

“The Fallacy of Tightening the Reins”

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Abstract

A prevalent recent response to dissatisfaction with democracy has been to “tighten the reins” by increasing voters’ control of representatives through the electoral connection and elected representatives’ control of bureaucrats, positing election as the only source of democratic authority. Yet the electoral connection is a weak reed for democracy: electoral campaigns are poor sources of information, distort information, and sometimes create perverse incentives for politicians. In addition, one frequently practiced and normatively justifiable form of representation, the “gyroscopic,” does not respond in the expected manner to the threat of non-election or non-reelection. The gyroscopic representative’s form of accountability is narrative and prompted by non-electoral incentives. Responding to the problems in the electoral system, I suggest heuristically various non-electoral mechanisms to increase government responsiveness, reduce the democratic deficit, and enhance the representative process. These non-electoral mechanisms are intended to supplement relations based on control through threat of sanction with relations of mutual communication and education.

“The Fallacy of Tightening the Reins”

I. Introduction

In both Europe and the United States, the most prevalent recent response to dissatisfaction with democracy has been to try to “tighten the reins” by tightening the electoral connection.

Instead of tightening the reins – increasing control of representatives by voters through the electoral connection and control of bureaucrats by elected representatives -- I suggest strengthening in other ways the relationship between constituent and representative, constituent and bureaucrat.

I argue first that the electoral connection is too weak to sustain all the democratic hope we have invested in it. Moreover, the standard theory of accountability through electoral sanctions ignores one frequently practiced and normatively justifiable form of representation that does not employ this form of accountability. Second, more speculatively, I suggest a panoply of non-electoral mechanisms that might increase government responsiveness, reduce the democratic deficit, and enhance the representative process. While these ideas are merely suggestive, they illustrate the larger point that we need to look beyond elections to sustain democracy. These non-electoral mechanisms would supplement relations based on control through threat of sanction with relations of mutual communication and education.

II. Flaws in the electoral connection

As societies grow more complex and interdependent, many aspects of their functioning are best left, as Friedrich Hayek has argued, to decentralized market mechanisms. Yet at the same time, these interactions also create more and more collective action problems. The collective action problems that these interactions create require for their solution ever more intrusions into “natural”-seeming interactions, including the market. To help solve these problems, government grows. But as the interactions become more complex and the polity grows in size, the link between citizens, representatives, and bureaucracies becomes attenuated. Citizens feel, correctly, that they have less control over the important decisions that affect their lives.

One standard reaction to these developments has been to tighten the reins, making the lines of control stronger between citizen and representative, representative and bureaucrat. One might diagram those lines of control simply as follows:

Constituents → representatives → bureaucrats

A major problem with this strategy is that the electoral process, modeled in the first causal arrow, itself has costs. Electoral campaigns are poor sources of information, distort information, and, at least in the United States, create perverse incentives for politicians.

In countries with considerable illegal political corruption there are obvious reasons not to rely heavily on the electoral process. In countries whose electoral systems are significantly bound up with clientelism and patronage, there are also reasons not to rely too heavily for the instantiation of democracy in the electoral process. Yet even in countries where there is relatively little illegal corruption or clientelism, I believe that we have made a fetish of the electoral process. We have put too much stress on electoral accountability, when the electoral process is itself somewhat flawed and tightening the electoral reins has counterproductive effects.

Because there are good arguments for the electoral connection, I would never suggest replacing it. I suggest only that we stress elections less and supplement them with other forms of citizen interaction with the state. Elections are irreplaceable in democracy at the very least because parties organize opinion and crystallize issues in the electoral process, electoral campaigns discover and bring out issues and information that the other side would like to hide, and, most importantly, votes for representatives have some effect on political outcomes and are thus deeply legitimating.

So some gains in reducing the democratic deficit can be made by reforming electoral processes, particularly when existing processes embody biases. I shall not, however, address these reforms here. I shall argue instead that the electoral connection itself is a weak reed on which to rest the government “of” and “by” the people that is said to be characteristic of democracy. I restrict my remarks here to the relatively successful, relatively uncorrupt, relatively unclientelistic advanced democracies, suggesting that even here the electoral connection is problematic.

Why? First, the electoral process is an extremely blunt instrument. The vote is a binary tool (yes/no) and gives a binary signal, much like the market (buy/don’t buy). As Albert Hirschmann (1970) points out, a binary signal (“exit”/“no exit”) communicates much less information than “voice.”

