1 Introduction

The impetus for this project came in the spring of 2006, while taking refuge from a cloud of tear gas in a metro station in Santiago, Chile. The street above had been clear for some time, but the noxious remnants of the state's response to a student protest march, one of many that spring, were still very much in evidence. The wave of protests had taken nearly everyone by surprise. Aptly summarizing the conventional wisdom that still held on the eve of the protests, political scientist Kenneth M. Roberts stated that "the mass social mobilizations of the 1960s, early 1970s and mid-1980s have been conspicuous by their absence ... there is little indication that they are looming on the horizon for years to come" (1998, p. 157). Despite lingering worries about inequality and atavistic institutions that had survived the transition away from military rule, most observers viewed Chile as one of Latin America's great success stories, both economically and politically. The eruption of a major wave of contentious politics (which turned out to be merely the first of many such waves to come) demonstrated that a significant portion of the Chilean population did not share this view. How could deep-seated discontent continue to fester, and eventually explode into the streets, within an economic and political system that was (and is) the envy of the region?

Years later, while conducting fieldwork in Caracas, another brush with violence provoked a bizarrely inverted sense of déjà vu. Sitting in my apartment in the affluent neighborhood of *Los Palos Grandes* late at night, the sudden sound of gunfire (and later grenade explosions) from the street below erupted as police battled a group of hoodlums who had been interrupted during an attempted kidnapping in another district. The event was shocking (and of course terrifying), though not the least bit surprising. These kind of violent incidents

(this one left several of the kidnappers dead and their victim bleeding but alive on the stoop across the corner from my building) had become nearly a matter of course. The gunfight recalled my experience in Chile years before, not because they were comparable in terms of danger or chaos, but because they both occurred alongside a clear and inexplicable divergence of public attitudes and "objective" reality. For despite the endemic violence, chronic inflation, shortages of basic goods, and the deterioration of society in to warring camps, I knew from my examination of public opinion surveys (as well as my day-to-day discussions with ordinary residents of Caracas) that many Venezuelans were deeply enamored with their leader, Hugo Chávez. They admired his penchant for unadorned rhetoric (including the use of profanities that would have been unthinkable coming from more traditional *politicos*), his passion for the poor and the dispossessed, and even his willingness to resort to violence, as he did in an attempted coup in 1992, which brought him to prominence. It became clear to me that Chile and Venezuela had become mirror images of one another. Or if you prefer, one was the other's evil twin; I leave it to the reader to decide which is which, although my personal view is that each country has had successes in some areas and failures in others, none of which should be ignored. Both countries, despite vast differences of culture, history, and economy, had inexplicable levels of public support for their regimes, given their respective policy performance. Chile's governments continually did as much right as could be expected, yet Chileans remained surprisingly cool to the political system that had generated such gains. Meanwhile, the grind of death and deprivation crushed Venezuelans day in and day out, yet many maintained faith in Chávez and his political project.

These circumstances appear to be contradictory due to the implicit assumption that all regimes need do in order to ensure the support of their citizens is tend to their material needs, or at least provide an environment in which citizens can easily provide for themselves. It is a common assumption, both in popular discourse and in academic literature on regime support and legitimacy.

Studies of these topics have, in recent years, privileged the quality of governance as the source of legitimacy almost to the exclusion of any other potential sources (Crozier, Huntington, & Watanuki, 1975; Hardin, 2000; Mainwaring, Scully, & Vargas Cullell, 2010; Miller & Listhaug, 1999; Newton & Norris, 2000; Rogowski, 1974). While studies may include any number of ancillary variables, be they institutional, behavioral, cultural, and so forth, such factors usually exert their influence based upon the utilitarian logic of rational self-interest, and are viewed as interesting because they enable or hamper a regime's provision of economic goods to its citizens.

The idea that a political system that routinely fails to provide desired goods and services, whether through incompetence or malice, would gradually lose its legitimacy is intuitively appealing and perfectly reasonable. It is also completely inadequate. Figure 1.1 presents average levels of regime support (as measured by two commonly used indicators, satisfaction with democracy and perceived level of democracy), and the relatively objective performance index used by Mainwaring et al. (2010).

