



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 15, 2021

A new decade for social changes

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

Public Administration and Democracy: The Virtue and Limit of Participatory Democracy as a Democratic Innovation

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Abstract. The expansion of public bureaucracy has been one of the most significant developments that has marked societies, particularly Western liberal democratic societies. Growing political apathy, citizen disgruntlement and the ensuing decline in electoral participation reflects the political nature of governance failures. Public bureaucracy, which has historically been saddled with derogatory and pejorative connotations, has encountered fierce assaults from multiple fronts. Out of these sharp criticisms of public bureaucracy that have emanated from both sides of the ideological spectrum, attempts have been made to popularize and advance citizen participation in both policy formulation and policy implementation processes as innovations to democratize public administration. Despite their virtue, empowering connotations and spirit-uplifting messages to the public, these proposed practices of democratic innovations not only have their own shortcomings and are conducive to exacerbating the conditions that they are directed to ameliorate but they also have the potential to undermine the traditional administrative and political accountability mechanisms.

Keywords. bureaucracy, governance, participatory democracy, democratic administration, democratic innovation

Introduction

As an embodiment of the rule by people, democracy has in practice come to be associated with mandating the power of people to a governing authority generally referred to as representative government, which in turn relies on public bureaucracy as a mechanism to achieve its societal goals and objectives. The centrality of public bureaucracy to both policy formulation and policy implementation has led to growing power of public bureaucracy which has been subject to an incessant excoriation emanating from both sides of the ideological spectrum. The growing disillusionment and political apathy within liberal democratic societies has persuaded a significant number of intellectuals to call for democratic innovations designed to democratize public administration, hence enhancing democratic polity. In parallel to the Right-wing intellectuals' calls for populist measures such as referendum and citizen initiatives, the Leftist intellectuals have similarly espoused the adoption of participatory democratic mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, community involvement, and decentralization. It will be demonstrated that despite their spirit uplifting propensity, participatory and direct democratic mechanisms not only have their own shortcomings and are also conducive to exacerbating the conditions that fuel political apathy and citizen alienation, but they are also geared to undermine administrative and political accountability in public administration.

This paper is divided into five parts. Part one reflects on the concept of democracy and historical evolution of its definition. Part two discusses public bureaucracy and its growing role in society. In part three of the paper, the trends towards governance by regulation will be highlighted. Part four reflects on arguments for democratic public administration. Part five assesses various proposed innovative measures that are designed to promote democratic administration. In the conclusion, the main points of argumentation and findings will be recapitulated.

Democracy

As one of the central concepts in the democratic theory, democracy has acquired a chameleon character depending on the context within which it is invoked. Like many political concepts and terms, democracy has been subject to different interpretations. It has been employed as an effective and self-serving tactic to apply it to one's own favoured type of regime. Democracy has thus become a floating signifier since it means what people want it to mean. According to Heywood, democracy's popularity "has threatened the term's undoing as a meaningful political concept" [1]. As John Schaar has pointed out, democracy has been used and abused "and anyone who employs it in reference to any modern state should be suspect of ignorance or bad intention" [2]. Due to malleability of its definition, democracy has historically been utilized as a rallying cry both for defying and protecting unequal power relations within the social order. While democracy has ideally continued to function as the nightmare of despotism and inequality, it has nevertheless been used as a convenient tool to lubricate the rationalization of exploitative power relations.

The roots of democracy's susceptibility to contradictory interpretations emanate from the historical metamorphosis of its definition. In the course of its history, two definitions of democracy have continued to prevail in the terrain of political discourse. Within the classical parameters as practiced in the ancient Athens, democracy was apprehended as the direct exercise of power by people and the establishment of a social order within which no class or group could be permitted to live at the expense of others [3]. Despite its exclusionary nature in ancient Athens where slaves and women had been ostracized, the classical conception of democracy portended the eclipse of exploitation and oppression from the realm of social relations and subsequent emergence of a classless society [4].