Second, electoral campaigns embody incentives that encourage distortion. Distortions created by soundbites, spin, and modern campaign techniques produce an ill-informed citizenry. As television and constantly improving production techniques accustom the viewer to a shorter and shorter attention span, political ads use shorter and shorter soundbites, which distort what citizens can learn from the campaign. As techniques of reframing information in one’s own favor become so well developed that citizens become cynical, they assume that they cannot trust anything, and that very cynicism keeps them from absorbing new information. As campaign strategists advise candidates not to respond to their opponents’ attacks on the grounds that any response directs media time and attention to the grounds on which the candidate is weakest, citizens rarely hear the explanation for the actions that are attacked. In the most recent Presidential election in the United States, for example, Senator Kerry never responded fully to the Swift boat

lies. President Bush never responded to Kerry's accusation that his administration was giving incentives to outsource jobs. This failure to respond distorts the information that citizens receive. For these reasons and many others, campaigns provide little opportunity for education, either by representatives of citizens or by citizens of representatives. The recent United States Presidential campaign spent \$718 million dollars, and the entire electoral campaign, including Congress, cost more than \$1.5 billion, yet the citizenry was not much better informed at the end. The U.S. has gone farthest down this road of campaigns failing to inform and even distorting the facts, but Europe may soon follow its lead.

Third and finally, the electoral connection creates perverse incentives for politicians both in and out of office, at least in the United States.

For politicians in office, the re-election imperative creates strong incentives to seek short-term gains and neglect the long term. In addition, because of the distortions of the electoral campaign and the difficulties of communicating in any depth with the citizenry, representatives have little capacity to explain complex issues to the citizenry. They thus have strong incentives to avoid policies that can be attacked with a soundbite or a distorting advertising campaign. In the United States, for example, many members of Congress first voted for a bill that would provide "catastrophic" health insurance for everyone in the nation, then voted against it after the insurance industry had mounted a campaign against it. The representatives told William Bianco (1994) that if they had the time, they could explain to their constituents why the bill was good for the nation, but in the time the television would give them they could not explain their position, against the advertising's distorting oversimplifications. They therefore changed their votes, against their own conclusions about what would be good for their constituents and the nation. Although the situation is probably worse in the United States than in Europe, my larger point is that, given the existing failures in the mutually educative process between representative and constituent, the electoral connection has significant flaws.

For politicians campaigning to enter office, in the United States the campaigns themselves generate a perverse selection for individuals with "fire in the belly" – that is, sufficient ambition to put up with a grueling campaign. They select, perversely from the perspective of the public good, for individuals with the capacity to withstand the abuse of self and family. And they also select perversely for individuals willing to spend much of their time fund-raising.

With all these incentives that obscure accurate and complex communication within the election, incentives against public spirited action when in office, and incentives against the selection of public spirited individuals, it is a marvel that in fact (at least in the United States) a good number of public spirited individuals still end up running for office, being elected, and acting for the long-run public good once elected. It is nevertheless the case that the electoral process in many ways works against the education of the citizenry, against public-spirited behavior while in office, and against the attraction of public-spirited individuals to office.

In clientelist systems the incentives are different, but here too the electoral connection does little in the way of educating the public about important policy questions, selecting public-spirited individuals for office, and providing incentives to act in the long-run public good when in office.

I conclude, therefore, that the electoral connection, at least as presently established, is a necessary condition for good representation, but not a sufficient condition. As a vehicle for representation it has many flaws.

Indeed, electoral systems often, from the perspective of the citizen, have the deeper form of seeming to entail some form of “betrayal.” No other person can ever represent us perfectly. But in two-party systems, both parties’ attempts to please the median voter often result in candidates who do not differ sufficiently to fit many voters’ needs for a candidate who even relatively accurately represents them. In multi-party systems, more voters have representatives who represent them fairly accurately, but then what the voter wants is compromised away in the legislature. The constituent feels the bite of betrayal, a necessary feature of democratic compromise in representative systems, either at election time or between elections.

Yet in spite of these flaws, most suggestions these days for reducing the democratic deficit place even more emphasis on the electoral connection. In the EU, for example, common suggestions for reducing the democratic deficit include making parties more central in the European Parliament, making elections for Parliament more important, perhaps turning the Council into a cabinet accountable to the Parliament, and perhaps instituting an elected European president. These reforms all focus on strengthening the electoral connection, in spite of the flaws with the electoral connection: elections are too blunt an instrument to convey much accurate information, electoral campaigns encourage distortion, the re-election incentive undermines concern for the long term, and the electoral process can select against those who would bring primarily a concern for the public good into office.

III. Flaws in the practice of control and sanction

Another problem with tightening the electoral connection involves human motivation. Simply put, people do not do their best work when they are tightly controlled. This is as true of a legislator or bureaucrat as it is of you and me.

