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Democracy Transformed?: Expanding Political Opportunities in Advanced Industrial Democracies

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Over the past quarter century, citizens, public interest groups, and political elites in advanced industrial democracies have displayed growing doubts about whether the principles and institutions of representative democracy are sufficient mechanisms of democratic self-government. In most of these nations, turnout in elections has declined, as has party membership and various forms of electoral participation.¹ In addition, the public is increasingly skeptical of politicians, political parties, and political institutions.² These signs point to a spreading dissatisfaction with the institutions and processes of representative democracy.

These trends are often accompanied by increasing demands for political reforms to expand citizen and interest group access to politics in new ways, as well as to restructure the process of democratic decision making. Although electoral participation seems to be declining, participation in new forms of action is increasing. Public opinion surveys routinely find that large majorities favor shifting political decision making from elites to the citizens themselves.³ Today, more people are signing petitions, joining citizen interest groups, and engaging in unconventional forms of political action.⁴ The enormous expansion of public interest groups and NGOs creates new opportunities for action. In addition, contemporary publics and political groups seemingly place increasing reliance on referendums as a tool for policy influence and agenda setting. Growing interest in the processes of deliberative or consultative democracy is another indication of this trend.⁵ There are also regular calls for greater reliance on citizen advisory committees for policy formation and administration, especially at the local level where direct involvement is possible.⁶

Thus, contemporary democracies generally are facing popular pressures to grant more access, increase the transparency of governance, and make government more accountable for its actions. Reflecting these trends, a chorus of voices has been calling for democracies to reform and adapt to changing political conditions and a changing public. Benjamin's Barber's "strong democracy" or Robert Dahl's discussion of transformative democratic reform both raise deeper questions about how the democratic institutions can be improved to involve the public more directly.⁷ Mark Warren writes, "Democracy, once again in favor, is in need of conceptual renewal. While the traditional concerns of democratic theory with state-centered institutions

remain importantly crucial and ethically central, they are increasingly subject to the limitations we should expect when nineteenth-century concepts meet twenty-first century realities.”⁸ The pragmatic American political analyst, Dick Morris, similarly observes: “The fundamental paradigm that dominates our politics is the shift from representative to direct democracy. Voters want to run the show directly and are impatient with all forms of intermediaries between their opinions and public policy.”⁹ At a more theoretical level, Ralf Dahrendorf has recently summarized the mood of the times: “representative government is no longer as compelling a proposition as it once was. Instead, a search for new institutional forms to express conflicts of interest has begun.”¹⁰

Some inside government have reacted in similar ways to observed shifts in the political environment. For instance, in 1999 the OECD held a symposium: “Government of the Future: Getting from Here to There.” The symposium report noted that technological advances and a more knowledgeable citizenry create more demands on contemporary governments. In response, the OECD began a dialogue about how its member states could reform their governments to create new connections to the public.¹¹ Building on this experience, the OECD conducted studies to assess existing opportunities for citizen access to information, consultation, active-participation in policymaking, and “best practice” reforms for expanding these opportunities. The report of these activities begins:

New forms of representation and public participation are emerging in all of our countries. These developments have expanded the avenues for citizens to participate more fully in public policy making, within the overall framework of representative democracy in which parliaments continue to play a central role. Citizens are increasingly demanding more transparency and accountability from their governments, and want greater public participation in shaping policies that affect their lives. Educated and well-informed citizens expect governments to take their views and knowledge into account when making decisions on their behalf. Engaging citizens in policy making allows governments to respond to these expectations and, at the same time, design better policies and improve their implementation.¹²

As this suggests, citizen demands for greater access, transparency, and accountability are clearly recognized by public officials within the OECD.¹³

In summary, there is an apparently growing consensus on the need for political reform to adopt democracy to new conditions, and the cumulative impact of experiments in democratic reform suggest that important new developments may be at hand. The most avid proponents of such reforms project this process forward and conclude that we may be experiencing *the most fundamental transformation of the democratic process* since the creation of mass democracy in the early 20th Century. Yet cycles of democratic reform are a recurring theme in history, and pressures for change in one direction often wane as new problems and new possibilities surface. So in discussing the impact of reform we need to go beyond the rhetoric and to ask whether these changes are really transforming the foundations of the democratic process, or whether these reforms are accommodating popular pressures without altering the basic nature of representative democracy. This essay reviews the evidence of institutional reforms across the advanced industrial democracies over the later half of the 20th century, and then considers the implications of these trends from the perspective of democratic theory and practice.

Three Modes of Democracy

At one level, there is nothing new about the call to inject more democracy into the institutions of representative government. Throughout the history of modern democracies there have been repeated waves of debate about the nature of the democratic process, some of which have produced institutional reform.¹⁴ The first wave of democratic transformation occurred early in the 20th century. The populist movement in America involved reforms of electoral processes, the introduction of new forms of direct democracy, and reforms of the governing process.¹⁵ Parallel institutional reforms occurred in European democracies. By the end of the democratic reform period in the late 1920s, most Western democracies had become much more democratic in terms of providing citizens with access to the political process and making governments more accountable to the public.

We believe that a new wave of democratic debate and rhetoric emerged in the last third of the 20th century. The stimulus for change often appeared first among university students and young professionals who pressed the boundaries of the conventional system of representative democracy. The Free Speech Movement in the United States was an early example of the rejection of traditional political processes and a search for alternative methods of political expression and influence. These sentiments soon broadened to include social protests over race, urban issues, and the Vietnam War. A strikingly parallel wave of student unrest spread across Europe in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The Provo movement unsettled the consensual aspect of Dutch politics in the late 1960s, the Alternativ and APO movements in Germany challenged the political establishment at the same time, and the RAF assaulted the Italian government during the 1970s. In France, the May Revolts of 1968 marked the apogee of the student movement, as student protest led to a general mobilization of political dissatisfaction among the French citizenry and the near collapse of democratic government. Moreover, embedded within the French student movement were clear challenges to the established system of representative democracy.

