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1. [Replace \(Ins\)](#) Tool – for replacing text.

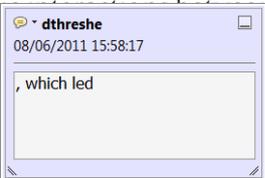


Strikes a line through text and opens up a text box where replacement text can be entered.

How to use it

- Highlight a word or sentence.
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standard framework for the analysis of microeconomic activity. Nevertheless, it also led to the development of a number of strategic approaches to the analysis of the number of competitors in an industry. One of the main components of this framework is that the structure of an industry, its main components, and the level of competition are all important factors in determining the important variables of the industry. (M. Henceforth) we open the 'black b



2. [Strikethrough \(Del\)](#) Tool – for deleting text.



Strikes a red line through text that is to be deleted.

How to use it

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- Click on the [Strikethrough \(Del\)](#) icon in the Annotations section.

there is no room for extra profits as mark-ups are zero and the number of firms (net) values are not determined by market structure. Blanchard ~~and Kiyotaki~~ (1987), perfect competition in general equilibrium. The effects of aggregate demand and supply shocks in a classical framework assuming monopolistic competition and an exogenous number of firms

3. [Add note to text](#) Tool – for highlighting a section to be changed to bold or italic.



Highlights text in yellow and opens up a text box where comments can be entered.

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- Highlight the relevant section of text.
- Click on the [Add note to text](#) icon in the Annotations section.
- Type instruction on what should be changed regarding the text into the yellow box that appears.

dynamic responses of mark-ups are consistent with the VAR evidence

sation of the industry. The number of firms in the industry is determined by the standard framework for the analysis of microeconomic activity. Nevertheless, it also led to the development of a number of strategic approaches to the analysis of the number of competitors in an industry. One of the main components of this framework is that the structure of an industry, its main components, and the level of competition are all important factors in determining the important variables of the industry. (M. Henceforth) we open the 'black b



4. [Add sticky note](#) Tool – for making notes at specific points in the text.

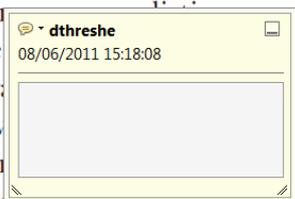


Marks a point in the proof where a comment needs to be highlighted.

How to use it

- Click on the [Add sticky note](#) icon in the Annotations section.
- Click at the point in the proof where the comment should be inserted.
- Type the comment into the yellow box that appears.

and supply shocks. Most of the evidence is consistent with the VAR evidence. The number of firms in the industry is determined by the standard framework for the analysis of microeconomic activity. Nevertheless, it also led to the development of a number of strategic approaches to the analysis of the number of competitors in an industry. One of the main components of this framework is that the structure of the sector



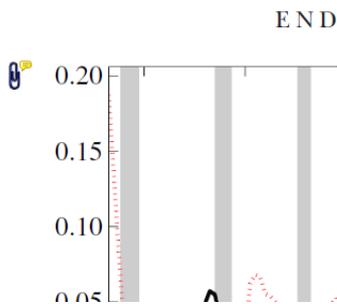
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How to use it

- Click on the **Attach File** icon in the Annotations section.
- Click on the proof to where you'd like the attached file to be linked.
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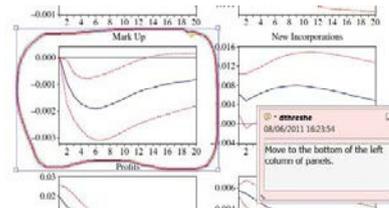


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In Defence of British Politics Against the British Political Tradition

1 DAVID RICHARDS AND MARTIN J. SMITH

Abstract

This article explores some of the current themes round the perceived crisis in British politics in a perceived age of 'anti-politics'. Drawing on Bernard Crick's *In Defence of Politics*, it offers a critique of what is referred to as a dominant British political tradition and in so doing seeks to challenge 'demand-side' accounts that ostensibly defend the traditional arena politics of the Westminster system. Instead, it argues that developments around issues such as big data, social media and freedom of information have led to a more open society in recent years. It concludes by suggesting that if traditional political institutions wish to restore a greater degree of legitimacy, they need to 'do' or, more particularly, 'supply' politics differently, adapting to these changes by seeking out new modes of openness, engagement and accountability.

