by out-of-touch elites. Can lend its voice to calls for depoliticisation, where depoliticisation is perceived to involve replacement of politics with management in the public interest	A cause of citizens' negativity (Version 1) but also justified by the same. Draws support from populism (Version 2) but can give populism cause too
Treatment in this book	The main focus	A minor character, though populism has a major role in Chapter 9	A minor character, though post-democracy and depoliticisation have major roles in Chapter 6

Three Versions of Anti-Politics

Anti-politics is a term with a history and no settled upon definition. In this book, we focus on one version of anti-politics but also take into account two other usages (Table 1.1). Our major concern is with negativity towards politics among citizens (i.e. political alienation or withdrawal of political support or political disaffection). A second concern is denigration of politics by populists, which may be a strategic political response to

citizens' negativity. A third concern is the political strategy of depoliticisation (i.e. post-democracy or post-politics or the post-political – which may explain citizens' negativity).

Sometimes, these multiple uses or versions have been connected by integrated narratives of anti-politics. One example would be Trevor Smith's (1972) *Anti-Politics*, inspired by Crick's writings of the previous decade. In this surprisingly neglected text, Smith notes a number of developments in British politics during the 1960s. There was a decline in conventional politics – defined as the choice between alternatives – which could be one version of anti-politics. Political protest became prevalent as citizens looked elsewhere for idealism, imagination, and fervour – which could be another version of anti-politics. In response, politicians looked to re-engage citizens with political sloganeering, symbolism, and populism – which could be a third version of anti-politics. For Smith, all these developments resulted from 'the prevailing political formula'. 'Consensus' was a first part of this formula and described the eschewal of ideological partisanship. 'Pluralism', a second part, captured the cosy balance of power between Labour and the Conservatives, the trade unions and big business, and the Establishment and newer elites. Finally, 'managerialism' captured the search for efficiency. For Smith, this prevailing political formula resulted, in turn, from factors that circumscribe the policy-making of domestic political parties (e.g. growing interdependence between nation-states), combined with long-term societal developments that leave politicians and citizens less confident and more vulnerable to philosophical vacuity and privatisation (e.g. the Reformation).

If Smith's text represents one approach to anti-politics – the integrated narrative approach – then another approach has been to focus on just one version, often to operationalise it for empirical research. So anti-politics has been used to describe negativity towards politics among citizens, regardless of what explains such negativity or how politicians respond to such negativity. This usage probably began in the 1970s with Suzanne Berger (1979) on the energy crisis, the economic recession, the growing politicisation of everyday life, and the translation of this growing focus on priority, value, choice, and conflict not into support for political parties but into anti-party and anti-state new political movements (that wished less to capture the state and more to dismantle it). It continued in the 1990s with Geoffrey Mulgan (1994) on 'the rise of an anti-political ethic' and 'an anti-political era' characterised by declining voter turnout, declining party membership, the low repute of politics as a profession, and the success of alternative movements connected to religion or group identity. In recent years, scholarly writing on this version of anti-politics

appears to have proliferated. For example, Clare Saunders (2014) uses 'anti-politics' to describe disaffection in democracies and disengagement from formal political institutions. Linda McDowell and colleagues (2014) use 'anti-politics' to capture 'an engaged form of disengagement' that is not apathy so much as dissatisfaction and active rejection of traditional politics. Allen and Birch (2015a) use 'anti-politics' to capture mistrust and cynicism towards politicians and political institutions and associated disengagement from various formal political processes. Or take Boswell and Corbett (2015), for whom 'anti-politics' describes negative beliefs about democratic government, whether held by citizens or elites.