Although these dramatic protests subsequently waned, the new challenges to democracy that they embodied have been linked to several diverse forces that still are affecting advanced industrial democracies. Calls for reform in recent decades seem to emanate from a complex mix of needs and motivations. One factor may simply be the underlying logic of democracy. Participation and consensus-building are essential characteristics of the democratic process. Once these values become accepted, there may be an inevitable pressure to expand these processes to allow greater citizen access and ensure the effectiveness of democratic participation. For instance, after assuming the Chancellorship in the late 1960s, Willy Brandt challenged Germans to “risk more democracy.” Democratic expectations may also expand to include other domains, such as Dahl’s emphasis on democratic reforms in the economic sphere. In other words, the logic of democracy may generate its own expectations for the expansion of the democratic process.

Other factors may have contributed to this reform wave. The modernization process in advanced industrial democracies may have contributed to calls for democratic reform. The dramatic growth of public interest groups in the United States and citizen action groups in Europe introduced new actors and new styles of action into the democratic process. This “participatory revolution” pushes the boundaries of political action beyond the traditional participation style of representative democracy. Another explanation of change focuses on a

Schumpeterian model of elite competition. The expansion of political actors may stimulate attempts to develop new access points through institutional reform that would grant them new opportunities for influence and political advantage. A contrasting view suggests that the congestion of the governance process may stimulate institutional change. In line with the governmental overload approach,¹⁶ governments may decide to delegate authority to administrators or the courts, which leads citizens and elites to try to influence these new decision-making centers. Finally, democratic innovation diffuses across the advanced industrial democracies both through imitation, and through the influence of international organizations such as the European Union and the OECD. Indeed, a combination of such factors is probably necessary to generate the type of sustained and cross-nationally broad patterns of democratic reform we have witnessed over the past three decades.

We see the democratization wave of the late 20th century as generating three types of democratic reform that occurred in overlapping patterns of change. One type aimed at improving the process of representative democracy in which citizens elect elites, much as the populist wave of the early 20th century reformed electoral processes. Second, there are calls for new forms of direct democracy that bypass (or compliment) the processes of representative democracy. And third, other reforms expanded the participation repertoire to include a new style of advocacy democracy. In advocacy democracy, citizens and public interest groups directly participate in the process of policy formation or administration (or participate through surrogates such as public interest groups), although the final decisions are still made by elites. We want to briefly summarize the evidence of institutional change in each of these domains.

Much of the history of democratic theory and practice focuses upon the processes of representative democracy. Scholars ranging from Schumpeter to Dahl have treated competitive elections as the primary measure of democracy. Thus, one focus of the contemporary reform wave has been the improvement of electoral processes and the institutions of representative democracy. Changes in U.S presidential elections are one example of such reforms to representative processes. In a thirty-year span these elections underwent a dramatic shift toward expanding citizen influence by selecting candidates through primary elections. In 1968 the Democratic Party had 17 presidential primaries and the Republicans had even fewer; in 2000 there were Democratic primaries in forty states and Republican primaries in forty-three. In addition, first the Democratic party and then the Republican party instituted reforms intended to ensure that the convention delegates are more representative of the parties' supporters.¹⁷ Meanwhile, public funding of presidential elections was introduced and expanded in an effort to limit the influence of money, and thereby to ensure the equality of citizens. More recently, reformers have championed causes such as term limits and campaign finance reform as the new populist remedies for restricting the influence of special interests in the democratic process.¹⁸ If Dewey and Truman were brought back to observe the modern presidential election process, they would hardly recognize the system as the same that nominated them in mid-century.

The institutionalized system of party government in Europe has restrained some of the populist reforms that occurred in the United States, but even so there are parallels in many nations. On a limited basis, some political parties have experimented with, or even adopted, closed primaries as a means of selecting parliamentary candidates.¹⁹ There is also some evidence that party members are wielding greater influence in the selection of party candidates.

Other reforms apparently increase the number of electoral choices available to voters by transforming appointed positions into elective offices.²⁰ Where once the typical democratic

citizen (outside of the United States and Switzerland) could cast less than a handful of votes during a four or five-year electoral cycle—the number of offices determined by elections has grown in most democracies.²¹ Now Europeans select a parliament for the European Union, regionalization has increased the number of elected subnational governments, and in several nations directly-elected mayors and local elected officials are becoming more common. Suffrage was again expanded during this democratic wave, this time to include younger voters (ages 18-20).

The reforms we describe above were implemented to strengthen representative democracy as a pillar of the democratic process. When one combines these findings, they lead to the conclusion that the significance of representative democracy as a method of access and influence has probably held constant, or even increased slightly during the latter 20th century. It is true that turnout in elections is down by about 10 percent across the advanced industrial democracies over the past four decades, and this partially signifies a decrease in political access (or use of this means of access). But at the same time, the amount of electing is up by an equal or greater amount. Because of the expansion in electoral choices, citizens are traveling to the polls more often and making more electoral choices. An increased number of political parties and an opening of electoral processes are additional examples of expanding democratic access. Moreover, reforms to develop internal democracy within political parties help to make political parties more accountable to their supporters and the decisions of party elites more transparent. In summary, much as was noted for the American populist reform era of the early 20th century, the current wave of democratic change begins by reforming the institutions of representative democracy.

