WORKING PAPER 264

Triumph, Deficit or
Contestation?
Deepening the 'Deepening
Democracy' Debate

John Gaventa
July 2006

Citizenship DRC

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Abstract

Around the world concepts and constructions of democracy are under
contestation. Some analysts see the spread of democratic institutional designs
as evidence of democracy's triumph. Others – across both north and south –
point to growing democratic deficits, and how they threaten democratic
legitimacy. Following a review of these debates, this paper focuses on emerging
debates within what is often referred to as the 'deepening democracy' field, a
school of thinking that focuses on the political project of developing and
sustaining more substantive and empowered citizen participation in the
democratic process than is often found in representative democracy alone.
Within this 'school', the paper explores four broad approaches – 'civil society'
democracy, participatory democracy, deliberative democracy and empowered
participatory governance – and how they differ from one another as well as
from 'thinner' forms of democracy associated with liberal and neoliberal
thinking. The paper argues that democracy-building is an ongoing process of
struggle and contestation rather than the adoption of a standard institutional
design, and poses a series of challenges which future conceptual and practical
work on deepening democracy may need to address.

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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

BBGC   Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium

EPG   Empowered participatory governance

NGO   Non-governmental organisation

IPPR   Institute for Public Policy Research

OECD   Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

1 Introduction

Around the world, concepts and constructions of democracy are under renewed contestation. In Iraq, Fallujah is bombed in the name of making the country ready for democracy; in Nepal, protestors are in the streets demanding democracy; in Indonesia, the Ukraine and the United States, voters and observers are gripped in debates about electoral democracy; in Cancun and other global forums, streets are occupied by those demanding more democracy in global processes; in small villages and neighbourhoods, grassroots groups are claiming their places in local democratic spaces. Democracy is at once the language of military power, neoliberal market forces, political parties, social movements, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). What's going on?

This paper picks up one strand of the democracy debate associated with what is known in some circles as 'deepening democracy'. This strand, simply put, focuses on the political project of developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizen participation in the political process than what is normally found in liberal representative democracy alone. The paper comes with a number of qualifications. The democracy literature is a vast one, and I have not tried to review or cover all of it. Rather, for the sake of stimulating discussion, and for introducing people to some of the debate, I shall attempt to:

● briefly explore two competing narratives of democracy – those which celebrate its ascendancy and those which are concerned about its deficits;

● review emerging debates within the deepening democracy literature, exploring concepts of 'civil society' democracy, participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, empowered participatory governance, and how they differ from one another as well as from dominant ideas associated with neoliberalism, or liberal representative democracy;

● pose some questions and challenges which emerge from the literature and practice for how the deepening democracy debate could be deepened further.

Of course, the debate on the spread, construction and deepening of democracy is an old one. In the development context, during the 1990s much of it focused on the process of democratisation associated with the wave of decentralisation processes that were happening in many southern countries, such as the Philippines, Brazil, and India. In these processes of democratic decentralisation, much earlier work focused on the questions of citizen participation. Earlier work focused, for instance, on the importance of citizen engagement, and the strategies and opportunities for doing so (see for example Goetz and Gaventa 2001; Gaventa 2004b; and McGee *et al.* 2003). A decade later, in many countries where decentralisation occurred, the agenda has moved from one of *how* citizens' engage or *whether* they should do so, to a series of next generation questions about what happens *when citizens do engage*, and how new forms of citizen engagement articulate with more traditional understand-ings of representative democracy, including beyond the local level.

In exploring these themes, this paper argues that democracy-building is an ongoing process of struggle and contestation rather than the adoption of a standard recipe of institutional designs. Democracy building work for the next century involves going beyond current formulations to find and promote those new and emerging visions and movements for democracy which will extend and deepen its meanings and practices towards full citizen engagement yet further.

2 Democracy on the march: triumph or deficit?

In reading the literature on democracy, we are confronted with a paradox. On the one hand, there is the somewhat triumphalist view that democracy has spread as never before. At the end of the twentieth century, we are told, there were ostensibly 120 electoral democracies in place (out of 192 existing countries), of which some 85 were thought to be 'full' democracies, in the sense that they provided respect for rule of law, civil and political rights. Quoting such data, a report by Freedom House declares the twentieth century as the '*Democratic Century*' (Freedom House 1999).

On the other hand, from other sources one gets the sense that democracy is in crisis, faced by a series of democratic deficits which are calling its very vitality and meaning into question. For the triumphalists democracy-building is about spread and quantity, and largely about creating a standardised recipe of institutional designs around the world. For those concerned with its deficits, democracy is not only about spread, it is also about deepening its quality and meanings in ways appropriate to the settings in which it is found. Indeed, this paper argues, both perspectives may be correct – while the institutional forms and procedures of democracy increasingly may be in place, the critical challenge now is how to deepen their inclusiveness and substance, especially in terms of how citizens engage within democratic spaces to create more just and equitable states and societies.

In the democracy literature, the process of democratisation is often thought of in waves.[1] In this historical view, it is important to remember that at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were 'no states which could be judged as electoral democracies by the standard of universal suffrage for competitive multiparty elections' (Freedom House 1999: 2). Of 130 political units or countries, more than 65 per cent were colonies or protectorates. Yet in the course of the century this rapidly changed with democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War I, in other parts of Europe after World War II, and in Latin American and eastern Europe in the late 1980s (Avritzer 2002: 11). Others extend this argument, and point for instance, to

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1   Though their number and definition are often in dispute.

more current processes in parts of Asia and Africa, including in more recent years, of former authoritarian regimes such as Indonesia and Nigeria.

Even as democracy was spreading, one can also find simultaneous movements throughout the century for the deepening of the quality of participation within it, in both North and South. Examples could include the suffragette movements and civil rights movements in the US, the anti-apartheid movements in southern Africa, the demands for the extension of civil and social rights, as well as political rights, and new experiments in democratic decentralisation and participation that occurred in many parts of the globe.

