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## FROM DELIBERATION TO PARTICIPATION: DEMOCRATIC COMMITMENTS AND THE PARADOX OF VOTING<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine the view that, surprisingly, the more citizens deliberate about politics, the less likely they are to participate in the realm of the political, and vice versa. In the first part of the paper, I approach the problem from the perspective of the paradox of voting, the claim that voting itself is instrumentally irrational because of the very low probability that a single vote will make any difference at the elections. In the second part of the paper, I argue that rather than analyzing voting instrumentally, it is better to view it as part of the civic commitments that constitute what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society. The act of voting is not primarily an individual's attempt to decisively influence any particular outcome, but an affirmation of the key practice that upholds the democratic society in which citizens play a part. This reveals a meta-paradox of voting. Namely, to not vote is to exhibit a type of behavior that implies acceptance of democracy simultaneously with rejecting its defining component. Because of that, I will claim, not voting is itself irrational. In light of that conclusion, in the third part of the paper, I explore the extant divide between deliberation and participation by referring back to the analysis of civic commitments. Whereas participation without deliberating reveals ideological bias, deliberation without participation expresses a lack of understanding of what it means to be a citizen. The way to connect them is to engage in a process of attaining reflective equilibrium between the two, starting from the practice of deliberation that would be fully informed by the awareness of our democratic commitments and disconnected from ideologically motivated participation.

### KEYWORDS

democracy,  
deliberation,  
participation, voting,  
civic, commitments

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## Introduction

The paradigm of democratic participation is voting, as the legitimacy of a representative government stems in large part from the high turnout at the elections. In an ideal scenario, the turnout itself would be the result of an array of participatory actions initiated by citizens themselves. The foundation of such an interest in the mechanisms of political and electoral action would be previous deliberative endeavors set up as a way to express and accept political differences, even occasionally bridging the gaps in political views. Each issue would be decided on its merit and in light of carefully weighed reasons, backed by methodologically sound research and neutrally collected data. This picture describes two ways in which citizens could be more closely characterized: as deliberative citizens and as participatory citizens. The distinction between the two is succinctly formulated by Brennan:

Deliberative citizens have frequent significant crosscutting political discussion. That is, they frequently consider and respond to contrary views. They are careful in forming their own political preferences. They are able to articulate good reasons on behalf of contrary views. They have high levels of political knowledge.

Participatory citizens engage heavily with politics. They run for office, run campaigns, vote, give money to campaigns, attend town hall meetings, engage in protests, write letters to the editor, etc. (Brennan 2011: 175)

In the political circumstances we described in the first passage, there would exist the complete convergence between three models of democracy – liberal, deliberative and participatory. Whereas liberal democracy rests on the values of justice, liberty, and equality, deliberative and participatory models supplement this broad conception with specific views on how key democratic values would be upheld within the confines of a political life that involves periodic elections, changes in governing bodies, occasional crises that test the judgment, leadership, and unity of the political parties, and other multifaceted phenomena engrained in any democratic political system.<sup>2</sup>

The story, as one might expect, is considerably more complicated than that. What some of the most extensive research shows is that there appears to be an insurmountable incompatibility between being a deliberative citizen and being a participatory citizen (Mutz 2006). To deliberate, even before engaging other citizens, means to closely follow the words and actions of political agents, to approach complex issues with due attention, and to, to the best of one's ability, determine the right side and the wrong side of an issue. But what happens if no political option holds the view one would consider the right view? What if all political options seem unattractive, interchangeably so? One then loses the motivation to participate and invest one's time in such an unappealing prospect. To not participate then becomes a question of preserving one's time and

2 See, for instance, Gould 1988, Singer 1973, and Waldron 1999.

energy for more suitable, personal, projects and this subsequently turns into the simple calculation of instrumental rationality – to participate in political life: to vote, campaign, march, write letters, etc. is to lose an irretrievable asset, time, that would yield a more profitable outcome if invested elsewhere.

On the other hand, to participate in a political life requires proper motivation in spending such an investment. However, the research presented by Mutz shows that people who are motivated in this way rarely genuinely deliberate. They enter the political life already clear on who they support and they are rarely ready to change their views in light of any new data. Their view that their time and energy are properly spent on political participation stems from how they ground their acceptance of this or that political position. This, however, is not based on deliberation. As Brennan puts it, „participatory citizens tend not to have much cross-cutting political discussion [and] instead, they seek out and interact only with others with whom they already agree“ (Brennan 2011: 176; Mutz 2006: 30).

It appears that there is an impasse. Pessimism might be in order, but the research described in the previous passages is not all that there is to observe. In this paper, I plan to explore the issue of deliberation/participation incompatibility from the perspective of the so-called ‘paradox of voting’ (henceforth also referred to as ‘PoV’). As first formulated by Downs (Downs 1957), the PoV thesis states that it is irrational to vote because one vote is highly unlikely to make a difference in the voter’s life, unlike a vast number of other actions which can and do make a difference for the agents themselves and others to whom the action may pertain. Thus, it is more rational to stay at home on an election day and iron your clothes than it is to spend time and energy casting a vote. For Downs, this line of thinking involves ‘the simultaneous truth of two seemingly contradictory propositions: 1) rational citizens want democracy to work well to gain its benefits, and it works best when the citizenry is well informed; and 2) it is individually irrational to be well-informed’:

Here individual rationality apparently conflicts with social rationality; i.e., the goals men seek as individuals contradict those they seek in coalition as members of society. This paradox exists because the benefits men derive from efficient social organization are indivisible. For purposes of this discussion, let us assume that everyone benefits in the long run if government is truly run “by consent of the governed”; i.e., if every voter expresses his true views in voting. By his “true” views, we mean the views he would have if he thought that his vote decided the outcome. But in fact his vote is not decisive: it is lost in a sea of other votes. Hence whether he himself is well-informed has no perceptible impact on the benefits he gets. (Downs 1957: 246)

What Downs means by these observations is one seemingly (and, as we will see, deceptively) simple statement of fact based on the instrumental view of rationality: that because one vote doesn’t determine the outcome of an election, the effort spent on getting informed to the degree that renders that vote reasonably cast is worth significantly more than the action for which it is spent.

