
Participation and Democratic Theory

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... At the beginning of the century the size and complexity of industrialized societies and the emergence of bureaucratic forms of organisation seemed to many empirically minded writers on politics to cast grave doubts on the possibility of the attainment of democracy as that concept was usually understood...

But by the middle of the century even the ideal itself seemed to many to have been called in question; at least, "democracy" was still the ideal, but it was the emphasis on participation that had become suspect and with it the "classical" formulation of democratic theory. The collapse of the Weimar Republic, with its high rates of mass participation, into fascism, and the post-war establishment of totalitarian regimes based on mass participation, albeit participation backed by intimidation and coercion, underlay the tendency for "participation" to become linked to the concept of totalitarianism rather than that of democracy. The spectre of totalitarianism also helps explain the concern with the necessary conditions for stability in a democratic polity, and a further factor here was the instability of so many states in the post-war world, especially ex-colonial states that rarely maintained a democratic political system on Western lines.

If this background had led to great doubts and reservations about earlier theories of democracy, then the facts revealed by the post-war expansion of political sociology appear to have convinced most recent writers that these doubts were fully justified. Data from large-scale empirical investigations into political attitudes and behaviour, undertaken in most Western countries over the past twenty or thirty years, have revealed

that the outstanding characteristic of most citizens, more especially those in the lower socio-economic status (SES) groups, is a general lack of interest in politics and political activity and further, that widespread non-democratic or authoritarian attitudes exist, again particularly among lower socio-economic status groups. The conclusion drawn (often by political sociologists wearing political theorists' hats) is that the "classical" picture of democratic man is hopelessly unrealistic, and moreover, that in view of the facts about political attitudes, an increase in political participation by present non-participants could upset the stability of the democratic system.

There was a further factor that helped along the process of the rejection of earlier democratic theories, and that was the now familiar argument that those theories were normative and "value-laden," whereas modern political theory should be scientific and empirical, grounded firmly in the facts of political life. But even so, it may be doubted whether the revision of democratic theory would have been undertaken with such enthusiasm by so many writers if it had not been that this very question of the apparent contrast between the facts of political life and attitudes and their characterisation in earlier theories had not already been taken up, and answered, by Joseph Schumpeter. His extraordinarily influential book *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1943) was in fact written before the vast amounts of empirical information that we now have on politics became available, but nevertheless Schumpeter considered that the facts showed that "classical" democratic theory was in need of revision, and he provided just such a revised theory. More than that, however, and even more importantly for the theories that followed, he put forward a new, realistic *definition* of democracy...

The very great difference between [participatory] theories of democracy ... and the theories

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of ... theorists of representative government makes it difficult to understand how the myth of one "classical" theory of democracy has survived so long and is so vigorously propagated. The theories of participatory democracy ... were not just essays in prescription as is often claimed, rather they offer just those "plans of action and specific prescriptions" for movement towards a (truly) democratic polity that it has been suggested are lacking. But perhaps the strangest criticism is that these earlier theorists were not, as Berelson puts it, concerned with the "general features necessary if the (political) institutions are to work as required," and that they ignored the political system as a whole in their work. It is quite clear that this is precisely what they were concerned with. Although the variable identified as crucial in those theories for the successful establishment and maintenance of a democratic political system, the authority structures of non-Governmental spheres of society, is exactly the same one that Eckstein indicates in his theory of stable democracy, the conclusions drawn from this by the earlier and later theorists of democracy are entirely different. In order that an evaluation of these two theories of democracy can be undertaken I shall now briefly set out (in a similar fashion to the contemporary theory of democracy above), a participatory theory of democracy...

The theory of participatory democracy is built round the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. The existence of representative institutions at national level is not sufficient for democracy; for maximum participation by all the people at that level socialisation, or "social training," for democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself. The major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is therefore an educative one, educative in the very widest sense,

including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures. Thus there is no special problem about the stability of a participatory system; it is self-sustaining through the educative impact of the participatory process. Participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more individuals participate the better able they become to do so. Subsidiary hypotheses about participation are that it has an integrative effect and that it aids the acceptance of collective decisions.

