DEMOCRATIC POLITIES IN ADVANCED COUNTRIES: SUCCESS AND CHALLENGE

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I HAVE BEEN INVITED to address you "on the current situation and prospects for democratic polities in advanced nations"[1].

Because an adequate examination of that topic would far exceed our time, I am going to focus on just one major challenge for democratic polities in advanced countries. This is the fundamental problem of attaining and sustaining a satisfactory level of political equality among the citizens of a democratic country. Though the problem of political equality is also too vast in its ramifications and complexities to deal with adequately here, I would like to explore three questions. Is political equality a desirable goal? If so, why does the goal of political equality pose a profound challenge for democracy in the advanced countries? Are there feasible innovations in the standard political institutions of large scale democracy that might help to meet the challenge?

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1 I have drawn freely here on my previous work.

Democracies: older, newer, newest

Before I turn to these questions, let me begin with this observation. One of the most extraordinary changes in all recorded history is the amazingly rapid increase in the number of democratic systems throughout the world during the twentieth century (Table 1). In 1900, democratic political systems existed in only six countries –and in all but one, New Zealand, the suffrage was restricted to male citizens. What is more, in the southern United States, most African-Americans were, in practice, excluded from voting, and would remain so until the mid-1960s. By 1930, the number of democratic countries had increased to twenty one, although in three –Belgium, France, and Switzerland–women were still excluded. By mid-century the democratic countries numbered twenty five– several of which would collapse into dictatorship. By the end of the century, out of 191 countries in the world, more than seventy were democracies and they included almost half the world's population[2].

I find it helpful to classify democratic countries into three groups: the older democracies, the newer democracies, and the newest democracies. Democratic political institutions have existed continuously since 1950 or earlier in twenty-one countries. I'll call these the older democracies (Table 2). In another fourteen countries democratized after 1950, the institutions have existed continuously since 1980 (Lijphart, 1999, Table 4.1: 50). These I'll call the newer democracies. Finally, in thirty-seven countries, the newest democracies, the institutions have existed only since 1981 or later. Indeed, in many, democratic institutions are very recent (Diamond, 2003).

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2 Larry Diamond (2003: 8-9) has recently listed 72 countries as "liberal democracies", i.e., countries that fully possess the basic institutions. He identifies an additional thirty-one countries as "electoral democracies." In these, "the principal positions of political power are filled through regular, free, fair, and competitive (and therefore multiparty) elections. Electoral democracy can exist in countries with significant violations of human rights, massive corruption, and a weak rule of law... Normatively I do not argue that we should rest content with such an illiberal and hollowed-out democracy as our goal. The goal for every country should be a political system that combines democracy on the one hand with freedom, the rule of law, and good government on the other. As Guillermo O'Donnell has incisively argued, a truly accountable political system requires three components. One is *democratic*, enabling citizens to choose their rulers in free and fair elections and to participate and express themselves in other political processes. The second is *liberal*, limiting the power of the state to encroach on the basic rights of the person, and thus affirming civil liberties and minority rights. The third is *republican*, providing a rule of law and good government through institutions of horizontal accountability that check and balance executive (and other forms of) power, while holding all actors, public and private, equal before the law. When these three normative goals are combined, we have the second, higher threshold of democracy, what I call *liberal democracy*.

The *older* democratic countries share much in common. For one thing, their predominantly market economies produce very high levels of income. These range from a GDP of over $19,000 per capita in New Zealand to around $30,000 or more in Norway, Iceland, Ireland, and the United States (Table 3). The older democratic countries also rank high on the quality of life, as measured by the "Human Development Index." This index, which is prepared annually by the United Nations Development Program, includes GDP per capita, life expectancy at birth, adult literacy, school enrollment, general life expectancy, and education (UNDP, 2003).

The fourteen newer *democracies* are far more mixed. Thus Spain's GDP per capita of $20,000 is slightly larger than that of New Zealand, an older democracy. On the Human Development Index, Spain ranks slightly higher than two other older democracies, Italy and New Zealand, while Portugal and Greece are close behind. At the bottom are Jamaica, with a GDP per capita of $3,720, India with $2,840, and Papua New Guinea with $2,570.

