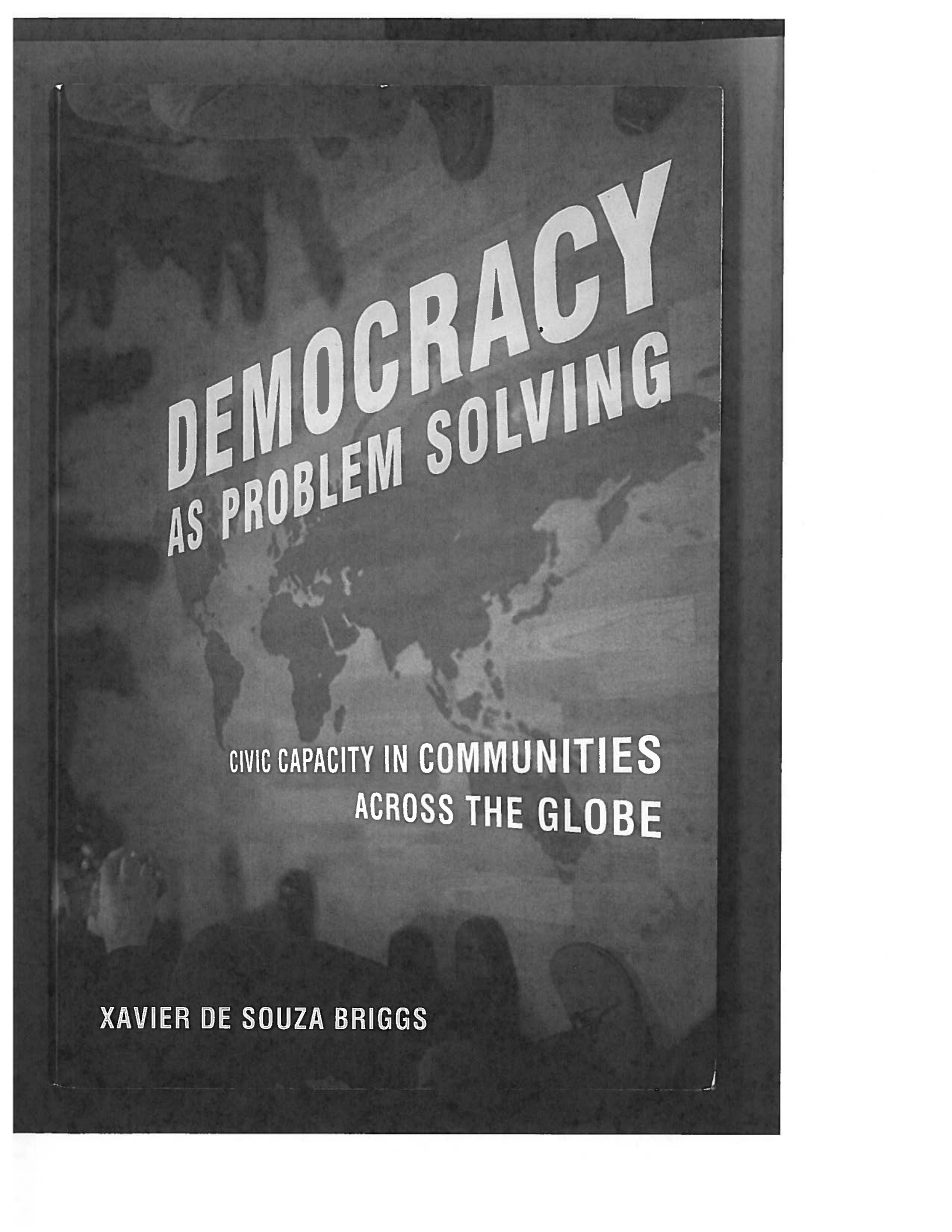




DEMOCRACY AS PROBLEM SOLVING

**CIVIC CAPACITY IN COMMUNITIES
ACROSS THE GLOBE**

XAVIER DE SOUZA BRIGGS

Democracy as Problem Solving
Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe

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Democracy and Public Problems

Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve.

—George Bernard Shaw

As a recipe for tackling public problems, is democracy mainly a self-interested contest for influence—a strategic game—or is it a hopeful search for better answers that meet a wider community interest? For decades, students of local politics working in distinct traditions have often talked past each other when it comes to this basic question. But it gets to the heart of the connection between democracy and civic capacity as a resource that can be developed—or destroyed—through the way we conduct civic life.

Extending that broad question to several more popular ones, given the decentralization and global competitive pressures that have put a renewed focus on governance at the local level, does effective public action require less government and more “community” action or just new roles and rules for new times? If that action is collective or “collaborative,” does that mean, whether from a normative or a pragmatic standpoint, that dissent and contention should be put on hold? In this chapter, I address these questions, aiming to advance the debates over political power in cities, as well as “community-driven” development, reinvented government, participatory planning and decision making, and solving problems via “partnership.”

