

Global Democratization: Soup, Society, or System?

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The prospects for global democracy are starting to receive serious attention from scholars and political reformers alike. Working on the premise that global *electoral* democracy is not feasible, I will identify and compare three emerging ways of thinking about democracy in global politics—ways that I refer to as a *soup*, a *society*, and a *system*. Briefly, a *soup* refers to the proliferation of democratic practices within existing patterns of international politics; a *society* has a set of constitutive norms and discourses that might be more or less democratic in their content, production, evolution, and interchange; and a *system* is composed of differentiated and ordered components linked to the production of collective outcomes, and might therefore seem the obvious objective when it comes to democratic innovation in international politics. However, system is not necessarily a higher-order concept than society, because it may lack the depth of shared understanding and degree of solidarity that “society” can connote. And sometimes the requirements of a system may be so at variance with existing practices that it is more feasible to think in terms of soup or society. Soup, society, and system are basically frames for the interpretation and evaluation of practices (ranging from transnational social movement activism to international negotiations, to the operation of networks, to the decisions of states). But they also contain the seeds of programs for future democratic development.

Robert Keohane points out that “the conditions for electoral democracy . . . do not exist on a global level,” but this only means that “rather than abandoning democracy, we should rethink our ambitions.”¹ Fortunately, contemporary democratic thinking is not tied exclusively to elections, and much of it emphasizes

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instead a communicative aspect of democracy. This paper therefore undertakes analysis rooted in the communicative and, in particular, deliberative aspects of democracy, within which legitimacy is sought through the participation of those affected by a collective decision (or their representatives) in consequential deliberation about that decision. A deliberative orientation sharpens productive understandings of what both “society” and “system” can mean in global politics, in the form of a deliberative society and a deliberative system.

Deliberation may be defined as communication that induces reflection upon preferences, links particular claims to more general principles, and exhibits what Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson call reciprocity: that is, communicating in terms that others who do not share one’s normative framework can accept.² In a deliberative light, democratic accountability means, literally, giving an account rather than being subject to the sanction of electoral defeat. Democratic legitimacy is therefore to be found in the right, opportunity, and capacity of those subject to a collective decision (or their representatives) to participate in consequential deliberation about the content of that decision. This basic principle of deliberative democracy is no less applicable at the global level than at any other level of governance.

Deliberative democracy is not just a school of thought in democratic theory. It is also a real-world reform movement for particular kinds of political innovation. Barack Obama has endorsed deliberative democracy as a program consistent with the U.S. Constitution.³ Perhaps more surprisingly, the hierarchy of the Chinese Communist Party has permitted experimentation in public deliberation, even as it resists competitive elections (beyond the local level) and constitutional guarantees of rights.⁴

From a global perspective, a communicative and deliberative approach to democracy has a further advantage over conceptions of democracy for which competitive elections are the *sine qua non* in that it is not modeled on developed liberal democracies. As Amartya Sen has pointed out, democracy as government by discussion or public reason is much more pervasive in the world’s various political traditions than democracy as voting, whose history is tied to that of Western liberal democracies.⁵ Aspects of, and demands for, more authentic and inclusive deliberation pervade real-world politics, including global politics. Deliberative principles can sometimes be glimpsed in the consultation practices of the European Union, World Bank, and World Trade Organization. As William Smith and James Brassett point out, “On this view the spread of deliberative

ideas may itself be a constitutive element of the growth of global deliberative governance.”⁶

I begin with a brief justification of global democracy and a look at its ingredients. Soup, society, and system are then analyzed in that order. The elements of a deliberative system are sketched, and the template they supply is illustrated through reference to financial and environmental issues. I conclude with some thoughts on how society and system frames might fruitfully be applied in the evaluation of practices and proposals for more democratic global politics.

WHY GLOBAL DEMOCRACY?

There are at least three normative justifications for global democracy. The first is that global democracy is instrumental to global justice. Democracies in practice are more likely to yield just distributions than are other sorts of polities; and justice conceived in terms of full recognition of the core identity of the individuals and groups affected by collective practices benefits from the broad allocation of political standing that democracy connotes.⁷ A second justification is that democracies are particularly good kinds of systems for solving complex collective problems, because they enable proposals and criticisms to come from multiple directions. The classic arguments on this score of Karl Popper and Charles Lindblom should apply to any level of governance, including the global.⁸

A third justification for global democracy is arguably more powerful because it is intrinsic rather than instrumental: to be legitimate, authority must be democratically accountable. In this light, many of our current global institutions are of dubious legitimacy, including the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank. There is also an instrumental aspect to legitimacy, because without effective democratic accountability, as Keohane has pointed out, “we risk discrediting global governance and fostering reversion to national sovereignty, with disastrous consequences for cooperation, for peace, and for our own prosperity and personal security.”⁹

International governmental organizations have rarely been set up with democracy even marginally in mind. At best, they might be accountable to citizens at one very considerable remove because some of their member states are representative democracies. However, even this path to democratic accountability is dubious, given that it is generally executive departments of government that deal with international organizations, not elected legislatures. And even if it is democratic states

that steer international organizations, they may steer them in an undemocratic fashion. Thus, the International Monetary Fund is dominated by its financial contributors, not by states at the receiving end of its decisions.