This is the point at which the deliberation/participation incompatibility (henceforth: DPI) intersects with the paradox of voting. Resolving the latter, as I will try to show, will help us make inroads toward resolving the former. I will attempt to accomplish this in three steps. First, I will discuss different aspects of the paradox of voting, from both the empirical and the theoretical angles. Second, I will discuss the notion of rationality this paradox is based upon and try to show that we need an altogether different standard of rationality if we are to properly discuss what it means to vote at the democratic elections. Third, I will return to the question of deliberation and participation and explore how we can remove the seeming incompatibility. The main thread of the discussion throughout the paper will rest on the view that to understand what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society is to explore the commitments such a role entails, and that carefully analyzing these commitments requires a value-neutral pragmatist point of view.

## 1. The Paradox of Voting – Why We (Don’t) Vote

In the previous section, I stated the basic version of the paradox of voting. One of the most interesting things about it is that such a claim is both unintuitive and unsurprising. It is unintuitive because elections are something we hold as crucially bound to the political fate of the electorate and millions of people vote every year in every democratic country (as well as in some less-than-democratic countries). Surely such behavior is not viewed by the person in the voting booth as being paradoxical? On the other hand, it is unsurprising if we look at the recent history of turnouts. The data shows decreasing across multiple countries. Let’s look at the countries which significantly differ in their current and past democratic performance<sup>3</sup>:

Country	Year	Turnout		
Colombia	1991	33.00%	2002	46.45%
Czech Republic	1990	96.33%	2017	60.84%
Denmark	1981	87.77%	2019	84.60%
Germany	1980	88.57%	2017	76.15%
Hungary	1990	65.10%	2018	69.67%
Spain	1982	79.83%	2019	71.76%
USA	1980	88.60%	2016	65.44%

As we can see from the table, the turnout in all countries except Denmark is either already very low and still on the decline, or is decent (though on the

<sup>3</sup> Data can be found at: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/vt-advanced-search>. This is merely a comparative illustration, and is deliberately limited to just several cases with low, middling and high turnout. The provided link contains full list of countries per turnout and doesn’t change my point regarding the decreasing turnout.

low-end of what one would reasonably call a good turnout) but falling. In that sense, perhaps Downs's formulation of the paradox of voting is on the right track. There may seem to be something about our votes not making any difference that makes elections unappealing to citizens and contributes to the decreased turnout. In order to better understand what influences the decision to vote or not to vote, let us take a look at a survey conducted by Pew Research in 2006<sup>4</sup> (the same year when Mutz published her research on the DPI thesis). In it, the participants were asked to state whether they agree with a proposition pertaining to their voting habits. The researchers then measured what percentage of participants, divided by the frequency of their voting, agreed with each of the propositions. Even though such an approach only indirectly relates to the reasoning behind the paradox of voting, the analysis of different combinations of answers will help us understand what it is about the paradox that might be considered at least *prima facie* correct. Namely, the way this research is represented, we can cross-reference two distinct sets of data: the content of the proposition and the frequency of voting and not-voting, to arrive at an interpretation of the answers. This will also bring us closer to the next step, which is considering some plausible ways to alleviate the problem posed by the paradox.

Here is the outcome of the research, as provided by Pew:

<b>A Spectrum of Voters and Non-Voters: How They Differ</b>				
----- Voting Frequency -----				
Inter- Registered, Not				
<u>Regular</u>	<u>mittent</u>	<u>but rare</u>	<u>registered</u>	
%	%	%	%	
35	20	23	22=100	
<i>Agree with each statement...</i>				
Interested in local politics	91	76	57	45
Duty as citizen to always vote*	88	80	60	39
This election matters more	83	74	67	67
Feel guilty when I don't vote	72	70	57	45
Know little about candidates	44	60	76	68
Bored by what goes on in DC	25	38	42	43
Angry with government	24	15	14	22
Issues in DC don't affect me	15	25	32	27
Voting doesn't change things	13	18	30	33
Sometimes too busy	8	12	29	43
Difficult to get to polls	8	8	19	30

Based only on those who 'completely agree.'

4 <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2006/10/18/who-votes-who-doesnt-and-why/>

Although a thorough analysis of this table would require far more space than is available here, for the present context it is also unnecessary. There are several propositions where the discrepancy between those who regularly vote and those who are not registered to vote is greatest and these will be the first item to examine. Take a look at the propositions: ‘interested in local politics’, ‘duty as a citizen to always vote’, ‘sometimes too busy’ and ‘difficult to get to polls’. In the first two cases, there is a 91/45 and 88/39 split between the first and the fourth column, which means that 91% and 88% of regular voters agree, respectively that they are interested in local politics and that they think it is their duty to vote, whereas only 45% and 39% of those who are not registered to vote agree with those statements. The reversely high split 8/43 and 8/30 occurs for the latter two propositions.

Thus, for the sizeable percentage of the citizens who never vote, being sometimes too busy or finding it difficult to access the polls seems to be one of the confounding variables which decisively influence their voting practices. At the same time, a similar percentage of the same group of participants isn’t interested in local politics, nor do they think it is their duty to vote. This sort of voting profile seems then to be the profile of someone who would agree with Downs’s formulation of voting paradox based on instrumental rationality. Again, intuitively, in order to move beyond the instrumental view, one would, it seems, need to hold voting to be the duty that trumps the assets (time, effort, energy, etc.) spent to be informed, arrive at the polls, and cast a vote. As we can see, moreover, only 13% of those who regularly vote hold that voting doesn’t change things, meaning 87% hold that it does.

