The participatory paradox: An egalitarian critique of participatory democracy

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Democrats believe that citizen participation is necessary and valuable. However, they disagree over its scope and nature. On one end of the spectrum, democratic elitists hold that participation need only be high enough to ensure basic democratic legitimacy and the election of stable governments. They are sceptical of claims that citizens should be directly involved in the affairs of state (Schumpeter, 1943/2010). Further along the spectrum, other representative democrats temper their commitment to elitism, emphasising the 'mixed' nature of democratic systems. Many areas of decision making are appropriately viewed as being under the control of the citizens through elected representatives, but many also are not, they argue. The challenge is to ensure that citizens are able to participate effectively in the governance of those areas which are viewed as appropriately under their control, and to ensure that appropriate epistocratic constraints are in place to insulate the other areas from public opinion (Manin, 2010; Parvin, 2018b; Urbinati, 2008).

Further still along the spectrum, deliberative democrats argue for the introduction of opportunities for participation (such as mini-publics) into representative regimes, and reforming institutions in such a way as to ensure that citizens are afforded more control over decision-making (Chwalisz, 2017; Dacombe, 2018; Smith, 2009; Young, 2002). Although early deliberative democratic theory focused on substantive, macro-level deliberation among citizens broadly conceived (e.g. Cohen & Sabel, 1997), the contemporary 'deliberative turn' is focused much more on introducing citizens into representative democratic politics in a way that is limited and circumscribed, rather than fully participatory (Dryzek, 2012; Goodin, 2012; Mansbridge et al, 2012; Parvin, 2015). Indeed, recent studies have suggested that wider *participation* comes at the cost of quality *deliberation*, and vice versa (Mutz, 2006). The key challenge, deliberative democrats believe, is generally not to replace representative democracy, but to work out how representative institutions might be reformed in ways which ensure that they are more responsive to citizens' concerns (e.g. Escobar & Elstub, 2017; Fung, 2015; Fishkin, 2018; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004).

Participatory democrats, standing at the opposite end of the spectrum to the democratic elitists, understand participatory democracy as a much more radical and distinctive conception of democracy in its own right (Barber, 1984; Bevir, 2009; Landemore, 2017; Pateman, 1975 & 2012). Participatory

democrats cast themselves in opposition to elitist democrats as well as many representative and deliberative democrats (Pateman, 2012). To participatory democrats, weak participatory democracy is in fact part of the problem: in focusing on marginal institutional reforms which increase participation in a way which 'does not disturb existing institutions', deliberative democracy leaves untouched many of the underlying trajectories of change (like globalisation) which have served to isolate the business of politics from the people (Pateman, 2012, p. 15), and centralises philosophical ideas like rights which overly constrain the democratic state, and minimise the role of citizens in political decision making (Barber, 1984). Furthermore, some say, deliberative democracy overly restricts what counts as proper participation and, hence, serves to exclude diverse viewpoints and stifle genuine debate (Benhabib, 2016; Young, 2002). Participatory democrats claim that real democratisation requires that citizens be afforded more direct control over a wider sphere of public life. It requires the creation of what Pateman calls a 'participatory society', in which 'full' citizen participation is embedded as a core virtue, and is present in all spheres of citizens' lives including political decision making (Pateman, 1975 & 2012). Indeed, participatory democracy is arguably as much a vision of *society* and of *citzens* as it is of *politics*: a society in which free and equal citizens are enabled to collaboratively reveal their concerns and to resolve problems collectively through and with others. Participatory democracy flows from this social ideal. As such, it requires nothing less than a radical re-shaping of contemporary democratic societies in order that institutions are placed under the control of citizens who have, through participation, developed the capacities for what Pateman called 'extended citizenship' (Pateman, 1975), and what Barber called 'politics as a way of living' (Barber, 1984).

There is significant, and growing, support for participatory democracy among political theorists and political scientists, for the vision of something like the participatory democracy that Pateman describes, and also for the idea that democracy needs the establishment of a participatory society to function. The claim that representative democracy is suffering a 'crisis', and that it needs to be replaced by an alternative system which places power more directly in the hands of an active citizenry, is common in the contemporary literature and in earlier works too. Just as in 1984 Barber argued that 'representation destroys participation and citizenship,' and needs to be replaced (Barber, 1984, p. xxxiv), so we find in later thinkers like Landemore and Bevir Pateman's idea that that democracy is rightly understood as a system in which every individual has the opportunity 'to

participate in all political spheres,' and in which 'maximum input (participation) is required' by citizens in decision making (Bevir, 2009 & 2010; Pateman, 1975; Landemore, 2017). In this essay, I argue that the opposite is true: that the contemporary challenge to democracy is best resolved by de-emphasising participation.

While this article avoids explicit discussion of grassroots politics, its argument has implications for those debates. Many political scientists and democratic theorists rely heavily on grassroots movements as engines of political reform (e.g. Cohen & Arato, 1992; Habermas, 1996; Tocqueville, 1835 – 1840). These theorists rightly suggest that grassroots movements have historically played an important role in securing social and political change, especially in the fight against various forms of inequality (e.g. Benhabib, 2016; Dryzek, 2012; Young, 2002). However, grassroots movements face obstacles to bringing about large-scale social and political reform as a result of specific social, political, and civic changes experienced by many liberal democratic states in the late 20th/early21st Centuries. The historical role of grassroots movements is well-documented in the literature, and important (e.g. Flesher-Fominaya, 2020). However, what is also well-documented is the fact that grassroots politics, and its civic and social bases, have declined in recent years as a result of a combination of factors including a withering of associational life, changing patterns of social capital, and declining/changing patterns of political participation (Apostlova et al, 2017; Halpern, 2005; Macedo et al, 2005; Putnam, 2001). Furthermore, these relatively recent changes have entrenched structural inequalities and have had a disproportionate impact on citizens of low socioeconomic status (SES): increasing their numbers, weakening their inclusion in the formal democratic system, and undermining their representation (Klofstad, 2016; Schlozman et al, 2018; Skocpol, 2005; Solt, 2008).

I suggest herein that democratic theorists keen to provide guidance for the reform of democratic states to make them better able to hear and act upon the concerns of low SES citizens, should take seriously the obstacles in the way of grassroots movements and citizen in the current political moment, and explore other options. Arguing for more a more participatory system, or a system in which citizens are required to do the heavy lifting via grassroots movements, risks downplaying what has been happening in states like the UK and the USA over the past half-century and places an undue burden on low-SES citizens to be responsible for resolving problems that (because of

structural factors beyond their control) they are often ill-equipped to resolve. In this piece, I describe some general trends in citizen participation, inequality, and grassroots politics over the past half-century, and outline their implications for democracy. I suggest that they render arguments for widespread participation as a solution to structural inequality *inegalitarian*, *unfeasible*, and also *philosophically incoherent*: participatory democracy requires the deep social and economic inequalities that characterise liberal democratic states rectified, but it does not itself possess the ability to rectify them.

