Introduction

According to the most recent World Values Survey (WVS, 2010–2014), the majority of citizens across the sixty countries surveyed do not have much confidence in government, parliament, or political parties. Just over half reported not very much or no confidence in government, 57 per cent reported not very much or no confidence in parliament, and two-thirds reported such a lack of confidence in political parties. According to the most recent European Social Survey (2014), the majority of citizens across the fifteen countries surveyed think that the political system allows them to have little influence on politics, that politicians don't care about what people think, and that politicians and political parties are not to be trusted.[1] There is potentially a lot at stake. Drawing on WVS data, Foa and Mounk (2016: 6) argue:

> Three decades ago, most scholars simply assumed that the Soviet Union would remain stable. This assumption was suddenly proven false. Today, we have even greater confidence in the durability of the world's affluent, consolidated democracies. But do we have good grounds for our democratic self-confidence? At first sight, there would seem to be some reason for concern . . . Even in some of the richest and most politically stable regions of the world, it seems as though democracy is in a state of serious disrepair.

Many scholars are not so gloomy about the future, but it would be reasonable to share some concern about the state of democracy in a context where the activity that brings it to life – politics – is viewed with a great deal of negativity and anxiety.

Mainstream politicians have tended to respond to this lack of confidence, trust, and perceived efficacy with 'democratic innovations', e.g. lowering the voting age, devolving power to regions/localities, or participatory decision-making. Other politicians – from Marine Le Pen to Nigel

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[1] On a scale running from 10 (completely) to 1 (not at all), just under two-thirds gave a score of 4 or less to the statement 'The political system allows people to have influence on politics', and a similar proportion gave a score of 4 or less to the statement 'Politicians care about what people think'. Fifty-five per cent gave such a low score for trust in politicians and also for trust in political parties.

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Farage to Donald Trump – have responded with versions of populism, positioning themselves with 'the people' against a system characterised as broken and a political class characterised as uncaring, untrustworthy, and out of touch with ordinary people.

Meanwhile, journalists have tended to respond – both to citizens' disaffection with politics and to populists' denigration of politics – by writing of 'anti-politics'. They sense an 'anti-politics mood' (Rawnsley 2016) or 'anti-politics wave' (Rentoul 2014) or 'anti-politics breeze' (Toynbee 2015). They describe an 'age of anti-politics' (d'Ancona 2016) or 'anti-politics age' (Lichfield 2016). For Rachel Sylvester (2014: 25), writing in *The Times*:

The anti-politics mood is growing all over the world, but manifests itself in different ways. In America, there is a loathing of big government that chimes with the individualism in the land of the free. In France, a distinctive form of nationalism taps into the anti-establishment mood, while in Greece and Spain a left-wing anti-austerity message is winning support. In Britain, intrigued and horrified by its upstairs-downstairs past, UKIP [the United Kingdom Independence Party] is playing on historical class divides.

There is much to unpack here. In this book, we offer our own response to this anti-politics talk and the survey results, democratic innovations, and populist campaigns it brings into focus.

We bring to the debate two connected methodological developments. First, we offer a longer view on the development of anti-politics than is found in most previous analysis. We explore the rise of anti-politics across eight decades. Second, we give a multi-layered voice to citizens' concerns about politics by mixing qualitative data from Mass Observation (MO) studies with quantitative analysis of responses to public opinion surveys. Using these two approaches allows us to conclude that – for the United Kingdom (UK), at least – anti-political sentiment has probably never been absent among citizens but has become more widely held and intensely felt over time. Our explanation for this growth is that citizens' changing images of what makes for a good politician, together with changing patterns of interaction between politicians and citizens, have shaped a more negative folk theory of democratic politics – a more negative popular narrative of how formal politics is *meant* to work and how it *does* work for most people. The increased prevalence of anti-political sentiment among citizens reflects both a heightened set of expectations regarding the qualities and character of a good politician and a reduced set of opportunities for making positive judgements about individual politicians (because of the nature of political exchange on offer in contemporary democracies). Anti-politics is the price that contemporary democracies

are paying for developing political systems where citizens expect politi-
cians to be exceptionally competent (capable, trustworthy, strong) and, at
the same time, ordinary ('normal', 'in touch'). It is the price paid for
political systems where the remoteness and negativity generated by poli-
tical marketing renders positive judgements about politics unlikely if not
impossible.