Now, the proponents of the PoV thesis might point to the fundamental irrationality of such behavior and of the belief that one vote can change anything. After all, are we not in the same territory as when examining the lottery paradox?<sup>5</sup> Strictly speaking, they would be correct and one might even be compelled to explore constructive ways in which the problem presented by the paradox could be alleviated. For instance, a *prima facie* plausible attempt to resolve the problem of PoV is to find ways in which a voter can gain more influence at elections. For instance, a group of solutions would appeal to the very aspect of a political agency captured by the participatory model of democracy. Namely, talking to candidates or elected representatives about concrete issues, participating in grassroots movements, performing community service or campaign volunteering could conceivably mean that a citizen has increased the range of their voting actions, and even if their vote is still only counted the same, they have garnered additional votes for their preferred election option and thus made their efforts more worthwhile. A different, institutional approach to increasing the voter influence would entail making politically relevant information more readily available and reliably presented, thus alleviating common concerns expressed by voters that politicians or the governing body itself do not really address real concerns that voters have.

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5 See, for instance, Hawthorne 2004.

The problem with these strategies is that they only strengthen the PoV thesis. Namely, one only needs to consider the efforts required to even start to accomplish any of the mentioned goals. Becoming a more educated or a more active voter takes time and effort, while the vote one casts still counts as one and there is no guarantee that any of our additional actions will change even one vote. Thus, instead of making our act of voting instrumentally more rational, in terms of PoV, such moves are rendering it even more irrational. Instead of spending 30 minutes to cast a single among millions of votes, we spend much more time on various political activities, only to again cast a single among millions of votes. There is a clear expenditure of at least one resource – time, with unclear benefits of gaining another – a more influential vote. Therefore, the more we do to become educated citizens in a democratic society, thus becoming better citizens, the less we ought to be concerned with voting itself, thus directly undermining the democratic society we live in.

Moreover, by thus strengthening the paradox, we are undermining the viability of both civic participation and of civic deliberation because neither appears to yield outcomes that would make either seem rational, let alone effective or fruitful. Thus, to even get to the dilemmas posed in regards to the PDI, we must address their *prima facie* viability. To do that, we must first try to resolve the paradox of voting and, as we will see in the next section, this can only be done if we successfully challenge the root premise of the paradox, the instrumental view of rationality.

## 2. Rationality of Voting – Instrumentalist and Pragmatist Conceptions

When a citizen considers whether to vote, it is natural to think about what one votes on, whether the candidates or the political proposals are worth our time, if our vote will change anything, and do we have anything better to do on the election day. After all, voting is just one action among many we need to perform that day, and in order to determine if it is instrumentally rational to vote, we must weigh the cost and the benefit of voting against the cost and benefit of any other action that we can do on the same day. Thus, applying the standards of instrumental rationality seems to pit our resources against one another. Since our resources are limited, we are in the territory of a zero-sum game: some tasks must be abandoned for others to be accomplished. This is why, according to the PoV thesis, to spend valuable time in order to exercise minuscule influence on political life is fundamentally irrational.

However, even though *prima facie* understandable, treating voting as just another type of everyday action, on par with paying bills, driving to the store, etc., means disassociating it from the system of government within which it is only possible, which gives it meaning and is, in turn, reinforced by it. Thus, a part of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society is to treat voting as an activity that defines a democratic system. Democracy is founded upon several fundamental institutions that embody essential values of justice,

freedom, and equality, among others. The institution of elections, the peaceful exchange of power, the independent legislative body which guarantees the legitimacy of the elections all pertain to any democratic form of government.<sup>6</sup> Voting is then one of the fundamentally distinctive democratic practices, and an unavoidable aspect of a society that can be justifiably called ‘democratic’ is the constitutional codification of elections. What this entails, it seems, is that the reasoning behind the PoV thesis is based on a mistaken premise that doesn’t account for the definitional significance of voting and thus applies an incorrect, instrumental, standard of rationality.

There are, however, multiple ways in which one might want to discuss voting non-instrumentally. In no specific order, we might point out a wide range of reasons for voting. One can vote out of the sense of civic duty, or out of the sense of moral duty. People vote simply because they wish to express their freedom to do so, or because they want to be seen casting a vote. In addition, they commonly vote simply because they genuinely prefer one of the options at the ballots, or because they want to express their dislike for one of the options. What I want to emphasize here is that none of these genuinely capture what it means to vote. The question of whether it is rational to vote doesn’t end with the instrumental zero-sum approach outlined earlier, nor with the normative claims of the duty-based reasons for voting. Instead, we have to take into account the most basic fact about voting – that it is a defining element of democracy.

To live in a democratic society is to tacitly or overtly accept its foundational values and institutions. When discussing the person who, at the election day, considered whether to vote or to clean a house, we were thinking of a generic democratic citizen in a stable democracy – a person who, by all accounts, accepts the division between branches of government, follows the laws, believes that everyone is equally protected and has the same human and civil rights as every other citizen. In other words, we were thinking about a democratic citizen who approves of the system of government codified by their country’s constitution and doesn’t perform any acts to somehow subvert it or change it (we will return to this later). However, if such a citizen withholds going to the polls and casting a ballot, what they essentially do is exhibit behavior that is in

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6 One can naturally contest both the normative aspect of democracy which pertains to ideals of freedom and equality, and its procedural aspect, reflected in regular elections. The topic of this paper doesn’t require one to accept this traditional model of democracy and certainly there are numerous criticisms that have been levied against it in the previous years. In fact, numerous participative and deliberative models have been put forward in order to provide better alternatives to the way a democracy could better embody both freedom and equality (see, e.g., Elstub 2018). I do not claim here that the traditional model is somehow superior to these alternatives, nor that it is something that can’t be reassessed. It is simply a starting point from which elections and voting can be discussed in the context of citizens’ democratic commitments, especially as they pertain to assent to freedom and equality (in one form or another). I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for the suggestion that led to this clarification.



contrast to their otherwise common democratic practice. They fail to adhere to the practice of voting and thereby, in their actions, demonstrate that they do not accept one defining element of democracy, while, at the same time, demonstrating in their other actions that they accept other defining elements of democracy. However, since those elements are all essential to it, failure to uphold even one is a failure to uphold democracy as a system. And just like we would deny that a country can be democratic if the judicial and executive branches of government were not independent of each other, so we would deny that a democratic country can fail to hold regular elections. Thus, the practice of voting is not different in its democratic capacity from the division of government. The citizen who doesn't vote, then simultaneously accepts and doesn't accept the basic tenets of democracy and, therefore, accepts and doesn't accept democracy itself. This, I claim, is the real paradox of voting.