As outlined in the introduction, juxtaposing the contest and deliberation perspectives helps clarify problem solving as an alternative that draws on both of those. And discussing the changing expectations for democracy and social problem solving highlights additional concepts that I employ in the case analyses to come. But the purpose of this chapter is not to preview a test, say, of whether causal theory A is more

valid than theory B. Nor is it to resolve an important question I take up in the conclusion, after analyzing the cases: If democracy can be so varied and complex in its workings and ambitions, what qualifies any process, however efficacious at problem solving, as genuinely democratic?

Views of Democracy: Contest, Deliberation, or Problem Solving

Contest: Elite Control or Pluralist Bargaining?

The first major analytic tradition in the theory and practice of local democracy sees it as a *contest among interest groups* carried out under particular kinds of rules, which make the contest “democratic.” While I focus initially on American scholarship and commentary in this vein, the chapter turns soon to more global debates about the same fundamental questions. In the contest view, civic action is a strategic, interest-driven process in which public decisions are riddled with competing objectives and the proverbial pie must be divided. This leads to a competitive quest for influence: the power to shape decisions and thereby influence the allocation of more tangible resources, such as money, land, or oil. If democracy is mainly this, then civic capacity becomes little more than a tool for gaining strategic advantage. Particular actors may invoke notions and symbols of a “community” or common interest, whether cynically (as a rhetorical tool) or, more generously, to remind civic actors that they have certain shared interests in addition to their divergent interests.

The contest view of civic life in cities includes two main schools of thought: *pluralists*, who see power as dispersed and decision-making arenas as relatively accessible (Judge 1995), and those in the *political economy* school, who conclude that local politics is largely about elite domination and deep structural conflicts among groups, usually rooted in class or economic interests (Harding 1995). Studies in the pluralist tradition are largely concerned with who decides and who influences both the policy agenda (what is up for official discussion) and formal policy outcomes (what gets decided). Political scientist Robert Dahl’s influential *Who Governs?* (1961), a study of local-government decision making and interest-group advocacy in the city of New Haven in the 1950s, associates governing, for example, with the distribution of influence and a conception of local democracy as bargaining among interest groups to win elected office and set policy. The power that counts is the “power over” other groups seeking to do those same things (Stone 1989).

But as Altshuler and Luberoff (2003) note, any history of these ideas must acknowledge the fact that Dahl wrote in response to claims about

elite control of politics. Most famously, sociologist C. Wright Mills’s *The Power Elite* (1956) argued that a small group of elites held sway in local civic life, whether through direct pressure on decision makers or because those who command a disproportionate share of wealth, social status, and political power in society share a worldview and thus easily act in concert to advance elite interests and “reproduce” their power. Mills’s title soon entered the public lexicon even as Dahl and others responded critically, arguing that Mills overstated the level of political consensus and conformity at the local level and that his approach, which relied on key informants to name community influentials, led to a tautology: those thought to be influential locally named others they considered influential, leading the analyst to treat perceptions of influence as objective indicators of the real thing (power).

Later work in the pluralist tradition, whether influenced directly by Dahl or not, emphasized that government planning and decision making, especially when driven by an expert-determined, “rational” ideal of the public interest and a reform-oriented agenda, may fail to confront the need for interest-group support outside the bureaucracy as well as the realities of intergroup conflict (Altshuler 1965). As I will show, this need to build wider support and legitimacy is at the heart of civic capacity’s value and use.

More recent work has focused on *conflict resolution mechanisms* and *governing regimes*. I return to the latter below, since the regime concept goes beyond the pluralist tradition and its conception of “power over.” As for conflict resolution, a rapidly growing theory and practice literature focuses on strengthening institutions and procedures for resolving public disputes, including facilitated public policy mediation or consensus building (Innes 1996, 2004; Susskind and Cruikshank 1987; Susskind and Hoben 2004; Susskind, McKearnan, and Thomas-Larner 1999). This tradition is centrally concerned with the costliness of impasse in decision-making—which focuses the observer on how interest groups deploy their influence, not on whether they have any to begin with—and the potential to create more sustainable, mutual-gains agreements about contentious public issues. Inequities of power are to be handled by those who authorize dispute resolution processes, such as courts and executive agencies, and, to a lesser extent, by trained facilitators who design and manage the processes but do not decide the outcomes. The close focus on alternative decision-making processes and how to overcome costly impasse is crucial, and consensus building aims to straddle the categories of contest and deliberation by squarely recognizing and addressing

conflicting interests in structured settings that promote learning among the parties who define a dispute or who face an opportunity to generate new policy. But as I outline in the next chapter in the context of managing urban growth conflicts, it is not very clear where formalized, facilitated consensus-building processes should fit into the larger fabric of civic life—for example, over the years of action and multiple decision points that significant community problem solving typically requires.

