

The Future of Representative Democracy

Book Proposal

The Core Question:

With a close eye on the two-century-old relationship between democracy and representation, this book develops fresh perspectives on the uncertain future of representative democracy. Historically speaking, the synthesis of democracy and representation was supposed to serve the cause of democracy by improving its effectiveness and legitimacy. However, some contemporary observers think that processes of unelected representation have begun to supplant democratic government; or that the core institutions of representative democracy (elections, parties, parliaments) are in deep trouble. Others argue that the asymmetric representation of interests and groups is hollowing out democracy's core principle of political equality. How plausible are these various diagnoses? And if there is some truth in them, are there ways of renewing the relationship between representation and democracy in order to improve the quality or possibly change the meaning and significance of representative democracy?

Principal Themes:

- 1) This book represents an integrated collection of contributions by leading scholars on the subject of representation, representative democracy and its future. It aspires to be the best book on the subject, taking into account, discussing and even contesting the various attempts to tackle the issue of representative government in recent scholarship, all the while addressing the gaps left by them. The volume moves away from the usual European-centred approach by looking at the universal appeal of representative government and non-European examples of representative democracy. The book takes policy-specific discussions on board when diagnosing the current problems and possible futures of representative democratic institutions, and when envisaging new institutional forms and inventions. The book adopts an interdisciplinary approach. Its contributors come from different disciplinary backgrounds, including political science, political theory, international relations, sociology, media and gender studies.

- 2) The interdisciplinary approach is designed to enrich and bind together the book's contributions, which are also targeted at the standard literature on the subject, including Bernard Manin's *The Principles of Representative Government* (1997), which takes a close and rather suspicious look at the key features of modern democratic institutions; considering democracy as a consciously chosen alternative to popular self-rule, Manin sees in representation a rationally planned balance of aristocratic and democratic components. Jack Hayward's *The Crisis of Representation in Europe* (1995) focuses on the status of representative democracy in the European region. As its title suggests, it diagnoses what it takes to be an important crisis of legitimacy and discusses the decline of party support and failures of national parliaments and national party systems. The book concentrates on the nation-state level, although it does address problems of representation within a European Union context. Hanna Pitkin's revisiting of the concept of representative democracy almost 40 years after the publication of her seminal book, *The Concept of Representation* (1967), in an article entitled 'Representation and Democracy: An Uneasy Alliance' (*Scandinavian Political Studies*, 2004, 27, 3: 335-342) is another approach. It suggests that "representative government has become a new form of oligarchy, with ordinary people excluded from public life". Revisiting the relationship between democracy and representation, Pitkin finds it problematic and even dangerous since "a self-perpetuating elite rules passive or privatized masses of people". The solution to the problem, according to her, is to expand participatory politics at the local level and to tackle successfully the three obstacles that stand in the way: the scope of public problems and private power; inequalities of wealth; and ideas and their shaping in an age of electronic media.
- 3) The book addresses not only the work of these three authors, but also the wider literature on the subject, especially work that has important things to say about the need for improved forms of representation of citizens' interests, the present-day meaning of representative democracy, and the importance of processes of public deliberation in a democracy. There are three broad identifiable trends in contemporary scholarship: (a) work that is preoccupied with normative and strategic questions concerning the rise of new forms of identity politics, such as multiculturalism, and with the need for better representation of new social interests in government, for instance through an analysis of the meaning of fair representation and the search for electoral mechanisms that can better ensure the representation of diverse social interests (Kymlicka; Young, Phillips; and

Guinier); (b) approaches that target the semantics of ‘representation’ and ‘democracy’, and the way in which these terms were combined in practice into a new form of territorially bound constitutional state known as ‘representative democracy’ (C.B. Macpherson; Bobbio; Friedrich; Sartori); and (c) theories of ‘deliberative democracy’ that explore one vital (if narrow) dimension of representation, to do with how and why processes of public deliberation can and should be fed into decision-making processes (Habermas; Elster; Goodin; Dryzek). The fundamental point of this volume is that there is now an opportunity to synthesise and expand these different but overlapping approaches by productively broadening their theoretical and empirical horizons and charging them with a strong current of historically based awareness of present-day trends and possible mutations within the existing forms of representative democracy.