To capture the sense in which this is the case, we have to go beyond the instrumental conception of rationality and explore its deeper, pragmatic dimension. By 'pragmatic' here, I refer to an idea that goes back to C.S. Peirce and his formulation of the pragmatic maxim.<sup>7</sup> It goes as follows:

Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (Peirce 1986: 266)

While the pragmatic maxim has a wide range of applications, I here want to focus on the view that underlies the second sentence in this maxim – that the conception of an object is the whole of the conception of the effects. By analogy, the conception of a democratic citizen is simply the conception of the actions of a citizen relevant to characterizing the citizen as following through on essential democratic commitments (i.e., accepting and upholding the defining aspects of democracy). By applying this maxim, we can thus say the following. To be a citizen in a democratic society is, as just mentioned, simply to act in a way that affirms values, practices, and institutions of said society. By not voting, a citizen doesn't act in a way that affirms this. Thus, not voting implies that democratic citizens do not consistently act on the commitments they themselves accepted. This means that their behavior is, as mentioned, paradoxical.

There is a conception that predates Peirce by almost a century and captures a similar incompatibility – namely the idea that Kant expresses through his hypothetical imperative (Kant 1996). For Kant, hypothetical imperatives 'represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else that one wills, or that it is at least possible for one to will' (Kant 1996: 4:414). Furthermore, as Kant notes, the claim of a hypothetical

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<sup>7</sup> This is one way of attempting to incorporate an aspect of pragmatism into political theory. For another, more tied to Peirce's view of truth, see Misak 1999. For attempts to apply Dewey's pragmatist views, see Putnam & Putnam 2017. Depending on the context, I will sometimes use the term 'pragmatist' instead of 'pragmatic'. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.

imperative is that if one wills an end, they must will the means it requires (Kant 1996: 4:417).<sup>8</sup> Peirce's maxim expresses the idea that goes in the opposite direction – that if someone doesn't will (or act on) the means for an end, then they don't will the end itself because to want the end to obtain entails wanting to have the means for achieving it. To simultaneously say that we want the end without wanting the means to that end is to exhibit a form of pragmatic irrationality. This goes beyond our mere rational management of different resources. Moreover, it determines the factors which will influence how we treat our resources (time, energy, effort, etc.) in the first place. It also helps us look at the question of voting (as a primary instance of civic participation) through the lens of our democratic commitments.

Previous considerations reveal something important about what it means to accept commitments of living in a democratic society. The PoV thesis mistakenly identifies the citizen as lacking any particular commitments, which is why their participation in the democratic institution of voting is analyzed on the same level as any other daily activity. To take the pragmatic view of democratic commitments is not to thereby recognize that citizens have a civic, moral duty or that they should have a legal obligation to vote (though these aren't mutually incompatible<sup>9</sup>). This sort of normative language doesn't need to follow from the statement of fact (if the pragmatic view is correct) that says: to vote is to exhibit a coherent democratic-affirming behavior; to not vote is to be pragmatically irrational and to not genuinely be a citizen. This is simply a pragmatic statement about our rationality and doesn't in any moral or legal way need to compel anyone to vote. It, however, resolves the PoV thesis by showing how formulating it is itself paradoxical.

We can clarify the distinctive nature of the pragmatic conception of rationality and commitments by giving a couple of simple examples. Which commitments one has can be determined from the role in which they perform certain actions. Let us take two distinctive roles – being a student and being a parent. One of the key commitments that students have is taking exams. We can immediately see how this can be connected to Kant's hypothetical imperative, as the exams are means to the end which the role of being a student entails – getting a university degree. In a similar vein, a defining commitment of a parent is to keep their child safe from harm. The actions that embody these commitments are actions that are appropriate for a person that undertakes the roles of a student or of a parent. Consider, now, a situation in which a student forgoes taking an exam and instead goes to a concert. The latter action is not

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8 There are readings that ascribe a wider implications of the hypothetical imperative. One of the current interpretative dilemmas is whether to apply a wide reading and take the hypothetical imperative as instructing agents on whether to have or not to have certain ends, or to apply a narrower reading according to which agents are only instructed to recognize the necessity of certain means once particular ends have been established. See more in Schroeder 2005 and Rippon 2014.

9 On some of the grounds for having moral duty to vote see e.g.: Guerrero 2010, Beerbohm 2012 and Zakaras 2018.

in accordance with the role of a student. Judging by their actions, we can say that by making that choice, such a person doesn't commit to being a student while effectively having said role. Even more drastically, let us consider a parent who neglects to feed their child. Their action (say, preparing a meal only for themselves) is the action of a person who isn't a parent, and yet they at the same time are parents. Thus, the mere description of the commitments that their roles entail shows the discord of their overt actions.

By the same token, at least judging solely by overt actions (or lack thereof), a democratic citizen who doesn't vote is no different than a citizen who doesn't vote because the system of government in the latter's country doesn't allow it. The non-democratic behavior is the same, and yet the former is a citizen living in a democratic society and presumably adhering to their other commitments (such as treating others equally and obeying the law). What we must bear in mind here is that this is a morally neutral account of stated behaviors (or lack thereof). The pragmatic account of rationality doesn't hold the person who doesn't vote as immoral no more than it holds the student who doesn't take the exam but goes to the concert as immoral. There are no moral principles embedded in such an account from which there would follow a conclusion that such a person is immoral because it fails to act on that principle. On the other hand, just like in the case of the neglectful parent, we can take the pragmatic account in conjunction with some moral principle and say that the person who fails to feed their child is certainly an immoral person. However, the statement that they are pragmatically irrational in following through on the commitments that their roles demand is not the statement that they have failed to make a moral act. It is, in one sense, a statement that is more fundamental than a moral judgment. It is compatible with value judgments but is itself value-neutral. What it claims is, in effect, that if a student doesn't take the exam, they aren't behaving like students, that if a parent doesn't feed their child, they aren't behaving like parents, and that if a person living in a democratic society doesn't vote, then they simply aren't behaving like citizens. If that is so, then one sense they both are and aren't students, parents, or citizens, and just like it doesn't make much sense if a parent says that they didn't have time to feed the child or that they had more important things to do, so it doesn't make sense to say that voting on the election day was somehow less important than cleaning a house because cleaning house made more difference for them than voting.