Pluralism is a diverse and still-evolving school of thought, much more so than critics have typically acknowledged (Judge 1995; McFarland 2004), but its points of departure differ significantly from those of the second “contest” school, *political economy*. The latter emphasizes structural conflicts dominated by economic elites, such as a city’s major investors, employers, and real estate developers (Fainstein and Fainstein 1979; Gaventa 1980; Harding 1995). In their classic text on how physical growth is advanced politically in cities, sociologists John Logan and Harvey Molotch (1987) conclude that groups whose interests are defined by the *use value* of urban space (consumption value, such as in renting a housing unit) are invariably in conflict with those whose politics reflects the *exchange value* of that same space (its value at resale—that is, ownership rather than consumption interest). Under this conception, the civics of managing urban growth, whether in Mumbai or Boston, say, unavoidably pits owners (who gain financially when land values increase) against renters (who lose under that scenario). In this view, a regime is less the embodiment of a shared agenda and schemes of cooperation to advance that agenda than a recipe for dominating civic life—for example, through what Logan and Molotch identify as the pro-development “growth machine.”

I return to this conception of gladiatorial, economic-interest-based conflict over growth in the next chapter, because it poses a serious challenge to any notion of more broad-based collective action. But in sum, until recently, political economists emphasized conflicting economic interests to the exclusion of all else that defines civic life and the possibility of change (Fainstein 2000; Healey 1996).

For the most part, pluralists and political economists do not ask the same questions using the same types of evidence and then draw different conclusions. Rather, they ask somewhat distinct questions using different kinds of data and not surprisingly arrive at very different emphases. The study of civic life, like all behavioral sciences that include elements of philosophy and practical knowledge, is partly portraiture or storytelling. Telling stories about a complex world includes editorial choices, which

can lead to depictions that are very different but not incompatible. The larger question, however, is whether civic life, if it is often neither equitable nor efficient at resolving conflicts—as pluralists and political economists can agree—offers society a way to do any better. This hope and possibility motivates the second major tradition: democracy as a deliberative rather than competitive encounter.

Deliberation

In the second view, democracy is potentially a powerful instrument for *deliberation*: a collective process focused on dialogue, aiming for a broader understanding of interests, and open to learning, which may include new frames for understanding what is at stake in civic life (Fishkin 1991; Fung 2004; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Mansbridge 1980). Plainly put, deliberation suggests a way out of pure competition. Hopes for more and better deliberation reflect considerable evidence that political interests are much more varied, open to interpretation, and even unconsciously held—and, for these reasons, much more subject to change through social interaction—than the contest model would have us believe (Bowman and Rehg 2000; Fung 2004; Healey 1996; Susskind and Cruikshank 2006a, 2006b). The larger hope is to invigorate civic life by creating a politics that attracts wider participation because both the process and outcomes are more satisfying.

Practices are particularly important: in the deliberative view, democracy needs a set of “schools” that teach deliberative rather than purely competitive behavior. Civil-society associations are frequently examined for this potential, along with the converse potential for instilling patronage and cronyism, reifying group prejudices and hostility, and encouraging a politics of exclusion and domination rather than power sharing (Cohen and Rogers 1995; De Tocqueville [1835] 2004; Fung 2003; Putnam 1993, 2000).

But as respected observers have noted, “pure” deliberation is liable to be impractical beyond the scale of small groups of trusting individuals (Mansbridge 1980). If not prudently timed and structured, deliberative exercises can also waste time and distract the community. As Shapiro (2003, 20) puts it, “Sometimes by design, sometimes not, deliberation can amount to collective fiddling while Rome burns.” Furthermore, some powerful learning is not in real-time, face-to-face sessions or gatherings of a well-defined group but takes the form of shifts in the “distributed” sets of beliefs of members of a change-oriented coalition or larger public (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1993). Finally, deliberation in practice can

become one more tool for the best organized and informed to dominate the civic agenda while putting a legitimating mask on things.

Yet deliberative theorists and practitioner innovators, who often promote the value of consensus-based decision making following intensive dialogue, have offered powerful arguments about the kinds of political behavior and decision outcomes that alternative decision rules encourage (Carpenter 1999). While majority-vote rules can leave almost half the polity dissatisfied, resistant, and resentful, for example, consensus rules are subject to manipulation by minority blocs who can veto the will of large majorities. This risk appears to be more serious where interests are in sharp conflict (Innes 2004; Mansbridge 1980). These insights help us understand why different rules may suit different contexts and goals: the protection of minority interests, for instance, versus stable power sharing, efficiency, or other goals.

In spite of the openness to decision-making approaches, and even where deliberative democrats have adopted a focus on problem solving (notably, Fung 2004, 2006c), the deliberative tradition does not seek to explain what role deliberation *alongside* competitive bargaining plays in complex cases of political action over time. Furthermore, the intersection between the traditions seems important, but too often it gets overlooked. Political competition and conflict, for example, and not just the motivation to find better answers, help invigorate civic life. And the learning that deliberation can generate may not lead to a convergence among disparate interests, equality of influence, or the capacity to resolve remaining conflicts. Moreover, beyond expanding individuals' interests, learning may create new things to compete for and shift the stakes of the political contest, as well as the rules and incentives that structure competition. Beyond agreements on policy, such as those generated by formally facilitated consensus building over environmental resources, siting disputes, or contentious social issues such as abortion, learning can generate new institutions—including spaces such as the glass-walled room I described in the first chapter—for deliberating more informally. But it takes time, strategy, and some good fortune for these possibilities to be realized. I consider these factors in the cases to come.

