

# **Environmental Governance: A Deliberative Approach**

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B.A., Gonzaga University, 2019

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Political Science)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2021

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Environmental Governance: A Deliberative Approach

submitted by Cole Fairbairn in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

in Political Science

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## **Abstract**

Recent trends in environmental governance have seen a shift in policymaking and regulating that are beginning to question the efficacy of democratic systems, possibly in favor of corporate environmentalism and authoritarian regimes. This line of questioning has left many to wonder where the role of democratic national governments now lies when it comes to climate change governance norms and policy innovations. Using three case studies of successful deliberative mini publics, this paper argues that when democratic institutions use deliberative mechanisms at local, regional, and national levels, effective governance can be achieved, and that these achievements reflect legitimate collective action. Yet, because democracies have the unique ability to create spaces of free expression and loyal oppositions, a deliberative system model can be opened in a way that allows radical policy shifts which may not be achieved otherwise. Through various mechanisms of dissent ranging from boycotts to civil disobedience, the views and insights brought by climate activists challenge existing structural inequalities in governance systems and increase broader awareness of complex interconnected issues ingrained in climate change policymaking. Thus, when incorporated into a deliberative systems model, activists and dissenters work to strengthen the deliberative quality and legitimacy of deliberative institutions.

## **Lay Summary**

The key goals and contributions of this thesis are to both defend and expand upon the contributions of deliberative systems in democratic governments within the realm of climate change governance. Additionally, this paper sets out to demonstrate how democratic nation states still stand paramount as laboratories for effective governance systems where legitimate activism can open up deliberation in favor of novel solutions to climate change.

## **Preface**

This thesis is designed as an expansion of a research paper completed for my Democratic Theory course under the University of British Columbia Political Science Graduate Program. I personally completed analysis and incorporation of research through primary sources found at the UBC Library database. The portion of this paper related to the writings of Hannah Arendt are informed by previous work and research I have done during completion of my undergraduate degree at Gonzaga University.

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## **Acknowledgments**

I offer my enduring gratitude to the faculty, staff, and my fellow students at UBC, who have inspired me to continue my work in this field. I owe particular thanks to Dr. Mark Warren whose depth and knowledge of political theory challenged me to reach my full academic potential. I would also like to thank Dr. Bob Waterman of Gonzaga University whose mentorship and guidance opened my eyes to the wonderful and awe-inspiring mind of Hannah Arendt.

Special thanks are owed to my parents, whose have supported me throughout my years of education through their love and financial assistance.

## **Introduction**

Current debates in climate governance center around the interplay between international institutions (primarily developed through the United Nations) and national policies crafted through drastically different lenses of democracy on the one end and authoritarianism on the other. With China's recent successes in shifting towards economic sustainability in sectors such as energy, questions are beginning to arise surrounding the variabilities of success between these two governmental regime types. With these debates in mind, this essay aims to demonstrate that democratic or quasi-democratic nation states should not be overly hasty to put their faith into environmental authoritarianism. This paper argues that through the incorporation of deliberative democratic principles, democracies are still best suited to meet the challenges that climate change poses to systems of governance at local, regional, and national levels through the organization of collective action and opinion.

With this being said, the task of implementing legitimate deliberative models is challenging given the inability for institutional mechanisms at all levels to adapt quickly, especially in shifting the fundamental makeup of the institutions themselves. Thus, while at first glance deliberative democracy and activism may seem antithetical in their respective goals, when viewed together as foundations for challenging and building the legitimacy of governance systems, they both are needed so as to avoid empty institutions or empty governance regimes. Many states recognize the importance of creating effective global climate change governance, demonstrated by commitments made through institutions like the Paris Climate Agreement. Yet, as is seen with this agreement, many states continue to be unwilling to truly give up sovereign control of policy making or engage in effective modes of self-regulating. Currently, international institutions created for environmental governance can be hijacked or used by state interests to



create institutions deliberately designed not to create governance but to hide failures of negotiations and legitimize collective inaction.<sup>1</sup> Because to date there are very few international mechanisms of holding states accountable when empty institutions are made or obligations are unmet, accountability falls to the constituents who elect those representatives that are acting on the behalf of the nation. Specifically, this paper's main contribution is to demonstrate that climate activism and dissent opens democratic institutions towards more democratic and legitimate mechanisms of deliberative democracy. A phenomenon that when accomplished can positively impact climate change governance at all levels. Through the absorption and or reaction to radical ideas and challenges expressed by activists into deliberative discourses, such as deliberative mini publics, it is possible that vital critiques arise, in turn creating avenues for thinking outside the bounds of institutional structures currently in place. Thus, I am arguing for democracies to embrace a deliberative systems approach, especially where activism and mini publics are complementary.