- 4) This book is about the neglected relationship between representation and democracy. Democracy and representation are often seen as two different phenomena, with well established and independent historical origins. Democracy originated with the ancient Greeks, although as a language and practice it had much older roots. Athenian democracy knew no notion of representation, and thought of itself as direct and participatory, and restricted to a few people. Foreigners, slaves and women were excluded from the *demos*. Representation as a political idea and practice emerged only from the time of the medieval period and initially had nothing to do with democracy. The synthesis of democracy and representation did not take place until the great democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century and struggles for the extension of the suffrage. For some political writers, representative democracy meant a way of limiting the democratic impulse and controlling the lower classes. For others, it was the diminished version of the Greek ideal, in the sense that it was seen as the practical expression of a simple reality: that it wasn’t feasible for all of the people to be involved all of the time, even if they were so inclined, in the business of government. For still others, the grafting of representation onto democracy had definite advantages: for instance, by extending the geographic scale of democracy; recognising the importance of leadership; above all, by opening up of political power relations to periodic or permanent self-investigation by citizens and their representatives. Regardless of what is thought in retrospect about the synthesis, it certainly changed the original meaning of both representation and democracy. Representation had to make room for equality and democracy had to make room for delegation (responsiveness and accountability). The book

discusses the various meanings and practices of representation, both inside and outside the realm of democratic government. It examines the forms of representation (beyond the exclusively electoral ones) that might fill the gaps to be found in existing representative democracies. The book also revisits the reasons that were given for the superiority of representative democracy and evaluates present day democracies against the backdrop of this supposed superiority.

5) The book makes use of abundant empirical material to illustrate the theoretical and normative points mentioned above, and to explore the assumption underlying the modern expectation that representative mechanisms serve the cause of democratic government. It notes that free elections are supposed to lead to meaningful elections and that these, in turn, lead to good representation. Why is it necessary to re-evaluate this assumption that political representation serves the cause of democratic government? The reasons are to be found in the developments taking place in present-day representative democracies, developments that have led some analysts to talk about a crisis of representation. Among such developments, the book will discuss the following trends:

- Electoral turnout is low or very low. Elections are not a sufficient instrument of control over representatives by citizens. Electoral laws are designed or manipulated in order to favour or guarantee a particular outcome. Are elections an effective way of making elected officials accountable? Is democratic representation possible without fairly high electoral participation? Many problems (such as corruption, lack of accountability, disproportionality) may be ameliorated through institutional improvements. However, elections alone may not be a sufficient condition of the quest to produce fair representation. If this is the case, the “democratization of democracies” beyond elections has to be put on the agenda.
- Political parties find it increasingly difficult to attract citizens. Membership figures have dropped. Corruption in party finance is ubiquitous. Cartel parties (Katz & Mair) are involved in a corrosive effort to keep out other political parties from electoral competition. Given this dismal reality, how necessary are parties for the functioning of representative democracy? Can representative democracy work without parties? For some, representative democracy is party democracy. Parties

are an intrinsic part of the process of representation, understood as both delegation and advocacy; political deliberation, a constitutive part of the act of representation, is seen as unavoidably partisan. For others, representative democracy existed before parties, which are a relatively new invention. The book explores the possibility of a democracy without parties.

- The book also asks whether there is something of a developing ‘crisis’ of legislatures. Parliaments are highly discredited in the eyes of some parts of the citizenry. The decline can be traced, on the one hand, to the erosion of representative and accountability functions with a high public salience; on the other, to parliament’s association with aspects of politics that have become increasingly unpopular, not to say discredited, in the public mind, such as extreme partisanship (in the sense of sectarianism) and “money politics”. The conclusion of the book is not that parliaments are no longer important, but that what is needed is the reinvention of parliaments in ways that have not so far been envisaged. It may also be that new forms of participation designed to engage citizens in politics, forms that bypass parliament, are not enough to avoid the alienation of the public from parliament, and that such bypassing can in fact contribute to the deepening of political disaffection.
- The volume examines the vital matter of degrees of representativeness and their relationship to the democratic value of equality. In modern societies that are heterogeneous in terms of gender, race, ethnic and cultural background, wealth, sexual orientation, religious denomination, etc., there is a clamor from below to make space for the equal participation of all and for the representation of all. There are different normative visions of how to represent heterogeneity (descriptive representation versus substantive representation) and different visions of democratic equality (equality of opportunity versus equality of result) with clear empirical and practical implications. Representative democracies are currently engaged in public discussion of such issues, and it is clear that new forms of representation and participation of minorities will need to be developed in order to further democratize our societies.
- The book examines the problem of representation of nations and national identity. According to some observers, we have entered a new age of denationalization in international politics and institutions. These institutions are no longer mere agents of democratically elected

governments. However, when it comes to the supranational and transnational regulation of denationalized issues, the existing modes of representation are still heavily weighted in favour of territorially-organized representation through elected executives and sectoral organized representation (including lobbying) through interest groups. But the cases of Spain and other countries suggest that representation within “multinational nation-states” is moving in new directions. Modern representative democracies must find acceptable modes of representing their multinational societies. In present day democracies, minority nationalisms, their organizations (cultural movements and political parties) and supporters (nationalist party activists and nationalist voters), represent a fundamental challenge to the nation-state. In its maximalist version, minority nationalists seek their own states. In its pragmatic version, minority nationalists are willing to accommodate themselves into flexible, multinational state forms. In order to face this new challenge, representative democracies in multinational states may well have to accept their intrinsically provisional status, to recognise that the constitutional identity of society is always provisional, and that representative claims are always contested and contestable. Seen in this way, a multinational representative democracy is therefore not a way of solving, once and for ever, nationalist claims; it is a democratic way of dealing with them now and in the future.