Collective Problem Solving, beyond "Governance"

The study of democracy as a recipe for collective problem solving, which I introduced in the previous chapter with reference to John Dewey, owes an important debt to the theory and practice of local governance worldwide (Pierre 1999; Stoker 2002; Wolman 1995). This tradition distin-

guishes *governance* (the set of norms, institutions, and practices for managing collective life) from *government* (the official apparatus, which is authorized and steered by popular will in democratic societies, for acting on public concerns). Governance, which encompasses government as well as business and civil-society roles and alliances, opens up a much wider range of possibilities for civic action than either the contest-over-policy tradition or the deliberation-through-dialogue tradition. Because of its broad scope, governance can accommodate, even welcome, both purely deliberative and purely competitive behavior and the range in between—as elements of a multifaceted “social production” model of civic life (Judd 2006; Stone 2006). Governance can include “public entrepreneurship networks” that find value-added roles for the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in emergent fields (Laws et al. 2001).

But problem solving goes beyond the growing focus of scholars and advocates on effective governance, which has centered heavily, in America's influential research literature, on *regimes*. Regimes are governing coalitions that forge ambitious agendas of action, mobilize resources to enact those agendas, and develop and oversee productive mechanisms or “schemes” for public-private cooperation that put the resources to use (Stone 2004). Much research has focused on how regimes get constructed and sustained in various cities, as well as on the question of who gets incorporated, or not, into the governing coalition (Stoker 1995; Stone 1989; Savitch and Kantor 2004). The regime focus, and the governance perspective more broadly, emphasizes the distinction between “power to” (achieve purpose by mobilizing support for an agenda) and “power over” (controlling decision making) that defines the democracy-as-contest tradition. McFarland (2004, 2006) has highlighted a third concept—“power with”—as the component concerned with what motivates and shapes behavior among coalition partners.

The problem-solving focus inherits those distinctions but goes beyond the regime concept in three ways. First, while the formation of regimes that wield broad-based influence is important in and of itself, that formation is not necessarily vital to every effort at ambitious public problem solving—a point Judd (2006) makes about American cities that is all the more true in global perspective, since urban regimes do not clearly exist everywhere (Stoker 2002). That is, regimes are probably not the only road to civic capacity (collective efficacy vis-à-vis communitywide problems or opportunities), and regimes, where they exist, may not be interested enough in certain issues to incorporate those issues into a long-run governing agenda. Yet this need not rule out significant change: the

regime, if it does not adopt, may also not oppose; and the regime's range of resources may not be essential for forward movement in a particular problem arena. The accomplishments of the slum dweller-based Alliance in Mumbai (chapter 5) and the San Francisco children's movement (chapter 10) are cases in point.

Second, while scholars have employed the term *regime* to analyze the civics of advancing agendas of change, much regime function is about routine politics. Stability and routine are important sources of a regime's support and thus of its influence and efficacy vis-à-vis long-run purposes. But like Stone (2001) speaking of education reform in American cities, I argue, based on an international sample of cases in a wider range of problem domains, that community problem solving is defined by *non-routine* politics. That is, it necessarily includes efforts to shake up the routine and the stable.

True, change agents must institutionalize their influence or mechanisms for public-private cooperation to advance an agenda. Stone's (2005, 2006) reminders, focused on U.S. cities, about the importance of such mechanisms are highly relevant outside the United States, despite cross-national differences in political history or government structure, as the Brazil, India, and South Africa cases in this book make clear. But the main point is that significant community problem solving, which may neither establish nor successfully replace a local regime, calls for out-of-the-ordinary practices that we all too easily overlook if building and sustaining a regime is the key test of civic effectiveness.

Third, scholarship on regimes and other instruments of governance has not grappled nearly enough with the range of possibilities for three closely interrelated pillars of effective governance, particularly when viewed in global perspective: meaningful and consequential *participation* in public life, including the multiple purposes of such participation and the role of conflict when participation expands in a given society; the *assignment of responsibility* for acting on public problems, which depends on history and appears to be at least as dependent on ideology as pragmatism; and *accountability* for such action, which, in spite of certain global trends outlined below, is likewise a function of each place and time.¹

Whose Job Is It Anyway?: Legitimate and Effective Public Action

Civic, Governmental, Participatory, Accountable

Civic capacity's central concern is enabling effective public action, which is often necessarily broader than official (government) action. With

notable exceptions, the study of democracy and the design of governance innovations, such as citizen committees and collaborative forums, have focused, to a great extent, on the issue of directing government or "steering the state" (Fung 2004). Steering well and justly is important for a host of reasons. But as any manager, implementation researcher, or governance expert knows, official policy does not equal impact.

Government policies may be largely symbolic, chosen directions may never get implemented, they may get distorted along the way, or, regardless of how tangible, complete, and faithful action is to the policies from which that action is supposed to follow, the intended results may never be achieved. This is particularly true where there is limited information or considerable uncertainty about the future (making the likely efficacy of policy tools more limited and harder to predict), where government alone has limited leverage over the forces driving the targeted problem (making "coproduction" with players outside of government a must), and where controversy and mistrust lead to informal "verging" of government rules and priorities.