Undemocratic international governmental organizations are just part of the problem when it comes to the democratic deficit of the global political economy, within which many forces have largely eluded governmental control of any sort, but have an enormous impact on states and peoples. Market forces were for many years intensified by the market liberalism of the (now defunct?) “Washington Consensus” on free trade, capital mobility, and deregulation. Other undemocratic aspects of the global political economy include transnational financial networks that are not controlled by any governmental authority at any level, decision-making by transnational corporations, and the informal agreements reached by global elites at, for example, the annual Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum.

Global political economy is just one mainstay of the global polity. Environmental issues, such as climate change, are processed through negotiations at the global level—not always very effectively, and almost never with democracy in mind.¹⁰ Global security is in the hands of powerful states, especially the United States, and occasionally the United Nations Security Council—both exercising power without much thought to accountability to any transnational publics.

If democracy is the main form of legitimation for the exercise of political authority (the increasing assertiveness on the international stage of undemocratic states, such as Russia and China, notwithstanding), the democratic deficit at the global level becomes all the more troubling. Remedies for this deficit are increasingly being put forth by both political theorists and international relations scholars.¹¹ Scholars of international relations might therefore add democracy to their traditional preoccupation with issues of peace and war and (occasionally) prosperity, rights, and justice. Within the main schools of international relations, transnational democracy is ruled out in a realist framework, but liberal institutionalism, the English School of international relations, and constructivism can be mined for resources for global democratization (even if their practitioners long ignored the question).

INGREDIENTS OF GLOBAL DEMOCRACY

If there is one thing that analysts of transnational and global democracy can agree on, it is that democracy at this level is going to look very different from democracy

within the state. Current and emerging practices that can contribute to global democratization include the following:

- Transnational social movement activism.¹² Such activism can exert pressure on international organizations, or upon particular national governments, or upon corporations.
- Self-appointed and unelected popular representation. Perhaps the most famous such representative is Bono: “I represent a lot of people [in Africa] who have no voice at all . . . they haven’t asked me to represent them.” However, quite what spokespeople such as Bono really represent (a people, a place, or a discourse?) and their contribution to the practice of democratic representation remains contentious.¹³
- Representation from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) within transnational communities of stakeholders whose activities have consequences across national boundaries—for example, in terms of how aid gets delivered, or how global norms develop.¹⁴
- Multinational elections, so far found only in the European Union.
- Designed citizen forums. So far these have appeared mostly within states, in the form of consensus conferences, citizens’ juries, planning cells, citizens’ assemblies, and the like, all featuring deliberation by randomly selected non-partisan lay citizens. For example, the 2009 EuroPolis deliberative opinion poll recruited citizens from twenty-seven countries to consider a variety of questions facing the European Union. Also in 2009, the World Wide Views project organized citizen deliberation on climate change in thirty-eight countries from all over the world on the same day (though unlike EuroPolis, the deliberation itself was not cross-national). Thinking a long way ahead, it is possible that a global citizens’ assembly of participants recruited by more or less random selection would prove cheaper (because elections and campaigns would not need to be organized) and perhaps more feasible than any globally elected assembly. For a start, China would be less likely to object, because nationwide elections of the kind that the Chinese Communist Party resists so strongly would not need to be held.¹⁵
- Gatherings of activists. For example, the World Social Forum periodically brings together thousands of activists concerned with a variety of issues, mostly pertaining to social justice within the international political economy.

- Consultation with NGOs organized by international governmental organizations, in recognition of the need to expand their accountability beyond the representatives of states.
- Deliberation within international negotiations and forums, such as the G20 and the World Economic Forum. Obviously, deliberation can occur without being especially democratic, but the idea that in deliberation persuasive arguments appeal to principles beyond one's own self-interest means that the range of values that enter into justification can sometimes achieve some expansion.
- Demonstrations and protests at these gatherings. As Joseph Stiglitz points out, protests on the part of antiglobalization activists have been quite successful in influencing official agendas.¹⁶
- Transnational networks that communicate about the civil regulation of business activities. These networks can involve members of national governments, NGOs, and corporations.¹⁷
- International media scrutiny of the actions of governments.
- Discussion on blogs and Internet forums engaging individuals from different parts of the world about international affairs.

What are we to make of all these practices? None offers in itself the key to global democracy (and so some normative theorists want to go way beyond them). Some are only occasionally or variably deliberative. Those that are occasionally deliberative (such as gatherings of activists) are not necessarily very inclusive. Some are consequential some of the time, while others struggle to make a difference. Some may be more consistently consequential, but generally not very democratic and only sporadically deliberative (for example, transnational governance networks). Many are hard to judge in isolation, because their effects could be good or bad for democracy, depending on other external factors (for example, uncompromising activism may produce vastly different results in the absence of any responsive governmental bodies than it does when such bodies are present and functioning well).