A second set of reforms involves the expansion of direct democracy. The most common tools of direct democracy, initiatives and referendums, allow citizens to decide government policy directly, instead of relying on the mediated influence of representative democracy. Moreover, when ballot initiatives are an available instrument, actors outside of the government can control the framing of issues and even the timing of the policy debate, further empowering the citizens and groups that use this mode of action. Because of changes in both attitudes and in formal rules over recent decades, referendum usage has increased in the United States and several other democracies. The Initiative and Referendum Institute calculates that there were 118 statewide referendums in the U.S. during the decade of the 1950s; this increased to 378 referendums in the 1990s. Several other nations have amended laws and constitutions to provide greater opportunities for direct democracy at both the national and local levels.²² For instance, Britain had its first national referendum in 1975, Sweden's constitutional reform introduced the referendum in 1980, and Finland adopted the referendum in 1987. In these and other cases, the referendum won a new legitimacy as a basis for national decision making, one that runs strongly counter to the theoretical ethos of representative democracy. There also has been mounting interest in expanding direct democracy into new institutional forms, such as citizen juries and methods of deliberative democracy.²³

Do these changes represent a fundamental expansion in political access and the means of making government accountable? On the one hand, the political impact of each referendum is more limited than an election to decide the national legislature, since only a single policy is being decided in each referendum. We would therefore describe direct democracy channels as more constrained in providing access and influence compared to traditional channels of representative democracy. On the other hand, the increasing use of referendums influences

political discourse and principles of political legitimacy beyond the policy at stake in any single referendum. In Britain, for instance, the introduction of the first referendum on European Community membership in 1975 reshaped democratic theory and practice. No longer was parliamentary sovereignty absolute; instead, the concept of popular sovereignty was legitimized. Thus, subsequent devolution decisions were deemed to require additional referendums, and today contentious issues, such as acceptance of the Euro, are considered issues that “the public should decide.” Thus, even though the use of direct democracy in Britain remains limited in terms of the frequency of usage and the scope of issues decided in this manner, the expansion of this mode of access represents a significant institutional change in most contemporary democracies.

In addition to bringing reforms to institutions of representation and direct democracy, the democratization wave of the late 20th century also expanded the participation repertoire to include a new third style of advocacy democracy. In this form, citizens or public groups directly interact with government and even participate in policy process directly; that is, citizens participate in policy deliberation even though the actual decisions remain in the hands of government elites. One might consider this to be a form of traditional lobbying activity, except that these actions do not involve traditional interest groups or standard channels of informal interest group persuasion. Rather, advocacy democracy empowers individual citizens or citizen groups to participate in advisory hearings, attend open government meetings (government in the sunshine), consult an ombudsman to redress a grievance, demand information from government agencies, and challenge government actions through the courts.

The evidence of a growing use of advocacy democracy is less direct and less easily quantifiable than other aspects of institutional change—but the overall expansion is undeniable. For example, the principle of “maximum feasible participation” became the watchword of the social service reforms of the Great Society in the United States. As a result, citizen consultation and public hearings have been embedded in an extensive range of legislation, giving citizens new access points to government policy formation and administration.²⁴ Congressional hearings and state government meetings became public events in the U.S., and here legislation such as the 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act even extended open-meeting requirements to advisory committees. This yields, for example, the contrast between the system of Environmental Impact Reviews (EIRs) and public hearing now required by U.S. environmental policy versus the traditional closed system of British environmental policy making protected by the Official Secrets Act. In 1970 only a handful of nations had freedom of information laws, such provisions are now almost universal in the OECD nations. There has also been a general diffusion of the ombudsman model across advanced industrial democracies.²⁵ The “government in the sunshine” provisions that have been enacted in recent years reflect a fundamental change in understandings about the role elected representatives should play, a shift that we might characterize as a move away from the trustee towards the delegate model. It is not difficult to guess what Edmund Burke would think about these types of reforms.

Reforms in this category also include the new legal rights that give citizen groups and individuals access to political information and influence. The judicialization of the policy process now enables citizen groups in most Western democracies to develop class action suits on behalf of the environment, women’s rights or other public interests.²⁶ As a result, virtually every public interest can be translated into a rights appeal, which provides a new venue of action through the courts.

Advocacy democracy is a form of political access that was seldom available to individual citizens or interest groups a generation ago, but it has grown dramatically since then. Especially in European democracies where direct citizen action was initially quite rare, the expansion of public interest groups, *Buergerinitiativen*, and other citizen groups substantially expanded the repertoire of political action. Administrative reforms, decentralization, the judicialization of politics, and other factors created new opportunities for access and influence. Moreover, although we have focused on institutionalized political access in our studies, it is worth noting that the growth of unconventional political action—protests, demonstrations and similar activities—also has been substantial over this timespan.²⁷

In summary, institutional reform has generally expanded citizen access and participation in all three styles of democratic action. Today's public is more engaged, though in part using different channels of access, than citizens a generation ago. Political change on all three dimensions is transforming the relationship between citizens and their democratic state.

Britain as an Illustration

Britain's experience in the later 20th century illustrates the processes we are studying. In 1960 Britain was considered a highly successful democracy. Indeed, British support for their government and their nation was one factor that sustained the nation through World War II and was a hallmark of British democracy.²⁸ At the same time, however, citizens' actual access to the democratic process was limited both in terms of the processes of representative democracy and through direct and advocacy democracy. Most British citizens focused their participation on electoral involvement—but actual input through the process of representative government was quite limited: a single vote for a Member of Parliament every five years, and perhaps single votes for the local and county council. Participation beyond elections was quite limited.

Gradually pressures mounted for greater democratic access. In response, various reforms increased the role of elections. For instance, the creation of the Scottish Assembly and the Welsh National Assembly expanded citizens' electoral input, as did the new direct elections to the European Parliament and the recent local government bill allowing cities to institute directly-elected mayors. New parties emerged to represent regional interests and for short periods new parties such as the Social Democrats and Greens appeared on the electoral stage. Other reforms sought to increase the citizens' role within the political parties, such as the restructuring of the Labour party nominating process in the 1980s and the increasing formalization of participatory rights for individual members in all the major parties.

As noted above, direct forms of citizen access also expanded during this period. In 1975 Britain held the first national referendum in its history, which was followed by several regional referendums on devolution. Even if referendums are used infrequently, their existence has shifted the content of political debate in Britain, where now the public is seen as the source of political sovereignty, rather than Parliament. There are also clear prospects of other national referendums in the future (such as on the Euro).