Setting a nation's monetary policy is not a problem of that type, but getting the next generation educated in a fast-changing world, making urban communities much safer in the context of insecurity and inequality, accommodating growing populations while at the same time making cities more environmentally sustainable, tackling public health crises in the context of social taboos and complex and uneven medical guidance, restructuring the job economy of a local region after devastating decline, incorporating immigrant newcomers on a scale without precedent in history—these and many other public problems and opportunities *do* present with these challenging traits. Beyond conflicting interests, these problems often present with conflicts over values and identities—what defines people and their sense of what it means to belong to a community.

Some leadership gurus have taken to calling these "adaptive" rather than "technical" problems (Heifetz 1994), in that the former require significant learning and risk taking rather than the application of known technical solutions to well-identified problems: the perfect tutoring program to improve student learning, for instance. But most important public problems present with adaptive features as well as significant technical complexities. Dewey (1927) highlighted this complexity as one of the key challenges to modern democracy, and although he could scarcely have imagined the Internet, cell phones, text messaging, multimedia presentations, simulation modeling, e-mail, and other information

and communication technologies that have the potential to strengthen democracy, he probably foresaw that new technologies would offer no panacea.

Information tools can help us tame complexity but also overwhelm us with it, enabling new forms of genuine deliberation but also projecting scaled-up versions of “ritual participation.” The tools can mitigate conflicts over the “state of the world”—that is, conditions and prospects about which stakeholders may have very different and very ill-informed assumptions and beliefs—by providing more credible analyses and forecasts (Raiffa, Richardson, and Metcalfe 2002). But the tools can also enable each side of a polarized debate to dress up its preferred scenario or causal story with false precision and cherished symbols.² Rhetorical power is a key to civic mobilization and therefore to active citizenship, but this alone does not ensure civic capacity.

To understand what drives perceptions in a world where public is more than governmental, consider the accountability revolution. It is sometimes referred to as a “performance revolution” sweeping all three sectors—public, private, and nonprofit or nongovernmental (Behn 2001; Ebrahim 2005; Kettl 2000; Kaplan and Norton 2000; Letts, Ryan, and Grossman 1999; Stoker 2002; Weber 2003). This revolution is reflected in the “new public management,” or the movement to “reinvent government,” as it is more widely known in America (Osborne and Plastrik 1992). The new public management includes controversial cost-cutting, “merit pay” for government workers, outsourcing government services to the for-profit and nonprofit sectors through performance-based contracts, and other strategies.

But the revolution is broader, and its implications far more sweeping, than those stock managerial models indicate. In public and private organizations, and in efforts to team up across them in the cause of public problem solving, we see a dramatic break with older conceptions of accountability, a shift beyond *behavior that complies* (with rules) to *behavior that accomplishes* (promotes performance on crucial tasks). This shift reflects the recognition, in fact, that the former has often undermined the latter and driven talented people away from government service (Behn 2001). A shift is also occurring from direction setting by technical experts in traditional bureaucratic organizations to blended action and network-based communities of practice that draw on expert as well as “local” knowledge (Snyder and Briggs 2003; Wenger 1998) or public entrepreneurship networks that foster cross-sector, interorga-

nizational cooperation around focal problems, such as how to advance “green technology” (Laws et al. 2001).

This is consonant with the argument that government organizations and entrepreneurial public managers exist, first and foremost, to create public value (Moore 1995), which demands discretion and learning, and not to blindly comply with the dictates of policy makers who steer government. Furthermore, it is consistent with the widespread finding that citizens are motivated to participate in public affairs not out of an abstract desire to strengthen democracy but out of the rational belief that their investment of time, reputation, commitment, and other precious resources should measurably change social conditions (Barber 1984; Bolan 1969; Fung 2004). That is, citizens are motivated by problem solving for results, not by process or by seminar notions of idealized democracy.

Even regulation, which we have traditionally associated with police powers that belong exclusively to government, can be “community driven” and at the same time performance driven—if the community extends the limited capabilities of government in crucial, mutually accountable ways. Citizen-driven “bucket brigades” and “grassroots ecosystem management” that enhance environmental quality (O’Rourke 2004; Weber 2003), plus the effort to leverage so-called street science (Corburn 2005), blending community knowledge and professionalized knowledge, reflect these developments.