The reason is this. The more emphasis that is put on citizen participation as a driver of public policy decisions, the more important it is that the system ensures that all citizens are able to participate and to develop their democratic capacity. Pateman believes that this capacity will emerge as a product of participation itself (Pateman, 1975). In fact, there is widespread agreement among political scientists that citizens need access to a wide range of social and civic resources in order to develop the kind of democratic capacity necessary for a participatory democracy to function, and that lacking access to these resources is a key driver of low participation among citizens of low-SES. In so far as establishing a more participatory *democracy* would require first establishing a participatory *society*, in which citizens have access to the resources they need to participate on equal terms, establishing a participatory democracy would require a wide and deep recalibration of the social, political, economic, legal, and civic infrastructure of democratic states which would need to occur independently of the democratic will and would, therefore, significantly diminish the scope of democracy and lift a significant number of areas of policy and decision making out of democratic control and into the hands of non-majoritarian institutions and experts. I call this the participatory paradox. The richer and more 'citizen centred' we want our democracy to be, the more decisions we have to take out of citizens' hands. A realistic theory of democracy thus needs to contend with the participatory paradox by de-emphasising the importance of widespread citizen participation and seeking to incorporate citizens' voices in more effective and coherent ways. Taking participatory inequality and the participatory paradox seriously should lead us to reject participatory democracy and focus on improving representation instead. The future of democracy, I suggest, lies in harnessing the ability of representative institutions to better identify and resolve citizens' problems, and empowering them to make fair and appropriate decisions in the absence of widespread participation among citizens.

Furthermore, I argue that, given the scale and nature of the inequalities which characterise many liberal democratic states like the US and the UK and the effect they have on the ability of citizens to participate on an equal basis, I argue that a representative democracy which does *not* require the establishment of a participatory society is more likely to create a more egalitarian society than on which does. This goes against the grain. Participation is popular among many egalitarian political philosophers. Critiques of participation have tended to come from the economic and political right (e.g. Brennan, 2016; Somin, 2016). But once we grasp the scale and nature of social and economic inequality, as well as the changes in liberal democratic states, we can see that the egalitarian project is *hampered* by a commitment to participatory democracy.

As a work of applied normative political theory, this piece evaluates arguments for widespread participation in democratic life in the light of real-world changes in liberal democratic states, and recorded patterns of participation among citizens. It is a work which *critically* engages with arguments for the establishment of a participatory society, and finds them wanting. Its aim is to argue for a shift in the conversation among normative political theorists and democratic theorists about the challenges facing democratic states and what these challenges mean for our normative theorising about democracy. Among many scholars, the emphasis has for a long time been on expanding opportunities for meaningful participation. The point of this piece is to suggest that if we take seriously the scale, complexity, and depth of the obstacles which stand in the way of low SES citizens participating in much greater numbers, and if we really do care about political equality and the capture of democratic politics by socioeconomic elites then we might do best to focus *less* on encouraging wider participation and *more* on how we can harness the capacity of existing institutions to represent citizens who, often for reasons beyond their control, are not active participators.

In what follows, I outline the state of participatory inequality in liberal democratic societies, discuss the correlation between socio-economic status and citizen participation, and describe some of the social, economic, and civic changes associated with this inequality (section 1), present my critique of participatory democracy as being empirically unfeasible (sections 2 & 3), and philosophically incoherent (section 4), before providing my own argument for preferring a reformed form of representative democracy instead, in which participation is circumscribed and de-emphasised, as

better serving the interests of low SES citizens. I argue, *contra* Landemore et al that both democratic and egalitarian ends are best served by embracing representative democracy (in section 5).

1. Socio-economic and participatory inequality: civic decline, elite governance, and the estrangement of citizens.

Many citizens of low SES fail to participate in democratic life. They don't vote, join political parties, get involved in political campaigns, or lobby their elected representatives. Many also don't follow election campaigns or even discuss politics with their fellow citizens (Apostlova et al, 2017; Audickus et al, 2018; Parvin, 2015, 2018a, 2018b; Stoker, 2005). Vast numbers of citizens, especially citizens of low SES, feel estranged from the political system, and the problem is not just at the national level but the local level too (Parvin, 2009, 2011). Devolving power from central institutions to local ones, as occurred in the UK under New Labour, the coalition, and then later the Conservative government, has not increased engagement with political issues or fostered a more active democratic culture in the ways that many defenders of localism hoped it would. In fact, localist initiatives have in many cases served merely to entrench at the *local* level social, economic, and political inequalities already present at the *national* level (Electoral Commission, 2013; Parvin, 2009 & 2011; Sharman, 2014).

Similarly, studies of self-organising citizens at the local community level have noted the relative paucity of such groups, the difficulties citizens face in forming such groups, and also their lack of success at impacting national politics, or wider political debates (e.g. Dacombe, 2018). The problem is not simply a widespread alienation from national politics, or a cynicism about politicians, or even a sense among citizens that their involvement makes no difference because the site of politics is too far away. It's that the complex and overlapping civic, social, and political conditions which converge to provide citizens with the resources they need to develop their democratic capacity are in decline, and that the political, economic, and social reality that has replaced them disproportionately concentrate these resources among citizens of high SES (Lofstad, 2017; Putnam, 2001; Schlozman et al, 2018; Skocpol, 2005). This is not controversial. Citizens' experience of inequality and disadvantage vary, of course. Different groups are impacted in different ways which in turn shape their participation (Macedo et al, 2015; Schlozman et al, 2018). Nevertheless, SES has been found to be significant

across all cross-cutting groups (Birch et al, 2015; Schlozman et al, 2018; Skocpol, 2005; Solt, 2008). Focusing on SES is therefore not to deny different citizens' experiences but simply to focus on a common variable that impacts *all* groups. Empirical studies of citizens' political behaviour and attitudes over the past three quarters of a century suggest that citizens of low SES are participating in neither formal *nor* informal political activities in the ways that many democrats believe is important for these citizens, democracy, or the wider civic culture on which democratic politics rests (Bartels, 2016; Schlozman et al, 2018; Skocpol 2004a, 2004b, 2005).

