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Aligning Democracy: A Comment on Bruno S. Frey's "Proposals for a Democracy of the Future"

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Abstract Bruno S. Frey suggests nine Proposals to refine future democratic processes. This paper unifies subsets of Frey's Proposals. In doing so, certain Proposals are further supported while others are challenged. In addition, I suggest that our increased global reliance as well as advances in technology should force further changes to our democratic institutions.

1 Introduction

Aristotle suggested that a citizen's individual liberty is intrinsically tied to their participation in political life. In his day, Aristotle was tasked with promoting participation and civic virtue within small populations of homogeneous people. As our populations have become increasingly heterogeneous and our republican thought has turned democratic, the task of promoting citizenry has become even more daunting (Sandel 1998). A natural line of inquiry is to investigate revisions to democracy that would align our institutions with the evolved responsibility of modern citizens. The essay by Frey (2017) provides nine concrete Proposals aimed at this task. The contribution of this paper, here, is twofold. First, this paper unifies

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subsets of Frey's Proposals using different underlying themes. I am enthusiastic about Frey's venture and I agree with much of Frey's composition and subsequent nine Proposals. However, in an effort to further advance Frey's original work, I largely reserve attention towards critical aspects of the nine Proposals. The second section proposes new challenges for the future of democracy based on advances in technology and our increased global reliance.

2 Frey's Proposals

2.1 Purpose-Driven Democracy

Democratic processes are used to aggregate individual preferences into a group decision. This external property is useful in a broad range of applications from electing people into the most powerful positions in the world to electing a suitable establishment for a group lunch. There are many refinements that a democratic process can include and Frey illustrates particularly novel suggestions with his nine Proposals. When considering refinements for modern-day and future democratic processes, we can apply a teleological approach which, maybe coincidently, is a tool as old as democracy itself.[1] The inclusion of any democratic refinement should be contingent on its alignment with the intrinsic purpose, or "telos", of that democratic process. Frey suggests that democracy can be extended to non-political spheres, such as within incorporated companies. However, different companies serve different purposes and the level of democracy can flexibly align with the unique purpose of each company. For instance, if the purpose of the company is to endow power equally across all workers, regardless of their position, experience, or stock holdings, then voting rights should be equally spread across all workers. A different company could champion the purpose of granting power to those in proportion to their monetary holding in the company. The latter would endow voting rights proportional to the number of stocks held.[2] An extreme case would be a company whose purpose is to endow power to the individual with the most amount of monetary earnings to lose, which would lead to a dictatorship. With the case of incorporated companies, different purposes dictate different levels of democracy. More generally, the intrinsic purpose of any group decision will dictate whether it is appropriate to introduce democratic ideals. In this way, teleological thinking can serve as a guideline for Proposals 6.1 and 6.2. Whether a political (Prop 6.2) or non-political (Prop 6.1) organization adopts a democratic platform will depend on the purpose of the organization.

Proposals 6.3 and 6.4 offer novel ways to progressively increase or decrease an individual's voting weight based on the amount of time they reside within a country's borders. In these Proposals, foreigners will gain a percentage of a vote for every year they live within a country and nationals living abroad will lose a

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[1] Teleological thinking is largely credited to Plato and Aristotle (Barker 1958).

[2] However, an analysis using power indices shows that this approach hardly ever guarantees proportionality of power (Holler and Nurmi 2013).

percentage of their vote for every year they live outside a county. It seems clear that endowing proportional voting rights is a more desirable method than an all-or-nothing policy based on a country's classification of citizenship. However, a teleological criticism can be raised against these Proposals. Is the purpose of these democracies to reward those who have resided the most amount of years within the physical boarders of that society? Proposals 6.3 and 6.4 can be improved upon by endowed voting power proportional to a more meaningful measure of involvement in society. For example, individuals who are more affected by the outcome of the vote should have a higher voting power. Proposal 6.5, which splits an individual's voting power based on where they live and where they work, clearly illustrates that Frey anticipates a teleological approach. While this Proposal only applies to individuals who commute to work, it is attractive because it can be immediately implemented. A future challenge is to find other meaningful and measurable factors that can be used to allocate proportional voting power.

2.2 Important Social Change

Suggesting that older voters have greater power in constitutional reform (Proposal 6.6) relies on a "mechanism design" argument that disconnects the voters (elderly) from the consequences of the vote (disproportionately the young). In this way, direct personal interest is somewhat removed from the voting process which may lead to more socially beneficial choices. However, endowing any group with a disproportionate amount of voting power will also serve to disproportionately propagate that group's beliefs. In the case of the elderly, empirical evidence suggests that endowing them with a disproportionate amount of voting power could disrupt the progression of human rights. As an example, consider the modern debate over the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States. A Pew research poll "5 facts about same-sex marriage 2015" conducted yearly from 2005 to 2015 compared the support for legalizing same-sex marriage across four different generations: the Silent generation (born between 1928 and 1945), Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980), and Millennials (born after 1980). The overall trend is that all generations are becoming more supportive of same-sex marriage. However, the percentage of supporters within each generation was always negatively related to age. For each of the 11 years of polling, Millennials supported same-sex marriage more than Gen Xers who supported it more than Baby Boomers who supported it more than the Silent generation. In the case of same-sex marriage laws in the US, endowing older voters with additional power for constitutional reform would almost certainly have a negative effect on social progress.