Keywords: anti-politics, British political tradition, democracy, accountability, open society, transparency

Introduction: The 'disorders of the present time'

SINCE *Political Quarterly's* 2012 special edition on the 'contemporary relevance' of Bernard Crick's *In Defence of Politics*, the British political scene has gone through a turbulent period. A spate of ongoing institutional crises have further fanned disillusionment with traditional forms of politics. Understanding why is both a challenging and complex task, yet it is possible to argue that two broadly contrasting approaches have emerged: the first tends to frame crisis as being predominantly that of 'demand' (in terms of the expectations of citizens); conversely, the second regards crisis predominantly as a matter of 'supply' (in terms of the state and its related institutions' ability to deliver politics).¹

In terms of the first approach, for some commentators, a climate of 'anti-politics' and the problem of political disengagement lies not with the political system and its elite, but instead can be explained by what is regarded as a growth in unrealistic 'demands' placed on the democratic process. It suggests an unappreciative citizenship has

emerged, one that fails to recognise the difficulties of governing, the dedication of politicians and the realities of hard choices in government. Also thrown into this particular mix are suggestions that the cynicism of the media (and even comedy) and an explosion of accountability (too much democracy) have cultivated a disrespectful political culture that is in danger of undermining democracy.

Yet in diagnosing what Crick would have referred to as 'the disorders of the present time', the view we offer in this article is markedly different, anchored instead on accounts critiquing the way British politics is supplied.² We suggest that the reason for growing disillusionment with politics is that it is seen as a particular form of activity undertaken by specific groups in defined arenas that has little relevance to the lives of ordinary people. Moreover, we argue that Britain's governing class has been slow to adapt to the 'information age', in which the closed decision-making practices of the past are no longer deemed legitimate. We suggest the need for a fundamental shift to the micro-politics of everyday life. People may not have much interest in David Cameron or

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electing a police commissioner, but they do care that they are safe when they leave their houses, that the streets are clean and that their children receive a good education. Politics and its adversarial battles, defections, deceptions and deals are not important to most citizens. What citizens see is not *politics* but everyday problems of collective action, and their engagement may be partial because there is a growing disconnect with the way politics is currently defined and supplied by Westminster.

Our argument is that much of the debate about political disengagement has confused politicisation and democratisation. The extant literature has a limited definition of democracy, seeing it as citizens engaging with the political conflict of the Westminster arena. From our perspective, this is a process of politicisation where issues are defined through the spectrum of political positioning, rather than democratic deliberation. Democratisation, on the other hand, is about engaging citizens in a wider process of decision-making and giving them control over their own lives. Consequently, we are sceptical of the demand-side position that the failure of political engagement is a consequence of over-inflated voter expectations. Instead, we draw on the recent spate of scandals concerning Parliament, the banks, the police and the media to argue that the problem of engagement is a supply-side issue stemming from the failure of decision-makers to properly take account of the interests and wishes of the electorate. Consequently, we conclude that there is an urgent need to do politics differently ~~to~~ allow people ways of engaging in the things that matter to them, which is not understood simply in terms of why they should vote and which takes account of the information explosion that is changing the relationship between citizens and policy-makers.

In defence of politicians: the demand-side perspective

Our starting point, then, is to set out what we regard as the inadequacies of the demand-side approach in explaining the perceived problems currently besetting British politics. In diagnosing the climate of

anti-politics, a growing number of commentators, most notably Peter Riddell and Matthew Flinders, offer a defence of the political class. Flinders, for example, suggests a 'bad faith model of politics' is with us, caused by a surge in consumer-like pressures being placed at the feet of the political class.³ The net result is, for Peter Riddell, an emergent 'expectations gap' in which '... voters have unrealistic beliefs and hopes about what the political system can deliver for them'.⁴

There are various dimensions to what can be labelled a 'demand-side' set of arguments, but they can be distilled into three prominent themes:

- *The rise of the citizen consumer*: citizens are acting as consumers rather than political actors.⁵ Peter Riddell, for example, suggests that marketisation and commodification of the state and politics have 'encouraged people to demand levels of service provision that would commonly be provided only in the private sector... thereby inflating public expectations far beyond what the state or politics was intended, expected or resourced to provide'.
- *Governance, complexity and rising expectations*: this concerns the range and complexity of issues governments are now expected to address. Governing in the twenty-first century is seen as a more complex and demanding task, leading Flinders to conclude that the 'public's expectations of politics have grown even greater, as have the range of issues which politicians are expected to shoulder responsibilities'. To compound this issue, not only does government have to operate in an increasingly complex, multilevel governance setting, but the often individualised and specialised challenges laid at its door have exponentially grown and in some cases become nigh on intractable to resolve. Stoker for example cites 'the impact of globalisation and the technological challenges we face [which mean] that doing politics in the twenty-first century is hard'. For Flinders, the advance of science has heightened 'social anxieties' and by implication heaped added pressure on government. Elsewhere, the erosion of

'fate' means politicians are expected to 'prevent, manage and respond... to natural disasters... to alleviate both the likelihood and consequence of events... which would for most of the twentieth century have existed beyond the realm of democratic politics'. The cumulative effect of these forces has led to a view that there has been an exponential growth in public expectations placed on government.