Protest and other forms of direct political action increased; in place of the deference of British political culture there arose a culture that tolerated and encouraged elite-challenging activities. Membership in the European Union brought new rights of legal standing and citizen rights that were lacking under Britain's unwritten constitution. No longer was parliament supreme, because the public could turn to the European Court of Justice to challenge

parliamentary sovereignty. In addition, the adoption of the Human Rights Act of 2000 potentially creates a new constitutional order for Britain by providing for rights-based appeals by British citizens, which can be heard by the European Court of Human Rights. And Britain finally initiated a Freedom of Information Act in 2000, which parted some of the veil of secrecy that protected governments under the Official Secrets Act. Thus Britain developed new channels for political access as well as participation in elections.

In short, gradually Britain has moved from a starting point of limited public access in 1960 toward greater opportunities for citizen involvement in the process through representative institutions, direct democracy, and advocacy democracy. Our estimate of the degree of change along these dimensions is imprecise, and the progress along each dimension is uneven, but access apparently has increased on all three dimensions. The guiding hypothesis of our study is that the changes illustrated by the British example are far from unique. Although other advanced industrial democracies may have different starting points, we posit that they, too, have followed a similar trajectory in developing representative, direct and advocacy channels.

The Changing Relationship between Citizens and the Democratic State

If the institutional structure of democracy is changing, how has this affected the democratic process? The consequences are diverse, and not always for the positive. Democratic gains in some areas can be offset by negative consequences in other. Gains in access, for example, may produce new problems of democratic governability. We faced the challenge of systematically describing changes that are occurring across models of democratic practices that already are diverse.

In this essay, we limit our attention to how these institutional changes have altered the relationship between citizens and the contemporary democratic state. Robert Dahl's writings provide a benchmark for defining the essential elements of this relationship in a democracy.²⁹ But like many other democratic theorists, Dahl tends to equate democracy with the institutions and processes of representative democracy. In *On Democracy*, for example, Dahl discusses democracy in terms of elections and the mass franchise—much less attention is paid to other forms of citizen influence that may actually represent important and in some cases more influential methods of citizen influence over political elites.³⁰ Similarly, Joseph Schumpeter offered a minimalist definition of democracy: “The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”³¹

Our broader examination of democratic change stems from a conviction that citizens do not just vote and then serve in chains until the next election, as Rousseau stated in his critique of representative democracy. Recognizing the uses and limits of these other forms of citizen participation is essential to understanding democracy in its entirety. These other channels are largely missing from many treatises on democratic theory.³²

Thus, while we draw upon Dahl's *On Democracy* to define the essential criteria for a democratic process, we broaden the framework to compare the implications of a changing mix of representative democracy, direct democracy, and advocacy democracy. Such comparisons can determine the implications of a changing repertoire of political action for democratic publics. Dahl suggests that systems that claim to be democratic can be judged by five criteria:³³

- *Inclusion.* All, or most, adult permanent residents should have full rights of citizenship implied by the following criteria
- *Political equality.* When decisions about policy are made, every member must have an equal and effective opportunity to vote, and all votes must be counted equally
- *Enlightened understanding.* Within reasonable limits, each member must have equal and effective opportunities for learning about the relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences
- *Control of the agenda.* The members must have the exclusive opportunity to decide how and what matters are placed on the agenda.
- *Effective participation.* Before a policy is adopted, all the members must have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known to other members.

The following discussion considers how the processes of institutional change we have described can be related to these criteria.

Table 1 lists Dahl's five democratic criteria down the first column. The second column in the table summarizes the prevailing view on how well the electoral process of representative democracy fulfills these criteria. For example, inclusion is a fundamental element of democracy.³⁴ Advanced industrial democracies addressed the inclusion criterion through the expansion of the franchise to all adult residents—a process that required a long series of reforms but is now virtually assured in these nations. Success in addressing this goal is illustrated by the bold highlighting of "universal suffrage" in the first cell of this column.³⁵

The political equality criterion also posed an initial challenge to many supposedly democratic states because they offered multiple voting for some citizens or excluded other potential voters (de facto or de jure). Nearly all advanced industrial democracies now meet the equality criterion for elections based on the principle of one person-one vote, which is also highlighted in the second cell. At the same time, some problems of equality remain. For example, contemporary debates about campaign financing and registration are linked to the equality criterion, and full equality in political practice is probably unattainable. These remaining potential equality problems are noted in the shaded area of the cell. Overall, however, the principle of equality is now a consensual value when applied to elections and the process of representative democracy in these nations.

On first appearances it may seem that the expansion in the amount of electing simply extends these principles to new elections. But increasing the number of times that voters go to the polls and increasing the number of items on the ballot tend to depress turnout—which poses a challenge to the equality criterion. When local elections, or even European Union elections, draw less than half the electorate to the polls, one must question whether the gap between equality of access and equality of usage has become so large that it undermines the basic principle of political equality. If only a quarter of the American public actually votes for a local mayor or a local school board, this erodes the legitimacy of the electoral process. Moreover, low turnout may distort the representativeness of elections. Second-order elections tend to mobilize a different electorate, which may be more ideological than the public at large; and more second-order elections would mean more distortions within the electoral process.

