On Democratic Responsiveness

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Prepared for “The Quality of Democracy: Improvement or Subversion?” Conference,
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In his organizing essay, Leonardo Morlino (2003) offers a minimal definition of democracy, based on multiple information sources and the competitive election of those who dominate the policymaking process. He then suggests five dimensions of “quality” on which working democracies might vary. One of these dimensions is “the responsiveness or correspondence of the political decisions to the desires of the citizens (3).” He suggests that this dimension is closely connected to accountability, but evaluates more substantively how government policies correspond to citizen’s demands. While some democratic theorists have defined democracy itself in terms of such responsiveness, I shall follow Morlino’s general suggestion that we think of it as a desirable quality of performance, rather than as part of the definition of democracy. This approach is also in line with Dahl’s suggestion that citizens inducing the government to do what they want is a justification for democracy, not a definition of it (1989, 95).

We must keep in mind that correspondence between citizens’ policy desires and government’s policy outcomes is not a sufficient measure of democratic responsiveness. Good fortune or environmental advantages do not imply responsiveness. Nor should responsiveness in a democracy depend only on the benevolence of its policymakers. Ideally, we should find that the institutionalized arrangements of the democracy, above all its electoral processes, are reliably creating connections between citizens and policymakers (see Pitkin 1967, 232-234.)
These systematic policy connections might be created in one or more of several ways. Among these are (1) the systematic eviction of unresponsive or incompetent policymakers, encouraging their successors to anticipate citizens’ desires more carefully, (2) the direct election of powerful, promise-keeping governments who are publicly committed to policies the citizens want, and (3) the election of multiple, representative parties, who are committed to negotiating as agents the policies favored by the subgroup of citizens who elected them (Powell 2000, Ch. 1). Different theorists and commentators on democratic processes have varying opinions as to the relative likelihood that one or another of these connections will be effective. But democratic responsiveness should probably be founded on one or more of them, not on happy accident.

At the moment I want to set aside the issue of citizen’s “interests” as opposed to their preferences, and consider responsiveness to be a connection between preferences and policies. There are both philosophical and practical reasons for this. The philosophical reason is that liberal democratic theory, which is my guide here, assumes that in the end citizens must be their own judges of their interests; no one else can better do it for them (e.g. Dahl 1989, 99). The practical reason is that I have no idea in general as to how to judge true “interests” apart from preferences. Of course, citizens may be ill-informed or their policymakers may choose to mislead them (or dupe them in their own interests) and where this is obvious we may choose to be critical of the quality of democratic responsiveness. I’ll try to return to this. But at the moment I want to sketch some issues in assessing the “responsiveness connection,” assuming that citizens are the best judge of their own interests.
The bottom line here, I regret to say, is that evaluating the quality of democratic responsiveness seems very difficult. This is probably not the message that this Conference wanted to hear. Indeed, I don’t like it myself, being normatively committed to democracy and believing that policy responsiveness is one of the qualities that should follow from it. I hope that I shall be convinced otherwise after hearing others discuss this issue. But let me explain why it seems to me that it is so hard, first in a few words and then in slightly more detail.

We can think of democratic responsiveness as involving a causal chain, as is sketched in Figure 1. It begins with citizen policy preferences on the left of the figure and involves each of the subsequent stages through voting choices, election outcomes, the selection of policymakers, policymaking between elections, and public policies. These policies and their consequences then affect preferences that citizens have for subsequent policies in an on-going, dynamic process.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

If we break down the process of democratic responsiveness into its components this way, a moment’s reflection will remind us that the last half-century of theoretical and empirical political science research has taught us that such essential concepts as citizens’ preferences, election outcomes, political influence, and policy consequences are fraught with exquisitely complex problems for analysis. Even the “simple” connection between voting choices and election outcomes has generated a large and complex literature in which, although a great deal of progress has been made, important questions remain unanswered (Powell 2004.) Each part of this causal chain involves substantial difficulties in measurement and matching to assess correspondence. Moreover, different democratic
ideals and different democratic visions (general theories about how the connections should be created in democratic competition) would make some of these matches in different ways.