As motivated by Frey, a natural concern with close majority victories is the "undemocratic" sentiment that a small number of voters are pivotal in deciding an issue that affects the entire society. Instead of requiring a super-majority, Proposal 6.7 suggests a second-stage of negotiation dependent on the margin of victory. This Proposal states that "[t]he narrower the outcome of a vote is, the more strongly must the representatives of the two opposing camps engage in a *formalized, constitutionally sanctioned procedure* in which a solution agreeable to both sides is to be

reached" (Frey 2017). However, there is empirical evidence suggesting that such a refinement could hinder social progress. A notorious example is the vote to adopt the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which essentially outlawed slavery (Vorenberg 2001). If 3 of the 175 voters within the US House of Representatives changed their votes from "yea" to "nay", the Amendment would not have passed. If the voting system of 1865 implemented a revision reflecting Proposal 6.7, it seems plausible that the practice of owning slaves would not have been so decisively criminalized.[3]

Proposals 6.6 and 6.7 are susceptible to the same criticism that Frey leverages towards requiring a super-majority: "The society risks getting increasingly conservative and fossilized". There is little doubt that, regardless of the democratic system, the American electorate would have eventually outlawed slavery. The same could be said for the eventual acceptance of same-sex marriage. The enlightenment of an electorate's morality with respect to important social progress is bound to outweigh any reasonable democratic procedure. However, proposals that endow disproportionate weight to the elderly or require deliberation for close victories can slow such progress.

2.3 Preference for Randomness

Proposal 6.8 is most easily motivated with Frey's example of an electorate choosing whether to build a bridge. If 60% of the citizens vote to build the bridge and 40% vote to not build it, then the decision will ultimately be made by a randomized mechanism where the probability that a bridge is erected is 60% (possibly by drawing a ball from an urn with 60 green balls and 40 red balls). Proposal 6.9 uses a similar approach to randomly draw political positions from an underlying population. Frey makes a compelling case for these two Proposals in the section focused on a "True Democracy by Random Decisions". In addition to the benefits discussed in Frey, humans have been shown to prefer random mechanism in some environments. For instance, humans prefer a level of randomness when allocating an indivisible good. In Machina's intuitive "Parental Example" (Machina 1989), a mother needs allocate an indivisible "treat" to one of her two children. In this case, the mother would prefer a coin flip to determine the outcome rather than endowing either child with treat for sure. Further research has equated a preference for randomness with a preference for fairness (Bolton et al. 2005). Indeed, experimental research has shown environments where subjects prefer randomized mechanisms (Walker et al. 2000; Bolton et al. 2005; Krawczyk and Le Lec 2010; Borah 2013; Dwenger et al. 2013; Agranov and Ortoleva 2017). Even purely mathematical models of human behavior suggest scenarios where utility is maximized with the choice of a random procedure as opposed to a deterministic one (Cerreia-Vioglio et al. 2015). In addition, hostility across party lines would likely decrease if unfavorable election outcomes were perceived as "bad luck" rather than "losing" to an opponent.

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[3] As side note, multi-stage voting rules are more susceptible to strategic behavior as well as other undesirable properties (Saari 2003). These results reflect negatively on Proposal 6.7.

There are very strong arguments for the introduction of Proposals 6.8 and 6.9. However, electorates may feel uncomfortable with using a process that could select a fringe decision, however unlikely. To address this concern, a rule could state that randomization will only be used when the electorate is closely divided. For instance, the rule could be that randomization will only be used if a 2/3 majority is not reached. In this case, election results with less than 2/3 of agreement will result in randomization proportional to the voting outcome. If the 2/3 majority threshold is reached, the majority decision will be implemented with certainty.

Another daunting task is to convince an electorate of the legitimacy of using a randomization mechanism in democratic processes. This concern places importance on the explicit motivation behind the mechanism. Consider one such motivation. A group of five wants to have lunch together and they need to choose from two different locations—one that primarily serves pizza and one that primarily serves salad. Each individual knows their preference and suppose that three people prefer pizza and two prefer salad. If the rule is that each person is able to choose the restaurant at each of the 5 different days of the workweek, then the group will go for pizza on 3 days and salad twice. From the week-long perspective, most people will consider this "alternating dictator" as a fair method. What is the analogous extension of this example if one of the five members can only show up for lunch on one of the 5 days? The natural answer is that this person would have a 60% chance of going for pizza and a 40% chance of going for salad. In this motivation, the legitimacy of the week-long perspective should extend to the individual-day perspective.