The fact that liberal democratic states have experienced changes which make it harder for citizens, and especially citizens of low SES, to participate and to develop democratic capacity, exerts pressure on democratic theory and practice, and in particular, on conceptions of democracy which foreground citizen participation. Participatory democrats are clear on the need to encourage widespread participation among citizens. Pateman, for example, argues that we need to transcend the Schumpetarian model in which citizens are seen as consumers, and embrace a system in which the public 'own' political decisions through their engagement with the political process (Pateman, 2012, p 15). For participatory *democracy* to exist, she says, a participatory *society* must exist first: 'a society where all political systems have been democratised and socialisation through participation can take place in all areas' including industry and the economy as well as government (Pateman, 1975, p. 43). Barber argued that we need to move beyond a 'thin democracy' as envisaged by liberals and embrace instead an alternative model which emphasises the 'pleasures of participation[,] . . . the fellowship of civic association, and the ability of all people to express their individuality' through political activity across their lives (Barber, 1984, p. 24). More recently, Landemore has argued for the reassertion of a 'citizen-centric' or 'people-centric' model of democracy in place of the current 'elite-centric' or government-centric' one, and for a decoupling of deliberative and representative democracy (Landemore, 2017, p. 7). And Bevir has argued for greater and richer opportunities for citizen participation as means of eroding the dominance of 'experts' in modern democratic decision making (Bevir, 2010).

But the problem isn't simply that citizens don't participate, or even that citizens of low SES don't participate: it's *also* that, often for reasons beyond their control, low SES citizens experience

constraints on their ability to participate that citizens of high SES don't. The problem is the unequal distribution of those structural and other resources associated with, and required by, political participation, and the vast, complex, and long term programme of remedial state action that would be necessary in order to distribute them more fairly.

The correlation between SES and propensity to engage politically, and also between levels of social and economic inequality and overall levels of civic and political participation, are arguably two of the most strongly-drawn in modern political science. Many studies, conducted over the past three quarters of a century, have confirmed that the more socially and economically unequal a society is, the less politically engaged its citizen body will be, and also that both the rate and quality of participation is higher among citizens of higher SES (e.g. Almond & Verba, 1963; Lijphart, 1997; Hansard Society & Electoral Commission, 2012; Klofstad, 2016; Macedo et al, 2005; Schlozman et al, 2018). The evidence strongly suggests that '[t]hose who are not affluent and well-educated – that is, those of low socio-economic status - are less likely to take part politically' (Schlozman et al, 2018, p. 5; Solt, 2008). 'Overall,' write Theda Skocpol and Lawrence Jacobs, 'the US electorate has contracted since the 1960s, and the well-educated and well-to-do are much more likely to vote than the least educated and economically deprived' (Skocpol & Jacobs, 2005; p. 9).

In Britain, too, studies have emphasised the link between levels of civic and political participation and SES (Hansard Society, 2017). One 2013 study showed that, by 2010, 'individuals in the highest income group were 43% more likely to vote than those in the lowest income group' (Birch et al, 2013). Studies also confirm that rates of participation are systematically lower in deprived areas, with electoral turnout lowest in wards which have the lowest rates of income and the highest rates of unemployment, and (like in the US) also closely associated with educational attainment (Hansard Society, 2017; Schlozman et al, 2018; Stoker, 2006).

Furthermore, the same pattern is replicated when we measure rates of participation in those *new* opportunities for participation which have emerged in recent years. For example, some have argued that the rise of new communications technologies and social media offers a possible solution to participatory inequality (e.g. Kennedy et al, 2020; Landemore & Reich, 2019). But empirical evidence

suggests that the rise in digital technology has thus far failed to compensate for wider participatory deficits among low SES citizens and, in fact, serves to entrench them (Norris, 2001; Schlozman et al, 2018; Shaw & Hargittai, 2018). In the US, for example, 'Americans have been left behind in the technological advances of recent decades' and the 'digital divide' that exists between those who participate and those who don't 'mirrors the socio-economic stratification of political activity' (Schlozman et al, 2018, p. 115). And in the UK, participation in online surveys, petitions, and grassroots campaigning of various kinds is concentrated among citizens of high SES (Hansard Society, 2017; Uberoi & Johnson, 2019).

Others have emphasised the democratic potential of political organisations, pointing out that while many citizens fail to make use of traditional mechanisms like the vote to advance their interests, many nevertheless use NGOs, interest groups, and campaign organisations to do so. But again, the increased influence of these kinds of organisations has actually served to entrench patterns of unequal participation. It's true that the UK and the US have seen a significant growth in the number and influence of unelected representative groups since the 1960s. However, this rise coincides with a wider and deeper decline in civil and associational life, and of grassroots associations (Putnam, 2001; Schlozman et al, 2018; Skocpol, 2003; Stoker, 2006). A range of overlapping forces have conspired to *diminish* the centrality and influence of traditional broad-based political organisations and grassroots associations which were relatively demanding of citizens' time but which provided citizens – especially those of low SES – with political knowledge, a sense of their political identity, and a recognisable conduit through which their concerns could be raised with decision makers, and *increase* the centrality and influence of professionalised interest groups which tend to be hierarchical, undemanding of citizens' time, and more effective at mobilising and representing wealthier citizens (Bartels, 2016; Berry, 1992; Gilens, 2012; Parvin, 2016; Skocpol, 2003). As grassroots and other traditional associations became less able to rely on the active participation of their members, so they were forced to restructure themselves as hierarchical lobby organisations possessing expert insights into policy debates or see their influence decline. Those like Amnesty International and Greenpeace that have done so have become influential insider organisations who work with governments to influence policy, while those who have not – such as political parties and trade unions, which draw

their strength from their increasingly inactive memberships – have seen their relative importance and popularity among citizens decline.

It has long been a dominant theme in democratic theory and modern political science that a functioning democracy requires a strong civil society, populated by associations which can *mobilise* citizens into political action, *represent* citizens' interests, and act as a *bridge* between the people and the state (e.g. Dahl, 1974; Habermas, 1996; Hirst, 1994; Tocqueville, 1830 – 1835). Such groups are capable of translating amorphous civic activity into focused political action that can be used by governments and other state actors to inform decision making. They create the space for grassroots politics to grow, but also harness the political potential of citizens' civic activity by focusing it in ways which effectively advance certain political ends. But it is this kind of civil society, and these kinds of focusing civic associations, which have declined in recent years. The explosion in the number and influence of lobby groups in countries like the US and the UK since the 1960s has seen a concentration of political activity at the elite level, and a decline of such activity at the level of civil society. Lobby organisations increasingly work at a distance from the citizenry *and* their own members, if they even have any (Baumgartner, 2009; Schlozman et al, 2018). As a result, governance has retreated ever further from citizens and become increasingly conducted in a language that the wider citizenry do not understand, according to rules that they do not know, in institutions which feel distant from them (Crenson & Ginsberg, 2002; Lowy, 1979; Parvin, 2018a). And just as political organisations have sought to reconfigure themselves in order to contend with low levels of participation among their members, so states have retreated from citizens and sought epistemic insights from elsewhere, namely, lobby groups. In the US, there are now 22,000 registered advocacy organisations and interest groups based in Washington DC and over 40,000 groups and individuals who lobby at the state level. In Brussels, there are similarly 11,000 such groups, and many more based throughout the world's financial and political centres.