The integration of liberalism and democracy which has come to be known as liberal democracy, has been praised for its simultaneous commitment to protect both liberty and equality. Under the aegis of liberal democracy, liberty is construed as an unrestricted opportunity to appropriate, which is in a direct contradiction to equality understood as equal freedom for individuals to act as developers and exerts of their own capabilities [4]. The affixation of democracy to liberalism has been accompanied by an inveterate clash between equality and liberty in capitalist societies. The material ramification of liberty, which entails the transfer of power from many to few individuals, is bound to curtail the scope of equality [3].

Under the auspice of liberal democracy, democracy has manifested itself through the emergence of the pluralist model which has become the ubiquitous paradigm throughout the Western societies and beyond. In accordance with underlying assumptions of this model of democracy, "government by people has come to mean government approved by people" [5]. Within the parameters of this elitist model of democracy, political participation is reduced to a simple act of voting which requires nothing more than the opportunity for individuals to cast their retrospective judgment on the performance of incumbents. In line with the postulations of this pluralist model of democracy, democracy is strictly conceptualized as a mechanism for

choosing and authorizing governmental authority among competing political parties which mirrors the oligopolistic operation of the market in the economic sphere. What can conspicuously be extrapolated as a striking difference between direct and representative democracy is that under the former, individuals control the rules that govern their lives whereas under the latter, individuals are required to cede their power to an elected body which would in turn rely on public bureaucracy to run the affairs of the state.

Public Bureaucracy

Though the genesis of public bureaucracy has been shrouded in history, administration has always been an inevitable governing mechanism guiding societies throughout the tunnel of history. Even though most of modern public bureaucracy's features such as hierarchy and specialization had existed in ancient civilization, the use of bureaucracy as a term is contemporarily recent. Defined as rule by the desk and exercise of power and authority by office holders, bureaucracy entered political discourse in the 18th century France [6]. Based on Max Weber's characterization of the ideal type of a bureaucratic organization, which has become a reference point for authors and analysts in the field of public administration, bureaucracy refers to the legally entrenched formal organization with hierarchal structure whereby merit based criteria govern the recruitment and promotion of public officials who perform functionally specialized tasks in an impersonal manner. Even though bureaucracy has become a striking feature of all types of organizations even in the business sector, bureaucracy is mainly used with reference to government. Thus, bureaucracy and public bureaucracy are used interchangeably. Public bureaucracy has become central to the operation of the modern government and it touches the daily lives of people from cradle to grave. The centrality of public administration to both society and government lies in the fact that government cannot function without public bureaucracy which acts as the horse-works of government.

The seeds for the gradual expansion of public bureaucracy in modern societies were sown by the epochal transformation of pre-industrial social arrangements into capitalist social relations. The social transformation accompanying industrialization triggered a tumultuous surge of social dislodgement that necessitated structural accommodation. The rise of industrial social relations with their demographic and employment corollaries required a new approach to social income security that was manifested in the extension of state power to pacify antagonized layers of the social order [7].

Though the roots of current social welfare programs can be traced back to the nineteenth century, the consolidation and expansion phases of the welfare state and hence the expansion of public bureaucracy were reinforced by the ascendancy of Keynesianism. Keynesianism was geared to providing a logical ground for the regulation of capital and the harmonization of public intervention in the economic sphere. Though Keynesian prescription was a technical advice for governments on how to prevent cycles of economic instability, it nonetheless encouraged the provision of workers' protection through statutory regulation, social security, unemployment insurance and entitlement to housing and family allowance, collective bargaining and full employment through macroeconomic policy [8]. Thus, the economic vicissitudes in the 1930s and the post-Second World War economic order accompanied by state-led demand management facilitated the emergence of the Keynesian welfare state which was conducive to the expansion of public bureaucracy.

The post war expansion of social welfare programs and growing scale of regulation made decision making too complex and technical, which in turn required granting greater discretionary power to bureaucratic entities. Consequently, the pressure on governments to provide social services and the imperative of regulation led to the increase in the number of

regular departments and the proliferation of an array of statutory bodies such as regulatory, adjudicative and administrative agencies, boards and commissions mandated to regulate, administer or control social, economic and environmental activities [9].