Anti-Politics

We define anti-politics as citizens' negative sentiment towards the activ-
ities and institutions of formal politics (politicians, parties, elections,
councils, parliaments, governments). Anti-politics, we argue, should
not be confused with healthy scepticism towards formal politics, which
most theories see as an essential component of democracy (e.g.
Sniderman 1981). Anti-politics goes beyond healthy scepticism to the
point of unhealthy cynicism. Nor should it be confused with apathy,
where citizens are less disaffected with and more just indifferent to formal
politics. Nor should anti-politics be confused with a changing party
system. Many citizens around the world are currently shifting their alle-
giances from older, larger, established parties to newer, smaller, challen-
ger parties. But many others are disengaging completely, having decided
that all parties and politicians are just as bad as each other. Finally, anti-
politics should not be confused with a crisis of democracy. While there is
much evidence of negative sentiment towards the institutions of formal
politics, there is little evidence of such feeling towards the idea of democ-
racy itself (Norris 2011).

We argue that anti-politics matters. It is associated with non-
participation such as not voting and non-compliance such as not paying
taxes (Dalton 2004, Norris 2011). It is associated with support for popu-
lism (Ford and Goodwin 2014, Jennings et al. 2016) – a problematic form
of politics that misrepresents heterogeneous populations as homogeneous
peoples, misrepresents all other politicians as elites opposed to those
peoples, and misrepresents the institutions and procedures for negotia-
tion and compromise between competing interests – i.e. politics – as just
unnecessary bureaucracy. Anti-politics also makes government more
difficult. Government is easier when demands have been aggregated by
strong parties (Dalton 2004) and legitimacy has been granted by strong
electoral support (Hetherington 2005).

There is a discussion of whether negativity towards formal politics
is currently being cancelled out by positivity towards informal politics
('the democratisation thesis' – Dalton 2000). We argue that little
empirical support exists for such an optimistic view. In countries

like the UK, only minorities participate in alternative activities like signing petitions, buying products for political reasons, or working in voluntary organisations (Whiteley 2012). These numbers are not really growing (ibid.). And, far from being disaffected citizens looking for alternative outlets for their political energies, protesters – whether demonstrators, boycotters, or signers of petitions – are more likely to be members of political parties and voters too (Norris et al. 2006, Saunders 2014). We argue that informal politics is not replacing formal politics but actually depends on a functioning formal politics for its freedoms and achievements. Democracy, if it is to provide government that is not only responsive but also able to make and enforce collective decisions, requires a balance between formal and informal politics. So anti-politics matters in so far as it directly undermines formal politics and indirectly undermines all politics (including informal politics). These issues and some of the conceptual challenges associated with anti-politics are discussed further in Chapter 1.

Taking the Long View

In the rest of the book, we take a longer view of anti-politics than has been taken by most researchers to date. Existing research has mostly taken a relatively short view and considered anti-political sentiment at one particular historical moment or the development of anti-political sentiment over just the past few decades. For example, Steven Fielding (2008) studied popular attitudes to British politics expressed in commercial feature films and public opinion polls in the two decades following the Second World War. He found evidence of anti-party populism. Citizens were viewed as powerless, while politicians were viewed as corrupt. He concluded that 'populism is not a recent phenomenon provoked by social change but something deriving from endemic tensions at the heart of representative democracy' (p128). Another example is the comparative research of Pippa Norris (2011). She studied longitudinal trends and cross-national patterns in political support using data from Eurobarometer (since the early 1970s) and the World Values Survey (since the early 1980s). She found variation by country and object of political support, which led her to conclude that 'confidence in public sector institutions ebbs and flows during these decades' (p12), 'public support for the political system has not eroded consistently in established democracies' (p241), and 'fluctuations over time usually prove far more common than straightforward linear or uniform downward trends' (p241).