Psychological research has established that in general extrinsic motivation drives out intrinsic (Deci, Koestner and Ryan 1999). People work less well under the whip than when they think the goal toward which they are working is good.¹ Advocates for

¹ Philp (2004, 22) makes a congruent point in arguing that an agent “who regards his conduct...as a matter of honour should not be held to account in a way that is itself dishonouring or shaming.” See also Anechiaro and Jacobs: “...if public employees are treated like second- or third-class citizens, they will act accordingly” (1996, 202), Goodin (1982) on moral incentives, and Self, who concludes, “The tensions between the requirements of responsibility or ‘accountability’ and those of effective executive action can reasonably be described as *the* classic dilemma of public administration.” (1972, 277-8).

increased political accountability rarely take this feature of human psychology into consideration. They often act as if the threat of sanctions had no cost, for example, in the motivations of elected representatives.

As for the civil service, the more someone in public service is micro-managed, the more that person has to report back on everything to a superior, the more tightly the reins are held, on average the less good work that person will do -- if that person is already internally motivated to do good work.

These considerations do not mean that I advocate eliminating control by voters of elected representatives or control by elected representatives of the bureaucracy. They mean only that more “accountability” in the sense of more monitoring and sanctioning is not always the best solution to a perceived democratic deficit.

IV. Flaws in the practice of transparency

A similar analysis holds for transparency, that familiar cure for the ills of democracy advocated by both public and political science. Although some transparency is good, indeed necessary, for democracy, more transparency is not always better.

Having just focused on the counterproductive effects of control through the threat of sanction, let me now make the case against greater monitoring -- that is, against greater transparency -- in contexts where the elected representatives and appointed civil servants are in general competent and honest. There is an obvious cost in efficiency, as each agent fills out reams of paper that allow every step in a process to be reconstructed for public inquiry. There is the concomitant cost in motivation, as more of each day is spent creating a paper trail and less on the job that optimally the agent intrinsically wants to do. But the greatest cost of transparency is often that many negotiations, great and small, are best conducted behind relatively closed doors. Negotiators need to be able to say things for which they will not be held accountable, because they need to show those with whom they are negotiating that they understand their positions. The much-maligned European comitology system, for example, has produced reasonably good results, given the large numbers of factors the decision-makers have had to take into account. It has forged bonds among the members of the civil service of the many nations of the European Union. The compromises have been hammered out not by taking positions in public, which encourages grandstanding, but by forging friendships and trust among the negotiators and creating packages that are eventually acceptable to all participants in that negotiation.

When transparency in the process has costs like these, we should favor not transparency in process, but transparency in procedures, information, reasons, and the facts on which the reasons are based. For example, in the Supreme Court of the United States the deliberations and the negotiations around the decisions are secret, but the facts on which the decisions are based and the reasons for the decisions are public. When EU bureaucrats have been asked to be more “transparent,” they have in most cases responded appropriately in this more communicative fashion – giving reasons, explanations and

facts, and improving notification, rather than opening their processes to public monitoring (Lodge 1994; also Keohane and Nye [2001] 2002, 230, Magnette 2003, 151).

The greatest dangers in much of the current EU are not that the bureaucrats will be incompetent or dishonest but first, political pressure (that they will succumb to pressures from major political interests), second, self-serving bias (that they will come to think their own agency's mission more important than an informed member of the public would think it, and so promote that mission at the expense of other public goods), and third, the exclusion of some interests and perspectives from the process as a whole. It is important to curb these tendencies. Yet it is not clear that the best way to curb them is through the standard model -- making the electoral link between constituents and representatives carry the burden of conveying the right information to the bureaucrats to offset self-serving bias and allocating to the representatives the job of monitoring and sanctioning the bureaucrats to prevent undue external pressure or insure full participation of all interests.

V. Flaws in the theoretical model

Problems arise not only in the practice of the electoral connection and control through monitoring and sanctions, but also in the theory behind this practice.

One problem involves the very definition of accountability. Rational choice theory has recently deeply reinforced the popular views that democratic representation is synonymous with the electoral connection and that the electoral connection reduces to a matter of sanctioning through the vote. In the "principal/agent" theory derived from economics, the accountability of an agent depends on the principal's capacity to monitor and sanction -- particularly to sanction. In an important recent edited volume, Bernard Manin, Adam Przeworski, and Susan Stokes write that "Governments are 'accountable' if voters can discern whether governments are acting in their interest and sanction them appropriately. ... In a pure accountability model, voters use the vote only for one purpose, which is to sanction the incumbent..." (1999, 40, 44). James Fearon agrees: "In the jargon of economic theory, relations involving accountability are *agency relationships* in which one party is understood to be an 'agent' who makes some choices on behalf of a 'principal' who has powers to sanction or reward the agent" (1999, 55). A definition making sanctions central is also commonplace in everyday life. As Robert Behn puts it, "When people seek to hold someone accountable, they are usually planning some kind of punishment" (2001, 4).

