

THE GAMIFICATION OF DEMOCRACY:
GAMES, DEMOCRACY, AND DELIBERATIVE PROCEDURALISM

By

DILLON LUKAS HLOHINEC

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Approved by Dr. Thomas Christiano

Department of Philosophy

ABSTRACT

What are games? What is democracy? Why is it important that democracy is not a game? This paper hopes to answer those questions. Games give us clear and precise worlds to be a part of for just a few moments. Democracy allows the people to select and hold accountable their government. Relying on the work of C. Thi Nguyen to discuss games and Joseph Schumpeter to discuss democracy, I argue that we ought not to treat democracy as a game. I suggest that Schumpeter portrays democracy as democracy gamified and offer reasons for why this is bad. Nguyen's work can help us understand the problems of gamification and why we should avoid gamifying vast parts of our lives. After discussing what is good about games and what is bad about gamified democracy, I end with a version of democracy that resists gamification and rejects Schumpeter's definition of democracy. I offer deliberative proceduralism as a form of democracy that resists the simplifications of gamified democracy and asks us to treat democracy as the serious and impactful subject that it is.

INTRODUCTION

Games hadn't been a particularly rigorous field of study until C. Thi Nguyen's *Games Agency as Art* was released to attempt to give us an account of games that makes sense of them as a unique art form. They give us a lot of knowledge about ourselves and the world, they provide us with a moment of respite in a chaotic and complicated world. I find that studying games has enriched my life, and I hope to highlight the value that can be gained from inspecting the world through a philosophy of games lens.

Democracy is a vital part of political life, at least for those in such systems of political participation. Democracy allows the people to make their government, to be part of the process of holding such a dominating force accountable. This essay hopes to use the study of games to gain some knowledge about the democratic process, and give insight into some of the ways that we (ought to) interact with our political figures and political systems.

In the first section on games, I will talk about what is so incredible about games and what they teach us about the real world. Why I might be privy to describe some games as "cardboard crack for the soul". The second section then discusses gamification, answering questions such as "what is gamification" and showcasing the benefits and the harms of a gamified system.

Joseph Schumpeter defended a definition of democracy that he felt better lined up with the way civilizations practice the act of democratic governance. The third section is designed to spell out why he rejects the traditional view of democracy and what his replacement version of democracy is. The argument of this paper picks up in the fourth section: Schumpeterian democracy is democracy gamified. I will lay out what this means, how it impacts participants in a democracy, and why it is bad to view democracy as a game. Section five is devoted to a

potential reply from Schumpeter, with the suggestion that gamified democracy really isn't as disastrous as I make it out to be.

The sixth and final substantive section argues for an account of democracy that resists gamification. I advance a view I call deliberative proceduralism and spell out some necessary components of a democratic system that refutes the seductiveness of gamification.

This paper claims that Schumpeterian democracy is to view democracy as a game and that we ought to reject the call, and instead answer back that democracy should not be played as such. It is no wonder that we say “you’re playing games with my heart” when someone we admire wrongs us by tugging at our heartstrings to get us to do some act or task.

GAMES

If there is an attempt to defend the claim about democracy as a game, we might want to start by understanding games. The goal of this section is to discuss the concept of a game and then shift to a discussion of the medium of games to reveal how they impact our agency and autonomy.

What is a game? Ludwig Wittgenstein famously declared that because a game is an open concept (i.e., one cannot list all necessary and sufficient conditions to properly define it) it is indefinable (Wittgenstein, 1968). Society cannot properly define it without including objects which lie outside the definition or excluding objects that should reside inside the category. In other words, we cannot make a category for “games” which is sure to include all things that are games that also exclude each thing that isn't a game. So, on his account, we cannot define a game and we should not even try to.

Bernard Suits called such a claim “non-sense” (Suits, 2014). Suits took up the goal of providing a tangible and practical definition in his treatise on games *The Grasshopper*. Suits defines a game as “A voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles”.¹ His definition articulates the core parts of what it means to play a game. On our own accord, we submit to rules which generate an interesting activity for the sake of that activity. He offers two examples to show his definition properly includes and excludes all things called games. Ring-around-the-Rosie, which on his account is a theatrical performance with music, is not a game. A marathon, despite not being called a game, is a game, since players don’t attempt to take a taxi to the finish line. They submit to having to run all 26 miles, something they don't necessarily have to do.

This helps us understand what games are, but it doesn't deliver insight into why we play games or what we get out of playing games. Johan Huizinga argues that when we engage in play (either free play or rule-bound gameplay) we enter a “magic circle”(Huizinga, 1980). This magic circle, says Huizinga, is separate from the rest of reality. The things we do inside the magic circle should stay there; people should not have their in-game consequences permeate out into the non-game world. Play, and by extension games, is a special act. Because games take place inside the magic circle, people are free to experiment, they are free to be whoever they want; we are each free from the consequences of the game, as they should remain inside the game world, safe inside the magic circle.. Huizinga declares that we are not *Homo sapiens* (the clever human), but *Homo ludens* (the playing human).