Here, we have two different illustrations of the short view. Fielding considers one particular historical moment (the immediate post-war period), finds evidence of anti-politics, and concludes that if anti-politics was prevalent then it is surely a permanent fixture of British political culture. For Norris, the timeframe is recent decades (since the early 1970s). Looking across a range of countries and indicators, she sees only 'trendless fluctuation' (p241). In their own ways, each of these studies challenges common assumptions of declining political support and rising political disaffection. But they do so from particular historical perspectives. We argue that baseline and timeframe are crucial when studying change over time. If a longer period was considered, what would be the pattern of historical continuity and change?

There is a need for longer views of anti-politics. Since popular discussion often assumes a 'golden age' for democratic politics just after the Second World War – when voter turnout in countries like the UK was relatively high (see Chapter 1) – there is a need for views covering both the current so-called 'age of anti-politics' and the immediate post-war period. Some studies do exist going back further than Eurobarometer data from the 1970s. Research on political support in America often takes the late 1950s as its starting point, when the forerunner to the American National Election Study began asking questions about political trust (e.g. Putnam et al. 2000). Other single-country studies have managed to construct datasets going back to 1957 in the case of Norway (Listhaug 2006), 1959 for Italy (Segatti 2006), 1968 for Sweden (Holmberg 1999), and 1969 for Australia (Goot 2002). We are not aware of any existing studies that cover the full period of interest from the present day back to at least the Second World War.[2]

This is hardly surprising. Studies of historical change over more than a few decades are fraught with methodological challenges. We discuss these challenges in Chapter 2. We go on to argue that, for the case of the UK, such challenges can be overcome. Trends for things like approval of government or satisfaction with leaders can be constructed from commercial polling data (first collected by the British Institute of Public Opinion or BIPO in 1937). Historical comparisons for things like the suspected motivations of politicians can be constructed from survey data collected by BIPO, Gallup, Ipsos MORI, YouGov, and other polling organisations. Perhaps most significantly, a long-term index of political disaffection can be constructed from these datasets and others – including

[2] Goot's (2002) study of Australia probably comes closest. While he finds data on trust in government and political interest going back only to 1969, he finds more narrowly focused data on political parties – e.g. perceptions of difference between the main parties – going back to 1946.

the British Election Study since 1963 – using James Stimson's (1991) dyad-ratios algorithm. We do this in Chapter 3.

Listening to Citizens' Voices

In addition to taking the long view, in the rest of the book we also listen to citizens' voices more than has been done by most research on anti-politics to date. Existing research in this field has been dominated by large-scale surveys and closed questions. There is a need to listen more to what citizens say about politics when allowed to speak in their own terms on the subject. This has been done to some extent for the current period, where interviews and focus groups have been completed with citizens (e.g. Allen and Birch 2015a, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002, Hörschelmann and El Refaie 2013, Manning and Holmes 2013, McDowell et al. 2014, O'Toole et al. 2003, van Wessel 2010). But it has not really been done for the past, not least because researchers holding twenty-first-century concerns cannot go back in time and discuss them with people from an earlier period. One exception worth mentioning here is Jay Childers' (2012) study of youth in America. He listens to – or reads – their voices in high school newspapers going back to 1965. This longitudinal yet qualitative study is novel and rigorous in its use of high school newspapers to excavate citizens' changing orientations to politics. But the focus is rather narrow – both socially (on American youth) and temporally (going back only to 1965).

In Chapter 2, we argue that listening to a wider range of citizens over a longer period of time is possible for the case of the UK because of a possibly unique dataset: the Mass Observation Archive. Mass Observation (MO) was founded in 1937, the same year BIPO began collecting survey data in the UK. Between 1939 and 1955 and again between 1981 and the present, MO ran a panel of between 400 and 1000 volunteer writers (depending on the year). On numerous occasions during both periods – which happen to correspond to the so-called 'golden age' of democracy and the so-called 'age of anti-politics' – panellists were asked by MO to write about formal politics (politicians, parties, elections, governments). Historians have used MO sources to study the immediate post-war period and to argue that Britain's political culture has long been characterised by anti-political feeling (e.g. Fielding et al. 1995, Jefferys 2007). We build on such research in two main ways. First, instead of taking the short view of just the immediate post-war period, we take the long view by comparing the writing of MO panellists in the earlier period with equivalent writing from the

later period. Second, instead of relying on summaries of MO mate-rial constructed by MO researchers (known as File Reports and Topic Collections) – as these historians did, at least for the most part – we undertook our own systematic analysis of the 'raw' data.

