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doi:10.1017/S1537592710001337

In recent years we have witnessed, paradoxically, both an increase in the number of democratic countries *and* a growing dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy, even in the most "advanced democracies." This paradox has animated much debate among students of politics about the viability of contemporary democracy. Addressing these debates, Pierre Rosanvallon opens his book by noting that "the democratic ideal now reigns unchallenged, but regimes claiming to be democratic come in for vigorous criticism almost everywhere," warning that "In this paradox resides the major political problems of our time" (p. 1). This well-informed and stimulating volume represents a major reflection on the turn-of-the-century challenges and opportunities facing democracies. The recent emergence of new concepts—such as *Post-Democracy* (Crouch 2005) or, now, *Counter-Democracy*—is a response to both the reduced capacity for intervention of elected politicians and citizens' growing dissatisfaction with their performance.

In addressing the challenges to contemporary democracies, Rosanvallon, however, does not limit himself to outlining the various components of a critical syndrome; he also reflects on the specific *conception* of democracy that is put into question. While in fact some scholars hoped that the triumph of democracy would bring about not simply peace and prosperity but also a shared definition of the term itself, Rosanvallon insists that "the history of *real* democracies has always involved tension and conflict" (p. 3) regarding the very meaning of the concept.

An original and valuable contribution of *Counter-Democracy* to the problematization of the definition of democracy passes through the distinction between *legitimacy,* considered as a juridical, procedural attribute, and *trust,* conceived of as the invisible institution that expands legitimacy, involving a *moral* dimension of integrity and a *substantive* dimension related to the pursuit of the common good. As stressed in the subtitle of the volume, the current democratic malaise is especially linked to widespread *mistrust.* As confirmed over and over again by extensive empirical research, trust in real democracy as a regime based upon electoral accountability is limited by widespread phenomena such as the decline of electoral participation, but also by the deep transformations of the political parties. The decline of party members and, especially, activists (with the related spread of memberless and personalized parties) and the weakening of party loyalties (with the increase in electoral volatility and opinion voting) are tangible signs of these transformations.

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By distinguishing between legitimacy and trust, Rosanvallon goes beyond the list of challenges to representative democracies, also singling out some new and important democratic opportunities. On his view, if mistrust is the disease, it might be part of the cure as well, as "a complex assortment of practical measures, checks and balances, and informal as well as institutional social counter-powers has evolved in order to *compensate for the erosion of confidence, and to do so by organizing distrust*" (p. 4; emphasis in original). The different elements of what Rosanvallon defines as "counter-democracy" do not represent "the opposite of democracy, but rather a form of democracy that reinforces the usual electoral democracy, a democracy of indirect powers disseminated through society—in other words, a durable democracy of distrust which complements the episodic democracy of the usual electoral representative system" (p. 8).

An important contribution of this volume is its linkage of counter-democracy to deep-rooted traditions of democratic theory and practice that go beyond electoral accountability. This emerges, for instance, in Rosanvallon's discussion of the powers of oversight. As he argues: "In order to understand the nature of such powers and trace them back to their inception, we must first recall that the idea of popular sovereignty found historical expression in two different ways. The first was the right to vote, the right of citizens to choose their own leaders. This was the most direct expression of the democratic principle. But the power to vote periodically and thus bestow legitimacy to an elected government is almost always accompanied by a wish to exercise a more permanent form of control over the government thus elected" (p. 12). This second conception of sovereignty found its incarnation in growing societal powers of sanction and prevention. In fact, the author argues, to fully understand the modern experience of democracy, we must consider not simply the "functions and dysfunctions" of electoral representative institutions but also the importance of the organization of distrust.

Rosanvallon thus highlights the diversity of conceptions of democracy, only one of which focuses on the value of electoral accountability. As he notes, equally important to the historical evolution of democracy has been the consolidation of a circuit of oversight anchored outside of state institutions. Indeed, if theories of democratic legitimacy have long privileged the question of electoral accountability, current challenges to procedural democracy underscore the importance of the "counter-democracy" of surveillance. As he writes, "the democratic form of political distrust is especially important because of the erosion of trust in contemporary society . . . the strategy is thus one of institutionalizing distrust in a positive way, so as to serve as a kind of protective barrier, a guarantee of the interests of society" (p. 9).