The tension between democratic theory and practice becomes even more obvious when we turn to the criterion of enlightened understanding. The political behavior literature has long debated whether the average voter possesses the necessary information and cognitive skills to make “enlightened” political choices.³⁶ While we are fairly sanguine about the voters’ abilities

Table 1 Dahl's Democratic Criteria

DEMOCRATIC CRITERIA	REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY	DIRECT DEMOCRACY	ADVOCACY DEMOCRACY
Inclusion	Universal suffrage provides inclusion	Universal suffrage provides inclusion	Equal citizen access
			<i>(Problems of access to non-electoral arenas)</i>
Political Equality	One person/one vote with high turnout maximizes equality	One person/one vote maximizes equality	Equal opportunity
	<i>(Problems of low turnout, and inequality due to campaign finance issues, etc)</i>	<i>(Problems of lower turnout)</i>	<i>(Problems of very unequal use)</i>
Enlightened Understanding	<i>(Problems of information access, voter decision processes)</i>	<i>(Problems of greater information and higher decision making demands placed on citizens)</i>	Increased public access to information
			<i>(Problems of even greater information and decision making demands)</i>
Control of the Agenda		Citizen initiation provides control of agenda	Citizens and groups control of locus and focus of activity
	<i>(Problems of control of campaign debate, selecting candidates, etc.)</i>	<i>(Problems of influence by special interest groups)</i>	
Effective Participation	Control through responsible parties	Direct policy impact ensures effective participation	Direct access avoids mediated participation
	<i>(Principal-Agent problems: fair elections, responsible party government, etc)</i>		

Note: Criteria that are well-addressed are presented in **bold**, criteria that are at issue are presented in *italics in the shaded cells*.

to make rational choices when it comes to high visibility elections, such as presidential and national parliamentary elections, the expansion of the amount of voting gives a new meaning to this debate. How does a resident of Houston make enlightened choices on the dozens of judges that appeared on the November 2002 ballot as well as other local offices and local referendums? In such second-order and third-order elections, the heuristics that voters can use in high profile first-order elections may be insufficient or even lacking altogether, as in non-partisan races for low visibility offices. Thus, the expansion of the electoral marketplace may empower the public, but it deepens questions about the ability of voters to exercise these new electoral opportunities.

Another problematic criterion for representative democracy is the control of the political agenda. The extent to which public officials and other elites can structure the agenda setting process comes at the cost of minimizing the public's ability to control the course of government. This is especially problematic when the opportunities for citizen input are limited, and elites dominate public discourse as well as the institutions of governance.

The recent reforms of representative democracy partially address the difficulties of broadening access to the political agenda. Increasing the number of elected offices gives citizens more input and presumably more venues to raise relevant issues. Moreover, political finance reforms which aim to equalize of campaign access and party support also facilitate greater openness in political deliberations. In short, the contemporary reforms of parties and electoral systems discussed above have generally strengthened the extent to which systems conform to this democratic criterion.

Finally, a crucial issue for representative democracy is the effectiveness of participation. Do citizens get what they vote for? Often this principal/agent problem is solved through the mechanism of party government; voters select a party and the party ensures the compliance of individual MPs and the translation of electoral mandates into policy outcomes.³⁷

It is difficult to deduce how the reforms described above impact on this democratic criterion. On the one hand, more openness and choice in elections should enable the public to express their political preferences more extensively and in more policy arenas. If voters can elect the mayor, for instance, the connection of voters to elites is more direct than if this were an appointed office. On the other hand, as the number of office holder proliferates, it may become more difficult for voters to assign responsibility for policy outcomes to multiple elites where divided party and political control become more common. We share the general concern that fragmented decision making, divided government, and the simple multiplicity of elected officials may diminish the political responsiveness of each actor. In short, recent institutional reforms increase the potential for participation in the processes of representative democracy, but we are uncertain how this systematically alters the effectiveness of participation.

Democratic theorists have focused on how voting in party/candidate elections fulfill these five democratic criteria, but we can ask the same questions of direct democracy (column 3 in Table 1). Because referendums and initiatives are based on mass elections, they function much the same as representative elections in terms of inclusion and political equality. Most referendums and initiatives use universal suffrage to ensure inclusion, and one person/one vote to ensure political equality. The notable exceptions are special elections and bond elections that define the voters as a subset of the total electorate; for instance, allowing only property holders to vote on a special tax assessment on property. Such elections and other participatory forms that violate the inclusion norm pose fundamental problems from the standpoint of democratic theory.³⁸

We would argue, however, that when one moves beyond the institutions of representative democracy in mass-franchise elections, the democratic criterion of inclusion becomes more complicated than the simple assessment of equal access. Equality in opportunity does not mean equality in participation when the threshold for becoming engaged is higher and the level of participation falls far below national vote levels. Turnout in direct democracy elections is often lower than for comparable elections for public officials. Thus, the expansion of direct democracy raises new questions about political equality in low turnout elections. For instance, when Proposition 98 appeared on the 1996 general election ballot in California, barely half of the voting age public turned out in this election and only 51% percent voted for the Proposition. But as a consequence, California's constitution was altered to mandate a specific part of the state budget be directed to K-12 education, which has reshaped state spending and public financing in California (and, some would argue, has not necessarily benefited the programs the referendum was supposedly designed to help). Such votes raise questions about the fairness of elections in which a minority of voters can make crucial decisions that affect the public welfare.

Referendums and initiatives also place even greater demands for information and understanding upon the voters. Many of the heuristics that voters can use in party elections or candidate elections are less relevant to referendums. Moreover, the issues themselves are often complex and beyond what a typical citizen could understand. For instance, did the average Italian voter have enough information to make enlightened choices on the 1997 referendums they faced? The ballot included referendums dealing with television ownership rules, television broadcasting policy, the hours that stores could remain open, the commercial activities that municipalities could pursue, labor union reform proposals, the regulations for administrative elections, and residency rules for mafia members. Arthur Lupia has presented provocative evidence that voters can still rely on group heuristics and other cues to make informed decisions on referendums.³⁹ But obviously the proliferation of policy choices and especially the introduction of lower salience local referendums raises questions about the overall viability of such cue-taking models. Thus, the expanded use of referendums raises questions about whether voters can fulfil the criteria of enlightened understanding in making their decisions.

The strength of direct democracy is seen when we apply Dahl's last two criteria. Referendums and initiatives shift the locus of agenda setting from elites toward the public and public interest groups. Indeed, issues that elites do not want to address can be brought into the political arena through processes of direct democracy: tax reform or term limits in the United States, abortion reform in Italy, and the terms of EU membership in Europe. Even when referendums fail to reach the ballot or fail to win a majority, the mechanism of direct democracy can force elites to be more sensitive to public interests.⁴⁰ Direct democracy can strengthen the public's ability to shape the agenda of politics.