On one hand, if we are to assess causality in the overall correspondence of preferences and policies, we need to fill in at least some of these causal mechanisms, despite the demonstrated complexities. On the other, we should not equate apparent success of one connection with quality of the entire process. If there is a practical answer to this problem, it would seem to lie in multiple indicators and/or in the identification of key failures in necessary links in the chain. Following this thought, I shall try in conclusion to temper my generally sobering message with a few suggestions about indicators of democratic quality that we might consider.

WHAT CITIZENS WANT

Let us begin with perhaps the most difficult problem. We want to assess the quality of the process through which citizens induce governments to do what they want them to do. Therefore, we must identify what citizens in a given society at a given time want their government to do. Let me consider some difficulties and possible solutions at three levels: conceptual, normative, and empirical.

Conceptual difficulties in assessing what citizens want. There are several difficulties here. First, how much “enlightened understanding” of the citizenry shall we require before we consider the system to be a democracy? Dahl (89, 112) and Morlino (2003) assume adequate and equal opportunities for citizens to acquire information about their interests, so that their preferences can be formed on a firm foundation. We know,
however, that even in democracies with high levels of education and multiple media sources, such as the United States, many citizens pay little attention to political issues much of the time. Shall we just assume that opportunity is sufficient? We seem to have little choice here, but, if so, how much opportunity to become enlightened shall we require? Shall we consider a population that is 50% illiterate still to be sufficiently enlightened, if there are multiple mass media? If not, then we should not be trying to assess its democratic responsiveness.

Second, equally fundamental, what shall we do about multiple issue dimensions? Social choice theorists have spent a great deal of time investigating formally the problem of aggregating preferences of multiple individuals into single choices. The fundamental result of such investigations (summarized as Arrow’s Paradox) is that there are distributions of preferences on which no outcome may be unequivocally preferred by a majority of citizens to all other outcomes. The only condition under which this is definitely not true is when all the preferences may be summarized on a single dimension; under that condition the position of the median voter will defeat any other position, (assuming citizens always favor the position closer to them). This problem led as convinced a democrat as William Riker, after thinking very hard about these issues, to deny fundamentally that responsiveness (what he called “populism”) could or should be a quality of democracy:

“The populist interpretation of voting (i.e., that what the people, as a corporate entity, want ought to be public policy) cannot stand because it is inconsistent with social choice theory. If the outcomes of voting are, or may be, inaccurate or meaningless amalgamations, what the people want cannot be known. Hence
the populist goal is unattainable.” (Riker 1982, xviii.)

Riker argues, in effect, for a purely procedural assessment of democracy, in which a majority of citizens can collectively remove an incumbent government, but no assessment of the policy implications can be inferred. “The kind of democracy that thus survives is not, however, popular rule, but rather an intermittent, sometimes random, even perverse, popular veto.” (Riker 1982, 244.)

For Riker, responsiveness in the substantive policy sense that we have in mind here, is conceptually impossible—except under conditions where the people have a “coherent” will. “If, by reason of discussion, debate, civic education and political socialization, voters have a common view of the political dimension (as evidenced by single-peakedness), than a transitive outcome is guaranteed.”(128.) From this point of view, it is an empirical question about the citizens in a given society, as to whether it is conceptually meaningful to assess the democratic responsiveness of the policies made by their government. (But Riker thinks that because of strategic behavior and manipulation of choices it is even impossible to find out empirically whether the preference configuration allows meaningful responsiveness.) I shall set aside Riker’s opinion that this conceptual problem and the complexity of the full bundle of preferences that citizens hold in a large society make assessing democratic responsiveness generally impossible, but posit that the discovery of a common discourse (ideally a unidimensional one) is essential for our assessment of responsiveness.

Normative difficulties in assessing what citizens want. Let us suppose that we can identify a common, even unidimensional, discourse and a citizen distribution on it. It is still not entirely clear to what position the policymakers should respond. Of course, if the
people are in general agreement, the answer is straightforward. But what if they are not? Arend Lijphart puts it this way:

“Who will do the governing and to whose interests should the government be responsive when the people are in disagreement and have divergent preferences? One answer is: the majority of the people….The alternative answer is: as many people as possible. That is the essence of the consensus model;…its rules and institutions aim at broad participation in government and broad agreement on the policies that government should pursue.” (Lijphart 984, 4-5.)