- *Decline in civic virtues and the need for democratic [re]-education*: this concerns a perceived decline in civic virtues and with it the rise of an anti-politics generation of non-voters. For example, Flinders suggests that an older generation who experienced total war has a greater respect for and appreciation of the value of democracy. This is then contrasted with the disengagement of a younger generation 'that has become complacent and parochial, and... forgotten the alternatives to democratic politics'. The net result is that the electorate ends up with the type of politics [and politicians] it deserves.

This theme often draws on the various surveys of the decline in younger generations' participation in formal arena politics—party membership, voting, etc. A variety of debates are invoked concerning changing lifestyle choices that are seen as habit-forming at an early age and as having a subsequent, path-dependent effect on levels of civic engagement. In a similar vein, the point is also made that there is a gap between the rhetorical commitment by citizens to act and the reality of their propensity to actually engage.

What binds these arguments together is a view that an increasingly skewed relationship between the governors and the governed has emerged in which individuals have an acute sense of their rights but an under-developed understanding of their reciprocal democratic responsibilities. The conclusion is that Britain's existing model of representative democracy, warts and all, remains the 'least worst' form of government. The logic of such an analysis leads to a rejection of the need for a major overhaul in the UK's existing democratic and governance arrangements—for the underpinning driver of these various accounts is that

democratic politics ultimately is about a political class having to make difficult, often unpopular choices over the allocation of a scarce set of resources.

For Flinders, then, the diagnoses offered for the current crisis of politics fall mainly on the need to [re]-educate the demos in what it should expect from contemporary democratic politics:

Could it be that if politics is failing it is easy to blame the politicians? Could it be actually that the public is to blame? I cannot help thinking that the public is fickle; that they want pain free solutions to complex problems where none exist. They don't want politicians; they want supermen and superwoman that will find the magic wand, the technological fix, the pain free solutions.

Yet this [demand-side] defence of politics, unlike Bernard Crick's original contribution, has a fundamental confusion at its heart. There is little evidence to suggest that the public expect simple solutions. Moreover, as Seymour points out, an intriguing aspect of recent policies is a weary acceptance of austerity politics and the apparent realisation that government cannot keep spending.⁶ Similarly, the debate leading up to the 2014 Scottish referendum revealed that people are prepared to engage in complex political debate where they feel it has relevance. The demand-side argument potentially provides legitimation for an outdated, elitist form of politics which, it can be argued, is actually at the heart of the present disillusionment with formal politics. Rather than return to a mythical age of respect for institutional politics, the emphasis should be on thinking about how to accommodate and develop new and different forms of politics. As we argue below, the problem may not be with 'the public' or politicians, but instead with the institutions and a political culture where people are predominantly excluded from decision-making. Disillusionment from this perspective is then unsurprising.

Identifying the problem: public, politics or politicians?

The politics of not voting

A major concern for commentators has been declining turnout. The problem of the demand-

side approach is that electoral abstinance is seen as a failure of the electorate and not the political system. It is an approach that Saramago's novel *Seeing* parodies; his rulers, when faced with a mass of blank votes, decide that the people have to be taught a lesson and shown that they need to appreciate their governing class, for failure to vote is subverting and betraying the democratic process. Hence the problem is not the process or the government, but the voters. Yet it is arguable that, at least for some, non-voting is a consciously democratic act, because to vote is to legitimise a system that electors do not see as fair or democratic.

Others do not vote, or at least have stopped voting for the traditional mainstream parties, because of a growing sense that their vote makes little difference and/or that Westminster's established parties no longer represent their interests. Ford and Goodwin's study of the rise of UKIP captures this dynamic in what they refer to as the 'left behind': those who are 'on the wrong side of social change, are struggling on stagnant incomes, feel threatened by the way their communities and country are changing, and are furious at an established politics that appears not to understand or even care about their concerns'.⁷ Here, abstentionism, or voting for populist, insurgent parties such as UKIP, is not explained by civic decadence, but instead is understood as an explicitly political act.

Elsewhere, the low turnout for the 2012 election of police commissioners represented both the failure of politicians to make the vote relevant and a rejection of a politicisation of policy. Here, non-voting could be explained as a sign of an intelligent and reflexive electorate not prepared to vote for an ill-explained and ill-justified politicisation of police decision-making.

In Saramago's novel, the main aim for the political leaders is to persuade 'the degenerates, delinquents and subversives who had cast the blank votes, to acknowledge the error of their ways and to beg for the mercy and the penance of a new election to which, at the chosen time they would rush en masse to purge themselves of the sins of a folly they would never dare to repeat'.⁸ Similar sentiments are echoed by those, like Flinders, who argue that the public do not

hate politics, 'but they do not understand it'. If enlightened, they will look on politicians in a new, benign light and the normal process of politics can resume, in which people dutifully vote for and respect their leaders.