Despite the spread of democratic institutions and practices, there are warnings from many that the quality of democracy is in crisis, in both North and South. In the northern more 'mature' democracies, a large literature discusses the growing democratic 'deficits', involved in declining patterns of political participation, the 'hollowing out' of politics and take over of political processes by special interests. In the UK, for instance, despite efforts by the Labour Party to call for new forms of 'active citizenship' and 'a new localism' that would revitalize democracy, a study by Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) argues that people remain interested in political issues, but are increasingly becoming frustrated in the political process and feel that Britain is becoming less democratic (Clarke 2002). As commentator and activist Hilary Wainwright wrote in the lead-up to the Iraq war, 'the gulf has rarely been greater between decisions made by those in power, and the wishes of the people; it is the nadir of representative democracy' which, she argues, has been captured by elite democracy (2003).

Similarly, in the United States, Thelda Skocpol (2003: 11) warns of the emergence of 'diminished democracy', in which public involvement has lost its link to political life and political engagement has become more the domain of professionalised associations, such that 'early-twenty-first-century Americans live in a diminished democracy, in a much less participatory and more oligarchicly managed civic world'. In a democracy celebrated since Tocqueville for its associationalism and collective life, Putnam (2000) and others write of the decline of social capital as people 'bowl alone' rather than participate in community and public affairs. Crenson and Ginsberg (2002) warn of the 'downsizing of democracy', in which collective citizen action has given way to narrow interest groups, and in which citizens are treated like customers, who communicate to elites through opinion polls and electronic market research processes.

If concerns about the quality and substance of democracy are widespread in the North, they are perhaps even more prevalent in the South. Here the concerns are not only about whether democracy is in decline but also about whether the democratic institutions that emerged from northern experience indeed are appropriate to the historic conditions of the South, and whether democracy itself will deliver on problems of extreme poverty, growing inequality and social justice. In Latin America, for instance, while the institutions of democracy have taken hold in every country but Cuba, pervasive poverty continues and the

region presents the world's highest level of inequity. According to a recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, 'with political and economic reforms failing to translate into tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary citizens, Latin Americans are increasingly frustrated with the way their democracies are functioning … Only 53% of the population supports democracy and 28% are satisfied with its performance' (UNDP 2004: Appendix A).

In Africa an important study by Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy*, argues that democratic states are trapped between the demands by external donors for economic liberalisation by on the one hand, and the needs of political majorities on the other. As a result 'the good governance discourse has presided over the creation of what might be called *exclusionary democracies*, which allow for political competition, but cannot incorporate or respond to the demands of the majority in any meaningful way … where the voices of the poor are frequently overruled by the demands of external actors' (2000: xiv). The point is echoed by the World Bank's own *Voices of the Poor* study which pointed to widespread distrust by poor people of institutions that affected their lives – especially those of the state – due to perceptions of corruption, unaccountability and a lack of responsiveness (Narayan *et al.* 2000).

Looking across a range of literature, Luckham *et al.* (2000: 22–3), analyse four broad types of democratic deficits, including:

● hollow citizenship – in which citizens do not enjoy equal rights and entitlements;

● lack of vertical accountability – 'the inability of citizens to hold governments and political elites accountable for their use of power;'

● weak horizontal accountability – in which 'potentially tyrannical' executives manipulate checks and balances through patronage, corruption, and the stifling of dissent; and

● international accountability dilemmas – involving the shrinking policy space of national governments, and their citizens, due to the decision-making power of global markets, multinational firms, and international bodies.

The differential performances of democracy in different contexts have led to the practice, at least in academic circles, of distinguishing 'democracy with adjectives' (Collier and Levitsky 1997), ranging from authoritarian, neo-patrimonial, or military-dominated forms of democracy on the one hand, to more substantive, inclusionary, participatory, deliberative, or deepened democracy on the other, with perhaps forms of representative, procedural or delegative democracy occupying a type of middle ground. And yet, behind the adjectives, are competing discourses and meanings which themselves are highly contested in practice. It is to a further discussion of some of these distinctions that we now turn.

3 Responding to the democratic deficits: deepening democracy with more democracy

In response to the perceived crisis of democracy, we see a number of competing trends. A neoliberal market approach argues for the continued weakening of the state through a combination of decentralisation and privatisation. In such a formulation, citizens are often reduced to consumers, who express preferences through market choices, and perhaps though co-provisioning of services at the local level, but who exercise little real democratic power. A second dominant view grows out of the liberal representative model, which puts a great deal of emphasis on getting the institutions and procedures of democracy right, especially as measured through competitive, multiparty electoral processes. In this view, the role of citizens is somewhat passive. Citizens participate through elections, and enjoy certain rights, but primarily the individual rights of freedom from interference by the states in matters of private property or political association.

The liberal representative view is extended by a third view, which grows out of long traditions of participatory democracy and which is increasingly referred to as the 'deepening democracy' approach. In this view, democracy is not only a set of rules, procedures and institutional design, and cannot be reduced to only a way of competition amongst parties, though these are of course important. Rather it is a process through which citizens exercise ever deepening control over decisions which affect their lives, and as such it is also constantly under construction. In some formulations, especially those emerging from Latin America, this view also is about the extension of rights. Full democratic citizenship is attained not only through the exercise of political and civic rights, but also through social rights, which in turn may be gained through participatory processes and struggles. As summarised in the recent UNDP report on *Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Citizens Democracy*, the challenge in this view is to extend democracy from a 'democracy of voters, to a democracy of citizens':

> we must welcome the emergence of governments elected by popular vote and the advances achieved in political representation and participation over the past several decades. But the challenge of how to expand politics remains. That is, how to submit for debate and resolution all of those issues that can affect the collective interest. In turn, this necessitates greater diversity in terms of options and the granting of more power to the State so that it can fulfill the mandate given by its citizens ... the seminal idea of the Report is to integrate the different dimensions of citizenship in the building of democracy through the expansion of politics.