2.4 Importance of Individual Votes

A positive externality that runs across Proposals 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9 is the increased importance placed on individual votes. Most elections are not determined by a small number of votes and even fewer are determined by a single vote. If a citizen is only motivated to change the election outcome, it can be considered rational to abstain from voting with even the smallest cost borne by casting a vote (Downs 1957). As the number of voters increase, the probability that an individual vote will be pivotal goes to zero. Proposals 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9 mitigate this well-known problem by including the margin of victory as a function of the election outcome. Since every vote affects the margin of victory, every vote is pivotal. If every vote is pivotal, "rational" citizens are more likely to vote. As a natural side effect, citizens will be encouraged to become more informed and to form opinions on issues that they would otherwise ignore. Cultivating well-informed and highly active citizens is arguably the greatest challenge faced by a democracy, at any time in history. Proposal 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9 should be championed for addressing this challenge.

3 Future Challenges for Democracy

3.1 Technology

The percentage of Americans using at least one social media website (65%) is greater than the percentage of Americans who voted in the 2016 presidential election (60.2%).[4] Technological advances can be harnessed in order to enhance future democratic processes. For instance, mobile technology can provide a voting platform that could eliminate the need for voters to cast their votes at specific physical locations. This would increase voter accessibility and reduce voter costs, which will almost certainly increase voter turnout. In addition, technology can be used to collect and count votes which could decrease human error associated with the tasks. In 2005, Estonia was the first country to offer its citizens the option to vote on the Internet ("I-voting") in national elections. In the 2014 and 2015 parliamentary election, approximately 30% of the Estonian votes were cast through the Internet. However, the Estonian I-voting system has been shown to have significant security concerns. Independent researchers concluded that a sophisticated attacker could "manipulate election outcomes" or at the very least "disrupt the voting process or cast doubt on the legitimacy of results" (Springall et al. 2014). Similar security concerns were discovered in the New South Wales iVote system which accounted for 280,000 total votes in a state election in March 2015 (Halderman and Teague 2015). While some countries are increasing the use of Internet or online voting (Finland, India, Lithuania, and Switzerland) others are pulling back on its use based on security concerns (France and the Netherlands). It seems likely that, as security concerns are reduced, more systems will incorporate voting procedures that don't require a physical presence.

Voting that does not require a physical presence can greatly empower the average voter. Recent empirical work has shown that policy outcomes in the United States are influenced by the alignment of interest groups and the preferences of the economic elite while "the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy" (Gilens and Page 2014). One possible explanation for this result is that interest groups and elites have a continual and direct influence on the political process while average voters only vote for representatives once every few years. Technology and social networks can provide a platform where the average voter can choose to have a level of direct democracy that is comparable to the interest groups and elite. Such a platform would enable everyone to directly vote on policies, rather than just voting for representatives who serve as middle-men. Ideally, the platform could support a "liquid" democracy where citizens flow back and forth between indirect and direct democracy. Voters can choose to use a representative on some policy matters while choosing to directly vote on other matters. While seemingly outlandish, this idea has begun to take shape in the form of Argentina's "Net Party" (Partido de la Red) which received 21,000 votes (1%) in the local parliamentary election in October

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[4] Data from a 2015 Pew research poll (Social Media Usage: 2005–2015) compared against data from the United States Election Project (McDonald 2017).

2013. Net Parties rely on social networking software in order to facilitate switching between direct and indirect democracy. However, incorporating technology in this way gives massive electorates the power to support a level of direct democracy that would otherwise be impractical. To what extent will liquid democracies and Net Parties affect our future elections?

The increasingly digital world supports a rapid flow of information which has the potential to create a more informed electorate. A crucial side effect of this informational freedom is that voters can select their preferred source of information. In this way, it has become increasingly possible to only hear news reported by sources that you already align with. Paradoxically, the advances in the flow of information have coincided with information bubbles, echo chambers, and widespread belief in "fake news" (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). Technology will undoubtedly continue to advance our inter-connectedness and availability to information. How will a future democracy be affected by these advancements?

3.2 Globalization

Frey's "basic idea of democracy is that people being affected by political decisions have a say". In our highly-globalized society, it is patently clear that elections held at the national level will almost always have international consequences. This is most obvious when considering nations that have great war-fighting or economic power. For example, the US presidential election and the UK's Brexit vote will certainly have implications outside of the United States and the United Kingdom. Even the choices made by small countries have a global impact. The next social leader or social despot can come from any nation. Small countries also have access to goods that all living creatures enjoy such as clean oceans, clean air, and endangered wildlife. If the purpose of a democratic election is to aggregate preferences of people who will be affected by the election outcome, why should this purpose not extend outside of physical boarders of a country? Should we allow for impacted parties to cast votes, however small, in these domestic elections? Since the major problems faced by any country are becoming increasingly global, our world will need to transition from a landscape of competing nations to one where global interests are of paramount importance. How will this increased inter-reliance be reflected in our future democracy?

4 Conclusion

Today's democracy "requires a politics that plays itself out in a multiplicity of settings, from neighborhoods to nations to the world as a whole. Such a politics requires citizens who can think and act as multiply-situated selves. The civic virtue distinctive to our time is the capacity to negotiate our way among the sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting obligations that claim us, and to live with the tension to which multiple loyalties give rise." (Sandel 1998). A citizen's role has evolved over time. It will continue to evolve with advances in technology and our growing reliance on one another. Can democracy be shaped into alignment with the

evolving role of the citizen? If so, work following in the vein of Frey seems to be a natural starting point.

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