Seen in this light, efforts to make public decision making more transparent, accountable, and inclusionary are many, varied, and enormously encouraging, whether in the form of participatory local budgeting in Brazil, parent-teacher councils shaping urgent school-level improvements in urban America, village-level economic development planning in India, or similar innovations. The aim is to hold public agencies more accountable and improve results, through what Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright (2003) have termed “empowered participatory governance”—that is, reforms that go beyond citizen advice or review of policy and devolve decision-making power to citizen bodies. The new push is also for “compacts” forged in an “accountability environment” rather than the endless pursuit of individual scapegoats for performance failures, waste, fraud, or abuse (Behn 2001; Kearns 1996).³

But each of the public problems in this book, and indeed many of the problems that citizens, nongovernmental organizations, and public officials are deliberating in those innovative forums, demands that

"communities" coproduce needed change with government (Ostrom 1996; Waddell and Brown 1997). This is not the same as saying that the urgent problems of our time demand smaller or less regulatory government, and it is not an argument focused on self-help or more social capital (useful social bonds) to substitute extensively for money and other types of capital, as in "more community, less public funding."⁴ Indeed, as Edward Weber (2003) suggests in his exploratory study of emerging forms of governance in the environmental policy arena, for new approaches to survive, they must find ways to balance national policy interests and the security of government-backed rules with the enormous potential benefits of cross-sector local networks, collaborative learning, and transparent and widely verifiable results.

Nor is this an argument against reforming public agencies where such reform is clearly useful, even urgent (see Behn 2001; Fung 2004). Rather, this is a different conception of how much effective public action we can rely on the public sector to ensure. That distinction underlies an ambitious definition of what aspirations to democracy actually include, at least if democracy is to contribute to human progress and development. It is a definition that emerges not principally from democratic theory or from received wisdom about how official policy making should work—that is, from people's informal theories about how things get decided by "the powers that be"—so much as from the rapid diffusion of the concept of partnership and from a broader cultural logic of empowerment.

To focus on the first idea, effective partnerships are not always democratic in the way we have traditionally thought about the exercise of voice and shared power. Some declared partnerships are not the genuine article at all: they are unequal and limited contracting relationships dressed up as opportunities for the "partner" with few evident alternatives. But legitimate and effective partnerships that tackle some of the most important public problems of our time directly provide the twin ingredients of effective public action: *legitimacy* and *productive capacity*. Legitimacy confers vital informal authority to be heard in the public square, to act on public problems, and to have other players respond to one's actions. Productive capacity is the means for learning, adapting, and operating to generate visible results.

These essential ingredients, which help determine the effectiveness of mission-driven public organizations (Moore 1995), too often elude formal systems that rely solely on representative government, open and competitive elections, majority rule, interest-group bargaining,

professionalized public agencies, and the other stock institutions of modern democracies. Most of all, the lack of legitimacy for public institutions robs collective problem solving of what international affairs expert Joseph Nye (2004) has termed "soft power." It is the magnetism and informal authority to influence the actions of others, and it comes from perceived integrity, trustworthiness, and values that resonate, not the power to compel or buy the actions one desires and—often—not from practices that clash with strong cultural expectations (Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway 2006).

Soft power helps explain why partnerships *may* be well worth it despite key pitfalls, such as a loss of control, and risks, such as the loss of reputation and tangible resources if things go badly. The reason is that some public problem solving demands a multilateral approach in order to be legitimate, not just because the partners involved complement one another—get different things done well—in the operational dimension. Public policy that lacks soft power is frequently—and more and more visibly—inadequate to solve key social and economic problems, from crime to school failure, environmental sustainability to economic restructuring, public health crises, and more.

In the United States, we have learned this the hard way, perhaps most dramatically in police-community efforts to make segregated and highly disadvantaged neighborhoods safer and more secure. Where a history of racial mistrust and perceived abuses of police power cast a long shadow, carefully constructed and respectful partnerships provide "an umbrella of legitimacy" (Berrien and Winship 1999) for public officials to act. This is important above and beyond the productive supports also provided by many partnerships, such as investigative evidence or deterrence through informal social control, which reinforce and extend what public officials can do to change social conditions.

Grassroots ecosystems management likewise reflects the wisdom of soft power, which supplements rule-bound traditional bureaucratic procedure with new forms of public participation. And the evolving practice of facilitated consensus building aims for problem solving—getting beyond the routine and the status quo—with specific principles for promoting legitimacy and trust, accountability through the selection of stakeholders and agents to represent them, and joint fact finding to overcome disagreements about the state of the world (Susskind, McKernan, and Thomas-Larmer 1999; Susskind and Cruikshank 2006a).

In developing partnerships democratically, and this is a worldwide growth industry with too few guides or safeguards, one must be attentive

to a range of interests and to the presence or absence of support for ideas—the principal things that political decision-making systems exist to test in democratic societies young and old. But one must also, quite consistently and vigorously, attend to the *quality* of ideas for proposed action (the likelihood that they can be implemented and that, if implemented, they will yield results) and the degree of *commitment* to help implement (take action jointly).

These imperatives separate effective coproduction, where there is a complementarity and synergy among the players' contributions, from the displacement or substitution of one productive community resource—be it public, private, or nongovernmental—for another (Ostrom 1996). The lack of attention to these different outcomes has dogged hopes for creating and applying more useful social capital, as a resource for solving problems, around the world (Woolcock and Narayan 2000).⁵ It has also led critics to decry a legitimate concern for producing results as mere “managerialism” meant to exclude wider participation in decision making or to justify an abdication of government’s rightful role (e.g., Heller 2001).