Professional philosopher of games, C. Thi Nguyen, can provide us with an account of games to help satisfy the inquiry into questions of the last paragraph. Games, on Nguyen’s

¹ This is his portable definition. His more in-depth analysis uses pre-lusory and lusory goals, constitutive rules, and a lusory attitude. Seeing as this isn't necessary for my purposes I've decided to stick with the portable version. For more info see (Suits, 2014).

account, operate in the medium of agency (Nguyen, 2020). When one sits down to play a game they have an entire world dictated to them; they are told where they are, who they are and what they can do, and what they care about. In other words, a game designer decides the environment, the characters, and the goal(s) of the game space.

Nguyen uses the Suitsian definition of games to support his argument. When we play a game we sign up to be put under specific constraints and to temporarily care about a specific goal. These constraints help expand our autonomy by expanding our catalog of wearable agencies. When we engage in enough striving play of a specific game, says Nguyen, we gain that style of agency into our personal mental libraries.² When I play *Monopoly* enough times, I gain the agential mode of a self-centered narcissistic banker. I understand what it takes to reason in a way that leads to disvaluing the well-being of others and to instead value property and money. In games, we can instrumentalize every aspect of the game towards the goal; I do whatever I have to do in order to monopolize the entire board. It is this that leads Nguyen to declare that in games we live up to the perfectly rational *Homo economicus*. The clearness and precision of the game world is what allows a player to pursue their in-game end by any means necessary.

To this, we see Nguyen defend the view that in practical life we take the means for the sake of the end (we take whatever route we can towards our goal). Opposed to this, in gameplaying we take the ends (the goal) for the sake of the means (playing a game). We choose games to play them, not just to achieve victory in a constructed game world.

Nguyen's account seems to require that the "magic circle" from Huizinga is permeable; the things that occur inside the game translate into the outside world. Our in-game agency that guides reasoning and action can be transferred to the outside world. He uses this to suggest that

² I do not discuss the distinction between achievement play and striving play, for a thoroughly detailed account, see (Nguyen 2020) Chapter 2.

playing games, as a striving player, allows people to gain new agencies they might not otherwise have learned. So, once I have played *Monopoly* enough times (as a striving player), I can understand people who seem to use the same style of agency in regular life. I add “self-centered banker” to my accessible agencies, ready for a situation where I either need to act in such a manner or deal with others who do.

The specificity of the goal yields another interesting conclusion about games. In games, we have value clarity. In a game, one knows exactly who they are, exactly what they can do, and exactly what they care about. This is not the case in real life. In real life, one has to balance competing values. Pluralism often causes conflict. If I have multiple desires how am I to balance completing one of them over the other? How do I know that graduating from university is more valuable than working full time at a full-time job? *Homo economicus* would pick the latter because of the opportunity cost of attending college. Nguyen argues that in our everyday lives we might struggle with the value of a task; “How do I compare a paper that achieves a small insight with perfect rigor, against another paper that offers a grand and sweeping insight based on a looser and more slapdash argument?” (Nguyen, 2020, p. 196).

Here is the picture in other words: in real life we don't know who we are, we might agonize over the limits of our own abilities, and we have to struggle over competing and pluralistic values and goals; in game life we suddenly know exactly who we are, what we can (and cannot) do with perfect precision, and we have absolute clarity with regard to what is valuable.³ This is the clarity of games. Value clarity is the part of games that makes them incredibly pleasurable experiences. Because of this clarity, Nguyen concludes that “Games can be an existential balm for our practical unease with the world.” (Nguyen, 2020, p. 20). We slip

³ Nguyen's account of gameplaying specifies that all players play games to win. This is not to say players cannot have other goals or motives, but that players are aiming at, or attempting to, win.

into the magic circle for the simplified value structure it offers; it is a moment of respite in a world that often demands us to make hard value judgments.

The upshot of this, and an answer to our questions, is that games store and transmit different types of agencies (“what games do”) and that games give us a moment of reprieve from having to deal with deliberating about pluralistic, complex, and competing values (“why we play games”). These reasons are what lead Nguyen to his argument against gamification, which is the next piece that requires further inspection should we wish to understand the problems of gamifying the world of politics.

GAMIFICATION

Like this last section, it might be wise to start with a definition of gamification. Sebastian Deterding and colleagues offer a wonderful discussion of the term gamification and a settled (enough) definition. “[T]he use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding et al, 2011). Game design elements often mean point systems, badges, achievements, and leaderboards. To gamify means to make that which is not a game like a game.

What do these different elements do? Points keep track of progress towards the goal or levels. Badges and achievements attempt to make players feel good about progress. Leaderboards allow easy commensuration and comparability among players. All of these seem very beneficial to whatever the task at hand is. Points help people understand how they are doing (with reference to the targeted goal). Badges and achievements reward and encourage players to continue to keep playing the game. Leaderboards allow players to understand their place in a multiplayer setting.

There are two major camps with regard to gamifying the world. One group might have a tagline “games are good, so gamification is great”. Jane McGonigal defends such a view in her book *Reality is Broken*, where she says reality is depressing, unproductive, and hopeless (McGonigal, 2011).⁴ Because reality is like this, says McGonigal, we ought to make everything more like a game, and that doing so will make life better, more pleasurable, and more enjoyable.