Therefore, for a democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratised and socialisation through participation can take place in all areas. The most important area is industry; most individuals spend a great deal of their lifetime at work and the business of the workplace provides an education in the management of collective affairs that it is difficult to parallel elsewhere. The second aspect of the theory of participatory democracy is that spheres such as industry should be seen as political systems in their own right, offering areas of participation additional to the national level. If individuals are to exercise the maximum amount of control over their own lives and environment then authority structures in these areas must be so organised that they can participate in decision making. A further reason for the central place of industry in the theory relates to the substantive measure of economic equality required to give the individual the independence and security necessary for (equal) participation; the democratising of industrial authority structures, abolishing the permanent distinction between "managers" and "men" would mean a large step toward meeting this condition.

The contemporary and participatory theories of democracy can be contrasted on every point of substance, including the characterisation of "democracy" itself and the definition of "political," which in the participatory theory is not confined to the usual national or local government sphere.

Again, in the participatory theory “participation” refers to (equal) participation in the making of decisions, and “political equality” refers to equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions, a very different definition from that in the contemporary theory. Finally, the justification for a democratic system in the participatory theory of democracy rests primarily on the human results that accrue from the participatory process. One might characterise the participatory model as one where maximum input (participation) is required and where output includes not just policies (decisions) but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual, so that there is “feedback” from output to input.

Many of the criticisms of the so-called “classical” theory of democracy imply that the latter theory has only to be stated for it to become obvious that it is unrealistic and outmoded. With the participatory theory of democracy this is far from the case; indeed, it has many features that reflect some of the major themes and orientations in recent political theory and political sociology. For example, the fact that it is a model of a self-sustaining system might make it attractive to the many writers on politics who, explicitly or implicitly, make use of such models. Again, similarities between the participatory theory of democracy and recent theories of social pluralism are obvious enough, although these usually argue only that “secondary” associations should exist to mediate between the individual and the national polity and say nothing about the authority structures of those associations. The wide definition of the “political” in the participatory theory is also in keeping with the practice in modern political theory and political science. One of the advocates of the contemporary theory of democracy discussed above, Dahl (1963, p. 6), has defined a political system as “any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves to a significant extent power, rule or authority.” All this makes it very odd that no recent writer on democratic theory appears to have reread the

earlier theorists with these concerns in mind. Any explanation of this would, no doubt, include a mention of the widely held belief that (although these earlier theories are often said to be descriptive) “traditional” political theorists, especially theorists of democracy, were engaged in a largely prescriptive and “value-laden” enterprise and their work is thus held to have little direct interest for the modern, scientific, political theorist. . . .

Conclusions

Recent discussions of the theory of democracy have been obscured by the myth of the “classical doctrine of democracy” propagated so successfully by Schumpeter. The failure to re-examine the notion of a “classical” theory has prevented a proper understanding of the arguments of (some of) the earlier theorists of democracy about the central role of participation in the theory of democracy; prevented it even on the part of writers who wished to defend a participatory theory of democracy. This has meant that the prevailing academic orthodoxy on the subject, the contemporary theory of democracy, has not been subjected to substantive, rigorous criticism, nor has a really convincing case been presented for the retention of a participatory theory in the face of the facts of modern, large-scale political life.

The major contribution to democratic theory of those “classical” theorists whom we have called the theorists of participatory democracy is to focus our attention on the interrelationship between individuals and the authority structures of institutions within which they interact. This is not to say that modern writers are completely unaware of this dimension; clearly this is not so, as much political sociology, especially that dealing with political socialisation, confirms, but the implications of the findings on socialisation for the contemporary theory of democracy have not been appreciated. The link between these find-

ings, particularly those on the development of the sense of political efficacy in adults and children, and the notion of a “democratic character” has been overlooked. Although many of the advocates of the contemporary theory of democracy argue that a certain type of character, or a set of psychological qualities or attitudes, is necessary for (stable) democracy—at least among a proportion of the population—they are far less clear on how this character could be developed or what the nature of its connection with the working of the “democratic method” itself really is. While most do not support Schumpeter’s declaration that the democratic method and the democratic character are unconnected, nor do they take much trouble to examine the nature of the postulated relationship. Even Almond and Verba, after clearly showing the connection between a participatory environment and the development of a sense of political efficacy, show no realisation of the significance of this in their final, theoretical chapter.