In line with politics/administration dichotomy developed by Woodrow Wilson, which has remained as a central principle in public administration, the main and overriding function of public bureaucracy is the implementation and administration of policies formulated and decided by elected officials. In other words, policy making entails politics and ideological debate which is the preserve of elected officials. On the other hand, implementation of public policy which is the responsibility of bureaucrats, is subject to reasoned and professional wisdom emanated from the science of administration. However, politics /administration dichotomy might sound valid in theory, but it does not square with the reality of public decision-making processes. As Frank Goodnow pointed in the beginning of twentieth century, politics/administration are not separable since both need to be performed for effective governance [10]. Bureaucrats are not only responsible for implementation of policies made by elected officials, but they also play a significant role in formulating policy. The involvement of bureaucrats in policy formulation lies in the fact that the political executive (ministers and the Cabinet) heavily depend on expertise and technical knowledge possessed by bureaucrats. The growing role of public bureaucracy has led to the rise of the administrative state as reflected in a shift from governance by legislation to governance by regulation.

Governance by Regulation

It is a conventional wisdom that in a democracy all laws must be made by the legislative body. However, it is almost beyond imagination that the legislature can be able to enact all laws, rules and regulations which are needed to govern society. Therefore, it has become a structural imperative in both parliamentary and presidential systems to enact a legislative scheme in outline only and delegate to a subordinate body such as the cabinet, ministers or any bureaucratic body to make further rules and regulation in order to govern the implementation of the very enacted law. However, ministers neither have the time nor the required expertise to make further laws or regulation. As David Mullan has pointed out, "there is a rule that ministers are generally entitled to exercise their statutory powers through responsible persons {bureaucrats} in their departments..." [11]. With the expansion of governmental activities, there has been a great increase in delegated legislation which confers on the executive the right to make subsidiary rules or regulations. Consequently, law making delegation in effect transfers the legislature's legislative power to the executive branch. As Justice Beverley McLachlin, former Chief Justice of Canadian Supreme Court has pointed out, "This transfer is said to be justified on grounds that it is required to govern effectively in the complex modern state" [12]. Therefore, it is due to this delegated authority that bureaucrats exercise significant discretionary powers in implementation and administration of a given policy or program. The delegated discretionary powers entail choice or judgment by bureaucrats who exercise authority over implementation and administration of given public policy. Furthermore, there has also been an emerging trend since post war expansion of public sector which affects the functions of the executive branch of government. This new development is manifested in the proliferation of regulatory and administrative tribunals which are statutory bodies mandated to administer, control, or regulate particular social, economic, and environmental activities. Under this major transformation in the function of executive branch, "Work formerly done by civil servants under the direction of a minister answerable to Parliament, is assigned to independent bodies set up for this purpose" [12]. Justice McLachlin has meticulously articulated the significance and institutional ramifications of these changes:

These two developments; the tendency to legislate by regulation and the devolution of executive authority to independent tribunals – have effectively changed the scope of the power exercised by the legislative and executive branches of government. This has occurred in all western democracies. This transformation of the powers of the Legislative and Executive branch is not the result of constitutional amendment. It is rather the result of a *de facto* transfer of power necessitated by the complexity of modern governance. The result is the modern regulatory state [12].

The growing role of bureaucratic agencies in making decisions that affect daily lives of people has also been accompanied by an increase in the level of criticism of public bureaucracy. It has become a conventional norm to attribute any problem, shortcoming, and failure of governance to bureaucracy. Though bureaucracy has historically been saddled with pejorative and derogatory connotations, the central thrust of criticism of bureaucracy has mainly been associated with alleged bureaucratic growth's negative ramifications for democracy and the role of elected bodies. Because of incessant excoriation deployed by politicians, journalists and popular media outlets, references to public bureaucracy tend to conjure up rigidity, ritualistic adherence to procedures, aloofness, inefficiency, red tape, and empire building [11]. These attacks have even been taken a step further to assert that public bureaucracy has an innate predilection to embark on political sabotage of democratically elected governments. It is within the context of such criticisms of bureaucracy that the quest for democratic administration has gained currency.

Democratic Administration

The prevailing political apathy, citizen disgruntlement and decline of trust in political institutions in liberal democratic societies are construed by numerous authors as the reflection of democratic deficit and the failure of representative democracy to respond to societal needs. The contribution of the failure of political institutions to surmount the widening income inequality gap and ensuing socio-economic polarization in liberal democratic societies was highlighted as the major culprit by top 20 political scientists gathered in Yale University in the first week of Oct 2017 to discuss the crisis of democracy [13].

