



# Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity

*Pierre Rosanvallon*

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## **Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity** Pierre Rosanvallon

It's a commonplace that citizens in Western democracies are disaffected with their political leaders and traditional democratic institutions. But in *Democratic Legitimacy*, Pierre Rosanvallon, one of today's leading political thinkers, argues that this crisis of confidence is partly a crisis of understanding. He makes the case that the sources of democratic legitimacy have shifted and multiplied over the past thirty years and that we need to comprehend and make better use of these new sources of legitimacy in order to strengthen our political self-belief and commitment to democracy.

Drawing on examples from France and the United States, Rosanvallon notes that there has been a major expansion of independent commissions, NGOs, regulatory authorities, and watchdogs in recent decades. At the same time, constitutional courts have become more willing and able to challenge legislatures. These institutional developments, which serve the democratic values of impartiality and reflexivity, have been accompanied by a new attentiveness to what Rosanvallon calls the value of proximity, as governing structures have sought to find new spaces for minorities, the particular, and the local. To improve our democracies, we need to use these new sources of legitimacy more effectively and we need to incorporate them into our accounts of democratic government.

An original contribution to the vigorous international debate about democratic authority and legitimacy, this promises to be one of Rosanvallon's most important books.

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