Seen this way, the act of voting is a foundational democratic act, rather than simply an individual and contingently fungible action. To not act doesn't by itself imply that one is an immoral person, as we still lack an overall conception of duty to vote that would elevate it to a moral principle. Again, the pragmatic account of rationality and of our commitments doesn't entail any moral principle which non-voting would fail. There might be a whole host of moral principles that could be tested or accepted in accordance with pragmatism, but pragmatism itself doesn't require any one of them to lead us to the idea that voting is wholly different than cleaning our house, driving, going on a holiday, reading a book, etc. In addition, it also doesn't imply that the act of voting ought to be

legally compulsory. Although there are countries with compulsory voting, and although there are different debates on the merits or demerits of such a practice, a pragmatic account is here again neutral. It doesn't state anything specific about it, and it doesn't need to, though it is compatible with different propositions. To understand why it is legislatively neutral, we can simply refer to the fact that it is virtually impossible (and very probably morally unacceptable) to legislate rationality. Just because not voting at concrete elections is pragmatically irrational doesn't mean that voting should be compulsory, no more than just because not taking exams is pragmatically irrational, there should be a law that would punish students if they didn't take some particular exams.

This might lead to a set of further questions. Even if voting isn't compulsory, why would we exhibit pragmatic irrationality if we didn't vote because we didn't prefer any option? What if the elections themselves are susceptible to fraud? Aren't there, after all, legitimate reasons for not voting that make our actions compatible with our civic role and our democratic commitments? The answer to this is that there are legitimate reasons, and this pragmatic conception actually helps us understand them better. Let us go through two scenarios, one in which there are no good options on the ballot and the other when we suspect that there will be election fraud. When it comes to the first, the simple answer is that just because we have no one to vote for, we can still follow through on our commitments. Instead of staying at home, we fulfill our civic role of a democratic citizen by going to the polling place and filling out the ballot the way we want to. If there are no good options, we can write that down on the ballot. That makes the ballot invalid, but it still expresses our commitment to the institution and the process. Furthermore, if done in a large number, it sends a much clearer and stronger political message than just staying at home. After all, a person who didn't vote might have been sick or away or uninterested, but a person who voted in protest will not be mistaken for a merely complacent or uninterested non-voter. And, if at an election with a 60% turnout, and the final tally yielding, say, a 25/22/10/8 split among major options, a 20 or 30% of invalid ballots (with the rest really being sick/away/etc.) would mean much more than 40% of people simply not showing up.

When it comes to not voting because of the suspicion of fraud, the pragmatic account helps us explain why, in those instances, it is not irrational to stay at home. Namely, a country in which it is not possible to hold legitimate elections is a country in which some of the basic democratic procedures cannot be followed through according to the law. The suspected fraud can happen in different ways.<sup>10</sup> Even in a country with a long-standing democratic tradition and different ways to preserve the legitimacy of the elections, such as the USA, it is all too easy to doubt the outcome and claim the failure to protect the legality of elections.<sup>11</sup> If a democratic capacity of a country that organizes

10 A comprehensive examination of a variety of institutional forms of corruption, see Lessig 2013, Miller 2017, Rose-Ackerman 2015, Thompson 2018.

11 See, for example, Temming 2018.

elections is in doubt, then staying at home and not voting actually is in line with one's democratic commitments, since such an act is actually an expression of disregard for the diminished democratic performance of the country. In that sense, there certainly are situations in which adhering to democratic commitments would entail not voting. However, as we can recall, the scenario represented in the PoV thesis was entirely different than what scenarios with illegitimate or illegal elections would require.

Instead of thinking about the upshot of the pragmatic approach as providing a basis for a value judgment or for legislation of our political actions, it is much more pertinent to consider what it tells us about our roles and the commitments they entail. It is this aspect of what it means to be a citizen that, I will claim in the next section, will help us understand why the apparent incompatibility between deliberation and participation occurs in the first place. Moreover, it will provide an approach that might even make the appearance of incompatibility dissipate.

### 3. Between Deliberation and Participation

As we have seen in the introductory section, it seems intuitive to think of the deliberative and participative aspects of citizen involvement in politics and society as co-tenable. However, Mutz's research demonstrated that this intuition is entirely misplaced. Not only are the two jointly untenable, but they are also even almost contradictory – more participation seems to involve less deliberation, and more deliberation leads to less participation. We might ask why it is that we have such intuition in the first place?

One possible answer is that we have the tendency to think about citizen participation and deliberation in abstraction from the actual conditions of political involvement. What the 'ground-level' analysis demonstrates is that wide gaps between different groups of people lead to the increased appearance of the so-called 'echo chambers', a term denoting the discussions that take place only among the people who already agree with each other on whatever topic is at hand.<sup>12</sup> Groups of citizens who fail to register, or actively avoid sources with whom they disagree, are less informed than they could be, even if the missing information needn't be some set of facts, but knowledge about the reasons for opposing viewpoints. Since participation requires motivation, it stands to reason that the most ideologically biased citizens will be most motivated to become involved in political matters – be it through community organizing, town hall discussions, campaign volunteering, and the like. However, since none of these activities requires talking to the other side, and sometimes they even preclude it, more participation actually entails less deliberation. After all, what to deliberate upon and with whom, when one already knows everything they need to know and everyone in their immediate surroundings already thinks the same thing?