To avoid the trap of demonising non-voters as 'decadent', in Flinders' provocative phrase, the starting point then is *not* to focus on ways to persuade voters that elections are good for them. A healthy democracy requires people to have confidence first in parties being able to represent their interests (and so that politicians are not just 'in it for themselves'), and second that voting will make a difference. There is a need to re-imagine the political institutions and culture, so that the people build a genuine political participation, where they are trusted to be involved in decision-making and not just rubber-stamping the appointment of a new government. Under the present electoral system there is little rational reason to vote, when so few votes actually determine the outcome.

What do 'the public' actually think?

One of the core assumptions of the demand-side approach is that the electorate expects too much of the government. However, such a position treats the public as a unitary agent, when it is clear that different people have different expectations; additionally, the evidence to support the expectations thesis is thin. It fails to outline what is reasonable for citizens to expect from government.

An oft-repeated yet unsubstantiated view is that the public have 'an ideological commitment to limited government' but are at the same time demanding ever more from government—the nub of what is presented as an 'expectations gap'. However, Whiteley⁹ offers a revealing account of citizens' changing attitudes over time toward what they expect from government. His analysis is particularly relevant as it is drawn from extensive data sets provided over a twenty-year period by the International Social Survey Programme Role of Government Studies collected in 1985, 1990, 1996 and 2006. Crucially, this data (see Table 1.1) reveals that individual perceptions of what is expected

Table 1.1: Changes in perceptions of government responsibility 1985–2006

<i>Government definitely should do the following:</i>	1985 (%)	1990 (%)	1996 (%)	2006 (%)
Provide healthcare for the sick	86	85	82	71
Provide a decent living standard for the old	79	78	71	60
Impose strict laws to protect the environment	–	–	62	48
Provide financial help to students	–	49	37	34
Keep prices under control	61	49	42	32
Help industry to grow	54	43	40	29
Reduce income differences between rich and poor	48	42	35	27
Provide affordable housing	–	–	62	48
Provide a job for everyone who wants one	38	24	28	17
Provide a decent living standard for the unemployed	45	32	28	11

from government over time have fallen, not risen.

Whiteley concludes that there has been a cumulative decline in the electorate's expectations of what government should be providing:

Over a period of years the UK population has grown more conservative in feeling that government should do less... The trends suggest that Britons are gradually moving away from the belief that the state should provide health, welfare and education... people are less inclined to turn to government to solve their problems.

Why defend the British political tradition?

At the heart of the demand-side account is a failure to reflect on the British political tradition (BPT) and the model of democracy it offers. The core argument, led by Flinders, is that people are 'disillusioned with democracy because they feel that it does not deliver', but that the political class does its best, so 'carping from the side-lines and blaming politicians for failing to deliver painless solutions to painful questions is simply too easy'. In other words, the public fail to appreciate how lucky they are to live in a stable political system where politicians work selflessly for the good of the public. The problem has become one not of too little democracy but too much, as politicians clamour to satisfy the overinflated demands of a politically naïve electorate (effectively rehashing the 'overload thesis' of the 1970s). Politics has descended into little more than a 'retail

activity' operating as an online 'click-and-collect' model, 'where you make your choice and expect your goods to arrive. And if you don't get what you want, it has become too easy to heckle... from the sidelines'. The implication is that Britain's long-established and rich democratic tradition has been eroded and replaced by a more cynical, thinner, consumerist-style polity.

This argument fails to define democracy or even demonstrate the existence of the 'click and collect' model. It is also underpinned by an implicitly eurocentric set of assumptions that beyond the safety of the West, people live in a state of fear. It ignores the fact that Britain essentially sustained a nineteenth-century model of elitist democracy that did what it was intended to do—deliver stability, continuity and order. The BPT, as Tony Wright observes, prioritises strong government over accountability and participation.¹⁰ This in a way is the fatal flaw of such a tradition: what happens when a system of strong government based on a view that the rulers know best fails to maintain the respect of the electorate? The British system is based on a uniform, elitist and top-down approach which was once lauded for its ongoing stability, continuity and ingenuity.¹¹ Yet it is a tradition organised around a set of principles that do not 'so much disdain deliberation as ignore it altogether... [and is] not concerned with promoting the value or principle of citizen participation'.¹²

The substantial accrual of power at the centre of the UK government, sustained by a bi-partisan consensus has, as numerous critics have observed, remained largely unchallenged.¹³ Both the executive and the

legislature have operated within a self-regulating arena legitimised on the grounds that it protects against outside, potentially undemocratic, influence. This *modus operandi* can be traced back to the nineteenth century where, alongside the emergence of a new democratic settlement, was seen the embedding of what Moran¹⁴ refers to as a system of 'club regulation' among the UK's political elite, but also of what Vincent¹⁵ identifies as the principle of 'honourable secrecy'.

