

Preference Endogeneity and the Problem of Electoral Representation

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Abstract.

I analyze the implications of elite influence on voter preferences and priorities for the study of representation. I consider five approaches currently used to evaluate democratic representation: the correspondence of parties' policy platforms with the preferences of the median voter; the extent to which parties adhere to their manifesto promises; the selection of good 'trustees' who will defend the constituency's interests; the ability of voters to 'throw the rascals out'; or the election of surrogates to represent the full range of relevant opinions in the electorate. I demonstrate that all five approaches are incomplete once we allow for either preference or salience endogeneity, and propose two supplementary criteria be included in measures of representation instead: citizens' ease of access to political power, and opportunities for competing elites to contest, or influence, the legislative process.

Section 1. Introduction

The possibility of preference endogeneity, or the endogeneity of citizens' political preferences and priorities to elite cues and behavior, highlights the need for and yet, absence, of dialogue between empirical analysts of representation and their political theory counterparts. Although the susceptibility of political preferences to the influence of social and political elites has often been documented (Zaller 1992, Mendelberg 2001, Lenz 2013), only recently have normative political theorists begun to recognize and directly engage with the problems posed by preference endogeneity for traditional approaches to studying representation in democratic political systems (Mansbridge 2003, Disch 2011). This is not because the possibility of preference endogeneity has gone unnoticed by either empirical political scientists or political theorists. Indeed, we can date concern with protection against the “tyranny of the prevailing opinion” back to at least Mill's *On Liberty*. In this instance, it was “society” broadly which was held up as the tyrant in question. However, concern with how various specific inequalities have influenced the construction and dissemination of political knowledge and discourse have also been a recurrent theme in political theory since Marx – and are to be found over a century later in works by authors as disparate as Foucault, Hayek and Dewey, while being particularly well preserved in the western Marxist tradition that descends from Gramsci.

Preoccupations with the nature and formation of the “public sphere” have provided inspiration to democratic theorists who, after Habermas, became interested in harnessing the process of political will formation to the service of a putative “deliberative” function of democracy (Urbinati and Warren 2008, 392). However, such observations seem to have had relatively little impact among theorists and empirical analysts of *electoral* representation.

Indeed, empirical analyses of electoral representation (Powell 2000, Stokes 2001, Adams et al. 2004, Adams et al. 2009, Adams and Ezrow 2009) have remained wedded to measures for representativeness that were developed in the early post-war period: the achievement of close correspondence between parties' policy platforms and the preferences of the median voter; the extent to which parties adhere to their manifesto promises; the selection of good "trustees" who will defend the constituency's interests; the ability of voters to "throw the rascals out"; or the election of surrogates for the full range of "relevant" opinions within the electorate to the legislature. Henceforth, these will be referred to as the congruence, mandate, trusteeship, accountability and surrogate models of representation respectively.²

None of these traditional approaches to the study of electoral representation emerge untarnished when the possibility of preference endogeneity is raised. Nevertheless, empirical political science has been slow to recognize this and to recalibrate its analyses of political systems accordingly. At the same time, theorists of electoral representation – with some notable exceptions (Manin 1997, Mansbridge 2003) – have kept their distance from colleagues concerned with deliberative and participatory models of democracy, which have placed greater emphasis on the process of political will formation and the need to expand our understanding of political equality beyond access to the vote. This nonchalance has been

² I use these terms slightly differently from how they have been used in the literature. For instance, what I refer to as the "mandates" and "trusteeship" models of representation are both described as types of "promissory" representation by Mansbridge, where the representative is in some sense answerable to or bound by his or her voters (Mansbridge 2003, 516). However, empirically, these two views lend themselves to different measures of representativeness, and therefore I consider them separately. Additionally, I use the term "surrogate" representation to refer to "representation by a representative with whom one has no [necessary] electoral relationship", as Mansbridge does (Mansbridge 2003, 522), but intend this to include what she describes as "descriptive" or "selective" representation (Mansbridge 1999, Mansbridge 2009), as well as representation of the range of opinions present in the electorate in the legislature as might be obtained through a fully proportional electoral system with no barriers to entry and a fully informed electorate.