The most prominent alternative version – to anti-politics as citizens' negativity towards the activities and institutions of formal politics – has been anti-politics as political strategy of depoliticisation. This usage probably began in the 1990s with James Ferguson (1994) on the development industry in Lesotho, its refusal to allow its role to be formulated as a political one, its reduction of poverty to a technical problem, and its depoliticisation of poverty, land, resources, wages, and the state ('the anti-politics machine'). Another founding text here is Andreas Schedler's (1997) *The End of Politics? Explorations into Modern Antipolitics.* For Schedler, anti-politics describes a mode of thought or discourse or ideology. If politics assumes a community whose members are mutually interdependent, internally different, able to act in concert, and needful of authoritative decisions, then anti-politics works against politics by doing a number of things. It substitutes collective problems for a self-regulating order (e.g. the market). It substitutes plurality for uniformity (e.g. the people). It substitutes contingency for necessity (e.g. global forces). And it substitutes political power for individual liberty. Put differently, again by Schedler, anti-politics seeks to replace the communicative rationality of politics with another rationality from another societal subsystem. This could be the technology of 'instrumental antipolitics', the absolutism of 'moral antipolitics', or the spectacle of 'aesthetic antipolitics'.

This second main version – anti-politics as depoliticising discursive system – has been much studied since the turn of the century. Weltman and Billig (2001) found Third-Way politics to be anti-political. Its technocratic managerialism denigrates ideology while functioning to obscure the irreconcilability of antagonistic interests, to discourage challenges to powerful vested interests, and to maintain relations of inequality. Similarly, William Walters (2004) found governance discourse to be anti-political. Its focus on inclusion, participation, partnership, and stakeholders excludes those who emphasise structural problems and threaten the social order. Ultimately, governance works to displace political conflict and legitimate inaction. Two final examples are Clarke (2012)

and Clarke and Cochrane (2013). In the former, urban policy mobility is characterised as anti-political for positioning urban policy as a technical achievement – as opposed to a political achievement – in order to hold stretched networks of policy-making together. In the latter, the localism agendas of recent UK governments are characterised as anti-political. They imagine a nation of autonomous and internally homogeneous localities and thus deny the conditions of politics (interdependence and difference). They also promote expertise, technology, markets, and direct democracy over the content of politics (listening, discussing, compromising).

In this section, we have shown that 'anti-politics' has been used to mean different things by different scholars in different contexts. It also exists in a heavily populated conceptual world – alongside political alienation, democratic crisis, withdrawal of political support, political disaffection, and post-democracy. In this book, we choose to use the term 'anti-politics' for two main reasons. It is good to think with, not least because it encourages the making or interrogation of connections between citizens' negativity towards politics, political strategies of depoliticisation, and political strategies of populism. It is also good to write with, not least because 'anti-politics' travels well – whether across theoretical and empirical research, scholarly and popular discussion, or radical and reformist politics. Of course, any concept that travels well and encourages connections also carries with it the risk of conceptual confusion. We now turn, therefore, to the working definition we used to frame our research and the rest of this book.

Anti-Politics: A Working Definition

Our starting point is a working definition of politics. There are, of course, many definitions of politics (e.g. see Rancière's definition in the preceding discussion). We are drawn to the tradition running from Aristotle to Crick because we perceive a complex moral terrain, a plural society, and a need for collective and binding decisions. As such, we define politics as those activities appropriate to such conditions – tolerating, canvassing, listening, negotiating, compromising – and their institutionalisation in politicians, parties, elections, parliaments, councils, and governments (the institutions of formal politics). This gives us a working definition of anti-politics as negative sentiment towards those activities and institutions. We finish this section with some important clarifications:

- In this book, our primary focus is on citizens' orientations to politics. We do consider anti-politics as strategy of depoliticisation – and potential cause of citizens' negativity towards politics – but under the

distinguishing heading of 'depoliticisation' (see Chapter 6). We also consider anti-politics as strategy of populism – and potential effect of citizens' negativity towards politics – but under the distinguishing heading of 'populism'.

- Anti-politics describes negative sentiment towards the activities and institutions of formal politics but not towards the idea of democracy itself. Previously, we noted how research around the turn of the twenty-first century distinguished between withdrawn support for the actors and institutions of democracy and continued support for the principles of democracy. The presence of anti-political sentiment, therefore, should not be confused with a situation of crisis for democracy.