SOUP

Skeptics about the prospects of global democracy who are oriented by the way democracy is organized within states might charge that the practices just listed as ingredients have no ordered relationship to central authority of the sort

required in an effective and enduring democracy. However, the absence of such order does not mean we should dismiss these developments. To begin, we might think of them as ingredients of a soup. Carolyn Hendriks uses the expression “democratic soup” to cover the variety of representation practices that can be found in contemporary governance networks.¹⁸ Here we can broaden the expression to cover citizenship, accountability, participation, and deliberation, as well as representation—in many contexts, not just networks.

In a soup, the content and proportion of these various ingredients are of prime importance. In this light, global democratization would consist of the proliferation of accountability, participation, representation, and deliberation practices, at the expense of unaccountable, exclusive, unrepresentative, and uncommunicative alternatives. Some of these practices could be formal, some informal; some durable, some transient. All could be held to common normative standards of the sort specified by democratic theorists. However, in a soup framework the relationship of these practices to each other and to centers of power remains fluid and unpredictable, as opposed to stable and systematic.

Michael Saward, for example, argues that though there are plenty of democratic practices, processes, and patterns appearing in international politics, they are disjointed and transient and do not belong under the heading of global democracy.¹⁹ Saward is not opposed to transnational democracy—indeed, he advocates the expansion of accountability, citizenship, and representation. But he is careful to distinguish between “transnational spaces” and “global space,” the former being plural, impermanent, and differentiated, the latter encompassing. He is opposed to any grand logic that the term “global democracy” connotes. Rather, he advocates “thinking of democratic designs in a micro-level and reflexive manner that is far distant from ready invocations of global democracy.”²⁰ In short, Saward is concerned with particular democratic advances in various places that can contribute to democratization of the international system. Similarly, for James Rosenau, “Global governance is the sum of myriad—literally millions—of control mechanisms,” meaning that “the world is too disaggregated for grand logics that postulate a measure of global coherence.”²¹ For such theorists as Rosenau and Saward, soup is all that is on offer: “democratic procedures” can only be “ad hoc, non-systematic, irregular and fragile.”²² Contemplating democratization of the global governance of climate change in particular, Rolf Lidskog and Ingemar Elander conclude that “there is not, nor can there be, a blueprint for efficient and democratic politics to mitigate and adapt to climate change. What we have, and must

live with in a foreseeable future, is a patchwork of partially overlapping assemblies, responding to various kinds of demos at different levels and sectors, and thus representing different spheres of authority.”²³ For Robert Goodin, all that matters is that when power is exercised in international politics, it should be accountable to someone in the soup—it hardly matters to whom.²⁴ Keohane identifies a range of accountability mechanisms for preventing abuses of power by international organizations, states, and multinational corporations. These mechanisms are supervisory (they are exercised by states or other organizations that delegate power), fiscal (as these bodies are accountable to their funders), legal (they are subject to international law), market-oriented (because they entail the possibility of boycott), peer (as other international organizations, or other states, may regulate their behavior), and reputational (because the perceived opinions of other key actors may affect their decision-making). Keohane’s mechanisms run up and sideways as well as down to any public; they constitute what he calls a “pluralistic accountability system,”²⁵ but in the terms set out here they look more like a soup than a system.

Rather than constituting the limit of democratic ambitions, soup should be treated as the first course of global democracy, and Goodin for one recognizes that he is only talking about a beginning.²⁶ But summary assessment of the significance of myriad developments for global democracy is difficult. Although democratic practices are proliferating, so too might constraints upon these practices (for example, those emanating from power politics, or the structural constraints generated by the international political economy). Further, hardheaded analysts of international affairs could argue that democratic practices are just a sideshow that does not challenge the real stuff of international interaction. So, for example, structural realist theorists could claim that, myriad democratic developments notwithstanding, the basic condition of the international system remains that of Hobbesian anarchy, complete with an ever-present threat of violence. International politics in this view is first and foremost about states maximizing their comparative advantage in relation to other states that may pose an existential threat. In failing to exhibit the full communicative possibilities in global governance that would counter such skepticism, a soup frame does insufficient justice to the real prospects for global democratization.

SOCIETY

Realists see international interaction in strategic terms. Strategic action is oriented to success through the calculated pursuit of goals in an environment constituted

by other strategic actors. Democracy, however, cannot be made up of purely strategic action—as the litany of horrors developed by rational choice theory’s analysis of democracy demonstrates so vividly. These horrors include the under-provision of public goods; collective choice that, if it avoids dictatorship, lapses into arbitrariness; instability and the manipulation of agendas; rent-seeking by public officials and organized interests; and the pervasive pursuit of private gain at public expense.²⁷ These are all exacerbated to the degree that there is no sovereign authority or structure of well-developed and enforced political rules to curb all the perverse consequences of strategic action, which is of course the basic character of the international system. So in light of rational choice theory, structural realism should have nothing but bad news for transnational democracy.²⁸

On a somewhat different reading, international politics is still made up of states pursuing their strategic objectives, but they are amenable to organization in a society rather than being stuck in a Hobbesian state of nature. The concept of international society associated with the English School of international relations theorists stresses the self-regulating and rule-governed character of international politics in the absence of overarching governmental authority,²⁹ though not all states are necessarily members of Hedley Bull’s “anarchical society”³⁰ (for example, pariah states would be excluded). International society, usually dominated by great powers, is in this sense generally not democratic. And English School theorists have generally shown little interest in democracy, except to the degree the democratic credentials of states qualify them for membership in international society. So James Mayall refers to “respect for democratic values” as “the entry ticket into international society.”³¹ Still, a society has more democratic promise than a soup because it has norms that regulate the activities and interactions of all the relevant component members. Some of these norms might be influenced by democratic thinking. For example, Mayall sees the operation of the United Nations as “heavily influenced by the American model of federal democracy.”³² Importantly, democratic norms can be applied across national boundaries.