> (UNDP 2004, building on the work of Guillermo O'Donnel)

In this view, then, the way to deal with the crisis of democracy, or the democratic deficit, is to extend democracy itself – i.e. to go beyond traditional understandings of representative democracy, through creating and supporting more participatory mechanisms of citizen engagement, which in turn are built upon, and support, more robust views of the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

The debate about deepening forms of participation is, of course, not entirely new in classic democratic theory, which often starts with contrasts between the more participatory views of Athenian democracy and more republican views found in Rome, and in later European models (Luckham *et al.* 2000). Similarly, there have been long-standing arguments between the democratic elitists, represented by writers such as Schumpeter, and others who argue for more participatory forms of democracy, such as John Stuart Mill or G.D.H. Cole, and more recently Carole Pateman (1970).

However, following the end of the Cold War, and increasingly during the 1990s, we have seen a reinvigoration of many of the earlier more participatory theories from a number of sources. In the early 90s, Warren (1992: 9) juxtaposed standard liberal democracy with 'expansive democracy', which argues for 'increased participation in, and control over collective decision making, whether by means of direct democracy in small-scale settings or through stronger linkages between citizens and institutions that operate on broader scales'. Others such as David Beetham, argued that even in classic views:

> *the core idea of democracy is that of popular rule or popular control over collective decision making. Its starting point is with the citizen rather with the institutions of government. Its defining principles are that all citizens are entitled to a say in public affairs, both through the associations of civil society and through participation in government; and that this entitlement should be available in terms of equality of all. Control by citizens over their collective affairs, and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control, are the key democratic principles.* [emphasis added]

(1999: 3)

Driven by a variety of concerns – from a desire by the state for gaining greater legitimacy, to a re-assessment of the role of expertise in public policy, to the rise of participatory processes in planning and policy making, to demands from social movements for greater power – during the decade of the 1990s an important shift occurred in the democracy debate from one of concern of democratic *government*, to the concern for democratic *governance*, which involved new forms of interaction between state, market and society.

At the same time, further challenges to the more traditional liberal-representative view of democracy also emerged from southern critics, who argued that not only was the liberal approach limited in terms of its understanding of how citizens might engage in political life, but that it was not relevant to understanding and explaining the historical trajectories of democratisation in some southern settings. In an important book, *Democracy and the Public Space in*

Latin America (2002), the Brazilian political scientist Leonardo Avritzer argues that theories about democratisation in the South are largely based upon a particular western (or northern) view of democracy, especially those grounded in democratic elitism. Emerging out of a particular period of European history following World Wars I and II, democratic elitism was premised on a concern for protecting democracy from *too much* participation by ill-equipped masses. As Avritzer writes, 'democratic elitism was based on two main theses: first that in order to be preserved, democracy must narrow the scope of political participation; and second that the only way to make democratic decision-making rational is to limit it to elites and to restrict the role of the masses to that of choosing between elites' (2002: 14–15). In so doing democratic elitism and its associated institutions placed government in the hands of minorities, who, while they may compete amongst one another, are still a minority. As such politics 'is stripped of its horizontal elements, which are replaced by the political authorization of elites through elections' (2002: 23). In so doing, this approach reduces the scope of political participation from 'mobilization' to 'voting, and 'leaves behind the idea of a search for consensus of the public good' by focusing on the self-interested individual attempting to 'appropriate the largest possible share of public goods' (2002: 23).

While the democratic elitist view has been challenged by many competing traditions of democracy *within* the North, Avritzer argues that it has largely been hegemonic in trying to explain and expand democracy in the South. However, in post-authoritarian settings, the challenge is not to 'protect' democratic institutions from ill-equipped participants. Rather, it is the opposite: how to bring the experiences of participation and citizenship gained through democratic action and movements in the social sphere into the political sphere. Elaborating a theory of 'participatory publics', he argues that 'because the gap between the political space and political representation is wider still in post-authoritarian countries … the most sensible way to further democratize state-society relations is to transfer democratic potentials that emerge at the society level to the political arena through participatory designs' (2002: 8–9). In attempting to do so, recent experiences of Latin American democratisation have wider democratic implications because they may 'point in the direction of rehabilitation of those traditions within democratic theory that stress the importance of participation at the public level' (2002: 1). This possibility is already being seen in practice, as new democratic practices, such as the now famous Porto Alegre experiment, inspire and support demands for greater participation in other settings, including in the North.[2]

While we can see in both North and South a contemporary revival of strands of democratic theory which favour deeper forms of engagement by the citizenry, there are still many debates even *within* this broad school about how this is to

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2   For instance, the Porto Alegre experiment has led to a similar participatory budgeting
    process in Manchester, and to organising work by civil society around the theme of
    'democratising democracy.'

be done. Each contains important but often implicit assumptions about strategies and political choices which need to be examined more closely. At the risk of over-simplification and generalisation, I want to suggest four sub-schools or approaches for how to strengthen citizen engagement that may be found in the emerging deepening democracy literature. These approaches, which are by no means mutually exclusive, include what I shall call 'civil society' democracy; participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, and empowered, participatory democracy.

3.1 Deepening democracy through building civil society

One approach widely used by donors has been to argue that the biases towards elitism or a lack of public accountability found in traditional institutional design approaches can be off-set by investing in a vibrant civil society, as well as in political institutions and electoral politics. Based on long standing ideas of the importance of 'associationalism' in democracy, a robust civil society can serve as an additional check and balance on government behaviour, through mobilising claims, advocating for special interests, playing a watchdog role, and generally exercising countervailing power against the state. In this construction, the concern is how an independent civil society holds government to account, not on how civil society participates in processes of co-governance.