The starting point, then, to diagnosing the current problems besetting British politics does not reside in a defence of the way in which politics is supplied, and with it an implicit defence of the virtues of the British political tradition, for it is rooted in a flawed understanding of both cause and effect. Instead, the argument can be made that the perceived crises occurring within British politics are linked to the emergence of twenty-first century expectations, technologies and transparency challenging a nineteenth-century model of democracy and participation.

Demystifying the British political tradition: the supply-side critique

We suggest that to understand the source of contemporary political disengagement from formal politics, it is crucial to recognise that for too long political elites have been making decisions without reference to the public. The role of the electorate has been to do little more than legitimise policies and not to be involved in politics. We do not live in an era of 'hyper-democracy', but if anything, the opposite. There is a perversity attached to the view rehearsed by Flinders that Britain has 'too much democracy'. Its underpinning rationale is that voter-driven politicians over-promise which leads to political failure and disillusion. Hence we need to allow politicians the freedom to govern and acknowledge the importance of politics to our lives. We need more politics and less democracy.

We argue the opposite: that there is too much politics and not enough democracy. The demand-side view wants to allow politicians to govern, but that is the root of the problem. A less acknowledged consequence of Thatcherism has been the politicisation of public life. For instance, rather than privatisation depoliticising the provision of utilities,

it has made the provision of transport, water and energy highly political. Likewise, in the postwar years trade unions were a part of the fabric of everyday life, from the shop floor to Number 10, but in the 1980s the role of unions was explicitly politicised in a 'them or us' sense; you were either for or against unions, and their defeat saw the rejection of a politics of compromise and resulted in their exclusion from decision-making.

With the politicisation of the Thatcher years, politics became an argument between elites and not the politics of conciliation that Crick advocated: the public are shut out, and so of course they disengage. Everything becomes political because it is always the subject of controversy. Paradoxically, one of the legacies of the shift from a postwar consensus through Thatcherism to a post-Thatcherite settlement is a political system that has not been depoliticised but over-politicised, as politicians argue about every aspect of policy. One example—and there are legion—is education policy. Education has become the ground for politicised policies, where politicians try to adapt education to their priorities and/or ideologies. Teachers, parents and pupils, who should be engaged with decisions about education, are increasingly the passive recipients of Whitehall fiat. They are not the source of policy changes but the subjects—they have almost no input into the political process. Education policy becomes an elite-driven project where politicians effectively berate the providers and consumers of education. As education becomes subject to ideological warfare through a process of politicisation, the disillusionment of those involved in receiving services but not in shaping decisions is clear to understand.

The problem is that politics is being both confused and conflated with democracy. So an argument between parties about education policy is seen as the democratic process because it is a conflict of political interests. However, a democratic process would be one that engaged those affected by education policies and worked towards solutions that accommodated a range of views while protecting the quality of education for children. In the current system, political outcomes are not a messy compromise but a consequence

of power. Britain's majoritarian system is one in which politicians often do not need to compromise; indeed, there is little reason to take account of the opposition. Voters' disillusionment with institutional politics is a consequence not of the citizens' failings but of the failings of the British political process. Crucially, the recent contagion of crises besetting many of Britain's major institutions has exposed a particular set of pathologies, in what we term an emergent clash of two cultures.

A clash of two cultures

What is fascinating about the British political (and economic) system is the everyday operation of institutions. There has been an ongoing series of revelations about political institutions making decisions in secret that are subsequently exposed as dubious and, in some cases, explicitly deceitful or even illegal. As we highlight in *Institutional Crisis in Twenty-First Century Britain*, a familiar pattern of events has occurred across a range of UK institutions, with notable examples including the scandal around Jimmy Savile, the falsification of evidence in relation to the Hillsborough disaster, the manipulation of mortality statistics in hospitals, MPs' expenses, a range of banking scandals around mis-selling products and manipulating the Libor rate and, of course, issues around phone hacking and the links between the media and the political elite.

The banking crisis and the crisis over MPs' expenses are illustrative of the problems of the broader institutional framework. In both cases a system of self-regulation was put in place where effectively the banks (through shareholders) and MPs (through voters) were held to account for outcomes and not processes. So both the bankers and MPs designed their own systems, which were self-regulated and based on internal accountability. As a result, there was a disconnect between the internal legitimations of their behaviour and how that behaviour was perceived externally. The shock came when the behaviour was revealed and citizens deemed unacceptable what seemed a reasonable form of behaviour to the actors involved. The crisis was a result of clashing cultures which fed the distrust of voters. This distrust was not the result of

over-expectation or decadence, but a consequence of elites abusing their privileges.