largely mutual (Plotke 1997), with proponents of deliberative and participatory approaches likewise eschewing the importance of an effectively wielded vote to their envisioned democratic process. As a result, it has been somewhat overlooked that our normative assessment of electoral politics in connection to representation depends upon how we normatively evaluate the process of political will formation, and vice versa. The relationship between these arguably warrants more consideration. In light of these discrepancies and failures of communication, this article sets out to accomplish two tasks. Firstly, I discuss the implications of preference endogeneity for standard approaches to studying political representation, and secondly, I speculate on potential alternative (or supplementary) criteria by which we might evaluate the representativeness of a political system in the context of endogenous preferences, drawing on work done by theorists concerned with deliberative and participatory models of democracy.

At this stage, it is important to clarify a few terms. First, by preference endogeneity, I refer to not only the dependence of citizens' preferences over policy positions on elite behavior (position endogeneity), but also the dependence of their beliefs regarding the true state of the world (belief endogeneity), as well as the dependence of the salience of various issues or issue dimensions to elite strategies (salience endogeneity). Next, without wanting to cast aspersions on the importance of other elites to public discourse, I deviate from Disch (2011: 100) and Zaller (1992: 6) in defining "elites" within the narrow confines of political elites (meaning, elected politicians, bureaucrats and party rank-and-files). This is justified by my specific concern with the implications of preference endogeneity for the representative relationship, rather than with those of broader inequalities of influence on public discourse.

Section 2. Preference Endogeneity: Why It Matters

2.1. Value Pluralism and the Case for Democratic Representation

Representative government has frequently been presented as a political aspiration at odds with democracy. This was first articulated by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, where he wrote: “Sovereignty cannot be represented for the same reason that it cannot be alienated. It consists essentially in the general will, and the will cannot be represented...The deputies of the people, therefore, neither are nor can be its representatives; they are nothing else but its commissaries.” Thus, in this view, true democracy requires direct involvement by citizens in the act of government through their presence at assemblies where the laws to which all citizens are subject are decided. If this right of presence is abrogated to a representative, citizens lose the conventional freedom that they have obtained through the social contract: “the instant a People gives itself Representatives it ceases to be free; it ceases to be.” (Rousseau 1997 [1762]: 114) This sentiment has been echoed most recently by Manin, who reiterates that representative government is synonymous with elected aristocracy, as most citizens are necessarily excluded from the decision-making process (1997: ch. 4).

Even so, the inevitability of representative government in modern industrial society has been almost universally recognized: given the size of nation-states today, the demands of economic life in advanced industrial societies, and the sophistication and expertise required of legislators, it is utopian to demand universal attendance and participation by citizens in legislative assemblies, not to mention their attention to and knowledge of the vast range of issues that are brought to the legislative table in any given parliamentary session. Yet, given the heterogeneous forms that representative government can take, we would like to select the

institutions that govern us on the basis of some normatively desirable criteria. Moreover, if we argue, following Berlin, that there exist “ends equally ultimate, and claims equally absolute”, and “[the] necessity of choosing between absolute claims is...an inescapable characteristic of the human condition” (2002 [1958]: 214-17) – we must also accept there does not exist any single foundational criterion which we might use to evaluate all of our institutions.

Nevertheless, by the same token, we might argue that in a value-pluralistic universe, our governing institutions, or the first-order institutions which coordinate and regulate social interactions by citizens in all other domains, should at the very least aspire towards democracy – if we define democracy as a situation where “all affected by collective decisions should have an [equal] opportunity to influence the outcome” (Urbinati and Warren 2008: 395). To see why, consider the alternatives: either that only some affected by collective decisions should have an opportunity to influence the outcome, or that all affected by collective decisions should have an opportunity to influence the outcome, but the influence of some should dominate that of others. Neither of these scenarios is particularly consistent with value pluralism and the recognition that there are “ends equally ultimate, and claims equally absolute”.