But the twin imperatives of legitimacy and capacity also imply a range of objectives for participation that debates about invigorating democracy, or promoting active citizenship, often obscure. To be sure, participation is important for shaping official policy (for guiding or steering government) and for developing legitimate support for government action. Not only is consulting those affected by decisions a must in democratic societies, but it is psychologically important as well. A large body of evidence in the field of procedural justice underlines the importance of fair hearing, for example. People are much more likely to be satisfied with decision outcomes when they feel they have been heard, even when the decisions are costly and unpleasant (Deutsch 2000; Raiffa, Richardson, and Metcalfe 2002; Schmidt 2006; Susskind and Cruikshank 2006a).

Yet from the standpoint of problem solving, participation is crucial for two other reasons as well. First, the proverbial “two heads” can be, though they are not always, better than one. Managed well (and those are the key words), inclusionary groups and processes, which blend different sources of knowledge and disseminate knowledge too, can generate better, more actionable ideas than top-down, exclusionary, technocratic planning. The principle has been powerfully confirmed from studies of diverse workgroups and firms (Adams 1979; Amabile 1996) as well as social-movement organizations (Ganz 2000). Advocates of deliberative

democracy often emphasize this rationale for wider and better structured participation (Fung 2004, 2006a, 2006c; Mansbridge 1980; Williamson and Fung 2005). And so do the critics who detail how and why the technocratic and typically bureaucratic “rational planning ideal”—an outgrowth of the Enlightenment belief that logic and reason should guide society—has failed so often in practice (Arnstein 1969; Friedmann 1987; Scott 1998). Efforts to replace planning by professional experts with something better must contend with that older model’s mistaken but admittedly convenient assumptions: that professional knowledge is superior to other forms of knowledge, including local, indigenous, or “craft” knowledge born of experience (Scott 1998); that citizens will be persuaded by professional knowledge because technical superiority, according to objective standards of science, makes it more legitimate than other kinds of knowledge (Scott 1998); and that members of the public share a culture—norms of communication, decision making, and influence—so that encounters between experts and citizens, or among diverse citizens, will produce learning and trust under rules of fair play (in fact, this is often not the case; see Briggs 1998; Healey 1997; Sandercock 1998; Tauxe 1995). But the point, for now, is that well-structured participation *can* lead to decisions that are better in that they are substantively wiser, not just more popular or more legitimate, and this is crucial in the context of heightened demand for results.

Second, wider and better structured participation may enable coproduction: generating knowledge and commitment to drive private and nongovernmental action, not just government action, and the blending of actions by these sectors to produce a meaningful impact on public problems. This idea was well enshrined in the “small democracies” of cohesive, relatively homogeneous agrarian communities with limited government machinery to tackle problems.⁶ But as Dewey recognized a century ago, the idea, not to mention its fulfillment, is elusive in big, institutionally complex, and socially diverse democracies. The field of management and organizational change, not political theory, has gone farthest to develop the idea that commitment gets developed through entrepreneurial collective action (Deming 2000; Ganz 2000). There is arguably more in teams of self-managed or “empowered” workers than in community visioning exercises, deliberative polling, or other self-consciously democratic civic experiments to explain how commitment to coproduce change gets built, sustained, and focused on what works. But certainly, as I examine in the chapters to come, there are promising examples in civic initiatives too.

Contentious, Collaborative, Consensual?

If civic capacity's purpose is to enable collective action, "collective" does not mean, and cannot mean, purely consensual or conflict free or even consistently "collaborative" in the sense that that term is often used. As many students of democracy have noted, but as the elastic rhetoric of "partnership" and "community building" frequently does not, collective action benefits from divergent as well as convergent thinking, from robust and flexible mechanisms for "getting to yes" as well as space and rules for "having a good fight." These plain-English labels are more than homage to a bestseller on the theory and practice of negotiation on the one hand, legal scholar Roger Fisher and anthropologist William Ury's *Getting to Yes* (1981), and a widely read management article on what makes teams or workgroups productive on the other (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois 1997). Rather, the two labels draw attention to what civic capacity is *for* in the realm of conflict, whether within or across the government, market, and civil-society sectors.

Potentially, civic capacity is for both having a good fight and getting to yes, for confronting and pushing on one hand (the traditional realm of pressure politics and "insurgent" social movements) but also for overcoming impasses that impede valuable agreements—each of these in its appropriate context and time. As any committed activist knows, the former can sharpen debates about important values and conflicts among them, mobilize people to act on their values and not merely spectate or complain from the sidelines, and force essential learning and changes in political opportunities (Coser 1956; Fainstein and Hirst 1995; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Schattschneider 1960; Warren 2001). Well-organized contention includes values-driven "prophetic voice" and pressure politics that changes what gets bargained, by whom, and how—what scholars have termed "transgressive politics," in that the basic rules of engagement (the norms and institutions through which civic life happens) are transformed in the process (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

Moreover, while civic life need not begin with the assumption that interests are in conflict or that voting is the only valuable means of arriving at just decisions, it is a reality of large democratic societies with diverse publics that the "unitary ideal," as political scientist Jane Mansbridge (1980) terms it, will be limited to selected, often ad hoc groups. That is, the "small democracy" of face-to-face exchange among trusted parties, to arrive at a common interest, has a place but cannot be treated as a template for democratic life as a whole. It is an impractical ideal where interests diverge and reasoned exchange among trusted

others is limited or essentially impossible to construct. Real democracies, as opposed to idealized ones, contain elements both strategic (contested) and learning oriented (deliberative). And without mechanisms for conflict resolution and consensus building, "good" fights can quickly turn bad, further eroding the willingness to engage, deliberate, and even coproduce change.