Consider Figure 2. Here we see three distributions of citizen opinion on a unidimensional issue space. I call it “left-right,” but it could have any substantive content. In the “spike” distribution, the citizens are pretty much agreed on a given policy and it is that position that the policy makers should be induced to match. (It will, of course, contain the median citizen position.) In the more dispersed, but bell-shaped, distribution, with citizens symmetrically distant from the median, the best single position under either “majoritarian” or “consensus” models is still the median. But Lijphart seems to suggest that in the consensus view policies, rather than focused on a single point, will cover a wider range of the distribution, perhaps with some specific policies to the left and some to the right, still centered about the median. In the assymetrical and bi-modal distribution, the median position is still the best single point for majoritarians, but for the consensus responsiveness to get a distribution that matches the citizens some specific policies must depart quite a ways from the median. Or, possibly, to raise another, possibly related, normative issue, perhaps the best consensus position should take
account of substantive distances, not merely numbers, and focus around the mean, rather than the median. We might especially think this if those at more distant position felt more intensely, a feature that simple voting comparisons cannot reveal.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

While these issues of “to whom” the policymakers should respond are not as conceptually intractable as those discussed above, they do alert us to the implications of simple majoritarianism versus some alternatives, and the need for a more complex assessment of the distribution of citizens preferences, as well as the median point, in some normative models of responsiveness. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Powell 2000, 6,) those who favor the consensus or proportional vision of electoral and policymaking institutions, may do so either because they favor normatively the more dispersed (or intensity-directed) criterion of responsiveness, or because they theorize that proportional election outcomes and inclusive policymaking are a more reliable means of getting correspondence to the median. The former issue is not empirically resolvable, although the latter may be.

Empirical Difficulties in Assessing What Citizens Want: Votes as a Solution. Let us suppose that we can rely on a sufficiently informed citizen discourse, based on multiple information sources and have decided that we want to know the position of the median citizen (or the mean, or a distribution, for that matter.) How do we find out what it is? The simplest way is to assume that all we need to know is the distribution of citizen’s votes.

Votes have several important advantages over surveys as the way to assess what citizens want. First, empirically, they are much more widely available and (if we agree
that the country is a democracy) more easily comparable across languages, contexts, administrative procedures, samples, and so forth. Second, they allow the citizens themselves to deal with many of the troubling conceptual problems of multi-dimensionality and salience of different issues, policy enlightenment, intensity and so forth, weighing these in whatever manner they deem most appropriate as they approach the voting decision. Votes constitute uniquely authoritative, behavioral evidence of citizen preferences. As such, in my view, they should never be ignored in trying to assess responsiveness.

However, as libraries of voting studies have demonstrated, votes are also problematic as comparable evidence of preferences. On one hand, policy preferences are not the only bases on which citizens make their voting choices. Quite aside from bribery, corruption, and error in counting and aggregation (which in some systems may be not inconsiderable,) we know that as they make vote choices citizens may be thinking about candidate personalities, attractiveness of leaders, party identifications learned in childhood, images of connections between parties and social or economic groups, and other considerations of varying relevance to public policies. We know that individually there is a great deal of inconsistency across elections that is not systematically related to changing policy preferences or alternatives. On the other hand, we also know that the citizens’ voting choices are constrained by the alternatives that are offered them by the political parties. Parties at best offer alternative packages of policy alternatives, but the more preferred packages may well contain elements that citizens don’t like, outweighed by elements that they do like. (The classic examples are found on nationalization and denationalization issues that divided British parties, and shaped their behavior in office,
in ways that did not match voter preferences, as in the renationalization of the steel industry after 1966.) Moreover, as social choice theorists warned us, many possible alternatives cannot even be posed by the parties; some of these or their combinations might be preferred to any of the alternatives offered.

It may be especially doubtful to compare votes as a guide to preferences across party systems. Multiparty systems may offer a wider range of policy alternatives than two party systems, which will be forced to exclude more possibilities, especially troubling if multidimensionality is involved. Moreover, as Lijphart suggests, there may be varying levels of strategic voting in different systems, which may make the vote distributions an unequal guide even to party preferences (1994, 97). We also know that some party systems are much more oriented to local issues and district level candidate characteristics than others, both because of the society and because of the election rules. There is also the question as to whether the voters who participated matched the total preferences of the citizens; and we know that turnout levels and the representativeness of participants vary notably across systems (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978).