- The volume pays attention to the challenge posed by globalisation to existing mechanisms of democratic representation. The growing pressure of cross-border processes upon territorial states is among the key trends of our times, but such a development has serious and far-reaching implications for the theory and practice of representative democracy in territorial state form. How can existing representative democracies best handle the mounting cross-border forces? Are new means required at home and abroad? How politically significant is the proliferation of summits, Aarhus-style conventions, peer-review panels and other new forms of representation? What is their relationship (if any) to representative democracy as it has been conventionally understood by scholars? Does it make any sense to speak of the spread of representative democracy beyond borders? These and other questions will form an important part of this volume.

6) The contributors to the book have an open mind about whether or to what extent there are serious alternatives to representative democracy. It asks: given the diagnosis of the kinds of contemporary problems outlined above, what kinds of future(s) does representative democracy have? The book explores possible answers to this question by examining three themes:

- The universality or particularity of the Western model, especially when judged in terms of past experiences, long-term consequences and future potentials of exporting representative democracy to non-Western contexts. In this volume, India will serve as a metaphor for non-Western representative democracy. Looking beyond India's clichéd characterisation as 'the world's largest democracy', the book will pay attention to the many ways in which representative democracy in this country is quite at odds with textbook accounts of the subject. Acknowledging its various religious, ethnic and regional divisions along with its constant serious economic underdevelopment, which make India's 60-year old democratic experience a rare and important event in post-colonial history and a case worth looking at, the book asks questions about what India's example might teach us about the whole subject of representative democracy and its future.
- The book reconsiders the relationship between media and representative democracy. In an era in which power relationships are heavily mediated, our notions of democracy, of representation and of political institutions are formed in and through media representations. But how does this happen and whom do the media themselves represent? Does the growth of new forms of computer-mediated communication force systemic changes in the meaning and practice of contemporary democratic representation? Half a century after the emergence of the earliest scholarly discourses on the effects of television on politics and citizenship, a new debate has erupted about the impact of recent technological developments. As representative bodies have come under increasing pressure either to connect more directly with citizens or to risk becoming marginalised, there has been a dawning recognition that digital forms of communication may provide a way of making institutions more accessible to public inputs. E-government, the internet, mobile technologies, blogging and the emergence of a network society are some of the terms that have become fashionable. They have had the effect of stimulating debate about the

possibilities of enhanced public accountability and the need to invigorate democratic communication in matters of representation. However, the new media remain for some scholars vulnerable to exploitation and mishandling. The book will examine the various trends and counter-trends, and their profound implications for the relationship between representation and democracy.

- The volume reconsiders the time-bound and future-oriented quality of representation under democratic conditions. It addresses the trade-off between responsibility (future-oriented representation) and responsiveness (immediacy, time-bound or ‘myopic’ representation) in connection with pressing challenges faced by actually existing representative democracies, for instance in the realms of environmental policy and science and technology policy. Focusing on the growing engagement of mainstream political thinking with the environmental agenda, the book examines the challenges posed to modern representative democracies, including their need to shift away from an anthropocentric bias and to make use of precautionary principles on a global scale.

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Introduction: What crisis of representation? (Wolfgang Merkel and Sonia Alonso)

Part 1: The Relationship between Representation and Democracy: Origins - Historicity - Definitions – Problems

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2. **The Present Forms of Representative Democracy** (Klaus von Beyme, Institut für Politische Wissenschaft, University of Heidelberg)
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Part 2: Contemporary problems in representative democracies: diagnosis and possible solutions

4. **Performance and Deficits of Present-day Representation** (Bernhard Weßels, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung)

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(Philippe Schmitter, Central European University and European University Institute)
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(Sonia Alonso, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung)

Part 3: Future of Representative Democracy: prospects and new forms of representation (other substantive themes for possible inclusion)

9. title tbc [**Monitory Democracy**] (John Keane, Center for the Study of Democracy and Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung)
10. **Time-bound and future-oriented representation (Robyn Eckersley, University of Melbourne)**
11. **title to be confirmed [Representation beyond the Nation-State]** (Michael Zürn and Gregor Walter-Drop, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin and Hertie School of Governance)

Production details

Contacted publisher: Cambridge University Press.

Length of book: 140,000 words, maximum.

Length of individual chapters: 7500 words, maximum.

Population target: With the aim of being the best book on the subject, the range is considerable: teachers and students alike, the aim is for the book to be adopted at schools and higher education. Given its interdisciplinary and international scope, it aims both to European readership and overseas; translations in various languages are possible, and desirable.