There is evidence, for example, that the proliferation of participatory approaches to managing water and other vital resources worldwide has led to many unstructured negotiations, misunderstandings about the meaning of consensus, deeper impasses, and a fear of sharing power (Susskind and Ashcraft 2007).⁷ But as leading scholars of transformative social change McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) contend, with a focus on large structural changes over the medium to long run, researchers' efforts to understand the role of contention still do too little to illuminate how creative action in specific episodes *leads* to larger change. I aim to address this in each case, treating episodes as cases within cases, as outlined in the methods section of chapter 1.

The second feature—getting to yes or coming to workable agreements in the context of ongoing differences—helps "deliver the goods." It also helps keep conflicts, which can all too easily become shrill, self-serving, and unproductive, in check. In its pure form, getting to yes hinges on bargaining effectively where some interests are shared and others are not, and will *remain* not, as negotiation theorists and practitioners have emphasized (Fisher and Ury 1981; Raiffa, Richardson, and Metcalfe 2002; Susskind and Cruikshank 1987). Far from the image of "horse trading" for competitive advantage, punitive military deal making, or purely opportunistic gaming or claiming, "principled" bargaining, whether assisted or unassisted by professional mediators, is a core civic skill. It is also an underdeveloped and frequently misunderstood skill in democratic societies that expect more and more shared decision making.

But through learning and relationship building, and as small-scale unitary democracies such as deliberative "study circles" show, civic engagement can also change people's preferences, change the way problems are framed, bring new resources and stakes into view, and expand the menu of options under consideration. In this way, I use "getting to yes" as a shorthand for the element of civic process that is broader than pure bargaining (over fixed interests and values). Where getting to yes is concerned, the book aims precisely to examine how coming to agreement contributes to larger processes of civic action—that is,

beyond the decision points on which negotiation, conflict resolution, and consensus-building theorists and practitioners have focused helpfully so far. This includes dialogue that leads to agreements and not just to the understanding that deliberative democrats prize (Susskind and Cruikshank 2006b). But it also expects, through formal as well as informal exchanges over time, the *achievement of purposes* that people value. This is the ultimate test of problem solving; it is more than devising and deciding together. It includes *doing*—acting—to change the state of the world.

Both contention and agreement seeking, then, capture important dimensions of problem solving as strategic behavior,⁸ grounded in part on guesses we make about what others will do, why they are doing what they are doing, and how to deal with uncertain outcomes (Ganz 2000), as well as disinterested learning, grounded in the commitment to new knowledge and capability. As I hinted above, the strategic dimension often gets obscured in the now-ubiquitous rhetoric of “community building” and apolitical notions of acting in partnership (Briggs 2001; Chaskin 2005; Kadushin et al. 2005; Warren 2001). That dimension highlights key reasons why too much community initiative and grassroots “claim making” is not well integrated with formal policy making systems. Popular mobilization does not always lead to effective and essential bargaining, and the “grasstops”⁹—that is, a community’s influentials or leaders, not necessarily the traditional political or economic elites—may need to be mobilized constructively, and their conflicts sorted out, too. Viewed from the so-called roots, the grasstops may *seem* always and everywhere to be organized and effective at acting in concert—and to the detriment of the disadvantaged group or the transformative idea—but the cases to come show why this view can be so misleading.

Civic capacity is not about some hoped-for evolution “from protest to collaboration,” as popular reports on the rise of cross-sector partnerships in American community development typically framed things in the 1980s.¹⁰ Knowing when to emphasize conflict, consensus, or a bit of both at once, and being capable of managing both well, is a matter of craft, judgment, and a willingness to take risks. Moreover, the effort to influence others toward honest and productive conflict, constructive and timely agreement seeking in the face of conflicting interests or values, or a blend of the two also helps put flesh on the bones of that most ubiquitous and elastic of ideas about enabling change—“leadership”—to which so many scholarly treatments of public problem solving and politics seem indifferent, if not downright averse and suspicious.

The bottom-line implication is that civic capacity is not only, or primarily, about capping conflict. Nor is it universally about stirring up conflict to get new proposals heard, change the balance of power, or make decision making more inclusionary. Both contentious and agreement-seeking civic action matter. And both demand acts of leadership when people and institutions cling fervently to one at the expense of the other, whether because of ideology, partisan perceptions, or what psychologists term “defensive routines” that block learning (Argyris 1985).

In the case of chapters to come, I explore the strategic and deliberative elements that define collective problem solving over time in particular places, develop a more robust view of the forms and uses of civic capacity that might meet the changing expectations of democracy. I have outlined in this chapter, and—in the process—show why acts of leadership matter as well.