Finally, the alternative normative visions of responsiveness noted above have their counterpart in the rules and practices that connect parties, representatives and governments. Suppose we take responsiveness to imply correspondence between citizens’ votes for a party and its representation in the government. As we see in Figure 3 there are two rather different ideals of this kind of responsiveness. In the proportional ideal, as a party’s voter support increases, so should its share in government. In the majoritarian ideal, a party will have no share in government until it approaches 50% of the vote. After that point, it is given complete control of the government. These are, to be sure, both
democratic ideals of responsiveness—non democratic forms would show a downward sloping line; non-responsiveness would be a flat, horizontal line, showing irrelevance of voter support for a party’s role in government. But they are quite different ideals, reflecting (as noted above), either different ideals about the nature of policy responsiveness or different theories about how best to attain it. (An empirical investigation of these correspondence patterns in established parliamentary systems in economically developed societies showed that alternative election rules tended to perform fairly well by “their” standards (PR systems by proportional criteria and majoritarian systems by majoritarian criteria,) and poorly by the alternative standards, Powell 2000, Ch. 6.)¹

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Empirical Difficulties in Assessing What Citizens Want: Positional Attributions of Votes as a Solution. A further difficulty of using votes as the measure of citizen’s preferences is, of course, that votes have intrinsically no policy content. On one hand, this implies that we cannot ascertain whether parties are very similar in policy terms or very different. If they are very similar, then for policy responsiveness it may not matter very much if the party with the most votes is superceded in government by the second-place party. In the ideal model of two party competition proposed by Anthony Downs (1957), the policy promises of the two parties converge to the position of the median voter. Good correspondence between the median voter and the winner is guaranteed by competition itself, regardless of which party actually wins. From this point of view, we might not be

¹ This summary is only true for the majoritarian systems if we accept achieving a voter plurality, not majority, as sufficient justification for gaining total control of government. Voter majorities were only rarely achieved by a single party in either type of system.
disconcerted by, say, the New Zealand election of 1978 (or 1981), in which the party finishing second won unchecked control of government due to the distribution of votes across parties and districts in a three-party race, because at that point the two parties were offering fairly similar policy promises. We might be quite disconcerted, on the other hand, by an election in which a plurality winner far from the median voter took office because two candidates closer to the median split the vote. (New Zealand in 1993 looks something like this, as perhaps does Chile in 1970.) We might be especially dismayed, in terms of democratic responsiveness, if the winner might have lost to both of the other parties in a two-party confrontation (a Condorcet loser.)

Yet another problem with simply using votes as indicators of citizen preferences is that votes give us no ability to assess the performance of the subsequent government in keeping its policy promises. (Although we might look at the fate of that government in the next election as a possible solution.) We cannot directly match votes with policies or policy outcomes, because votes as such provide no common metric.

A possible solution to these problems, building on the authenticity of votes, is to attribute policy positions to the parties and assume that citizens who voted for those parties supported those positions. While we know from voting studies that this assumption will contain substantial error at the level of individual citizens, we might assume that these “errors” of inattention, candidate personality, and so forth will largely cancel out. The positions of the parties or candidates themselves could be inferred from press accounts of the election campaigns, as does Stokes in her assessment of which presidential candidates favored “efficiency-oriented” or “security-oriented” economic policies in Latin American elections between 1982 and 1995 (Stokes 2001, 28.) Or, from
expert assessments of party positions as does Colomer in his analysis of presidents and median voters, (and of Condorcet winners and losers,) in Latin American presidential elections (Colomer 2003). Or, from systematic analyses of party election manifestos, which are used by Kim and Fording to estimate the position of the median voters in twenty-five Western European countries throughout the postwar period (Kim and Fording 1998, 2003; based on the original manifesto codes of Budge, at al 1992 and Budge and Laver 1993, which are designed to be substantively comparable across countries.) These estimations may be of varying levels of detail, from a dichotomy (Stokes), to a five-category scale of extreme left to extreme right (Colomer), to a continuous 0-100 scale (Kim and Fording).