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12 See more in: de Laat 2006, Parsell 2008, Sunstein 2008.

To approach the matter from the other side, let us take a look at what deliberation involves. To deliberate in a basic sense of the term (even before entering the public arena of politically motivated group-level discussions<sup>13</sup>) means to gather information about political parties, policy proposals, merits or demerits of particular representatives, etc., and to consider how to act in a political arena. However, elected representatives fail their constituents, policies are enacted based on something other than the interests of citizens and parties respond to genuine criticism too infrequently and overly defensively. In such situations, citizens aware of those problems lose motivation to participate. If a political climate becomes too discouraging, the lack of political participation extends even to refrain from voting. Now we can say why exactly. It is because in such situations disenchanting citizens apply the instrumental standard of rationality and think that being involved in politics, at least through voting, is simply not worth their time. By explaining the background of Mutz's result in this way, we arrive at two additional questions. First, is Mutz's research a definitive statement on deliberation/participation incompatibility? Second, how can the two become genuinely convergent? The remainder of this section will consist of answering these questions in turn.

We have mentioned earlier the rise of the phenomena of echo chambers. To use Mutz's term, the main wedge between deliberation and participation seems to be the lack of 'cross-cutting exposure' (Mutz 2006, 44). The two factors that, according to her, explain this are selective exposure and environmental constraints. However, such an account assumes that citizens have already been somehow predetermined to avoid discussions with the other side. Namely, the selective exposure is the result of previous biases, whereas environmental factors (by which Mutz has in mind the social aspect of our relationships with others) only constitute a possible hindrance to cross-cutting exposure, but by no means render them impossible. Furthermore, the advent of the Internet and various social media has more or less made the connection between our political preferences and our immediate social surroundings irrelevant (or at the very least weakly connected). One can discuss the problem of rising inflation with a person at the other end of the country, or the world, without ever needing to discuss it even in their household or with their neighbors. Even one's choice of sources of analysis of the problem of inflation isn't determined by what newspapers or what TV channels they have in their vicinity.<sup>14</sup> Rather, the choice is determined and even reinforced by the earlier choices that were made in this regard.

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13 For a detailed discussion of various aspects of deliberation in this sense, see Gutmann, Thompson 2004.

14 Calhoun made the point that 'most of the information we have about people from ourselves comes not through any direct relationships [but] through print and electronic media' (Calhoun 1988: 225). While certainly true in 1988, in 2021 we have to update this notion by expanding what 'electronic media' refers to, so as to include the dominance of social media and various algorithms which determine what sort of exposure we will have to different sources of information, analysis and opinion.

In other words, the social context hardly matters, and selective exposure has a self-reinforcing aspect that renders cross-cutting exposure increasingly difficult. To put it even more pessimistically, the very motivation for being exposed to other perspectives, a precondition for entering deliberative discussions, is thereby lessened or eliminated, which then leads to the increased motivation for participating in the reinforcement of political points one already adheres to. Mutz correctly points to three benefits of cross-cutting exposure: encouraging a deeper understanding of one's own viewpoint, producing greater awareness of rationales for opposing viewpoints, contributing to a greater tolerance (Mutz 2006: 69). Ideally, these are the benefits that citizens ought to fully embrace. However, as is clear from the previous discussion, neither of the three has sufficient motivational capacity. It might even be surmised that only if one is already predisposed to hold the three inherently valuable, they would be ready for cross-cutting exposure. On the other hand, if one was already positively inclined to cross-cutting exposure, they wouldn't be susceptible to the problem of echo chambers or for ideologically motivated participation. Thus, to use a familiar metaphor, it seems that the cure for a disease would only work on people who aren't likely to get sick in the first place. The first question we asked earlier seems to be rather pessimistically answered. However, as we will see, the answer to the second might hold a promising way out of such a situation.

In asking whether deliberation and participation can become more convergent, we are in effect asking for a mechanism by which the main issue – lack of motivation for cross-cutting exposure – is resolvable by any effective means. One possible answer might be more deliberation by those who tend to ideologically participate and more participation by those who tend to deliberate. To be sure, there is deliberative research that points to actionable policy changes, and this is certainly to be commended.<sup>15</sup> However, this still doesn't account for the initial motivation for participating in such research, as that is what makes those citizens less bound to participate for ideologic or purely partisan reasons. In addition, a government's willingness to adapt its policies in light of deliberative events demonstrates its willingness to overcome polarizing partisan gaps – at least in some significant instances. Thus, we are faced with the same type of question – how to bring deliberation and participation closer together – only in an extended form: how to bring deliberation and participation closer together in cases in which there is initially little interest or inclination for taking part in one or the other. Here is where the pragmatic account of rationality and the resulting account of citizen commitments comes into play.

The key to understanding why deliberation and participation seem irreconcilable is to recognize that both sides – the one who deliberates without participating, and the one who participates without deliberating – share a common

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15 One promising instance is Fishkin's research via the method of deliberative polling (Fishkin 1991; Fishkin 1996). See some positive effects enumerated at [https://cdd.stanford.edu/what-is-deliberative-polling/#Selected\\_Results](https://cdd.stanford.edu/what-is-deliberative-polling/#Selected_Results).

failure: not following through on their democratic commitments. Much like the students who don't take exams, citizens who don't participate by not voting (which is, in a sense, a minimal form of participation) aren't fully citizens. On the surface and in that particular respect, their daily actions resemble, as I suggested in the previous section, those of the people who live in an autocratic state. Similarly, ideologically motivated participation fails to fulfill the democratic capacity of what it means to be a citizen because it exhibits inclinations that go against the main tenets of democracies – tolerance, impartiality, and equality. To overcome such a situation, members of both groups must start thinking about what are their roles in a society and what they entail. Moreover, they must act on closing the gap between their roles and their actual democratic performance or lack thereof.