Furthermore, by definition direct democracy should solve the problem of effective participation that exists with all methods of representative democracy. Direct democracy is unmediated, and so it ensures that participation is effective. Voters make policy choices with their ballot: to enact a new law, to repeal an existing law, or to reform the constitution. Even in instances where the mechanisms of direct democracy require some elite response in passing the law or re-voting in a later election, the direct link to policy action is clearer and more immediate than through channels of representative democracy.

Direct democracy seems to fulfill the agenda-setting and effective participation criteria of democracy, but there are questions in these areas as well. Elizabeth Gerber, for example,

suggests that special interest groups may find it easier to manipulate processes of direct democracy to their own advantage.⁴¹ The discretion to place a policy initiative on the ballot can be appealing to a special interest, which then has unmediated access to the voters during the campaign. In addition, the decisions of direct democracy are less susceptible to the bargaining and checks/balances that occur within the normal legislative process. Some recent referendums in California may illustrate this style of direct democracy: wealthy backers pay a consulting firm to collect signatures to get a proposal on the ballot, and then bankroll a campaign to support their desired legislation. This is not grassroots democracy at work, but the representation of special interests by other means.

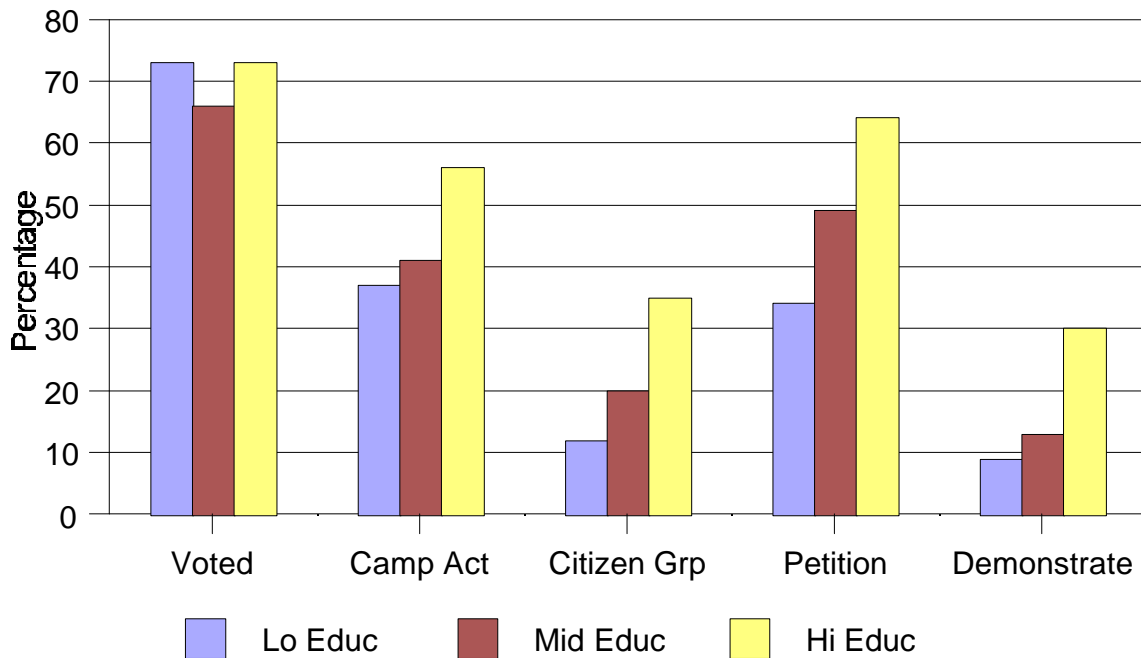
In summary, the expansion of direct democracy has the potential to complement traditional forms of representative democracy. In terms of several criteria, it can provide a positive expansion of the democratic process by allowing citizens and public interest groups new access to politics, and new control over the political agenda. But direct democracy also raises new questions about the equality of influence, if not access, and the ability of the public to make fair and reasoned judgments about the issues placed before them. Perhaps the most important factor is not whether direct democracy is expanding, but how it is expanding: are there ways to achieve the desired increase in access and influence, without sacrificing inclusion and equality? We return to this question later in this article.

The final column in Table 1 considers how the new forms of advocacy democracy fulfill each of Dahl's democratic criteria. These new forms of action provide citizens and public groups with valuable and politically significant new access to politics, but it is also clear that this access is very unevenly used. Nearly everyone can vote, and most do. But very few citizens can (or do) file a lawsuit, file the papers under a Freedom of Information Act, attend an Environmental Impact Review hearing, or attend local planning meetings.

There is no equivalent to one person-one vote for advocacy democracy. Thus advocacy democracy raises the question of how to address the criteria of inclusion, political equality, and enlightened understanding. Equality of access is not sufficient if equality of usage is grossly lacking, particularly if usage is highly biased by the skill and resource variables that predict such participation. The extent of this inequality can be seen in the following example from a European Election survey.⁴² When Europeans were asked whether they voted in the election immediately preceding the survey, educational differences in participation were very slight (Figure 1). A full 73% of the lesser-educated said they had voted in the previous European Parliament election (even though it is a second-order election), and an identical percentage of the better-educated claimed to vote (Tau-b=.03). Education differences in campaign activity are somewhat greater, but still modest in overall terms (Tau-b=.11).

A distinctly larger inequality gap emerges for modes of participation that come closer to direct or advocate forms of democracy. For instance, only 13% of the lesser-educated said they had participated in a citizen action group; but nearly three times as many of the better-educated had participated (Tau-b=.20). Similarly, quite large inequality gaps exist for signing a petition (Tau-b=.21) or participating in a lawful demonstration (Tau-b=.21). Like the old European proverb of beggars sleeping under a bridge, the law treats everyone equally when it comes to opportunity, but it is the use of opportunities in which real inequality exists.