- If anti-politics describes something less than negativity towards democracy itself, it describes something more than negativity towards particular actors or institutions. Negativity of this latter, most specific kind is to be expected in any plural society and partisan system.

- Anti-politics also describes something more active than apathy, which implies detachment, indifference, and passivity – a lack of interest, concern, and passion. We show later in the book how anti-political sentiment can follow from experiences of engagement with formal politics and can be deeply felt by concerned citizens.

- Anti-politics also describes something more than healthy scepticism. Such scepticism is required for democratic oversight (Sniderman 1981). For Claus Offe (2006), democracies need a certain amount of distrust to reduce participation during normal politics (when it just gets in the way) and to increase participation during extraordinary politics (when it is needed). The problem arises when distrust reaches a certain level where it creates opportunities for populists, breeds non-compliance, leads to state impotence, and threatens anti-democratic mobilisation. Similarly, for Ercan and Gagnon (2014), democracy – as a normative and unfinished project – is meant to be in permanent crisis, at least to a certain extent. But the extent of crisis, like the level of distrust for Offe, is what matters. Compared to healthy scepticism, anti-politics describes something more like unhealthy cynicism towards formal politics.

- Finally, where do we see such anti-political sentiment? We see it directly in qualitative data generated from focus groups where citizens get to speak in their own terms about what interests and concerns them (e.g. Stoker et al. 2016). Then we see it more indirectly in survey measures of trust in things like politicians, parties, parliaments, and governments and approval regarding things like leader performance, government performance, decision-making processes, and policy outcomes (e.g. Jennings et al. 2016, 2017a).

Why Anti-Politics Matters

Why should we be concerned by deeply felt cynicism among citizens towards the activities and institutions of formal politics? In this section, we provide three positive grounds for concern before addressing four potential critiques of research framed in terms of anti-politics. The first reason for concern is that previous research has found an association – relatively weak but significant nevertheless – between anti-political sentiment on the one hand and non-participation and non-compliance on the other (Dalton 2004, Marien and Hooghe 2011, Norris 1999, 2011, Torcal and Lago 2006).

Voter turnout is one common indicator of participation. It varies across the globe, not least because of different degrees of compulsion in different countries, but in recent years voter turnout has been notably low in some of the mature democracies. Among members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), turnout was on average 11% lower in national elections held in 2011 compared to elections held three decades earlier (OECD 2011). According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), turnout in the US presidential election of 2016 was 68% – the second lowest on record (after 2012), having always been above 80% until 2008 and having once been so high as 96% (in 1964). We find a similar story in the UK. Turnout in the general election of 2017 was 69% – relatively high for general elections of the past two decades but low for those of the twentieth century (when turnout was above 70% in every election from 1945, peaking at 84% in 1950). An additional point here is that citizen disengagement as a result of antipathy towards formal politics disproportionately affects already marginalised groups, including youth (Lawless and Fox 2015, Mycock and Tonge 2014) and the working class (Ford and Goodwin 2014). As such, anti-politics threatens to empty the political field of those who may need it most.

Related to these concerns about non-participation and non-compliance, our second main concern is that anti-politics makes government more difficult (at a time when societies face numerous challenges and requirements for governmental action). Coherent public policy is made difficult when demands on government proliferate without being aggregated by parties (Dalton 2004). Governmental action is made difficult when citizens don't trust government to manage programmes efficiently or fairly and withdraw their support for programmes of redistribution that ask citizens to make sacrifices or take risks (Hetherington 2005). Ultimately, politicians themselves may withdraw, mirroring the withdrawal of citizens, either by focusing on society's easier problems or by turning away from

popular democracy and towards constitutional democracy (Mair 2013). By popular democracy, Mair means government by the people who participate through parties. This leaves constitutional democracy as government *for* the people by an elite governing class. This latter version is characterised by checks and balances across institutions, transparency, legality, stakeholder access, depoliticised decision-making, and non-majoritarian institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) or International Monetary Fund (IMF). For Mair, citizens are destined to find constitutional democracy unsatisfactory. He foresees a vicious cycle of mutual withdrawal by citizens and politicians and a democracy functioning poorly for citizens and politicians alike.

