As the triple dysfunction hypothesis predicts that a major cause of underprovision of public goods is confusion about whether citizens or politicians direct this provision, it indicates that the underprovision should be less pronounced in polities that facilitate overt, deliberative directorship by electors. Some democracies tend to do this with features such as proportional representation of multimember electorates (Milner 2002, 89), not having their head of government directly appointed as such by popular election, and having a consensual political tradition. That tradition includes governing with coalitions of minority parties and developing social choice with discussion and negotiation among all interested citizens rather than by concentrating on securing power. Citizen initiated referendums may be viewed as assisting such direction by the people, but they tend to neglect deliberation. The Netherlands and the Nordic countries have several of these characteristics (Arter 1999, 151–55) and as a consequence they rank at the top of The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index (Economist 2008c). The Nordic nations have been described as state-friendly societies with society-friendly states (Grenstad et al. 2006, 122) and they are investigated below, followed by the contrasting case of the United States of America.
3.1 The Nordic democracies

Political sociologist Jørgen Goul Andersen (2007) participated in a project investigating power and democracy in Denmark from 1978 to 1982. He observed that among the committee of parliamentarians that initiated this work ‘there clearly was a feeling of losing power, and more generally … that there are increasing threats to the democratic idyll in the Nordic countries.’ This feeling was endorsed by that investigation, in which the ‘most original result … probably was the finding that wherever we sought to measure power perceptions, we always found the feeling that ‘power belongs to the others’’. This echoes the triple dysfunction view that a major problem is confusion about who directs. A subsequent study of power and democracy in Denmark in 1998–2004 produced mixed results, but identified problems of declining political party membership, a growing gap between a competent and resourceful majority and a marginalized minority that is becoming more disadvantaged, increasing influence of the media, and a transfer of power from the political to the judicial system (Christiansen and Togeby 2006). A similar study was carried out in Norway from 1998 to 2003 and its chair, political scientist Øyvind Østerud (cited in Gjessing 2003, 1), concluded that democracy ‘as a chain from elections to decisions is weakened all the way… Parties don’t mobilize many voters any more, and young people are less active than before, so the trend is likely to gather pace’. Together with political scientist Per Selle (2006, 564–65), Østerud has observed that ‘the Norwegian political system is becoming less distinct’ as large-scale ideological movements decline and interest grows ‘in smaller and nimbler associations better at catering for individual needs and wishes, but also less able to plug members into the central decision-making institutions’. Along with other developments, these have been interpreted as revealing no general civic decline (Listhaug and Gronflaten 2007, 272), but as Selle and Østerud indicate, they appear to weaken the political role of the people.
For Sweden, it is relevant to note that in 1969 Prime Minister Olof Palme (cited in Oliver 1987, xviii) observed that his nation ‘is to a considerable degree a study circle democracy.’ Study circles are self-organizing groups of 5–20 citizens who choose to meet several times to learn about a public issue. This is done in a democratic manner aiming at freedom of choice, critical thinking and exchange of ideas and knowledge. These groups meet throughout Scandinavia, in some other European countries and have been introduced to the US, Australia and a few developing countries. Study circles have operated for a century in Sweden, where they are financially supported by government and reflect a strong commitment by the people to use adult education for social change (Oliver 1987, xv, xvii).

Swedish political scientists Johannes Lindvall and Bo Rothstein (2006, 48) have observed that a 1985–1990 study concluded that their polity was ‘turning into a new kind of democracy, more ‘individualistic’ and more similar to political systems elsewhere’. Ten years after this investigation, its assessment was endorsed by a large Swedish government commission led by politicians, which called for the strengthening of civic society, more responsiveness by political institutions and a more ‘participatory democracy with deliberative qualities’ (Lindvall and Rothstein 2006, 60). Lindvall and Rothstein argue that in Sweden there are

troubling indications for the operation of democracy… One common, if maybe simple view of the democratic ideal is that the state should do what the people want it to do. With the development of ideological state apparatuses, Swedish democracy looks more like a society where the state decides what the people ought to think and do… The system still spins, but it spins backwards… The question for the future is whether the strong state will be replaced by some new model that provides the necessary focal points for debates on public policy, or whether stable norms will remain absent due to an inherently obscure division of labour within Sweden’s policy-making and administrative structures. (Lindvall and Rothstein 2006, 47, 61, 47)
Triple dysfunction, of course, suggests that this ‘inherently obscure division of labour’ is at least partly caused by the ambiguity of the delegation performed by the electoral system. Despite this, it seems that the ‘strong state’ in Sweden is supported by a relatively sophisticated public. For example:

Sweden has long implemented one of the most progressive energy policies in Europe. The national government enacted one of the world’s first carbon taxes in 1990. Ministers announced further ambitions last week through a plan that would increase renewable energy production to 50 per cent by 2020, transition the Swedish vehicle fleet to fossil fuel independence by 2030, and reach complete carbon neutrality by 2050. (Block 2009, 1)

On the other hand, perceptions of a weakening of the socialistic qualities of Swedish democracy appear to be confirmed by the 2010 election, in which, for the first time since the Second World War, a centre-right government has been re-elected after serving a full term.

Svanur Kristjánsson (2004, 172, 153), a political scientist at the University of Iceland, observes that the semi-presidential constitutional framework in his country makes the role of the voter complex. Together with the decline of the party system and its membership, this means that active citizen control of government has all but disappeared. Instead, politicians cater to a fickle electorate, which means that they restrict their policy development to a narrow focus on economic stability and growth. Kristjánsson’s (2004, 153) conclusion is that ‘the Icelandic system of governance has become a rather messy and complicated political arrangement, thereby resembling the situation in other modern democracies.’

Reviewing the results of the Power and Democracy projects for Denmark, Norway and Sweden, Andersen (2007) observes that by comparison with other democracies they remain quite healthy, and from what was known at that stage it would be surprising if the current study on Finland did not largely support this picture. He described the Nordic countries as having strong
representative democracies that rest on a solid popular base with high and equally distributed political participation conducted through capable mass-based parties and people’s movements. They have rich economies with solidary (pro-social) wage policies that ensure redistribution for a high degree of economic equality. Gender equality is highly developed and the regulation of business to make it comply with social goals is strong. Levels of political literacy, political engagement, electoral turnout and trust in politicians are mostly high.

However, in agreement with the Danish parliamentarians, Andersen (2007) notes signs of trouble: declines in party membership, in electoral turnout and in political trust; increased electoral volatility; weakening of voluntary associations; excessively competitive behaviour among the media; concentration of economic wealth and power; and an increase in the importance of the market, not only relative to the state (both internally and internationally) but in the management of the state. Some of this growth of market power is indicated by lowered ambitions for macro-economic steering and fewer instruments available to government for economic regulation. As Andersen and Hoff (2001, 75) observed six years before, in some ways ‘the period of Scandinavian exceptionalism is coming to an end.’ Andersen (2007) points out that the decline of parties raises questions: What is to replace this linkage between citizens and political decision-makers? Are there new forms of participation building up to replace those which decline? He suggests there is a need in Scandinavia for a public debate on new democratic criteria for citizen participation, dialogue, deliberation and government responsiveness.

This sketch of democracy in Scandinavia suggests that triple dysfunction also occurs here, but to a much lesser degree than in many other democracies, presumably because the characteristics listed at the beginning of this chapter tend to prevent them. Proportional representation, non-presidential governance (except for Finland and to some extent Iceland) and consensual cultures may all give the people a feeling that they have a significant role as directors of public policy. In addition
to citizens in Nordic countries having somewhat less cause for confusion about who directs government than citizens of most other democracies, there also tends to be less strident competition between politicians because their political institutions and cultures support a more cooperative style of politics. Moreover, compromise in public opinion may not be as damaging as elsewhere because less confusion over directorship means that citizens feel more in charge, so they give considerable support to institutions that help them think constructively about public policy, such as consensus conferences and study circles.

3.2 The case of the United States

The structure and performance of government in the United States provides contrasts with the Nordic democracies that also appear to illustrate triple dysfunction. Before we look at this diagnosis, consider the symptoms, such as those noted by development economist Jeffrey Sachs (2009, 20–22).

When you compare the US with Canada, Western Europe and Japan, the news is sobering. Its child-poverty and infant-mortality rates are the highest, its life expectancy is the lowest, its budget deficit as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) is the highest, and its 15-year-olds rank among the lowest on tests of math and science.

A big difference between the US and the rest of the rich world is that for the past 30 years or so, Americans consistently rejected ‘government solutions’ to the problems of health, poverty, education and the environment…

In the past 50 years, arguing for tax increases to fund the expansion of federal programs has been a political death wish… Jimmy Carter failed to close the deficit through higher taxes in the late 1970s. And Ronald Reagan made tax cuts the down payment on every election since.