Though often organised in donor agencies as separate projects, the good governance and the civil society building agendas often come together under the label 'democracy building'. In his thoughtful book on *Aiding Democracy Abroad* (which focuses mainly on US-based democracy aid programmes), Thomas Carothers (1999) argues that 'democracy promoters' often start with the same 'democracy template', which includes a standard recipe of support for elections, state institutions and civil society.

The Democracy Template (adapted from Carothers 1999: 88)

Electoral process	Free and fair elections; strong national parties
State institutions	Democratic constitutions, independent and effective judiciary and rule of law, competent representative legislature, responsive local government, pro-democratic military
Civil society	Active advocacy NGOs; politically educated citizenry, strong independent media; and strong independent unions.

In this view, argues Carothers, democratic 'consolidation involves top-down change – the rationalisation and democratisation of the main state institutions. It also includes bottom-up change – the strengthening and diversification of civil society. These two halves of the consolidation process are mutually

reinforcing. Democracy promoters often speak of seeking to increase both the "supply" (state institutions) and the "demand" (civil society) of democracy' (1999: 87).

Such a model of democracy building can be criticised on many grounds, many of which Carothers himself reviews. First, it promotes a very specific and idealised notion of democracy, arising especially from one set of experiences (heavily influenced by a Tocquevillian vision). As such it tends to support a one-size-fits-all approach and pays little attention to local context and pre-conditions, much less to existing democratic impulses. It 'frequently treats the symptoms rather than the causes of democratic deficits' (1999: 101), by failing to ask questions about power and interests which will keep reforms from working in the first place. Finally, it holds empirically questionable assumptions about the degree to which civil society can be seen as autonomous from the state,[3] and the degree to which states have the capacity and autonomy to respond to civil society demands. More recently, Wainwright takes these critiques further arguing that 'there are good reasons for questioning the assumptions of an automatic flow between civil society organizations that are (or claim to be) democratic and the process of democratizing state power' (2004: 94). The real issue, she argues, is not the strength of civil society but how, whether and under what conditions it exercises its *potential* for political power in support of greater popular control and political equality.

3.2 Deepening democracy through participation and participatory governance

While the civil society approach focuses on building civil society's role as an autonomous, countervailing power *against* the state, other views focus on deepening democratic engagement through the participation of citizens in the processes *of* governance *with* the state. As recently put by John Ackerman (2004: 447), in this view 'the best way to tap into the energy of society is through 'co-governance', which involves inviting social actors to participate in the core activities of the state'. Such a view, he argues, is preferable to the 'exit solutions based in the market theories, or to 'the "voice" solutions, grounded in "co-production", social protest or consultation' (2004: 447). Building on earlier views of participatory democracy, the argument here is that 'citizens should have direct roles in public choices or at least engage more deeply with

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3   As a matter of empirical practice, the separation of these spheres may not be as distinct as originally conceptualised. Actors in civil and political society have multiple identities and loyalties, and may be linked by various cross-cutting networks. For instance, very interesting recent research by Houtzager *et al.* (2003) on the civil society organisations who participate in the various social councils and participatory budgeting processes now established in São Paulo finds that those most likely to do so are those which have (a) political affiliations with the Workers Party, and (b) receive some sort of contract from the state for their work.

substantive political issues and be assured that officials will be responsive to their concerns and judgments' (Cohen and Fung 2004).

In practice, the search for more participatory forms of governance, which supplement the roles of citizens as voters or as watchdogs through more direct forms of involvement, may be seen at many levels. In Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has called for new ways to include citizens in policy making through 'a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making' (OECD 2001: 12). In development policies, participatory approaches which have a well-developed practice in the project sphere are now being applied to processes of participatory governance in policy debates, often with donor support and conditionalities. A great deal of donor and civil society attention has also been applied to the area of strengthening participatory governance at the local level, where a host of potentially 'new democratic arenas' and spaces (Cornwall and Coelho 2004) are opened up by initiatives from above or demands from below. A recent study (McGee *et al.* 2003) of legal frameworks which support and enable participatory local governance found numerous examples, including[4]

- approaches to planning at the local government level that link community representatives and elected representatives in forms of authority and decision-making;

- new ways in which public accountability is exercised through legally empowered monitoring groups;

- more direct and popular forms of participation at the local level through village assemblies;

- approaches which make existing representative structures more inclusive though establishment of quotas for previously excluded groups.

Arguing that such approaches necessitate linking *democratisation with inclusion*, Manor also describes a series of 'recent approaches by developing country governments to include ordinary people, particularly the poor, in democratic processes', including local councils, user committees, devices for bottom-up participation and downward accountability, such as direct forms of democracy at the local level (Manor 2004).

While the arguments for participatory governance are now commonplace in the development and democracy literatures, they have also been highly criticised. Some argue that participation is subject to abuse, is easily captured by elites, and can itself become a 'new tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari 2001).[5] Others argue that participation proponents have a naïve view of power, and that

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4   For a further summary of lessons from these experiences see Gaventa (2004).

5   A more recent book turns the theme of this one around and asks how participation can move *From Tyranny to Transformation?* (Hickey and Mohan 2004).

participation has failed to deal with the hard politics of party building and mobilisation of demands (Houtzager 2003), thus enabling weaker forms of participation to be easily captured and coopted by a neoliberal agenda. Still others examine who really participates in new democratic spaces, and the degree to which such spaces are – or can be made to be – more inclusive through other forms of representation (Cornwall and Coelho 2004).

