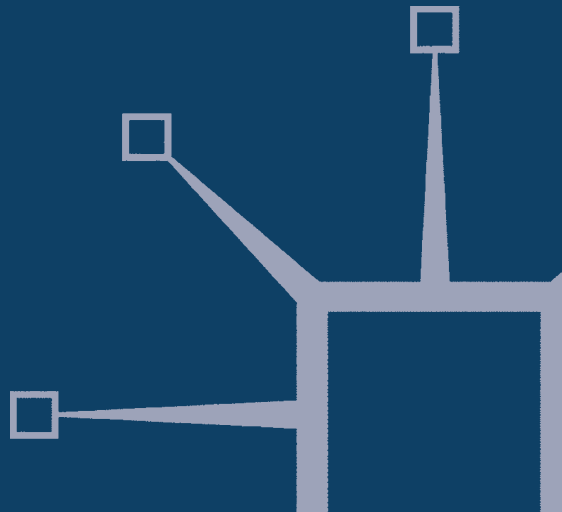


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# Political Communication and Democracy

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Gary D. Rawnsley



# Political Communication and Democracy

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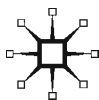
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# Political Communication and Democracy

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*Dedicated to the memory of my Dad and best friend  
Jack Rawnsley  
14 February 1936–28 June 2004*

*If there are any persons who contest a received opinion, or will do so if law or opinion will let them, let us thank them for it, open our minds to listen to them, and rejoice that there is someone to do for us what we otherwise ought, if we have any regard for either the certainty or the vitality of our convictions, to do with much greater labour for ourselves.*

– John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* in Mary Warnock (ed.), *Utilitarianism* (London: Fantana Press, 1969) pp. 172–3.

*Free and untainted information is a basic human right. Not everyone has it; almost everyone wants it. It cannot by itself create a just world, but a just world can never exist without it.*

– Elizabeth Wright, 'Postscript: broadcasting to China' in Robin Porter (ed.), *Reporting the News from China* (London: RIIA, 1992) pp. 18–29.

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*Gary Rawnsley*  
*Nottingham, UK*  
*2005*

# 1

## Introduction: Crisis? What Crisis?

The evils of the Representative System are ... great and grievous. Manifold also are the temptations to which the representative by virtue of his position is exposed. Unlawful usurpation of power individual or in committee, the illegal exertion of administrative pressure for personal or party ends and the demoralizing opportunity to obtain the prize of illegitimate riches, have all combined to impair or debauch the character of many representatives. Great political principles are forgotten or repudiated in the busy game of trafficking in spoils of office, whereas in the mad pursuit of partisan or private aims the people's good and the people's cause are for the most part abandoned.<sup>1</sup>

A meeting to discuss public apathy in Dorchester, Dorset, got off to a bad start when only four people turned up.

– 'Disappointment of the Week', *Sunday Times News Review*,  
24 August 2003.

The titles of some recently published books say it all: *Why People Don't Trust Government* (1997); *Disaffected Democracies* (1999); *What is it About Government that Americans Dislike?* (2001). The ancients would shudder at the very thought: democracy in crisis? Surely not. However, there is a growing consensus that citizens of all democratic political systems – though the criticism tends to be levelled at the usual suspects, the United States and Europe – are becoming progressively more cynical, disillusioned and apathetic.<sup>2</sup> Hence, we should not be surprised that people are consciously deciding not to participate in politics.<sup>3</sup> Few voters are prepared to turn out for elections (Gray & Caul, 2000) and cast their vote, and even fewer are joining political parties and interest