Figure 1 Social Status Inequality in Participation



Source: Eurobarometers 31 and 31A. Results combine the twelve nations weighted to represent the total EU population.

Advocacy democracy fares better when it comes to the remaining three democratic criteria. In regards to the principle of enlightened understanding, it has a mixed result. On the one hand, advocacy democracy can enhance citizen understanding and facilitate a greater inclusion in several ways. Citizens and public interest groups can increase the amount of information that the citizen has about government activities, especially through FOI laws and participating in government policy-making and administrative hearings. And with the assistance of the press that disseminates this information, the public can better influence political outcomes. By ensuring that information is given to the public in a timely fashion, advocacy democracy allows citizens to make informed judgments that hold governments more accountable. And by eliminating the filtering that governments would otherwise apply, it may increase the likelihood that citizens get a more accurate picture of the considerations that influence policy decisions, with fewer cover-ups and self-serving distortions. On the other hand, advocacy democracy makes greater cognitive and resource demands on participants, and thus may similarly suffer from the inequalities of participation noted above. It requires much more of the citizen to participate in a public hearing or petition a government administrator than to simply cast a vote at election time.

Another advantage of advocacy democracy is that it gives citizens greater control of the political agenda, in part by increasing their opportunity to press political interests outside of the institutionalized time and format constraints of fixed election cycles. Using the tools of advocacy democracy participants can often choose when and where to challenge a government directive or pressure policy makers, this is a strength of advocacy democracy. Similarly, even though these

forms of action are often attempts at persuasion where elites still make the final policy decisions, they do nevertheless provide direct and unmediated access to government. Property owners might participate in a local planning hearing, a public interest group might petition government for information on past policies, and dissatisfied citizens might attend a school board session. Such direct and unmediated participation brings citizens into the decision making process rather than having them rely solely on agents. Unmediated access might not be ultimately as effective as the efforts of a skilled representative speaking for one's interests, but greater direct involvement in the democratic process should improve the accountability and transparency of the democratic process. Thus the strength of advocacy democracy is denoted by the bold entries in these last two cells of the table.

In summary, advocacy democracy increases the potential for citizen access in important ways. It gives citizens and public interest groups new influence over the agenda-setting process, and it can give the public unmediated participation in the policy process. These represent important extensions of democratic rights. At the same time, however, advocacy democracy may exacerbate political inequality because of the inequality of usage. As new access points are created through advisory panels, consultative hearings and other institutional reforms, some citizens are empowered to become more involved in the democratic process. But other citizens who do not possess the skills or resources to compete in these new domains are left behind.

Perhaps the best illustration of this problem can be seen in the realm of environmental policy. This is an area where citizen and public interest groups have gained new rights and new access to the democratic process. This is seen as a genuine expansion of the democratic process. But this democratic potential is disproportionately used by citizens who are already participating in politics and who possess the skills and resources to engage in these new forms of action. Left behind are the poor and minorities. Thus environmentalism is both an example of democratic empowerment of the citizenry, but also through problems of environmental justice it is a source of increasing democratic inequality.

Conclusion

In the early 20th Century, a populist wave of reform restructured the processes of representative democracy and introduced new forms of direct democracy to many Western nations. Again, in the last third of the century a new reform wave has restructured the democratic process. Party and electoral systems have been reformed to increase citizen access and make decision making more transparent. There has been a sizeable increase in the use of referendums and other forms of direct democracy across the OECD nations as a whole. And finally, new forms of advocacy democracy have expanded the political repertoire of the public--increasing citizen access, the transparency of politics, and government accountability.

Greater citizen access to politics should be applauded as an expansion of the democratic process, but we also see various tradeoffs between these different forms of democratic action. Applying Robert Dahl's democratic criteria to the three domains leads to a realization that each democratic form involves potential benefits and limitations. The traditional processes of representative democracy maximize democratic performance on the criteria of inclusion and equality through the development of institutions and processes focused on these criteria. Most citizens can participate in the act of voting, and labor unions, social democratic parties and other organizations mobilize participation to achieve high levels of engagement in most nations. The

processes of representative democracy are less successful, however, in addressing other democratic goals--such as broadening control of the political agenda or the extent of effective participation.

Direct democracy has advantages in terms of increasing the effectiveness of participation and public control of the political agenda. But referendums also place new cognitive demands upon the voters. It is less clear that the average citizen invests the time to understand direct democracy to the same extent they understand first order party-based elections. Moreover, direct democracy is often unequal in the use of this mode.

Finally, the style of advocacy democracy is seemingly a mirror image of traditional patterns of representative democracy. Advocacy democracy offers the potential to more fully address the criteria that are weak points for representative processes: agenda control and effective participation. At the same time, advocacy democracy presents problems in ensuring that participation is inclusive and equal. Because these forms of direct action require more sophistication and the resources, they are disproportionately used by higher status and politically engaged citizens. Thus, ironically, this welcomed expansion of democratic access may produce gross inequalities in usage and thus influence within the political process that undermine the core democratic principles of inclusion and equality.

No form of democratic action is ideal, each contain advantages and limitations.⁴³ As action repertoires shift from a predominant reliance on processes of representative democracy toward a mix including greater use of direct and advocacy democracy, this will create the need to find a new balance among democratic goals. There may be institutional arrangements that maximize the benefits of these new modes, while limiting their disadvantages. Indeed, the institutions of representative democracy similarly depended on parties and interest groups to make the system work. And as of yet, democracies have not fully recognized these potential problems, and thus have not attempted to find institutional or structural methods to address them. Our findings might contribute to the realization that democratic reforms represent opportunities, but they also represent challenges in ensuring that progress on one democratic criterion is not sacrificed to make progress on another.

