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Models of Democracy: An Introduction

> *There is a striking paradox to note about the contemporary era: from Africa to Eastern Europe, Asia to Latin America, more and more nations and groups are championing the idea of democracy; but they are doing so at just that moment when the very efficacy of democracy as a national form of political organization appears open to question. As substantial areas of human activity are progressively organized on a regional or global level, the fate of democracy, and of the independent democratic nation-state in particular, is fraught with difficulties.* (Held 1998, 11)

Many recent contributions on democracy start – like David Held's above – by mentioning a paradox. On the one hand, the number of democratic countries in the world is growing – according to Freedom House, from thirty-nine democracies in 1974 to eighty-seven countries free and democratic, and sixty partially free, in 2011 (Freedom House 2012). On the other, there is a reduction in the satisfaction of citizens with the performances of 'really existing democracies' (Dahl 2000). Some scholars even suggested that the third wave of democratization risks developing into economic wars and armed conflicts (see, in particular, Tilly 2004). Certainly, research on quality of democracy by Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino (2005) pointed at the low quality of many democratic regimes. The question 'Can democracy be saved?' became central in the recent political debate faced with a most serious financial crisis, as well as apparent institutional incapacity to address it. Not only have these developments triggered harsh societal reactions and calls for politics to come back

in, but also the austerity measures to address them have accelerated the shift from a social model of democracy, with its development of the welfare state, to a neoliberal one, that trusts free-market solutions.

As we will see in this volume, to understand this paradox it is necessary to distinguish between different conceptions of democracy, both as they have been theorized and as they have been applied in real-world, existing democratic institutions. As Robert Dahl observes about the idea of democracy, 'Ironically, the very fact that democracy has such a lengthy history has actually contributed to confusion and disagreement, for "democracy" has meant different things to different people at different times and places' (2000, 3).

In this volume, I shall in fact contrast four models of democracy, assessing the challenges and opportunities that recent social, cultural and political changes represent for them. If we want to save democracy, we have in fact to acknowledge its contested meaning, as well as the different qualities that are stressed in different conceptions and practices of democracy. Saving democracy would mean going beyond its liberal model, broadening reflection on participation and deliberation inside and outside institutions. This would imply looking at the same time at normative theories as well as at empirical evidence on different models from the liberal one. Referring to research I carried out on social movements, but also to other scholars' work, I aim to discuss general challenges and opportunities for democracy. In this chapter, I will start this journey first of all by introducing different conceptualizations of democracy, which will then be discussed in depth in the rest of the volume.

Conceptions and practices of democracy: an introduction

The search for a shared conceptualization of democracy in political science was for a long time oriented towards procedural criteria which mainly considered free, competitive and periodic elections as a sufficient indicator for the presence of democracy. The choice of a minimalist definition of democracy was justified at the time with reference to the ease of its empirical operationalization. Normative definitions – which look at the ability of democracies to produce a government 'for the people', realizing its wishes and preferences – are instead considered difficult to apply in empirical research:

> How may we see to what extent certain real problems are close to, or far away from, the ideal 'correspondence' or responsiveness postulated as necessary?…How is it possible to pinpoint the 'wishes' or

> 'preferences' of citizens? Who is entitled to express them without betraying or modifying them? Is it only the 'preferences' of the majority that count? But should a democratic regime not also protect minorities? How, then, do we measure the 'correspondence' or responsiveness, that is the 'congruence'? (Morlino 1996, 84)

More recently, however, it has been observed that a minimalist, procedural definition is not, in reality, the only empirically verifiable one. As Leonardo Morlino (2011) has argued, all the different ideals of democracy can be operationalized in the sense that adequate empirical indicators can be found to determine whether, according to a specific definition, a country at a particular moment in time is democratic or not. It should be added that definitions of democracy are always changing, linked as they are to specific problems (theoretical and empirical, scientific and real) that emerge and change in different historical periods.