Within the realm of academic literature that is primarily aimed at analyzing climate governance systems that are tasked with tackling the effects of climate change, a large portion of energy and knowledge is being spent addressing the roles of international institutions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Global climate change governance aims to bring together the gambit of governmental institutions and officials, spanning from democracies to authoritarian regimes as well as developed to developing economies, in which "liberal environmental norms are identified as the current basis of global environmental governance"<sup>2</sup>. This continual attempt towards an increasing amalgamation of interests on the

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<sup>1</sup> Radoslav S. Dimitrov, *Empty Institutions in Global Environmental Politics*. International Studies Review (2020) 22, 626-650.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Bernstein, *Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance*. Global Environmental Politics 2: 3, August 2002.

global stage has heightened discourses surrounding governance actors at an international level, partially shifting the focus of policy making away from national discourses, often disconnecting constituents from the policies their own nations agree to follow. Working hand in hand with this shift towards global governance, is the rise in neo-liberal sustainable development goals and green corporate responsibility represented under the auspices of neoliberal norms aimed towards “sustainable growth”. This shift is spearheaded by transnational corporations and multi-national organizations, who because of their ability to control supply chains as well as sway consumer actions in favor of sustainable production and consumption on the one hand and work outside the restrictions of national diplomacy on the other, are largely seen as the major movers of climate action worldwide. It is because of this move towards increased global governance and corporate environmentalism in producing actionable policies and norms of change in international forums that many are left wondering: Where do democratic national governments fit within different nexuses of climate governance. And can they still be more successful at creating actual policies or institutions for tackling climate change in comparison to authoritarian regimes?

Importantly, the answer to these questions can be found and defended through an acknowledgment that national governments, specifically democratic governments, may not be as out of the loop as initially may seem. Examples of policy failures attempted on the international stage, specifically the catastrophe of the Stockholm Conference<sup>3</sup>, and the institutional reality which allowed targets for the reduction of carbon emissions created under the Paris Climate Agreement to be left up to individual states, demonstrate that state sovereignty still stands at the foreground of creating successful governance nationally and thus in relation, internationally. Similar to common discourses surrounding the dominance of national sovereignty regarding the

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<sup>3</sup>Steven Bernstein, *Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance*. Global Environmental Politics 2: 3, August 2002.

intake of refugees within the European Union, state sovereignty still reigns supreme when it comes to nation states deciding how, what and when to produce and implement policies and regulate technologies that fall under the umbrella of climate change governance. This statement does not turn a blind eye to the increased importance of both international governance regimes and to the emergence of global cities at the heart of climate change initiatives<sup>4</sup>, nor does it look past the importance of an ever-entangled world market driven by neo-liberal globalism. When engaging in national and international policymaking, individual nation-states both shape and respond to multitudes of variable pressures politically, socially, etc. There is no doubt that given the existential threat to the survival of all biological life that climate change poses, multi-level governance from city municipalities and local civil society groups all the way up to multi-state international institutions and transnational corporations will be needed. Yet insofar as the stage of governance is derived through neo-liberal norms, post-colonial conceptions of state sovereignty, and required legitimacy within democratic nations, the process through which states arrive at policies has a great deal of effect on the success of environmental governance in producing real actionable outcomes. Thus, this paper is aiming to establish realistic sectors of change where democracies can and should carry out to increase the scope, effectiveness and frequency of policies and institutions aimed at mitigating or adapting to climate change. This is ultimately achieved through the incorporation of deliberative mechanisms that are integrated with activist challenges to hegemonic discourses. When viewed as two tools aimed at accomplishing similar goals (in this case drastically more efficient and better climate governance regimes), both activism and deliberation can work hand in hand. It is with this thought that

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<sup>4</sup>Simon Curtis, *Cities & Global Governance: State Failure or a New Global Order?* Millennium: Journal of International Studies.

democratic theories and practices must be designed to affirm the practices of each while also recognizing the tension between them.