Even aside from the assumptions involved in inferring preferences from votes, there are some fairly serious technical complexities and difficulties in each of the approaches to estimating party positions. Each has to be assessed in detail in its own right, depending on the explicit way that responsiveness is being analyzed. Moreover, various specific assumptions are being made, which might make the application more appropriate in some circumstances than others. (E.g. Stokes assumes that the economic policies loomed largest in the voters minds; Colomer and Kim and Fording assume that specific issues can be collected into a single left-right scale; all assume that the inferences are comparable across different countries and times.) While this approach is a promising one, especially where individual level surveys are unavailable or inappropriate, the various limitations, especially at finer levels of gradation, must be kept fully in mind.

**Empirical Difficulties in Assessing What Citizens Want: Survey Research as a Solution.** Of course, where available, citizen surveys are the obvious way to get at the
assessment of citizen preferences. Aside from the far from trivial practical question of the availability of comparable, high-quality surveys in different countries, the main problems of surveys remind us of the conceptual difficulties raised above: how “enlightened” are the citizen responses; how do we deal with multiple issues and saliences; do the questions capture the policy trade-offs across different issues, and so forth? We must be careful in avoiding casual citizen replies to issues they have not, or not yet, fully considered. We must avoid assuming that all issues are of equal importance. We must deal with the problem, understood well by experienced survey researchers, that questions asked of citizens must typically be simpler than the full complexities of specific policies. (For a thoughtful discussion of these issues, at both substantive and technical levels, see the classic study of representation in Congress by Miller and Stokes 1964; for a brief review of literature building on Miller and Stokes in contexts outside the US, see Powell 2004.) Moreover, very few studies ask citizens to evaluate combinations and trade-offs across policy areas.

Where we can assume both general citizen understanding of a common language of discourse, such as a left-right dimension, under which the specific issues can be subsumed, and the presence of good surveys tapping this discourse, then citizen-self placement on left and right can be a valuable base-line for assessing correspondence of citizens and policymakers (Powell 2000, Ch. 7-10.) Yet, great care must still be used in moving across countries. It may well be that citizens’ understanding of the substantive meaning of a centrist position at 5.5, for example, may be quite different in different countries. (Think of British and American’s view of national health policy, for example.) We must either (1) find a way to make an assessment of elite positions comparable to the
citizens within each country, and then use only distances between the two to measure responsiveness, or (2) find a way to adjust the citizen self-placements to substantive comparability across countries to link to comparable policies.

MATCHING CITIZEN PREFERENCES AND PUBLIC POLICIES

Considering the use of the left-right scale to estimate citizen preferences brings to the fore a number of specific difficulties in matching citizen preferences and public policies. Ideally, we want to match preferences to policies, not only to the positions taken by parties and policymakers. It is, after all, the correspondence to public policies, not to announced elite positions, that is essential to our definition of democratic responsiveness.

First, there is the problem of the units of matching. If citizens are asked about welfare spending, for example, how many more dollars of expenditure are an appropriate match for a citizen response that “more” support for the unfortunate would be a good thing? How much concern about poverty translates into a responsive increase in spending or a new set of programs? Similarly, with inflation, unemployment, life-expectancy, economic growth, literacy, murder rates, and so forth. What does “3” on the left-right scale translate into in terms of economic and social policy?

Second, closely related, is the issue of policy outputs versus outcomes. Are we interested in citizen’s desire for more security or reduction in specific types of crime? Is it spending on education or success in reducing literacy? Reducing the unemployment level, programs to retrain the unemployed or more spending for those without jobs? Specific surveys can ask these specific questions, but do we expect citizens to have specific opinions on them, or general leanings in one direction or another? (Note that this
is a question that can emerge at the general philosophical or conceptual level, or at the practical level of survey research.)

Third, the problem of the status quo looms large in matching preferences and policies. The context in which citizens are living inevitably shapes their perception of the importance and the content of the policies they desire. Questions about national health policy in the US and Britain are dealing with quite different current programs. Levels of income inequality and welfare transfers differ sharply across countries. So do levels of inflation and current government expenditures. It is difficult to get at citizen preferences somehow apart from these contexts. But if, as is often the case, what we know about citizen preferences is relative to the contexts, (as in questions about whether income inequality should be “reduced,” for example) our cross-national comparisons of citizen preferences for policies in their respective countries is a complex matter.