Yet if we return to an earlier understanding of accountability, we see that it includes "giving an account" (*rendre compte, Rechenschaft abgeben*). Not only a numerical but also a narrative account is inherent in the concept of accountability. It is not just a matter of the principal monitoring and sanctioning; it is a matter of the agent showing, explaining, and justifying. Seeing the constituent-representative relation only in terms of making the representative subject to sanctions diverts attention from the central communicative process of "giving an account" -- explaining and justifying one's action (Behn 2001, 4; Philp 2004, 12). Failures in explanation, both from citizens to

representatives and from elected representatives and appointed civil servants to citizens, produce mistrust.

A second problem in the rational choice model of representation (which is now the standard model in political science) arises because the model pivots on “inducing preferences.” In the standard model the voter exerts power over the representative. That is, the voter (the principal) gets the representative (the agent) to do what the representative (agent) would not otherwise do through the threat of sanction or the use of force. The model assumes that absent the voter’s power, the representative would act differently. The voter induces the representative to have preferences that he or she would not otherwise have.

Constituent → representative

In practice the constituent-representative relationship often works differently, and this alternate relationship is normatively as good. In this alternate model, which many political scientists agree accurately describes much actual interaction between voter and representative in the United States (Kingdon 1981, Bernstein 1989, Stimson et al. 1995, Fearon 1999) and I believe also in Europe, the voter does not induce any change in the representative’s preferences. In fact the voter exercises no power over the representative at all. I have called this model “gyroscopic” representation, because in it the representative acts like a gyroscope (*ein Kreisal*), setting its own direction.² In the pure case (and no case is pure), the voter exercises no power over the representative. The voter does not induce any change in the representative’s preferences. Instead, the voter exercises power over the political system, by putting into that system a representative with a certain direction. The voter thus affects not the behavior of the representative but the behavior of the legislature, and through the legislature the rest of the polity.

Constituent → legislature

Edmund Burke’s “trustee” is one form of gyroscopic representative. The larger set of gyroscopic representatives encompasses the smaller subset of “trustee” representatives. In this form of representation, a voter can place in the system not only a “trustee” representative who will act for the good of the nation as a whole but also one who will always vote for a particular policy, such as lower taxes, that the voter may desire for purely self-interested reasons. The concept of a gyroscopic representative is indifferent to the reasons (public-spirited or not) motivating the representative. It does, however, provide the democratic framework through which we may understand the independent stance of a public-spirited representative. Past democratic theory has tended to treat such a representative, who acts independently and is not influenced by others’ attempts to exercise power over him or her, as in some way undemocratic. This analysis refutes that claim. It lets us see that the voter is still in charge. But in this model the voter does not change the behavior of the representative (and may well not even want to change the behavior of the representative). The voter changes the behavior of the legislature. The voter has power, but over a different entity.

² Mansbridge 2003; also Philp 2004 on integrity-based vs. compliance-based systems.

This form of control couples intrinsic motivation on the part of the representative with control (over the legislature, not the representative) on the part of the voter. It can often get voters more of what they prefer than can the standard, induced-preference model, because in the gyroscopic model the motives of the representative are more aligned with those of the voter than in the standard, induced preference model. To take the example of a horse race, you are more likely to win when you select a horse that wants to run than when you rely on the whip to make the horse run. So too a constituent may be far more satisfied with an honest, competent representative who wants intrinsically to pursue the same kinds of policies that the constituent wants than with a representative who is only seeking reelection and thus responds only to the promise of votes or the threat of withdrawing those votes.³

Importantly, in this alternative model the reins can be completely slack, or even non-existent. There need be no reins at all on the gyroscopic representative. If the representative is driven from the inside, believing in some set of policies, and if the voter has an accurate understanding of the direction in which the representative, driven from inside, will go, then the voter need do no more than place this representative in the political system and go home. No control is needed, because the representative's motivation is intrinsic, not extrinsic.

In the British party system and in European proportional representation systems, the party itself may act at least in part as a gyroscope. Party platforms indicate the direction the gyroscope will travel. Voters then choose one party and place it in the system, expecting the system to respond accordingly. They do not necessarily expect to induce preferences while the party is in power.

The normative criteria appropriate for gyroscopic representation are first, good system-wide deliberation at the time of election, and second, relative ease in maintaining one's selected representative in office or removing that representative and placing another in the system. In gyroscopic representation, the better the information and the deliberation at the very first election, the lower is the likelihood of the voters needing or wanting to replace that representative in the future. If the quality of deliberation is excellent in the first election of a representative and the choice is therefore good, there is in this model no reason to think that the constituents would ever want to replace that representative. He or she can carry on until retirement.