Such is the nature and regularity of these events that it is difficult to dismiss them as cases of 'bad apples' or one-offs. These crises have occurred because of the way that the British version of democracy and accountability is embedded in everyday activity. As Moran's detailed, historical account of the British approach to regulation reveals, the norm is for 'club governance', in which institutions make decisions according to their own rules and then regulate the implementation of the rules.

Such a system worked when the process of decision-making, and in many cases the decisions made, were not revealed; allegations of sexual abuse by Cyril Smith and Jimmy Savile were known among the elite but never made public. As Richards, Smith and Hay observe, when rulers were left to rule, the hallmark was secretive decision-making and self-regulation. These current crises have occurred because the world has changed and citizens are increasingly gaining insights into the inner works of institutions. Notable examples of this change include the actual role of the police in Ian Tomlinson's death being revealed by mobile phone footage, the extent of internet surveillance by government being revealed by Edward Snowden's leaks and the challenges presented to various governmental, religious and corporate organisations through the hacking activities of the Anonymous group. Ironically, a combination of new public management and digitisation has opened up a world of information that allows citizens and social movements to analyse previously closed institutions in more detail.

Tony Wright makes the point that politicians and decision-makers are more accountable than ever before.¹⁶ Similarly, Flinders sees the demands of accountability 'binding the hands of politicians'. But it is hard to see how democracy and accountability can be separated. Inquiries, select committees, the media, whistleblowers and cyber-hackers are revealing information in ways that would have been unimaginable thirty years ago. For some, ~~this is tying the hands~~ of politicians. As Tony Blair says, he wishes he had not introduced the Freedom of Information Act—a view echoed by Gus O'Donnell, his

last Cabinet Secretary. We can see that the openness leads to disillusionment, but the failure comes from a world of closed decision-making and institutions' lack of adaptation to an open world.

The disillusionment occurs because the political processes have not caught up with the informational challenges of the digital age. This complex and multilayered phenomenon has in recent times been addressed from a number of often competing perspectives, notably by the likes of Andrew Chadwick, Pippa Norris, Matthew Hindmann and John Keane.¹⁷ But recent, empirical manifestations of this debate can be understood, for example, through the ways in which the public obtained details of the Rotherham child abuse scandal, the operation of phone hacking by parts of the press or the deceptions of Hillsborough. The solution cannot be to put the genie back in the bottle; rather, politics must change how it works and relates to citizens. Prime Minister's Question Time continues to operate in the same form that it did in the nineteenth century. It may be a mechanism of accountability, but it is one that has little relevance to ordinary voters because it is a hermetically sealed theatre of politics. Macmillan's observation in the 1950s symbolises a view of politics that still has relevance today:

I didn't mind even losing a by-election or bother too much with the outside world, if you can once impress upon the House of Commons that the government is strong and the prime minister is in control... then gradually it begins to go out into the country as the members go back to their constituencies.¹⁸

For more than a decade, proclamations of a new age of digital democracy have been exposed as somewhat wide of the mark. Nevertheless, it is clear that while the internet does not resolve the problems of democracy (it may make some things better and others worse), it has become an important resource for challenging government. For instance, it is relatively easy for political groups to distribute information that challenges official discourses. Increasingly, political debate is conducted through social media channels—blogs, Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube, etc. Hacktivists and organisations like Wikileaks and Anonymous have the means to provide information and an

approach to traditional forms of politics that creates radical challenges to governments. These may at the moment be used by a minority, but they are part of a potential shift in the balance of power from the traditional institutions of politics—parties, government, Whitehall etc.—to allowing a wider, more diverse group to be involved in influencing policy.

The past decade has seen a notable range of developments which are opening up information and how it is used, highlights of which include:

- The Freedom of Information (FoI) act—used as a political and journalistic tool to reveal the decisions and processes of institutions (for example, an FoI application by Heather Brook led to the revelations about MPs' expense claims).
- The proliferation of smartphones and tablets, which means that footage taken by citizens can increasingly be used to challenge 'official' narratives of institutions.
- Social media, which can be used to challenge institutions through the collection and distilling of information, revealing alternative accounts, organising action and creating political processes. Many of the crises, for example that in the NHS, have been disclosed as the result of whistleblowers, who have increasingly become political actors, no longer prepared to conform to an institution's organisational logic;
- The digitisation and availability of vast amounts of data, which allows detailed analysis of the performance of organisations.
- Citizens' increased willingness to engage in political protest and unwillingness to accept formal institutional accounts.

Hitherto, the relationship of politicians with citizens has effectively been uni-dimensional, through voting. The emergence of a new, more open, digital society at least provides the potential for more complex political relationships with vastly different time horizons. Citizens are able to challenge information and have new ways of setting the political debate.