Some of these critiques are countered in another important recent contribution to the literature entitled *Beyond Good Governance: Participatory Democracy in the Philippines* (Estrella and Iszatt 2004) – one of the few in-depth empirical studies of these local participatory governance processes. This book documents how citizens combined and used a number of different participatory strategies to engage in and occupy emerging democratic spaces following the passage of the Local Government Code in 1991, which provided for direct participation of civil society organisations in local governance. What began as a small initiative known as the 'BATMAN' project emerged into a movement of NGOs, peoples' organisations, social movements and progressive local officials, loosely known as the Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium (BBGC) – one of the largest organised consortia working on participatory local governance anywhere in the world. The Consortium argued for a 'dual power' approach, e.g. gaining power within local government through strategies of collaboration and partnership, while also maintaining strong community organising strategies at the grassroots. It also argued for 'multiple lanes for engagement', which link community development, social movements, and political parties, with direct strategies of participation in local government. Through a series of case studies, the book documents that by using the dual power approach, which 'targets civil society, government and the democratic space in between', concrete gains can be made. It also raises the challenges of linking civil and political society, either through forging more genuine partnerships between local governments, NGOs, and peoples' organisations, or through working closely with political parties, such as in the Philippines case, Akbayan!, the 'peoples' party' with which many of the Consortium members are also affiliated.

3.3 Deepening democracy through deliberative democracy

While the previous strand of democratic theory emphasises the importance of inclusion through participation in democratic processes, a related strand focuses more on the nature and quality of deliberation that does occur when citizens do come together for discussion and debates in public spheres. Such a view builds upon the philosophical work of Habermas, as well other more recent theorists (such as Cohen and Sabel 1997; Dryzek 2000), and argues for 'a more deliberative democracy in which citizens address public problems by reasoning together about how best to solve them … The ambitious aim of deliberative democracy, in short, is to shift from bargaining, interest aggregation, and power to the common reason of equal citizens as a dominant force in democratic life' (Cohen and Fung 2004). The focus here is often more on the 'quality of public talk, and the conditions necessary for achieving such equality, less than on 'who'

participates in the process of public engagement (McCoy and Scully 2002), or on voting and elections. In this view, 'talk-cenric democratic theory replaces voting-centric democratic theory … Accountability replaces consent as the conceptual core category' (Chambers 2003). Moreover, as Dryzek (1996: 482) argues, the concept of the public sphere broadens the conceptions of where struggles for democratisation might occur. 'Civil society can constitute a site for democratization because it can be a place where people choose to live their public lives and solve their joint problems. Those who see deliberations as the essence of democracy … should be attracted by the discursive style of public spheres.'

In both north and south, theories of deliberative democracy have spawned a huge and interesting array of innovations in practice. In the north, these include such face-to-face approaches as deliberative polling, large scale deliberative meetings, or citizens juries – many of which seek to gain participation through some form of representative sampling of citizens, who then deliberate together to propose new – and arguably more reasoned – solutions to public issues. Other methods are experimenting with various forms of e-dialogue and e-democracy. In the south, not only are deliberative experiments also being tried (e.g. in India and China), but also may be influential in examining processes of public deliberation found in the citizens fora in Indonesia and participatory budgeting and health councils in Brazil. In many of these projects, the emphasis is often on processes of recruitment which seek to avoid capture by organised groups and special interests, rather than on mobilising and supporting such groups to demand inclusion in public processes.[6]

As other approaches to deepening democracy, the theory and practice of deliberation comes under criticism from those in other schools on a number of counts: favoring consensus at the expense of difference; being built on narrow understandings of what constitutes reason and how people deliberate (especially across cultures); underestimating the value of advocacy and counter-veiling power, as well as the role of conflict in public life; and making assumptions about the nature of public space which may not exist in many societies (see, for instance, Cornwall and Coelho, forthcoming; and von Lieres and Kahane, forthcoming). Inevitably, some argue, there will be trade-offs between the quality of deliberation and the depth and quantity of participation, and how and by whom such trade-offs are made may be grounds for contention. At the same time, at the practical level, exchanges between practitioners of advocacy, participatory and deliberative strategies have also found a great deal of common ground for discussion and learning across strategies, such as found in recent exchanges between LogoLink partners in the south and members of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium in the north.

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6   For further information of some of this work on deliberation visit the Deliberative
     Democracy Consortium at www.deliberation-democracy.net

3.4 Empowered participatory governance (EPG)

Most recently, Archon Fung and Eric Olin Wright (2003) have sought to link various strands from each of these schools in their work on *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance* (see also Fung 2004). Separately from this work, they also point out that representative democracy, associational democracy, or more direct forms of participation, can each have 'thin' or 'deep' democracy versions. Moreover, as the following chart points out, 'deeper' forms of empowered governance, do not replace, but complement 'deeper' forms of engagement in elections, or in the associational sphere.

Focusing then on four examples of what they then call 'empowered participatory governance' in both north and south,[7] Fung and Wright (2003) argue that these reforms 'aspire to deepen the ways in which ordinary people can effectively participate in and influence policies which affect their lives … They are participatory because they rely upon the commitment and capabilities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation and empowered because they attempt to tied action to discussion' (2003: 5) An 'empowered participatory governance' orientation is based on principles of bottom-up participation, starting with a pragmatic orientation to solve concrete problems. At the same time, it seeks to foster deliberation in which 'participants listen to each other's positions and generate group choices after due consideration' (2003: 17). Finally it has several design properties, including (a) a focus on devolution, but to mechanisms which have public authority; (b) coordination and supervision by a strong central body to insure quality and to diffuse learning, and (c) an attempt to harness state power. Finally, the EPG approach also recognises the importance of countervailing forms of power which help to open the public spaces and insure they do not become captured by existing power holders.[8]

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7   These include neighborhood governance councils in Chicago; conservation planning processes in the US; participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil; and Panchayat reforms in West Bengal and Kerala, India.

8   While Fung's work also especially focuses on how public policies and institutions can be designed to enable such forms of empowered governance, the characteristics of the approach are very similar to those also emphasised by Avritzer, who starts with how participation occurs in public spaces but then how it be can be extended into the creation and design of public institutions. Nevertheless, the process involves several common elements: the first are 'mechanisms of face-to-face deliberation, free expression and association'; the second is that social movements and voluntary associations will introduce into these spaces alternative ideas about contentious issues; the third is that there will be a forum for public deliberation and decision-making, and the final is that deliberations become binding through institutional formats which address 'at the institutional level the issues made contentious at the public level (2002: 7).