It has become convenient for the media and even politicians from both sides of ideological spectrum to blame public bureaucracy for any governance failures. However, as Meier et al have pointed out, governance failures in liberal democratic societies are mainly political not bureaucratic. Contentious ideological clashes lead to inappropriate policy design with multiple and contradictory goals which are to be implemented by public bureaucracy. The shift of blame to public bureaucracy runs counter to the fact that public bureaucracy is actually much more responsive and even representative of demographic composition of societies than representative political institutions such as parliament and Congress in many liberal democratic societies including Canada and United States. Furthermore, contrary to prevailing bureaucracy bashing, a survey by the Environics Institute and the Institute on Governance found that almost 66% of Canadians thought that public servants should actively provide expert advice and recommend policies to politicians [14]. Moreover, based on surveys in early 2002, Canadians have more trust in public servants than their elected politicians [15].

However, criticisms of the failures of political institutions are mainly directed at public bureaucracy. Writing in the context of Canada, Donald Savoie has pointed out that decades of bureaucracy bashing has taken its toll on the morale of public servants who have become the subject of a complex and perplexing assortment of political control and supervision [16].

Within the realm of both academic studies and popular literature, bureaucracy and democracy are conceptualized as antithetical approaches to providing governance for a society [17]. The depiction of democracy and bureaucracy as mutually incompatible concepts rests on literal definitions of these terms. Democracy implies rules by people and greater public scrutiny of democratic decision-making processes. Bureaucracy connotes hierarchy and command and control which allegedly leaves less room for public input in implementation of policies that directly impact the daily lives of citizens. As result, public participation in development and implementation of public policy is envisioned by the critiques of public bureaucracy as an essential prerequisite to democratize bureaucracy. Contrary to this prevailing perception that depicts bureaucracy and democracy as opposing and incompatible concepts, many of democratic principles and values such as fairness, impartiality, rule of the law can best be protected under an independent and powerful public bureaucracy [17].

Despite this complementary nature of relation between democracy and bureaucracy, Left and Right-wing critiques of public bureaucracy have nonetheless deployed arguments for the democratization of public administration. While both Right and Left extremists advocate certain similar prescriptions such as decentralization and citizen involvement for advancing democratic administration, they nonetheless have radically different conceptions of democratic administration. While the Left puts greater emphasis on galvanizing the participation of the disadvantaged communities in the development and implementation of public policy particularly, delivery of services, the Right views market competition and choice as a road to the achievement of democratic administration [18]. Some commentators have gone further by asserting that in order to liberate human beings from the bureaucratic shackles as reflected in its suffocating rulebooks and procedures which smother the freedom people need to accomplish their objectives and goals, the modern bureaucratic state must be replaced not reformed. According to this line of reasoning, since there is inequality of power between bureaucrats as policy implementers and citizens who are subject to the decisions made by bureaucrats, modern public bureaucracy necessitates to be fundamentally restructured [19].

Prior to assessing the effectiveness and desirability of proposed democratic innovations, it is essential to provide a comprehensive outline of arguments that have been made in favour of democratic public administration. The central thrust of these arguments is the assertion that the prevailing political apathy and aversion to representative democracy and public bureaucracy can be ameliorated through stimulating citizens participation in decision-making processes both at the policy formulation and policy implementation stages. Advocates of direct and participatory democracy are under the impression that direct democratic measures not only enhance citizen involvement, but they also bring greater legitimacy for governance. It is also a corollary of these arguments that greater political participation would provide an auspicious ground for individuals to enhance their status as citizens which in turn is conducive to legitimizing political institutions. Furthermore, participation and dialogue will not only enhance legitimacy of decision making but will also generate external collaboration and neutralize resistance to decision making [20]. As Brugue and Gallego have pointed out, "the democratization of administration improves efficiency because moving from a position of isolation to one of consensus reduces resistance" to the acceptance of outcomes. The proposed method to intensify democratic participation range all along way from administrative reforms of the state apparatuses to participatory budgeting, the adoption of direct democratic measures, and the juxtaposition of direct democracy with market socialism.