## 2 *Political Communication and Democracy*

groups (Mair & I. van Biezen, 2001; Putnam, 2000). A report published by the British Labour party in September 2001 announced that it had lost 50,000 members during the previous year. The Conservative party had lost 75,000 since the 1997 General Election. Between the end of 2002 and 2003, membership of the Labour party fell by more than 33,000 to 214,952. The turnout in the 1997 British General Election was 71.4 percent, the lowest since the Second World War, provoking John Curtice and Michael Steed (Butler & Kavanagh, 1997:299) to conclude: 'It seems clear that the 1997 general election excited less interest than any other in living memory' ... That is, until the 2001 General Election when turnout across the United Kingdom fell to an extraordinary 59.3 percent. ('The 71 percent participation in 1997 was itself a record low for almost 80 years.' Butler & Kavanagh, 2001:257<sup>4</sup>). Only 39 percent of eligible voters under 25 cast their ballot, giving rise to the idea that the 'Barcardi Breezers' (Britain's 18–24 year olds) should be persuaded to take more interest in politics (Julia Margo, 'Bacardi Breezers want a serious party ... a political one', *Sunday Times News Review*, 25 August 2003:3). Only in Britain would the press celebrate the 40 percent turnout in the 2004 local elections!<sup>5</sup> The same patterns seem to be recurring elsewhere: In the 1996 American Presidential election, less than 75 percent of all eligible voters were registered to vote, 49 percent of whom actually voted ([www.turnout.org](http://www.turnout.org)). In 2000, the turnout had risen to just 51 percent of eligible voters ([www.igc.apc.org/cvd/turnout/preturn.html](http://www.igc.apc.org/cvd/turnout/preturn.html)). The problem is particularly acute among the young; 51 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 24 are registered to vote, but only 29 percent actually voted in the 2000 presidential election. Critics of apathy wonder whatever happened to the politically engaged America that Alexis de Tocqueville discovered in the 19th Century:

No sooner do you set foot on American soil [he wrote] than you find yourself in a sort of tumult; a confused clamor rises on every side, and a thousand voices are heard at once, each expressing some social requirements. All around you everything is on the move: here the people of a district are assembled to discuss the possibility of building a church; there they are busy choosing a representative; further on, the delegates of a district are hurrying to town to consult about some local improvements ... One group of citizens assembled for the sole object of announcing that they disapprove of the government's course ... (de Tocqueville, 1969 edn.:242).

Those were the days! In the first round of the 2002 French parliamentary election, only 64 percent voted, the lowest turnout for a parliamentary election in the history of the Fifth Republic. In the presidential election of the same year, the abstention rate was 28 percent, meaning that Jean-Marie Le Pen representing the French far right, went into the second round. Observers suggested that the result could be explained largely by the strength of the protest vote on both the political right and left. This represented the general dissatisfaction with the mainstream Socialist and Gaullist movements that have governed France for over 40 years. The turnout across Europe in the four-days long 2004 election to the European parliament was an unprecedented 45 percent, with the lowest voting – 26 percent – recorded in the ten states that joined the EU the previous month (for example, turnout in Slovakia was 17 percent, in Poland it was 21 percent). Voters were deciding to cast a ballot – or not – on national, rather than European issues, suggesting that European issues are ‘too complicated’, and that pro-Europe governments have to make more of an effort to communicate or sell Europe to their citizens.

Efforts to introduce innovative voting methods have had little effect. At first, the signs were encouraging: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister released figures following the 2003 local elections that showed an average turnout of 50 percent in the 29 areas of the country using postal only ballots, compared with only 35 percent elsewhere. The highest recorded turnout was in Herefordshire, where 61 percent of eligible voters returned their postal ballot. This continued a trend of increasing turnout when the government first piloted postal-only voting in several areas in the 2002 local elections.<sup>6</sup> This seemed to suggest that there is a genuine interest in local elections, but that voters are seeking new, perhaps more convenient ways of casting their ballot, and this prompted the government to introduce all-postal voting in four constituencies in the 2004 local and European elections. Turnout did increase in these regions by 13 percent compared with just seven percent elsewhere, but in Sunderland turnout fell to 40 percent from 47 percent recorded in 2003 when postal voting was used in local elections, suggesting improvements may be explained by the ‘novelty factor’. More seriously, the experiment was dogged by claims that scores of homes failed to receive ballot papers. Security was another concern, with two arrests made in Oldham of men who offered to ‘look after’ ballot papers, while in Burnley the Electoral Commission agreed to investigate a suspiciously high number of proxies. Voters complained of intimidation and bullying by party canvassers, and incorrectly completed forms invalidated votes. Some MPs complained that



the requirement that ballot papers are countersigned by a friend or neighbour compromised the democratic right to a secret ballot.