**Three Dimensional Democracy
(Fung and Wright IDS seminar presentation, May 2004)**

	Thin democracy	Deep democracy
Elections and representation	Weak parties, disengaged electorate	Egalitarian, engaged elections
Associations	Bureaucratic corporatism	Associative democracy
Direct participation	Plebiscitary referenda	**Empowered participatory governance**

While the work of Fung and Wright is too recent to have received a great deal of published scrutiny, they themselves raise and attempt to deal with possible criticisms of the model. These include (a) the risk of elite domination or capture; (b) that the scope of decision-making will be limited by external actors and conditions; that (c) the empowered institutions will fall prey to 'rent-seeking' behaviours; (d) that devolution may 'balkanize the polity'; (e) that participation may demand 'unrealistically high levels of popular commitment' and (f) that these experiments may be difficult to sustain over the long term (Fung and Wright 2003: 33). Further arguments could be raised about not going far enough to grapple in depth with the problem of power. As they write, one background enabling condition for these approaches is that 'there is a rough equality of power, for the purposes of deliberative decision-making, between participants' (2003: 25) – a condition that will be found lacking in many parts of the world.

While the 'civil society', 'participatory', 'deliberative' and 'empowered participatory governance' approaches give four conceptually overlapping approaches to deepening democracy, in practice of course the distinctions are never so clear. What is important is not so much to argue for one approach or the other, but to deepen our understanding of all of them, and to ask how – together or separately – they begin to respond with some of the democratic deficits of different political settings examined in the earlier section. Moreover, as these deepening democracy approaches begin to gain purchase in some parts of the world, we must look at how they engage with, strengthen or weaken other concepts and practices of democracy as well. To do so, our knowledge must also be deepened about these approaches – when they work, for whom, and in what conditions.

4 Deepening the deepening democracy debate

As debates and innovations in deepening forms of democracy spread, old questions about democracy building persist while new ones emerge. The following are a series of contemporary challenges which future work in the deepening democracy agenda may need to address.

4.1 From 'democracy' to 'democracies': the need to pluralise the debate

As we have seen in this paper, the language of democracy is now widely used by a range of actors, from large multilateral institutions and powerful foreign aid programmes, to grassroots activists and social movements. Yet the word democracy has radically different meanings, with radically different consequences for practice. For some, democracy may be a pretense for consolidating global power and military might; for others the agenda is one of less governance, driven by a neoliberal, efficiency perspective; for others it is about strengthening local governance through greater citizen participation; for yet others it is about using the spaces and opportunities of democracy for creating broader social change and social justice.

At the same time, in much of the literature and policies, certain models of democracy – usually those based on neoliberal or liberal representative understandings – often remain hegemonic. An important part of democracy work is thus to democratise the debate itself, to move beyond one-size fits all approaches. In this view, democracy may be seen as constantly contested and under construction. In different settings and contexts these constructions will take different forms. The issue is not replicating one version of democracy, as a standard set of institutions and practices, but to construct and deepen *democracies*, which may work differently in different places, and to find the most effective entry points for doing so, based on the local contexts. At the same time, while recognising the diversity of forms of democracy, such diversity does not preclude more universal commitment to its underlying values, which may compete with other values within and across cultures. As Amartya Sen (1999: 16) writes in his important work on this subject, 'The value of democracy includes its *intrinsic importance* in human life, its *instrumental role* in generating political incentives, and its *constructive function* in the formation of values (an in understanding the force and feasibility of claims of needs, rights, and duties.) These merits are not regional in character…The cultural argument does not foreclose, nor indeed deeply constrain, the choices we make today.'

4.2 Democracies in different political settings

Even as alternative conceptions and practices of democratic practices emerge, there is a danger that one blueprint will simply substitute for another. Already,

for instance, we have seen the rapid spread and promotion of the Porto Alegre approach to participatory budgeting as a democratic 'solution' to perceived deficits in other parts of the world, often without any consideration of issues of appropriateness within that context, nor understanding of the specific conditions under which it emerged in Brazil. Indeed, many of the 'success' stories in the deepening democracy literature come from a relatively few countries (e.g. Brazil, the Philippines, India, South Africa and some parts of the north) which share certain key characteristics – relatively strong or at least functioning states, strong civil societies, and often a social movement, party or strong political leadership which has worked to create new democratic spaces for participation.

As we know, such characteristics are not found in large parts of the world (e.g. Nigeria, China, Indonesia or Egypt). A key challenge, therefore, is to develop and systematise our understanding of the entry points for democracy work in different settings. What are the strategies for building more participatory governance in places with weak or non-functioning states, in regions of conflict and large-scale violence, in places with little history of organised civil society engagement, in post-authoritarian regimes? In such settings, the most obvious beginning place may not be elections (as one model would suggest), or empowered deliberative co-governance (as another would imply). Rather, deepening democracy may involve other strategies such as constructing and supporting political cultures of rights and citizenship; finding whatever public spaces exist, no matter how small, and strengthening and expanding them from within (e.g. the citizens' fora in Indonesia); or supporting emerging actors who in the first instance do not engage directly with the state, but are creating opportunities for learning and practicing democracy in other spheres. In conflict and post-conflict settings, other strategies may involve exploring how participatory strategies are or could be used in processes of peace building and reconstruction. No matter where democracy deepening occurs, far more work is needed in general on how to map and understand the social practices of engagement in that context, and to understand how key concepts like deliberation, participation and decision making are understood and practiced in local cultures. Taking a constructionist approach to democracy means that the strategies for deepening democracy will look differently in different places, but at the same time we need more systematic knowledge than we currently have of what the promising strategies might be across a much wider range of political and social conditions.