However, this failure is only part of a more general, and striking, feature of much recent writing on democratic theory. Despite the stress most modern political theorists lay on the empirical and scientific nature of their discipline they display, at least so far as democratic theory is concerned, a curious reluctance to look at the facts in a questioning spirit. That is, they seem reluctant to see whether or not a theoretical explanation can be offered of why the political facts are as they are; instead they have taken it for granted that one theory which could possibly have yielded an explanation had already been shown to be outmoded, and so concentrated on uncritically building a “realistic” theory to fit the facts as revealed by political sociology.

The result of this one-sided procedure has been not only a democratic theory that has unrecognised normative implications, implications that set the existing Anglo-American political system as our democratic ideal, but it has also resulted in a “democratic” theory that in many respects bears a strange resemblance to the

anti-democratic arguments of the last century. No longer is democratic theory centred on the participation of “the people,” on the participation of the ordinary man, or the prime virtue of a democratic political system seen as the development of politically relevant and necessary qualities in the ordinary individual; in the contemporary theory of democracy it is the participation of the minority élite that is crucial and the non-participation of the apathetic, ordinary man lacking in the feeling of political efficacy, that is regarded as the main bulwark against instability. Apparently it has not occurred to recent theorists to wonder why there should be a positive correlation between apathy and low feelings of political efficacy and low socio-economic status. It would be more plausible to argue that the earlier democratic theorists were unrealistic in their notion of the “democratic character” and in their claim that it was, given a certain institutional setting, open to every individual to develop in this direction, if the persons today who do not measure up to this standard were to be found in roughly equal proportions in all sections of the community. The fact that they are not should surely cause empirical political theorists to pause and ask why.

Once it is asked whether there might not be institutional factors that could provide an explanation for the facts about apathy as suggested in the participatory theory of democracy, then the argument from stability looks far less securely based. Most recent theorists have been content to accept Sartori’s assurance that the inactivity of the ordinary man is “nobody’s fault” and to take the facts as given for the purpose of theory building. Yet we have seen that the evidence supports the arguments of Rousseau, Mill and Cole that we do learn to participate by participating and that feelings of political efficacy are more likely to be developed in a participatory environment. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that experience of a participatory authority structure might also be effective in diminishing tendencies toward non-democratic attitudes in

the individual. If those who come newly into the political arena have been previously “educated” for it then their participation will pose no dangers to the stability of the system. Oddly enough, this evidence against the argument from stability should be welcomed by some writers defending the contemporary theory, for they occasionally remark that they deplore the low levels of political participation and interest that now obtain.

The argument from stability has only seemed as convincing as it has because the evidence relating to the psychological effects of participation has never been considered in relation to the issues of political, more specifically, democratic theory. Both sides in the current discussion of the role of participation in modern theory of democracy have grasped half of the theory of participatory democracy; the defenders of the earlier theorists have emphasised that their goal was the production of an educated, active citizenry and the theorists of contemporary democracy have pointed to the importance of the structure of authority in non-governmental spheres for political socialisation. But neither side has realised that the two aspects are connected or realised the significance of the empirical evidence for their arguments.

However, the socialisation aspect of the participatory theory of democracy is also capable of being absorbed into the general framework of the contemporary theory, providing the foundation for a more soundly based theory of stable democracy than those offered at present. The analysis of participation in the industrial context has made it clear that only a relatively minor modification of existing authority structures there may be necessary for the development of the sense of political efficacy. It is quite conceivable, given recent theories of management, that partial participation at the lower level may become widespread in well-run enterprises in the future because of the multiplicity of advantages it appears to bring for efficiency and the capacity of the enterprise to adapt to changing circumstances. Nevertheless, if the socialisation argu-

ment is compatible with either theory, the two theories of democracy remain in conflict over their most important aspect, over their respective definitions of a democratic polity. Is it solely the presence of competing leaders at national level for whom the electorate can periodically vote, or does it also require that a participatory society exist, a society so organised that every individual has the opportunity directly to participate in all political spheres? We have not, of course, set out to prove that it is one or the other; what we have been considering is whether the idea of a participatory society is as completely unrealistic as those writers contend who press for a revision of the participatory theory of democracy.

