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## **Toward a New Political Project: Resetting by Reconceptualizing**

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### **Abstract**

This article starts by pointing out that existing proposals to confront the failures of democracy tend to be limited to tackling the symptoms of the current dysfunctional system rather than offering meaningful alternatives to transform the system. It then suggests that a total reset is required and offers an innovative theoretical framework, to conceptualize the new political project, that can transcend the existing impasses. It further argues that such a framework ought to consist in four fundamental, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing principles: (1) equal primary, non-derivative value of all persons; (2) non-instrumentalization of persons; (3) well-being of all as a common good and the end of the political project; and (4) non-antagonistic positive peacefulness as a characterizing feature of political processes. In doing so, this article systematically re-envisages what constitutes good governance, provides a normative basis for advocating participatory democracy, and suggests ways to evaluate the processes and practices of institutions in the new political project.

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*The only indispensable material factor in the generation of power is the living together of people.*

—Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

**H**umanity today is confronted with crises in multiple domains, not least the crises of climate change, mass migration, ideological paralysis, social divisiveness, and distrust in political institutions. All of these prompt us to reimagine different kinds of public space for engaging citizens in decisions toward advancing the common good. They likewise evoke the need to characterize new approaches and processes of public governance and forms of public institutions, the kinds that can lead us into a promising future rather than despair.

Over the last few decades, there has been burgeoning research in the political sciences and sociology that investigates and analyses the failures of some democratic governments. However, having identified the common causes of the widespread democratic breakdowns, these analyses tend to have little to offer as meaningful alternatives to the current system. To imagine a promising political project that can transcend the existing impasses, it requires a total *reset*; here I offer an innovative conceptual framework for re-articulating democratic processes and re-designing relevant public institutions.

Reconceptualization is necessary also because, as I shall argue, despite their attempts to arrest the further decline of democracy, proposals for reform rarely challenge the underlying systemic factors and structural conditions that have resulted in the problems experienced by many democracies. These include, for instance, the fact that politics have always instrumentalized people and their votes; political antagonism has been accepted as part of the culture of democracy; and political institutions do not respect all peoples equally and seldom take collective human well-being seriously as a public interest. Furthermore, political reforms tend to deepen the disparity between the political and economic elites and the rest of the society.

Instead of rehearsing the political critiques and suggesting more reforms, in this article systematically re-envisages the nature of good governance, genuine democratic process, and political institutions. It seeks to answer questions such as the following: What kinds of governance processes and institutions do we need in the twenty-first century? What underlying evaluative principles should form the basis for the design of these processes and institutions? and How might ordinary people participate peacefully in democratic decision-making and consensus-building?

In other words, such a project requires a clear and thorough understanding of the normative basis of politics, therefore it is necessary to return to the drawing board. The normative values highlighted here will serve as the design principles for a new form of public governance and characterization of innovative political institutions. The latter will draw on a diagnosis of what has gone wrong with the existing institutions and why. Both have implications for the ways that people as political agents engage in public governance. They can further provide insights into responsibilities of governments as well as international, transnational, and global organizations.

## **The Impasse of Representative Democracy**

The weaknesses of representative democracy are well documented. To explore them, political scientists and sociologists have analyzed many current models of representative or electoral democracy that have sustained authoritarian regimes and even allowed the rise of autocrats and dictators.<sup>1</sup> These analyses have reflected on some of the important political upheavals in the twentieth century, including those involving Fujimori in Peru, Chavez in Venezuela, Erdoğan in

Turkey, Orbán in Hungary, Modi in India, Putin in Russia, and Trump in the US.<sup>2</sup> In particular, this kind of research tends to highlight the fact that the demise of democracy is often not the result of violent revolution, such as a military coup, but the manipulation of the public's votes, including through social media.<sup>3</sup>

As representative democracy is characterized by citizens voting to elect political candidates, which includes the implementation of myriad strategies to persuade and to swing votes,<sup>4</sup> it is typically regarded as a process of utilizing the ballot box to secure political elites' positions of power.<sup>5</sup> Through instrumentalization, representative democracy reinforces the assumption that elections are necessarily political *fights* or *battles* that will end up with *winners* and *losers*. According to this assumption, voters must take sides and support one set of political promises against another. The idea of democracy as involving a collective understanding of a shared vision for the common good is lost.

Indeed, disillusionment with representative democracy has long been expressed. Some examples focus on the inherent shortcomings of party politics,<sup>6</sup> the unrealistic demand on the voters as rational beings,<sup>7</sup> the risk of 'mob mentality' under political manipulation,<sup>8</sup> and antagonism (including antagonistic populism).<sup>9</sup> In fact, as the political life of many Western societies demonstrates, through the *winning* and *losing* of elections, representative democracy heralds political division, and political processes become power struggles that engender a culture of hostility. During election campaigns to persuade voters, the erosion of civility is a widespread phenomenon that leads to aggressive polarization and even violent demonization of the other (e.g., candidate, party, groups, and communities). The instrumentalization of politics partly consists in deliberate strategies and measures to weaken democratic institutions, such as the court and the media, and to sway public opinion. To a certain extent, representative democracy is neither representative nor democratic. Following an election, there are few public spaces for systematic conversations between the voter and their chosen representative about the policies represented and how they might shift after further votes by the parliament/assembly. This suggests that in between elections, the voter has no voice, and there is no way for the voter to participate in policy processes. The system is closed for voters' involvement until the next election.