A third reason why anti-politics matters is that where disaffected citizens do not withdraw completely from participation in formal politics, some shift their support to populist politicians and parties. In the UK, for example, support for the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is partially explained by anti-political sentiment. According to Ford and Goodwin (2014), UKIP supporters are disaffected, distrusting, and angry. They have lost faith in the political system. They reject the politics of both Brussels and Westminster, which they see as remote, elite, bureaucratic, corrupt, and unresponsive to their concerns. We found something similar in survey data from YouGov and Populus (see Jennings et al. 2016). When social group is held constant, political discontent increases the odds of supporting UKIP by more than a half.[1]

The previous paragraph, of course, begs another question: Why should we be concerned by populism? Well, for Schedler (1997), populism denies the reality of internally differentiated and mutually interdependent communities. It substitutes plurality for uniformism ('the people'). For Offe (2006), populists pose as ordinary people with common sensical views and disgust for bureaucracy ('anti-political politicians'). They incite and exploit both fears and hopes, which attracts a few citizens to politics but repels many others. Finally, we have Crick's (2005) evaluation of populism. On the one hand, by imagining a collective will frustrated by institutions and their procedures, populism embodies the spirit of democracy (i.e. lack of deference towards elites). But on the other, populism is not sufficient for democracy. The will of the majority, which is sometimes wrong, cannot be allowed to deprive individuals and minority groups of freedom (Tocqueville's 'tyranny of the majority'). To summarise all this, we might say that populists trade on a series of

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[1] 'Political discontent' here was measured by whether citizens think politicians are knowledgeable, can make a difference, possess leadership, are focused on the short-term chasing of headlines, and are self-seeking.

misrepresentations. They claim there is just one people ('the silent majority'), they are of that people, and all other politicians are not of that people (but rather are 'out of touch' elites). They claim there is no mutual interdependence between that people and other peoples (whether external peoples or internal minorities). They claim there is little need for negotiation and compromise between multiple competing interests and opinions. Finally, they claim – again wrongly – that procedures and institutions to facilitate such negotiation and compromise are not required (but just constitute 'bureaucracy' and 'red tape').

Anti-politics matters, then, because it is associated with non-participation and non-compliance, it makes government more difficult, and it is associated with support for populism. However, there are four potential critiques of research framed in terms of anti-politics. The first can be represented by Joseph Schumpeter (1942), for whom democracy constitutes a mechanism of selection; an institutional arrangement for placing power in the hands of high-capacity individuals. In this view, non-participation should be of little concern because democracy works better without too much participation anyway. We do not share this view. We do not share Schumpeter's view of an overly weak, emotional, impulsive, irrational, ignorant, manipulable citizenry. Also, as mentioned earlier, we think participation provides input legitimacy, often making government easier and more effective – especially in situations where governmental action rests on risk-taking or sacrifice-making by citizens.

Another potential critique, also focused on the relationship between anti-politics and non-participation, questions the commonly assumed binaries of participation and non-participation, engagement and disengagement, active citizens and disillusioned citizens. Amnå and Ekman (2013) identify a third group of citizens: 'standby citizens' who keep a low profile but are not so much disillusioned and disengaged as interested and willing to participate, but only when absolutely needed. Theoretically, we find standby citizens interesting and therefore quite attractive. But to date, few standby citizens have been found by empirical research. The same cannot be said for anti-political citizens, as we show in the rest of this book.