In a Different Kind of State, Leo Panitch has argued that there is a soaring aspiration among Canadians for democratic restructuring of the state apparatuses [21]. According to Panitch, the solution to political apathy associated with both the bureaucratic welfare state and

democratic centralism of the Soviet type is to democratize state institutions through allowing citizens to have a greater control over the decision-making processes that profoundly affect their lives. To enhance citizen status and aggrandizing the control of communities over the operation of state agencies, Panitch has extended his call for democratization to the realm of judiciary and policing services as well.

In parallel to Panitch's argument for administrative overhaul of state institutions and the decentralization of political power as manifested in community involvement, Judy Rebick has also asserted that the tarnished image of democracy in western societies can be rehabilitated through the adoption of a participatory model of democracy [22]. Rebick is under the impression that galvanizing political participation would not only enhance the quality of citizenship but would also alleviate the crisis of legitimacy that has haunted liberal democratic societies. In her argument for participatory democracy, Rebick has accentuated citizen initiatives and referendum as efficacious direct democratic mechanisms to surmount the ineffectiveness of representative democracy and traditional public administration [23].

One of the most detailed arguments in favour of participatory democracy has been made by Philip Resnick who has unequivocally excoriated the representative democracy as an anachronistic legacy of the British Empire that has been inherited by most countries. According to Resnick, statism, elitism and aristocratic anticipation from Canadians to display deferential attitudes towards political institutions are the vestiges of colonialism that have continued to impair the image of popular control on Canadian soil. Resnick has asserted that these bequeathed colonial heritages have deprived Canadians of control over political processes that have had tremendous impacts on their lives. It is Resnick's conviction that the key to exorcizing these ingrained anachronistic political values and therefore, invigorating popular control lies in invoking Rousseauian notion of direct democracy which is bound to reestablish the supremacy of the will of people. Resnick's proposed paradigm of participatory democracy entails reversing the top-down decision-making process that has prevailed in representative democracies. Resnick's scenario entails dividing the whole country into units at the base level which are required to deploy delegates to the higher layers of the political order. The strength of Resnick's argument for a participatory model of democracy stems from his simultaneous call for a swift alteration in power relation within the overall social relations of production which is an essential prelude to the operation of direct democracy. Resnick's designed participatory model of democracy is therefore, intended to combine the base level democracy at the political level with the self-government of the major industries by working people within the economic sphere. Resnick has inadvertently or intentionally eschewed from elucidating the method and social agency through which this revolutionary transformation of the existing social order is to be accomplished. Furthermore, Resnick has also evaded from clarifying whether his constructed model of participatory democracy has the potential to surmount ethnic cleavages that have continued to menace the national integration in multicultural societies like Canada. Furthermore, this proposed model of participatory democracy cannot overcome the imperative of the delegation of authority which is a central characteristic of representative democracy. Like other proponents of direct democracy, Resnick has not evaluated the alleged efficaciousness of popular measures such as citizen initiatives, recalls and referendum that have also been espoused by intellectuals on the right side of the ideological spectrum.

The inspirational force of direct and participatory democracy emanates from claim that political participation would catapult citizens into a higher plateau of social relations where individuals regain the ultimate power that has under the representative democracy been ceded to others. Popular democratic measures such as citizen initiative, recall and referendum, community involvement and decentralization are claimed to be conducive to re-transferring

sovereignty from political authorities to individuals as irreducible units of the social order. Under the participatory model of democracy, citizens are expected to be elevated to the status of the authors of laws to which they are bound to subjugate themselves. It is the logical extension of this line of reasoning that direct political participation in political processes would circumvent the delegation of power to a governing authority which Rousseau characterized as a sacrilegious intrusion on human dignity. Direct democratic mechanisms are also expected to reinvigorate the vision of community that cannot be accommodated under representative democracy which can easily obfuscate rather than conquer the deep division of power and wealth in societies. It is an enduring promise of participatory democracy to eliminate the division between rulers and the ruled that has become a source of alienation in liberal democratic societies. Judy Rebick has vehemently argued that the implementation of a participatory model of democracy would function as a key to open the gate of socialism:

I believe instead that widening the scope of democracy will lead us to a more socialist society. By placing more and more power in the hands of people who have nothing to gain by maintaining the status quo, we will move down in the road towards social and economic equality.