## **Background: Deliberative Democracy & Mini Publics**

Deliberative democracy can be described as processes of democratic design aimed at legitimizing political decisions through mechanisms of inclusion, reason, plurality, and mutual understanding, all of which are or should be integral foundations of contemporary liberal democracies. According to Niemeyer “A polity is inclusive to the extent that all those individuals are affected by a decision have the opportunity to deliberate and provide input into the decision-making process... And it is consequential to the extent that the deliberations of citizens are reflected in the decision being made”<sup>5</sup>. Specific to the issue of climate change and environmental governance within democratic regimes, deliberative processes can begin to address the issue of climate consensus and the production of actionable policies, including the creation of regulatory mechanisms at a local, regional, and national scale. Disturbingly, to date such methods of policy creation and regulation are being crowded out within national discourses by dominant political ideologies and powerful lobbying efforts. A phenomenon that has frequently been the case in the United States. Importantly, “Deliberative, communicative action ought in theory to promote environmental values because in such action, argument is effective to the degree it proceeds in terms generalizable to all parties concerned”<sup>6</sup>. A concept that is more easily theorized than put into practice. With this being said, glimmers of hope are already making themselves known at the national level as has been seen with the rise of rights of nature norms through the incorporation of indigenous models of human-nature interactions such as *buen vivir* in states like Ecuador. As a country Ecuador inundated their new constitution with *buen vivir* values and principles through a deliberative process involving integral communication with indigenous

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<sup>5</sup> Simon Niemeyer, *Democracy and Climate Change: What Can Deliberative Democracy Contribute?* Australian Journal of Politics and History: Volume 59, Number 3, 2013, pp. 429-448.

<sup>6</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.

peoples, signifying that deliberative mechanisms have the potential to incorporate non-human interests into the decision-making process, especially when working within avenues of both legislative and judicial systems. As opposed to other modes of democratic legitimacy such as elections or referendums, which largely act as a zero-sum game, the legitimacy of deliberative models arises out of its ability to provide open spaces for a plethora of arguments over an extended period. This means that interlocutors can speak for the broader populace and the environment in ways not accomplished at the ballot box. Rights of nature laws or proposals for carbon taxation are complex issues which may provide more explanatory reasonings for implementation than what can be provided to constituents when voting. Given the cyclical nature of democratic elections, policies addressing complex crises like climate change may need to be incorporated over an extended period. This fact alone points to massive potentialities for deliberative processes that aim to integrate indigenous norms and values into democracies both in the Global North and South, even allowing for transmission of norms between the two. Furthermore, deliberative democracy has the unique potential to shift dominant discourses of knowledge transmissions away from the normal North to South model, allowing norms and values found in the Global South to be democratically legitimized and transmitted to states in the Global North. This is an idea that will further be elaborated when identifying how deliberative processes can be opened favorably towards activists demands.

Specifically in relation to the use of deliberative democracy by governments, there is an abundance of literature that has been written on the use of deliberative mini publics as a mechanism for increasing public knowledge while integrating legitimate variation of discourses into governance decisions. Defined by Beauvais and Warren<sup>7</sup>, deliberative mini publics are

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<sup>7</sup> Edana Beauvais & Mark Warren, *What can deliberative mini-publics contribute to democratic systems?* European Journal of Political Research 58: 893-914, 2019.

“groups of 20 to 200 or more citizens tasked with learning, deliberating and advising or deciding on a policy or issue” where “Participants are selected through random or stratified sampling in such a way that they are descriptively representative of the public affected by the issue”. A defining characteristic of deliberative mini publics is their ability to expand citizen knowledge on complex issues through providing exposure to experts over a course of weeks or months. As a mechanism of deliberative democracy, deliberative mini publics are just one of a many promising innovations of democratic design. For the purposes of this paper, the choice of using examples of mini publics is deliberate for both continuity in the argument for scaling deliberative processes and theorizing how mini publics as a democratic innovation can specifically be integrated with activist ideals while remaining legitimately democratic.