The *newest democratic countries* are perhaps even more diverse. In most of them, democratic institutions have never previously existed. Yet Chile and Uruguay are exceptions, because both countries experienced many years of democracy before an interval of dictatorship set in. Some of the newer democracies –Israel, South Korea, Taiwan– have advanced economies and high levels of personal income, whereas in some, most people are desperately poor and lack the basic essentials for a decent life.

As a group, then, the older democracies possess some exceptional advantages. Yet even in these affluent countries where democratic political institutions have been well established, political equality, considered as an ideal, continues to pose a serious challenge, and I believe will continue to do so.

Is political equality desirable?[3]

Before we turn to that challenge, we might first ask whether movement toward greater political equality is necessarily a good thing. Is political equality really a desirable goal?

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3 In the following I draw freely from my "The Future of Political Equality," (2001 [a]).

Although some among us may have reservations, I believe that if we are prepared to make two assumptions, the case for political equality and democracy becomes extraordinarily powerful. Each assumption is, in my view, difficult to reject in reasonable and open public discourse.

The first is the moral judgment that all human beings are of equal intrinsic worth, that no person is intrinsically superior in worth to another, and that the good or interests of each person must be given equal consideration[4]. Let me call this the assumption of intrinsic equality. The alternative –that some human beings are of intrinsically greater worth than others and therefore their interests ought to be given special consideration beyond that of their inferiors– seems to me so morally opprobrious that it cannot be reasonably defended in open public discourse.

Yet even if we accept this moral judgment, the troublesome question immediately arises, who or what group is best qualified to decide what the good or interests of a person really are? Pretty clearly the answer will vary, depending on the situation, the kinds of decisions, and the persons involved. To justify political equality as an end, then, we need to make a second assumption. If we restrict our focus to the government of a state, then it seems to me that the safest and most prudent assumption would run something like this: among adults, no persons are so definitely better qualified than others to govern that they should be entrusted with complete and final authority over the government of the state(Dahl, 1989; 1998: 74 ss).

Although we might reasonably add refinements and qualifications to this prudential judgment, it is difficult for me to see how any substantially different proposition could be supported, particularly if we draw on crucial historical cases in which substantial numbers of persons have been denied full citizenship. Does anyone really believe today that when the working classes, women, and racial and ethnic minorities were excluded from political participation, their interests were adequately considered and protected by those who were privileged to govern over them?

Yet even if political equality is a desirable goal, you might wonder whether, like most desirable goals, it may sometimes conflict with other important values, indeed might actually harm them? And if so,

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4 I provide a fuller account in my *Democracy and Its Critics,* (1989)and *On Democracy* (1998). In these works and elsewhere I have drawn on Stanley I. Benn (1967: 61-78).

shouldn't our justifiable desire to attain other goals temper our pursuit of political equality?

Consider, for example, the conflict that is often said to exist between equality and liberty. In the second volume of Democracy *in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville seems to offer a scenario in which excessive equality in a democratic society will lead to the impairment of freedom of thought, expression, and other fundamental rights. Since his time this view has often been voiced by critics fearful of the possible "excesses" of democracy. Indeed, Tocqueville is sometimes interpreted as foreseeing the possibility, or even the likelihood, that majorities may employ their rights to destroy democracy by supporting authoritarian rulers.

What does a century and a half of experience since Tocqueville's time reveal?

Before turning to my response, I cannot resist commenting that I am frequently amazed by assertions about the supposed conflict between liberty and equality that make no mention of what would seem to me to be an absolutely essential requirement of any reasonable discussion about the relation between the two. Whenever we talk about liberty, freedom or rights, are we not obliged to answer the question: liberty or rights for whom?[5]

As to historical experience: when we examine the course of democratic development over the past two centuries, and particularly over the century just ended, what we see is a pattern of democratic development that seems to me to contradict the pessimistic Tocquevillian scenario.