For McGonigal, a central part of games is the motivational pull they exert on the players. Because games are so crisp and clear it's easy to be competitive about them or to have the drive to complete all tasks or goals. Value clarity makes it easy to understand what one needs to do. Point systems encourage players to maximize their points (and in multiplayer settings, climb leaderboards). Badges and achievements nudge players to finish goals and complete quests. For her, this motivational method should be used to the betterment of our home and work lives. We should try our best to gamify the world to make society better. Gamified environments make us more productive. McGonigal points out cases of games that aim to produce kindness, compassion and sharing, and critical thinking and reflection. She argues that we can harness the power of gamification to make the world a better place⁵.

McGonigal suggests that gamification can make us better because it makes us more productive. Because games offer a simple value structure, it makes it easier to get ourselves to complete tasks. This is why people play videogames, because they are crisp and clear. So, we ought to gamify our own lives and work places to make them a little crisper and a little clearer, and therefore a little bit easier to get into doing. Gamification offers us a motivational lure. This is a huge benefit of gamification: it can get us to do things we otherwise would not do. She uses

⁴ For the sake of fairness, she uses each of these adjectives with reference to games contrasted to reality in her “fixes for reality” throughout her book.

⁵ McGonigal never uses the term gamification, referring to these enterprises as “alternate reality games”. Authors elsewhere (Deterding et al, 2011) (Nguyen, 2020, 199) indicate she is indeed discussing gamification.

this strategy to suggest that gamification can help us clean our homes, get better sooner after recovering from medical issues and make school a better experience for students (McGonigal, 2011). Games ask us to engage in a task in a way that pushes us towards completion. It focuses on the goal of the task to make sure we are achieving the ends at which we aim.

McGonigal points to some of the aspects of games that are good, and suggests a gamified environment would have these too: that we would be happier, more satisfied with our work, less afraid of failure, and make new and better social connections (McGonigal, 2011).

But there is a second, much more skeptical group. This group articulates that “games are good, so gamification is terrible”. Nguyen falls into this camp, arguing that value clarity can be dangerous when exported to the real world. He calls this value capture.

For Nguyen, value capture occurs when:

- “1. Our values are, at first, rich and subtle.
2. We encounter simplified (often quantified) versions of those values.
3. Those simplified versions take the place of our richer values in our reasoning and motivation.
4. Our lives get worse.” (Nguyen, 2020, p. 201).

It's obvious from his definition how he feels about value capture. We might then say that an agent is value captured when their own values are replaced by that of an institution or gamified environment. It might not be evident how this can make one's life worse or why allowing outside forces to dictate values to someone is potentially damaging to autonomy.

Games are guided by their goal. Boardgame designer Reiner Knizia has said that the most important part of the game is its goal; while players are engaged in a game, the goal guides their reasoning and motivation (Chalkey, 2008). In Nguyen's words, it tells them what to care about.

Gamified systems provide clear goals as a way to guide people's actions and reasoning. Nguyen is worried that people might start to aim at the wrong (gamified) targets and that once they start being value-captured the apparent clarity will cause them to seek out more and more gamified systems. It's the quantification, the point system, which causes such apparent clarity and makes them motivationally addictive.

It might help to illustrate. A central example for Nguyen is the education system. In the education system, administrators, faculty, and students are all focused on a specific metric, Grade Point Average. GPA is a quantified measure meant to simplify all the complexities hidden in learning. GPA strips out the values of education; it becomes hard to value anything in the academy outside of the number. Administrators use it to compare and contrast students, determine merit-based aid, and give awards based on numerical status. Faculty use it as a way to gauge how a class is performing. They can easily understand what students are learning (or failing to learn). Students can easily determine how well they are doing by checking their grade for a class. But none of these actually track the complex and pluralistic values of education: curiosity, critical thinking, comprehension (to name a few). They replace those values with the value of a context-insensitive number.

Theodore Porter, in *Trust in Numbers*, suggests that this is because quantified metrics are portable and aggregatable (Porter, 1995). This is why the administrator can use them for a multitude of uses. It allows professors to calculate class averages. It allows students to compete with their friends based on how well one is doing in a class (tracked by GPA). Qualified metrics, on the other hand, require context-sensitivity and nuance. If professors instead wrote qualified reports for each student, administrators wouldn't be able to easily transfer that number from department to department or school to school (graduate school admissions would be a disaster).

Students couldn't compare themselves in quite the same way because such reports would show the unique idiosyncratic character of each and every student rather than a standardized number.

In the current system of GPA, students are motivated by the metric; I do not need to prove that I care about the subject or that I am curious or reflective. All that does matter is that I can calculate how many points I need to attain the grade I desire. In becoming educated, I come to value achieving a 4.0 and not subtle, hard to commensurate, educational values. My reasoning and my motivation become guided by raising my GPA rather than learning, fostering particular skills, or understanding a certain field or topic.

To return us to the project at hand, gamification can help motivate us, but it can also cause us to focus on the wrong thing. “Value capture pressures our values to change, not in light of what is really good, but for reasons of pleasure, ease, and aesthetic satisfaction.” (Nguyen, 2020, p. 208). McGonigal bases her support of gamification on the same definition of games as Nguyen, using Bernard Suits to show that it is the voluntariness of gamified systems that makes them acceptable. Because one can just opt-out or not join the game, we can avoid having our values changed. But if one desires an education (at least in the proper American sense), one has to submit to the metric of GPA. Perhaps, the workaround is to just ignore the metric and focus on one’s own values. But with so much tied to GPA (funding, opportunities, etc) it seems impossible to not be lured to value the quantified metric (especially when everyone else in the system is valuing it).