Given the fact that the “lack of public demand for action on climate change feeds into the longstanding distrust of public opinion among many concerned about the issue, who question the ability of the average citizen to adequately understand its complexities”<sup>8</sup> deliberative mini publics stand as strong tests for the possibility of increasing citizen engagement and knowledge within complex areas. This begins to prove wrong the argument that climate action must be left in the hands of elites without a role for the majority of those directly impacted. This is especially the case when dealing with sensitive policy decisions such as voluntary movement of populations already being experienced in low lying islands like the Republic of Kiribati. An argument favoring a discourse of elites is normatively defended in liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes alike, because in many cases the intangibility of climate change in contrast to immediate pressing issues such as health care can lead constituents towards ambivalence or ideological radicalism on the climate change debate. This is especially true given the fact that

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<sup>8</sup> Simon Niemeyer, *Democracy and Climate Change: What Can Deliberative Democracy Contribute?* Australian Journal of Politics and History: Volume 59, Number 3, 2013, pp. 429-448.

“Too often, decision makers in liberal democracies are far removed from the impact of their decisions, and the experiences, knowledge and perspectives of those whose practices are more attuned to the changes in ecosystems are not articulated”<sup>9</sup>. A sentiment that is even more prevalent in municipal elections where voters have both a difficult time gaining access to knowledge on pertinent issues because of factors like lack of media coverage and a disconnect between national and municipal party platforms<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, given a powerful and well-resourced persistent right-wing rhetoric arguing against climate change science, being fueled by corporate interests through methods such as donations in elections, it is no surprise that the legitimacy of policymaking has begun to lack vital modes of stabilization in democratic representation. An example being the fluctuations in US attitudes towards commitments made in the Paris Climate Agreement. Specifically, this means that democratic regimes are failing to live up to the full environmental potential that democratic politics have to offer the world. There are many ways to legitimately combat the vitality of these arguments such as putting caps on campaign contributions. Pertinent to the argument of this paper, deliberative mechanisms can achieve successes in relegating right-wing climate change deniers to the fringes, by moving arguments of policy into the realm of aggregating values and collecting opinions to achieve positive outcomes. Deliberative processes aim to reverse or at the least tame the effects of radical ideologies on both sides of the spectrum, prompting compromises for the goals of collective action. Even if such radical voices on all sides of the spectrum are argued out of a perceived democratic process or co-opted, this paper further aims to demonstrate that dissent and activism

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<sup>9</sup> Graham Smith, *Deliberative Democracy & the Environment*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York.

<sup>10</sup>Fred Cutler & J. Scott Matthews, *The Challenge of Municipal Voting: Vancouver 2002*. Canadian Journal of Political Science Vol 38, No. 2 pp. 359-382.



voiced because of inaction or apparent underrepresentation allows for voices to be re-integrated through deliberation.

In highlighting problems many democratic institutions and processes face, such as ideological bias, extremism and polarization, an important question is, what kinds of influence mini publics can generate as a response to these issues. As a tool for policymaking through the uptake of constituent collective action, designers of mini publics such as citizen assemblies argue that as a stratified sample of the public, participant's views can be seen to represent the views of the public if they were more knowledgeable on subjects like climate change. According to Dahl, the decisions, and recommendations of the 'minipopulis' "would represent the judgment of the demos... Its verdict would be the verdict of the demos itself, if the demos were able to take advantage of the best available knowledge to decide what policies were most likely to achieve the ends it sought... The judgments of the mini-populus would thus derive their authority from the legitimacy of democracy"<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert E. Goodin & John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-publics*. Politics & Society, Vol 34 No. 2, June 2006, 219-244.

## **Deliberative Systems Approach: Success of Democracies**

Deliberative democracy can integrate “seemingly conflicting values, which is why the discourse of ecological modernization, putting environmental and economic values in positive–sum relationship, flourishes”<sup>12</sup>. When looking at different types of democratic regimes in relation to climate governance, “an inspection of the environmental performance league tables sponsored by the World Economic Forum shows many of the top positions occupied by European consensual democracies”<sup>13</sup>. This trend is even stronger in democracies where policy making is a product of multi-level governance through representatives, business leaders, and civil society groups. Dryzek argues that because of their ability to incorporate an array of values in tandem with mechanisms of communicative action, consensual democracies fare much better than authoritarian regimes at coordinating collective action for climate change legislature. In defending this claim Niemeyer states, “authoritarian approaches to governance fail to adequately coordinate inputs within the socio-environmental system to respond to environmental challenges... The Chinese response to climate change is not driven by public demand, and the level of support is irrelevant in any case”<sup>14</sup>. An argument supported by that fact that China’s shifts towards sustainability is arguably a result of economic and political considerations, not because of primary considerations of climate change. This can be seen with China’s decision to crack down on the black-market trading and selling of sharks in the shark fin soup business, largely because of President Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption agenda.<sup>15</sup> While authoritarian regimes

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<sup>12</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.