Decentralization of political power as manifested in greater community involvement in policy-making process and delivery of social services also became a central plank in social democracy's political renewal known as the Third Way that gained momentum in 1990s and early 2000s. The propagators of the Third Way have called for greater degree of political decentralization and involvement of voluntary and community-based organizations in the delivery of social services. It is the logical extension of the Third Way's push for political decentralization that community involvement in public affairs is not only geared to broaden the basis for political action at the community level but is also conducive to aggrandizing the political efficacy of citizens to have greater control over political decision making that profoundly affects their lives. According to Mark Latham, a staunch defender of the Third Way politics in Australia:

The Third Way... is a true believer in collective action. But not through the centralised power of government bureaucracies. Notions of economic planning, state control and class struggle are foreign to the new social democracy. It aims to create a new type of collectivism.... In the past, social democrats have relied on large, massified institutions (such as government departments, trade unions and political power) to achieve their goals. In the Information Age, however, hierarchical institutions are losing support and relevance. The new politics requires the dispersal of power: enabling citizens and communities to form new networks of mutual interest and mutual support [24].

In line with the Third Way politics, the decentralization of political power is expected to function as a catalyst to increase the scope for local initiatives and community control over the delivery of public services. The Third Way also espouses participatory democracy as a crucial strategy for community building:

The yearning to belong in society extends well into domain of democratic governance. Most people value the process of participation no less than the political outcomes it produces. Politics needs to open many avenues for meaningful participation and moral dialogue. It needs to develop new forums for deliberative and direct democracy [24].

Assessing Direct/Participatory Democratic Mechanisms

The attractiveness of direct and participatory democracy and the moral basis of arguments for intensifying citizen participation in both policy development and policy implementation processes are so compelling that they cannot be contemptuously dismissed. Despite their moral uplifting, direct and participatory democratic mechanisms cannot surmount the prevailing political apathy and disgruntlement in liberal democratic societies. Under the existing socio-economic order, there is no guarantee that direct and participatory democratic mechanisms can spur the marginalized strata into political action and therefore, conquering political apathy that has continued to remain as a dismaying feature of liberal democratic societies. On the contrary, the adoption of direct and participatory democratic measures as means to settle socio-political issues can indeed multiply the channels of access for the dominant groups to influence the political processes and therefore, acquiring greater latitude to convert their sentiments into concrete political results.

The assertion that multiplying the number of channels for citizen involvement in policy development and policy implementation processes would galvanize political participation seems to be controversial. Contrary to their ostensible attractiveness, direct and participatory democratic measures have proven to be ineffective in conquering political apathy. In United States and Switzerland where, direct democratic measures have frequently been used, voter turnout is lower than most of other Western liberal democracies [25]. Within the domain of capitalist social relations under which economic resources are the powerful means for converting social demands into political goods, direct democratic measures might indeed increase the points of access for powerful elements to influence the legislative process. Citizen initiatives and referendum which are anticipated to ameliorate the social position of marginalized classes, can in fact become powerful instruments at the disposal of resourceful groups to shape the patterns of social and economic policies. As observers of direct democracy in California have pointed out, direct democracy has not only generated a climate of disillusion for an increasing number of voters but has also encouraged a conservative cultural politics in which activists utilize direct democracy mechanisms to advance their own narrow agenda. As Morris Fiorina has meticulously pointed out, civic engagement at community level leaves greater political space for a small minority of highly committed activists to take advantage of participatory opportunity," minorities who are by and large extreme voices in the context of ... politics and who have less reason to moderate their commitment" [26].

It should also be noted that democratic governments have historically encouraged public participation and public consultation on policy issues as means to legitimize their own course of actions. By introducing community as the shareholder and the co- author of policy, government can in fact utilize public participation as a tool to legitimize its own public policy orientation. In her study of newly introduced prostitution Bill in 2014 by Honorable Peter Mackay, the then justice minister under Harper administration, Nancy Bouchrad found that government used public participation on the Bill in order to legitimize its own Political Party's values which were declared to be the reflection of Canadian values [27].