As democratic institutions become more deeply rooted in a country, so do fundamental political rights, liberties and opportunities. As democratic institutions mature in a country, the likelihood that they will give way to an authoritarian regime approaches zero. As we all know, democracy can collapse into dictatorship. But breakdowns are extraordinarily rare in mature democracies. Instead, breakdowns are likely to occur in countries that encounter times of great crisis and stress when their democratic institutions are relatively new and frag-

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5 Amartya Sen (1992: 17-22) seems to me entirely correct when he says: "It is, I believe, arguable that to have any kind of plausibility, ethical reasoning on social matters must involve elementary equal consideration for all at some level that is seen as critical. The absence of such equality would make a theory arbitrarily discriminating and hard to defend... Libertarians," he goes on to say, "must think it important that people should have liberty. Given this, questions would immediately arise regarding: who, how much, how distributed, how equal?".

ile. Occasional crisis appears to be an inevitable occurrence in the life of every country. Even mature democratic countries face severe crises: wars, economic depressions, large- scale unemployment, terrorism, and other challenges. But they have never, or almost never, collapsed into authoritarian regimes.

In the twentieth century, on something like 70 occasions, democracies have given way to nondemocratic regimes. Yet with very few exceptions, these breakdowns have occurred in countries where democratic institutions were very new –less than a generation old. Indeed, the only instances in which a democratic breakdown occurred in a country where democratic institutions had existed for 20 years seem to be Uruguay and Chile in 1973, though even here the case of Chile is a somewhat less clear-cut case because of restrictions on the suffrage that had only recently been lifted. As to the famous case of the Weimar Republic, we need to remember that it had existed less than 14 years before the Nazi takeover and the stresses on the German people –defeat in World War I, followed by inflation that inflicted enormous damage on the middle class, and then by extensive and continuing unemployment– were enormous.

Nor is the pessimistic scenario of declining liberties confirmed by the 21 countries in which democratic institutions have now existed continuously for the past half century or more, the older democracies. Have the fundamental rights and liberties of citizens steadily narrowed or become less secure over the past half century in these countries –in, to name a few, Iceland, Britain, Norway, France, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, the United States? I do not see how an affirmative answer to this question could be seriously maintained. Although we must not ignore the occasional harms and failures, what is striking is the extent to which fundamental rights, including political rights, have been broadened in democratic countries over the past century, not contracted. In changes that broke with ancient and deeply established practices, fundamental political rights have been extended to groups hitherto excluded –notably women and racial minorities– and deepened to include wholly new social and economic rights.

Ideal vs. actual

I now want to advance a proposition that runs directly counter to the view that political equality conflicts with liberty. My proposition is this: insofar as the goal of political equality is expressed through democratic institutions, it actually *requires* fundamental rights and liberties. To see why this is so, I want to introduce a distinction that has been familiar at least since Aristotle's time: between ideal and actual political systems. For the same reasons that Aristotle found it useful to describe his three ideal constitutions in order to classify *actual* systems, a description of an ideal democracy provides a model against which to compare various actual systems. Although ideal democracy is probably unachievable, setting out its ideal requirements is highly useful, I believe, for classifying and appraising actual political systems. A conception of the ideal –the kind of system we would like to emulate– is also useful, I think, for designing appropriate political institutions, for fashioning strategies of democratization, and so on.

In classifying *actual* political systems, we commonly judge some to be "democracies," even though they fall short, probably far short, of the ideal, as when we say that the United States, France, and Sweden, for example, are democracies. In effect, we conclude that however distant their political institutions are from the ideal, they meet its requirements at an acceptable level, a minimal threshold, if you will.

How then should we describe the ideal? Although no model of democracy can claim universal acceptability, it is useful, I find, to think of an ideal democracy as a political system that might be designed for members of an association who were willing to treat one another, for political purposes at least, as *political equals*. The members of the association –let me call them collectively the *demos*– might, and indeed almost certainly would, view one another as unequal in other important respects. But if they were to assume that, despite these inequalities, all of them ought to possess equal rights to participate fully in making the policies, rules, laws, or other decisions that all citizens are expected (or required) to obey, then the government of their state would, ideally, have to satisfy several criteria. Let me list these criteria without amplification.

> - Before a policy is adopted by the association, all the members of the demos would have equal and effective opportunities for making known to other members their views about what the policy should be.

- When the moment arrives at which the decision will finally be made, every member would have an equal and effective opportunity to vote, and all votes would be counted as equal.

- Within a reasonable amount of time, each member would have equal and effective opportunities for learning about the relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences.