<sup>13</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Niemeyer, *Democracy and Climate Change: What Can Deliberative Democracy Contribute?* Australian Journal of Politics and History: Volume 59, Number 3, 2013, pp. 429-448.

<sup>15</sup> Elaine Jeffreys. *Translocal Celebrity Activism: Shark-Protection Campaigns in Mainland China*. Environmental Communication 10 (6) (2016): 762-776.

may have the benefit of making hegemonic policy decisions, many are skeptical of the capacity of authoritarian environmentalism to initiate long-standing commitments towards measures of sustainability. Something that is especially true given the possibility of regime change and volatility of economic sectors. While democracies may not be able to move policy aims as quickly as authoritarian regimes, long standing arguments for democratic systems such as the argument for policies being founded on pluralistic legitimacy are even further integrated under deliberative models.

Furthermore, an argument could be made that does not suggest the efficacy of authoritarianism but rather emphasizes the role of elites in democratic decision making. Many critics of contemporary democracy point to the influence of bureaucratic technocrats or wealthy lobbying groups in controlling legislative actions. Yet perhaps these arguments overlook the historical impacts of civil society in the establishment of environmental norms. It is quite possible that “political elites are actually less likely to support environmental causes on their own terms, not least because the “logic” of the state is skewed toward the functions of accumulation... It is no accident that the environmental movement first gained momentum not within the machinery of government, but within civil society”<sup>16</sup>. Such an argument puts the onus of climate governance not on elites, but rather on the ability of democratic systems to create pockets of deliberative discourses through which elites come into contact with civil societies founded on collective action. Yes, it might be possible that the influence of elites in the decision making of representative democracies is felt greatest within elections, but this point only strengthens the argument for deliberation by allowing the incorporation of multi-level governance that does not insulate elites from dominate norms of environmentalism. Deliberative models allow civil

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<sup>16</sup> Simon Niemeyer, *Democracy and Climate Change: What Can Deliberative Democracy Contribute?* Australian Journal of Politics and History: Volume 59, Number 3, 2013, pp. 429-448.

society groups as well as knowledgeable experts to be incorporated into decision making processes. These mechanisms of deliberative models in democracies may in turn work in concert with activists' actions, particularly given the freedom in democracies for activists to mobilize votes and organize dissent through arguments, norms, and institutional organization. While it is beyond the bounds of this paper to show the primacy of civil society in establishing and impacting environmental norms, civil society groups or non-governmental organizations like the World Wildlife Fund have been extremely effective at using social media campaigns to enact norms or even shame corporations and governments towards more environmentally resonant measures.

With an understanding that the basis of effective climate governance for democratic systems stands on each democratic institution's ability for organizing collective action, I am using Dryzek's<sup>17</sup> model of deliberative systems, which emphasis the importance of these four mechanisms:

1. Integration of multiple perspectives on complex issues.
2. Prioritization of public goods and generalizable interests over sectional interests.
3. Facilitation of positive sum discourses such as ecological modernization.
4. Co-existence of moments of consensus and contestation.

In using this model of deliberative systems, I can begin conceptualizing modes of deliberation that soak up and capture the ideas and values of the citizenry, leading to the establishment of legitimate policies related to climate change. Deliberative democracy begins its normative conceptual foundations through a bottom-up approach, necessitating me to demonstrate how deliberative models, specifically deliberative mini publics, can be used effectively by municipalities and national governments to enact impactful governance. Something that is

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<sup>17</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.

achieved through the creation of avenues through which differing values and opinions come into contact. Once it is established that the deliberative system works at a micro-level that can eventually be used in tandem with environmental activism, an argument for national deliberative governance models can begin to form. This argument will be strengthened by an example of a deliberative citizens assembly used by the Irish government to push various governance institutions towards becoming a leader in environmental policy initiatives.