In addition, every definition of democracy necessarily has a normative dimension. As rightly observed by David Held, empirical theories of democracy, focusing on the meaning normally attributed to the term, have thus tended to normatively legitimate that specific conception:

> Their 'realism' entailed conceiving of democracy in terms of the actual features of Western polities. In thinking of democracy in this way, they recast its meaning and, in so doing, surrendered the rich history of the idea of democracy to the existent. Questions about the nature and appropriate extent of citizen participation, the proper scope of political rule and the most suitable spheres of democratic regulation – questions that have been part of democratic theory from Athens to nineteenth-century England – are put aside, or, rather, answered merely by reference to current practice. The ideals and methods of democracy become, by default, the ideals and methods of the existing democratic systems. Since the critical criterion for adjudicating between theories of democracy is their degree of 'realism', models which depart from, or are in tension with, current democratic practice can be dismissed as empirically inaccurate, 'unreal' and undesirable. (2006, 166)

It could be added that, over time, the research focus on representative institutions has produced a partial vision of the real functioning of existing democracies.

If a large part of political scientists' attention has been concentrated on democracy, this does not mean that a unanimously accepted definition of the concept exists. There is no doubt that the concept of democracy is not only 'stretched' but also contested. In a recent *APSA-CP Newsletter* symposium dedicated to conceptualization, Thomas Koelbe (2009) rightly lamented the use and abuse of the concept of democracy to

describe a plethora of different political systems, and indeed a basic disagreement on its conceptualization.

Different types of definitions of democracy do in fact exist. The classical normative definitions underline the legitimizing role of citizens. Democracy is power *from* the people, *of* the people and *for* the people: it derives from the people, belongs to the people, and must be used for the people. Those general principles are, however, combined in very different ways. Charles Tilly (2007, 7) has distinguished four approaches to democracy in the social sciences:

- A *constitutional approach* concentrates on laws a regime enacts concerning political activity…
- *Substantive approaches* focus on the conditions of life and politics a given regime promotes…
- Advocates of a *procedural* approach single out a narrow range of government practices to determine whether a regime qualifies as democratic…
- *Process-oriented* approaches…identify some minimal sets of processes that must necessarily be continuously in motion for a situation to be considered as democratic.

If we look at actually existing democracies, we can generally observe that they in fact combine different conceptions. Representative institutions are flanked by others. As Pierre Rosanvallon has recently noted, 'the history of real democracies cannot be dissociated from a permanent tension and contestation' (2006, 11).[1] Indeed, the democratic state needs not only legal legitimacy through respect for procedures, but also the trust of its citizens. In the evolution of 'really existing democracies' this has meant that, alongside the institutions that guarantee electoral accountability (or responsibility), there is a circuit of surveillance (or vigilance) anchored outside state institutions (2006, 11). A public sphere developed from the encounter between the state's search for efficiency and the intervention of civil society seeking to express requests and rectify mistakes (Eder 2010). Placing emphasis on elections often ends up obscuring the need for critical citizens who make governors accountable. Thus, 'When the electoral institution is chosen as the institution characterising democratic regimes the much more important presence of a sphere that is both public and distinct from the regimes is obscured. Deprived of this, deprived that is of open public discourse, and despite being governed by persons regularly elected, such a regime could only misleadingly be called democratic' (Pizzorno 2010, xiii).

Rosanvallon suggested that democracy needs not only legal legitimation, but also what he calls 'counter-democracy', that is 'a specific,

political modality of action, a particular form of political intervention, different from decision making, but still a fundamental aspect of the democratic process' (2006, 40). In the historical evolution of democratic regimes, a circuit of surveillance, anchored outside state institutions, has developed side by side with the institutions of electoral accountability. Necessary to democratic legitimacy, confidence requires defiance, in the sense of instruments of external control and actors ready to perform this control; in fact, democracy develops with the permanent contestation of power. Actors such as independent authorities and judges, but also mass media, experts and social movements, have traditionally exercised this function of surveillance. The latter, in particular, are considered as most relevant for the development of an 'expressive democracy' that corresponds to 'the *prise de parole* of the society, the manifestation of a collective sentiment, the formulation of a judgment about the governors and their action, or again the production of claims' (2006, 26).

The definition of democracy also changes over time. Through self-reflexive practices, democracy is in a permanent process of definition and redefinition (Eder 2010, 246). Although extremely young as an institution (just a few decades old in the majority of states, if we take universal suffrage as a fundamental condition), democracy does have a long history as a subject for reflection (Costa 2010). If electoral responsibility was privileged in the historical evolution of the discourse on really existing democracy, today the challenges to procedural democracy bring our attention back to other democratic qualities (Rosanvallon 2006).