4.3 Linking the civil and the political

As discussed earlier, much of the work for democracy building in the previous decade focused on civil society building and state reform as somewhat separate projects. As this paper and others have argued, this separation between the civil and political societies may need to be re-considered. As civil society and the state increasingly interact in processes of co-governance, the challenge is to understand better the intersection of the two spheres, as well as to

systematically 'work on both sides of the equation' to strengthen the depth and quality of their overlap. And, as civil society engages with the state in new ways, many argue that it must also it must go beyond what some perceive as an apolitical view of participation and deliberation as to engage with much more *political* processes of aggregation of interests and distribution of power, traditionally the terrain of parties, and legislatures and other political actors. Put simply, to be meaningful, participatory processes must engage with and change political power.

To say this however immediately raises several other questions which need further exploration:

● First, we need much more work on how to analyse power relations in different settings. Where does real power reside? How in a changing world is it exercised? How does power open and close political spaces? What are the practical tools for how to map power, and identifying the strategic for confronting it? (For further elaboration on this see Gaventa 2005).

● Secondly, we need much better understanding of how participatory and deliberative processes for deepening democracy interact with and strengthen the traditional institutions of representative democracy. And, few deepening democracy theorists would argue that participatory or deliberative processes should substitute for other democratic processes, such as elections or party building. As seen in the earlier chart by Fung and Wright, there can be 'thin' and 'deep' versions of electoral democracy as well as participatory democracy. Potentially deepening processes in one arena can help to deepen the other. However, many argue that participatory and deliberative processes can have the opposite effect, e.g. they can serve to undermine more traditional democratic processes and institutions. Not enough is understood about how and under what conditions these approaches interact to strengthen one another.

● Thirdly, if we are concerned about deepening democracy in both its traditional representative as well as its more participatory forms, what are the best strategies for doing so in different settings? Is it to form or build links with political parties? To run civil society leaders for office? To enter co-governance spaces? If so, as advocates; as deliberators; as governors? How do these processes interact? Are dual strategies implied, or sequential approaches?[9] Far more work needs to be done to document and to understand the best strategies for linking civil and political society towards 'political capacity building' – from building alternative political parties, to monitoring existing ones, to civic and political education.[10]

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9   Note the very interesting work from the Philippines experience on how civil society incorporated multiple strategies simultaneously in their work on local governance (Estrella and Iszatt 2004).

4.4 Bringing in rights and citizenship

Any view of democracy also implies a view of citizenship, and the rights and duties associated with it. And, as more robust views of democracy emerge, so too do important debates occur about the meanings of citizenship, the sites in which it is attained, and how rights are created and claimed. As Dagnino writes in the Latin American context, 'citizenship became a prominent notion in the two last decades because it was recognized as a crucial weapon, not only in the struggle against social and economic exclusion and inequality but – most importantly – in the widening of dominant conceptions of politics itself' (Dagnino 2005: 150). In this view, citizenship is not bestowed by the state, or by a set of legal norms, rather (or in addition), it is attained through practice, based on different identities and struggles around concrete issues. In this more robust view, the rights associated with democracy include not only political and civil rights, but also social rights, and in some views, the right to participation, e.g. to participate in claiming rights, and even to participate in *creating* new rights, through new social demands.

While such a view inevitably intertwines ideas of rights, citizenship, democracy and participation, in the programs of donors, NGOs, and researchers, these are often considered as separate projects. Work on rights often is equated with work on 'human rights' and the international legal standards associated with it. Work on democracy-building and participation is often more actor-oriented, and grounded in conceptions and struggles of social justice at the local level. There is a need to examine these debates and projects together, to see how one strengthens the other. In this view, participatory action can enliven and strengthen work on rights, and work on rights can strengthen the claims to fuller citizenship and participation.[11]

4.5 Diversity, identity and inclusion

One of the strengths of the more robust conceptions of citizenship is that they see citizenship as linked to various notions of identity – be they around gender, ethnicity, or community – and that citizenship is attained through action not only *vis-a-vis* the state, but in other sites of politics as well, be they in the home, acts of cultural resistance, or social movements (e.g. Lister 1997; Luckham *et al.* 2000: 32). Building on these conceptions, other democratic theorists (sometimes known as 'difference democrats'), focus on the politics of inclusion of different identities in democratic processes and institutions. Chantal Mouffe,

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10 I am grateful to lessons from Hans Antlov and others on this point, arising from the workshop on 'political capacity building for NGOs', Jakarta, Indonesia, September 2004.

11 For a body of work on this theme see Dagnino (2005), Kabeer (2005), and other publications associated with the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability at www.ids.ac.uk/drc-citizen.

for instance, challenges both the 'aggregative model' which 'sees political actors as being moved by the pursuit of their interests' and the 'deliberative model', which 'stresses the role of reason and moral considerations'. *Both* of these models', she argues, 'leave aside the central role of "passions" in the creation of collective political identities' (Mouffe 2002: 8). Others, such as Iris Marion Young (2000), support the idea of a deliberative democracy, but examine how multiple identities and perspectives can be brought to deliberative processes.

Whatever the theoretical perspective, a further critical challenge for the deepening democracy movement is how it engages with the debates on issues of difference, diversity and inclusion in the political process, and whether its approaches actually broaden the space for inclusion in better ways than previous approaches. Simply arguing for more participation begs the question of 'participation by whom?' Simply opening new spaces for engagement does not mean that they will be filled by different voices. Rather, spaces are imbued and filled with prior power relations, affecting who enters them, with what knowledge, and with what effects (Cornwall 2002). A series of critical questions must be asked about how of concepts and practices of deepening reconcile issues of difference and diversity with often more universalising notions of participation and deliberation (Cornwall and Goetz 2005). This is important not only in relation to gender, as feminist critics of democracy have long argued, but also in relationship to issues of ethnicity, the relationships of customary traditions and institutions to more 'modern' democratic forms, and to other cultural and social identities.