## Case Studies: Municipal & National Mini-Publics

Deliberative processes can respond to these modes of ideological biases as “the reciprocal requirement to put forward reasons and to respond to challenges will tend to eliminate irrational preferences based on false empirical beliefs, morally repugnant preferences that no one is willing to advance in the public arena, and narrowly self-regarding preferences”<sup>18</sup>. This section focuses on three case studies of deliberative mini-publics. Recognizing the effectiveness of highlighting a case directly related to environmental governance, the first case aims to demonstrate both theoretical and normative arguments on how municipal deliberative mini publics can be extrapolated to address governance systems pertaining to climate change at a municipal level. This first case study demonstrates how deliberative systems interact with the creation of long-term city planning. While the second case study does not focus on climate governance specifically, it is a strong example of the way deliberative processes can be incorporated into the democratic makeup of governance regimes in global cities, in this case Vancouver, British Columbia. Finally, the third case grapples with much larger theoretical issues, that is, can deliberative systems be applied on a national stage. In each case, the overall effectiveness of the mini public will be assessed through the already established criteria of Dryzek’s model of deliberative systems in relation to climate change. These qualifications and criteria being public space, transmission, accountability, meta-deliberation, and decisiveness<sup>19</sup>, which when met establish legitimate means of democratic action towards addressing climate change. The primary reason for using solely deliberative mini publics and not a variety of deliberative institutions is to firmly establish the ways deliberative systems can be used to address complex issues in a

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<sup>18</sup> Graham Smith, *Deliberative Democracy & the Environment*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York.

<sup>19</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.

democratically legitimate way. The following sections on activism address the possible shortcomings of mini publics specifically, thus pushing my argument into the broader arena of a deliberative systems.

I turn now to an example of a municipally led deliberative mini public in a global city directly aimed at enhancing the value and efficacy of governance within that city. The *Citizen's Panel on Edmonton's Energy & Climate Challenges* provides a clear theoretical and practical picture of how deliberative processes enhance policy action related to climate change. According to Participedia, a global crowdsourcing platform aimed at cataloging and highlighting democratic innovations, "From October to December, 2012, 56 Edmontonians gathered to deliberate about climate change and energy vulnerability in a municipal policy making context"<sup>20</sup>. Commissioned by the City of Edmonton, the panel was established with the goal of creating policy recommendations for the city's energy transition plan. A plan that was established as a long-term mechanism for creating actual policies addressing climate change in areas of mitigation. Importantly in highlighting the meta-deliberation of the panel itself, "Weekly communications and support were provided to ensure positive and effective participation by all Panelists; Panelists also had access to an intranet site to support their overall learning and experience"<sup>21</sup>. Members heard from experts in energy related professional and academic fields, representatives, and civil society groups. These information sessions were guided by established principles of; weighing the cost and benefits of specific energy transition, using public and transparent modes of conduct ensuring public legitimacy, link city leaders to citizen education, and recognize/highlight multiple reasons for promoting energy transition.

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<sup>20</sup> Participedia. *Citizen's Panel on Edmonton's Energy & Climate Challenges*. Participedia.net

<sup>21</sup> Participedia. *Citizen's Panel on Edmonton's Energy & Climate Challenges*. Participedia.net

By attempting to link city leaders to citizen education/knowledge as well as civil society groups, this deliberative mini public directly highlights the potentiality for deliberative processes to create pockets of elite-citizen interaction where policy action takes places and norms are established. Interestingly, because of this interaction, “a majority of the participants resisted the initial framing of the deliberation and pushed for a more radical agenda than was initially proposed”<sup>22</sup>. Effectively affirming Dryzek’s necessary qualifications of both “public space” and “meta-deliberation”, where participants of the mini public engage with both themselves and the broader public/experts. Furthermore, the panel decided on six policy proposals in their final discussion paper/report, translated to the public through traditional media, social media and even marketing. Ultimately demonstrating the importance of deliberation and community out-reach extending beyond the point of initial processes, meeting the qualification of effective transmission. Importantly, transmission is a vital tenet to deliberative processes beyond relaying the findings or suggestions of the mini public, but also legitimizing the actions of the process itself in the eyes of the public. By releasing their proposals in multiple avenues beyond the traditional methods of a city council meeting, the deliberative process in Edmonton challenges elite control of time/place for democratic decision making. Ultimately, the panel’s recommendations such as “Reduce the greenhouse gas intensity of the provincial electricity grid” and “Reduce energy use in industrial facilities through energy efficiency”<sup>23</sup>, were effectively integrated into the City of Edmonton’s 2015 Energy Transition Plan, directly focusing energy transition through 2050. Because the initial goal of creating the panel was related to the creation of a long-term plan, the deliberative system allowed for the inception of more radical policy recommendations through incorporation of multiple stakeholders. Policy action related to climate