The final two critiques for consideration start from the same broad position: that research on anti-politics mistakes change and renewal in politics for decline and crisis. The third critique is that we are not seeing citizen withdrawal and support for populism so much as the fragmentation and remaking of party systems. Citizens are turning away from what traditionally have been the main parties, but less because they are disaffected with politics as a whole and more because they prefer the newer and, for now, smaller parties (which they believe to better represent their current interests). From our perspective, it seems true that many party

systems are currently experiencing fragmentation and renewal. For example, the UK's two main parties received 97% of the vote in 1951. By 2015, this had declined to 67% (with figures generally in the 90s during the 1950s and 1960s, the 70s during the next three decades, and the 60s since the turn of the century). If we exclude the general election of 2017 – when share of the vote for the two main parties bounced back up to 82% and which we discuss in the Preface – we have a situation in the UK where citizens have gradually been turning away from the Conservative Party and the Labour Party and towards parties like the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party (SNP), Plaid Cymru, UKIP, and the Green Party. Our point is that, alongside this situation, we also have another situation: complete withdrawal from politics by some citizens who are voting for neither the main parties nor the minor parties. These two situations are connected in complex ways. For example, some disaffected citizens may disengage completely while others may shift support to more populist parties. But the two situations do not fully explain or account for each other. Anti-politics, therefore, is left as a discrete problem worthy of study.

This leaves the final and most important critique, at least by quantity of advocates. These advocates focus less on anti-politics and withdrawal from formal politics and more on new and alternative forms of politics and participation. They propose a democratisation thesis (Dalton 2000) – that democracy is not in crisis or decline but rather is being remade, transformed, post-modernised by citizens who are wealthier, better educated, and more capable of doing things for themselves. These commentators see an expansion of the boundary of politics (ibid.), a broadening of the category of the political (Black 2010), and an expansion of what constitutes politics (Hilton et al. 2013). They see a move from liberal democracy to a more participatory democracy. They see negativity towards formal politics being compensated for by positivity towards informal politics: new social movements, transnational policy networks, internet activism. Such change to a more radical and plural democracy should be expected, they argue, in that democracy has been expanding and deepening – through proliferating antagonisms and new forms of political identity – ever since the French Revolution (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). For many scholars, these developments should be celebrated. The old politics was not only passive, high-cost, and exclusive for citizens but also struggled to deal with new governability problems, e.g. environmental destruction (Micheletti 2003). The new politics is active, flexible, and inclusive of traditionally excluded groups like women and the young. It is prefiguring a different politics that makes opportunities from the challenges faced by contemporary societies (Della Porta 2013).

This 'transformationalist case' (Norris 2002) is commonly used to critique research framed in terms of anti-politics and thus demands a full response. Our first reservation is that much of the literature on democratisation is overly sociological, structuralist, and evolutionary in character (e.g. Bang 2005, Beck 1992, Childers 2012, Dalton 2009, Giddens 1991, Inglehart 1997). Arguments tend to begin with modernisation and its two main component parts: industrialisation/economic development and bureaucratisation/expansion of the welfare state. These structural changes in society are thought to result in changes to, or adaptations by, citizens and politics – seen in a decline of deference, individualisation, a rise of post-materialist values, and the emergence of new political issues, identities, and movements (Giddens' 'life politics', Beck's 'sub-politics', Inglehart's 'evolved democracy', Bang's 'everyday makers', or Dalton's 'engaged citizenship').

These arguments are convincing, but only up to a point. They leave little room for political agency; for the construction of citizenship by political projects. Yet from histories of national citizenship, we should expect forms of citizenship to emerge not only from bottom-up demands for rights, as in T. H. Marshall's (1950) influential account of the historical development of citizenship in Britain, but also from top-down attempts to create capitalist markets and loyal populations. We see this in Benedict Anderson's (1983) global account of the creation and naturalisation of national citizenship around the turn of the nineteenth century. Key actors for Anderson were elites concerned to replace the loss of religious community, to replace the automatic legitimacy that was lost with the decline of sacral monarchy, and to establish markets of reading publics for book and newspaper publishing. We see it in Eric Hobsbawm's (1990) account of how national citizenship was mobilised from the late 1800s by elites seeking loyalty and consent via 'ideological engineering' (especially through national education systems). More recently, Clive Barnett and colleagues (2011) have shown how political consumerism, a commonly used example of the new politics of the current period, did not simply follow from structural changes in society (cf. Micheletti 2003) but was actively constructed by social movement organisations looking for new ways to demonstrate support for their values and policy recommendations.

