

Rethinking Democratic Decision-Making: Integrating Deliberation and Voting

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A recent turn in democratic theory emphasizes the inherent connections between voting and deliberation. This idea marks a departure from a long tradition that sees deliberation and voting as mutually exclusive, reflecting the opposition between aggregative and deliberative models of democracy (Elster 1997; Habermas 1996; Miller 1992; Young 2000; Cohen and Rogers 2003; cf. Mansbridge, et al. 2010).

Increasingly, the focus on aggregative and deliberative models has been criticized as, in the words of Mark Warren (2017, 40), “hampering the further development of democratic theory”. Warren points out that focusing on models has drawbacks, as it results in highlighting certain aspects of democratic practice while inevitably downplaying others. In particular, the focus on voting foregrounded decision-making mechanisms, but fell short in explaining how collective decisions, produced by aggregating individual preferences through voting, reflect the collective will. In contrast, the focus on deliberation enabled an exploration of how an exchange of reasons and arguments transforms individual preferences into a collective will, but sidelined the mechanisms that translate the collective will into collective decisions (Warren 2017, 39-40; cf. Mackie 2011; Landemore 2013).

The move away from democratic models has sparked a renewed interest in a systemic approach to democracy, which originates in Habermas’s earlier account of deliberative democracy (Owen and Smith 2015). In *Between Facts and Norms* (1997), Habermas distinguishes the informal public sphere from formal representative institutions, and emphasizes the importance of continuous interaction between the two. In a similar vein, recent systemic approaches highlight the interdependence of different institutions and processes in the democratic system as a whole. Those who employ such an approach recognize a ‘division of labour’ between different parts of the system, meaning that each part can make a valuable contribution to the system despite its shortcomings, as the strengths of some parts can compensate for the weaknesses of others (Dryzek 2011; Mansbridge 2012).

The systemic approach to deliberative democracy goes hand in hand with attempts to reconcile deliberation and voting, leveraging the strengths of each to compensate for the weaknesses of the other (Dryzek and List 2003). Some have fleshed out the idea that deliberation and voting belong together, rather than oppose each other, by acknowledging what deliberation may accomplish for voting. Along these lines, Robert Goodin (2008) and James Fishkin (2018) argue that deliberation enables voters to acquire a better understanding of their own and others’ interests and values, making it more likely that voting results reflect both individual preferences and collective preferences. Most recently, the reverse argument has gained traction emphasizing the way that voting benefits deliberation. In this context, voting has been seen as a communication device and, as such, interwoven with deliberation (Moore and O’Doherty 2014; Serota and O’Doherty 2022).

The contributions to this special issue further develop this trend in democratic theory towards integrating deliberation and voting. In the opening essay, Cristina Lafont explores the theoretical foundations for this reconciliatory project, arguing that the interdependence between deliberation and voting should be anchored in our understanding of democratic legitimacy. She develops a novel institutional account of democratic legitimacy that is distinct from both purely procedural and substantive accounts. According to her institutional account, democratic legitimacy neither solely derives from the procedures used to reach decisions, such as majoritarian voting, nor solely depends on the substantive quality of its outcomes. Democratic legitimacy, instead, depends on whether the institutional framework governing majoritarian voting allows decisions to be substantively contested—for instance, on the basis of conflicts with fundamental human rights—and whether, in resolving such challenges, citizens can reflectively affirm the decisions through mutually acceptable reasons. The fact that public contestation and deliberation can undermine the legitimacy of majoritarian voting outcomes highlights the intrinsic connection between deliberation and voting.

The recognition that deliberation can enhance the quality of voting motivates Ana Tanasoca's contribution. Tanasoca explores an alternative implementation of the Proportionality Principle, according to which individuals' interests must be considered in proportion to how much they are affected by a decision. Instead of implementing this principle through weighted voting, Tanasoca proposes *internally weighted deliberation*. She assumes that voters are adjudicators who must take into account all affected interests when forming a judgement on how to vote, and argues that, in their role as adjudicators, voters should proportionally weigh all affected interests. Internally weighted deliberation could provide a desirable alternative to (externally) weighted voting that is more feasible in neither requiring institutional reform nor full information on the part of deliberators, more democratic in letting each voter choose the appropriate weighting function, and more likely to lead to an epistemically correct outcome on the appropriate allocation of weights to interests.