Take another example: hospitality workers at Disneyland having their workplace gamified. They referred to the metric (how many linens a worker has washed and folded) as “the electronic whip” (Gabrielle, 2018). They could not help but be pulled by the gamified system, it gave them the motivation to continue working even when tired. This leads to an increase in

workplace accidents. Workers come to be motivated not by their own values of work, but by their employer's measure of value. They have the value of their work change from quality to quantity; which is easier to track from the centralized perspective of the employer.

None of this is to say that gamification is inherently bad. Michael Ridge defends situations where value capture can be helpful, such as when one's own values are rotten or harmful to ourselves or others (Ridge. 2021). McGonigal portrays a convincing example of a gamified educational system that promotes learning and helps teach students (McGonigal, 2011). It's for this reason that gamification seems to have found quite a large home in the literature surrounding education; it can help students who do not see the value of education come to have values regarding education. But, it's important to understand the dark side of gamification and to assess in which situations gamification helps or hinders our ability to understand what ends we ought to value.

SCHUMPETERIAN DEMOCRACY

With the groundwork laid for thinking about games, it is time to turn to discuss the foundations of democracy. Joseph Schumpeter in his work *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* discusses democracy to show the lack of connection between democracy and socialism. He critiques what he calls the “classical doctrine of democracy” to put forward a new model of democracy that he feels is closer in line with the actual practice. He arrives at his own definition after much discussion of the current issues of democracy. Mainly, the issue of the common good and that of the will of the people. It will of course help to cover the background here.

According to Schumpeter, the classical view rests upon being able to show that democracy can both advance the common good and reflect the (so-called) will of the people. To define it precisely: “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will” (Schumpeter, 2010, p. 225)

But what is the common good? Schumpeter seems to think such a concept is impossible. I do not mean impossible to define as with open concepts (in the Wittgensteinian sense). Schumpeter argues that because we cannot reach a common consensus about what “the common good” is, it does not exist. Society is pluralistic. We saw this on the individual level with how one reasons about values in education. If we zoom out to a society-wide aperture it becomes obvious not only that different people value different things, but that they are often in conflict with one another about what is valuable; “to different individuals and groups the common good is bound to mean different things” (Schumpeter. 2010, p. 226). He then says we cannot compromise our different claims about the common good, because doing so “could only maim and degrade [them]” (Schumpeter. 2010, p. 227). Even if we could agree on some metric to attempt to measure the common good, we would disagree about what would add points and what would subtract points.

We then have to reconcile with his second claim, that of the impossibility of the will of the people. How can we even begin to have a collective sense of desire if each person lacks certainty about what they desire? Schumpeter says that we cannot have surety, and if we could we might assume that each individual’s will is about as good as any other. Even if each individual knew exactly what they desired, says Schumpeter, it couldn't be correct to refer to a

collection of individual desires as some type of collective will. Put another way, we cannot determine the collective will of the people by adding up all of the individual wills.

Schumpeter also continually refers to the products we get out of democracy. By this, I mean things like freedom, security, individual rights, and so on. He gestures to other forms of non-democratic government (autocracy, fascism) that regularly do better at providing their citizens the products which a government is to produce. His analysis seems very utilitarian (despite responding to the utilitarian fathers of democracy); he is, after all, merely an economist. So it seems that we submit to the authority or legitimacy of a government because of what we get out of it, a very Hobbesian view of what governments do.

He then turns to a disheartening discussion of what he calls “Human Nature in Politics”. Relying on work on the psychology of crowds he argues that groups reason poorly, often discarding logic. Parliaments, news media, and parties can generate the psychology of a crowd and cause irrationality to settle into the individuals who get swept up by it (Schumpeter, 2010, p.231). Combine this with the observation that we are not *Homo economicus* and we are easily persuaded by advertisements and Schumpeter quickly descends into pessimism about the ability of humans to produce good governments. He suggests that we are unable to reason in a solid way about politics.

The division of labor then turns us into experts with little experience or knowledge of areas outside one’s expertise. Each of us only knows what we know; we are each an expert in our own little domains. How are we to make decisions which lead to desirable outcomes if each person is ignorant of everything outside the daily activities of their lives? The answer for Schumpeter is that we cannot; the views of, say a janitor, could not be rationally defensible (valuable) concerning economic or foreign policy.

He then says that individuals, when they are rational, will be motivated by the short-term gains of the moment rather than by long-term interests. “Voters thereby prove themselves bad and indeed corrupt judges of their own long-run interests” (Schumpeter. 2010, p. 234). It is no wonder that people spend less energy on politics than they do on (meaningless) games. Because we do not take politics seriously, we have no desire to gather information or participate. “Thus, the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field” (Schumpeter. 2010, p. 235).