Attempts in 2003 to launch e-voting via the Internet and text messaging<sup>7</sup> were equally unsuccessful. Only 19 percent of the electorate in the 18 pilot areas chose this form of voting. In Basingstoke, turnout fell from 34.3 percent in 2002 to 30.9 percent in 2003 despite the opportunity to vote by electronic methods. This may have been due to reported technical problems and congestion on the Internet. Clearly the voting system does not an interested voter make. And yet Brazilians of all people have managed to successfully create a national electronic balloting booth. With an electorate of 115 million, Brazil is the world's fourth most populous democracy (admittedly with compulsory voting). It is larger than continental United States and includes two of the world's biggest cities (not to mention the Amazon basin). In spite of the grand scale of the project the Brazilians managed to implement a fully computerised voting system, organised around 406,000 electronic ballot boxes in the 2000 Presidential election. When voting closed, diskettes were taken from the electronic ballot boxes and transported to state capitals. In remote areas the results were sent by satellite telephones. If a country the size – in geographic and demographic terms – of Brazil can manage it, why can't little old Britain?<sup>8</sup>

### **'Our votes were stolen.'**

(Gerald White, discussing the way African-Americans in Florida feel about the 2000 presidential election, 'Blacks aim to avenge Florida's 2000 poll,' *The Guardian*, 2 November 2002:15).

We can take heart that the Brits are not alone in creating anomalies in the democratic process. How can we take politics seriously, the critics ask, when democracy allows such fiascos as the 2000 Presidential election in the United States? After all, this was an election with no obvious winner, accusations of voting irregularities, missing ballots and even corruption. Many eligible citizens, including African-Americans, were 'omitted' from the electoral roles in Florida.<sup>9</sup> It is not surprising that many of the regimes that have been the focus for American vitriol for their lack of democracy should find the whole system laughable: Singapore's media described the US as a 'banana republic', while China declared that obviously 'the US electoral system is not as fair and perfect as the country boasts'. Malaysia's Industrial Trade and Industry Minister, Rafidah Aziz, even suggested that 'Maybe we, all developing countries, should send an elec-

tion watch every time they have a presidential election' ('Either Way, A Bad Precedent', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 November 2000).<sup>10</sup>

Other critics explain the absence of interest in politics by its ostensible professionalism, and the domination of the spin-doctor. Image and sound-bites, they claim, have deprived voters of substantive political discussion.<sup>11</sup> The media and government now run democratic politics, not the people. As Tony Benn once remarked, 'The media, the pollsters, the people who hype it up and the public relations people who engage in politics have taken the democratic process away from us and made it something that highly paid experts want to manage for us' (Franklin, 1994:10). Trevor Kavanagh of *the Sun* and Simon Kelner of *The Independent* argued about the EU constitution on *Today* programme, 21 June 2004. This is a significant development; it used to be that the politicians themselves would debate such weighty matters. Now journalists are increasingly taking over politicians' debating role. If the politicians won't take politics seriously, why should we?<sup>12</sup> One only needs to recall the fury that met Jo Moor's comments of 11 September 2001, leaked to the British media. On a day when the world was coming to terms with the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York and the death of an estimated 6,000 people at the hands of terrorists, Ms. Moor, a special adviser to the British transport secretary, Stephen Byers, wrote an e-mail to her boss explaining that it was a good day to release bad government news. Two hours after the attacks on New York, she said: 'It is now a very good day to get out anything we want to bury' ('Pressure grows on Byers adviser to quit', *The Guardian*, 10 October 2001).<sup>13</sup> Such seemingly insensitive behaviour reinforces popular distrust of politicians.