The fact that these new interest groups are more effective at representing the interests of high SES citizens than those of low SES citizens, whose interests have been traditionally better served by grassroots movements, has meant that their rise in number and centrality to democratic governance has further concentrated power in the hands of high SES citizens (Baumgartner, 2009; Gilens, 2012).

Even those organisations which advocate on behalf of disadvantaged groups are generally populated by 'foot soldiers drawn from the middle class' (Schlozman et al, 2018, p. 132). The fact that traditional grassroots movements have proven less able to represent their constituent members and to push for the interests of low SES citizens relative to professional lobby groups representing the concerns of high SES citizens, has meant that the concerns of the high SES citizens have been given disproportionate weight in public debates, a phenomenon exacerbated by the disproportionately high presence of high SES citizens at the ballot box, and in other forms of participation (Bartels, 2016).

All this is to say that there has been a decline in the number, influence, and importance of traditional membership associations – including political parties – that has resulted in the creation of a new stratum of interest groups and lobby organisations which serve the interests of their member constituencies not through grassroots activism but through representation at the elite level via sophisticated lobbying and public relations initiatives (e.g. Baumgartner, 2009; Berry, 1992; Holyoke, 2014; Parvin, 2010; Skocpol, 2003, 2004a, & 2004b). The explosion of new advocacy and interest groups in American and British public life has had the effect of disenfranchising low SES citizens by driving policy making to the elite level, excluding citizens in general from the process by which decisions are made, in ways which have disproportionate effects on low SES citizens, and eroding the important bridging mechanisms which linked low SES citizens with the wider democratic system and with their elected representatives (Lessig, 2011; Parvin, 2016; Skocpol, 2004a & 2004b; Jacobs & Skocpol, 2005; Berry, 1992).

It has also had a secondary and more fundamental effect. The reason why the changes in civil society that we have seen in liberal democratic states over the past century are so important is not merely because they describe a worsening institutional capacity to engage with or resolve the concerns voiced by the poor, but that traditional associational life, grassroots movements, and broad-based membership organisations provide cognitive, psychological, and intellectual resources to their members which have been shown to be important in developing citizens' democratic capacity, their political knowledge, and their political identity (Achen & Bartels, 2016; Converse, 1964; Friedman, 2006; Klofstad, 2016; Mutz, 2016; Putnam, 2001; Schlozman et al, 2018; Whiteley, 2012).

Shared norms of trust and reciprocity expressed through, and strengthened by, formal and informal engagement with others has been shown to build in individuals a sense of citizenship as well as the 'civic skills' they need to participate (Schlozman et al, 2018). Participation in associational groups 'provides reassurance and feedback that the cause of engagement is relevant, and that participation is having some value' (Stoker, 2005; p. 97). As associational membership declines, individuals lose both the will to participate, and the reinforcing networks and associations which make participation meaningful over and above the satisfaction of individual desires. They also lose those support networks which provide education and awareness about political issues, and which encourage the idea that it is within the capabilities of individual citizens to do something about issues which they feel strongly about. Levels of educational attainment compound this effect, as the well-educated remain more able to access professional networks which encourage participation and an engagement with political issues, while less-educated citizens are not (Schlozman et al, 2018).

Empirical evidence about the changing role of civic associations in the UK and the US, and the important role such organisations play in the development of democratic capacity and the rate and quality of citizen participation, fit with more established work on the importance of group membership to participatory behaviour and the development of political views (Mutz, 2016). It also provides a partial explanation as to why low SES citizens participate in democratic life less *often* and less *effectively* than those of higher SES. It's not that they lack concerns. It's that they find it harder to access the basic resources they need to identify as citizens or to participate as such, and as a consequence, what participation they *do* engage in is less likely to be effective. As traditional non-political and mass-membership associations capable of mobilising citizens of low SES decline and are replaced with newer associations and groups which mobilise citizens of a predominantly higher SES, social capital becomes concentrated among citizens of higher SES (Putnam, 2001; Schlozman et al, 2018). The problem is therefore not merely that the decline in traditional civic associations has made it harder for low SES citizens to get their views heard. It is that the resources which individual citizens need in order to gain political knowledge, to articulate their views in ways that others can understand and accept, and to think of themselves as citizens joined in a collective political project with others have become increasingly estranged from low SES citizens and are becoming disproportionately available to citizens of high SES (Bartels, 2016; Gilens, 2014; Stoker, 2006). Low SES citizens in

liberal democratic societies that have experienced a decline in traditional civil society and grassroots politics and a rise in the number and influence of professionalised lobby groups face a dual impediment to democratic inclusion: institutions have retreated from them at the same time as the resources on which they relied to participate have evaporated.

As a consequence, many liberal democratic states are characterised by a wealthy, educated, engaged political class which participates in a range of formal and informal political activities and which possesses a disproportionately high level of power and influence, and a poorer, less-educated apolitical class which participates in fewer activities, and possesses a disproportionately low level of power and influence (Gilens, 2014; Solt, 2008). So stark is the gulf between the political and the apolitical class in liberal states, and so excluded are low SES citizens from formal democratic politics and decision making, that it has led several political scientists to suggest that the US in particular is no longer even a democracy, but an oligarchy in which the government responds to the concerns of the wealthy over those of the poor (Gilens & Page, 2014; Achen & Bartels, 2017).

2. Participatory democracy as a two-stage process

Participatory democrats who argue for the need to increase citizen participation are generally attentive to the importance of wider associational participation to democratic participation, and to the importance of ensuring that all citizens are afforded equal access to the resources they need to build democratic capacity. Indeed, participatory democracy is as much a vision of society as it is of political decision making: a vision in which free and equal individuals participate with others to seek solutions to common problems. Participatory *democracy* is valuable because it is the form of politics most suited to, and arising out of, such a society. Participatory democrats thus emphasise the need to establish a participatory society as a basis for participatory democracy in order to develop the right 'individual attitudes and psychological qualities' in all citizens through socialisation across numerous spheres of their lives in order to ensure 'maximum participation by all the people' (Pateman, 1975). Only in a participatory society, by participating in *other* areas of their lives, will citizens acquire the skills to participate in *politics*. But this raises a problem: if citizens get the skills they need for participation by participating, what do we do about those citizens who are not participating and hence,

are not learning the civic skills to participate? Participatory democrats need to explain how, in the current context of economic inequality, and social and civic decline, citizens will make the leap from not participating to participating: that is, from not having the necessary resources they need to build democratic capacity, to having them.