To recognize the democratic potential of mistrust is to appreciate the democratic role played by protest movements and by social movements more generally. Rosanvallon's work thus speaks powerfully to empirical scholarship

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710001337 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on social movements and civil society, a genre of social research that has too rarely been concerned with the democratic functions of these institutions. While social movement scholars have mainly considered democracies as a context in which these actors move, the study of the effects of social movements on policies, polities, and politics is still in its infancy. At the same time, political scientists have focused their attention upon more institutionally recognized actors and processes, such as political parties and elections. As a result, a major gap exists in the study of democracy. Rosanvallon helps to fill this gap by stressing the growing importance of nonconventional forms and actors of political participation. In line with recent research on political participation, he stresses that while some more conventional forms of participation (such as voting or party-linked activities) are declining, protest activities are rising. While citizens vote less, they are not less interested in or less knowledgeable about politics. On the author's view, the civic vigilance that social movements exert is profoundly political, and is essential to the development of a *democracy of expression* in which society has a voice, collective sentiments can be articulated, judgments on governments and their actions are formulated, counter-knowledge (or counter-expertise) is formulated, and demands are issued (p. 20).

Recent research on social movements confirms their growing support for the reform of real democracies in ways that parallel Rosanvallon's own proposals to recognize the democratic potential of mistrust, and thereby to transform challenges into opportunities. In fact, his counter-democracy resonates with two conceptions of democracy increasingly discussed by both political theorists and movement activists—participatory democracy and deliberative democracy. If representative democracy is based mainly on principles of delegation and majority rule, social movements have long been seen as vehicles of greater participation and more direct civic involvement in decision making. The development by social movements of new arenas of discussion and engagement open to a plurality of different actors—such as the World Social Forum and other initiatives linked to the global justice movement—testifies to the growing importance of nonelectoral forms of democratic practice. Such practices are not simply more participatory but potentially more deliberative, promoting transparent and inclusive communicative processes able to transform individual preferences into decisions oriented to the public good.

This evolution in social movements' conception of democracy sheds a different light on what Rosanvallon singles out as a main problem in our democracies, what he calls *depoliticization,* meaning "a failure to develop a comprehensive understanding of problems associated with the organizations of a shared world" (p. 22). In the fourth part of the book, devoted to "[t]he sense of powerlessness and symbols of depoliticization," Rosanvallon argues that [t]he recent tendency toward political disintegration" (in French, *dissolution du politique* has more a sense of the political that disappears) is produced by "the gap that counter-powers tend to open up between civic-civil society and the political sphere" (p. 253). As he rightly notes, "social distrust can encourage a salutary civic vigilance and thus oblige government to pay greater heed to social demands, yet it can also encourage destructive forms of denigration and negativity" (p. 24). Yet recent research partially calls into question Rosanvallon's understanding of social movements as particularistic and depoliticized, and therefore part of the syndrome of depoliticization that he fears. He seems to conceive of civil society and social movements as able to voice protest but not to "understand the problems associated with a shared world. . . . Reactive in essence, these strategies and actions cannot sustain or structure collective projects" (p. 23).

This alienation of the society from the political sphere is explained functionally, from the need of the citizen-as-watchdog to gain what the citizen-as-elector has lost: "[T]he proof of [the counter-powers'] efficacy lies in their ability to weaken the power-that-be" (p. 253). In this process, "the statesman is automatically degraded to the rank of 'politician.'" Through the prevalence of the powers of oversight, "the citizen is transformed into an ever more demanding political consumer, tacitly renouncing joint responsibility for creating a shared world" (pp. 253–54). At the root of the dissolution of the political "is a decline in global awareness of political action," with politics appearing "to be increasingly fragmented, deconstructed and opaque" (p. 254).