The notion of a participatory society requires that the scope of the term “political” is extended to cover spheres outside national government. It has already been pointed out that many political theorists do argue for just such an extension. Unfortunately this wider definition, and more importantly its implications for political theory, are usually forgotten when these same theorists turn their attention to democratic theory. Recognition of industry as a political system in its own right at once removes many of the confused ideas that exist about democracy (and its relation to participation) in the industrial context. Its rules out the use of “democratic” to describe a friendly approach by supervisors that ignores the authority structure within which this approach occurs, and it also rules out the argument that insists that industrial democracy already exists on the basis of a spurious comparison with national politics. There is very little in the empirical evidence on which to base the assertion that industrial democracy, full higher level participation, is impossible. On the other hand there is a great deal to suggest that there are many difficulties and complexities involved. . . .

The major difficulty in a discussion of the empirical possibilities of democratising industrial authority structures is that we do not have sufficient information on a participatory system that contains opportunities for participation at both

the higher and lower levels to test some of the arguments of the participatory theory of democracy satisfactorily. . . .

Today, the question of economic efficiency is bound to loom very large in any discussion of the issues involved in democratising industrial authority structures; in particular how far the economic equality implied in a system of industrial democracy would be compatible with efficiency. Economic equality is often dismissed as of little relevance to democracy yet once industry is recognised as a political system in its own right then it is clear that a substantive measure of economic equality is necessary. If inequalities in decision-making power are abolished the case for other forms of economic inequality becomes correspondingly weaker. . . .

We have considered the possibility of establishing a participatory society with respect to one area only, that of industry, but because industry occupies a vitally important place in the theory of participatory democracy, that is sufficient to establish the validity, or otherwise of the notion of a participatory society. The analysis of the concept of participation presented here can be applied to other spheres, although the empirical questions raised by the extension of participation to areas other than industry cannot be considered. Nevertheless, it might be useful to indicate briefly some of the possibilities in this direction.

To begin, as it were, at the beginning, with the family. Modern theories of child-rearing . . . have helped to influence family life, especially among middle-class families, in a more democratic direction than before. But if the general trend is toward participation the educative effects arising from this may be nullified if the later experiences of the individual do not work in the same direction. The most urgent demands for more participation in recent years have come from the students and clearly these demands are very relevant to our general argument. With regard to the introduction of a participatory system in institutions of higher education, it is sufficient to note here that if the arguments for giving the

young worker the opportunity to participate in the workplace are convincing then there is a good case for giving his contemporary, the student, similar opportunities; both are the mature citizens of the future. One person whom the opportunities for participation in industry would pass by is the full-time housewife. She might find opportunities to participate at the local government level, especially if these opportunities included the field of housing, particularly public housing. The problems of running large housing developments would seem to give wide scope to residents for participation in decision making and the psychological effects of such participation might prove extremely valuable in this context. There is little point in drawing up a catalogue of possible areas of participation but these examples do give an indication of how a move might be made toward a participatory society.

A defender of the contemporary theory of democracy might object at this point that although the idea of a participatory society might not be completely unrealistic, this does not affect his definition of democracy. Even though authority structures in industry, and perhaps other areas, were democratised this would have little effect on the role of the individual; this would still be confined, our objector might argue, to a choice between competing leaders or representatives. The paradigm of direct participation would have no application even in a participatory society. . . . [W]ithin the industrial context, this objection is misplaced. Where a participatory industrial system allowed both higher and lower level participation then there would be scope for the individual directly to participate in a wide range of decisions while at the same time being part of a representative system; the one does not preclude the other.