Democracies are also varied. Different democratic qualities have been intertwined in the construction of diverse typologies. Political scientists have often looked at different arrangements in terms of functional and geographical distribution of power, involving more or less centralization in public decision making. Other scholars have pointed at the varying capacity of democratic states to implement their decisions. Tilly has, for instance, classified political regimes on the basis of some of their capacities: 'How wide a range of citizens' expressed demands come into play; how equally different groups of citizens experience a translation of their demands into state behaviour; to what extent the expression of demands itself receives the state's political protection; and how much the process of translation commits both sides, citizens and the states' (2007, 13).

Not one, but four models

Noting the diversity between different conceptions and practices of democracy, my aim in this volume is not to reconstruct various ideas of democracy, but rather to analyse the way in which they have been

prefigured by different actors, as well as translated into requests and proposals, thus penetrating and transforming real democracies, and so the democratic state. From this point of view, in addressing the question 'Can democracy be saved?', the original contribution I wish to develop in this volume lies in the combination of normative theory with empirical analyses of how some conceptions have developed and have inspired concrete institutional changes.

Throughout the analysis, some general considerations will emerge on the status and content of the liberal model of democracy. If this is dominant today, it is, however, challenged by other conceptions, variously discussed as participatory democracy (Pateman 1970; Polletta 2002), strong democracy (Barber 2003), discursive democracy (Dryzek 2000a), communicative democracy (Young 1996), welfare democracy (Fitzpatrick 2002) or associative democracy (among others, Perczynski 2000).

In the intense debate in normative theory, we can single out two dimensions of democratic conceptions that are relevant for our reflections. The first dimension refers to the recognition of participation as an integral part of democracy; a second one looks at the construction of political identities as exogenous versus endogenous to the democratic process. In political theory from Dewey to Habermas, it is often observed that the principle of representation is balanced by the presence of participatory spaces, and the majoritarian principle, central to liberal definitions of democracy, is in various ways, balanced by the presence of deliberative spaces.

First of all, a general mantra of discussion on democracies in so-called 'empirical theories of democracy' is that democratic institutions are representative. While the ideal of democracy as government of, by and for the people stresses the source of all power in the citizenry at large, democratic institutions are called to restrict the number of decision makers and select them on the basis of some specific qualities. A distinction is in fact usually made between the (utopistic) conception of a *democracy of the ancients*, in which all citizens participate directly in the decisions about the public goods, and a (realistic) *democracy of the moderns*, where an elected few govern. The volume and complexity of decision making in the modern state is often quoted as imposing severe constraints on the participation in public decisions of the many and, especially, of the normal citizens, often considered as too inexperienced, if not too emotional, to have a say in the choices which will affect them. Electoral accountability should then give legitimacy to the process, by allocating to the citizens-electors the power to prize or punish those in government, every once in a while (see chapter 2).

If the liberal theories have underlined delegation, or electoral accountability, this has, however, been considered to be insufficient in other

theorizations (see chapter 3). In particular, so-called participatory theories have affirmed the importance of creating multiple occasions for participation (Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1970). Elections are in fact, at best, too rare to grant citizens sufficient power to control the elected. Additionally, elections offer only limited choices, leaving several themes out of the electoral debates and citizens' assessment. More and more, elections have been seen as manipulated, given the greater capacity of some candidates to attract financial support, licit or illicit, as well as to command privileged access to mass media. In parallel, the quality of decisions could be expected to decline with the decline in participation, as the habit of delegating tends to make citizens not only more apathetic, but also more cynical and selfish. Participation is instead praised as a school of democracy: capable of constructing good citizens through interaction and empowerment.

Not only delegation, but also majoritarian decision making has been criticized. A 'minimalist' view of democracy as the power of the majority has been considered not only as risky in terms of thwarting the rights of the minorities, but also as reducing the quality of decision making. As there is no logical assumption that grants more wisdom to the preferences which are (simply) more numerous, other decision-making principles should at least temper the majoritarian one (see chapter 4). In normative debates, deliberative theories have in fact promoted spaces of communication, the exchange of reasons, the construction of shared definitions of the public good, as fundamental for the legitimation of public decisions (among others, see Miller 1993, 75; Dryzek 2000a, 79; Cohen 1989, 18–19; Elster 1998; Habermas 1981, 1996). Not the number of pre-existing preferences, but the quality of the decision-making process would here grant legitimacy as well as efficacy to the decision. By relating with each other – recognizing the others and being recognized by them – citizens would have the chance to understand the reasons of the others, assessing them against emerging standards of fairness. Communication not only allows for the development of better solutions, by permitting holders of different knowledge and expertise to interact, but would also change the perception of one's own preferences, making participants less concerned with individual, material interests and more with collective goods.