Moreover, the British government's information machinery was again embarrassed in January 2003 when it was disclosed that a dossier detailing Iraq's abuses of human rights and use of weapons of mass destruction was partly plagiarised from an American Ph.D thesis. 'Though it now appears to have been a journalistic cut and paste job rather than high-grade intelligence analysis, the dossier ended up being cited approvingly on worldwide TV by the US secretary of state, Colin Powell, when he addressed the UN security council ...' ('Downing St admits blunder on Iraq dossier', *The Independent*, 8 February 2003:6). The Hutton inquiry that followed Britain's involvement in the war was convened to determine reasons for the apparent suicide and death of weapons expert, Dr David Kelly,<sup>14</sup> but also revealed how the Blair government worked and was almost ruined by its dependence on spin and presentation. The career

of the ultimate 'spin-meister', Alastair Campbell, was pored over when he announced his resignation as the British Labour Government's director of communications and strategy on 29 August 2003. Andrew Rawnsley in *The Observer* (31 August 2003:29) captured the popular impression of his power: 'But ... even when his formal job was merely that of Prime Minister's press secretary, the title was much too modest to describe the status of Alastair Campbell. The force of his personality, combined with the dependence of the Prime Minister on that personality, made him the most formidable unelected official in British politics.' Voters believe themselves excluded from the political process, ineffective and distant from the institutions which govern in their name (Nye, Zelikow & King (eds), 1997; Pharr & Putnam, 2000). Politicians appear unresponsive, uncaring, and impervious to rational debate. These accusations are a serious indictment not only of the political institutions and processes that structure democratic societies, but are also a comment on the frail condition of democratic political communication. Clearly, governments and politicians are failing to convey the 'right' image, despite the enormous amount of resources now devoted by governments to public relations.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, democracy is thought to be about inclusion, dialogue, public opinion, public interest, government by the governed – all of which are the concern of political communication.

It is far too easy to hold the media responsible for our current political cynicism and disengagement from the political system, a trail of blame and shame that has a long pedigree: in an influential report to the Trilateral Commission in 1975, the American political scientist Samuel Huntington blamed the media for the apparent erosion of reverence for authority in many post-industrial societies and therefore of contributing to a global crisis in democracy (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975). As we have seen, this idea has gathered momentum and support in the intervening years, reinforced by evidence of supposed declining turnout at elections and the trivialisation of politics. Audiences, critics suggest, would rather vote for their favourite *Pop Idol* or member of the *Big Brother* house than their parliamentary representative or president. The media are now more interested in entertaining audiences than informing them of the substance of politics and the decision-making process, and thus encourage the very apathy that cynics lament. The Bill Clinton presidency will be remembered for the Monica Lewinsky scandal than anything else partly because of the extraordinary amount of media coverage this particular incident received (Zaller, 2001), while Anthony Pratkanis and Elliott Aronson

(2001:xii) mourn the obsession of the American media with the 1995 O.J. Simpson trial:

From January 1, 1995, until the week after the verdict, [American] television network news spent twenty-six hours and fifty minutes, or 13.6% of the available airtime, covering the O.J. [Simpson] story. That is more time than was devoted to Bosnia (thirteen hours and one minute), the bombing in Oklahoma city (eight hours and fifty-three minutes) and the U.S. budget (three hours and thirty-nine minutes) – the other top three ‘news’ stories – combined.