If this is the case where the alternative areas of participation are concerned, there is an obvious sense in which the objection is valid at the level of the national political system. In an electorate of, say, thirty-five million the role of the individual

must consist almost entirely of choosing representatives; even where he could cast a vote in a referendum his influence over the outcome would be infinitesimally small. Unless the size of national political units were drastically reduced then that piece of reality is not open to change. In another sense, however, this objection misses the point because it rests on a lack of appreciation of the importance of the participatory theory of democracy for modern, large scale, industrialised societies. In the first place it is only if the individual has the opportunity directly to participate in decision making and choose representatives in the alternative areas that, under modern conditions, he can hope to have any real control over the course of his life or the development of the environment in which he lives. Of course, it is true that exactly the same decisions are not made, for example, in the workplace as in the House of Commons or the Cabinet, but one may agree with Schumpeter and his followers in this respect at least: that it is doubtful if the average citizen will ever be as interested in all the decisions made at national level as he would in those made nearer home. But having said that, the important point is, secondly, that the opportunity to participate in the alternative areas would mean that one piece of reality would have changed, namely the context within which all political activity was carried on. The argument of the participatory theory of democracy is that participation in the alternative areas would enable the individual better to appreciate the connection between the public and the private spheres. The ordinary man might still be more interested in things nearer home, but the existence of a participatory society would mean that he was better able to assess the performance of representatives at the national level, better equipped to take decisions of national scope when the opportunity arose to do so, and better able to weigh up the impact of decisions taken by national representatives on his own life and immediate surroundings. In the context of a

participatory society the significance of his vote to the individual would have changed; as well as being a private individual he would have multiple opportunities to become an educated, public citizen.

It is this ideal, an ideal with a long history in political thought, that has become lost from view in the contemporary theory of democracy. Not surprisingly perhaps when for some recent writers such a wide-ranging democratic ideal is regarded as “dangerous,” and they recommend that we pitch our standards of what might be achieved in democratic political life only marginally above what already exists. The claim that the Anglo-American political system tackles difficult questions with distinction looks rather less plausible since, for example, the events in the American cities of the late 1960s or the discovery in Britain that in the midst of affluence many citizens are not only poor but also homeless, than it may have done in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but such a statement could have only seemed a “realistic” description then because questions were never asked about certain features of the system or certain aspects of the data collected, despite the much emphasised empirical basis of the new theory. In sum, the contemporary theory of democracy represents a considerable failure of the political and sociological imagination on the part of recent theorists of democracy.

When the problem of participation and its role in democratic theory is placed in a wider context than that provided by the contemporary theory of democracy, and the relevant empirical material is related to the theoretical issues, it becomes clear that neither the demands for more participation, nor the theory of participatory democracy itself, are based, as is so frequently claimed, on dangerous illusions or on an outmoded and unrealistic theoretical foundation. We can still have a modern, viable theory of democracy which retains the notion of participation at its heart.

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Polyarchal Democracy

Robert Dahl

I

Examination of Madisonian and populist theory suggests at least two possible methods one might employ to construct a theory of democracy. One way, the method of maximization, is to specify a set of goals to be maximized; democracy can then be defined in terms of the specific governmental processes necessary to maximize these goals or some among them. . . . Madisonian theory postulates a non-tyrannical republic as the goal to be maximized; populist theory postulates popular sovereignty and political equality. A second way—this one might be called the descriptive method—is to consider as a single class of phenomena all those nation states and social organizations that are commonly called democratic by political scientists, and by examining the members of this class to discover, first, the distinguishing characteristics they have in common, and, second, the necessary and sufficient conditions for social organizations possessing these characteristics.

These are not, however, mutually exclusive methods. And we shall see that if we begin by employing the first method it will soon become necessary to employ something rather like the second as well.

II

. . . [T]he goals of populist democracy and the simple Rule deduced from these goals do not provide us with anything like a complete theory. One basic defect of the theory is that it does no more than to provide a formal redefinition of

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one necessary procedural rule for the perfect or ideal attainment of political equality and popular sovereignty; but because the theory is no more than an exercise in axiomatics, it tells us nothing about the real world. However, let us now pose the key question in slightly different form: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for maximizing democracy in the real world? I shall show that the words “in the real world” fundamentally alter the problem.

Let us begin, however, with a meticulous concern for precision of meaning. First, what do we mean by “maximizing democracy”? Evidently here, . . . we must proceed by regarding democracy as a state of affairs constituting a limit, and all actions approaching the limit will be maximizing actions. But how shall we describe the state of affairs constituting the limit?

The model of populist democracy suggests three possible characteristics that might be made operationally meaningful: (1) Whenever policy choices are perceived to exist, the alternative selected and enforced as governmental policy is the alternative most preferred by the members. (2) Whenever policy choices are perceived to exist, in the process of choosing the alternative to be enforced as government policy, the preference of each member is assigned an equal value. (3) The Rule: In choosing among alternatives, the alternative preferred by the greater number is selected.