This seems similar to Anthony Downs's argument in *An economic theory of democracy*, where he suggests that if we are like *Homo economicus* we would tune out politics because the likelihood of one vote making a difference is approximately zero (Downs, 1957). On his account, people do not vote because they do not have an incentive to, their vote does not matter. This causes them to not even bother to gather information about the election because any rational being wouldn't participate if they knew it wasn't going to make a difference in the outcome. So they rely on “free information”, info obtained without paying for it; this is information from work, family, businesses, political parties, and government.

Because of this, we rely on politicians to tell us what to care about. We fall prey to their persuasion because it is easy to let someone else tell us what to care about. Even without parties or politicians, says Schumpeter, people would just rely on their biases in order to decide where to spend a vote. And since there are political parties, political actors can manufacture the will of the people to be whatever they like; they can create issues for their voters to care deeply about. Hostile forces in politics manipulate the information that constituents receive and biases become more deeply entrenched. The people simply let themselves be cajoled into specific policy

positions without spending the thought or action required to investigate the ends one would desire for themselves if they took politics seriously. Politicians construct a reality for their voters.

So then, we might ask Schumpeter, “what is the way out?”. His response, at least I think, is not satisfying and is, as I hope to show, very worrisome.

“The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Schumpeter. 2010, p. 241). In other words, democracy is a competition among politicians for who will be chosen to hold the power of government. “The principle of democracy then merely means that the reins of government should be handed to those who command more support than do any of the other competing individuals or teams” (244). Democracy is solely a competitive struggle for leadership selection.

DEMOCRACY AS A GAME

It's time now to discuss the central claim of this paper. In a tagline: Schumpeterian democracy is democracy gamified. But what does this mean? And why does it matter?

To tackle the second question first: it matters because Schumpeter was attempting to offer a definition of democracy that reflects reality; he is attempting to give us a definition of democracy in practice. If this is the case, then there might be concern about current democracies, those around the world, being potentially gamified systems. I will return to why this is an issue after I return to, and hopefully convincingly answer, our first question of this section.

What does it mean for democracy to be gamified? Our above definition of gamification gives us a clear way to think about gamification: it is adding game design elements (badges, achievements, leaderboards, point systems) into non-game settings. Nguyen discusses both

intentional gamification (that of FitBit) and accidental gamification (that of Grade Point Average) (Nguyen, 2020). It is entirely possible that gamification in political settings could be intentional, but given the history of democracy, I am one to believe it would be an accidental kind of gamification.

What does this accidental gamification of democracy look like under Schumpeter's conception? Let's take the view.

Every game needs players. Schumpeter places the competition for leadership at the front of his democracy. Thus, our players are our politicians. We can wonder about their abilities. They can host events, make speeches, reach out to voters directly, use social media, and fundraise for themselves and their political party. They are, like all good gamers, interested in winning. What is the goal of the game of democracy? To win the election that one runs for. This seems no different than the regular goal of running for office. They are interested in winning whatever office they run for so they can acquire the power to rule over their constituents.

There is a second player embedded in the gamified democracy: the voter. But the voter isn't playing the game of democracy like a politician. They do not get the same clear gain for obtaining their goal (because the politicians get the power to rule). I would think the voter's goal is to see change happen before their eyes; voters want to see policy implemented in their real lives. Voters too have various abilities: they can vote, they can gather information, they can participate in discussions or debates, and they can donate money to candidates, causes, or parties. Voters determine which politician ends up with enough votes to declare victory.

Lastly, we have our environment. In the game of democracy, this is the media environment. This is where politicians use their ability to transmit information and where voters gain insight into politicians and political party's platforms. We now have our "who you are, what

you can do, where you are, and what you care about” that the structure of a game gives to anyone willing to commit to playing. I’d like to develop the implications of the analysis of a gamified democracy.

First, our politician players are one-dimensional. In Schumpeterian democracy, winning elections gives one power (this is the purpose behind playing the game). Politicians care about winning the position of office they run for. They do, of course, have quite a few abilities at their disposal. The version of themselves that they portray to the public is crafted, a sculpted version of their dynamic and pluralistic self. Political figures are giving just enough information to convince voters to vote for them and not someone else. The goal is not to govern well but to win office. So, political figures have a big incentive to lie. Schumpeter seems to believe this himself about the classical conception of democracy and I cannot find a reason why his critiques of the old conception do not apply quite aptly to his conception.

But our voters are not so one-dimensional. They have policy positions they want to see enacted in their lives. A voter might desire universal healthcare or a repeal of the estate tax or have public transportation funded in their city. They have so many desires they wish to see made into a reality. They have very complex and pluralistic values and desires, so much so that it may be hard for a voter to determine which policies are priorities and which policies it would simply be nice to have implemented.

Politicians need a way to signal to voters that they are the correct candidate. They want to abstract away all information that a voter doesn't need and make sure they maximize the information that will cause voters to vote for them. It is no wonder that Schumpeter believes political figures will construct issues: they need a quick and easy way to signify to voters that they are the correct politician and all the other candidates do not care for them. They will want to

try to sell a one-dimensional world where one policy is seen as more valuable than all others. Politicians will want to create single issue voters so that they can continue to push that issue and receive votes for pushing it; and, they might want to do this with a few highly contentious issues (such as abortion or immigration).