Gus Speth (2011) gives a more extensive list of problems, prefacing it by noting
a deepening sense that this nation’s challenges have grown so large that they exceed current capabilities. Reflect for a moment on the magnitude of the challenges America confronts. For example, in a 20-country group of America’s peer countries in the OECD, the US is now worst, or almost worst, on nearly 30 leading indicators of social, environmental and economic well-being.

Even a well-intentioned and highly capable government in Washington, DC, would have severe difficulty addressing the current backlog of major challenges. And, of course, the good government the American public needs is not the one that it has or is likely to have anytime soon. Indeed, right now Washington isn’t even trying to seriously address most of these challenges. Neglect, stalemate, and denial rule the day.

To our great shame, among the 20 major advanced countries America now has

- the highest poverty rate, both generally and for children;
- the greatest inequality of incomes;
- the lowest government spending as a percentage of GDP on social programs for the disadvantaged;
- the lowest number of paid holiday, annual, and maternity leaves;
- the lowest score on the United Nations’ index of ‘material well-being of children’;
- the worst score on the United Nations’ gender inequality index;
- the lowest social mobility;
- the highest public and private expenditure on health care as a portion of GDP,

yet accompanied by the highest

- infant mortality rate;
- prevalence of mental health problems;
- obesity rate;
- portion of people going without health care due to cost;
- low birth-weight children per capita (except for Japan);
- consumption of anti-depressants per capita;
along with the shortest life expectancy at birth (except for Denmark and Portugal);

- the highest carbon dioxide emissions and water consumption per capita;
- the lowest score on the World Economic Forum's environmental performance index (except for Belgium) and the largest ecological footprint per capita (except for Belgium and Denmark);
- the highest rate of failing to ratify international agreements;
- the lowest spending on international and humanitarian assistance as a percentage of GDP;
- the highest military spending as a portion of GDP;
- the largest international arms sales;
- the most negative balance of payments (except New Zealand, Spain and Portugal);
- the lowest scores for student performance in math (except for Portugal and Italy) (and far from the top in both science and reading);
- the highest school dropout rate (except for Spain);
- the highest homicide rate;
- the largest prison population per capita.

In looking at some of this performance, economics journalist Jeff Madrick (cited in Parker 2009, 40) alleges that such ‘facts amount to about as conclusive a proof as history provides that the ideology applied in this generation has failed.’ Much of that ideology is an upholding of libertarian rights such as: freedom from restriction by government (for example, in gun ownership); unfettered access to the entrepreneurial opportunities of free markets; and freedom from obligations to think carefully about the welfare of large publics, whether they are only of the present or whether they include future generations. This ideology has been interpreted as driving the US to trigger the 2008 global financial crisis (e.g. Stiglitz 2010; Madrick 2009; Krugman and Wells 2011) and its irresponsibility does nothing to replace faith-based thinking with the discipline of reasoning from critically scrutinized evidence. Perhaps this (along with the fear
aroused by highly competitive working conditions and poor social security) encourages religious belief to flourish in the United States, a phenomenon that evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (cited in K. Muir 2008, 17) sees as a major problem: ‘In a Gallup poll 44 per cent of the American people said that they believe the world is less than 10,000 years old.’ As a culture of excessive libertarianism is, in itself, an underprovision of a public good, it is arguable that government in the US is failing in this way as well as in the others listed above. But do these failures result from triple dysfunction? Ambiguous delegation encourages them by granting both citizens and representatives a licence to neglect the common good. Excessive competition between politicians must support this neglect by focusing these agents on opportunities for personal advantage. And excessive compromise must permit it by directing and constraining politicians with ignorance from the mass public.

Excessive competition is implicated as a strong factor by British political scientist Anthony King (1997), for he ascribes US neglect of public goods largely to the exceptional need of American federal politicians to focus on campaigning for election rather than on governing. King describes American citizens as ‘hyperdemocrats’, partly because they hold their representatives accountable to a very high degree and partly because of their pride in their political system. This accountability is accentuated in three ways: with the very short two-year terms of office for members of the House of Representatives; by selecting candidates via primary elections; and through weak support for politicians by parties, which makes elections very candidate-centred. The system of primary elections in electoral colleges forces new candidates and incumbents to assiduously cultivate local activists, which means that Congress is fraught with dogmatic conflict. Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2012, 269) have called for the electoral college to be abolished as it is (in the language of their ‘selectorate theory’) a mechanism for keeping ‘the winning coalition smaller that it could be and, thereby, to empower politicians more and the people less.’ As ambiguous delegation stunts voters’ incentives to develop broad understand-
ings of public affairs, their tight control over members of the House of Representatives will produce poor policy. This damage is reinforced by an aspect of excessive competition in which the enormous personal expense of campaigning focuses candidates on raising funds by pleasing wealthy special interests.