To make the first of these operational we must either ignore the problem of different intensities of preference among individuals or find ourselves in so deep a morass of obstacles to observation and comparison that it would be very nearly impossible to say whether or not the characteristic in fact exists. I shall return to this problem in the next chapter. But if we ignore intensities, then in effect we adopt the second characteristic as our criterion: that the preference of each member is assigned an equal value. It would appear at first

glance that the question whether the preference of each member of an organization is assigned an equal value is more or less susceptible of observation. Likewise the third characteristic, the Rule, should be observable. But since the Rule is deducible from the first two characteristics, would it not be enough simply to examine a social organization in order to discover the extent to which the Rule is or is not followed? That is, do we have in the Rule an adequate definition of the limit of democracy? Suppose we observe that a majority prefers x to y , and x happens to be selected as government policy. Yet it may be that among the majority is a dictator; if he were in the minority, then y would be selected. The condition of political equality evidently requires "interchangeability," i.e., the interchange of an equal number of individuals from one side to another would not affect the outcome of the decision. But how can we observe whether interchangeability is present? Evidently no single decision provides us with enough information, for at best a single decision can only reveal that the Rule is not being followed and that political equality therefore does not exist during that decision. We can infer interchangeability only by examining a large number of cases. . . .

. . . If we take any specific action, such as the outcome of balloting, as a satisfactory index of preference, then no operational tests exist for determining political equality, other than those necessary for determining whether the Rule is or is not being followed. That is, given the expression of preferences as adequate, the only operational test for political equality is the extent to which the Rule is followed in a number of cases. . . . What events must we observe in the real world in order to determine the extent to which the Rule is employed in an organization?

Unfortunately, the phrase "given the expression of preferences" harbors some serious difficulties. What kinds of activity shall we take as indices of preference? At one extreme we could rely on some overt act of choosing, such as casting a ballot or making a statement.¹ At the other

extreme, through deep and careful probing we could search for psychological evidence. If the first is often naïve, the second is impossible on a sufficient scale. In practice most of us adopt a middle course and take our clues from the prevailing environment in which the particular preference is expressed. In one environment we accept the overt act of voting as an adequate if imperfect index; in another we reject it entirely. . . .

III

The effect of the argument so far is to divide our key question into two: (1) What acts shall we consider sufficient to constitute an expression of individual preferences at a given stage in the decision process? (2) Taking these acts as an expression of preferences, what events must we observe in order to determine the extent to which the Rule is employed in the organization we are examining? We are still looking, let us remember, for a set of limiting conditions to be approached.

At a minimum, two stages need to be distinguished: the election stage³ and the interelection stage. The election stage in turn consists of at least three periods which it is useful to distinguish: the voting period, the prevoting period, and the postvoting period. . . .

During the voting period we would need to observe the extent to which at least three conditions exist:

1. Every member of the organization performs the acts we assume to constitute an expression

1. More accurately, in using votes and opinion polls we generally rely on some overt statements of individuals who compile the returns.

3. Election is used here in a broad sense. To apply the analysis to the internal operation of an organization that is itself constituted through elections, such as a legislative body, one would consider votes on measures as "the election stage."

of preference among the scheduled alternatives, e.g., voting.

2. In tabulating these expressions (votes), the weight assigned to the choice of each individual is identical.

3. The alternative with the greatest number of votes is declared the winning choice.

... [I]t is self-evident that we have thus far begged the first of our questions. A totalitarian plebiscite might meet—and indeed in practice evidently often has met—these three conditions better than a national election or legislative decision in countries that most Western political scientists would call democratic. The crux of the problem is in our first question, what we take to constitute an expression of individual preference. Can it not be truthfully said that the peasant who casts his ballot for the dictatorship is expressing his preferences among the scheduled alternatives as he sees them? For, perhaps, the alternatives he sees are either to vote for the dictatorship or to take a journey to Siberia. ...

What we balk at in accepting the vote of the Soviet citizen as an expression of preference is that he is not permitted to choose among all the alternatives that we, as outside observers, regard as in some sense potentially available to him. ...