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<sup>22</sup> Participedia. *Citizen’s Panel on Edmonton’s Energy & Climate Challenges*. Participedia.net

<sup>23</sup> Participedia. *Citizen’s Panel on Edmonton’s Energy & Climate Challenges*. Participedia.net



change must take the form of both short-term and long-term solutions to rapidly occurring problems, something that cities are primed for due to their inherent governance structures and proximity to both experts and citizens. Thus, because of its actuality in succeeding in its goal, Edmonton's deliberative process meets the final qualification as a democratic deliberative system for establishing a legitimate means of democratic action towards addressing climate change. The process decisively allowed for members of the public to not only learn about a complex issue but engage in meta-deliberation and create proposals that were integrated into the creation of an energy plan.

Having established a basis through which the efficacy of governance systems in the realm of climate change is strengthened by deliberative practices in a global city, the question of broadening the results of such cases arises. Before delving into the difficult case of applying deliberative mini publics to national or international stages, a case study exemplifying regional success through the integration of deliberation is warranted. An example of this regional model is the Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform in the Province of British Columbia. Although this case does not represent the topic of climate change governance, its effectiveness for the argument of this paper comes from the cases ability to represent an increased governance efficiency in a larger demographic while holding onto foundational democratic principles. This assembly aimed to increase inclusion, representation, participation, and legitimized outcomes in the proposal of an alternative electoral system by increasing knowledge, access, and demographic representation through sampling. Importantly, the task of this deliberative process moved beyond informing public debates or legitimating policy, towards actual policy outcomes. The assembly itself was composed of 160 randomly selected citizens "established by a unanimous enactment of the provincial legislature and charged with the task of recommending

an electoral system for the province” where “If it recommended changed arrangements, the provincial government committed itself to putting that proposal to the electorate at large in a referendum at the next year’s elections”<sup>24</sup>. The participants were informed about alternative electoral models and held fifty public meetings attended by over 3000 citizens and 1600 written submissions. The participants then deliberated over six weekends, ultimately bringing their formal recommendation of a version of a single-transferable vote. This recommendation was included in the referendum but ultimately fell short of the needed 60% “yes” threshold by only 2%. Meaning the deliberative process in tandem with another democratic innovation, referendums, moved the onus of decision making away from elites and into the hands of the public, who were charged with both informing themselves and deciding on the issue. Importantly, although the vote did not reach the legislated threshold of 60%, it must be noted that 58% of voters voted yes for a change in the electoral system. For this type of proposal in a referendum, such a number is high, demonstrating the influence of the BCCA as an avenue of trusted information through which voters based their choice. While not focused on climate change governance, the success of the assembly in making actionable recommendations in the implementation of electoral reform demonstrates that “The Citizens’ Assembly was constituted as a formal part of the political system...It was legislatively charged with making a recommendation that would automatically go onto the ballot as a referendum proposal”<sup>25</sup>. Even without being directly related to climate governance, the decisions of this deliberative process could have ultimately influenced the electoral makeup of the province itself, which has massive implications for decisions of environmental governance such as sustainable city planning in

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<sup>24</sup> Robert E. Goodin & John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-publics*. Politics & Society, Vol 34 No. 2, June 2006, 219-244.

<sup>25</sup> Robert E. Goodin & John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-publics*. Politics & Society, Vol 34 No. 2, June 2006, 219-244.

major cities like Vancouver and how multi-layered governance is approached in the province. In addition, by possibly directly impacting the electoral makeup of the province, the deliberative process created an avenue through which multiple actors in the realm of climate governance interact with those making the policy decisions.