The processes that constitute these norms are potential targets for democratization.³³ Here, international society composed only of states is less promising than the “world society” concept that English School members have also occasionally written about. World society is a wider concept and it admits nonstate actors, including individuals. Unfortunately, the concept remains undertheorized; as Barry Buzan recognizes, “It is hard to escape the conclusion that the concept of

world society has served as a residual category for many in the English School.”³⁴ While a “society” framing is helpful, the English School does not in the end provide enough resources for thinking about global democracy in these terms, and so help is needed from elsewhere.

This historically variable character of the constitutive norms and thus the fundamental institutions of international politics has been stressed by constructivists.³⁵ While many different processes can contribute to the construction and evolution of the norms that regulate international interaction, one possible process involves communicative action. Communicative action aims to create reciprocal understanding and the coordination of actions through the medium of language, and involves argument and discussion not just over the content of norms but also in terms of norms.³⁶ As such, communicative action is the basis for deliberative democracy. Indeed, Habermas’s landmark account of deliberative democracy is grounded in his earlier theory of communicative action.³⁷

Thomas Risse has demonstrated at length that international politics can be home to a substantial degree of communicative action.³⁸ Risse points to what are seemingly unlikely cases of successful communicative action, such as the talks involving the United States, Germany, NATO, and the Soviet Union over the reunification of Germany. During these talks Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership changed their initial position and became convinced that a united Germany would actually pose little threat to the Soviet Union, and would be preferable to keeping Soviet troops in a hostile Germany. This is an unlikely case for communicative action because it features negotiation between states over security issues, exactly where strategizing ought to monopolize concerns (if realists are right). Communicative action should be still more feasible when it comes to other sorts of issues, pertaining, for example, to the political economy, the environment, poverty, and development.

Neta Crawford points out that Risse actually underestimates the incidence of argument in international politics, because argument underpins even the sorts of action categorized by Risse as noncommunicative under logics of strategy and (norm-governed) appropriateness.³⁹ For strategic action itself is mobilized and coordinated by argument, and norms are largely created and operationalized by argument. Indeed, international politics ought to be home to extensive persuasion and argument precisely because it generally lacks a sovereign authority able to put an end to talk of the sort that exists within states.⁴⁰ In this light, it is no surprise that international politics is pervaded by talk intended to persuade.

Moreover, as war between sovereign states becomes increasingly rare and illegitimate, and so coercive threats become less credible, the importance of communicative action ought to increase.

Communicative action in international politics may connote deliberation—but not necessarily deliberative *democracy*, if it is confined to, say, a small set of state negotiators. Democracy connotes the inclusion of those affected, so deliberative democracy benefits to the degree international politics encompasses a broad variety of actors in a post-Westphalian as well as more authentically dialogical community: “Discourse ethics supports a radical democratic ethos,” as Andrew Linklater puts it.⁴¹ Habermas has doubts about expanding participation in this fashion, on the grounds that the degree of solidarity and shared civic identity that facilitate deliberation among large numbers of citizens within nation-states are rarely found internationally.⁴² But this pessimism should be attenuated to the degree that international and even global publics can be constituted around shared problems, and possibly even attain a degree of public authority.⁴³ Many examples can now be found, on the regional (for example, the European Social Forum) and global levels. Consider, for example, the global public constituted in the run-up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference in December 2009 in Copenhagen. This public encompassed the scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, journalists, international businesses, and national politicians, as well as a host of NGOs. It was influential in developing and disseminating norms about, for example, climate justice, as well as establishing reasons why the climate issue belonged at the top of the global agenda. Thus, global publics have a place in communicative action, which in turn can influence the content of norms that constructivists believe order global politics.

Constructivists have generally had little more interest in democracy than most other international relations theorists. Nevertheless, a constructivist critique is promising in that, as Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink point out, constructivists could stress that influence within the social processes that determine the content and relative standing of norms can be more or less decentralized, more or less competent, and thus more or less democratic.⁴⁴ In addition, constructivists draw attention to the global spread of democratic norms. One particular set of norms now being advanced in international politics is actually consistent with deliberative democratization: as Rodger Payne and Nayef Samhat have noted, “participation and transparency norms are developing in a great number of substantive IR regimes.”⁴⁵

Norms themselves are generally creatures of particular discourses. A discourse is an intersubjectively shared set of ideas, concepts, and categories, and is home to judgments, assumptions, capabilities, dispositions, and intentions. Discourses identify agents and actors, establish relations between actors and others, and define what can be accepted as common sense and legitimate knowledge. Discourses coordinate and structure actions and interactions. From the point of view of democracy—and especially deliberative democracy—the crucial question is, then, whether or not the content and relative weight of different discourses can be subject to the communicatively competent influence of those affected by collective decisions. To the degree they can, then a deliberative and democratic global society starts to look conceivable.