Direct and participatory democratic mechanisms have also been praised for enhancing political decentralization and greater community control. However, there seems to be two major problems with political decentralization and community control that have escaped the attentions of the proponents of participatory democracy. First, Community control can provide a golden opportunity for the state to circumvent and offload its social responsibility to local communities which themselves are subject to powerful penetrative forces beyond their reach. Furthermore, greater community involvement and civic participation in policy

implementation and delivery of public services has the potential to blur the traditional line of administrative and political accountability. Second, since the days of Rousseau to the present, intellectuals of different ideological persuasions have asserted that direct democracy is only practical in small communities. Even direct democracy in smaller communities might in fact facilitate the ability of a single powerful group to convert local politics into the monopoly of private club since such a group has a greater opportunity to mobilize its resources. Ironically, within smaller communities' direct democracy is therefore, proven to generate an atmosphere that can become a menace to democracy itself. As Jane Mansbridge has pointed out:

Despite the theoretically open character of the town meeting, the costs and benefits of attending are distributed in such a way that the old-timers, the villagers, the elderly, the middle class, and the self-confident are somewhat more likely to attend than neighbours. This means that when an issue comes to a vote these groups will have slightly more than their proportionate share of votes. since, in addition they are more likely to be elected to town office, they will also be able to exercise disproportionate influence before and after the vote [28].

The ineffectiveness of direct and participatory democratic mechanisms such as referendum becomes conspicuous when it is adopted to settle the national questions in multi-ethnic societies Referendum cannot be employed to resolve ethnically motivated socio-political tensions. Ostensibly, referendum purports to be able to provide a swift and easy solution to national questions. But it cannot be harnessed as a nostrum to assuage ethnic conflicts. Referendums have the potential to endanger the democratic system since rather than fostering accommodation and compromise, they intensify social and ethnic tension. In other words, rather than complementing representative democracy, referendums with their inevitable undemocratic fallouts can generate adverse implications for political stability.

To be sure, referendum is not an alien phenomenon in many of Western liberal democracies including Canada. It would undoubtedly be an academic distortion to dismiss the contribution of referendums to the democratization of the political system. It was in fact through the 1916 referendum in British Columbia that women acquired the right to vote [29]. However, there is also a dark side of referendum as a mechanism to bring about progressive social changes. In some countries such as Switzerland and United States, several referenda that were held in nineteenth and early decades of twentieth century to approve equal suffrage and therefore enfranchising women, were not successful [30].

As a mechanism to tackle political conflicts emanating from ethnic cleavages, referendum has an intrinsic potential to exacerbate the conditions to which it is directed to placate. Historically, the application of referendum as a political device to surmount ethnic schism has demonstrated to be counterproductive. In a municipal plebiscite in 1983 in Manitoba, the vast majority of voters rejected the provision of French language services. But since that referendum was not binding, the provincial government dismissed the result and Ronald Penner, the incumbent Attorney General in Manitoba enunciated that " minority language rights should not be settled by a popular vote of the majority". [28]. The overt rejection of the 1992 Charlottetown Accord by Canadians did not terminate the ethnic conflicts but rather intensified the inveterate national tensions that have continued to dominate the political scene. What seems to be evident is that referendum in multiethnic societies provides a camouflage for majority to impose its will on ethnic minorities which itself constitutes a clear threat to democratic virtues. As a democratic device to settle ethnically induced political conflicts, referendum has the potential to provide a disguise for the majority to inflict its will on minorities. In other words, under the veil of the sovereignty of people, referendum can itself be transformed into an antidemocratic weapon to coerce ethnic minorities to join the procession

of uniformity which runs counter to democratic values. Neither the perennial quest of Quebec for being recognized as a distinct society nor the aspiration of aboriginal peoples for self-government can be fulfilled through referendum.