Second, and related to the first, how does one achieve their goal? In a democracy, the victory condition is tied to what the voters decide. So a politician requires that other people commit to supporting them when it comes time for the voter to cast a ballot⁶. There is a worry here about the instrumentalization of one's in-game tools. Politicians do not care about the reasons why the people vote. I can best explain this by a comparison to the video game concept of NPCs. A Non-Player Character is any entity in the game that is not a player (in multiplayer games it's any character that is not piloted by a person behind a screen). An NPC, by definition, is not a person. Politicians then, might treat voters as means to power and not ends in themselves. In other words, politicians will treat voters as NPCs, because their interests and values aren't considered real or aren't aligned with one another. It does not matter how one convinces, manipulates, or exploits the voters as long as one can get them to vote for the proper politician.

There is a value mismatch going on here. Voters desire to see policy implemented, but politicians only desire to win. This feels like an easy way to explain why political figures and parties make so many campaign promises and then fail to deliver on them.

Third, the gaming environment can, I argue, lead to disaster. If the purpose (for the politician player) is to win the election (at all costs), then one will change the gaming environment to ensure victory. Democracy is played over multiple rounds. Every few years

⁶ This argument can work regardless if votes connote support, preference, or are just a resource as discussed in (Christiano, 1995).

politicians face challengers. But because they have won the game of democracy and now have power, they can rig the game in their favor. And I don't find this point to be a hypothetical one.

Gerrymandering is the rigging of the system to ensure victory in future rounds. This practice is one of re-drawing districts so that segments of land have a guaranteed majority for one party or politician over another. If I am a newly elected politician and it is time to re-district (often occurring with the country-wide census), then I will want to draw my maps in a way to make sure that next election I have put all of the people who will vote for me into my district; this ensures that I will achieve a majority of the votes and stay in power. Gerrymandering would mean changing the rules of the game so that politicians pick their voters and not voters picking their politicians.

Voter Identification laws appear another attempt to restrict who has access to voting. If I know that the people who would vote against me in the next round don't have easy or assured access to getting an ID, requiring an ID to vote makes it so that they cannot play the game. If I were a newly minted politician and I knew my opponents receive votes from vulnerable populations who may have a hard time obtaining a valid ID, then I will make sure the next round requires having the proper identification. This will help me achieve victory in the game of politics not only by restricting the eligible population to those more likely to vote for me, but I can now also paint "Voter ID Laws" as an issue to signal to voters that I am the politician they ought to spend their vote on.

To state it plainly: there is a worry of value capture here. Under such a conception, it seems politicians come to care about becoming leaders and having power rather than governing well or assisting their constituents. So, instead of caring about eliminating homelessness, building good public infrastructure, or investing in education, politicians come to care solely

about winning the game to have power (which they then do not need to use for productive social causes because they have already achieved their victory condition).

But I am not just worried about politicians becoming value captured by the game of democracy. Voters, too, can come to care about victory over progress. Politicians rarely run as individuals. They are backed up by political parties to help with funding. Schumpeter defines them as groups that are attempting to fight for power together (Schumpeter, 2010, p. 251). Political parties, then, are our teams. Schumpeter, as discussed above, is quite the cynic about the people's ability to take politics seriously. So political parties allow people to quickly and easily pick a side and defend it to the death. Voters, as *Homo economicus* in the game environment, would want to maximize their impact while minimizing their effort; it strikes me that political parties allow a quick heuristic for determining who one ought to vote for. If I know one political party generally supports the policies I am interested in seeing (even if they aren't good for me as a person outside of politics) then I will know to just vote for politicians on that party's ticket.

I am, again, not just worried about this in theory. In journalism, we see the concern about *horse race news*. This means focusing on polling data and competition rather than on policy positions or candidate differences. Aalberg, Strömbäck, & de Vreese cover what it means to cover our politics with a game or strategy frame on news media (Aalberg, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2011). They find that people start to distrust politics (as though it were merely a game), that there is a focus on who is going to win an election rather than on what policy positions each candidate supports (in news coverage), and that voters tend to focus less on issues and more on politics (as though it were a game). But they also point to studies that show how voters may be more politically engaged, since measuring victory is a lot easier than measuring differences between candidates (since they aren't easily commensurable). Participation would be higher

because the simplicity of the game frame allows easier digestibility (since it's all tracking who is winning, but not necessarily what they stand for).

One positive of gamifying a system is increased motivation to participate. It's easier to reason towards the clear goal of winning than it is to reason about what policies I want and figure out which candidates support them. When I do not care about what policies each candidate will implement but instead care about my favored politician winning, I have taken up the game's value system instead of my own. We should expect increased participation (perhaps voters might vote solely so they can collect their "I voted" sticker badge), but I do not think this increased participation is worth continuing to degrade democracy by suggesting it is a game. Schumpeter's conception of democracy suggests that this simplification is valuable. Schumpeter doesn't mind if voters disengage, political elites can better secure the things people ought to want out of government anyway.

Remember, games have some kind of special property that makes them a degree removed from reality (at least partially). But one cannot allow politics to enter the magic circle because the purpose of politics is to impact the real world. To treat democracy as a game means to discard the hard pluralism of real-life and instead simplify everything into a one-dimensional process with the singular goal of winning. Democracy (and politics and governance) is not a game, and it shouldn't be treated as such.