Consider the first of the two scenarios, that not all those affected by collective decisions should have an equal opportunity to influence the outcome. Then, it must be the case that those who are excluded from the process are either randomly selected or excluded on the basis of some systematic criteria. If the former, then all citizens must have an equal probability of being included in the decision-making process -- and this is consistent with the

claim that all those affected by collective decisions have an equal *opportunity* to influence the outcome. On the other hand, if the latter, then if we make the additional, and natural, assumption that no two citizens have identical preferences over ends, then any criterion we use can only be justified on the grounds that it is fundamentally desirable to prioritize the ends favored by some over the ends favored by others. Such a position is obviously inconsistent with value pluralism. An analogous argument can be made for the inconsistency of the second scenario with value pluralism: any justificatory strategy employed to determine *whose* influence should dominate must violate value pluralism. On the other hand, if we do accept that no two citizens have identical preferences over ends, it can be said that decision-making processes where all concerned have an equal opportunity to influence the outcome in fact *institutionalizes* value pluralism, by according all opinions and judgments over ends equal weight. Then, it follows that in a value pluralistic universe, first-order institutions which coordinate and regulate social interactions by citizens in all other domains should aspire towards the democratic ideal.

2.2. How Should We Evaluate Representative Institutions?

To argue that governing institutions may and should be both representative and democratic contradicts the oft-wielded claim that democratic and representative forms of government are mutually exclusive. However, if democracy is understood as enshrining the principle that “all affected by collective decisions should have an [equal] opportunity to influence the outcome”, then we can easily envision representative institutions which are more or less democratic in nature. For instance, few would dispute that the extension of universal suffrage in much of Western Europe in the early twentieth century exponentially increased the number of citizens who could now claim to be self-governed, in that they now had an opportunity to

directly influence the laws under which they were governed through their vote, whereas previously their only opportunities for influence might have been through extra-parliamentary action. Thus we might say that the British House of Commons is a more democratic institution today than it was in 1927, before the vote was given to all men and women above the age of 21. And yet, it is easy to argue that it is still very incompletely democratic, in that the use of a single member simple plurality electoral system rather than a more proportional system means that the votes of citizens residing in “safe” electoral districts have had considerably less influence over the final makeup of Parliament, and therefore, indirectly, the laws that are passed, than the votes of citizens in “competitive” districts. Moreover, it is obviously the case that not all those who are affected by collective decisions do have an opportunity to influence the outcome even in the most purportedly “democratic” of countries; electoral rules systematically continue to exclude those under the age of 16, non-citizens who are resident in a country, and in some cases, convicted prisoners even after they have been released.

I have so far assumed that it is fair to describe an institution like the British House of Commons as “representative”. If we accept the “standard account” of representative democracy (Urbinati and Warren 2008: 389), then this seems a fair assumption, at least from 1928 onwards. The standard account highlights the following features:

1. Representation constitutes a principal-agent relationship, where the principal (constituencies on some territorial basis) elects agents (politicians) who are to “act on their interests and opinions”.

2. Electoral mechanisms ensure some degree of responsiveness by representatives to citizens they claim to represent.
3. The universal franchise endows the mechanism with some legitimate claim to “political equality” (though as noted earlier, this universality still operates to exclude many claimants).

The justification for establishing institutions that fulfill the above criteria seems typically to originate with democratic aspirations – that is, given modern economic life and the size of contemporary nation-states, representative institutions that satisfy the above criteria provide the only means by which citizens can hope to exercise (equal) influence over the laws that govern them. I place the word equal in parentheses because it does not appear anywhere in the standard account—and indeed we cannot dispute that politicians have greater influence over policy outcomes than the citizens that they represent by virtue of their presence in the legislative chamber—yet it seems that proponents of the standard account must at least hold some aspiration to *opportunity* of influence over collective decision-making. If we required only that all citizens exercise some influence over collective decision making, with no commitment to equality, then we might be willing to accept institutional arrangements that facilitate the most infinitesimal of influence by all over collective decisions as sufficiently “representative” – for which even the vote may not even be necessary.