- The demos would have the exclusive opportunity to decide how, and if its members chose, what matters are to be placed on the agenda. Thus the democratic process required by the three preceding characteristics would never be closed. The policies of the association would always be open to change by the demos, if its members chose to do so.

- All of the members of the demos would have the full rights that are implied by the first four criteria: a right to effective participation, a right to equality in voting, a right to opportunities for gaining an enlightened understanding of the issues, and a right to participate in exercising final control over the agenda.

Actual democracy

As we all know, the democratic ideal I have just described is too demanding to be fully achieved in the actual world of human society. Although I have described that ideal as applying to any association, the particular association to which democracy is most important is, of course, the state. To achieve political equality in a state, so far as may be possible under the imperfect conditions of the real world, then, certain political institutions for governing the state –*actual* if by no means *ideal* institutions– would be required. Amid the imperfections of the real world, these actual institutions would be necessary, but they would no doubt be far from sufficient to achieve the ideal. Moreover, democratic institutions in the modern world, unlike the assembly governments of the Greek city-states and the medieval republics of Italy, would have to be suitable for governing a state that encompasses a large territory, such as a country, and perhaps a very large country, like the United States. That is, they would need to provide for *representa-tive* democracy rather than *direct* (or *assembly* or *town meeting)* democracy.

There is no need for me to describe in detail the basic political institutions of representative government in a modern democratic country, but by now it should be obvious that just as in the ideal so too

in actual practice, the existence of a representative democracy presupposes that all its adult citizens possess a body of fundamental rights, liberties, and opportunities. These include:

> - the right to vote in the election of officials in free and fair elections;
> - the right to run for elective office;
> - the right to free expression;
> - the right to form and participate in independent political organizations, including political parties;
> - the right to gain access to independent sources of information;
> - rights to any other freedoms and opportunities that may be necessary for the effective operation of the political institutions of large-scale democracy.

Finally, to be fully democratic as we now understand the ideal, all or at any rate most adult permanent residents under its jurisdiction and bound by its laws would possess these rights. I need hardly add that although most democrats today would consider the full inclusion specified by this criterion to be a necessary requirement if a state is to be governed democratically, before the twentieth century most advocates of democracy would have rejected it (Dahl, 1989; 1998 and table 4 in this article).

It is obvious, then, that both as an ideal and as an actual set of political institutions, democracy is necessarily a system of rights, liberties, and opportunities. These are required not merely by definition. They are required in order for a democratic system of government to exist in the real world. If we consider these political rights, liberties, and opportunities as in some sense fundamental, then in theory and practice, democracy does not conflict with liberty. On the contrary, democratic institutions are necessary for the existence of some of our most fundamental rights and opportunities. If these political institutions, including the rights, liberties, and opportunities they embody, do not exist in a country, then to that extent the country is not democratic. When they disappear, as they did in Weimar Germany, Uruguay, and Chile, then democracy disappears; and when democracy disappears, as it did in these countries, then so do these fundamental right, liberties, and opportunities. Likewise, when democracy reappeared in these countries, so, necessarily, did these fundamental rights, liberties, and opportunities. The connection, then, is not in any sense accidental. It is inherent.

The links between political equality, democracy, and fundamental rights, liberties and opportunities run even deeper. If a country is to maintain its democratic institutions through its inevitable crises, it will need a body of norms, beliefs, and habits that provide support for the institutions in good times and bad –a *democratic culture* that is transmitted from one generation to the next. But a democratic culture is unlikely to be sharply bounded. A democratic culture will not only support the fundamental rights, liberties, and opportunities that democratic institutions require. People who share a democratic culture will, I think inevitably, also endorse and support an even larger sphere of rights, liberties, and opportunities. Surely the history of recent centuries demonstrates that it is precisely in democratic countries that liberties thrive.

Let me repeat: We need always to keep in mind that certain political institutions may be *necessary* for approximating ideal democracy to an important extent, but they may not be *sufficient* for fully closing the gap between ideal democracy and real democracy. Indeed, as is almost always the case with highly demanding ideals, we have every reason to suppose that even under the most favorable circumstances the gap will remain quite large. In short, judged against the exacting standards set by democratic ideals, real democracy as we know it is almost sure to be quite far from fully democratic.

Challenges

Will a belief in the desirability of democracy, which so many citizens in the older democratic countries seem to possess, withstand future challenges?