Both graphs show that, while there is clearly a relationship between support and performance, there is a great deal of unexplained variation, as can be seen by a number of cases lying far above or below the regression line. For both indicators, Chile is the most extreme outlier (except Honduras for perceived level of democracy), but it is not the only one. While regime support in Chile has remained anemic (Angell, 2010; Madrid, Hunter, & Weyland, 2010; Mainwaring et al., 2010) despite inarguably strong economic performance (Angell, 2010; Posner, 1999, 2004), Venezuela presents an opposite, mirror-image of the Chilean case. Under the Chávez government, and the regime he helped to bring about, the quality of governance has been abysmal by nearly any standard (Corrales, 2010; Mainwaring et al., 2010, p. 39). Although some of the social programs instituted by Chávez and his government undoubtedly improved the lives of poor Venezuelans, these gains are dwarfed by the rising wave of violence, inflation, and stagnation that engulfed the country as Chávez's reign continued.

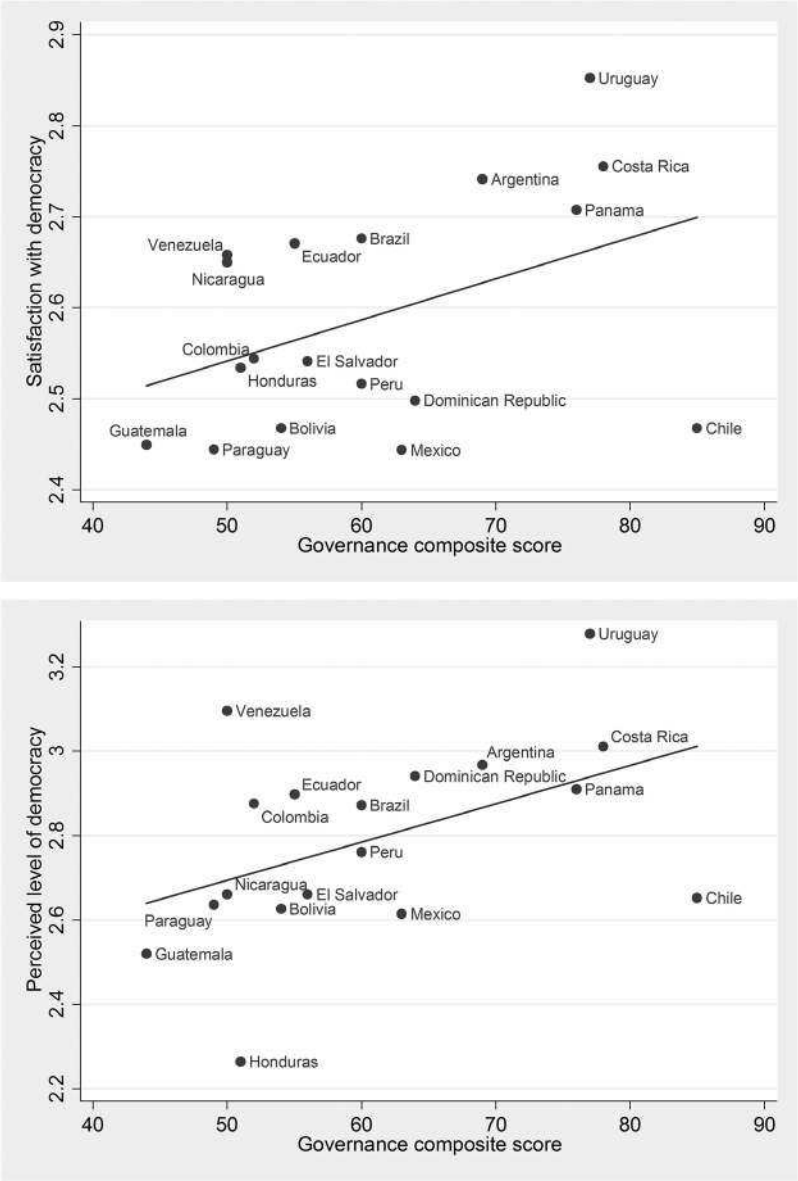

FIGURE 1.1: Satisfaction with democracy and perceived level of democracy by performance

Data on the *y*-axis are from the 2012 wave of the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) Americas Barometer survey. See Mainwaring et al. (2010) for data years, but which correspond roughly to 2009–2010.

Some of the blame for these issues can be laid at the feet of others, including prior administrations and the chaos of international oil prices, but a considerable amount (especially for inflation) belongs to the policy choices of Chávez's government. And yet the Bolivarian state was viewed by its citizens as more legitimate than the majority of its regional neighbors during much of Chávez's reign (The Latin American Public Opinion Project, 2012; Canache, 2007; *Latinobaró-metro*, 2007). Just as Chile is an extreme "underperformer" in the graphs in Figure 1.1, Venezuela is an extreme overachiever; it is the largest outlier above the line for satisfaction with democracy, and the second largest of perceived level of democracy (after Uruguay).