If existing systems of representative government are defended against alternatives on the grounds that they more closely approximate an ideal where citizens have equal opportunity to influence the outcomes of collective decision-making processes, then it follows that we should evaluate our representative institutions according to criteria which help us to how well

the institutions approximate this ideal. However, we again quickly find ourselves in intellectual quicksand, as what “influence” means in a world where preferences are highly endogenous seems obscure. Utilizing a counterfactual understanding of causality, I define influence in the following way: an individual is considered to have had influence over an outcome if the outcome undergoes some change with positive probability following an *exogenous* shock to that individual's preferences – where an exogenous shock is one that is independent of all other individuals' actions. An example of such a shock might be if I were to witness a fox killing a rabbit while walking alone to school, and this were to lead me to question the ethics of eating meat. If I were then to convince a handful of my friends that they should also become vegetarian, then it might be considered that I have had some influence over the popularity of vegetarianism in my neighborhood. Then, we can ask the question: how well do our current measures of representation enable us to evaluate the “democratic” character of our governing institutions – or the extent to which all citizens have an equal opportunity to influence the laws under which they are governed – in the context of endogenous preferences?

2.3. Existing Measures of Representation and Their Shortcomings

Mansbridge asserts that “there is more than one way to be represented legitimately in a democracy” (2003: 515). This conviction explains the popularity of not one but several models of electoral representation in contemporary political theory and political science, which are all argued to be legitimate models of citizen influence. I identify five ways in which electoral representation has typically been understood and evaluated---which has some, though not complete, overlap with how models of representation have been previously categorized in the literature---and discuss the shortcomings of these conceptions in the face

of preference endogeneity. The first of these is what I term the "congruence" model of representation.

Under this model, effective representation occurs when we see close correspondence between parties' policy platforms, or even better, enacted policy, and the preferences of the median voter. Under the assumption that parties will truthfully implement their manifesto promises and given faith in the normative supremacy of majority rule, this seems to provide a good metric for citizen influence over the laws that govern them. The prevalence of this measure of representation in the empirical political science literature (Stimson et al. 1995; Cox 1997: 226-26; Adams et al. 2006: 516; Adams et al. 2004: 595-96; Powell, 2009; Powell 2013) owes much to its importance within the highly influential Downsian spatial model of voting (Downs 1957), which argues that under certain assumptions parties will converge to the preferences of the median voter. This was perceived as being a normatively desirable outcome following the publication of May's Theorem (May 1952), which established the attractiveness of majoritarian decision rules relative to alternatives. However, among the assumptions that the Downsian model required was the assumption of exogenous preferences, and this assumption is critical to our positive interpretation of congruence as a measure of representation. The reason for this is simple: if preferences of the median voter are endogenous to party strategy, then we are likely to be overstating citizen influence on policy outcomes if we rely on congruence between the median voter's preferences and policy outcomes alone – even if all the other assumptions of the Downsian model are assumed to hold.

This claim is justified regardless of the type of preference endogeneity we consider: position endogeneity, belief endogeneity or salience endogeneity. Firstly, by position endogeneity, I am concerned with the endogeneity of voters' policy preferences to elite behavior – for instance, their preferences for or against European integration.³ Secondly, by belief endogeneity, I refer to the endogeneity of voters' beliefs (or information) about the state of the world to elite behavior. For instance, it seems probable that voters' perceptions of the probability that there existed “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq in the US was highly responsive to elite cues and behavior. Thirdly, by salience endogeneity, I refer to how the importance voters attach to different issues varies as a function of elite behavior. This could refer to the relative importance of parties' valence characteristics versus policy positions, as well as the relative importance of particular policy domains (such as immigration, economic policy, etc). I do not see these three types of preference endogeneity as separately occurring phenomena; rather, they are likely to have a mutually reinforcing effect – and particularly so when it comes belief endogeneity and position endogeneity.

The resonance of the claim that citizen influence on policy outcomes is overstated if we rely on congruence as a metric of representation is almost immediate when it comes to position endogeneity. If the median voter's policy positions on particular issues are shaped in large part by elite cues and behavior, then an estimate of how faithfully party platforms reflect voters' preferences could exemplify zero citizen influence over the laws that govern them. This is because our estimate of congruence cannot tell us whether and by how much the outcome would change were there to be an exogenous shock to the median voter's

³ For evidence suggesting that voters' views on European integration are influenced by party strategies, see Ray (2003).

preferences. Even if the median voter had no influence on the positions taken by parties, we might nonetheless observe high congruence in a world of endogenous preferences simply because parties lead and the median voter's preferences follow. Moreover, even if all citizens could become the median voter with equal probability, congruence is unhelpful in assessing whether there exists equality of opportunity of influence if the policy preferences of the median voter are heavily influenced by elite cues and behavior.