Finally, if we cannot rely on something like a “left-right” scale, we confront again multiple issues, packages, and sharp differences in the realistic possibilities in different countries. Do we generate theoretically a list of possible public policies, as in Gabriel Almond’s “policy goods” of welfare, security, equality, etc. (Almond, et al., 2004, 148-150) and go down the list? Do we rely on surveys to ascertain the issues most important to citizens and try to weight them? Do we rely on the packages that the parties are offering and match those back to the citizens and forward to the nation’s policy performance?
THE CAUSAL CONNECTION:
DO CITIZEN PREFERENCES MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

I want to return to the point that democratic responsiveness is a causal connection, in which citizens’ preferences are influencing the public policies of the society. There are two problems here. One problem is that even if policymakers are attempting to be responsive, inevitably many things other than citizen preferences are going to affect public policies and the outcomes of those policies. A second problem is that we want evidence that the democratic processes are indeed inducing that attempt to be responsive.

The first problem, the impact of exogenous, uncontrollable conditions on policy, looms very large when we attempt to assess impact of citizen preferences in shaping policies. There are many relevant conditions that policymakers cannot control, especially in the short run. The productivity of the economy (level of economic development,) natural resources and human capital, social demographics, dependence on international trade and aid, short term economic fluctuations induced by international factors, bureaucratic capacity, and so forth will affect what the most democratic policymakers can do about reducing poverty, providing for the elderly, increasing literacy, retraining the unemployed, supporting agriculture and whatever else citizens may want for their public policies.

In assessing the causal impact of citizens on policy, we need to have direct or indirect measures of citizen preferences in an analysis that also takes account of all these uncontrollable conditions. (Determining which conditions are truly beyond the control of national policymakers and which can be altered by them, and what time frame, is part of
the challenge.) It is important not to assume that, for example, a rich country that spends
twice as much on welfare or education as a poor country is more responsive, even if both
sets of citizens say they want equivalent welfare or education policies. Indeed, taking
account of resources and capabilities, the poorer country might be more responsive. For
this reason, simple cross-national comparisons of policy outcomes are extremely dubious
as indicators of the quality of democratic responsiveness, even if we could assume that all
citizens want, for example, economic growth. If we are to pursue this route to analyzing
responsiveness, we would need to draw on sophisticated studies of public policies,
incorporating measures of (e.g.) citizen party support in a multivariate model that
controls for conditions beyond policymakers’ control. (See, e.g., Franzese 2002 on
macroeconomic policies, including transfer systems, in developed democracies.)
Unfortunately, it is likely that these conditions vary by type of policy area, as well as by
general features of the society.

We should note at this point also that measuring democratic responsiveness by
citizen’s satisfaction with policies may run into the same difficulty. Citizens are likely to
report economic pessimism and dissatisfaction when an international depression causes
exports to dry up and plunge the economy into declining growth and loss of jobs. Yet, the
policymakers may be being just as responsive to citizen preferences as they were in good
times. Much depends on whether we think citizens can or should discriminate between
conditions within and outside of policymaker control in their evaluations (whether these
are measured by polls or votes.) Perhaps I am being unduly pessimist here.

Finally, in the problem of causal effect of citizens’ preferences on policies, I return to
the difficulty of distinguishing between correspondence and causality. Democratic
responsiveness means not just correspondence, but correspondence founded on working democratic processes. This is where not just comparing the preferences and the outcomes, but tracing the connections through elections and choosing (or rejecting) policymakers is desirable. In assessing the quality of democratic responsiveness, we would ideally want to find both (1) policies that push the country (given its advantages and constraints) in the direction that citizens want and (2) evidence of positive electoral connections or absence of negative ones (plurality losers, distant winners, and so forth) between citizens and those who make the policies.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS: MEASURES

As should be clear from the comments above, I am somewhat doubtful that any simple measures available for a large number of democracies at this time can adequately assess their relative democratic responsiveness. In my view the concept contains such difficult and complex elements that our measurement attempts are not likely to be very reliable or satisfactory. I am especially skeptical of using--as responsiveness measures--statistics on aggregate economic or security performance that take account neither of citizens’ preferences nor of other factors (such as economic development and international dependence) that shape such performance.