Furthermore, while, ideally, government would put forward public policies aimed at the common good, elected representatives often end up serving some groups' interests better than those of others, and sometimes, at the expense of others. Usually, the least well-served and the most under-privileged comprise the greatest part of the society, especially the working people (such as nurses, builders, teachers, carers, social workers, and others in public services) as well as those from minority, migrant, and similar vulnerable backgrounds who are treated as *aliens* or the Other. Ironically, it is the concerns of these groups that are typically weaponized to collect votes. Thus, those who voted for the leaders find themselves once again at the receiving end of disappointment and become politically disenchanting. Those who are marginalized continue to be the main victims of the political process, despite the new facades and pledges.

Notwithstanding most recent and appreciated reforms in some European countries, such as increased opportunities for discussions through town-hall meetings, citizens assemblies, and meetings with local representatives, there remains a power imbalance between the voter and their representative. The system of representation creates a separation between the ruled and the ruling, even though the ruler is elected by the ruled. Such a system tends to instrumentalize the ruled in the service of the ruling.

Today, more people are beginning to recognize that their votes have been instrumentalized, and worse, that their voices and trust have been exploited and abused by a ruling elite.<sup>10</sup> Such

disillusionment often drives voters to give up on political engagement because they have concluded that turning up to vote or voting itself is futile. In other words, they are losing faith in democracy. Therefore, the phenomenon of low election turnout has become increasingly common.<sup>11</sup> Hand-in-hand with this disillusionment is the feeling that elections as expressions of democracy is a myth rather than a reality.

## **Few Alternatives**

Although the factors that underlie the erosion of representative democracy are known, political scientists, researchers, and commentators have proposed few remedies to this contemporary malaise. Existing suggestions include improvements to the electoral system, such as proportional representation that allows the demographics of subgroups (e.g., regions or political parties) of an electorate to be respectively reflected in the elected body, increased tolerance between the political oppositions, and more institutional checks and balances.<sup>12</sup> Such proposals typically focus on reforms to existing institutions, but few put forward radical or creative alternatives beyond representative democracy. Even the few alternatives they propose are in effect flawed. Let us briefly review some, starting with the least radical.

‘Lottocracy’ refers to political systems in which decisions are made by a group of people selected by sortition, such as a lottery. In contemporary politics, sortition usually takes the form of people’s assemblies or citizens’ assemblies.<sup>13</sup> Sortition has the advantages of being inclusive and non-partisan, and it can help alleviate the antagonism inherent in the typical representative electoral democratic systems. There are a few recent examples to demonstrate that citizens assemblies can help make policy recommendations to the national government.<sup>14</sup> Lottocracy is made possible by the time commitment of the people involved. These assemblies also need to be well designed and carefully facilitated to enable a group of randomly selected everyday people from diverse backgrounds to come together and grapple with a complex political decision that affects the society in which they live.<sup>15</sup>

However, sortition is necessarily restricted to being one limited element in a democratic system. It cannot replace the processes of government because any decisions reached through sortition will only constitute recommendations to an elected assembly or government.

A variant of citizens’ decision-making is preferential voting.<sup>16</sup> In this case, all people can vote, rather than only people selected through sortition. When voting, each person registers the order of their preferences for each of the candidates, allowing preferences to be counted together in the case where no candidate receives a majority of first preferences. Furthermore, along with their preferences, it is suggested that voters list their demographics and even take a brief test to demonstrate their level of proficiency in political knowledge. Once done, the crunched data (based on these three sets of information) will be used as the basis to determine how the public from different backgrounds have their preferences registered and taken into account.<sup>17</sup> Preferential voting, such as that practiced in Belgium and the Netherlands, notwithstanding the different models applied, can formally impact the election outcome.<sup>18</sup>

Another alternative proposed is ‘epistocracy.’<sup>19</sup> Epistocracy was first proposed by Plato in the form of guardianship.<sup>20</sup> It is a political system in which society is governed by those who are wiser or more learned, and whose work is directed to serving the common good of the people rather than to their own interests. This approach recognizes the importance of knowledge and understanding in the decision-making process.<sup>21</sup> Thus, epistocracy resonates with some African endogenous governance practices in which a wise leader, such as a chief, or a group of wise leaders, such as a

council of elders, would preside over a community's decision-making process for optimal outcome.

Contemporary forms of epistocracy advocate the distribution of decision-making powers according to the relevant capacities of citizens. Some propose restricted suffrage,<sup>22</sup> and others plural voting.<sup>23</sup> These are based on the assumption that most citizens who take part in voting are not competent enough to understand well the choices they make. For epistocrats, therefore, the entitlement to participate in democratic decision-making should be limited to those who are sufficiently competent. The phenomena of Donald Trump being elected, the British people opting for Brexit, and other far-right candidates being voted into office, have proved to epistocrats that most voters are incompetent, if not naive and malleable.<sup>24</sup> Although training in politics and citizenship education may improve people's knowledge and enhance their political participation, in an epistocracy, voting will necessarily be restricted to sophisticated participants, who are often the elites.<sup>25</sup> Thus epistocracy risks being a system that endorses oligarchy whereby the politically savvy and competent make decisions based upon what they believe to be important, while the politically naive and unskilled remain voiceless. An electorate restricted in such a way means that the lived realities of the majority will tend to be neglected, and their interests undefended.