This might seem as overly naive. After all, the biases we mentioned earlier seem all but impossible to remove. As Caplan terms it while talking about economic biases, they persist because of the tendency of people to behave in a rationally irrational manner (Caplan 2001). As Brennan puts it:

A person is said to exhibit rational irrationality when it is instrumentally rational for him to be epistemically irrational. An instrumentally rational person chooses the best strategies to achieve his goals. An epistemically irrational person ignores and evades evidence against his beliefs, holds his beliefs without evidence or with only weak evidence, has contradictions in his thinking, employs logical fallacies in belief formation, and exhibits characteristic epistemic vices such as close-mindedness. (Brennan 2011: 173)

While discussing the likelihood that the described irrationality can be overcome, Brennan further notes:

When it comes to politics, individuals have every incentive to indulge their irrational impulses. Demand for irrational beliefs is like demand for most other goods. The lower the cost, the more will be demanded. The cost to the typical voter of voting in epistemically irrational ways is nearly zero. The cost of overcoming bias and epistemic irrationality is high. The psychological benefit of this irrationality is significant. Thus, voters demand a high amount of epistemic irrationality. Most voters have the incentive to remain irrational about economic policy. (Brennan 2011: 174)

What the previous two quotes in effect demonstrate is that the instrumental approach leads to political complacency. As in the case of the failure regarding our commitments, both mere deliberation and mere participation exhibit a form of complacency. Namely, one is either complacent regarding the prospects of political realities being significantly different, or is, through partisan participation complacent with regard to what the other side has to say. Since the cost of such a state of affairs being changed is high, as noted by both Caplan and Brennan, we seem to be back at the beginning, when Downs discussed the paradox of voting using the very standard of rationality that is, in its



instrumental form, both theoretically reinforced and even empirically demonstrated in fMRI studies (Westen 2008).

However, as we have seen, there is more to be said, because the instrumental approach captures only one element of a citizen's political life. What it leaves out is the very factor that ought to determine what is to be calculated within an instrumental model of rationality. To return to the analogy with Kant's hypothetical imperative, an instrumental model might be able to determine (if anything) how some particular means stand in relation to particular ends in terms of their viability, but it cannot determine how are some ends to be chosen in the first place. Here, though, is where the analogy stops. As is well known, in Kant's view, that role is reserved for categorical imperative. On the other hand, the realm of the political cannot be easily subsumed under the banner of ethical principles.<sup>16</sup> The pragmatist approach to rationality fits, however, both with views that declare the political to be autonomous from the ethical and with the views that reject such a notion because it is, as we mentioned, value-neutral. In the context of answering our second question, the way this feature or pragmatism comes into play is the following.

To recognize one's role in any walk of life, we must consider what that role entails. The same way our words carry a certain weight and may imply what wasn't explicitly stated, so our different roles – being a student, a parent, a friend, a worker, a citizen – imply certain modes of behavior. To fulfill our roles successfully, such implications need to be carried out to their conclusion. A communicative effort wouldn't go very far if we didn't understand the implication of our words, or worse yet if we intentionally obfuscated them. In either case, it would reveal a pragmatist gap not dissimilar to how a failure to instrumentally determine a means-end relation would reveal a fundamental failure to observe which means are required by our chosen ends. Let us, then, take a closer look again at what it means to be a democratic citizen. When we discussed voting, we said that in ordinary circumstances – when a citizen isn't actively protesting the way their representative government or an autocratic regime rules their country – such a form of participation constitutes an aspect of what it means to be a democratic citizen. On par with upholding the tenets of freedom, equality, or justice, to take part in voting means that one holds the defining democratic institutions in the proper regard. Now a question arises in light of the reason we identified as being at the root of DPI – democratic complacency reinforced through the adherence to echo chambers which diminish or preclude cross-cutting exposure. Namely, what about voting along strictly partisan lines? Isn't that what exactly epitomizes the problem of the divide Mutz and Brennan discuss?<sup>17</sup> Taken at face value, it certainly is, but a

<sup>16</sup> In fact, it is doubted that something like that can or ought to be done at all. See, e.g. Nardin 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Merely one among many examples of voting that doesn't reflect genuine democratic commitments (in the sense that it was motivated by partisan reasons) happened in the USA in the last presidential elections. According to the poll conducted by Pew

pragmatic approach doesn't merely analyze our actions. It goes into what lies behind them. Thus, we can say by following such an approach that an act of partisan voting undermines what democracy entails.<sup>18</sup> And because partisan voting is one overt form of non-deliberative participation, the pragmatic approach helps us see not only what is wrong with it, but what we should do to ameliorate the situation. The solution consists of four steps.

First of all, effective deliberation has to be the initial step, which then would lead to genuinely democratic participation.<sup>19</sup> Second, in light of the deliberative efforts undertaken with democratic participation in mind, citizens would be able to fully reflect on their commitments and whichever choices they then make (and realize through some form of participation) their democratic capacity as citizens wouldn't be thereby diminished. Third, whatever the result of their participation – whether their candidate lost, won, etc., that result would inform their further deliberative efforts. Fourth, such efforts would then influence future participation and render the duality between deliberation and participation mutually reinforcing, rather than incompatible. This sort of reflective equilibrium, to borrow a term from Rawls, would result in citizens both understanding what lies at the root of their commitments and becoming increasingly more proficient in fulfilling such commitments. Without needing to resort to any type of evaluative judgment about that sort of democratic performance we can say that the pragmatic account of rationality is thus able to capture the key to what constitutes the role that being a democratic citizen entails. At its root, citizens who avoid cross-cutting exposure and exhibit democratic complacency are fundamentally irrational in that particular aspect of the set of roles they play in their lives. However, the way out of that is readily available and attainable in modern democratic societies.

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research between Jan. 8-12 2021, for 67% of the voters hold that voting against Trump was a 'major reason', and only 12% don't think it was the reason for Trump's defeat. On the other hand, a half of the voters don't think that Biden's campaign was a reason for his winning the elections. See full results of the poll at: [https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/01/PP\\_2021.01.14\\_biden-trump-views\\_04-03.png?w=640](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/01/PP_2021.01.14_biden-trump-views_04-03.png?w=640).