In contrast to gyroscopic representation, the induced preference model is almost pure Schumpeter ([1942] 1981) – the politician as entrepreneur offers on the market whatever he or she thinks the public will want and will therefore buy. Although gyroscopic representation looks on the surface rather Schumpeterian (in the sense that voters choose elites for a time and leave them alone), it is fundamentally quite different. The

³ I have described a pure type. No actual representative is either purely gyroscopic or purely induced. Any gyroscopic representative will undoubtedly change some features of his or her behavior, even if unconsciously, in order to be elected or reelected. Any induced representative will undoubtedly have a least a vestigial gyroscopic core.

gyroscopic representative is internally driven, while the preferences of Schumpeter's representatives are all externally induced.

The crucial problem in both the individual theory of gyroscopic representation, and to a lesser degree the party theory, is the very electoral system whose flaws I described earlier. Electoral systems that fail to convey accurate information harm gyroscopic systems of representation as much as any other. Moreover, ease of removal and maintenance are critical to the normative viability of gyroscopic representation. Only if voters can add and remove gyroscopic representatives relatively easily at appropriate points will those voters be able to exercise their democratic power over the system. Incumbent privileges that impede removal and term limits that prevent maintenance block the effective use of that power. Gyroscopic representatives do, however, usually care intrinsically for the long term in ways that counter some of the tendencies of the electoral system.

Turning to the civil service, some theories of democracy condemn extensive delegation from an elected legislature or executive to an appointed bureaucracy. But in our own lives each of us frequently exercises our freedom to delegate. I am not clear what theory of democracy forbids the demos from doing in this respect what we as individuals want and need to do. Bureaucrats will always "make law" as well as applying it; such relative autonomy is inherent in efficient delegation. Yet when the bureaucrats are relatively honest and competent for exogenous reasons -- as they mostly are in the UK and EU systems, particularly in Scandinavia -- and when the process of delegation follows justifiable procedures, it seems to me both to make sense in motivation and efficiency, and to be normatively justifiable as reasonable democratic delegation, to let them work with a minimum of monitoring and sanctions, and fight these sources of distortion largely outside the electoral process.

Of course we need some monitoring of both elected officials and bureaucrats. But that monitoring need not be systematic and on-going. Matthew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz (1984) once distinguished between "fire-alarm" and "police patrol" oversight, contending that it is more efficient for individual citizens and interest groups to send in the alarm when they come across wrongdoing rather than have Congress engage in continual monitoring of the bureaucracy. The same might be said of elected representatives when other factors, such as internal commitment, produce a high probability of honest, competent behavior.

In addition, both among elected representatives and the appointed civil service, what organizational theorists call "network" -- or "horizontal," or "professional" -- accountability can often -- extremely effectively -- substitute for "vertical" accountability, that is, the accountability of the standard model.⁴ If members of a network have a strong

⁴ See Goodin 2003 for the particular appropriateness of network accountability in the "third sector" of non-profit institutions, on the grounds that a form of accountability based on "praising or shaming and shunning" (12) will work most effectively among actors motivated by the public good. See Keohane and Nye [2001] 2002 on network accountability in international organizations. As Goodin (2003, 41) points

enough internal commitment to the norms of their profession, or even if those members have only a self-interested concern for the reputation of their network, they will have an incentive to monitor and sanction the behavior of others in the network to keep potential defectors up to network standards. The ambitions of one section of the bureaucracy will also check in some respects the ambitions of others. These networks of horizontal accountability, along with recruitment systems and larger social norms, help produce honesty and competence exogenously to the electoral system. When these processes are functioning effectively the amount of monitoring and sanctioning needed is only the minimum that experience shows is necessary to prevent the unraveling of a system of motivation based primarily on internal incentives and horizontal accountability. And that is often not very much.

In short, I would conclude regarding elected representatives that if the quality of deliberation at election-time is good and if it is relatively easy both to maintain representatives in office and to remove them, then it is normatively quite consistent with democracy to leave them alone. Enough of this single-minded focus on voter control of representatives. Enough of this across-the board opposition to incumbency. Enough of this obsession with turnover in office. When an initial selection has been a good one, neither voter control of the representative nor turnover are necessary for good democratic representation. As for the civil service, if they are doing a good job, leave them alone too. Enough of this hand-wringing about delegation.