SCHUMPETER'S REPLY⁷

Perhaps a gamified political environment is not a problem for the economist Schumpeter. Schumpeter might suggest that the value capture and goal shifting of gamification are a good

⁷ I am indebted to Thomas Christiano for this section's idea.

way for the people to get what they want out of elections. Schumpeter's reply would likely have us think about the similarity between the political sphere and the economic market world.

In business, business people do not aim at satisfying the desires of their customers. They aim at maximizing profit, and it just so happens that while they aim at maximizing the revenue from their business, they happen to produce goods that satisfy human needs. People pursue the direct effect of maximizing their profit from sales and services, and they indirectly produce the satisfaction of desires. Note that we don't inquire into the desires of the people, people can have bad taste in preferences, but because they are individuals in a market, they are free to pursue whatever it is they can (and will) purchase. Buyers are allowed to have whatever preferences and desires they have in the marketplace.

We can extrapolate this out to the gamification of democracy. Politicians may aim at winning elections, but they satisfy the preferences of the voters along the way. Voters are not asked to reflect on their preferences or to determine what they value for themselves since Schumpeter believes politicians and parties will manufacture issues to rile up blocks of voters. Voters then have their preferences satisfied through the political process, even if their representatives are aiming at different targets than they themselves are. So, even though politicians aim at winning and voters aim at policy, voters have their preferences satisfied through the gamified system.

On top of this, going for the maximization of votes is a useful tracker for success. The median voter theorem suggests that aiming at votes will actually satisfy a majority of the preferences of the people (Downs, 1957). Thus, when we aim at votes, we are using democracy to help pick out which policies are supported by the most people. This, again, does not ask our

voters to reflect on their own preferences, desires, or needs; it only asks that they vote for their most preferred option.

Gamified democracy, much like a market, asks producers to satisfy desires even though it is not what they aim at. Producers aim at maximizing profit, it just so happens they have to satisfy people's wants to do that. Politicians aim at winning elections, it just so happens that they have to aim at satisfying political demands to do that. So even though Schumpeterian democracy is like a game, it is okay because it produces good outcomes, it gets the people close enough to what they want.

And this is good, says Schumpeter, because it gets us to focus on politicians. With Schumpeter's gesturing to what we get out of democracy and his lack of faith in the people to be rational, we ought to be happy that people lack serious participation in politics and instead just defer to their political representatives. In politics, "He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again" (Schumpeter, 2010, p.235).

So a gamified environment need not be an issue for Schumpeter because such an environment can still produce good results even if some players are aiming at different targets. Voters still get what they want or need, politicians still win elections by manufacturing issues on focusing on gaining and maintaining power. Directly, we have people aiming at gamified goals, but indirectly we have people's preferences being satisfied. And even if (gamified) democracy is flawed as a form of government, it is still better than killing each other to determine a ruler.

While I find myself agreeing with this last point, I do not think such a trade off is valuable for democracy. This response follows from the economic tradition of taking preferences as given. If voters (or politicians) have crummy values, than they are still participating and

shaping the world. This seems potentially disastrous. Such a system does not ask voters what they think is good, it does not ask them to reflect on their policy positions or why they favor certain politicians. It instead asks them to cast a vote and ignore the political sphere. Politicians are free to use their power however they desire (assuming they satisfy some of the preferences of their constituents once they are in office). The focus on politicians ignores voters forming their own policy preferences; voters should not engage seriously with politics, because their vote doesn't really matter anyway.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND PROCEDURALISM

How do we avoid gamifying democracy? It seems a hard question to answer because the winning of elections is so central to the politics of democracy. The goal of running is to win. I might insist that the purpose of running is to govern, but I suppose I would be accused of idealism by my intellectual opponents. I wish to advance a view I call deliberative proceduralism. The purpose of this section is to spell out exactly what this means and show why it resists gamification.

I'll start with deliberative democracy. The deliberative democrats are especially interested in people's reasoning, often publicly, with one another to reach their own conclusions about what the government (and by extension politicians) ought to do. The purpose of deliberation is to allow people to express support or disdain for policies and to ask experts and gain understanding and knowledge (Klein, 2019). There are several conceptions of deliberative democracy, and as a field in political philosophy, there are always people arguing about the best version of it. Let me make a few comments about elements that I find important in a deliberative setting that resists gamification.

Deliberative democracy asks participants (voters) to engage in public deliberation. This means reasoning towards a goal or policy in a way that enables everyone else to see how you reasoned for that position. This is counter to the reasoning given by the value clarity of a game. I am not to reason for something “because I like it” or “because I think it should win” but because of the benefits of the policy being implemented. I might reason for, say public transportation, because of the economic benefits and the reduction of traffic I believe it will bring to my city. Under deliberative settings, this allows others to respond with their own reasons both for and against public transportation so that we can come to an enlightened understanding together (thanks to the help of experts and public reasoning).