What we have done, then, is to formulate a fourth limiting condition, one that must exist in the prevoting period governing the scheduling of alternatives for the voting period.

4. Any member who perceives a set of alternatives, at least one of which he regards as preferable to any of the alternatives presently scheduled, can insert his preferred alternative(s) among those scheduled for voting.

... [W]e must lay down a fifth condition operating in the prevoting period.

5. All individuals possess identical information about the alternatives.

...

At first glance it might be thought that these five conditions are sufficient to guarantee the operation of the Rule; but, at least in principle, it would be possible for a regime to permit these conditions to operate through the prevoting and voting periods and then simply to ignore the results. Consequently, we must postulate at least two more conditions for the postvoting period both of which are sufficiently obvious to need no discussion:

6. Alternatives (leaders or policies) with the greatest number of votes displace any alternatives (leaders or policies) with fewer votes.

7. The orders of elected officials are executed.

These, then, constitute our set of more or less observable limiting conditions which when present during the election stage will be taken as evidence for the maximal operation of the Rule, which in turn is taken as evidence for the maximal attainment of political equality and popular sovereignty. What of the interelection stage? If our argument so far is correct, then maximization of political equality and popular sovereignty in the interelection stage would require:

8.1. Either that all interelection decisions are subordinate or executory to those arrived at during the election stage, i.e., elections are in a sense controlling

8.2. Or that new decisions during the interelection period are governed by the preceding seven conditions, operating, however, under rather different institutional circumstances

8.3. Or both.

IV

I think it may be laid down dogmatically that no human organization—certainly none with more than a handful of people—has ever met or is ever likely to meet these eight conditions. It is true that the second, third, and sixth conditions

are quite precisely met in some organizations, although in the United States corrupt practices sometimes nullify even these; the others are, at best, only crudely approximated. . . .

Because human organizations rarely and perhaps never reach the limit set by these eight conditions, it is necessary to interpret each of the conditions as one end of a continuum or scale along which any given organization might be measured. Unfortunately there is at present no known way of assigning meaningful weights to the eight conditions. However, even without weights, if the eight scales could each be metrized, it would be possible and perhaps useful to establish some arbitrary but not meaningless classes of which the upper chunk might be called "polyarchies."

It is perfectly evident, however, that what has just been described is no more than a program, for nothing like it has, I think, ever been attempted. I shall simply set down here, therefore, the following observations. Organizations do in fact differ markedly in the extent to which they approach the limits set by these eight conditions. Furthermore, "polyarchies" include a variety of organizations which Western political scientists would ordinarily call democratic, including certain aspects of the governments of nation states such as the United States, Great Britain, the Dominions (South Africa possibly excepted), the Scandinavian countries, Mexico, Italy, and France; states and provinces, such as the states of this country and the provinces of Canada; numerous cities and towns; some trade-unions; numerous associations such as Parent-Teachers' Associations, chapters of the League of Women Voters, and some religious groups; and some primitive societies. Thus it follows that the number of polyarchies is large. (The number of egalitarian polyarchies is probably relatively small or perhaps none exist at all.) The number of polyarchies must run well over a hundred and probably well over a thousand. Of this number, however, only a tiny handful has been exhaus-

tively studied by political scientists, and these have been the most difficult of all, the governments of national states, and in a few instances the smaller governmental units. . . .

. . . What are the necessary and sufficient conditions in the real world for the existence of these eight conditions, to at least the minimum degree we have agreed to call polyarchy? . . .

V

. . . [W]e can set down some hypotheses for which considerable evidence exists.

. . . It would seem truistic that if all the members of an organization rejected the norms prescribing the eight conditions, then the conditions would not exist; or alternatively, the extent to which polyarchy exists must be related to the extent to which the norms are accepted as desirable. If we are willing to assume that the extent of agreement (consensus) on the eight basic norms is measurable, then we can formulate the following hypotheses, which have been commonplace in the literature of political science:

1. Each of the conditions of polyarchy increases with the extent of agreement (or consensus) on the relevant norm.
2. Polyarchy is a function of consensus on the eight norms, other things remaining the same.¹¹

Unfortunately for the simplicity of the hypotheses, consensus possesses at least three dimensions: the number of individuals who agree, the intensity or depth of their belief, and the extent to which overt activity conforms with belief. . . .