If discourses were easily manipulated by agents they would have little independent ordering force of their own. At the opposite extreme, if discourses completely condition actors, there is no scope for democratic control of them (post-structuralist followers of Michel Foucault have sometimes treated hegemonic discourses in such terms). Discursive democracy is conceivable in a middle ground where discourses are seen as both enabling and constraining action (to use the language associated with Anthony Giddens's description of social structures in general). The hallmark of what Ulrich Beck calls "a reflexive modernity" is the possibility of such reflection.⁴⁶ For Beck, reflexivity involves subjecting understandings and frameworks previously taken for granted to critical scrutiny. Discursive democracy is enhanced (though not guaranteed) to the degree that there are multiple discourses competing for the attention of particular individuals. Individuals may be subject to these discourses, but their very multiplicity enables space for reflexive action in relation to them. If international politics is largely about struggles between contending discourses (human rights and counterterrorism; sustainable development and market liberalism; communitarian "Asian values" and human rights; various "civilizational" discourses, in Samuel Huntington's terms; neoconservatism and liberal multilateralism; globalization and nationalisms), then discursive democracy can be found in the degree to which the engagement of discourses can be subject to inclusive, critical, and competent control in transnational public spheres.⁴⁷

Such processes can be joined by publicists, national governments, social movements, political leaders, journalists, bloggers, and perhaps even scholars. Many of their interactions will not be especially deliberative, but that is the whole point of developing and applying to them deliberative standards of the sort that can be

found in Habermasian ideas about communicative action and in other normative theories of deliberative democracy. Thinking in “society” terms enables an assessment of the contributions of the myriad exercises, practices, and forums listed earlier under “Ingredients” in terms of what they contribute to the deliberative engagement of discourses. So, for example, we might look at how contending discourses, such as sustainable development, neoliberalism, and climate justice, play out in the context of the global public sphere constituted around climate change (where the first obvious deficiency may be the confinement of particular discourses to enclaves within that public sphere).

In international politics weak on formal authority structures that look at all democratic, yet which is ordered by norms and discourses, this kind of transnational discursive democracy ought to be central to democratization. Democratization here can be consistent with many kinds and mixes of formal authority—including a world in which formal authority is exercised only by states (of course, that particular world no longer exists). A global democratic society involves democratization of the engagement of contending discourses that are fundamental in ordering international politics, and so conditioning collective outcomes. But to make the connection to the generation of particular outcomes, more systemic thinking is needed.

SYSTEM

When it comes to systems of government (as opposed to governance) in the international system, it is liberal institutionalists who have thought longest and hardest—with real effects in terms of the establishment of international governmental organizations, from the United Nations to the World Trade Organization. Unlike realists, who view systems only in terms of structures of (contending) power, liberals believe there are mutual gains to be made from cooperation among states, and that those gains can be secured through institutional structure. The liberal tradition in international relations was for a long time preoccupied with creating these structures to promote peace, cooperation, and prosperity, even distributive justice, but without much thought for democracy. Their institutional legacy therefore has a severe democratic deficit.

The partial exception here may be the European Union. While the term “democratic deficit” is often invoked in relation to the EU, any such deficit exists only in comparing the EU as a whole to its member states. Compared to other

international organizations, the EU has a democratic *surplus*—for example, in the fact that the European Parliament is directly elected by European citizens. More relevant for global democracy, where direct elections are a nonstarter, may be the deliberative components of EU governance. Such components include the so-called open method of coordination, under which member states engage in a process of peer review and mutual learning in implementing broadly agreed policy goals domestically. One frame for the analysis of EU politics as a whole is specified by the 2007–2011 EU-funded RECON project (Reconstituting Democracy in Europe), which sees the EU as a “post-national union with an explicit cosmopolitan imprint,” amenable to analysis in deliberative terms, and involving a putative European public sphere, public consultation practices, and more formal institutions.⁴⁸

Cosmopolitan democrats do not of course stop with the EU: their program is concerned with democracy at the global level, where they advocate institutions both stronger than those that currently exist and more democratic in a variety of ways. Extreme cosmopolitans, such as Raffaele Marchetti and Torbjörn Tännsjö, advocate something that looks a lot like a world government, indeed a world state, whose democratic aspect could be understood in conventional electoral terms.⁴⁹ More cautious cosmopolitans, such as David Held and Daniele Archibugi, instead envisage a gradual construction project, building on existing liberal democratic states and multilateral institutions.⁵⁰ Some of these institutions are starting to show a cosmopolitan tinge—for example, the International Criminal Court. The goal of these theorists is to make these and other institutions more directly accountable to the peoples of the world, rather than to states. Institutions at various levels (from the local to the global) would all be subject to a common legal framework—cosmopolitan law. Cosmopolitans imagine a world with a global parliament to which all other institutions would be ultimately accountable. However, they accept that this is an aspiration for the long term, and they generally welcome an active transnational civil society helping to hold institutions and their policies to account.