One could indeed discern in Rosanvallon's counter-democracy (as in Crouch's post-democracy) a sort of nostalgia for the (ideological) mass parties of the past and their radical potential. Nowadays, Rosanvallon writes, "To be a radical is to point a finger of blame everyday; it is to twist a knife in each of society's wounds. It is not to aim a cannon at the citadel of power in preparation for a final assault" (p. 255). But is the shift from parties to movements, or from old to new social movements, a shift from a general vision of politics to particularism? Research on the evolution of contemporary social movements highlights some more nuanced (and more optimistic) developments. Even though less reliant on complex ideologies and more pragmatic in orientation, recent social movements have sought to promote greater breadth and political vision, through their general criticism of neoliberal policies and through their calls for global justice (e.g., della Porta 2009). While not revolutionary, social movement politics is hardly single-issue. While Rosanvallon's vision of fragmentation thus reflects some aspects of contemporary social movements, it obscures other important aspects.

In his very balanced account, Rosanvallon may have overemphasized not simply the fragmentation of civil

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710001337 Published online by Cambridge University Press

society but also the cleavage between politics and society. While recognizing that "there is ever greater involvement and participation of civil society in political life" (p. 254), he also contends that unlike the old labor movement, such collective agents believe that "their primary purpose is not to defend the interest of their members" but "to identify issues and exert pressure on governments" (p. 65). They fit well in an age in which politics is oriented to deal with situations, more than to produce stable organizations. If until the 1970s, according to the author, the political nature of social struggle remained central, "this is no longer the case" (p. 66).

Rosanvallon, however, fails to take into account a practice of continuous interaction between institutions and social movements, where social movement organizations not only are considered as negotiators for some interests (or identities) but also actively take part in various forums and at various levels in the complex mechanisms of public governance. Even though the relationships between parties and movements are indeed characterized by reciprocal mistrust, social movement organizations, far from concentrating only on the role of surveillance, interact in complex ways with political institutions. Their participation in democracy is therefore not limited to "countering" the decisions made from above but also involves the promotion of public policies, the construction of new political institutions, and the prefiguration of an alternative form of politics "from below."

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doi:10.1017/S1537592710001349

The developed democracies today would seem to be enveloped in paradox. On the one hand, democratic constitutionalism is now hegemonic: It faces no credible ideological challengers, and none appear likely. Broad public support for democratic values is wide and deep. Political battles are, for the most part, fought with reference to democratic norms. Rights discourses are entrenched, public spheres are lively, associational life is vibrant, advocacy groups oversee the margins, and public demand for, and oversight of, government performance has never been higher.

On the other hand, in most of the developed democracies, we are seeing shifts in the nature and form of political engagement that generate broad dysfunctions. Rates of participation in the formal institutions of democracy such as voting are low and stagnant, while citizen distrust of politics, politicians, and political institutions is higher than it was half a century ago. Popular disaffection and anger is more evident. Elections fail to form governments with clear, legitimate mandates; they increasingly serve not to focus the future, but as referendums on the past. Decision makers are left to manufacture legitimacy, policy by policy, typically in response to advocacy groups, and often contrary to election platforms. Of course, government in response to pressure groups is not new—certainly not in the United States. What is new is the intense organization of public advocacy in response to virtually any positive initiative or plan by government, even in response to broadly conceded crises. Government responsiveness to public pressure too often produces gridlock, and governments have difficulty governing at all. Under these circumstances, "democracy" enables obstruction to such an extent that government of the people, by the people, and for the people is continually and constantly undermined.

Pierre Rosanvallon's remarkable achievement is that he shows that these current dysfunctions of democracy are *problems,* but they are not *paradoxes.* They are neither deeply challenging to democratic norms nor historically unprecedented. Rather, they are a consequence of a distrust of power that is, in itself, both deeply liberal and deeply democratic (p. 24). The project of the book is to rehabilitate distrust of power as an essential dimension of democracy, and to frame the question as to how distrust should be organized so that its democratic potentials might be captured. The term *counter-democracy* names the phenomenon and summarizes the ways in which distrust of power is—and has been—expressed and organized within democracies. In short, according to Rosanvallon there is nothing

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710001337 Published online by Cambridge University Press