Their response has been to argue that establishing a participatory democracy requires a two-pronged approach: one which ensures strong and varied institutional forms capable of enabling all citizens to participate freely and meaningfully in democratic life *and* seeks to ameliorate damaging social, economic, and political inequalities as part of a wider process of establishing a participatory society (e.g. Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1975 & 2002; Young, 2002). To get citizens to make the jump from non-participation to participation, the system must ensure that citizens without the requisite civic skills to participate acquire them. So while participation *once begun* can itself provide the social training for democracy that Pateman believes is necessary, initial inclusion in the process must be ensured by an *independent* and *separate* process of economic redistribution. Creating a participatory society is thus, for participatory democrats, a two-step process. *First*, we need to deal with the background structural factors which shape patterns of political participation and serve to concentrate political participation among certain demographic groups at the expense of others. Once we have done so, *then* we can meaningfully discuss the ways in which equal citizens can access the political system and get their voices heard effectively and fairly.

The importance of establishing a participatory society *first*, and *then* creating new opportunities for widespread democratic participation makes sense, and is at least partly corroborated by the failure of many recent attempts by UK and other governments to increase democratic participation. Giving more direct control over state budgets to citizens in California, for example, has produced decisions which have damaged the state's economy and – in the case of property taxes - further entrenched social and economic inequalities. Furthermore, turnout in this process has remained disproportionately concentrated among socio-economic elites (Dyck, 2009). More generally, initiatives aimed at increasing turnout among citizens at the lower end of the wealth and income distribution and minority groups have proven unsuccessful, with rates of participation still overwhelmingly concentrated among white citizens of high SES (Gilens, 2014; Schlozman et al, 2018).

Similarly, successive governments in the UK have reformed local and national institutions in ways designed to encourage participation, especially among low SES citizens. For example, throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s New Labour introduced

> ‘new modes of citizen consultation and engagement (through citizens’ juries, focus groups, citizens’ panels, deliberative opinion polls, and local referendums); modernisation of electoral arrangements through the adoption of PR in Scottish local authorities, all postal vote ballots, electronic voting and counting, and e-democracy initiatives); and modernisation of local organisational structures (through elected mayors, cabinet models, and local strategic partnerships’ (Judge, 2006)

Nevertheless, general participation remained disproportionately concentrated among citizens of high SES (Apostlova et al, 2017; Birch, 2013; Stoker, 2006; Sharman, 2014). More recent initiatives under the coalition and conservative governments aimed at increasing participation among citizens of low SES, and to bring decision making closer to ordinary citizens, like localism and the introduction of elected Police and Crime Commissioners and Mayors, have proven unpopular except among a small proportion of high SES citizens who already have various other means of influencing the course of politics at their disposal (Birch et al, 2013; Gilens, 2014; Sharman, 2014). Initiatives such as new unionism, and the work of organisations like Citizens UK suggest that marginalised citizens *can* be encouraged to participate in certain forms of collective action through an emphasis on local community building and outreach. But while these localised initiatives are worthwhile, they don’t seem to have produced the kind of participatory society that participatory democrats like Pateman and Barber argue for, and which they believe is necessary to support participatory democracy at the national level. Recall, participatory democrats generally see participatory democracy as a more radical model of democracy than the representative system. This is why Pateman is critical of deliberative democracy, and why Barber rejects liberal democracy: both leave too much of the existing system untouched. Neither goes far enough in stating the need for widespread participation. So whatever benefits local community building or outreach have (and they have some), they are

insufficient to deliver the grand vision of widespread participation ‘at all levels’ of peoples’ lives that we see defended by participatory democrats (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1975 & 2012).

Participatory democrats agree with democrats of different kinds about the importance of social and economic inequality to political equality, and hence, about the importance of securing greater political equality through the reduction of social and economic inequality. Participatory democrats are clear: a *participatory* society first requires the creation of a more *equal* society (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1975). Past experience in the UK and the US suggests that creating new and different ways for citizens to participate without first rectifying inequalities in social and economic resources can actually make (and has made) the problem of participatory inequality worse rather than better in that it simply makes it easier for the politically active middle classes to exert their control over the political agenda (Bartels, 2016; Gilens, 2014; Parvin, 2018b).

But this is the problem. The project of establishing a participatory democracy can only begin once we have rectified the social and economic inequalities which affect citizens’ capacity to participate and build democratic capacity (Johnson & Knight, 1998). We can only hope for a rich participatory *democracy* on a national scale once we have created a participatory *society* at a national scale, and we can only do *that* by successfully reversing the deep and widespread social, economic, political, and civic changes outlined in section one which extend throughout society and its institutions. The problem in the UK and the USA, for example, is not simply that citizens of low SES find it difficult to get their voices heard in contemporary liberal democratic states, but that these states have undergone a profound and complex process of restructuring such that citizens of low SES face considerable and disproportionate obstacles in accessing democratic life. Vast tectonic shifts in the political landscape, as well as the distribution of wealth and income among citizens of liberal democratic states, have resulted in a democratic system in which political decision making is conducted at the elite level by an insider community comprising government and a range of professionalised lobby organisations which represent sectional interests of disproportionate concern to high SES citizens and which is disproportionately populated by wealthy individuals whose wealth is associated with access to wider networks and resources which provide political knowledge, a sense of active citizenship, and a secure political identity (Parvin, 2015; Schlozman et al, 2018).

If participatory democracy requires the rectification of inequalities in access to those resources which citizens need in order to develop democratic capacity and participate on an equal basis *before* we introduce wider opportunities for participation in political life, then the feasibility and persuasiveness of participatory democracy depends at least partly on whether and how the inequalities outlined in section one might be reversed, and who or what will drive the changes if grassroots movements have been weakened. The feasibility of establishing a participatory *democracy* depends on the feasibility of establishing a participatory *society* in which all citizens possess the equal opportunity to participate, and possess the necessary resources to do so. Focusing on this issue – namely, what social, economic, and civic conditions must prevail in order for a participatory democracy to function – reveals two fundamental and related challenges to participatory democracy: one practical, and the other philosophical.