Participation and deliberation are in fact democratic qualities in tension with those of representation and majority decisions, and are alongside these in a precarious equilibrium in the different conceptions and specific institutional practices of democracy.

Crossing the dimensions of delegation versus participation and majority vote versus deliberation, I single out four different models of democracy (see table 1.1) that I will refer to in the following chapters.

Table 1.1 Conceptions of democracy

	Majority vote	*Deliberation*
Delegation	**Liberal democracy**	**Liberal deliberative democracy**
Participation	**Radical, participatory democracy**	**Participatory deliberative democracy**

Liberal democracy privileges – as mentioned – delegation and the majority vote. The assumption is that deciding on public issues is too complex a task to be left to the mass of citizens. Their task is rather to legitimize the power of an elected elite. As power originates, indeed, from the people, they are expected to exercise it, as electors, at specific moments. Electoral campaigns should be able to inform the citizens about past performances and political programmes, as well as personal skills, of candidates; elections should allow the citizens to choose those who will then govern for an allocated time-span. The fear of losing power at the coming elections should make the elites in government sensitive to the people's judgement. The distinctive institutions of Dahl's polyarchal democracy are in fact based upon the presence of officials elected in free, fair and frequent elections, as well as freedom of expression and association and alternative sources of information (Dahl 1998).

Moreover, in liberal democracy, even if with some caveats, the majority wins. This means, decisions are made by measuring the degree of support for opposing views and allocating the victory to those who are more numerous. In principle, ideas, interests, preferences and/or identities are assumed to develop outside the democratic process, which channels them inside the political system. Decisions are then made on the basis of measurement of the support for each of them among the citizens. The legitimizing principle is 'one head, one vote'. In Anthony Downs' (1957) influential version, democracy works as a market where politicians aim at collecting votes, and citizens have (exogenously generated) preferences. While, of course, interests differ, a broad consensus is assumed among compatible interests, and conflicts tend to be considered as negative, as they risk overloading the system (Crozier, Huntington and Watakuni 1975). The actors carrying conflictual interests are seen as anti-systemic (Sartori 1976).

This liberal conception of democracy, however, does not sufficiently reflect the real functioning of democracy in any periods of its existence. As we are going to see, in the rest of this volume, really existing democracy incorporates institutions based upon different principles of legitimation. Referendums, considered as a residual vestige of direct democratic

procedures, are spreading, and so are institutions based on principles of restricted delegation or including representatives chosen by lot (see, e.g., chapter 9). Moreover, that conception is partial as it implicitly looks at the public institutions as the only democratic arena. Research on social movements, but also on political parties, called instead for attention to be paid to the many arenas in which democratic forms are based upon different principles from the liberal ones. Mechanisms of institutional accountability, through control by the people as the source of democratic legitimacy, require (many and varied) societal institutions that work as channels of political communication and socialization to the public good. Not only (negative) controls but also (positive) stimuli have to come from the citizens continuously if good decisions are to be made. Along the same lines, research on the long processes of first democratization stressed the importance of non-electoral circuits for the functioning of the democratic state. The influence of protest in regimes with restricted electoral participation did not operate through elections, even though the parliaments were targets of claims-making. In fact, in their concrete evolution, the existing democratic states and societies have amended the ideal-typical principles of liberal democracy, mixing them with others, linked to other conceptions of democracy.

The liberal conception of democracy has been, first of all, challenged by a *participatory* one. Recognizing the existence of deep conflicts in society, the theorists of participatory democracy have stressed the importance of involving citizens beyond elections (Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1970; Barber 2003). Participation in different forms and in different moments of the democratic process is in fact considered as positive both for individuals, who are socialized to visions of the public good, and for the very political institutions, as it might lead to increased trust and support for them. Challengers to the elites, in particular – from the labour movement to the most recent *indignados* – have nurtured a participatory vision, extending the forms of legitimate political involvement well beyond the vote. Conceptions of democracy as open participation tend, in fact, to limit the functions of delegates and instead expand (assembleary) arenas for decisions open to all. Moreover, the space for politics broadens in participatory visions, as democracy is considered as fundamental not only in parliaments, but also in civil society organizations: from parties to social movements, from working places to neighbourhoods. While collective identities are still, as in the liberal model, formed outside of the democratic process, and might lead to conflictual interests, agreement on the basic principles of decision making is a precondition for managing those conflicts peacefully.