Cosmopolitan democracy has been the subject of much debate. Charges against it include its insensitivity to the realities of power politics, its failure to recognize the importance of identity differences, its emphasis on building a legal system at the expense of more inclusive and participatory institutions (which would mean power in the hands of unelected courts and judges), its stress on formal rules and administration that sits uneasily in a world where networked governance is growing in importance, and its implausible invocation of a global demos.

To some critics, cosmopolitan democracy looks like an attempt to impose a very Western conception of liberal democracy on a world where others remain unconvinced of the desirability of that model.

Cosmopolitan democracy represents system-building at its most formal, ambitious, and encompassing. However, it is possible to think in systemic deliberative terms without being committed to this particular institutional architecture, or even to the idea that more formal institutions are needed, or indeed to the idea that formal institutions matter very much. Systemic thinking can respect some of the peculiar features of the international system—the importance of constitutive norms and discourses, its degree of decentralization, the variety of forms of governance mechanisms, even the presence of internally undemocratic states—without necessarily seeing these features as problems to be overcome. We can begin here by thinking about what it is that any deliberative system ought to feature.

DELIBERATIVE SYSTEM

Most existing discussions of deliberative systems proceed with a liberal democratic state in mind, and have shown no concern for international politics. For example, Jane Mansbridge's original presentation of the idea sees a deliberative system extending from everyday talk to formal debate in a legislature.⁵¹ Goodin's treatment is explicitly geared to an electoral system with political parties, with different deliberative virtues on display in, for example, election campaigns and post-election bargaining between party leaders.⁵² John Parkinson portrays a more complex deliberative system featuring parliament, bureaucracies, media, petitions, citizen forums, and social movement activism.⁵³ Hendriks proposes an "integrated deliberative system" linking forums made up of both lay citizens and partisans with more diffuse deliberation in the public sphere.⁵⁴

The basic idea of a deliberative system can be generalized so that it can cover settings that are not tied to any particular kind of institution, such as a state, let alone a liberal democratic state. This generalization is, of course, especially important when it comes to international politics, where any system-level state-like institution is generally lacking, and where we might have to make sense of myriad governance mechanisms. The components of a deliberative system in these general terms are as follows:

- *Public space* that features free communicative action not necessarily tied to any exercise of political authority. Ideally, there are few barriers to who can

participate and intervene in public space, and few restrictions on what they can say, so inclusiveness is an important criterion to apply to public space.

- *Empowered space* where authoritative collective outcomes are generated. This space would ideally feature deliberation in its internal workings. Formally empowered institutions are not necessary, however, and the collective outcomes in question may even be generated without clear moments of binding collective decision. (Governance networks sometimes produce outcomes in this fashion—for example, when corporations, regulators, and NGOs interact on how environmental norms are to be applied in particular instances.)
- *Transmission* whereby deliberation in public space can affect deliberation in empowered space, and (even if there is no deliberation in empowered space) the production of collective outcomes in the latter.
- *Accountability* under which empowered space answers to deliberative space for actions. Accountability can possibly be merged with transmission in what Michael Neblo calls “symmetric inter-public deliberation” populated by actors from public space and empowered space.⁵⁵
- *Meta-deliberation*, a reflexive capacity to deliberate about the organization of the deliberative system itself. The term comes from Dennis Thompson, who argues that we should “not insist that every practice in a deliberative democracy be deliberative, but that every practice should at some point in time be deliberatively justified.”⁵⁶

These five elements should ideally be *decisive* in producing collective decisions, such that the system is not just a sideshow to more consequential processes. And all five elements should feature deliberative kinds of communication. This might seem obvious, yet it is quite possible that nondeliberative components may be inserted into an otherwise deliberative system. For example, communication in empowered space might proceed by positional bargaining. And transmission might involve the coercive threat of disruption. Such nondeliberative components are sometimes necessary to construct a deliberative system. For example, without the threat of disruption, deliberation in public space might simply be ignored in empowered space. Meta-deliberation should ideally be capable of identifying such instances. So while in the first instance we might presume that any nondeliberative substitute diminishes the overall deliberative qualities of the system, we should always evaluate a deliberative system in its

entirety. It may even be the case that poor deliberative quality in one part of the system inspires good deliberation in another part that more than offsets the initial paucity. So, for example, the exclusion of certain groups from the state has sometimes led to a lively public sphere, as in Habermas's portrait of the early bourgeois public sphere, made up of political actors excluded from aristocratic and monarchical states.⁵⁷

This basic template of a deliberative system can be applied to any kind of political setting: to different kinds of states (not just liberal democratic ones), to traditional societies lacking a state, to governance networks within or across national boundaries, to regional associations, to transnational unions, and to various global bodies and processes.