Thomas Christiano advances the view that deliberative democracy does not need to be reasonable (Christiano, 2009). When someone is reasonable in a pluralistic society, they acknowledge that each other person's positions are just as valid and real as their own. But when we restrict people to only offer reasons that are acceptable to others, this might restrict the ideas they are able to advance. We might worry that failing to offer reasons others accept will treat others as inferior, that they are worthless as people in a democracy. But, says Christiano, we need to distinguish between treating those people as less than equal and treating their ideas as lesser (because of their content or what they require). They are not treated as lesser because they still can participate in the democratic process. So, we ought to reject the requirement of reasonableness so that members of a pluralistic society can advance their own views as they see fit. This isn't to say reasons don't matter, but that we shouldn't restrict them by requiring them to be acceptable to others. Some policies will be better supported by more reasons that more people, overall, find more compelling or more reflective of evidence. We should not restrict

people's abilities to reason about the policies they wish to see enacted in the world by requiring them to be shared reasons.

We might want to follow Maxime Lepoutre and allow the inclusion of emotional speech and narrative into some of our political arenas (Lepoutre, 2021). Emotional speech and narrative, on the traditional account of democratic disagreement, are not viewed as acceptable methods to persuade or communicate. Lepoutre instead advocates that we ought to include them if we accept the desire to keep the so-called *shared reasons constraint* alive. While I disagree with the desire to maintain the constraint (as argued above), I do agree that Lepoutre is correct in advocating for emotional speech. Emotional speech and narrative do not appeal to the cold logical part of our brains. They are resistant to the idea of instrumentalization because they avoid the rationality of *Homo economicus*. Put another way, emotional speech allows the transmission of reasons which are not based on an appeal to logic. They can, on Lepoutre's account, be extremely beneficial to include in some arenas. They ask us to consider the humanity behind each player and to remind us to not treat others as NPCs.

Deliberative democracy resists Schumpeterian gamified democracy because it asks us to investigate our reasons for supporting certain candidates and policy positions. It asks voters to inquire for themselves which policies they should support, and not to just believe they should support whatever policies their favored political figure supports. Deliberative democracy rejects reasons that are game-like because it nudges participants to think and reflect for themselves about which policies and politicians they want to support, rather than voting for someone because of a manufactured cause or desire to see them win. Good reasons are not those that are purely strategic.

The next part of our solution is tied to proceduralism. Proceduralism is about focusing on the process of democracy rather than the product. Schumpeter seems obsessed with what we get out of democracy (which is why he suggests autocracy might fair better sometimes). But proceduralism attempts to resist this and instead asks what we get for having democracy. In other words, proceduralism focuses on the procedure part of democracy: political equality. Maria Paula Saffon and Nadia Urbanati defend proceduralism as “the best normative defense of democracy” (Saffon & Urbinati, 2013). Proceduralism restricts policy making because it requires that any attempt to remove the political rights and liberties of the population ought to be rejected. You cannot make an entire segment of the population unable to participate in elections because of their race, ethnicity, or history.

Proceduralism focuses on ensuring everyone has one vote. It allows anyone to run for office and to do so because everyone else can also do so. We might worry about the minority getting trampled in a proceduralist society. But Saffon and Urbanati say that such unfair treatment does not obtain because democratic minorities can always try to win in later rounds. They also defend their conception as a beautiful way of dealing with gerrymandering: you would want to make uncertainty a part of the system to ensure people continue to engage and know the value of their vote. You remove the rigging of the system to ensure that everyone has access to it.

We can now arrive at a definition of deliberative proceduralism. Deliberative proceduralism focuses on reasoning in a public setting by way of arguing for and against propositions in a way that maintains the political equality of all participants. We ought not to restrict reasons by requiring them to be shared and we ought to allow emotional speech and narrative to resist the parts of democracy that are inherently like a game. People cannot advance

positions that restrict or remove the political liberties of others, because proceduralism requires that they ensure the value of each and every one vote.

There is elegance and simplicity here in the democratic procedure. A kind of clarity that is not lost in an attempt to escape the gamification of democracy. Majority rule is particularly easy for anybody and everybody to understand. Everyone can see that a majority of the people voted for one policy or politician over another. The apparent clarity of the system allows experts and non-experts of politics to witness the victory of the majority. It allows them to reflect and think about how to best engage deliberative arenas to attempt to win in the next round. Democracy (much like a game) also asks us to take the means for the sake of the end, where our means are politics and our end is political equality.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Games tell us what to care about, and this can be a comfort from the larger world where we have to determine for ourselves what each of us cares about. But they do so in a simplified way: by picking a specific measure of value for players to follow. Gamification uses this as a way to pull players to participate, it's easier to complete tasks that are crisp and clear, where the boundary between complete and incomplete is a line and not a blur. Schumpeterian democracy, I have argued, treats democracy as a game; it focuses on the politicians and what they win, rather than the voters and what they want. The gamification of democracy aims us at the wrong targets. It nudges us to tune out politics as unimportant, to disengage from the political process. But it isn't all for naught, because we can resist treating politics as a game. Deliberation resists the simplification of a gamified system because it asks participants to determine for themselves what they value, rather than having their values manufactured by politicians or taken as given or

dictated by a gamified environment. Proceduralism puts aside treating members of the public as means to an end and instead sees each of them as political equals; it enshrines uncertainty into the system and rejects rigging the game. Deliberative proceduralism can help refocus voters on what matters to them; it can provide a space for the process of value-deliberation in a complicated world while ensuring their equality. Democracy is not a game, it is not safe to place politics inside the magic circle when it has the power to change the real world.

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