When Alastair Campbell, the *unelected* Director of Communications and Strategy for the British Labour government – a Downing Street official – resigned on 29 August 2003, the news was released as a ‘Priority 2’ story, ‘equal to the death of the Queen Mother, Princess Diana and the resignation of any Cabinet minister’ (*The Observer*, 31 August 2003:15) – a clear indication of his perceived power and influence in British politics.<sup>16</sup>

Opinion poll data reveals that the British public do not trust the media or journalists; and they trust politicians even less (Table 1.1):

**Table 1.1 Trust in professions to tell the truth**

	Tell the truth 2002 % (2004)	Not tell the truth 2002 %	Don't know 2002 %
Doctors	91 (92)	6	2
Teachers	85 (89)	10	5
<b>Television News Readers</b>	<b>71 (70)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>
Professors	77 (80)	11	11
Judges	77 (75)	15	8
Clergymen	80 (75)	14	5
Scientists	64 (69)	23	13
The police	59 (63)	31	10
The ordinary man/woman	54 (55)	31	15
Pollsters	47 (49)	35	17
Civil Servants	45 (51)	42	14
Trades Union Officials	37 (39)	49	14
Business leaders	25 (30)	62	13
<b>Journalists</b>	<b>13 (20)</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Politicians</b>	<b>19 (22)</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Government Ministers</b>	<b>20 (23)</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>8</b>

N = 1972 interviews (15 years old +); conducted 7–13 February 2002  
 (2004 figures: N = 2,004 interviews (15 years old +); conducted Feb/March 2004  
 Source: <http://www.mori.com/polls/2002/bma-topline.shtml>; MORI

The Hutton Inquiry exacerbated this trend (see Table 1.2 below) and reinforced the popular view that politicians and journalists exist in a necessarily adversarial relationship. For example, the volatile relationship between the former Downing Street Director of Communications, Alastair Campbell, and the BBC's Andrew Gilligan, has been well documented. Lord Hutton concluded that Andrew Gilligan's broadcast statement that the government had 'sexed up' (ie. deliberately falsified) the dossier that made the case for Britain going to war against Iraq 'attacked the integrity of the government'.<sup>17</sup> However, the nature of the adversarial relationship is best demonstrated by the comment of the British television journalist and presenter, Jeremy Paxman, that his philosophy when interviewing politicians is to ask 'why is this bastard lying to me?' One report published in September 2003, the Phillis Review of political communications in Britain, identified similar problems of trust and acknowledged that a hostile government-media relationship was partly responsible.

The need to move on from this adversarial relationship was reflected in a House of Commons motion, tabled in 2004 which said: 'We ... hope that this report will mark a watershed in relations between politicians and the media, where we move to a debate based on respect for each other's opinions and adherence to the facts' (<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk>, 2 March 2004).

As David Yelland, former editor of the *Sun* newspaper commented, 'Those in the business of communicating have to engage an audience that presupposes you are lying, even when you are not' ('How did we get so cynical?', <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk>). The so-called Phillis

**Table 1.2 'Verdict on the political class'**

	Gone Up	Gone Down	No Change	Don't Know
<b>Politicians in general</b>	–	51	47	2
<b>BBC</b>	8	36	53	4
<b>Journalists in general</b>	3	32	62	3

N = 2,365.

Source: YouGov, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 2003, p. 14.

Review, a committee chaired by Bob Phillis (the Guardian Media Group chief executive) was asked in 2003 to report on the apparent breakdown in trust between the media, politicians and the public. As noted its interim report identified the appearance of an adversarial relationship as a problem:

The response of the media to a rigorous and proactive government and news management strategy has been to match claim with counter-claim in a challenging and adversarial way, making it difficult for any accurate communication of real achievement to pass unchallenged.

Our research suggests this adversarial relationship between government and the media has resulted in all information being mistrusted when it is believed to have come from 'political sources'.

... The public now expects and believes the worst of politicians, even when there is strong objective evidence in favour of the government's position.<sup>18</sup>

The situation is hardly better in other areas of the world. A Latinobarómetro poll published in *The Economist* (14 August 2004:41) found that trust in political parties, legislatures, judiciary and the police force in 18 Latin American countries remains lower than public confidence in television and the church, the two most powerful communicators in the region. (In 2004, less than 20 percent of respondents admitted to having 'a lot' or 'some' confidence in political parties; almost 80 percent said they had confidence in the church.)