Nonetheless, in the spirit of responding to the task set by the Conference, let me briefly touch on a few positive possibilities:

1. Citizen satisfaction with democracy. We have available for quite a few countries and increasingly in time series, citizen responses to the survey question on how well democracy is working in the respondent’s country (as suggested by Morlino 2003, 12.)
This kind of measure has the advantage of letting the citizens aggregate across possible issues, take account of their own intensities, and assessments, and so forth in producing a single overall assessment.

The primary difficulty with such measures is to know whether citizens are assessing “responsiveness” as a democratic quality, other democratic qualities, or the overall performance in substantive areas affected by matters beyond policymakers’ control. Moreover, the work of Anderson and Guillroy (1997), suggests that respondents whose parties are at the moment in government tend to say democracy is working better than their excluded counterparts and that the difference between the short-term winners and losers is greater in majoritarian systems than consensus ones. We might also expect, as often with survey results, that the degree of “enlightenment” in terms of the citizens’ thoughtfulness and attentiveness varies within and across societies. Still, if we are willing to trust the citizens, these measures have much to recommend them, perhaps especially if joined to some of the measures below.

2. Correspondence between the position of the median citizen and the position of the policymakers on a measure of common discourse, such as the left-right scale. Questions asking citizens to place themselves on such a scale are increasingly common; expert studies or supporter placements can be used to place the governing parties. With some reassurance from country experts that the discourse is meaningful to the citizens, and taking care to make comparisons of citizens and governing parties using a common scale within the country, this kind of distance measure can identify when electoral and government formation processes result in good or poor correspondence.
Aside from the dependence on a common metric within the countries, and comparable distances between scale points across them, this has the disadvantage of ignoring the actual policies that governments make. It will not pick up post-election policy-switchers, of the sort Stokes identifies in Latin American in the 1980s and 1990s (Stokes, 2001.) There is also the question of parties versus candidates, especially in presidential systems.

2a. Another form of this approach is to use experts, manifestos or other means to place the political parties and or presidential candidates on some kind of substantive scale. Then, infer the scale position of the citizen median voter from the distribution of party votes (Kim and Fording 1998). That position can then be compared to the position of the governing party or candidate. This will help identify outcomes where, e.g., parties and candidates closer to the median are splitting the vote and allowing extremists to win, (Colomer 2003) or where district malapportionment, too many parties, and other features of election contests, are leading to outcomes off the median voter. As avoiding this kind of outcome seems important to the causal linkages of democratic responsiveness, this kind of correspondence has attractive features.

Again, this won’t get at governments that abandon their electoral commitments. Moreover, by estimating the citizen position from the votes it will ignore cases where none of the parties are offering policy packages attractive to the citizens, so that the latter are choosing the least of evils. This approach, of course, also assumes that the voters are “enlightened” in the sense meant above, voting to express policy preferences between candidates rather than personalities, and representative of all citizens. However, this
approach, like the next, takes advantage of the uniquely authoritative nature of the vote as an indicator of citizens’ preferences.

3. We could also use the vote without substantive policy attribution to discover points at which the causal chain of democratic responsiveness seems to break down. We can use any of a number of measures of vote-seat representation to see breakdown of proportionality in legislative representation (in PR systems, as in early Eastern European elections) or government formation, or plurality losers in legislative representation or government formation (especially in majoritarian systems. (See Powell 2000, Ch. 6.) The breakdown of vote-representation-government connections seems to frustrate citizens and could be considered an indication of poor democratic quality. The disadvantage of this approach, of course, is that it says nothing directly about policy connections, which could be poor even if the vote-representation process was strong and vice versa.

Let me conclude these comments as I began. I share a concept of democracy and of democratic responsiveness that is compatible with the objectives of the Conference. I agree that responsiveness should be an important element in democratic quality. I think that we can identify examples of responsiveness and of failures of responsiveness that most of us might accept. But despite my suggestions above, I am doubtful that we can find measures of democratic responsiveness that will enable us easily to assess its quality across democratic systems. I hope that this Conference will prove me too pessimistic.

REFERENCES
Anderson, Christopher J. and Christine A. Guillory. 1997. “Political Institutions and


FIGURE 1

Democratic Responsiveness -- The Causal Connections

A                  B                 C                    D                   E
Citizens’ Preferences ----→ Citizens’ Voting ----→ Election Outcomes ----→ Policy Making between Elections ----→ Public Policies