King’s description of the second part of the hyperdemocratic problem is that,

as everyone who visits the United States quickly realizes, they are… inordinately proud of their government, or at least of their system of government. Far more than people in other countries, Americans are brought up to idolize, almost literally, both their governmental system, as embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and the heroes of American political history. (King 2000, 85)

As noted under ‘Personal involvement’ in §2.2.4, Dana Nelson (2008) has investigated this attitude by focusing on the prestige and power of US presidents, which is both desired by citizens and cultivated by presidents. This is such a prominent feature of American politics that Nelson gives it a label — ‘presidentialism’. She argues that it diminishes democracy by encouraging citizens to limit their participation to choosing their next chief. So when Americans feel a need for better national government, they look for a better president, rather than for ways of improving the quality of their own input. This reaction is encouraged by ambiguous delegation, but it would also seem that the absence in the US of two major characteristics of the Nordic democracies adds to the confusion about who directs government. These are the lack of proportional representation and an approach to politics that is less diverse and open-minded than that of the Nordic countries, as politics in the US lacks both a left wing and consensual motivation. It is arguable that the citizen disengagement encouraged by ambiguous delegation is accentuated by the absence of proportional representation because this discourages minorities from debating, developing and promoting innovative policy positions. As there is little prospect of such policy
gaining public attention through debate in Congress, citizens may turn away from trying to direct their government, either by ignoring politics or by focusing on political personalities and partisanship instead of on policies.

In addition to King’s observations, hyperdemocracy is also evident in the exceptionally extensive use of elections in the United States, with over one million offices being filled in this way. This is probably the most complicated electoral system in the world (see, e.g. Streb 2008). It asks citizens to make more decisions more frequently than citizens of other democracies, with the likely result that many fail to vote because they are overwhelmed by the task. At state and local government levels, elections may appoint not only the members of legislatures, but the executive (such as Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General and Secretary of State), the judiciary, sheriffs and school board members. According to the paradox of trust (see §2.2.1), this heavy reliance on elections should exacerbate citizens’ distrust of government. The triple dysfunction hypothesis suggests that such distrust is well-founded, for selecting public servants as well as political representatives by popular election should further encourage underprovision of public goods. Political scientists John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse (2001) have, in effect, declared that the paradox of trust is alive and well in the US with their assessment that Americans’ disapproval of government is provoked largely by the political process.

Another cause of government failure in the US may be the strong American emphasis on the production and consumption of private goods, as it directly competes with the provision of public goods (see §2.1). This emphasis is likely to be facilitated by ambiguous delegation because its confusion about who directs government leaves citizens very free to focus on private goods. As this is the main focus of the majority of citizens, excessive compromise makes it politically influential. The history of the United States, right from the arrival of the Puritans, is one of seeking freedom from oppression in Europe, of displacement of the American Indians, of exploitation of abundant natural resources and then subsequently, of exploitation of slaves — a
history that appears to have fostered an individualistic, materi-
alistic and competitive culture. Perhaps this is why the United
States has the most enterprising and vigorous market economy
in the world. As King (2000, 81) observes, there

are few countries in the world whose collective ideology is more
pro-business than that of the United States and where the climate of
opinion is more favourable to free-enterprise capitalism. Yet Ameri-
can businesspeople — an immensely influential force in American
society — do not love their government… This underlying suspi-
cion and mistrust extends well beyond the large corporate sector
and is also deeply embedded in the small business and entrepre-
neurial psyche.

Kuttner (2008, 75) laments the damage inflicted by this suspi-
cion of government:

Obama is constrained by a fiscal climate of opinion in which right-
thinking people are supposed to be more alarmed about budgetary
threats than about either the risks of another depression or a con-
tinued slow decline in the economic security and opportunity of
most Americans. Regulation is still widely considered a pejorative
word… large government endeavours are deemed to be outmoded
by modern markets…

As a consequence it appears that while presidentialism encour-
ages us citizens to neglect their democratic role of considering
and choosing public goods, their libertarian and pro-business
mistrust of government drives their politicians to neglect it as
well. Under these conditions, government must fail to provide
many important public goods, and as Sachs and Speth observe
at the beginning of this section, this is happening in the US.
The libertarian impulses driving this are acute. As King (2000,
97–98) observes, much of the mistrust of federal government
has ‘extreme intensity … of anger, frustration and betrayal’. It has
been reported as driving the 2009–2010 rise of the Tea Party
(Drehle 2010). Political scientist Alan Abramowitz (2013) sup-
ports that view with a multivariate analysis of factors that are likely to attract people to the Tea Party. He found that the conservatism of their ideology was the most powerful, but next and more important than factors such as age, gender, income and church attendance was racial resentment and dislike of Obama. The Tea Party is disproportionately supported by Republicans who are white, conservative and very upset about the presence in the White House of a black man.