Beyond the set of criticisms addressed to delegation, there is also one addressed to the principle of the majority vote. A second alternative to

liberal conceptions of democracy has, in fact, stressed the importance of the communicative dimension. Decisions are, in this sense, not made by counting votes, but rather through the more complex process in which opinions are formed. While liberal democracy assumes a political market in which candidates try to sell their products to electors, who already have their preferences, the *liberal-deliberative* conception of democracy is most attentive to the way in which those preferences are formed. The assumption is, in fact, that decisions are more legitimate and, additionally, better, the more interests and collective identities emerge – at least in part – throughout a high-quality deliberative process. In Habermas' (1981) theorization, deliberation should be based on communicative rationality, through an exchange of opinion based on reasons. While the extent to which deliberation implies the actual building of consensus is debatable (Dryzek 2010), good communication certainly implies a recognition of the others', and an open-minded assessment of one's own, reasons. With this in mind, the theorists of deliberation have looked at the ways in which preferences are formed within democratic institutions (Dryzek 2000a, 79). Even though the decision process often ends up with a vote, democracy should not, however, be identified with the principle that the majority wins over the minority. What counts as democratic is rather the possibility, during the democratic process, for holders of different points of view to interact and reciprocally transform each other's views. Empirical research on deliberative democracy has looked at deliberation within political parties (Teorell 1999), parliaments (Steiner et al. 2004), public journalism (Dzur 2002), cyberspace (Dahlberg 2001; Gimmler 2001), the European public sphere (Schutter 2002; Chalmers 2003), citizens' juries (Smith and Wales 2000), deliberative pollings (Fishkin 2003), referendums (Uhr 2000) and social movement organizations (della Porta 2009a and 2009b).

Combining both criticisms of the liberal conceptions of democracy, a fourth model of democracy stresses *participative-deliberative* qualities. In political theory, the feminist critique of Habermas has, in fact, stressed the importance of looking not only outside public institutions, but also beyond a mass-mediatic public sphere, creating places in which the weakest groups in particular can be empowered. Free spaces, with high-quality communication, are here considered as fundamental for the formation of collective identities. Not the bourgeoisie, but rather the subaltern classes are seen as the carriers of this democratic vision. The most recent waves of social movements, in particular, from the global justice movement to Occupy Wall Street, tried to put these norms into practice, by creating public forums, open to the participation of all citizens, in which a plurality of opinions is represented. The public sphere is here considered as a conflictual space, but there is also a reflection

on the conditions for the formation of collective identities during the democratic process.

This volume

In what follows, I aim to bridge theory and empirical evidence, debates on democracy and debates on social movements, in order to look at the normative characteristics of these four different models, but also at their historical evolution. In this sense, I will seek to move beyond the gap that exists between normative theory and empirical studies, responsible for a lack of comparative studies, informed by theory, on democratic innovations (Smith 2009, 8; also Shapiro 2003). That gap is linked to the separation between the institutional analysis of democracy and the analysis of democratic principles, as if they belonged to two different worlds (Beetham 1999, 29). I will try, therefore, to contribute to the dialogue between normative theories and empirical explanations, whose absence, or at least weakness, has been seen as a considerable obstacle to progress in the analysis of democracy (Smith 2009, 9).

As will be seen, not only the conceptions but also the institutions of democracy themselves have been transformed to include, with differing levels of tension and in different balances, diverse understandings of democracy. After presenting the challenges to the liberal model (chapter 2), I will introduce conceptions and practices of participatory and deliberative democracy (chapters 3 and 4, respectively), with particular attention to the role of social movements as promoters of another democracy. Later on, I will address the use of new media in the search for new forms of participation and deliberation (chapter 5), the challenge of building a global democracy (chapter 6), and the contribution of social movements to the democratization process (chapter 7). Chapters 8 and 9 look at two, very different, state responses to social movement challenges, in the forms of protest policing and institutional experiments aimed at innovating democracy.