Such criticisms hold even when we consider belief endogeneity or salience endogeneity. When it comes to belief endogeneity, the reasons for skepticism are the same as with position endogeneity. Belief endogeneity is a concern if we think that voters' policy preferences are shaped in part by their beliefs about the state of the world (that is, belief endogeneity feeds into preference endogeneity). For instance, voters' beliefs about whether or not a carbon tax is a good idea is likely to be a function of whether or not they believe that global warming is occurring and is anthropogenic. Therefore, if elites are largely responsible for voters' views on the existence and character of global warming, an estimate of congruence between voters' preferences on a carbon tax and parties' platforms would be unable to tell us how much influence voters (and particularly the median voter) truly have on policy outcomes, and how much voters' beliefs match those of elites simply because voters' beliefs are influenced by the beliefs of elites. On the other hand, if the electoral salience of particular issues is endogenous to elite strategies but voters' positions on and beliefs about those issues are exogenous, congruence on particular issues is not necessarily a poor measure of citizen influence on policy. However, if we measure congruence on a dimension that is constructed by aggregating across all issues after weighting by salience, as implicitly occurs with the left-right spectrum (the usual dimension of reference in empirical political science studies), then

we might observe congruence between voter preferences and parties' platforms when such congruence only exists for the more electorally salient issues (on which parties have a greater incentive to respond to the preferences of the median voter). Then, salience endogeneity also creates problems for congruence as a metric of representativeness. High congruence would be observed if parties were listening to the public on the issues of high salience, but it would also be observed if parties chose to emphasize the issues where their views matched the public, and, as a consequence, those issues became more salient. Simply measuring congruence on some aggregate scale would not allow us to discriminate between these two scenarios.

Next, consider the "mandate" model of representation. Under this model, effective representation occurs when elected governments adhere to their election promises (Mansbridge 2003: 516). This model derives from a weakening of one of the Downsian model's assumptions: that parties electoral promises constitute binding agreements which they will implement once in office. As pointed out by Manin (1997) and Przeworski, Manin and Stokes (1999: 38), politicians are not legally compelled to abide by their platforms in any political system, and there exist numerous examples where politicians have defied their electoral mandates with impunity (Stokes 2001). Consequently, numerous empirical political scientists have invested time and effort exploring the causes and consequences of party policy switches once in office (Stokes 1998; Tavits 2007). However, the usefulness of mandate implementation as a measure of representativeness is also crippled in the presence of preference endogeneity – for analogous reasons to those presented when it came to congruence as a metric. Insofar as a party is able to mould voter preferences, beliefs, and the

salience of issues to ensure that it gets elected on whatever platform it prefers, it can hardly be said that voters are influential when that platform is subsequently enacted.

This same loss of faith in the informativeness of both self-reported preferences and of electoral results as to the preferences voters might have had if their preferences were completely exogenous complicates our interpretation of the “trustee” model of representation as well. By the “trusteeship” model, I refer to the use of elections to select representatives who are believed to be the “good type” (Mansbridge 2003: 520-21; Fearon 1999: 68), or to possess desirable non-policy attributes.⁴ This model deviates considerably from the spatial model of voting, in that citizens are not thought to make their voting decisions on the basis of parties’ policy positions, but rather entirely on the basis of their observable valence, or non-policy, attributes. Drawing on a Burkean heritage, the justification for such a model lies in the conviction that voters do not necessarily possess, or claim to possess, sufficient information on a range of policy issues to wish to provide elected governments with policy mandates. Thus, they prefer to elect “trustees” who possess full autonomy when it comes to policy decisions, only retaining the freedom to sanction or reward them through votes in future elections. In empirical analyses, the extent to which this model is upheld can be assessed using voters’ self-reported assessments of candidates and elected representatives, as well as through the estimated association between a decline in vote share and loss of legislative power (whether wholesale, or as reflected in a decline in the number of cabinet portfolios held by a party).⁵

⁴ What Mansbridge (2003) labels “gyroscopic” representation also seems to be an example of this, although Mansbridge argues for a distinction between gyroscopic representatives and trustees.