Some of the mistrust of government by US citizens may arise in them feeling robbed by it because their focus on partisanship and presidentialism means that they lack practice at perceiving needs for public goods. The taxation needed for good governance therefore seems like theft to them. King (2000, 91) observes that another reason for declining trust in government in the United States since the 1960s has almost certainly been that a significant proportion of those at the head of the government have proved untrustworthy. They have cumulatively deprived the American presidency of much of its dignity.

This is likely to be decisive. It will cut through the usual disengagement of most citizens on issues and politics because, as political scientist Susan Pharr (2000, 201) points out, misconduct reports are likely to trigger what cognitive psychologists call ‘hot cognitions,’ judgments that carry powerful emotions, facilitating the retention of such reports … And indeed, empirically speaking, we know that across class, educational, and age lines, people tend to be remarkably aware of major misconduct cases, often far more than they are about many other domains of government action or policy.

As ambiguous delegation fosters the delusion that the president directs the country, it allows the people not only to ignore many important public goods but to focus so intensely on political
personalities that, sooner or later, the presidency discredits itself.

In addition to these problems of citizens’ mistrust and disengagement, the US system has another major flaw, the policy ‘drift’ created by its separation of powers (Hacker and Pierson 2010). Separation of powers is employed to produce checks and balances and operates between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, between state and national governments, between the Senate and the House and between the people and their political agents through referendums such as citizen initiated referendums and recalls. Other checks and balances are the Senate filibuster, the two-thirds requirement to override a presidential veto, supermajority voting to amend the Constitution and pass legislation in the Senate, the committee system and the Senate’s excessive representation of small states. As discussed in §2.2.6, checks and balances are labelled by McGann (2006, 89–112) as ‘supermajoritarian’ because each one interferes with simple majority voting and thereby obscures the accountability of government to the people. McGann (2006, 115–52) argues that this underprovides public goods by damaging both political equality and public deliberation. This underprovision, or policy drift, might be illustrated by comparing legislation for sustainability in Germany with that in the US.

Germany’s policy portfolio comprises more than 30 legislative measures that address all aspects of sustainability, with binding long-term targets guiding implementation efforts and the necessary review of policies at regular intervals. In the United States, by contrast, short-term incentives, fragmented regulations, and a lack of planning certainty — in the absence of a binding policy framework — have dampened private-sector investment and technology deployment. (Buehler et al. 2011, 8)

Yet another problem for the US has been noted by political scientist Peter Beinart (2010): a tendency for politicians to deliberately incapacitate federal government. The motivation for this started to develop when Bill Clinton became president. Bein-
art observes that with the GOP no longer controlling the White House, a new group of aggressive Republicans such as Newt Gingrich, Tom DeLay and Trent Lott began trying to discredit Clinton by discrediting government itself.

Rhetorically, they derided Washington as ineffective and conflict-ridden, and through their actions they guaranteed it. Their greatest weapon was the filibuster, which forced Democrats to muster 60 votes to get legislation through the Senate. Historically, filibustering had been rare...

With these acts of legislative sabotage, Republicans tapped into a deep truth about the American people: they hate political squabbling, and they take out their anger on whoever is in charge... Republicans [had] learned the secrets of vicious-circle politics: When the parties are polarized, it’s easy to keep anything from getting done [because of the checks and balances in the US system]. When nothing gets done, people turn against government. When you’re the party out of power and the party that reviles government, you win...

In recent years, Republicans have played this style of politics better than Democrats. Winning elections by making government look foolish is a more natural strategy for the anti-government party. But there is no guarantee Democrats won’t one day try something similar... At its core, vicious-circle politics isn’t an assault on liberal solutions to hard problems; it’s an assault on any solutions to hard problems. (Beinart 2010, 14, 15, 16)

From the viewpoint of the triple dysfunction hypothesis, Beinart’s ‘vicious-circle politics’ is a product of excessive competition between political agents in the institutional environment of the USA.