We discuss this further in Chapter 2, where we also clarify our treat-ment of the various datasets in the book as a whole. Chapter 3 uses large-scale survey data to establish the changing social scope of anti-politics. This is a topic for which survey data is most appropriate. The original contribution in Chapter 3 is the application of statistical techniques like Stimson's dyad-ratios algorithm. Most of the rest of the book is driven by the MO data. We ask: What can this unusual dataset tell us about anti-politics? What can it tell us about existing claims and theories of anti-politics? What new claims and theories – new patterns and explanations – are suggested by the MO material? What new hypotheses are generated for testing by future research? In the rest of the book, we make some new claims – the original contributions of Chapters 4 to 8 – and begin the process of testing these claims by bringing back the survey data at various points. At some points, we find little available survey data to bring back in (a symptom of the historical development of public opinion research discussed in Chapter 2). But at other points, we can see to what extent our findings from the MO research are supported by available survey data.

One further clarification is worth providing at this early stage. Political support is multi-dimensional (Easton 1965, 1975). Across the chapters, we consider various objects of political support. In Chapter 3, the wide focus covers Members of Parliament, ministers, politicians, parties, Parliament, the government, the system of governing, and citizens (their political efficacy). In Chapter 6, the focus is mostly on parties. In Chapter 8, the focus is mostly on elections, political campaigning, and media coverage of politics. But in much of the book – Chapters 4, 5, and 7 – the focus is mostly on politicians. This emphasis is one reason for the book's title: *The Good Politician*. We focus on politicians above all other objects of political support because the MO material encouraged such a focus. MO panellists wrote much more about politicians than parties, governments, Parliament, or the political system as a whole. We also learned from Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995) and Whiteley et al. (2016) that politicians deserve such a central place in research on anti-politics because when citizens think of more abstract objects – such as Congress in the case of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse – they often think of the politicians who make up those institutions. They use politicians as a heuristic to judge the activities and institutions of formal politics in general (Whiteley et al. 2016).

The Rise of Anti-Politics

Having taken the long view and listened to citizens' voices, we provide a new analysis of anti-politics in the UK. We argue that no golden age of political support existed. Even in the immediate post-war period, substantial proportions of the population disapproved of governments and prime ministers (whatever their political persuasion). They thought politicians to be out for themselves and their party (as opposed to their country). They associated political campaigning with vote-catching stunts, mud-slinging, and a focus on personalities over policies. They imagined politicians to be self-seeking 'gasbags'. However, we also argue – contrary to narratives of permanent anti-politics or trendless fluctuation – that anti-political sentiment has increased in the UK over the past half-century in at least three respects: social scope, political scope, and intensity.

In Chapter 3, we use survey data to demonstrate how the *social scope* of anti-politics has increased over time. More and more citizens have expressed negativity towards the activities and institutions of formal politics. For example, more and more citizens have disapproved of governments and prime ministers and judged politicians to be out for themselves and their parties. Today, political disaffection is still felt more strongly in certain social groups (e.g. older, poorer, less educated men). But on some measures – such as questions about the competence of politicians – these differences have now shrunk as the vast majority of the UK's population express negativity towards formal politics.

In Chapter 4, we demonstrate how the *political scope* of anti-politics has increased over time. Citizens have expressed more and more grievances regarding the activities and institutions of formal politics. For example, in the first period of data collection by MO (1939–1955), panellists often described politicians as being self-interested (they were 'self-seekers' or 'place-seekers') and not straight-talking (they were 'gasbags' or 'gift of the gabbers'). In the second period (1981–2015), these storylines were still commonly used by panellists, but so were a number of newer ones. Politicians were also described as being out of touch ('toffs' and 'career politicians') and all the same (from similar backgrounds, focused on similar problems, offering similar solutions, and 'all as bad as each other').