When it comes to the international system in particular, empowered space might be found in international negotiations; in international governmental organizations, such as the World Trade Organization; in hegemonic states that can impose their will on the system; and in transnational governance networks, which might range from the global financial network to specific networks for regulating business.⁵⁸ Any of these arrangements to which states are party can of course help embed any type of domestic deliberative practices in a transnational deliberative system. Transnational public space for its part might be home to civil society organizations, transnational activist groups, celebrity advocacy on behalf of particular causes, international media, Internet forums, designed citizen forums, corporate public relations, demonstrations at meetings of global leaders, and contending discourses. The practices listed under the "Ingredients" section above can now be ordered under the "system" frame. So transnational social movement activism, designed citizen forums, gatherings of activists, and Internet exchanges are all aspects of public space. Deliberation within international negotiations and governance networks helps constitute empowered space. Representatives of various kinds as well as protesters engage in transmission. International media scrutiny is an aspect of accountability. Consultation by authoritative bodies with NGOs mixes transmission and accountability.

The template for a deliberative system can be applied empirically in both general and issue-specific terms. In general terms, one might even apply it to global governance in its entirety; or to, say, the governance of regional associations of states, such as the EU. The problem with proceeding in such terms is that there would probably have to be a great deal of generalization in terms of where,

why, and to what effect deliberation is taking place, and how the various connections are made. In addition, we should not assume that any formal institutional architecture actually describes the deliberative reality of any part of a system, because so much depends on what is happening informally as well as formally. So to begin, it might make more sense to proceed in issue-specific but still potentially global terms. We might, for example, describe and evaluate particular deliberative systems for the global governance of climate change, nuclear weapons, trade, health, terrorism, or piracy. To illustrate, consider the following two examples, which also show how the “society” frame can be applied.

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDIES

Global Finance

The global crisis of 2008 occurred in a financial system that was so complex as to be beyond just about anyone’s comprehension. Indeed, that was part of the reason for the crisis. As befits this complexity, the crisis has been analyzed from many different directions. One example is John Keane’s sweeping condemnation of the lack of monitoring mechanisms in international banking and finance—reflecting his belief that democracy in today’s world is largely “monitory democracy,” by which he means “the permanent public scrutiny and restraint of power.”⁵⁹ In deliberative terms, the case is actually fairly simple. Until the 2008 crisis the governance of global finance featured little that would meet the requirements of a deliberative society or system, perhaps because no key actors ever thought deliberation necessary. Thinking in terms of the deliberative system template enables a bit more precision in terms of exactly what is missing (and for that matter what is present).

In empowered space, composed of transnational financial networks as well as states and intergovernmental arrangements, this particular case featured little in the way of deliberation because of the hegemony of a market liberal discourse that precluded any deep questioning. Discursive hegemony spanning empowered and public space would also connote failure in deliberative “society” terms, which requires interplay and contestation of discourses. This particular discourse embedded the idea that markets, including financial and capital markets, were effectively self-regulating. It was this understanding—rarely questioned—that enabled the development of the complex financial instruments that hardly anyone understood, and which eventually triggered the crisis. This very complexity

illustrates another kind of deliberative failure, for if something cannot be understood (even by key actors in empowered space), how can it be deliberated?

Public space looks little better when it comes to the discussion of financial structures and products. The financial press completely failed in its task of helping constitute deliberation in public space, acting as little more than an echo chamber for empowered space. There were social movements at a critical distance, such as the anti-globalization/global justice movement. But these movements raised different kinds of concerns—about equity, social justice, poverty, environmental conservation, the exploitation of workers—and had little interest in or indeed knowledge of the workings of banking and finance. Thus, they were in no position to develop critical insights or raise critical questions that had much traction about those workings.

Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that both *transmission* and *accountability* (two concepts that cover Keane's "monitory" mechanisms) were and continue to be missing. There was not actually much being generated in public space to transmit. Those in empowered space could, if they noticed them at all, dismiss critics in public space as cranks and Luddites. Political accountability seemed unnecessary so long as the system was generating economic growth. Within states the financial sector was largely unaccountable to regulators (and via them to legislatures and the public); and even state-run central banks were insulated from control by elected governments. Key financial actors may have been accountable to each other, but given the discourse they shared, this was in very minimal, "bottom line" terms. Accountability refers literally to "giving an account"; but if in many cases nobody could really understand the complexity of financial instruments, there seemed little point in giving an account of them, except in public relations and advertising terms. Meta-deliberation, too, was conspicuous by its absence; again, as long as the system seemed to be delivering, there was no need to worry about its deliberative democratic deficit.

Of course all this changed with the onset of the crisis and the realization that there were some fundamental problems at the heart of the system, providing greater space for deliberation and for the articulation of competing discourses that a "society" frame would stress. But this recognition did not of itself mean an adequate deliberative system was going to be constructed. The failure of the system was not accepted by the relevant global elites as a failure of democracy. The perceptions of elites notwithstanding, global publics did start to attend more to global finance and its governance, and actors in empowered space felt

an increased need to justify their decisions and practices to skeptical publics. So at least some of the deficiencies in the deliberative system were corrected, if only marginally. In light of the elements of an effective deliberative system sketched here (as well as the idea of an authentically deliberative “society”), more thoroughgoing change might involve the cultivation in public space of alternative discourses to market liberalism; the establishment of forums in the new and old media, as well as in conjunction with global gatherings (such as the World Economic Forum) for the exchange of ideas; and the establishment of lines of communication from key decision-makers to these public spaces. Above all, reform could involve meta-deliberative capacity to contemplate global institutional architecture and its connections to more informal processes (of the sort that was on display, if in very exclusive, limited, and transient fashion, at Bretton Woods in 1945).