In recognizing the value of deliberation for voting, Pierre-Etienne Vandamme proposes to build deliberative components into voting. Accordingly, he defends a right to *expressive* voting methods. Expressive voting methods, such as approval or evaluative voting, allow voters to register preferences over multiple options (such as for several candidates or for both candidates and parties), to evaluate the options and/or to justify their registered choices. Consequently, expressive voting outcomes are not merely an aggregation of preferences but also reflect a diversity of viewpoints within the electorate. Vandamme derives the right to expressive voting methods from the democratic right to political expression. While deliberation also provides citizens with a means of expression, he considers voting to be the main means of public expression for citizens and argues that traditional voting methods fall short of this function.

Instead of examining how deliberation can enhance voting, other contributions to this special issue take a reverse approach, delving into the relatively uncharted territory of how voting can enhance deliberation. Simone Chambers and Mark Warren provide an insightful overview of the ways in which voting can complement and enhance deliberations. They suggest that voting defines the issues on which deliberations are focused, ensures that deliberations shape political decisions, provides a feasible and

fair closure mechanism for deliberations, and affirms the equal status of participants in deliberations (at least, if there is equality in voting). Moreover, public voting fosters authenticity as voters can be held to account for the alignment between their vote and their publicly held positions, whereas secret voting facilitates the registration and preservation of dissenting views, making it possible to measure the strength of dissent. To combine deliberation and voting in ways that better capitalize on the strengths of both, Chambers and Warren suggest that proportional electoral systems are preferable over single-member district systems, and advocate for an increased use of electorally embedded mini-publics.

Suzanne Bloks investigates how the design of electoral constituencies shapes party politics and impacts the dynamics of legislative deliberation and negotiation. Legislative decision-making may deadlock when political parties are socially sorted along societal divisions such as ethnicity, religion, or language. Bloks suggests that replacing geographic electoral constituencies with more heterogeneous ones may reduce social partisan sorting. Heterogeneous constituencies, which can be created by randomly assigning voters to constituencies, represent all social identities in the same proportion as in the entire electorate. As heterogeneous constituencies effectively cut across social divisions, Bloks believes that they encourage political parties to express cross-cutting identity conflicts, which in turn reduces the chances of social partisan sorting. As such, this new electoral design can promote more effective deliberation and bargaining in legislatures.

The last three contributions explore the function of voting in the broader deliberative democratic system. Alice El-Wakil observes that popular vote processes, such as referendums, can increase the amount of relevant information available in the system and encourage voters to become more informed. A major objection to popular vote processes is, however, that they grant ordinary voters the right to legislate even though those voters cannot be held to account. El-Wakil refutes this accountability objection by showing that it is based on a false characterization of voters as legislators who should be accountable (in the sense of being subject to possible sanctions). Instead, voters in popular vote processes can be seen as co-legislators and, as such, they are not voting *on behalf of* others. El-Wakil argues that only a representative function would justify demands for accountability. By refuting the accountability objection, El-Wakil also demonstrates that there is no inherent distinction between voting in popular vote processes and voting in elections, as both can be seen as forms of co-legislating by ordinary citizens.

Stefan Rummens and Raf Geenens advocate for the normative superiority of deliberative democratic systems based on elections, where citizens vote representatives into and out of office, over those based on sortition, where randomly selected citizen assemblies are entrusted with making political decisions. While proponents of sortition emphasize its deliberative strengths, particularly in enhancing the epistemic quality of decision making aimed at interpreting the general will, Rummens and Geenens argue that deliberative democratic systems based on sortition fall short in adequately reflecting essential democratic principles inherent in the idea of democracy as collective self-governance of autonomous citizens. Democratic systems based on elections score better on this count: Elections can promote an inclusive and

transformative exchange of reasons, provide a mechanism for authorization and accountability, ensure equality of political influence, foster citizens' participation in collective self-governance, and reinforce their identification with political decisions. By this argument, elections sustain the essentially democratic dimensions of a deliberative democratic system.

In the closing contribution to this special issue, Claudia Landwehr and Armin Schäfer discuss reforms to the electoral system and the organization of the legislature that can enhance a representative democracy's ability to meet its deliberative democratic promises of (a) individual and collective autonomy; (b) equality and (c) rationality. To assess whether these three promises are fulfilled, they develop a deliberative alternative to Pitkin's influential criterion of responsiveness. The criterion of *deliberative responsiveness* requires not only that representatives are responsive to citizens' preferences, but also that those preferences are formed in inclusive and egalitarian discourses and that representatives explain and justify their decisions with adequate reasons. Landwehr and Schäfer argue that the criterion is best realised with a proportional electoral system, especially one that uses the single transferable vote, and a semi-parliamentary government.

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