It is easy to dream up possible scenarios, but impossible, I think, to gauge with much accuracy their probability or consequences. Among many possible challenges, a number appear to me to be particularly important. But since an adequate exploration of any one of these would require an entire conference, and much more, I shall simply describe each of them briefly.

a) One is the perennial challenge of achieving a desirable balance between the needs of the two basic systems, political and economic. During the last half of the twentieth century, centralized, state controlled, predominantly nonmarket economies revealed themselves not only to be inefficient but, because they

necessarily grant excessive power to political leaders, also incompatible with democratic institutions. As a result, their appeal and even their existence have all but disappeared throughout the world. In all the older democracies –indeed in all democratic countries and even in most nondemocratic countries, like China today– goods and services are predominantly produced and distributed by nonstate enterprises in more or less competitive market economies. But even though a democratic political system and a market economy are in many important ways mutually supportive, they do not make an entirely happy couple[6]. If we believe that in a democratic political order, citizens ought to be relatively equal in their *political* resources and thus in *their capacities for influencing government policies and decisions*, the source of tension between political equality and a market economy is virtually self-evident. For, among other problems, a market economy automatically generates significant inequalities in the distribution of resources of all kinds; and these resources are all readily convertible into *political resources* that may be used for acquiring influence over government. Consequently, the two systems, economic and political, remain in perpetual tension, with constant adjustment and readjustment of the boundaries between the two. Nineteenth century visions of an economic order that would eliminate that tension have collapsed throughout most of the world, and no feasible "Grand Alternative" is in sight (Dahl, 1976).

b) Although international organizations have become the locus of important decisions and will doubtless be even more so in the future, they are not now and probably will not be governed democratically. Instead they will continue to be governed, I believe, mainly by bargaining among bureaucratic and political elites,

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6 I leave this problem and the three that follow undeveloped here because I have described them more fully elsewhere. On the tension between a market economy and democracy see *On Democracy*, Chapters 13 & 14. This is one of my many efforts over many years to discuss the problem of a market-economy in the context of democratic theory and practice, beginning in 1940 with an article "On The Theory of Democratic Socialism," *Plan Age*, Vol. 6 (November-December 1940), which was recently rescued from total oblivion by its republication in *Toward Democracy: A Journey, Reflections: 1940–1997* (1997: Vol. II, 553-583). I discuss the problem of democracy and international organizations in "Can International Organizations be Democratic? A Skeptic's View," in Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Gordon (1999: 19-36). On the challenge of complexity, see "The Problem of Civic Competence," in *Toward Democracy* (1997: Vol. 1, 211-228). On diversity, see "From Immigrants to Citizens: A New Yet Old Challenge to Democracies," (1994) in *Toward Democracy* (1997: 229-250).

operating within extremely wide limits set by treaties and inter-
national agreements. Thus they pose a crucial double-edged
question: Can they be made democratic, or at least more demo-
cratic, and to the extent that they cannot be made democratic,
how can they be made sufficiently accountable so that their
processes of making decisions are consistent with basic demo-
cratic values –notably, political equality? [7]

c) As a result of legal and illegal immigration and a sharp rise in
what is sometimes called the politics of identity, cultural diver-
sity and cleavages are increasing in almost all of the older dem-
ocratic countries. Distasteful as the thought may be, we know
that cultural diversity tends to stimulate conflicts that are
extremely difficult to resolve peacefully by means of civil dis-
course and compromise and therefore threaten to inspire
actions that might impair basic democratic rights and opportu-
nities. Yet in many of the older democratic countries in Europe
–and in Japan– assimilation over several generations, in the pat-
tern that has been fairly successful in the United States[8], may be
much more difficult to achieve. Because declining birthrates in
almost all of the older democratic countries will require immi-
gration in order to maintain an adequate labor force, the prob-
lem will probably continue for much of the twenty-first century.

d) A high likelihood remains that terrorists employing small and
easily transported weapons will attack major metropolitan
areas. It is by no means unlikely that some may employ nuclear,
biological, or chemical weapons and cause enormous devasta-
tion, death, and disease. As the American experience shows, the
human costs of terrorist attacks could stimulate strong
demands for severe restrictions on civil rights, to the detriment
of the democratic process.