Anti-politics has increased in social and political scope but also in the strength by which more and more citizens hold more and more grievances – what we call *intensity*. This claim is demonstrated in Chapter 5, again drawing on MO sources (with support from survey data). Panellists in the 1940s and 1950s were less deferent and more

critical of politicians than we might expect – at least given the 'decline of deference' literature (e.g. Nevitte 1996). They were also critical of doctors (seen as incompetent and self-interested) and lawyers (seen as dishonest 'sharks'). Panellists in recent decades were generally no more critical of these other professions than they had been in the earlier period (indeed, they were often less critical in the later period). The exception was negative feeling towards politicians, which had intensified – and beyond what could reasonably be expected as a result of things like citizens' improved education and higher expectations of politics. Many panellists in the 2000s and 2010s reported feeling 'anger', 'outrage', and 'disgust' towards politicians who they described as 'contemptable', 'disgraceful', 'loathsome', and 'shameful'.

Explaining Anti-Politics: Conceptual Tools

Having offered this new account of how anti-politics has developed over time, we turn to the question of what explains the rise of anti-politics. Much existing research on what explains patterns of political support has focused on either 'demand-side' or 'supply-side' factors. Some argue that citizens have changed and now demand different things from politics (e.g. Inglehart 1997, Norris 1999). Citizens are thought to have become more educated, more secure in economic terms, and less deferent to authority figures. They are thought to expect more from formal politics and also to practise their own informal politics, making formal politics less important for them compared to previous generations. Others argue that politics has changed – the supply of politics – and now provides different things to citizens (e.g. Hay 2007, Mouffe 2005). Parties are thought to have converged on the terrain of neoliberalism – a project of the New Right attacking the public domain in the name of free markets and market discipline. Neoliberalism positions civil servants and politicians as self-interested rent-seekers and removes power and responsibility from public actors via deregulation, privatisation, and audit. In turn, citizens are thought to withdraw from formal politics once there seems to be no meaningful choice between parties, and politicians seem to be at the same time both self-interested and powerless.

At the end of his influential book on *Why We Hate Politics*, Colin Hay (2007: 160) called for something beyond this supply-and-demand framework:

[I]t is time that we rejected the overly parsimonious language of supply and demand. Politics is more complicated than that ... [The] task from now on

must surely be to analyse rather more effectively the complex relationships between the ideas and assumptions we project on to politics on the one hand, and the practices and processes on to which those ideas and assumptions are projected on the other.

In responding to this call, we focus on citizens' judgements of politics as they relate to understandings of and encounters with politics. We develop an approach to explaining anti-politics focused on citizens' folk theories of politics and how citizens form judgements of politics in relation to these folk theories but also to interactions with politics and especially politicians.

Folk Theories

Our approach to how citizens understand politics has numerous origins. One is well-established research on political culture, defined as people's attitudes and feelings towards the political system but also their knowledge of the political system and especially their expectations regarding the potential of that system to effect change and the role of the self within that system (Almond and Verba 1963). Another is cognitive science of the past few decades (see Holland and Quinn 1987, Lakoff and Johnson 2003). This teaches how behaviour is shaped by understanding, and, in turn, understanding is shaped by cultural knowledge in the form of shared models, schemas, frameworks, scripts, stories, metaphors, and prototypes. A third origin is social theoretical writing on discourses as forms of consciousness (Foucault 1991) made up of concepts, ideas, representations, images, frames, stories, narratives, and subject positions. Such discourses delimit what can be thought and said, inform practices, and so construct social reality. Yet another origin is the interpretive approach to political science, where actions are taken to follow from beliefs and beliefs are taken to be holistic: action within a discourse or tradition (Bevir and Rhodes 2005).

What all these origins or influences point to is that citizens develop orientations – such as negativity towards the activities and institutions of formal politics – by drawing on repertoires of cultural resources. These are generated where expert knowledge, popular wisdom, and personal experience meet. They are communicated and disclosed through talk or writing. Perhaps most importantly, at least for this book, cultural resources vary over time in their prevalence and prominence. They are constructed and deconstructed in relation to changing social conditions (Fairclough 2002). As they come and go or stay and mutate, certain ways of thinking, being, and doing are made available to citizens at certain historical moments.