The development of what can be understood as an increasingly bottom-up insurgency,

through the development of a more open, digitally informed society, exposes a pathology in Britain's political institutions: they were established at a time of closed information and effectively were empowered to make decisions without external validation. New sources of information reveal many unacceptable practices and have contributed to a broader crisis of trust. Organisations make mistakes or act erroneously when they make decisions in closed arenas. As the Global Accountability Report suggests:

Where accountability mechanisms are effective, people are more likely to feel their needs are being taken into account. Greater transparency of decision-making can assist that as it will help to build trust in political processes. This trust is increased if feedback loops are built into decision-making processes so that decision-makers can learn from communities affected by their decisions and, in particular, learn from their mistakes in order to not to repeat them. Accountability mechanisms which enable greater involvement by the people who are most affected by the decisions results in greater ownership. A sense of ownership tends to lead to more relevant decision-making and better implementation.¹⁹

Flinders suggests there is too much democracy and accountability in the UK. The conclusions drawn from Rotherham, Hillsborough, Bloody Sunday, BSE, MPs' expenses and so on indicate that in an age of deference and limited accountability, political leaders could act in dubious ways that paid little attention to public interest. Conversely, there is very little evidence across the world to suggest that if politicians are 'simply left to govern', they govern well. They govern well when they know that they have to answer for their actions. Indeed, Crick explicitly cites the lesson of Orwell's *Animal Farm*: the fault for the decline into dictatorship was not that of the elite, 'but [lay] rather in the excessive credulity and trust of the other animals in their leaders'.

The UK does not have a 'click and collect' democracy, but its electoral system means that politicians are targeting a limited number of pivotal voters who can influence the outcome of the election. Elections are aimed at a few who can make a difference and normally elections result in a marginal victor, taking all and so not needing to compro-

mise. British politics does not meet Crick's ideal body politic of conciliation and unity. A majoritarian electoral system and adversarial politics produces imposition and disunity rather than compromise and consensus. Crick's praise for politics was not for extant British politics but for a form of politics that does not exist in Britain. He saw politics as about developing the collective good where interests are reconciled without conflict. Yet formal British politics is more often about the imposition of sectional goods, not about some mythical, ill-defined notion that it has too much democracy.

The argument we offer, then, is that, *contra* the tenets of the British political tradition, accountability and transparency act as the bedrocks to build rather than undermine trust, and that if citizens are to be engaged, they need to have some ownership over decisions. To regain trust and to create proper forms of accountability, the British political system needs to start operating in ways that recognise an open information world. Decision-makers need to be immersed in a new culture of accountability shaped by the principle of questioning: if a decision or process is revealed, can it be defended? How does it look to those not involved in the process? The recognition of openness means that institutions have to accept that they are accountable for their decisions and can use this process to start to rebuild trust with citizens. The antidote to the current clash of two cultures is greater openness and transparency, which can increase public trust and lead to better decisions.

Conclusion: Doing politics differently

For Britain's political class and the defenders of traditional politics, politics occurs in an arena. The argument is that the demands of democracy and accountability are making life in that arena more difficult, and so it is easier for people to snipe rather than participate. The way to be involved in politics is to join that arena.

Our argument is different. The decline of parties, the rise of a professional political class, the erosion of deference alongside the emergence of a more digitally informed soci-

ety mean that politics is perceived to be increasingly disconnected from what citizens understand politics to be. Politics has to become an everyday activity—often removed from party decisions—where people and communities start to take responsibility for their own lives and where political leaders are clearly held to account and are open to questioning and even cynicism. As Crick observed, politics is a moral activity, and we should praise it for its ability to resolve conflict without resort to violence. But we cannot define politics as the activities of politicians within their arena. Politics has to be about the lives of ordinary people who are not politicians but have views, preferences and interests in collective outcomes.

There is then, as Tony Wright has suggested, a need to do politics differently:

... it is not a matter of dumping representative democracy... but of making it work better... Just giving someone a vote every few years and letting politicians get on with it is not an adequate model for a mature democracy... Now that the contents of the democratic toolkit are so enlarged, offering new opportunities for communication and involvement. This is a challenge for our political institutions, but also for the conduct of our politics as a whole, which can itself be democratised.

As a starting point to this debate, we would argue for two major changes:

- The first is the recognition by institutions that they are now making decisions in an increasingly open and digitally informed world. That even if they make decisions in private (which in certain cases they clearly have to), they should recognise that at some point those decisions (and the rationale behind them) may need to be publicly justified. Therefore every decision should be made on the basis that if it were open, it would be deemed as legitimate.
- The second is the development of a plurality of accountability mechanisms that both take account of digital media and which is sometimes direct and not necessarily mediated through institutions (as is the case with parliamentary accountability). A recent Hansard Society report on PMQs proposes that new technology could be used to allow citizens rather than MPs to ask questions at Prime Minister's Question

Time.²⁰ This is but one example of many forms of citizen-led accountability that could reinforce the openness of decision making.