V. Citizen action

Yet a democracy that is plausibly “by” and “of” the people cannot consist only of a system in which voters select good representatives and leave them alone. Even if we were somehow able to create a world of perfectly public-interested elected representatives and appointed bureaucrats, all working on intrinsic motivation, doing everything they could to further the public interest without even self-serving bias, practical and normative problems would still arise. Practically, not always being connected to local knowledge, these representatives and civil servants would make mistakes. Normatively, their very capacities would tend to incapacitate the people they served, who would be encouraged to leave everything to them.

By contrast, active citizenship fosters public capacities. Although it is hard to measure such things empirically, taking an active role in politics very probably generates greater information, critical intelligence, political efficacy, political self-respect, and perhaps even mutual respect among the citizens themselves. (For problems in measurement see Mansbridge 1999; for recent evidence of the effects of active citizenship see Luskin, Fishkin and Jowell 2002, Gastil, Deesse and Wieser 2002.) Moreover, because even under gyroscopic representation and bureaucratic delegation citizens are the ultimate decision-makers, who choose the gyroscopic representatives and pass judgment on that civil service, active citizenship is the ultimate guarantor of both individual interests and

out, networks can also function as conspiracies against the public and “cozy cabals covering one another’s incompetence”; for these reasons some external monitoring and sanctions are always necessary.

the common good. Ideally, to play an active role in the democracy, constituents would not only vote but have an on-going relationship with the political process between elections. They would have a continuing role in educating the representatives and bureaucrats about the reality that they, the constituents, are experiencing and a continuing opportunity to educate themselves both about their own reality and the reality that the representatives and bureaucrats see.

So, in the large, representative democracies require at least three processes. First, they need selection processes that, at least to some degree, choose elected representatives and bureaucrats who intrinsically want to pursue the public interest. As political scientists we have not looked carefully enough at our institutions to ask what features in what contexts encourage and discourage the selection of individuals with public spirit and integrity. Second, as a continual although optimally somewhat peripheral process, they require a modicum of monitoring and sanctioning, as in the classic principal-agent model, with some degree of induced preferences, to prevent systems based on integrity and concern for the public good from unraveling. And third – this is the point I want to emphasize -- they need mechanisms by which, even when public-spirited gyroscopic representatives and civil servants are working well, citizens can enter the process, educate the elected representatives and the civil servants, and learn more themselves about themselves and the issues.

How is this process of continual mutual communication, education, and even deliberation to take place?

This is the time and place for institutional innovation. Here I can sketch a few possibilities, all of which I advance only experimentally. Only practice will show which of these, or of other similarly directed innovations, produce an active, better informed, more efficacious, intelligently critical, self-respecting, mutually respecting citizenry and, perhaps, better collective decisions as well.

One set of reforms, while neither deliberative nor aimed at the common good, nevertheless helpfully decentralize sanctions from the electoral process to the point of service. The extensive recent efforts at “reinventing government” (Osborne and Gaebler 1992) to increase competition, flexibility, and “customer service” have expanded this form of non-electoral accountability both in the United States and Europe. Despite the virtual absence of deliberation from these processes and their treatment of citizen as consumer, they do produce some communication and mutual education, both through complaint and response at the point of service and through the binary signals of “buy/don’t buy.” By shifting some power to the citizen, these reforms usually produce greater bureaucratic respect for citizens’ perceived needs and personal dignity. The microscopic bursts of empowerment they produce may conceivably also set the stage for more active citizen engagement on policy matters.

Other more deliberative reforms might build on existing institutions. The office of ombudsman, for example, although usually seen as acting only to preserve citizen rights, currently also enhances the respect owed to citizens on a daily basis and facilitates

communication, informing and persuading both representatives and bureaucrats. It could, further, provide a route for citizen activism if citizens organized to take issues to the ombudsman as a group. Similarly, the existing right to petition in the European Union could provide an avenue to citizen organizing through group petitions.

Existing and potential neo-corporatist institutions could provide another potential avenue to active citizenship. The United States, in my view, should adopt more such institutions of “associative democracy” (Cohen and Rogers 1995, Hirst 1994). Adding important interests, such as those of consumers and environmentalists, to the currently prevailing negotiations between the two “privileged interests” of business and labor would increase the representativeness of these institutions. Phillippe Schmitter (1995) has suggested a far-reaching reform that would give each citizen, perhaps every two years, the capacity to cast five vouchers for one to five organizations of the citizen’s choice, to represent the interests and ideals that the citizen wanted to promote most vigorously in those upcoming two years. This innovation, which some small state might introduce experimentally, would make neo-corporatist (associative) institutions more inclusive and less static, more responsive to changing citizen interests and preferences.