⁵ For a similar analysis, see Powell (2000: 48-50).

As only non-policy attributes are important to representation under this model, salience endogeneity is a less pressing concern – except insofar as there exist distinct non-policy dimensions. On the other hand, as policy preferences are assumed to be irrelevant to voters' calculations under this model, one might think that position and belief endogeneity also do not pose obvious problems for either of these measures. However, if voters' assessments of candidates' or parties' non-policy attributes are themselves endogenous to elite cues and behavior, then we are forced to treat voters' self-reported assessments of candidates' attributes with as much skepticism as their self-reported policy preferences. Then, glowing endorsements of the elected government may still grossly overstate the true nature and extent of citizen influence over the laws that govern them. Moreover, this also implies that we should treat the informativeness of parties' vote shares with some skepticism as well, as these vote shares do not accurately reflect how citizen support for candidates or parties would change following an exogenous shock to voters' perceptions of candidates' or parties' attributes.

Fourth, consider the “accountability” model of representation, whereby the representativeness of an election is measured by the ability of voters to “throw the rascals out”. Empirically, it may also be evaluated by the estimated association between a decline in a party's vote share and its loss of legislative power (whether wholesale, or as reflected in a decline in the number of cabinet portfolios held by a party), as well as using measures like the strength of the economic vote (whether and when voting decisions are made on the basis

of recent economic performance).⁶ This is a conception of representation that is closely related to the “trustee” model, as it also derives from skepticism about voters’ specific policy knowledge and interest – owing much to “elite” theorists of democracy like Schumpeter and later Riker. However, unlike the “trusteeship” model, it does not contain an element of prospective voting, relying solely on voters’ ability to reward and sanction elected representatives post hoc, and it does not presume that assessment will occur on the basis of particular attributes.

Nonetheless, even if not position endogeneity, belief and salience endogeneity pose a problem for the operation of this kind of representation. For instance, if voters' perceptions of who is to blame for recent economic performance (‘their beliefs about the state of the world’) are endogenous to elite cues and behavior, the strength of the economic vote may not be very informative about how parties' electoral support would change following an exogenous shock to the economy. When it comes to salience endogeneity, the existence of multiple issue dimensions on the basis of which voters base their choices means that the extent to which incumbents’ performance is truly assessed at the polls may be subject to elite manipulation of issue salience. We might see Thatcher’s 1983 electoral victory in the United Kingdom—when Thatcher decided to go to war against Argentina at a time with record unemployment—as an attempt at such a diversion, and the estimated strength of the economic vote at such a time would not be very informative as to citizens’ ability to influence the laws under which they are governed through the vote.

⁶ This has been examined by Powell and Whitten (1993) and Duch and Stevenson (2008) – among others.

Finally, consider the “surrogate” model of representation, or “representation by a representative with whom one has no [direct] electoral relationship” (Mansbridge 2003: 522). The qualifying term “direct” eliminates representative relationships built through donations (which Mansbridge considers, but are outside the scope of this article, which focuses on electoral representation) but includes what she terms “descriptive” or “selective” representation. However, it does not necessarily have to correspond to ensuring representation based on “relevant” observable demographic characteristics, but could also imply the need to represent all “relevant” opinions in the electorate. Consequently this conception of representation also encompasses what Powell calls the proportional vision, where, through elections, citizens hope to represent all points of view within “an arena of shifting policy coalitions” (2000: 5-6), and finds one of its earliest advocates in Mill (1861: Chapter VII). As it is impossible for any legislature to mirror its population exactly, both belief and salience endogeneity pose a problem insofar as they shape what characteristics and opinions are deemed electorally “relevant”. This brings my discussion of various conceptions of representation and their shortcomings in the face of preference endogeneity to a close. However, it raises a new question in its place: how *should* we, then, seek to evaluate the democratic representative institutions in a world where voters’ preferences are likely to be endogenous to elite behavior?