<sup>18</sup> This is not the criticism of the partisan dimension of politics in general. Rather, it is the criticism of ideological voting based on partisan affiliation and not on the reasons relevant for the issue one votes about. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting that this might be inferred from the passage.

<sup>19</sup> As one reviewer suggested, the issue with this first step is that it might be unattainable. While I agree that there is potential for such an assessment, there have been instances of effective deliberation, albeit in limited settings. More research is needed and certainly better recognition of the deliberative institutions would help. However, the solution I am proposing is formulated on steps that would have to be taken in order for it to work. I am not claiming that such solution can be achieved, but it is also clear that we cannot say in advance that it will not work. Any assessment must be based on a comprehensive body of research that is yet to be conducted.

#### 4. Some Questions for Further Research

The first step in the process of achieving the reflective equilibrium between deliberation and participation is to start deliberating in the first place. In the years after Mutz's research, various types of deliberative research yielded promising results. Some included even the official policy changes, as mentioned earlier. Qualitative research has demonstrated that even the highly polarizing discussion topics can result in a cooperative and mutually beneficial discussion.<sup>20</sup> For instance, recent research into the question of the abortion provision in Ireland demonstrated a fairly high quality of discussion at the level of the Irish Citizens' Assembly (Suiter et al. 2021). The same research also showed the lower quality of discussion at the level of the Irish parliamentary committee. The authors found it fairly surprising that, when measured in light of what they term the 'cognitive complexity of the issue of abortion, a citizen assembly would score higher than the committee representatives. However, having in mind the partisan nature of the issue and the problems we discussed in this paper, perhaps that is not all too surprising. What remains to be seen is whether a discussion between political representatives and citizens would have the level of quality demonstrated by the former or by the latter. In addition, a variety of similar studies would need to be conducted in order to determine whether the respective levels of quality are maintained across different countries and on similarly divisive topics.<sup>21</sup>

Combined with the growing body of research related to different aspects of deliberation, this would help us understand in great detail how exactly citizens regard their own views, how they react to others' expression of their own attitudes, and what are the conditions under which a convergence or agreement occurs. That it can occur has been demonstrated in a limited setting by studies we mentioned throughout this paper (see, especially, Steiner et al. and Suits et al.). However, before any general conclusion can be drawn with confidence, similar setups need to be repeated in much larger settings and on multiple occasions. Moreover, even before any new data is collected, we can be certain that however actual deliberation develops, in order for it to be successful, citizens will have to put instrumental calculation second and embrace the pragmatically defined roles they play as members of a democratic society. Furthermore, in doing so, they will be better equipped to properly (re)act if and when their society exhibits anti-democratic or autocratic tendencies. As several papers in this volume demonstrate, it is precisely in such settings that organizing different events which entail both deliberation and participation can 'enhance public trust, political efficacy of citizens, politically articulate bottom-up led deliberative democratization that may one day have an official mandate by a more democratic government' (Fiket, Đorđević this volume).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance a discussion on positive deliberative transformative moments by Steiner et al. (2017).

<sup>21</sup> See some of the promising outlines in: Luskin et al. 2014; Suiter 2021; Courant 2021.

<sup>22</sup> See also a paper by Đorđević and Vasiljević (this volume), which represents a case study of a deliberative event, which was held in Belgrade in 2019.

Voting (or abstaining) is an integral part of democratic performance, and participation, in general, can reinforce such a role only when founded on a well-defined deliberative practice. Otherwise, to participate in society on an ideological level, even if overtly democratic in nature, is to undermine the genuine democratic potential of a person, a community, or a society as a whole. Similarly, to merely deliberate means to again refrain from fully embracing what it means to be a citizen. To paraphrase Kant's famous sentence, participation without deliberation is democratically blind, and deliberation without participation is democratically empty. If the claims in this paper are correct, then since both phenomena have the same root – democratic complacency borne out of the instrumental view of citizen roles in society, they also have the same solution – a pragmatist framework for achieving an actionable reflective equilibrium between the two.

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Andrija Šoć

## Od deliberacije do participacije: demokratske uloge i paradoks glasanja

### Apstrakt

U ovom gradu, ispitujem gledište prema kom, iznenađujuće, što se češće građani upuštaju u političku deliberaciju, to su manje skloni političkoj participaciji, i obrnuto. U prvom delu rada, razmatram ovaj problem iz ugla paradoksa glasanja, teze da je sam akt glasanja instrumentalno iracionalan pošto postoji jako mala verovatnoća da jedan glas napravi bilo kakvu razliku na izborima. U drugom delu rada, tvrdiću da, umesto da glasanje analiziramo instrumentalno, bolje je da ga posmatramo kao deo građanskih obaveza koje konstituišu građansku ulogu u demokratskom društvu. Akt glasanja ne treba primarno shvatiti kao pokušaj jedne osobe da izvrši odlučujući uticaj na bilo koji konkretan ishod, već afirmacija ključne prakse koja čini jedno društvo demokratskim. Ovo otkriva svojevrsni meta-paradoks glasanja. Naime, ne glasati znači istovremeno implicirati prihvatanje demokratije i neprihvatanje njene suštinske komponente. S obzirom na to, kako ću pokušati da pokažem, samo neglasanje je iracionalno. U svetlu ovog zaključka, u trećem delu rada istražujem jaz između deliberacije i participacije u svetlu analize građanskih uloga. Dok participacija bez deliberacije otkriva ideološku ostraošćenost, deliberacija bez participacije implicira nerazumevanje toga šta znači biti građanin. Deliberacija i participacija se mogu efektno povezati ako se uspostavi reflektivni ekvilibrijum između njih. To se, kako ću tvrditi, može ostvariti putem procesa čiji je prvi korak uspostavljanje deliberativne prakse koja je u potpunosti utemeljena na svesti građana o njihovim demokratskim ulogama, a izolovana od ideološki motivisane participacije.

**Ključne reči:** demokratija, deliberacija, participacija, glasanje, demokratske uloge