Europeans are thoroughly familiar with the joint decision-making characteristic of the “Community Method,” involving a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors in what is often a relatively consensual decision, but one that does not involve the direct participation of either citizens or their elected representatives. Although at the moment these institutions do what most observers consider an excellent job, they also same time probably contribute heavily to the democratic deficit. Many analysts (e.g. Magnette 2003) suggest reducing that deficit through greater politicization, returning in one way or another to the electoral connection. Attention to direct citizen interaction with representatives and bureaucrats, however, might suggest instead something like the introduction of public hearings, perhaps made more responsive to citizen activism through citizen “interpellations.” In a process of citizen interpellation, collecting a certain number of signatures (with protections against some individuals paying others to collect signatures) could trigger mandatory public hearings in which the elected representatives or appointed bureaucrats responsible for an unpopular policy would be required face questions and objections from the public and to explain their reasons for these policies.

An innovation not yet linked to any existing institution is the representative citizens’ assembly, composed of randomly selected citizens and modeled loosely on the ancient Greek system of the lot. Sometimes called a “citizens’ jury” or “deliberative poll,” such institutions are in their infancy. Although problems in their instantiation must still be worked out, versions of these assemblies have already been used in the Commonwealth countries (particularly Canada, Australia, and Great Britain), in Denmark, and to a lesser degree in the United States (Luskin, Fishkin and Jowell 2002, Crosby 2003, Hanesch 2004, Citizens Assembly 2004). In such assemblies, citizens selected on a random basis are paid to assemble for a weekend, a week, or over the course of a year to deliberate on a policy and issue an advisory opinion on it. Their authority derives from the elected representatives or appointed bureaucrats who establish them. Because their participants

are not electorally accountable, their role has been advisory to other bodies, or in the case of the British Columbia Citizens Assembly on the electoral system, to the citizenry at large, which will decide the final issue in a referendum.

The connection of such assemblies to the citizenry would be greatly increased by joining them to the mechanism of the popular initiative. As with citizen interpellations, in a citizen assembly initiative process, collecting a specified number of signatures would mandate funding and organizing a citizen assembly on a particular policy, asking the citizen assembly to report on its recommended outcomes and its process, and requiring legislators and/or civil servants to respond in writing to the assembly's recommendations.

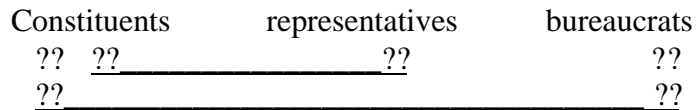
Thus if sufficient numbers of citizens did not like a parliamentary vote or a ruling from Brussels, they could collect signatures and demand a representative citizen assembly on the topic. The very process of forming the citizens' assembly would have the advantage of giving citizens an incentive to learn more about their issues. They would have to discover, for example, where in the EU's multilayered system the decision to which they objected was taken. (In 1995, Klandermans and colleagues [2001] found that only a quarter of the farmers surveyed in the Netherlands and less than 5 percent of those in Gallacia named the EU as having responsibility for their situation as farmers.)

To date, referenda have served the EU as the most common form of directly empowering citizens. Yet referenda can be notoriously undeliberative, responding to citizens' uninformed and occasionally quite casual preferences. To increase deliberation in referenda, Barber (1984) suggested creating two stages separated by more than a month, the first of which would include an array of options rather than the binary yes and no. It might also be wise to reserve referenda for important, e.g. constitutional, matters and combine them with what Ackerman and Fishkin (2004) have dubbed a "deliberation day."

Participatory mechanisms such as the participatory budget in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Fung and Wright 2003) appropriately supplement the electoral system in circumstances where the standard electoral and bureaucratic processes have substantial problems. In several cities in Brazil, participatory budget processes now enlist citizens in setting the priorities for about 10 to 20 percent of the municipal budget. These participatory mechanisms have had considerable success in redirecting priorities to those the public desires, in reducing clientelism in the elected representative system, in engaging the public in doing rather than simply receiving public decisions, and in legitimating the outcomes.

The particular form that these suggestions have taken is less relevant than their aim. The aim, overall, of my suggestions has been to retain or increase among representatives and bureaucrats a positive selection for public interest motivation (something that many countries in Europe have succeeded in doing more than the U.S.), while adding to the present system a greater responsiveness to informed public desires, a greater respect for public knowledge and perceptions among representatives and bureaucrats, a greater public voice in decisions, and a greater capacity for mutual education, communication, and deliberation between state actors and the public. None of the suggested

improvements in the representative process in the second half of this presentation involve the electoral system. The arrow of control and information goes directly from the citizens to those responsible for a policy. It also becomes in many cases a two-way arrow, carrying causal weight, through both power and information, in both directions.⁵



The ideal of democracy I am advancing is deliberative, rather than aggregative. It respects all three crucial sets of actors in the political world – the citizens, the elected representatives, and the appointed bureaucrats – and asks what settings will encourage them to develop their capacities in ways that foster critical intelligence and concern for the public good.