Section 3. Learning from Innovations in Democratic Theory

3.1. Modeling Representation as a Function of Endogenous Preferences

At this moment, let us restate what we are trying to measure: the extent to which citizens have an equal opportunity to influence the laws under which they are governed. This demands

a focus on electoral representation, as this is how the deliberative bodies that draft and pass legislation are recruited and authorized. However, I have argued that in the context of preference endogeneity, measures that focus on the effectiveness with which the vote is used to any particular end are insufficient, as the intentions with which such votes are cast are likely to be endogenous to elite behavior and cues. We might be able to overcome this if we were able to (statistically) instrument for that component of citizens' self-reported preferences or votes that is exogenous to elite cues and behavior, but this seems an impossible task – even if we were to focus our attention on preferences formed during the campaign period. Moreover, it would also be counter-productive to discount from our analyses those components of citizens' beliefs and preferences which might be the product of “reasoned” reflection and updating following elite cues.

Consequently, it seems necessary to look past the contents of the ballot box and its consequences, and towards the circumstances under which votes are decided and cast. That is, we need to consider the extent to which citizens have an equal opportunity to influence the electoral agenda – the issues which are considered to be important at any given time, the information which is considered to be credible, and in various political systems. This introduces a supplementary criterion by which we should assess our political systems – one related to the “quality of deliberation during authorizing election” that Mansbridge thinks essential to “gyroscopic” representation (2003: 525), but which turns out to also be essential to all the other conceptions of representation that we have discussed.

However, when it comes to specifying exactly what supplementary criteria are necessary, much turns on how we define “equality of opportunity of influence”. The term “opportunity”

is essential as it is unrealistic to aspire towards equal citizen influence over laws; this would require, at a minimum, unanimous support for electing any representatives to a legislative body in order that the median voter not have disproportionate influence at any one election. But what constitutes an opportunity to influence the electoral agenda? Not all citizens can be political pundits, or party activists, and even requiring political participation of all citizens seems draconian and contrary to value pluralism. However, if we were to move one step back and consider instead ways in which opportunities to attain such positions of influence might be made equally accessible to all citizens, then we might have a more reasonable threshold for “equality of opportunity of influence” over the electoral agenda on our hands.

Concrete suggestions for how this might be achieved might be derived from recent innovations in democratic theory, and particularly its more deliberative and participatory strains. Indeed, many of the more recent contributions to democratic theory have been motivated by concern with how political judgments are and should be formed (Urbinati and Warren 2008: 401). The hope is to enable the formation of political judgments in a context where participants are more “free and equal” than in the context of ordinary politics. Suggestions for how this might be achieved have proliferated among theorists of deliberative and participatory democracy: citizen juries and panels, deliberative panels, deliberative polling, forums, and focus groups (Pettit 1999; Fung 2006). However, what tends to be lacking in much of this literature, but is critical to our purposes, is how these organs should relate to electoral politics. Many of the deliberative bodies that have been conceived, such as citizen juries or deliberative polls, are intended to supplement deliberation in the legislature by organizing previously unorganized interests and values, or to communicate considered public opinion on issues that are considered particularly complex or fractious to

representatives. An example of this is given by the attempt by the government of British Columbia to design an alternative electoral system to be posed to the electorate as part of a referendum question using a “citizen's assembly” with members selected from voter rolls through a near-random process (Urbinati and Warren 2008: 405-6). However, as such attempts do not focus on altering the nature and quality of pre-electoral deliberation, they do not seek to alter or influence the constitution of the legislature itself, which remains vulnerable to the critiques outlined above. Moreover, it is not obvious how the content of issues which will be subject to “deliberative” interventions will be selected, or the timing of said interventions chosen. If current members of the legislature are selected through elections where citizens preferences over policy or candidates are endogenous to elite strategy, this does not do much to assuage concerns that citizen intentions are not being well represented in legislation.