4.6 Who speaks for whom? The challenges of representation and legitimacy

Questions of inclusion and identity are very closely linked to questions about who speaks for whom, and with what legitimacy, in democratic processes. Often within the democracy literature, representative forms of democracy, in which leaders are elected by their constituents to represent them, are contrasted with more deliberative or participatory forms of democracy (as this paper has also done!). Yet participation *also* includes processes of representation, through which some speak for others as intermediaries in policy or governance processes, often through claims to legitimacy other than elections – such as experience, common identity, traditional authority, or proximity. Yet, unlike elections, as corrupt or unrepresentative as they may be in some circumstances, other forms of legitimacy often lack clear rules or norms by which they can be judged and held accountable.

As traditional norms of governance and decision-making change, contestations over legitimate representation may grow. In the UK, such issues have led to conflict between political representatives and community leaders in neighborhood renewal programs (Gaventa 2004). In Brazil, work by Lavalle *et al.* (2005) on the participatory councils and budgeting processes reveals that representatives derive their legitimacy from a broad range of sources and

identities, some of which may be competing. At the international level, struggles for legitimacy, some argue, are creating an emerging set of new 'representation rules' (Van Rooy 2004). Given that in any democratic process some process of representation will be going on, continued work is needed to examine these alternative forms of legitimacy and accountability, how they map onto existing forms and institutions of representative democracy, and how they vary across issues and settings. If representatives in public policy processes come from key organisations, how are those organisations chosen and credentialed? If leaders are elected from 'the community', who counts as that community? If they are chosen to represent particular 'identities', who participates in that process and which 'identities' are acceptable over others?

4.7 Democracy, resources and inequality

A key conundrum for proponents of democracy is that despite its spread and deepening (in some places), we have also seen the simultaneous rise of massive economic inequality in many countries and across the world. The 'deepened democracy' solution to this problem might be to argue that through more inclusive and substantive forms of democracy, in which non-elites exercise some real power, then policies that promote inequality are likely to be challenged in favour of more progressive and redistributive ones. In fact, with rare exceptions such as Porto Alegre (Navarro 1998), we have little evidence of where this is happening. There may be many reasons for this. First, as seen in the recent US elections, people may choose to participate more intensely on other identities, such as cultural or religious values, rather than economic interests. Secondly, as pointed out in a recent study by ActionAid (Rowden and Irama 2004), key issues related to economic policies – be they fiscal policy, monetary policy, privatisation, trade, labour, or foreign investments – are often off the agenda of public debate. Even where people do engage in economic issues, they often face very powerful adversaries in the form of multinational corporations or global institutions, who feel very little accountability to ordinary citizens or their associations.

A key challenge for the deepening democracy movement therefore is to find ways in which citizens may engage more fully in economic policies and decisions which affect their lives. The long-standing work by civil society networks such as the International Budget Project on budget monitoring and advocacy and the current work by the Learning Initiative on Citizen Participation in Local Governance (LogoLink) on citizen engagement in resource decisions at the local level, partially address this agenda (Logolink 2005). But, other issues include how citizens engage in holding corporations to account across global borders (Garvey and Newell 2004), how they engage with international financial institutions, how to exercise citizenship in the context of privatisation (where democratic rights are eroded in favor of consumerism and a market logic), and how to gain the economic knowledge and literacy to pry open other aspects of economic decision-making for greater public scrutiny and involvement.

4.8 Deepening democracy by looking up: from the local to the global

While much of the debate on democracy in the last decade has focused on deepening its practice at the local and national levels, increasingly the debates look upwards and are linked to global issues. There are two arguments for this. First, as increasingly recognised by those who work on local democracy, various international practices, networks, discourses, institutions constantly constrain or enhance the opening and deepening of democratic spaces at the local and national level. In the context of globalisation, therefore, one cannot talk of deepening democracy locally, without also looking at the impact of actors and decisions beyond global borders. Secondly, there is a growing debate on global civil society and global governance which raises important questions about the forms and possibilities of deepening democratic engagement at the global level as well. Within this hot debate, some democratic theorists argue for the idea of 'cosmopolitan' democracy, referring to laws and political communities which transcend particular nations and states (Held 1995, among others). Others warn against this concept, arguing that in the absence of any meaningful form of global governance which can enforce global rights and claims of citizens, that ideas of cosmopolitanism may weaken existing democratic states (Fox 2005). Still others argue that just as at a local level, a global civil society in and of itself will not necessarily strengthen democracy – the issue is whether and how it can become a source of democratic power (Wainwright 2004).

The challenge may be found in not treating the local, national and global democracy debates as separate ones. Rather, there are key issues to be explored about vertical forms of accountability and engagement, through which local voices can exercise power around global decisions, and global decisions and discourses (e.g. around UN conventions) can be made real at the local level. Programmatically, the challenge for advocates of deepening democracy may be how to link together the historically important work on issues at local level with other currently important work on civil society engagement and democratic governance at the global level (Edwards and Gaventa 2001).

4.9 Supporting the democratic imagination

The question of whether there can be a meaningful form of global citizenship or global democratic governance links to my final point. If we understand democracy not as a set of institutional designs, but as a concept constantly under construction through contestation amongst actors in different settings, then to support the process of democracy building we must also find and support emerging visions and imaginations of what democracy might become. Taking a historical view (as this paper began), if we remember that at the beginning of the twentieth century not one state met the current widely accepted democratic standard of universal electoral suffrage, and yet now many do so, then we must also imagine forward and ask 'what might the

democracies of the end of the twenty-first century become?'[12] And, if we remember that historically, the expansion of democratic rights and more substantive and inclusive forms of citizenship came through social movements and innovations from below, as well as through interventions from above, then we must ask in our different settings, 'where are those movements and innovations that will construct deeper and wider forms of democracy for the future?' Wherever they are, is where work on deepening democracy ought also to be.

12   I am grateful to Sanjeev Khagram (2004) and Khagram and Ali (2004) at the Hauser Centre for this point.

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