### **'I don't care if they beat me. I'm going to vote for change'**

(*The Observer*, 10 March 2002:3, reporting on the presidential election in Zimbabwe.)

However, we should avoid the temptation to be excessively pessimistic, for there is a flip side to all this apparent doom and gloom that suggests things may not be as bad as they seem, especially when we end our obsession with the ballot box. For several decades now, extra-parliamentary movements and organisations have proliferated throughout the democratic world. Recent data suggests that these

organisations are not represented by pressure or interest groups, and contrary to expectations, they are not enjoying an extraordinary revival; rather, the so-called 'new social movements' are attracting participants who might not otherwise become involved in the kind of confrontational, unorganised political direct action they advocate. This indicates people do not tire of politics provided the issues directly affect them or are concerns they feel passionately about (for relevant data, see Richard Topf's chapter in Klingemann & Fuchs (eds), 1995). This persuasive argument runs that the broad church of political parties cannot satisfy individuals who are eager to effect change on the environment, human rights, poverty, or the inequalities of globalisation – issues that cannot be defined by parties or their programmes. The relevance of old models of democratic political communication connected to nation-states, parties, electoral participation, and representative government have become very limited. Now, the political agenda is more exciting, wide-ranging, and certainly more inclusive than ever before: '... though voter turnout has stagnated (largely because of weakening political party loyalties), Western publics have *not* become apathetic: quite the contrary, in the last two decades, they have become markedly more likely to engage in elite-challenging forms of political participation' (Inglehart, 1997:296).<sup>19</sup> On 15 February 2003, an estimated one million people marched through London to protest at the possibility of war with Iraq, the largest demonstration against a war in progress in British history, while the police estimated that 200,000 people joined another march through London on 22 March 2002. 'Those who marched yesterday could hardly be more representative of our country,' wrote Menzies Campbell in the *Independent on Sunday* (16 February 2003:25). 'MPs talk of postbags filled with letters from every social and economic background. The Government has mobilised inadvertently a mass popular movement of opposition. No voter apathy was on display in Hyde Park yesterday.'

Besides, when one looks at statistics available for each American Presidential election since 1924, turnout rates have actually remained remarkably steady at an average of 55.12 percent (the highest recorded turnout was 61.6 percent in the 1952 election).

Beyond Europe and the US, the situation appears even more encouraging. Many new and emerging democracies have embraced principles and procedures that most Atlantic powers take for granted, and their people would find bizarre the notion of widespread cynicism and apathy. Ask any black South African who was able to vote for his president for the first time in 1994 whether he is disillusioned with politics.



*Photo 1.1* A demonstration against the continuing occupation of Iraq, London, 2004 (Matthew Rendall).

**Table 1.3** US Presidential election voter turnout, 1924–2000

Year	Turnout
1924	48.9%
1928	51.8%
1932	52.6%
1936	56.8%
1940	58.8%
1944	56.1%
1948	51.1%
1952	61.6%
1956	59.4%
1960	62.8%
1964	61.9%
1968	60.9%
1972	55.2%
1976	53.5%
1980	52.6%
1984	53.1%
1988	50.1%
1992	55.2%
1996	49.0%
2000	51.0%
2004	60.7%

*Source:* The Center for Voting and Democracy, [www.igc.apc.org/cvd/turnout/preturn.html](http://www.igc.apc.org/cvd/turnout/preturn.html)