Another political system that seeks to promote the role of elite leaders is political meritocracy, which aims to select public officials who possess proven superior abilities and virtues.<sup>26</sup> Historically, in China, meritocracy was applied to identify civil servants through public examinations. Though in contrast to representative democracy through public vote, political meritocracy does not reject the values of democracy, in theory. In practice, political meritocracy is a top-down system with democratic practices confined to the very bottom, for instance in villages and within small organizations. This means the political will of the top governing body, whose power can be concentrated in the hands of one person, can preside over the will and interests of the people.

Despite its limitations, some theorists have regarded the contemporary China Model of political meritocracy as a potentially viable alternative to democracy.<sup>27</sup> Among its quoted merits is its capacity to transcend the flaws of the 'one person, one vote' electoral system of representative democracy. Likewise, political meritocracy through policy integration appears to avoid the typical prolonged political debate and deliberation, thus acting and reacting more readily and concertedly to national challenges. Furthermore, despite being limited to the particularity of the Chinese context, China's achievement of lifting a large part of the population out of absolute economic poverty has been regarded as an expression of political meritocracy's 'success.'

Because political meritocracy corresponds with classic Chinese political philosophy, whereby the leader must be a wise and learned person with superior knowledge and virtue, China's consistent political ideology and continuous practice of meritocracy make it difficult to evaluate how much progress is due to this system, and especially difficult to evaluate it against other political systems. However, it has become clear in recent decades that the political meritocracy in the China Model can be vulnerable in the hands of authoritarian rulers who tend to become politically oppressive.<sup>28</sup> Such a system can be dominated by political manipulation and corruption, and political meritocracy itself risks becoming dictatorship.

My review of a few so-called alternatives to representative democracy suggests that they are not alternatives per se. On the one hand, currently proposed reforms, such as preference voting, are simply amendments to the existing system rather than a change or challenge to the underlying structural relations between institutions. In other words, they do not go far enough. On the other hand, the few proposed alternatives, e.g., lottocracy, epistocracy, or political meritocracy, take us

further away from democracy. Although these non-democratic alternatives tend to use democratic language to frame their practices, in reality, they are heading in the completely wrong direction.

## **The Need for the Normative**

It is well recognized that humanity is currently at the brink of a precipice, and at such a crossroads, we need to critically re-examine our political system. Given the failures of contemporary liberal democracy, we must return to a theoretical context, and ask “How should we re-envision democracy in the twenty-first century that can overcome these types of malaise?” One of the paths currently explored by academics is to direct our attention away from the actions of governments to the processes of decision-making. This movement, which started in the 1980s, is rooted in a growing conviction that there are other kinds of political acts and practices apart from voting or electing governments. These can be regarded as forms of public governance.

This turn to public governance might have been due to a number of factors.<sup>29</sup> The first concerns a global increase in grassroots level movements related to innovative governance practices. These movements tend to be driven by a dissatisfaction with the status quo, such as the continued failures of democratic governments in both internal and international affairs, the growing suspicion about the capacity of representative democracies to select suitable leaders, and the frustration with politics’ drift away from serving the common good and the interest of the majority. These grassroots movements therefore stress the processes of participatory decision-making and consensus-building rather than focusing on electing the right representatives.<sup>30</sup>

The second factor is the opportunities afforded by the development of information and communication technology that can enable more direct public engagement in policy-making. Although online platforms have been subject to manipulation and abuse, especially during election campaigns, the spaces offered by digital media for myriad forms of citizens’ political involvement are enormous. Increasingly, people recognize the possibility of sharing their voices and of exercising their civil responsibilities through engaging in conversations online.

The third factor is the growing, widespread consciousness of human interconnectedness, reflected in both research and grassroots governance practices.<sup>31</sup> This is an awareness that our globalized and shared ways of life are constituted in our social-economic-political activities. More people, groups, and communities are calling to not only appreciate but also embrace this interconnection and interdependence. They recognize the importance of diversity and inclusion in communal, organizational, and institutional processes. For instance, it is appreciated that multiple perspectives and different voices can enrich collaboration and co-creative solutions to address complex challenges. The focus is therefore on exploring decision-making and consensus-building processes that are peaceful and non-antagonistic and that involve more listening, dialogue, and deliberation.<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, there are mounting demands globally for new forms of governance in light of the crises confronting humanity as a whole.<sup>33</sup> These emergencies urge the political project to seek good governance processes that transcend traditional institutional boundaries and that allow peoples, communities, and organizations to participate in making decisions that affect all.

The last consists in the realization that decision-making in a diverse range of institutions does share common features. How can an organization with multiple stakeholders make collective decisions? Answers to this question will be similar in the context of corporations, educational institutions, not-for-profit organizations, as well as various government agencies. Therefore, interests are directed toward institutional processes and procedures of decision-making.