3. The practical challenge: The size of the problem.

The first, practical, challenge to establishing a participatory democracy (grounded in a participatory society) concerns the *scale* of the economic, social, and civic changes that would need to be implemented by the state to bring it into existence and to maintain it over the long-term: the kind of reforms necessary to ensure participatory equality would be huge and significant, involving massive reconfigurations of the economic system, civil society, and political institutions. The scale of the changes that have taken place in liberal democratic states, including the decline of traditional civic society and associational life, the decline of grassroots political movements and organisations, and the increased elitism of democratic decision making as conducted by a community of insider groups, requires a similarly large scale response. It requires a vast and deep recalibration of society at the macro level. Rectifying enduring structural political inequalities requires nothing less than the restructuring of democratic societies from the ground up.

It *firstly* requires significant *economic* reform designed to alleviate inequalities. Markets would need to be severely curtailed. It's not controversial among egalitarians, classical liberals, or libertarians that capitalist free markets create economic inequalities, or that these inequalities translate into political

inequalities. Egalitarians have argued that the fact that markets create political inequalities justifies intervention (e.g. Rawls, 1971; Gutmann & Thompson, 2001). Classical liberals and libertarians on the other hand have argued the opposite: the fact that democracy requires intervention in markets shows that we should be sceptical of democracy (Brennan, 2016; Hayek, 1965; Somin, 2016). *Democrats* therefore argue for the market economy to be restructured in ways which alleviate the inequalities associated with participation. But this is no small feat. Changes to the economic structure would require changes to the institutional and political regime required to police and to regulate the new economy. Political institutions would need to be changed, re-designed, or built fresh from the ground up. Laws would need to be changed, re-written, created, and abandoned. Businesses and other organisations would need to be subject to new regulations. Their activities would need to be changed. On the other end, states would need to ensure that wealth and resources were being diverted *from* the right people *to* the right people. Wealth thresholds would need to be determined and measured: who should get what? What precisely should they get? Money? Education? Something else?

It *secondly* needs widespread civic and social change, to ensure that people have all the other resources they need to participate as reflective citizens with sufficient democratic capacity to engage in debates with others on appropriate terms. Associational life would need to be re-built, in order to give all citizens, not just wealthy ones, access to the kind formal and informal networks associated with the development of democratic capacity, political identity, political knowledge, and trust (Putnam, 2001). Non-state groups may need to be funded and given the space to develop and flourish (Cohen & Sabel, 1997; Hirst, 1994). Civil society groups would need to be better connected to citizens and also to the formal political sphere through formal and informal bridging mechanisms (Habermas, 1996; Benhabib, 1996; Mansbridge et al, 2012).

All these economic and civic reforms would need to be conducted over the long-term, over the course of many governments, and would either need to be seen through and supported by all political parties, or implemented irrespective of the parties' policy positions. Furthermore, they would be complex, involving long term and short term considerations. They would need to be rooted in a nuanced and technical understanding of economics and politics, their intersection, and the ways economics and

politics impact upon people's lives. They would need also to be grounded in a deep historical appreciation of what has been tried before, and what has succeeded and what has failed, and the kinds of things that are needed by individuals to possess and exercise their democratic capacity in ways which further their own interests, commensurate with everyone else doing the same.

Ensuring political equality would require a vast project of unprecedented social, political, economic, and civic reform along egalitarian lines. Enduring structures of social and economic inequality would need to be dismantled. The economic system would need to be fundamentally altered in ways which make opportunities to participate more widely available among the poorest citizens. Political institutions would need to be reformed or dissolved; new institutions would need to be built to administer and regulate the new economic and political reality. Civic associations would need to be fostered and built from scratch. The social and civil bases of grassroots politics would need to be supported through public and economic policy. Even if we assume for the sake of argument (as many do not) that such a significant programme of reform were *possible*, democracies would then need to wait until the effects of these new structures are felt by citizens on the ground. Norms of reciprocity and trust would need to develop organically as a result of the civic and political changes enacted; attitudes among citizens would need to alter; the psychological and cognitive obstacles internal to citizens would need to diminish and be replaced by habits of mind associated with effective participation: self-confidence, trust in one's peers and fellow citizens, a sense of one's own importance, some understanding of the system and the ways in which it can be accessed for citizens' benefit, and so on.

The project of designing and establishing a participatory democracy which is 'citizen-centred' in the sense that it places power in the hands of real citizens rather than elected representatives or non-majoritarian organisations or other unelected bodies would thus require nothing less than a fundamental re-ordering of the deep structure of liberal democratic states from the ground up, and the establishment of social, economic, and civic conditions of equality which would enable the poorest citizens living in the most deprived areas to overturn psychological and cognitive habits of mind which have, for generations, perpetuated their marginalisation (Schlozman et al, 2018). The *practical* challenge, therefore, is the scale, number, and complexity of the changes that would need to be

implemented. They could not be bolted onto the side of democracy as we know it. The scale of the inequality which now exists in liberal democratic states, and the extent to which these inequalities drive the nature, quality, and rates of participation, has resulted in a concentration of power in the hands of socioeconomic elites that cannot be dismantled without a fundamental change of the bases of democracy, of politics, and of the economy.

4. The philosophical challenge: The participatory paradox.

The practical challenge alone is not decisive. Political philosophers often offer normative prescriptions which would be very difficult indeed to implement and it is a vexed methodological question as to how important questions of *feasibility* and *realism* are to normative theorising. However, it *is* a problem for democratic theorists who seek to offer not merely an idealised conception of democracy, but one which can inform a concrete strategy for the reform of liberal democratic states, as many of them do, and as many participatory democrats in particular do. In so far as democratic theorising is understood as an endeavour which has, and should have, practical implications for actually-existing states, the sheer scale of the reforms that appear to be necessary to instantiate a participatory democracy should concern its defenders.

Nevertheless, they might say, questions of feasibility are still subordinate, or tangential, to philosophical and normative concerns. But the complexity and scale of the reforms needed for participatory democracy to function as intended are not simply empirical or practical matters. They also raise important philosophical challenges. Most importantly for the argument in this piece, is that in so far as they are essential for the functioning of democracy itself, and hence, a necessary foundation upon which democratic governance must be built, they would need to be implemented *independently of the public will*. That is, the creation of a participatory society, characterised by background social and economic equality and a flourishing civic and associational life, would need to be instantiated *prior* to, and separate from, the democratic process. It could not be a *product* of the democratic process. If the requisite social and economic foundations necessary to ensure and protect political equality over the long-term, and hence the integrity of the democratic process, were not already in place, the outcomes secured by citizens through the democratic process would not be

democratic. We would, in fact, have the situation that we have now: a system in which formal opportunities for participation exist, but which for a range of overlapping reasons are only effectively accessible by citizens of a high SES who are able to leverage their networks and access important resources in ways which allow them to control the political agenda and wield disproportionate influence over the direction of public policy, the design of institutions, and political decision making.