The election there was greeted by an impressive 89.9 percent turnout (22.7 million voters). While critics are now observing falling turnout in South African election as a sign of apathy, turnout rates still hover around 70 percent, which is still impressive (we have to accept that 1994's turnout can be partly explained by the novelty of voting. 'ANC set for third poll victory in a decade', *South China Morning Post*, 15 April 2004:A11). Or explain the constant 70 percent plus turnout for elections in Taiwan with reference to apathy. And why did the opposition suffer such inexplicable violence to mount a credible campaign against Robert Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe's 2002 election? The polls in Zimbabwe closed despite thousands not having the opportunity to cast their ballot, though as the quotation above highlights, Zimbabweans have not been cowed into forfeiting their democratic rights. In *The Guardian* Hugo Young provided a prescient comment on the significance of the election. His words are worth reproducing at length:

In one way, the Zimbabwe election sets an example to all democrats. It inspires even as it appals. It's a brilliant moment in the history of elections in Africa or anywhere else. It registers the attraction and the power of democracy as they've seldom been seen before. Where in our own continent of ingrates would people queue for 15 minutes, let alone 20 hours, to make their point? Where, simultaneously, has any other leader gone to such lengths as Robert Mugabe to confer democratic legitimacy on himself? While he serially violates the substance of democracy, he can't do without its semblance. Each side, voter and dictator, pays tribute to what democracy is meant to be. It could be called a kind of apotheosis

... the people ... have suffered more for the cause of democratic representation than any western politician has ever had to do. We get democracy on a plate, and are beginning to yawn. Zimbabweans had to fight for it every day (Hugo Young, 'The people of Zimbabwe have put us all to shame', *The Guardian*, 12 March 2002:16).

On 12 April 2003, tens of millions of Nigerians queued up, despite extremely bad weather, vote-rigging, allegations of irregularities in the selection of party candidates, and threats of violence in Africa's biggest election (with 61 million registered voters). One voter summarised her fellow countrymen's sentiments:

We know our politicians. They are thieves. When they come to office, they will cheat and will not attend to us. But we have a right

to vote. It is our right. We are not happy with the government, but we prefer democracy to the soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

In the run-up to the elections in March 2005, reports from Zimbabwe suggested that President Mugabe was determined to maintain control, including the power to appoint all members of the electoral commission which oversees polling. Moreover, independent groups were forbidden from campaigning. Even reports of alleged attacks on opposition supporters subject to repeated and systematic violence and intimidation could not douse popular enthusiasm for the electoral process in Zimbabwe.

High rates of participation are not confined to new democracies: 90.5 percent of those eligible to vote in Belgium's 1999 Parliamentary election did so; 84.07 percent in Iceland in 1998; 77.4 percent in Italy in 1995. The list goes on.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the data record that 'overall participation in competitive elections across the globe rose steadily between 1945 and 1990'. At its peak, the number turning out to vote reached a global average of 68 percent of the voting age population in the 1980s. While this dipped to 64 percent in the 1990s, this is far from being a sudden and dramatic fall that deserves the title of a 'crisis' ([www.idea.int/vt/survey/voter\\_turnout1.cfm](http://www.idea.int/vt/survey/voter_turnout1.cfm)).

Of course, democracy is about more than elections, and we cannot judge the value of participation by simply recording turnout rates. Non-democratic regimes appreciate the value of elections in reinforcing their legitimacy, while elections and voter turnout tell us nothing about the *quality* of democracy or participation, or about the effectiveness of government. Many of these political systems still have a long way to go in terms of institutionalising democratic processes and cultures (via freedom of expression and assembly, the rule of law, human rights, etc.).<sup>22</sup> Besides, choosing not to vote can itself be a form of participation, for it represents an act of communication that those eligible to vote are dissatisfied with politics. (See Appendix 1.) The high level of control over parliamentary elections in Russia, and the bias of the media towards the government and its candidates, had the kind of effect we expect in the US and UK: 'Why should I bother [to vote]?' The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe monitored the election: 'In most western countries this [indifference] indicates that people are content enough to not consider it necessary to vote. But in this case they think the election has been decided' ('Russian election leaves little to the voters,' *The Guardian*, 8 December 2003:16). Vasily Damov, an