Direct and participatory democracy has also been manifested in involving citizens in budget allocation particularly, at the local level. Since the adoption of participatory budgeting in *Porto Alegre, Brazil* in 1989, numerous municipalities across the world have attempted to enhance citizen engagement in political participation through various forms of public participatory approaches such as participatory budgeting. These participatory approaches have been intended to involve marginalized layers in political decision-making process and hence rebuilding political legitimacy [31]. The central thrust of participatory budgeting at the local level is to allow ordinary and marginalized people to participate in decision making over prioritizing local projects and allocating local governments' budget.

Even though Participatory budgeting comes in different forms, they are intended to involve local citizens in decision-making processes in order to foster public learning, promote social justice through improved resource allocation, and overcome citizen apathy that has become a major threat to the legitimacy of liberal democratic states. Despite sporadic successes in certain localities, the efficacy of participatory budgeting is nonetheless hampered by several factors and forces. Preoccupation of participants with their narrow and parochial interests, the lack of interest in learning about the overall public policy processes, the structural dependency of these participatory programs on local officials who can easily manipulate the whole process, the ineffectiveness of these programs to integrate long term planning, excessive concentration on local issues without paying attention to ramifications of regional, national and international challenges that have significant impact on local problems [32]. Furthermore, opening budgetary process to greater public participation can generate two major problems that policy makers must consider. First, greater consultation and public participation will inevitably delay the implementation. Second, public participation and consultation has always been uneven. Committed activists and powerful and well-informed groups benefit more from public policy participation than marginalized, disadvantaged and politically docile groups [11].

In their assessment of participatory budgeting initiatives across several major Canadian cities, Josh Lerner and Estair Van Wagner have underscored several challenges such as, only affecting small segments of local governance so far, no fundamental alteration in cities' political systems and the failure of these efforts in generating a more progressive social agenda [33]. On the question of whether participatory budgeting practices would lead to deepening democratic governance, Yves Cabannes and Barbara Lipietz have concluded that "our experience does not lend to such a teleological reading" [31]. In her study of the Keighley participatory budgeting pilot project in Bradford that ran from 2006 to 2008, Anita Pati found that rivalry between community group over bidding for the same pot of money undermined the whole process and consequently engendered a sense of resentment among the losing side [34]. In their assessment of participatory democratic decision-making processes in local government in South Africa, Laurence Piper and Bettina Von Lieres have also provided a clear answer to whether participatory democracy has made local government more democratic and has enhanced delivery of public services:

The answer suggested by our case-studies is 'no', or at least, 'not yet'. Poor implementation, a lack of political will and the poor design of public participation institutions has undermined their operation to date [32].

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated throughout this paper, though governance failures are political not bureaucratic, it is public bureaucracy that has been the subject of harsh criticisms and assaults stemming from both sides of the ideological spectrum. Despite being saddled with pejorative connotations and depicted as a threat to democracy, public bureaucracy not only enjoys a greater level of public trust but is also demographically more representative than the main political institutions such as Parliament and Congress. However, despite the political nature of governance ineffectiveness, there has been a growing predilection withing both the Right and Left camps to associate governance failure to public bureaucracy. It is within the context of this ongoing bureaucracy-bashing that direct and participatory democratic mechanisms such as referendum, participatory budgeting, community involvement, public consultation and decentralization are exalted as democratic innovations conducive to galvanizing public participation in both policy formulation and policy implementation processes. Despite their uplifting moral signals, these democratic participatory mechanisms intended to advance democratic administration, not only have their own shortcomings which might in fact exacerbate the conditions that foster political apathy, citizen disillusionment and decline of the public trust in governing institutions but they are also prone to undermine political and administrative lines of accountability.

The current crisis of representative democracy may denote the imperatives for creating new spaces that could allow people to become involved in policy-making processes that affect their daily lives. Though the ideas of direct and participatory democracy are tempting, they might not be the answer to the prevailing disillusion and political polarization in liberal democratic societies. Under the existing socio-economic order, direct and participatory mechanisms hailed as democratic innovations can in fact increase the inequality of influence in both policy development and policy implementation processes. There is no single solution that can function as a panacea to tackle and surmount the prevailing democratic deficit in liberal democratic societies. However, reducing growing socio-economic inequality which has become the source of consternation and an impending threat to democratic polity, might be an essential prelude to addressing and alleviating the growing crisis of confidence in representative political institutions.

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