To establish the required conditions for participatory equality, democratic decision-making about those issues and areas of policy which would need to be reformed would need to be suspended or significantly diminished in order to ensure that the state was enabled to do what it needs to do to alleviate the inequalities associated with participatory inequality and the concentration of political power in the hands of high SES citizens and their representatives. But as we have seen, the measures that would be necessary to put in place to do this would be considerable in their scale and complexity. Ensuring the substantive participatory equality of all citizens would require a considerable re-structuring of the political, civic, institutional, and economic infrastructure of the liberal democratic state. The number of things that would need to be done in pursuit of this goal would mean that a significant range of decisions across a significant range of policy areas would need to be taken out of democratic control. It would require the wide and deep re-structuring of society and politics by a state acting *outside* of the democratic process, engaged in a complex process of structural reform of the economy and society regardless of whether the citizen population supported these reforms. Furthermore, such reforms would need to be *ongoing*: states would need to protect the conditions for widespread equality even if the majority was against the idea. Reform would not be a once-and-for-all affair, it would need to be maintained and policed over the long-term by a state which acted outside of the democratic system, often against the will of the people.

Democracy is thus characterised by a paradox – what I call the participatory paradox – the presence of which becomes more problematic, more destabilising, the more control over decision-making citizens are assumed to need. The more that democracy is seen as a system which places direct control over political decisions in the hands of citizens, the more that it will be necessary for the state to do things without citizens' consent. The more that the system relies on citizens participating in democratic debates, deciding collectively on complex political issues, identifying political problems,

and finding policy solutions to these problems the more it becomes incumbent on democratic states to *remove* democratic decision-making power from citizens and enshrine it instead at the constitutional level, and rely not on the insights of citizens who will often not possess the level of technical and expert knowledge necessary to inform the search for political solutions, but on those experts who will.

To put it another way: a participatory *democracy* requires the creation of a participatory *society*, but a participatory society cannot be created via the democratic process. It must be created first, *before* any democratic process begins. It requires the state to reform society along egalitarian lines irrespective of whether the people support these reforms. The participatory paradox suggests that the *strengthening* of democracy requires the *weakening* of democracy. The *empowerment* of citizens necessitates their *disempowerment.* It suggests that a participatory democracy, which seeks to place greater control in the hands of citizens, and which values citizen participation as a principal driver of state action, actually requires the *removal* of power from citizens, and the reduction of the scope of democratic control over a vast range of policy areas. Conversely, and crucially, it also suggests that the *less* democrats rely on citizen participation, the wider the scope for democratic decision making can be allowed to be. The participatory paradox suggests that democracy can be rendered stronger, and the scope of the issues under democratic control can be larger, if participation in the democratic decision-making process is actually restricted to a sub-set of the citizenry, rather than all of them. Empirical data suggests that this kind of democratic debate would also be better - more productive, more deliberative, more reflective – than democratic debate conducted across a much larger constituency, or the citizenry as a whole (e.g. Cohen, 2009; Mutz, 2006). That is, it suggests that the driving assumption of participatory democratic theory – that higher rates of participation among as many citizens as possible is better for democracy - is actually upside down. Democracy would be better served by *de-emphasising* political participation at the mass level and focusing instead on improving the quality of democratic participation among a smaller number of citizens who possess, or who can be reasonably given, the requisite political knowledge and democratic capacity to engage in these debates in the way democracy requires, to pool citizens' epistemic insights in ways which ground decision-making in citizens' lived experiences, and which debate these experiences in the context of wider expertise provided by interest groups and experts. In other words, the participatory paradox provides the basis of a defence of a reformed representative democracy in which a sub-set

of citizens – including but not limited to elected representatives - are given greater autonomy to debate and make political decisions and in which the insights of citizens and expert organisations are included in ways which are fairer and more equal than they currently are.

5. Representative, not participatory, democracy

The participatory paradox poses a significant philosophical challenge to participatory democracy, and forms a basis for a defence of representative democracy which downplays the importance of widespread participation in decision making. Representative conceptions of democracy which do not emphasise democratic participation among citizens, and which are instead keen to explore ways of ensuring democratic outcomes in the absence of widespread and active participation among citizens, are more resilient to low and declining rates of political participation, precisely because they don't require the establishment of a participatory society before democracy can begin. Forms of democratic governance which understand decision making to take place not so much as a result of a conversation between citizens and states, or the people and their elected representatives, but more as a conversation between state and non-state actors within representative institutions, and which also give elected representatives a reasonable degree of autonomy with regard to their citizens' preferences rather than understanding their role as simply to implement the collective will of the citizenry, are in theory able to function coherently and according to democratic principles in a context of low participation. In a suitably configured representative democracy, which builds checks and balances on representatives and also the popular will into the heart of the system, it matters less that democratic capacity is distributed unevenly across different social, economic, and demographic groups. It also matters less if many citizens don't participate. The pressure on citizens in a representative democracy which emphasises the power of elected representatives to decide on matters of public policy rather than citizens themselves will be lessened. Citizens will not be required to think and act in ways that they do not or cannot by a system that can't coherently give them what they need to think or act in that way.

Focusing our efforts on harnessing the potential of representative institutions centralises the representative state in the re-democratisation process. It makes the representative state, not

grassroots movements or citizens themselves, the principal agents of social and political change. Doing so has two positive consequences. Firstly, it better fulfils *egalitarian* aims than participatory democracy and, hence, reveals why egalitarian political theorists should favour representative over participatory democracy. Secondly, it offers a better solution to the problem than participatory democracy can, and also creates the realistic possibility of higher rates of citizen participation, including among low-SES citizens, in the long term: because widespread citizen participation is not seen as an essential pre-requisite of the reform process, the business of creating a more inclusive politics can begin before there is widespread citizen participation.

(a) Representative democracy is egalitarian.