The extent of agreement, in turn, must be functionally dependent upon the extent to which the various processes for social training are employed on behalf of the norms by the family,

11. Appendix E to this chapter raises some questions about treating polyarchy as positive and increasing with both consensus and political activity.

schools, churches, clubs, literature, newspapers, and the like. Again, if it were possible to measure the extent to which these processes are used, our hypotheses could be stated as:

3. The extent of agreement (consensus) on each of the eight norms increases with the extent of social training in the norm.
4. Consensus is therefore a function of the total social training in all the norms.

It also follows from the preceding hypotheses that:

5. Polyarchy is a function of the total social training in all the norms.¹²

... It is reasonable to suppose that the less the agreement on policy choices, the more difficult it will be in any organization to train members in the eight norms. For then, although the operation of the rules may confer benefits on some members, it will impose severe restraints on others. If the results are severe for relatively large numbers, then it is reasonable to suppose that those who suffer from the operation of the rules will oppose them and hence resist training in them. Thus:

6. Social training in the eight norms increases with the extent of consensus or agreement on choices among policy alternatives.

From 5 and 6 it follows that:

7. One or more of the conditions of polyarchy increases with consensus on policy alternatives.

Hypothesis 6 suggests, moreover, that the reverse of Hypothesis 4 is also valid. We would expect that the extent to which social training in the norms is indulged in is itself dependent upon the amount of agreement that already

exists on the norms. The more disagreement there is about the norms, the more likely it is that some of the means of social training—the family and the school in particular—will train some individuals in conflicting norms. The relationship between social training and consensus is thus a perfect instance of the hen-and-egg problem. Hence:

8. The extent of social training in one of the eight norms also increases with the extent of agreement on it.

...

Now the extent of agreement cannot be considered entirely independently of the extent of political activity in an organization. The extent to which some of the conditions for polyarchy—1, 4, and 5—are met is also a measure of the political activity of members, that is, the extent to which they vote in elections and primaries, participate in campaigns, and seek and disseminate information and propaganda. Thus by definition:

9. Polyarchy is a function of the political activity of the members.¹⁸

A good deal is now known about the variables with which political activity is associated. . . . At present we know that political activity, at least in the United States, is positively associated to a significant extent with such variables as income, socio-economic status, and education, and that it is also related in complex ways with belief systems, expectations, and personality structures. We now know that members of the ignorant and unpropertied masses which Madison and his colleagues so much feared are considerably less active politically than the educated and well-to-do. By their propensity for political passivity the

12. For a "Summary of the hypothetical functions relating polyarchy to its preconditions" see Appendix C to this chapter.

18. For an important complexity in this hypothetical function, see Appendix E to this chapter, "A note on the relation between agreement and political activity."

poor and uneducated disfranchise themselves.¹⁹ Since they also have less access than the wealthy to the organizational, financial, and propaganda resources that weigh so heavily in campaigns, elections, legislative, and executive decisions, anything like equal control over government policy is triply barred to the members of Madison's unpropertied masses. They are barred by their relatively greater inactivity, by their relatively limited access to resources, and by Madison's nicely contrived system of constitutional checks.

VI

... Because we are taught to believe in the necessity of constitutional checks and balances, we place little faith in social checks and balances. We admire the efficacy of constitutional separation of powers in curbing majorities and minorities, but we often ignore the importance of the restraints imposed by social separation of powers. Yet if the theory of polyarchy is roughly sound, it follows that in the absence of certain social prerequisites, no constitutional arrangements can produce a nontyrannical republic. The history of numerous Latin-American states is, I think, sufficient evidence. Conversely, an increase in the extent to which one of the social prerequisites is present may be far more important in strengthening democracy than any particular constitutional design. Whether we are concerned with tyranny by a minority or tyranny by a majority, the theory of polyarchy suggests that the first and crucial variables to which political scientists must direct their attention are social and not constitutional....

19. Cf. especially B. R. Berelson, P. F. Lazarsfeld, and W. N. McPhee, [*Voting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1954)]; S. M. Lipset *et al.*, "The Psychology of Voting: An Analysis of Political Behavior," *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954).