Because of this relatively new shift, conceptions of governance are still emerging. Definitions of governance are typically divided into two broad categories. One views governance as the actions of governments. These refer to what the government officials do in their formal capacities, including ministers, parliamentarians, heads of public institutions, and others who are assigned political power.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, governance is what governments do. The other regards governance as a coordinating function, such as providing processes for public decision-making at different levels.<sup>35</sup> The latter conception sees public governance as a wider realm that includes the roles that governments play. That is to say that governments *participate in* governance.

Despite this distinction, the overarching conception of governance continues to require the idea of control, as is reflected in *The Oxford Handbook of Governance*. Here governance concerns “order and disorder, efficiency and legitimacy all in the context of the hybridization of modes of control that allow the production of fragmented and multidimensional order within the state, by the state, without the state, and beyond the state.”<sup>36</sup> The concern for *order* and *control* is among the attempts that aim to shift the conception of governance away from *power*. One such effort is to define governance as *steering*, a conception that lies at the root of its Greek etymology (kubernetes, κυβερνήτης).<sup>37</sup> However, the need for order and control through steering is ultimately in defense against the potential abuse of power. In other words, it did not succeed in moving away from power.

Attempts at definitional shift have continued because scholars tend to believe that only through reconceptualizing governance can there be the possibility of new multi-stakeholder approaches to political engagement. Indeed, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries saw the expansion of governance studies in higher education as well as in urban and corporate governance.<sup>38</sup> This expansion allowed more reflection on policy processes, the roles of institutions and politicians, and the politics of economy. Hence, in addition to governments or nation-states, markets and networks are introduced as part of the definition of public governance.<sup>39</sup> These efforts to redefine governance were intended to describe a different political vista.

No doubt, this transition of understanding democracy from governmental politics to public governance of multidimensional engagement was promising as it sought to explore new forms of governance. It applied in both macro-spheres, such as international relations and transnational concerns, and micro-spheres, such as communal and municipal policies and decisions. Furthermore, with this shift, governance can now be understood multi-dimensionally as a structure, a process, a mechanism and a strategy:

As a structure, governance signifies the architecture of formal and informal institutions; as a process it signifies the dynamics and steering functions involved in lengthy never-ending processes of policy-making; as a mechanism it signifies institutional procedures of decision-making, of compliance and of control (or instruments); finally, as a strategy it signifies the actors’ efforts to govern and manipulate the design of institutions and mechanisms in order to shape choice and preferences.<sup>40</sup>

Despite these exciting advances, none of these dimensions offer a clear indication of what might constitute good governance. To truly reconceptualize the notion of governance and to shed its prior theoretical baggage, it requires a normative basis. Without the normative, governance structure, processes, institutions, and practices in all of these domains will lack evaluative criteria. Evaluative criteria can determine what forms of governance are desirable and why. To evaluate governance processes and practices requires a clear sense of the direction in which these processes



and practices should aim. For instance, the term ‘governing,’ or even ‘governancing,’ has been put forward by sociologists who believe that a verb-form of the term is better than the noun-form, which limits ‘governance’ to governments. Governancing suggests decentralized and collaborative forms of governing.<sup>41</sup> The questions that must follow are “Why are decentralized power and collaborative governance favored here?” and “Why are they better?” The idea of *better* must be directed at the aims that governance should seek and why such aims are important.

It is not enough to know the avowed aims of a political project or of governance institutions; it is necessary to know the values and principles that define what those aims should be. After all, we could have erroneous and harmful aims.

## **Re-envisaging Public Governance**

Against the above backdrop, in this article, I set out to explore questions such as “What ought to constitute good public governance?” This is a simple question but it contains several parts. It requires that we understand what constitutes governance. For example, how does governance differ from government, and what ought to be the relationship between governance and government. There are many kinds of governance, such as school and corporate governance or healthcare governance. What makes governance public? Similarly, we need to understand the word ‘good’ in this context. What might count as good public governance? To respond to these questions, I propose a set of values that underpin principles of good governance as follows:

First, the value that ‘all persons are non-instrumentally valuable,’ which forms the basis of the first principle, (minimal) equality, and the second principle, non-instrumentalization. These two principles assert that all persons should be respected equally regardless of who they are, where they are, and what they do or cannot do, and that no persons should be instrumentalized (or treated solely as means). Together, these two principles determine that people and their voices must be respected equally, and cannot be instrumentalized in a political project. They also contend that any political system in accordance with these principles would necessarily be a participatory (and dialogic) democracy, as opposed to a representative democracy. The third principle is that the main aim of public governance must be directed at the well-being of persons consistent with our being part of the natural world. This end qualifies both the focus of political decisions and the normative characteristics of governance processes. The fourth principle maintains that any governance processes involved in participatory democracy must be peaceful and harmonious, and indeed, the peaceful processes should be a feature of people’s well-being. In other words, for public governance to be good, it is important that the processes are non-antagonistic and congenial. Such peacefulness and harmony should apply to practices of political engagement, e.g., dialogue, listening, sharing, inquiry, and deliberation.