Our second reservation is perhaps more important. There would seem to be little empirical evidence for the claim that positivity towards informal politics is compensating for negativity towards formal politics. Who are these evolved citizens practising an evolved form of politics? In the case of the UK, they are only a minority of the overall population. Paul Whiteley (2012) found this minority to be significant for low-cost

activities like signing petitions or buying products for political reasons. He found it to be small for higher-cost activities like working in voluntary organisations. In addition, participation in alternative forms of political action does not seem to be growing. Globally, the evidence suggests that protest is not on the rise (Stoker et al. 2011). Certainly in the UK, this lack of growth applies not only to protesting and demonstrating but also to volunteering, donating, and signing petitions (Whiteley 2012). Finally, and crucially, the minority who do practise these new forms of politics tend also to practise the older forms. Put differently, the new forms should not be seen as alternatives to the old forms but as part of an expanded repertoire of political action for citizens already engaged in traditional ways. This was found by Norris et al. (2006) when studying demonstrations in Belgium. On average, demonstrators were more likely to be supportive of the political system than non-demonstrators. It was also found by Saunders (2014) in her Europe-wide study. Citizens involved in demonstrations, protests, petitions, and boycotts were less likely to express anti-political feeling than other citizens. The broader point – that negativity towards formal politics is not being compensated for by positivity towards informal politics – is also supported by evidence from the newer democracies of Europe and South America. Here, Torcal and Lago (2006) found that political disaffection had a demobilising effect – through the mechanism of lower political information acquisition and processing – not only on 'conventional' modes of participation but also on 'non-conventional' modes (i.e. informal politics).

Our final reservation derives from our normative and functional evaluation of post-modern forms of political action. Let us bracket, for a moment, the question of whether new forms of politics are replacing older forms. If they were, would that be something to celebrate without any need to lament the passing of the old? We think not. 'Governance beyond the state' lacks the socially agreed rules – e.g. one person, one vote – that make formal politics relatively transparent, accountable, and fair (Swyngedouw 2005). New social movements tend to articulate interests without aggregating them, which is what parties traditionally have done and which has traditionally allowed for coherent public policy (Dalton 2004, Pattie et al. 2004). Furthermore, because new social movements focus primarily on interest articulation, they depend on a functioning formal politics to be effective. This is what narratives of transformation often miss: that formal and informal politics are largely interdependent. We see this in research on the political opportunity structures of social movements (e.g. Tarrow 1998, Tilly 2004). These political environments vary historically and sometimes provide democratic opportunities for citizens, with social movements relying on

governments as objects of claims, allies, or monitors of contention. We see this interdependence in Frances Fox Piven (2006), for whom change is achieved by ordinary people through the interplay of 'disruptive power' and electoral politics – not least because disruptive power is more potent when the electorate is more inclusive and elections are fairer. We also see it in Amin and Thrift (2013), for whom leadership and institutions – the stuff of old, conventional politics – are needed by any political movement intent on sustaining momentum and cementing gains. We even see this interdependence in one of the key sociological texts of the transformationalist literature. Anthony Giddens (1991) foregrounds the rise of life politics but notes that emancipation is a necessary condition for this politics of choice or lifestyle. He describes life politics as a supplementation rather than a replacement for emancipatory politics.

To summarise this last set of points, one of the reasons why anti-politics matters is because, far from replacing formal politics, much of informal politics depends on a functioning formal politics for its freedoms and achievements. In this view, democracy requires a balance. This balance is between the 'subject' and 'participant' political cultures identified by Almond and Verba (1963). It is between the 'solid old parties' and 'flexible new movements' of Crouch (2004). It is between Russell Dalton's (2009) 'duty citizenship', which allows governments to act but fails to make them responsive to the concerns of citizens, and 'engaged citizenship', which makes governments responsive but can paralyse governments by subjecting them to multiple and contradictory demands. It is between the concerns of radicals – voice and participation – and pragmatists: coordination, collective and binding decision-making, the exercise of rule (Barnett and Bridge 2013). Our concern is that such a balance is now under threat from the rise of anti-politics across much of the world.