e) Finally, let me mention what I have called the problem of civic
competence (Dahl, 1997 [a]: Vol. I, 211-228). Although it would
be easy to suggest standards of information and understanding

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7 The question has stimulated a great deal of debate. For one view, see my "Can international organi-
zations be democratic? A skeptic's view," (1999: 19-36)and "Is Post-national Democracy Possible?"
(2001 [b]pp. 35-46). For more optimistic views, see D. Archibugi and D. Held, *Cosmopolitican
Democracy* (1995).
8 One must always keep two major exceptions in mind: African Americans and Native Americans (i.e.,
indigenous peoples).

among citizens so high that they would be humanly impossible to achieve, we might reasonably lower our sights somewhat and aim for the "good-enough" or adequate citizen. Let us say that good-enough or adequate citizens would possess sufficiently strong incentives to gain a modicum of knowledge of their own interests and of the political choices most likely to advance them, as well as sufficiently strong incentives to act on behalf of these choices.

However, as public policies have become more and more complex, and, as with foreign affairs, remote from the direct experiences and immediate concerns of many citizens, to achieve even this more realistic level of adequate competence among citizens presents a formidable challenge. A large and growing body of evidence reveals that in all democratic countries, including the older democracies, many citizens are deficient in their understanding of policies that will have direct and important consequences for their basic interests. This is true not only in the most obvious case, foreign affairs, but many other matters as well. And public policies may continue to increase in complexity, and thus impose even greater obstacles to public understanding.

The institutions for facilitating public understanding that have developed in democratic countries over the past century and earlier include widespread literacy, universal education, a free press, freedom of discussion, political leaders actively competing for office in political campaigns by presenting policies, challenging the policies of the incumbent leaders, and many others. Essential as these are to an informed citizenry, they no longer seem fully up to the task of public enlightenment. In a moment I shall suggest a new and highly feasible innovation that would help to raise the level of citizen competence and engagement.

In the older democratic countries, many scholars, public intellectuals, research institutions, and others –including, no doubt, some in my audience– are engaged in creating proposals for meeting the challenges I described earlier. Although I have neither the time nor the competence to describe them here, I want to offer one example by describing a proposal designed to help meet the challenge posed by the problem of civic competence that I described a moment ago.

This is the Deliberative Poll, created by the American political scientist and political philosopher, James Fishkin[9]. Here is a recent description of its essential features:

"A Deliberative Poll is a survey of a random sample of citizens before and after the group has had a chance to deliberate seriously on an issue. The process begins by selecting a representative sample from the population and asking each person a set of questions on the issue to be considered at the Deliberative Poll. This initial survey is the standard sort conducted by social scientists doing public opinion research. The respondents are then invited to a single place for a weekend of discussion. A small honorarium and travel expenses are paid to recruit a representative sample".

"In preparation for the event, the participants are sent carefully balanced briefing materials to lay the groundwork for the discussion. These materials are typically supervised for balance and accuracy by an advisory board of relevant experts and stakeholders. On arrival, the participants are randomly assigned to small groups with trained moderators. When they meet in small groups, participants not only discuss the general issue that provides the focus for deliberation. They also try to identify key questions that merit further exploration, and they then bring these questions to balanced panels of competing experts or policymakers in larger plenary sessions. The small groups and plenary sessions alternate throughout the weekend. At the end of the process, the respondents take the same questionnaire they were given on first contact".

"These typically reveal big changes in the distribution of citizen opinion. When ordinary people have the chance seriously to consider competing sides of an issue, they take the opportunity to become far more informed. Their considered judgments at the end of the process demonstrate higher levels of knowledge and greater consistency with their basic values and assumptions. These experiments demonstrate that the public has the capacity to deal with complex public issues. The difficulty is that it normally lacks an institutional context that will effectively motivate it to do so" (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2003).

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9 An early view of the problem is my "From Immigrants to Citizens: A New Yet Old Challenge to Democracies," in Dahl (1997 [a]).

A Deliberative Poll along these lines is more than an abstract idea. It is a highly practical and well tested means that has already been employed on many occasions in many countries –the United States, Britain, Sweden, Denmark, and elsewhere.