New technology creates the opportunity to move away from nineteenth-century democracy. Technology can be used to change the way decisions are made, who and how citizens are involved and how institutions are held to account. This is already happening, with groups using social media, online petitions and mobile technologies as part of their campaigns. However, this process needs to be formalised. There is also a need for more user-friendly ways of analysing big data around government performance. Big data creates many new ways in which decisions can be opened up and critically reviewed. We also need much more explicit policies on leaks and whistleblowing, so that those who do reveal the inner workings of institutions are not criminalised. Fundamentally, the real change is about treating citizens as grown-ups and recognising that they can be privy to the details of the policy-making process, rather than seeking to provide the political class with more breathing space, so in effect providing an additional veil of secrecy round which they can continue their day-to-day business. The former would truly reflect a real era of hyper-democracy and, with it, a substantial set of claims round which to defend politics.

Notes

- 1 For an overview of this 'demand-side' literature see, for example, D. Richards, 'A crisis of expectation', in D. Richards, M. Smith and C. Hay (eds.), *Institutional Crisis in Twenty-First Century Britain*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2014 (and discussed further below).
- 2 B. Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, London, Penguin, 1962, p. 7.
- 3 This and the following discussion draws on M. Flinders, 'In defence of politics', *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 81, no. 3, 2010, pp. 309–26; M. Flinders, 'Daring to be a Daniel: the pathology of politicized accountability in a monitory democracy', *Administration & Society*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2011, pp. 595–619; M. Flinders, *Defending Politics: Why Democracy Matters in the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; M. Flinders, 'In defence of politics: fifty years on', *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 83, no. 4,

- 2012, pp. 639–44; *Do We Have Too Much Democracy*, 2 July 2014, <http://www.crickcentre.org/>, ³
- 4 This and the following discussion draws on P. Riddell, *In Defence of Politicians: In Spite of Themselves*, London, Biteback, 2011, p. 3.
- 5 See for example C. Leys, *Market Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest*, London, Verso Books, 2003; C. Pattie, P. Seyd and P. Whiteley, *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004; G. Stoker, *Why Politics Matters: Making Democracy Work*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006 (further discussed below).
- 6 R. Seymour, *Against Austerity*, London, Pluto Press, 2014.
- 7 R. Ford and M. Goodwin, *Revolt on the Right: Explaining the Support for the Radical Right in Britain*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 34.
- 8 This and the following discussion draws on J. Saramago, *Seeing*, London, Vintage, 2004.
- 9 P. Whiteley, *Political Participation in Britain*, London, Palgrave, 2012, pp. 15–33.
- 10 This and the following discussion draws on T. Wright, *Doing Politics*, London, Biteback, 2012.
- 11 See for example M. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, Indianapolis, Liberty Press, 1962; A. Birch, *Representative and Responsible Government*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1964; S. Beer, *Modern British Politics*, London, Faber and Faber, 1965; W. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition: The Rise of Collectivism*, vols. 1 and 2, London, Methuen, 1983; W. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition: A Much Governed Nation*, vol. 3, London, Methuen, 1987.
- 12 A. King, *The British Constitution*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 54.
- 13 This and the following discussion draws on T. Tant, *British Government: The Triumph of Elitism: A Study of the British Political Tradition and Its Major Challenges*, Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1993; M. Evans, *Constitution-Making and the Labour Party*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; D. Marsh and M. Hall, 'The British political tradition: explaining the fate of New Labour's constitutional reform agenda', *British Politics*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2007, pp. 215–38; D. Richards, *New Labour and the Civil Service: Reconstituting the Westminster Model*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; M. Hall, *Political Traditions and UK Politics*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2011; P. Diamond and D. Richards, 'The case for methodological and theoretical pluralism in British political studies: New Labour's political memoirs and the British political tradition', *Political Studies Review*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2012, pp. 177–94.
- 14 This and the following discussion draws on M. Moran, *The British Regulatory State: High Modernism and Hyper-Innovation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.
- 15 D. Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy in Britain 1832–1998*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.
- 16 T. Wright, 'Broken Politics', 2014, <http://www.politicalquarterly.org.uk/p/editors-blog.html>
- 17 A. Chadwick, *Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006; A. Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013; M. Hindmann, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, New Jersey, Princeton, 2009; P. Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; J. Keane, *Democracy and Media Decadence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013. ⁴
- 18 M. White, 'The history of PMQs', *The Guardian*, 27 October 2011.
- 19 Global Accountability Report, *Power Without Accountability*, 2003, http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news03_e/gar2003_e.pdf ⁵
- 20 Hansard Society, *Turned-In or Turned Off? Public Attitudes to Prime Minister's Questions*, 2014, <http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Tuned-in-or-Tuned-off-Public-attitudes-to-PMQs.pdf> ⁶

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