These principles form the values-basis of public governance and can present a new conceptual framework for the political project. By articulating the principles that underly good governance and the practices, processes, and institutions that follow from them, the overall argument for participatory governance can offer a true alternative to electoral representative democracy. Such an argument aims to establish the conceptual pillars for participatory democracy upon which good public governance institutions can be designed and practices implemented. For instance, these principles can enable us to provide an analysis of political epistemology and of democratic hermeneutics, including outlining the types of disagreement that can occur between people. On this basis, processes of consensus-building can be outlined. These include the creation of types of public spaces for open and deep dialogue and of facilitation processes that foster inclusive listening, open sharing, and mutual inquiry. Likewise, through these principles of good

governance, we can characterize the kinds of institutions necessary to scale up participatory democracy from the local to the national, and even to the global.<sup>42</sup>

In summary, these principles form a shift away from centralized national government systems toward more decentralized forms of governance. In this manner, they allow us to reconsider the authority of the state in relation to public governance.

## **Four Principles**

We cannot answer the question “What constitutes good governance?” without an understanding of how this elusive word ‘good’ qualifies ‘governance.’ The term ‘good’ is important for this project as it helps characterize the structural features of a political system. Such structures refer to the ways institutions are systematically organized in relation to each other, as defined by a set of principles. Thus, describing a political structure as good is not the same as describing the human relationships that occur within that structure.<sup>43</sup> Nor is it the same as evaluating the performance of institutions within that system. Structure cannot be reduced to relationships between individual persons or the performance of institutions. Instead, it relies on principles and how they can shape the institutions, e.g., the state, the municipalities, and their relationships with the citizens.

Next I examine the four key principles that ought to form the backbone of the conceptual framework for understanding good governance. They are based on a central point regarding *axiology*, understood as the study of what really matters. The main thesis is that participatory democracy is the most desirable kind of political system that is consistent with the relevant axiology and the emerging principles.

### **The Principle of Equality**

It has been well-argued that persons are non-derivatively valuable.<sup>44</sup> This entails that people’s lives must also have such a value, and so do the constituting aspects of those lives that amount to human well-being. (I shall return to this point later when discussing the principle of well-being.) In contrast, costs and benefits are important because of their relation to what is non-derivatively valuable, such as the lives of human beings. Similarly, other things, such as goods and services that make up an economy and the social infrastructure necessary for a functioning society, are valuable but only derivatively because their value is in relation to the lives of human beings who are capable of making choices and appreciating in ways that are guided by reasons.<sup>45</sup> If everything else is valuable only through their relation to human beings, then persons must be valuable essentially.

It follows then that all people are equally real and equally non-derivatively valuable. This forms the foundation of a principle of equality. This principle is an implication of the axiology mentioned earlier with an additional condition of impartiality. It is a claim more fundamental than a rights-based claim or a moral fairness argument. The idea that all persons are equally non-derivatively valuable does not depend on the notion of a moral entitlement or legal rights. In contrast, the idea that all people are equally non-instrumentally valuable is simpler and does not rely on there being a legal system to assign and protect people’s rights in one way or another.

For the same reason, this equality of all persons does not require the notion of citizenship, which tends to be tied to the institution of a state. Equality of value will apply to all persons, regardless of citizenship, including those who, in various historical conditions, do not live in nation-states at all. This point does not disavow the idea of the state. It simply indicates that the relevant notion of equality is more essential. In a similar vein, the principle does not depend on

the idea of what people deserve. The idea ‘what a person deserves’ is a retributivist concept employed to apportion the goods and benefits (and harms) that persons morally ought to receive (or not) based on some set of conditions or criteria.

However, the principle of equality does mean that no person should be instrumentalized and that no person should be instrumentalized more (or less) than any other. When applying this principle to the political project, it requires participatory democracy rather than representative democracy owing to the latter’s tendency to instrumentalize people, their voice, and their vote. When applying this principle as an evaluative lens to gauge the political project, we can see that the current system of representative democracy leaves most people without voice, and in this way, it fails as a democratic forum with respect to the criterion of equality. Indeed, respecting people equally and engaging them as beings of non-instrumental value and agents in the political project requires a participatory democratic system as only such a system can invite the participation of all.

### **The Principle of Non-instrumentalization**

Because people are non-derivatively valuable, it is an error to instrumentalize people or to treat them as objects or as less than fully self-conscious subjects who are agents. Instrumentalization is pernicious because people are treated as less than fully human. There are different kinds of instrumentalization when it is applied to persons, including discrimination, exploitation, marginalization, manipulation, alienation, and demonization. By naming them, we can immediately recognize how they have manifested in contemporary liberal politics. For example, instrumentalization occurs when those who have gained power use their power to retain power, rather than to improve the lives of people. Instrumentalization also occurs when a government is systematically susceptible to propaganda and lobbying through which the voices of people become converted into manipulable votes, which are merely a means for the government to retain or gain power. In each of these cases, people are instrumentalized.

Non-instrumentalization is a necessary condition of a good governance system that respects persons equally as beings with conscious subjective experiences and as social and political agents. That is to say, respect for the equal value of all persons and non-instrumentalization of persons must underpin any understanding of the normative basis of political ends, which should be the focus of political institutions. All other ends should drive from the essential non-instrumental value of persons. Once again, such a government system must be participatory and democratic.

### **The Principle of Well-being**

The political project’s end should not be winning the election. Instead, political institutions must serve the well-being of all people, in harmony with the wellness of the planet’s ecosystem. This requires a deeper understanding of what constitutes well-being.