Ozone Depletion

An issue-specific deliberative system in much better repair can be found in connection with reasonably successful attempts to reach international agreement on the phasing out of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). The 1987 Montreal Protocol for the protection of the ozone layer was negotiated in empowered space between representatives of national governments (most prominently the United States) and the European Community. While much of the negotiation involved strategic positioning by national representatives trying to protect economic interests, argument in terms of global environmental values did eventually come to the fore. It did so, on Karen Litfin’s account, in terms of the eventual acceptance on the part of negotiators of a “precautionary discourse.”⁶⁰ Of course, negotiators did not let go of material economic interests. But occasionally there was “a real exchange of ideas.”⁶¹ The presence of competing discourses—industrialist and environmentalist—was grist for interchange in the deliberative “society” of the public sphere, though by 1987 the industrialist prioritization of economic production over environmental protection was waning, at least on this issue. Atmospheric scientists and environmental activists were effective advocates and deliberators in public space, but transmission to empowered space was only possible with the rhetorical impact of the idea of an “ozone hole” over the Southern Hemisphere. The idea of a “hole” managed to grab attention in the way an accurate presentation of seasonably variable fluctuations in stratospheric ozone readings could not. There probably was not a great deal of meta-deliberation once the deliberative

system linking public space and empowered space was constructed. After the agreement was reached there was a perceived need for accountability in implementation of the agreement by states.

These two cases are very different in terms of the presence and quality of the relevant deliberative system, but both illustrate the fruitfulness of analyzing the democratic qualities of particular international cases in deliberative system terms, as well as the importance of the constitutive discourses that a “society” frame stresses.

CONCLUSION

For all their differences, the soup, society, and system frames share a common advantage over some other pervasive ways of thinking about democracy in international affairs, because none of the three frames requires that global democratization depends on the leadership and spread of liberal democratic states. This is an important advantage over, for example, recent proposals for a concert or league of democracies.⁶² System-oriented thinkers, too, can succumb to this problem—for example, when Held envisages global cosmopolitan democracy being built up from a nucleus of liberal democracies.⁶³ These kinds of proposals are viewed with suspicion, as some believe their real purpose is to extend the power of the United States and other Western liberal democracies.⁶⁴ But there is nothing in the logic of the system frame that requires such privileging of existing liberal democracies. Society and system frames do have a place for democratic states, but mainly in terms of the protection that such states can provide for actors (inside their own boundaries and occasionally even within other states) who want to engage global discourses or participate in global deliberative systems.

While this paper began with soup, moved through society, and ended with system, this order does not imply that system is a higher-level democratic concept than society. The system frame does have the advantage of seeking explicit connection to the production of collective outcomes. However, society may connote a degree of social integration through shared (if sometimes contested) norms and discourses that a system frame may miss. Moreover, it is hard to imagine a deliberative system that does not also feature the effective engagement of discourses in the public space, which is such an essential component of any deliberative society.

The soup frame can be subordinated with more confidence. This frame does not help to assess the overall significance of the proliferation of particular practices

and developments—in isolation or, especially, together. It is entirely conceivable that this proliferation will leave the basic structure of international politics untouched. In this light, the society frame enables analysis of how the parameters of international politics might change as a result of the more deliberative engagement of fundamental discourses. Society enables us to speak in terms of global (rather than just transnational) democracy more readily than does soup. Especially important here is the degree to which the discourses that help order global society can be subject to decentralized and competent control. The idea of a deliberative system imposes logical order on particular practices and their relationships with each other in a way that can pinpoint deliberative and democratic deficiencies and possibilities in existing arrangements. A systemic view does not imply any commitment to the building of formal institutions. But it does stress the need to trace connections from deliberative processes to the production of particular collective outcomes. Global democratization, therefore, needs society and system; soup is not enough.

NOTES

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- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 523–24.
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- ²³ Rolf Lidskog and Ingemar Elander, "Addressing Climate Change Democratically: Multi-Level Governance, Transnational Networks and Governmental Structures," *Sustainable Development* 18, no. 1 (2010), p. 39.
- ²⁴ Goodin, "Global Democracy."
- ²⁵ Keohane, "Accountability in World Politics," p. 79.
- ²⁶ Goodin, "Global Democracy."
- ²⁷ See Brian Barry and Russell Hardin, eds., *Rational Man and Irrational Society?* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1982).
- ²⁸ Early in the cold war, Hans Morgenthau flirted with the idea of a world government to control states armed with nuclear weapons. While classical realists such as Morgenthau had no interest in democracy, presumably such a government could have been more or less democratic.
- ²⁹ Paul Keal, "An 'International Society?'" in Greg Fry and Jacinta O'Hagan, eds., *Contending Images of World Politics* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 61–75; and Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
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- ⁵² Robert E. Goodin, "Sequencing Deliberative Moments," *Acta Politica* 40 (2005), pp. 182–96.
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