Scepticism about the value and importance of widespread citizen participation has tended to come from the political right. A growing number of philosophers working in the Hayekian tradition have recently criticised democracy for its tendency to give too much power to centralised states and 'politically ignorant' citizens (Brennan, 2016; Parvin, 2018b; Somin, 2016). My claim in this piece is that *egalitarians* who are interested in producing feasible theories that can guide a strategy for democratic reform should be sceptical about widespread participation and the value of participatory democracy too. The reason is this: in unburdening citizens from the duty of active participation, and instead re-structuring the system in such a way as to ensure that representatives have more autonomy to make decisions (informed by citizens' insights, appropriately and effectively incorporated), we lift the unreasonable responsibility currently held by disadvantaged citizens for their own circumstances, and their improvement. Too much faith in the ability of low SES citizens living in deprived areas to change their circumstances through active participation in political and civic life can lead to a culture of unfairly blaming these citizens for the circumstances in which they find themselves. If they want things to improve, we might say, why do so few of them get involved? Why don't they write to their MP or congressman or vote for change or take part in a town hall meeting or put their names forward for inclusion in any number of the new localist initiatives that have been created to give them a voice in the wider life of their community? The reason, as we have seen, is that they often can't. Egalitarian liberals are generally attentive to the effects of social and economic inequality on people's choices, their life chances, and their opportunities. Just as structural obstacles

beyond the individual's control can impose constraints on their ability to be a top CEO or attend an elite university, so they can also constrain their ability to participate in the democratic life of the polity, or even understand themselves as the kind of person who could or should do so, or make a difference. The fact that democratic participation takes time that many people working long hours and juggling familial and caring responsibilities don't have is well-known, and shouldn't be underestimated (Schlozman et al, 2018). But time is only one obstacle to enabling participation among the low SES citizens, and as we have seen, even if it would be possible to come up with democratic innovations capable of easing time pressures, low SES citizens would still have limited or no access to the range of networks and resources associated with participation and the development of democratic capacity (Knight & Johnson, 1998).

Representatives can, and should, take steps to increase democratic capacity across society. Outreach work of the kind that we mentioned earlier could be leveraged to increase citizens' political knowledge and encourage political activity. But we shouldn't underestimate the obstacles to doing so, or the scale of this endeavour. We should certainly not assume that citizens will be able to do this without support over the long term. Holding disadvantaged citizens responsible for, or complicit in, their disadvantage by virtue of their unwillingness to affect change through participation in the political process, holds them responsible for things that they often will not have the meaningful capacity to change. Or, at least, it is holding them responsible for things that we have every reason to believe that they cannot meaningfully change without long term support and significant social engineering. Furthermore, holding them responsible for their disadvantage in a wider context of democratic exclusion and structural inequality enables representatives to abdicate responsibility for resolving these issues. Blaming the victims of disadvantage eases the pressure on representative institutions to resolve it and hence, simply ensures that it continues to endure and, in doing so, continues to entrench the participatory inequality associated with it.

(b) Representative democracy could encourage greater, and more equal, participation in the long term.

Understanding the representative state as the principal driver of social and political change and not citizens themselves also creates the possibility for higher rates of citizen participation over the long term. When the capacity of civil associations and organisations to act as bridges between the state and the people is compromised, representative institutions must extend their reach by reforming themselves in ways which better incorporate citizens' voices at the elite level. Representation requires this. If political change aimed at rectifying social and economic inequalities which undermine democracy cannot be reliably ensured from the ground up by citizens and grassroots movements, then it must be built by institutions capable of listening to, and acting upon, the concerns of marginalised groups, and by low SES citizens in particular. There are many possible ways in which institutions might be so reformed, from lotteries to mini-publics, deliberative polls, and focus groups (Escobar & Elstub, 2017). In the UK, the power of the Parliamentary committee system could be better used to more formally include citizens through, for example, the introduction of new stages in the legislative process, or new citizen-led forms of legislative scrutiny. Similar institutional checks could be introduced in other states too in ways which leverage the pre-existing institutional structure for the expansion of citizen involvement at the elite level (Fishkin, 2009; Smith, 2009).

There is a significant and growing empirical literature on the comparative efficacy of different democratic innovations, and it's beyond the scope of this article to choose between them (e.g. Chwalisz, 2017; Elstub & McLaverty, 2014; Fishkin, 2018; Fung, 2015; Kasdan, 2019; Smith, 2009). As a work of applied normative theory, the central claims of this piece do not turn on the success or failure of any one innovation, rather they emphasise the importance of the search for successful innovations. The argument I have presented can hopefully act as a useful guide to determining what kind of innovations might work, what they should aim to do, and what kind of structure they should have. They should be weighted toward incorporating the voices of poorer citizens in the interests of re-balancing debates which are currently dominated by the voices of wealthier citizens. They should be small, in order that the participants can be afforded the resources and information they need to engage in policy debates as informed individuals who are in possession of the necessary facts. And they should complement and inform the process by which elected representatives make decisions. Democratic innovations need to be aimed at empowering a small sub-set of citizens – including but

not limited to elected representatives – to debate political issues in order that the widest possible range of policy can stay under democratic control.

It may well be the case that appropriately selected, successful democratic innovations aimed at ensuring greater representation of marginalised voices within elite institutions might over the long term pave the way for more citizen participation among the population. Limited measures designed to augment representative institutions in ways that make them more responsive to citizens' concerns might, if they are seen by citizens as successful, encourage in citizens the idea that their voices matter, and can make a difference, which might in turn lead to a strengthening of civil society and associational politics. This would be a good thing, as it would over time eliminate the economic and social deficits which marginalise low SES citizens, and might lead to iterative change.

But also, importantly, this may not happen, and we should not assume that it will. It may be that the structural obstacles to citizen participation remain too great to be overcome by institutional reforms. A representative democracy (augmented by reforms aimed at incorporating citizens in elite level debates) would be more resilient to low and unequal rates of citizen participation than one which foregrounds widespread participation because it would introduce citizens into the process in a different, complimentary way alongside existing democratic mechanisms, and in ways which enable elected representatives to understand and be guided by citizens' concerns and insights.

6. Conclusion.

The aim of this piece has been to suggest that representative democracy is more philosophically coherent, more egalitarian, and more realistic than a form of democracy which requires and assumes widespread citizen participation. More *philosophically coherent*, because it offers a solution to the participatory paradox. More *egalitarian*, because it takes seriously the scale and nature of structural inequalities and seeks to find ways citizens and representatives to work together to represent the interests of all citizens. And more *realistic*, because it drops the need to establish a participatory society and focuses instead on incorporating citizens' voices more effectively into political

conversations held at the elite level using democratic innovations which have been empirically studied and validated.

Political theorists concerned to provide a viable strategy for democratic reform that will better include marginalised voices and promote political and economic equality should defend an augmented form of democracy that enriches, rather than replaces, the representative system. Working out how best to introduce citizens into representative systems in ways which do not require unrealistic rates of participation at the mass level is an exciting and fertile area. What I have tried to do in this essay is merely to bolster support for this work, and to provide some guidance as to why it is so vital to the future of democracy and to egalitarian politics, and to the lives of many of those living under the most challenging social and economic conditions, that we de-emphasise the importance of participation among the general citizen population and focus more on strengthening and enriching representation.

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