In a bold new proposal Fishkin and Professor Bruce Ackerman of the Yale University Law School now want to extend Deliberative Polls to an even larger sphere. They would assemble 500 citizens for two days before a presidential election to "consider the 'major national issues' designated by the contenders" (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2003). I shall not attempt to present the details of their design, which they have described as "an essay in realistic utopianism." I mention it only to show that the challenges I described earlier will engender searches for creative solutions. While many of the proposed solutions, perhaps most, will probably not be adopted, as the example of Deliberative Polling shows, feasible and realistic reforms are well within our reach.

Can the older democracies meet the challenges I have just described –and no doubt others I have not? Is it possible that under the impact of these challenges, confidence in the value of democracy might erode badly in democratic countries, where citizens are already seriously discontented with their key political institutions?

We must never forget that the democratic systems in the older democratic countries have proved to be extraordinarily sturdy and adaptable. Indeed, it is because of their capacity to survive that we can now count them as the older democracies. The older democracies have managed to weather through major economic depression, mass unemployment, inflation, war, and inept or scandalous leadership.

That a democracy is able to survive challenges like these requires, among other things, a body of citizens who are reasonably confident that the essential qualities of a democratic order render it clearly superior to any feasible nondemocratic alternative, and so they remain largely immune to the temptations of authoritarianism. The evidence we have, imperfect though it may be, appears to indicate that a great many people in democratic countries not only understand what these basic qualities are but also value them highly.

Yet it would be wrong, I believe, to ignore the challenges to democratic governments like those I have mentioned. To borrow a term widely used to describe the European Union, we confront a democratic deficit in the political institutions of the older democracies, as well as in the newer and the newest. This democratic deficit

presents a challenge to political scientists, constitutional lawyers, and political leaders.

If this challenge were to occupy a significant place in the work of social scientists, it would keep many of us fruitfully occupied for a long time to come. What is more important, our contributions might even help to keep democracy alive and healthy through the coming century.

Table 1
Democratic Countries: 1900-1995

Decade	Democratic Countries	Non Democratic countries	Percentage democracies
1900-09	8	40	17%
1920-29	22	42	34%
1940-49	25	50	33%
1960-69	40	79	34%
1994-97	86	106	45%

Source: Dahl (1989) Table 17.2 (240).

Table 2
Countries steadily democratic since 1950

1	Australia
2	Austria
3	Belgium
4	Canada
5	Denmark
6	Finland
7	France
8	Germany
9	Iceland
10	Ireland
11	Israel
11	Israel
12	Italy
13	Japan
14	Luxembourg
15	Netherlands
16	New Zealand
17	Norway

Table 2 (Continued)

18	Sweden
19	Switzerland
20	United Kingdom
21	United States

Costa Rica might reasonably be added since it made the transition to democracy a few years later.

Table 3
The Older Democracies: GDP Per Capita
(Purchasing Power Parity, US $) 2001

GDP rank		GDP per Capita US$
1	Luxembourg	53.780
2	United States	34.320
3	Ireland	32.410
4	Iceland	29.990
5	Norway	29.620
6	Denmark	29.000
7	Switzerland	28.100
8	Netherlands	27.190
9	Canada	27.130
10	Austria	26.730
11	Belgium	25.520
12	Australia	25.370
13	Germany	25.350
14	Japan	25.130
15	Italy	24.670
16	Israel	19.790
17	Finland	24.430
18	Sweden	24.180
19	United Kingdom	24.160
20	France	23.990
21	New Zealand	19.160

Source: UNDP, 2003

Table 4

The relation between the institutions of actual (large-scale) democracy and the requirements of an ideal democracy

In a unit as large as a country, these political institutions	…are necessary to satisfy these criteria of ideal democracy
1. Elected representatives	Effective participation Control of the agenda
2. Free, fair, and frequent elections	Voting equality Effective participation
3. Freedom of expression	Effective participation Enlightened understanding Control of the agenda
4. Alternative sources of information	Effective participation Enlightened understanding Control of the agenda
5. Associational autonomy	Effective participation Enlightened understanding Control of the agenda
6. Full inclusion of all members of the demos	Effective participation Voting equality Enlightened understanding Control of the agenda

Source: Dahl (1998) Fig. 7, 92.

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