Ironically, the Venezuelan and Chilean paradoxes are exactly the sort of puzzle that the concept of regime support was intended to resolve. Easton (1975) saw support as a potential explanation for why equivalent economic or social troubles produced only mild disruptions in some polities but full-blown political crises in others. To resolve this, Easton differentiates between "specific" and "diffuse" support. Specific support refers to attitudes regarding what Easton calls "outputs": the actual decisions, policies, and actions. Diffuse support, which Easton argues pertains to the political regime, "refers to evaluations of what an object is or represents ... not of what it does. It consists of a reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed" (1975, p. 444). Various analysts sought to explain this sort of enduring support (Easton argued that experience and especially socialization were key antecedents), but the drift toward performance-centric theoretical frameworks, encouraged by the ascendency of rational choice in political science, abrogated this line of analysis. Utilitarian conceptions of support cannot resolve this sort of paradox; if regime support is assumed to be largely or entirely a product of economic success, then Chile and Venezuela are inexplicable.

1.1 THE ARGUMENT: BRINGING PROCEDURES BACK IN

The purpose of this research is to account for the paradoxes described earlier by restoring Easton's insight that inputs matter to its proper

place in regime support theory. That said, Easton's explanations relying on direct experience of interactions with the political system (which for most citizens are infrequent) and socialization are unconvincing. As both Chile and Venezuela show, support can both erode and build too quickly for socialization to be the primary force at work. And the support literature's utilitarian drift has resulted in a dearth of alternatives to Easton.

Another source can fill this gap: democratic theory. Both classical and participatory democratic theorists (e.g. Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970; Rousseau, 2002) have long argued that the process of self-governance has intrinsic value to individuals, regardless what policies such processes eventually produce. Psychological theories of organizational and procedural justice have also recognized the power of intrinsic procedural characteristics in shaping organizational attitudes, developing a bidimensional framework of organizational support that takes both procedures and outcomes into account (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001; Lind, 2001; Lind & Tyler, 1988; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; van den Bos, Lind, & Wilke, 2001). Although political theory and social psychology have very different epistemological foundations, on the topic of support they converge on a common proposition: that *how* decisions are made is as important as the decisions themselves, and that whether or not those bound by decisions have a say in them is among the most important procedural variables for explaining individual attitudes toward decision-making processes. In the context of democratic governance, the extent to which citizens as a group have a say in the policy process is called citizen autonomy. My most important and central argument throughout this book is that citizen autonomy is a critical (and neglected) source of systemic support. The term autonomy is used here as in democratic theory, meaning "self-governance," i.e. that decision-making authority is granted to those who are bound by those decisions, rather than separation or independence from another authority, as it is used in common parlance. Citizens are kinder in their evaluations of regime institutions if they feel they

have the ability to participate in the processes by which those institutions decide and implement policy.

The preceding discussion raises a question: how do political systems create autonomy? And what types or varieties of political systems are most able to *convince* citizens they have autonomy? Before diving into this issue, some discussion of the scope of the theory and evidence presented here is necessary. Although most of the normative theory I employ concerns democracy, the social psychological work cited earlier and throughout this book indicate that autonomy is a fairly universal human need, regardless of regime type. This may provide some insight on why authoritarian regimes, which often deny citizens *personal* autonomy, much less collective autonomy, have such difficulty maintaining legitimacy even when they are not brutally repressive. It may also shed light on why authoritarian regimes (Cuba comes to mind)[1] that give citizens some role in the political process have less trouble in this regard, even if that role is entirely subordinate. Indeed, one of the cases of interest here, Venezuela, experienced at least some authoritarian drift during the period of analysis.

That said, this book focuses on cases that are at least nominally democratic, and caution should be taken in extrapolating the findings presented here to fully authoritarian contexts. Mechanisms for engendering perceptions of citizen autonomy in authoritarian regimes may well exist, but they are likely to be complex and difficult to identify, and their effects will likely be extremely dependent upon the particular details of specific regimes. Authoritarianism is, given its emphasis on leaders who dominate the societies they govern, essentially antagonistic to citizen autonomy, and exceptions to that rule are just that: exceptions, idiosyncratic departures in unique cases. Further research would be necessary to determine if the theories developed in this book apply in authoritarian contexts.

[1] Thanks are due to the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, who first broached this issue. One of the reviewers also specifically mentioned Cuba.