On 5 August 2011, after America’s lamentable performance of initially triggering the global financial crisis, failing to adequately reform its financial regulation and then indulging in political confrontation on the federal debt ceiling, the credit rating agency Standard & Poor’s made the unprecedented move
of downgrading the AAA credit rating of the US to AA+. On 13 August *The Economist* reported that

S&P’s political analysis is spot on. In light of the brinkmanship of the recent months, it argues, America’s governance and policymaking are becoming ‘less stable, less effective and less predictable’ … The gap between the parties had become ‘extraordinarily difficult’ to bridge, and ‘the statutory debt ceiling and the threat of default have become political bargaining chips in the debate over fiscal policy’ … Other sober institutions concur. The World Economic Forum has downgraded America from second place in 2009 to fourth place in 2010 in its annual global competitiveness rankings. By the Forum’s reckoning, America comes a lowly 40th for the quality of its institutions, 54th for trust in its politicians, 68th for government waste and a dismal 87th for its macroeconomic environment. The World Bank sees a relentless decline in various indicators of American governance. Daniel Kaufmann of the Brookings Institution notes that last year 33% of American business leaders told pollsters that a big constraint was the ‘instability of the policy framework’. The figure for France was 14%; for Chile, 5%. (*Economist* 2011b, 23, 50)

But respected congressional scholars Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein (2012) have proclaimed that *It’s Even Worse Than It Looks*. Their subtitle explains this as a product of How the American constitutional system collided with the new politics of extremism. In reviewing the book, Paul Krugman and Robin Wells (2012, 9) note that Mann and Ornstein argue that Congress—and indeed the whole American political system—is close to complete institutional collapse. We have entered a new politics of ‘hostage taking’; they tell us, epitomized by but by no means limited to the 2011 fight over the debt ceiling …

What the country faces, they write, isn’t a problem with partisanship in the abstract; it’s a problem with one party:

‘However awkward it may be for the traditional press and non-partisan analysts to acknowledge, one of the two major parties, the
Republican Party, has become an insurgent outlier — ideologically extreme; contemptuous of the inherited social and economic policy regime; scornful of compromise; unpersuaded by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition. When one party moves this far from the center of American politics, it is extremely difficult to enact policies responsive to the country’s most pressing challenges.

... But ultimately the deep problem isn’t about personalities or individual leadership, it’s about the nation as a whole. Something has gone very wrong with America, not just its economy, but its ability to function as a democratic nation. And it’s hard to see when or how that wrongness will get fixed.

It is clear that the US is in a difficult position. The weakness of its democratic system invites wealthy interests to manipulate both public opinion and politicians. Government failure is evident, widely acknowledged and theoretically predicted, but countermeasures appear difficult to devise. Moreover, any that are proposed are not likely to be implemented by government because of its incompetence. As we have seen, this failure is a function not only of the inadequacy of US institutions, but also of their multiplicity and that many are intended to check each other.

As government failure underprovides public goods in the US it might be anticipated that it exacerbates citizens perceptions of uncertainty and threat. They might therefore have relatively elevated levels of fear and, as discussed later in §8.1, fearful responses are especially strong in conservatives. This may explain the extreme antagonism towards government by many of those people. As their attitude blocks government from limiting and reducing uncertainties and threats it is likely to amount to self-fulfilling prophecy. Perhaps that is propelling the US in a spiral to the bottom, where strident self-interest and antagonism rule.

King and Nelson recommend several remedies for these democratic difficulties, such as: lengthening the term of office for the House of Representatives; strengthening the role of parties (for example by replacing primaries with candidate selection by party caucuses and by allowing parties to contribute
more funds to their candidates’ campaigns); and replacing the presidential system with a head of government that is not elected by the people but by their representatives. The last change should help shift the public image of responsibility for the deliberation of public policy away from the head of state and towards citizens. However, if this shift is to be made constructive, new institutions are needed that assist the people to deliberate policy and to have political impact when they do. Such innovations are also needed for the implementation of King and Nelson’s recommendations. Those new institutions must be independent of government so that its failure does not obstruct them, yet they must influence government. This seems a formidable set of requirements. The abolition of the US presidency is the last thing that the well-cultivated awe of this office would countenance. Moreover, few proposals have been made for new institutions that could facilitate deliberation by citizens while giving their conclusions political influence. Descriptions of these designs, together with assessments of their probable effectiveness and their feasibility of implementation, are given in Part 2.