Endnotes

Our appreciation to our colleagues in the "Transforming Democracy" for this essay reflects our joint and cumulative views of political change. We also appreciate the advice from John Aldrich, Henrik Bang, Henry Brady, Giuseppe DiPalma, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Gillian Peele, Nelson Polsby, Austin Ranney, William Schonfeld, and Martin Wattenberg.

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² Russell J. Dalton, Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Decline in Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam, eds. Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries? Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000; Pippa Norris, ed. Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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⁴ Russell J. Dalton, Citizen Politics. New York: Chatham House, 2002: ch. 4; Ronald Inglehart, Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997; Verba, Sidney, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady, Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995: p. 72.

⁵ James Fishkin, The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995; John Elster, Deliberative Democracy. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

⁶ Carol Hager, Technological Democracy: Bureaucracy and Citizenry in the German Energy Debate. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995; Helen Ingram and Steven Smith, Public Policy for Democracy. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993.

⁷ Benjamin Barber, Strong Democracy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; Robert Dahl, Democracy and Its Critics. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. Also see Jürgen Habermas. Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaates. Frankfurt, 1992; and Jürgen. Habermas, "Drei Normative Modelle der Demokratie: Zum Begriff Deliberativer Politik." In Die Chancen der Freiheit. Grundprobleme der Demokratie, ed. Herfried Münkler. München/Zürich: Piper, 1992.

⁸ Mark Warren, Democracy and Association. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001: pg. 226

⁹ Dick Morris 1999.

¹⁰ Ralf Dahrendorf, "Afterword." In Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Democracies, ed. Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000: pg. 311.

¹¹ OECD. Government of the Future. Paris: Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2000.

¹² OECD. 2001. Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making. Paris: Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001:

pg. 9.

¹³ Similarly, the European Union recently issued a white paper on the need to increase citizen involvement in the policy process, to help citizens hold their political leadership to account for the EU's decisions, and to guarantee that the EU's system will be opened up to greater public scrutiny and debate (see Commission of the European Union. White Paper on Good Governance. Brussels: Commission of the European Union, 2001).

¹⁴ Samuel Huntington, American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981; Samuel Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993; Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Revolt against Modernity." In Mobilization, Center-Periphery Structures and Nation-building, ed. P. Torsvik. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1981; Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Cycles of American History. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

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²⁰ Susan Scarrow, "Direct Democracy and Institutional Design: A Comparative Investigation." Comparative Political Studies (2001) 34:651-665.

²¹ Russell Dalton and Mark Gray, "Expanding the electoral marketplace," in Democracy Transformed? Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

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²³ Add Matthews 1994; Fishkin, The Voice of the People.

²⁴ Jeffrey Berry, Kent Portney, and Ken Thomson. 1993. The Rebirth of Urban Democracy. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1993; Ingram and Smith, Public Policy for Democracy.

²⁵ Roy Gregory and Philip Giddings, eds. Righting Wrongs: The Ombudsman in Six Continents. International Institute of Administrative Sciences, 2000; also see Christopher Ansell and Jane Gingrich, "Reforming the Administrative State," in Democracy Transformed?

²⁶ Alec Stone Sweet, Governing with Judges: Constitutional Politics in Europe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

²⁷ Although not tailored to our specific interests, the 2000 Social Capital survey demonstrates that participation in direct forms of action—working on a community project, signing petitions, participating in political meetings and neighborhood associations, and protests—are a common part of the political repertoire of Americans:

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Percent Active</u>
Voted in 1996 presidential election	69

Worked on community project in last year	38
Signed a petition in last year	35
Participated in parent association or other school group	22
Participated in neighborhood association	20
Attended political meeting or rally in last year	16
Participated in a demonstration, boycott or march in last year	7

²⁸ Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

²⁹ Robert Dahl. Polyarchy. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971; Dahl, Democracy and Its Critics; Robert Dahl, On Democracy. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

³⁰ Perhaps the notable exception in Dahl's research is his attention to a need for citizen participation in the economic domain: Dahl, Democracy and its Critics.

³¹ Joseph Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy. New York: Harper, 1943, pg. 230.

³² Other democratic theorists have a more inclusive definition of democracy that includes the forms of direct democracy and advocacy democracy that we have presented, but often these discussions lack the focus and rigor of Dahl's theorizing on democracy. See, for example, David Held, Models of Democracy. 2nd edition. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

³³ Dahl, On Democracy, pp. 37-38.

³⁴ See also Mark Warren, "A Second Democratic Transformation?" in Democracy Transformed?

³⁵ Even this criterion has not been fully resolved in advanced industrial democracies. European nations are still debating the issues of voting rights for taxpaying permanent resident aliens, and similar questions of the linkage between citizenship and voting rights exist in the United States and other democracies.

³⁶ Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, What Americans Know about Politics and Why it Matters. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996; Samuel Popkin, The Reasoning Voter. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

³⁷ Hans-Dieter Klingemann, et. al. 1994. Parties, Policies, and Democracy. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994.

³⁸ Another exception would be citizen juries. This form of participation would be problematic in terms of inclusion and equality criteria, but may do better in terms of understanding, agenda control and the effectiveness of participation.

³⁹ Arthur Lupia, "Shortcuts versus encyclopedias," American Political Science Review (1994) 88:63-76; Arthur Lupia and Mathew D. McCubbins. 1998. The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need To Know? Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

⁴⁰ Shaun Bowler and Todd Donovan, Demanding Choices: Opinion, Voting, and Direct Democracy. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001; Elisabeth Gerber, The Populist Paradox: Interest Group Influence and the Promise of Direct Legislation. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

⁴¹ Gerber, The Populist Paradox; also see David S. Broder, Democracy Derailed: Initiative Campaigns and the Power of Money. New York: Harcourt, 2000.

⁴² The figure is based on the combined European weighted sample from Eurobarometer 31 and 31A conducted in connection with the 1989 European Parliament election. These data were acquired from the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan.

⁴³ This should not be a surprising conclusion, but it is surprising that much of the literature on strong democracy and deliberative democracy stresses only the positive features of these new forms, while overlooking the limitations (e.g. Barber, Strong Democracy).