Traditionally, well-being has been understood either in terms of hedonistic feelings of happiness (i.e., the absence of negative emotions and the presence of pleasurable experience)<sup>46</sup> and desire satisfaction.<sup>47</sup> These definitions are preferred by some scholars because they also allow for the specification of empirical criteria that can help measure happiness and subjective life experience. However, the concept of well-being should always be primarily normative as it involves the question “How should we evaluate our life?” and it really concerns how we ought to live our lives. Clearly well-being is not about getting more of what one desires, and what we desire is not always compatible with our well-being; even our preferences can be misinformed.<sup>48</sup> This is because we cannot capture what is desirable about something simply by citing that one desires it.

We also need to know why we desire some things (including for instance, activities, experiences, or relationships), and why they are in part what make us feel happy, content, or satisfied. This also means that these things should not just be causes of our happiness, they should constitute the ways we engage with and perceive or appreciate them as part of our good life. These cannot be magical pills we take and therefore feel happy, but rather characterize the contents of our life.<sup>49</sup>

For a political project to orient its end to people's well-being, a *thick* normative notion of well-being (people having a good life) is a key. This notion fits well with the axiological thesis highlighted earlier: our well-being matters because persons matter. Human beings are non-instrumentally valuable, and our lives and well-being matter non-instrumentally. Because of this, the relevant parts and aspects of a person's life matter as lived. Life as lived constitutes our well-being, including our being well, living well, and becoming well. This is why we need the idea of different dimensions of human living, each of which will have different evaluative criteria.

Because the notion of well-being has been elaborated elsewhere,<sup>50</sup> I will briefly characterize it in a way that transcends the utility and preference functions, along dimensions that comprise the contents of our life and our way of being, living, and becoming well in a holistic sense. The first dimension concerns our activities within a web of activities and processes that accord with the patterns of desirability as revealed in our desires. The second is the relational dimension of our life where others (both human and other beings in nature) and our congenial relationships with them count toward our well-being. The third dimension involves our appropriate appreciation of desirability or meaningfulness of our activities and our relationships. In other words, we can evaluate our life as good and feel delight and joy when we are engaged in these activities and participate in these relationships. The fourth dimension consists of our self-consciousness, including an awareness at a micro level (whereby one is aware of oneself as the person who is living such a life) and at a macro level (whereby one is aware of one's life past, present, and future). Together these dimensions count toward a full life of well-being.

The idea that public governance ought to serve the well-being of the whole community should not be controversial. A holistic conception of well-being can lay the foundation for the political project. This is because well-being as conceived here is multidimensional and concerns the full life of human beings as self-conscious agents, including the ways they engage in governance processes. Such an understanding also demonstrates that purely political economic concerns are typically only instrumental to human well-being. If the political project is directed only at economic growth as its end, it can instrumentalize people because it prioritizes economic concerns over what is non-derivatively valuable. When the political project urges people to work toward economic growth, it treats them and their lives as something of only instrumental value. This is why the principles of equality and non-instrumentalization are important aspects of well-being. They highlight that a political project must be oriented to the well-being and flourishing of the whole society. Governance concerns, such as economic growth, participatory decision-making, and caring practices of public institutions matter because the well-being of people and the community matter.

### **The Principle of Positive Peace**

Good governance that seeks to advance human well-being will require political institutions and their processes to be underpinned by non-antagonism, which I call the principle of positive peace. As a democratic forum that respects all persons equally and facilitates their participation in processes of consensus-building and decision-making, it ought to enable people to voice their concerns and share their ideas and worldviews peacefully, without resolving into antagonism. This

means that participatory democratic processes and institutions would not be antagonistic. They must be designed to be peaceful in a positive way. A political forum is negatively peaceful insofar as the conflicts it contains do not lead to overt violence. A process is positively peaceful insofar as the conflicts it contains are perceived as antagonistic, but are inclusive in the dialogue that actively seeks ways to transcend the conflicts.

With this principle, it is clear that antagonistic political strategies (e.g., those that elicit opposition, discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, and demonization) cannot be features of good governance nor characteristics of any political institutions' processes. However, a peaceful and harmonious process does not mean that it needs to elude conflicts among peoples' values and tensions as the result of people's and groups' diverse understandings of public interests. Instead, positive peacefulness suggests that decision-making and consensus-building processes, as part of participatory governance, must be able to contain and calm the potentially aggressive tendencies in human interaction. When I claim that participatory democracy will be positively peaceful, I do not mean there will never be conflicts and differences. I mean that such conflicts are not inherent in the design or structure of its processes and institutions. That is in sharp contrast to representative democracy, where antagonism is deeply built into political processes and in fact, institutions rely on aggressive antagonism to gain electoral victories. The language, metaphors, and logic of war and violence pervade political parties built on allegiances and alliances and hence on opposition. These are enemy-forming processes rather than congenial processes of well-being. Violent political aggression is a form of instrumentalization because it violates the equal value of all persons.

For governance to be peaceful, there must be intentional public spaces for participatory democracy that encourage civility and hospitality among people, facilitate inclusive dialogue, invite empathetic listening to the perspectives of others, and inspire curiosity and mutual inquiry.<sup>51</sup> Although conflict is always already present in human interactions, this principle of positive peace will enable the cultivation of a political culture of respect, acceptance, caring, and forgiveness and enrich other similar peaceful qualities through participation in the processes of political engagement.