Democracy, however, is another matter entirely. Although some democracies are (as this book argues) better than others at making their citizens feel politically capable, all democracies must grant at least some power to the citizenry as a whole. On this, there can be no exceptions: popular power, if only in limited form, is *the* defining characteristic of democracy; it is what makes democracy distinct from other forms of rule. Of course democratic regimes may grant radically different levels of power to citizens (reserving the remainder for elites), and that power may be granted using different mechanisms in different proportions. Describing how political institutions and practices either encourage or inhibit autonomy (and perceptions of it) is a necessary first step to developing testable hypotheses about which ways are best suited for encouraging autonomy. Doing so requires a conceptual framework, and democratic theory provides a solid foundation on which to build such a framework. I identify two broad categories of mechanisms – summarized here and described in detail in Chapter 3 – that democracies use to grant citizens the ability to influence the political process: representation and participation.

1.1.1 The Sources of Autonomy: Representation and Participation

Representation is the dominant mechanism of autonomy in modern democracy, and hues closely to Schumpeter's (2008) minimalist view of democracy as the granting of the power to govern to specific individuals or groups (usually political parties) based on elite competition for the votes of citizens. It assigns to citizens a largely passive role; citizens select elites, who then make decisions. Yet citizens do have some (albeit indirect) influence on the political process here because elites must consider their wishes and preferences if they are to successfully compete for votes. Two submechanisms must be present for this indirect empowerment to work: accountability and choice. Citizens must at a bare minimum be able to evict from office elites who provoke their displeasure. Yet accountability alone does not even imply the usual "free and fair election" standard that many

scholars cite as the defining feature of democracy. It would be possible for elections to allow accountability without competition: retention elections where the vote is to retain or remove a single, unopposed incumbent, as are sometimes used for local judicial elections in the United States, would suffice. A second criterion must be added here: choice. To be truly granted effective voice in the political system, citizens must have multiple options from which to choose. This would imply specific systemic features such as free entry in the electoral arena and multiple parties with a realistic chance of winning. A broader view of representation would include in its ideal vision a vibrant multiparty system, where the number of parties is sufficiently large to give every ideological bloc or social group a patron party to advocate for its interests or ideology.

Although representation does provide a significant amount of autonomy, it is far from a perfect mechanism. Representation reflects a view of the democratic process that is analogous to the processes of interaction between firms and consumers in a free market. Consumers can influence the behavior of firms, either as individuals (through their purchasing choices) or collectively (e.g. through the organized use of voice [Hirschman, 1970] or boycotts). Firms must adapt to consumer tastes and preferences or risk being strangled to death by the invisible hand. Likewise, under representation, citizens influence elites primarily by "consuming" (i.e. voting for or otherwise supporting) this or that leader or faction, and those who fail to respond to citizen demands, like intransigent firms, will perish. Yet citizens and civil society remain fundamentally divided from the democratic state, just as consumers do not become part of a business by consuming its products.

Some democratic theorists view this fundamental division as woefully inadequate for fulfilling democracy's purpose. Such scholars have an entirely different view of why democracy is valuable. Advocates of classical or participatory democracy such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Carole Pateman, C. B. Macpherson, and Benjamin Barber all dispute that true citizen autonomy can ever be created when the

state and society are so neatly cleaved. Generally these theorists also hold that "true" democracy, one in which the people play an active role, has some intrinsic value (e.g. moral, educational, or psychological development) that elite-directed forms of representative government can never satisfy. One of this book's most important arguments is that citizen autonomy, and its subjective perception by citizens, is a crucial benefit of giving citizens a relatively direct political role. Yet much of the literature on participatory theory is hypothetical, and due to its inherent suspicion of mediated forms of democracy, largely ignores representative institutions and structures as they currently exist. To overcome this, an alternative mechanism based on participatory theory must be derived and constructed, rather than lifted relatively unaltered, as representation was from liberal democratic theory.

To do so, I define participation as a mechanism for creating citizen autonomy; it is an alternative to representation, although I will argue that it can be used to evaluate many institutions and practices that are normally associated with representative democracy. Throughout this book, the term "participation" will, unless otherwise noted, refer to this mechanism, and not the actual behavior of any group or individual. Participation is defined as the extent to which citizens are given a direct role in the political process where possible, and where any indirectness or mediation necessitated by practical concerns (such as the scale of modern societies) is kept to a minimum. Like representation, participation can be decomposed into submechanisms. The first, which I call participatory opportunities, are the focus of much of this book, and are what empirical scholars have in mind when using the term "participatory democracy": institutions, programs, and fora where citizens make decisions without intermediaries. These sorts of opportunities are far more practical at the local level (within cities and neighborhoods), and thus participatory democrats often favor devolution of power to municipal-level institutions such as participatory budgeting programs, or the communal councils of Venezuela, which Chapter 5 discusses in considerable detail.