The proposed innovations made by theorists of participatory democracy, on the other hand, seem to hold more promise - but are still frustratingly hesitant to relate their suggestions to the politics of representation through elections. Relevant examples are given by Arendt's council democracy and Barber's vision of ‘strong democracy’. Taking inspiration from Jefferson's proposed “ward system”, in *On Revolution*, Arendt advocated the establishment of an institutionally recognized system of councils which would provide all citizens with a share in public space – something she saw as necessary for their “freedom” (2006 [1961]: 115, 236-59). However, in her view, these small-scale republics should not necessarily seek to influence the legislative process; rather, they should exist as a space where citizens could gather to discuss issues of concern. If implemented, this will likely reduce the potential for dominance over the public opinion held by elected representatives by providing citizens with

access to a wider range of alternate voices – and through the influence of such debate on citizens’ voting decisions, may increase opportunities for citizen influence over the electoral agenda. Barber’s proposal for neighborhood assemblies carries similar implications. He hoped to establish a “national system of neighborhood assemblies of from one to five thousand citizens [which] would initially only have deliberative functions but would eventually have local legislative competence as well.” (Barber 1984: 307). However, both are subject to the criticisms rightly made by Plotke: how can we possibly hope to determine the agenda for discussion, or who gets to speak first, without some degree of representation (1997: 25-27)? This criticism can also be levelled to some degree against the proposals for more “reflexive” democratic institutions made by Disch in response to this exact problem, where she advocates some version of Condorcet’s 1793 constitution, with a network of primary assemblies that hold the powers of objection to government acts as well as powers of nomination to government (2011: 111-12). (We might also fear deadlock, cycling, or legislative standstill, in a system where any law is subject to the possibility of immediate appeal.)

Then, we have come full circle. Even if we were to expand the opportunities for political participation available to citizens through networks of small-scale assemblies or councils, we cannot get away from a discussion of inequalities of influence over the terms of the debate even in these more local and intimate venues. Are the (elected) village councils in India really bastions of equality, or are do they simply mirror long-standing local inequities and prejudices? It is notable that the “khap panchayats” in Haryana, India, have been seen as dominated by (male) upper caste Jats, and as responsible for perpetuating gross sexual inequities, turning a blind eye to rapes and continuing to authorize “honour killings”. This

brings us to the need to discuss the nature and origin of our elites, and the need to try and mitigate inequalities of influence over public opinion among citizens by enhancing, firstly, opportunities to enter into the ranks of the elite, and secondly, competition between members of the elite, once constituted.

How we might hope to do so opens up a whole host of research questions. The suggestions made by democratic theorists like Barber, Arendt, and Disch provide a useful starting point, and suggest that greater federalization of legislative decision-making may improve the porousness of local elites. Whether or not this is in fact the case merits further exploration; one can imagine that even in a highly federalized context, an oligarchic party system or the nature of campaign financing might constrain the options available to citizens even in very local election settings. Then, we might want to consider the ways in which barriers to entry into party politics might be reduced. Are direct primaries helpful or hurtful? What about state funding of party campaigns? Proportional representation? The elimination of legal electoral thresholds? Is the internet, and social media, a boon or a blessing for emerging parties? Contemporary republican theory, in advocating a more “contestatory democracy”, also seems to contain some useful insights on ways in which the porousness of the political elites might be enhanced: for instance, by institutionalizing extra-parliamentary forums for contestation in organs like impartial ‘courts of appeal’ (Pettit 1997, 1999, 2001; Maynor 2003). Moreover, the example of the panchayat system above draws our attention to the role of social inequities in distorting equality of influence among citizens. Then, to what extent should is greater social and economic equality a precursor to a more democratic political system?

Answers to such questions are important not only to democratic theorists and theorists of representation, but also empirically minded political scientists concerned with evaluating how well existing political systems facilitate citizen influence over government. To this end, the existence of preference endogeneity highlights the importance of analyzing not only the ability of citizens to select and sanction political elites in various political systems, but also studying other surrounding conditions which affect the nature and porousness of those political elites. Particularly, it seems important to ensure that entry into the political elites is accessible to new aspirants and, that governing institutions encourage competition among different elite groups. For this purpose, the institution of regularly held elections with alternation alone—a definition of democratization originating with Przeworski et al. (2000) and popular in the empirical literature—may be insufficient, as may be conditions that facilitate the effective provision of mandates or sanctioning of errant elites. Which alternative institutions or policies are desirable instead, however, remains an open question, and a fruitful topic for future research.

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