Taking these four principles together, we can see that they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The first two, the equal value and non-instrumentalization of persons, lay the foundation for the principle of well-being as the end of the political project. Hence I argue that the non-derivative value of the person and non-instrumentalization are components of well-being and apply to all four dimensions of well-being as defined. The principle of positive peacefulness is not only an expression of commitment to equal respect and non-instrumentalization of persons, it is also an aspect of well-being that is not limited to the relational dimension. These four principles outline the conditions for good governance institutions and the basis of advocating for participatory democracy.

## **Conclusion**

Hannah Arendt envisaged that true democracy must involve people coming together to discuss, explore, build consensus, and decide on political matters.<sup>52</sup> To this, I have added that this form of political participation ought to reflect the commitment to the equal non-instrumental value of persons, and that as an activity of political agents, engagement should be constituted in a person's well-being. Furthermore, for any good governance system consistent with the aim of holistic well-being of all, the political institutions' processes must be positively peaceful, through the nurturing and presence of qualities that can calm the aggressive tendencies in conflicts and differences.

In Arendt's view, power remains in such a political project, but ought to be collaborative as in Spinoza's vision, rather than competitive, as in a Hobbesian conception. Power does not require the governing elite to preside over the governed majority. It also has implications for trust. Because 'trust' is intentional, what makes trust primarily politically relevant is precisely these principles: where there is respect and equality, there is trust in political institutions; where people experience well-being, there is trust in the political direction; where there is common space for non-antagonistic dialogue and listening, there is trust in the political processes; where people feel their voices are heard and their engagement is meaningful, there is trust in political agency.

These four principles can convey inclusive, collaborative, and participatory processes of political engagement that should be nonviolent, relationally enriching, and caring. They can serve as a conceptual framework for understanding and evaluating good governance. In contrast to the use of the ballot box, at a minimum level, participatory democracy ought to involve the creation of various types of public spaces for political inquiry and consensus-building. In these public spaces, the political agent will learn to practice the arts of dialogue, such as deep listening, openness to the other and to difference, personal sharing, and mutual understanding. In doing so, people can feel that their voice matters, their well-being is part of the collective concern, and their dignity as a social and political agent is recognized. The aims of the political project and the process to achieve them converge in our collective well-being as the common good.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Flowles, *Overruled: Confronting Our Vanishing Democracy in 8 Cases* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2022); Barbara F. Walter, *How Civil Wars Start and How to Stop Them*, (New York: Crown, 2022); Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Crown, 2017); Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (London: Allen Lane, 2020); David Runciman, *How Democracy Ends* (London: Profile Books, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die: What History Reveals About Our Future* (London: Viking, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Birch, "The Manipulation of Vote Choice," in *Electoral Malpractice* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2011), 89–108.

<sup>4</sup> In practice, political lobbying is an inefficient, costly, and time-consuming process.

<sup>5</sup> Randall G. Holcombe, "Elite Influence on General Political Preferences," *Journal of Government and Economics* 3 (2021): 100021.

<sup>6</sup> Simone Weil, *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, trans. Simon Leys (New York: New York Review of Books, 2013). Weil discussed the conceptual foundation of liberal democracy and examined party politics (or *partis politiques* in French) and their tendency to breed totalitarianism (such as the case of Nazi Party in Germany and the Communist Party in the Soviet Union), from two perspectives. On the one hand is the requirement for a homogeneity of ideas. This means that people or party members or party voters/supporters should share the same political ideals, beliefs, and values. According to Weil, such homogeneity, although it can bring people together under the same political convictions, diminishes if not erases the possibility of pluralism, which should be at the core of liberal democracy. Therefore, political parties readily encourage conformity, rather than creating spaces for diversity. On the other hand is the necessity to have access to power, and hence the imperative for the political party to seek power through winning votes and succeeding in elections. Once in the position of power, a political party would do anything to retain it. In these ways, political parties can only pursue their own ends rather than the common good, and the thirst for power is always without limits, including the strategies deployed.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (London: Junction Books, 1981); Margaret Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, ed. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 25–44.

<sup>10</sup> According to Pew Research Center’s 2019 data, in major European countries, citizens are increasingly dissatisfied with how democracy works in their countries: (43 percent of Germans, 55 percent of British people, 51 percent of the French, 70 percent of Italians, and 81 percent of the Spanish); Richard Wike, Laura Silver, and Alexandra Castillo, “Many Across the Globe Are Dissatisfied with How Democracy Is Working,” Pew Research Center, April 29, 2019, <https://www.pewglobal.org/2019/04/29/many-across-the-globe-are-dissatisfied-with-how-democracy-is-working>.

<sup>11</sup> There is, however, an exception in countries that practice direct democracy successfully, such as in Switzerland. It appears that the more voice people are given in politics, the less often they turn out to vote.

<sup>12</sup> See Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.