VI. Potential problems

There are, of course, several problems with supplementing the electoral connection.

The most important is the possibility of undermining that electoral connection. Competent bureaucracies responding to citizens as consumers, more representative and participatory neo-corporatist institutions, and extra-electoral participatory decision-making bodies such as citizens’ assemblies can all undermine the electoral connection, making elected assemblies less significant. This might not be a significant problem in most of the countries of the EU, where current electoral systems promote many parties and consequently both power and political responsibility are already relatively diffuse (e.g. Germany and Sweden). Such systems may be able relatively readily to accommodate a few more decision-making or advisory entities. Such systems are also relatively consensus-oriented. But where electoral systems promote two-party majoritarian democracy, power is concentrated in the executive, and political responsibility is allocated through a “responsible party system,” as in the UK, it will be far harder to accommodate separate centers of power. In France and the UK, any source of political power outside the electoral system, particularly if aimed at consensus, undermines both the conflict-based political culture that expects the majoritarian government to impose its political program without compromise and the tradition of “généralité,” in which the state represents the general interest with no intermediaries (Schmidt, forthcoming 2005).

Some experimentation should help reveal how serious this problem is – and in what contexts we might expect that these forms of participation would substitute for the

⁵ Gyroscopic representatives are more likely to engage fruitfully in deliberative consultations with constituents and others (mechanisms conveying information and insight), as they may be willing to revise means and even goals so long as their principles remain intact. Induced representatives are less likely to be interested in what citizens in a deliberative body have concluded, as they are concerned only with the citizens who will vote them in or out of office, and these may well differ in their preferences from what they would prefer after deliberation. Induced representatives will, however, respond to public hearings and other mechanisms that expose them to criticism and the threat of sanction (power).

electoral connection, rather than more helpfully supplementing it or being a stimulus to greater participation in electoral politics.

A second problem is expense.

A third problem is perceived legitimacy. In part, legitimacy will depend on how thoroughly the citizens who do not themselves participate in these supplementary institutions identify with and perceive themselves as represented by those who do. This too is a matter for experimentation.

Further analysis and experimentation will determine which of the suggestions made here for increasing active citizenship are fanciful and which have practical possibility. But it is my strong conviction that reducing the democratic deficit requires looking not only at the electoral connection but beyond it, to other lines of mutual communication between citizens and representatives, citizens and bureaucrats. In Europe, sometimes social class differences stand in the way of equal communication of this sort. Thus, perhaps more than in the US, politicians and bureaucrats may think that citizens have little to offer directly to the governing process. Participatory institutions might have a positive effect both on this perception and on the reality.

At present, “the EU benefits from the most elaborate of coordinative discourses...[but] suffers from the thinnest of communicative discourses” between political leaders and the public (Schmidt forthcoming 2005, 24). My suggestions, when applicable, are aimed at strengthening those communicative discourses.

VII. Conclusion:

I have reviewed the many flaws in the electoral connection – among others, that it is a blunt instrument, encourages distorted information, undermines legislators’ concern for the long term, selects against many who would bring primarily a concern for the public good into office, and supplants intrinsic with extrinsic motivation.

It has, of course, even more flaws in politically corrupt and clientelistic systems.

In part because of these flaws and in part because of the intrinsic betrayal inherent in all representation, reducing the democratic deficit depends less on tightening the electoral connection -- in the sense of making the representatives more responsive to actual or potential sanctions from the voters and making bureaucrats more responsive to sanctions from the representatives – and more on making an informed public itself the judge of good policy, by, among other things, improving the quality of communication – two-way communication -- between representatives and constituents and between bureaucrats and constituents.

Reducing the democratic deficit thus depends on multiplying the forms of representation for citizens, while maintaining and improving the efficacy of government by selecting and encouraging public-spirited representatives and civil servants.

As everyone realizes, improving the quality of the representative relationship enhances democratic legitimacy. But rather than simply promoting more control – by the people of their elected representatives directly and their appointed representatives indirectly – we should be looking for a better quality of representation in all levels of government, in which the people have a better chance to be heard, understood, and have an impact on the thinking of all of their elected and appointed representatives, while conversely, those representatives have a better chance to be heard, understood, and have a productive impact on the thinking of the constituents.

The American philosopher John Dewey once wrote, on the topic of the saying, “the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy,”

“The old saying that the cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy is not apt if it means that the evils may be remedied by introducing more machinery of the same kind as that which already exists, or by refining and perfecting that machinery” (Dewey [1926] 1994, 144).

That insight is worth repeating today.

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