<sup>13</sup> Different countries have used different terms to refer to citizens’ assemblies. For instance, in Canada, they are called Citizens’ Reference Panels, and the process a civic lottery; in Iceland, a National Assembly; in Germany, Planungszellen or Bürgerräte; and in Holland, Burgerforum. There are other names too, such as Citizens’ Constitutional Conventions, Peoples’ Senates, Consensus Conferences, Peoples’ Juries, and Mini Publics.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Iceland’s National Assembly of 2009 and the Irish Citizens’ Assembly in 2016. In 2022, the European Union enshrined Citizens Assembly in its decision-making process. Most recently, a Global People’s Assembly was proposed to seek solidarity in advancing the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), e.g. sustainable equality of all.

<sup>15</sup> Keith Sutherland, “What Sortition Can and Cannot Do,” 2011, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1928927>; Pierre-Etienne Vandamme, “A Randomly Selected Chamber: Promises and Challenges,” *Journal of Public Deliberation* 13, no. 1 (2017): 4–20.

<sup>16</sup> Jason Brennan and Hélène Landemore, *Debating Democracy: Do We Need More or Less?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Reynolds, Ben Reilly, and Andrew Ellis, *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Bram Wauters, Peter Thijssen, and Patrick Van Erkel, “Preference Voting in the Low Countries: A Research Overview,” *Politics of the Low Countries*, no. 1 (2020): 77–106.

<sup>19</sup> Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937).

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Plato advises that the participation of the “motley horde” should be “compulsorily excluded”; Plato, *The Republic*, 1:509.

<sup>22</sup> Brennan, *Against Democracy*.

<sup>23</sup> For which John Stuart Mills was a proponent.

<sup>24</sup> Brennan, *Against Democracy*.

<sup>25</sup> Jason Brennan, “Does the Demographic Objection to Epistocracy Succeed?,” *Res Publica* 24, no. 1 (2018): 53–71.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Chan, “Political Meritocracy and Meritorious Rule: A Confucian Perspective,” *The East Asian Challenge for Democracy: Political Meritocracy in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Daniel A. Bell and Chenyang Li (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 31–54.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Franz Mang, “Political Meritocracy and Its Betrayal,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 46, no. 9 (2020): 1113–26.

<sup>29</sup> Laurie Boussaguet, Renaud Dehousse, and Sophie Jacquot, “The ‘Governance Turn’ Revisited,” in *The “Community Method”: Obsolete or Obsolete*, ed. Renaud Dehousse (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 186–98.

<sup>30</sup> David Levi-Faur, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016);

<sup>31</sup> As advocated by Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>32</sup> There have been limited examples of such practices, but the global Fearless Cities or Municipalist Movement is an excellent illustration of consensus-based governance. See Barcelona En Comú, Debbie Bookchin, and Ada Colau, *Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement* (Oxford: New Internationalist Publications, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> These crises have been well documented, including the failures of democracy as already mentioned; the widening structurally induced disparity between the elites and the powerful and the disenfranchised and vulnerable; the global financial crisis as the result of the capitalist economic system; the continued nuclear threat; the climate crisis; and the widespread political antagonism, which has repercussion in regional, national and local politics.

<sup>34</sup> Henk Addink, *Good Governance: Concept and Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

- <sup>35</sup> Nikolas Kirby, “Good Governance: Contemporary Issues in Political Philosophy,” *Philosophy Compass* 16, no. 12 (2021): e12790; B. Guy Peters, “Governance as Political Theory,” *Critical Policy Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011): 63–72.
- <sup>36</sup> Levi-Faur, *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, 3.
- <sup>37</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control* (New York: The Free Press, 1963).
- <sup>38</sup> Levi-Faur, *Oxford Handbook of Governance*.
- <sup>39</sup> Mark Bevir, *Governance: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.
- <sup>40</sup> Levi-Faur, *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, 8.
- <sup>41</sup> Tamar Barkay, “Regulation and Voluntarism: A Case Study of Governance in the Making,” *Regulation & Governance* 3, no. 4 (2009): 360–75.
- <sup>42</sup> These will be fully explored in a forthcoming book titled *Beyond Instrumentalised Politics* to be published by DeGruyter.
- <sup>43</sup> Garrett Thomson, “Reificar o reducir: Una poderosa y persistente falsa dicotomía,” in *Ontología social: Una disciplina de frontera*, ed. Jaime Ramos Arenas and Carlos Andrés Ramírez (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2018), 65–96.
- <sup>44</sup> See Garrett Thomson, Scherto Gill, and Ivor Goodson *Happiness, Flourishing and the Good Life: A Transformative Vision for Human Well-Being* (London: Routledge, 2021).
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Although this argument is akin to Kant’s argument of categorical imperative that has received many objections, we have hence addressed possible objections to our thesis in the aforementioned book.
- <sup>46</sup> Ed Diener, Richard E. Lucas, and Shigehiro Oishi, “Advances and Open Questions in the Science of Subjective Well-Being,” *Collabra: Psychology* 4, no. 1 (2018): 15.
- <sup>47</sup> Donald W. Bruckner, “Subjective Well-Being and Desire Satisfaction,” *Philosophical Papers* 39, no. 1 (2010): 1–28.
- <sup>48</sup> See Thomson, Gill, and Goodson, *Happiness, Flourishing and the Good Life*.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>51</sup> See Scherto Gill and Garrett Thomson, *Understanding Peace Holistically: From the Spiritual to the Political* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017).
- <sup>52</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*.