Using Dryzek's model of deliberative systems to assess the deliberative quality of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly, the deliberative mini public effectively met the qualifications of "public space" and "meta-deliberation" through the fundamental makeup of the assembly structure itself. Citizen Assembly models are designed to include hearings from experts and activists during the learning phase of the process. Meaning that the fifty public meetings attended by over 3000 citizens and 1600 written submissions goes beyond the necessary provisions of providing physical space for discourse by also providing multiple avenues of connection with the public and experts through social media and write in questions. Importantly, the transmission dictated through the facilitation of positive sum discourses and "co-existence of moments of consensus and contestation"<sup>26</sup> took on a dual nature in this mini public. Not only was the public space through which both the learning phase and decision phase took place influenced by civil societies, political groups, and activists, but the outcomes from the recommendations made by the assembly would possibly affect transmission of public spaces for future political processes. Regarding the "accountability" needed for the qualifications of a legitimate deliberative process, the findings and recommendations made by the assembly tie into the "meta-deliberation" of the assembly. This is exemplified by the fact that recommendations made by the assembly were promised by the provincial government to be transmitted to voters in a referendum where the public would ultimately decide. Furthermore, for Dryzek, accountability

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<sup>26</sup>Robert E. Goodin & John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-publics*. Politics & Society, Vol 34 No. 2, June 2006, 219-244.

means literally providing an account of the assembly's findings, which took place in the form of both the recommendations made to the provincial government but also in the referendum itself. Finally, the "decisiveness" of the assembly, which dictates that "the deliberative system should be consequential when it comes to the content of collective outcomes"<sup>27</sup>, is marked by two factors. The fact that the assembly was created for the very possibility of a referendum dependent upon the recommendations made by the assembly itself, means that the mini public was directly made with authority. Furthermore, given the 58% yes votes in favor of the recommendations made by the assembly, clearly the deliberative process was consequential in the minds of the voters. Thus, as a deliberative mechanism that had the possibility to impact the electoral process of an entire province, the BCCA met the qualifications laid out by Dryzek as a legitimate democratic system by meeting the qualifications of "public space, transmission, accountability, meta-deliberation, and decisiveness".

While the efficacy of deliberative mini publics in impacting and possibly strengthening the overall quality of governance in global cities and regional provinces is widely recognized theoretically and normatively, discussion on the effectiveness and legitimacy of scaling mini publics to national and international institutions are ongoing. I turn now towards the more difficult task of demonstrating how national governments can use deliberative processes (specifically mini publics) to create legitimate and meaningful climate change policies. Much more importantly at a national discourse level, when discussing the implementation of mini publics, "The ordinary institutions of representative democracy generally remain sovereign, such that micro-deliberative mechanisms merely provide inputs into them"<sup>28</sup>. This means that while

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<sup>27</sup> Robert E. Goodin & John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-publics*. Politics & Society, Vol 34 No. 2, June 2006, 219-244.

<sup>28</sup> Robert E. Goodin & John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-publics*. Politics & Society, Vol 34 No. 2, June 2006, 219-244.

mini publics when applied at the municipal level may directly lead into legitimate policy actions, this legitimacy is more difficult to contrive at the national level. This deliberative process must not act as a replacement for normative democratic processes of policy-making or representative selection. It instead must be a tool for funneling collective opinion by constituents into insightful policy recommendations that ultimately produce a stronger national governance system in tackling the effects of climate change. While there is a larger argument surrounding how effective the uptake of mini publics can be, if in many cases they are not provided with initiatives for actual policymaking, I argue that the impact of deliberative mechanisms within climate governance is not the incorporation of actual policies but rather the ability of mini publics to simultaneously depolarize an issue. Something that is achieved by providing plural representation of citizens to knowledgeable experts while incorporating this same plurality into the ultimate conclusions of the assembly. Hence the success of activist calls for the creation of deliberative mini publics may not be action on a given policy but rather an expansion of those able to deliberate and gain knowledge within a governance arena. While I am making an argument for a deliberative system where deliberative institutions like mini publics and activism can work in concert to tackle climate change governance, it is worth noting that activists do not always see deliberative institutions as a positive tool. Because of their relative independence and random sampling makeup, deliberative mini publics are difficult to influence and control, meaning arguments made by activists may be ineffective.

This third example more specifically demonstrates where a citizen assembly/mini public can have a direct impact on climate change governance while taking place at the national level. The *Citizens Assembly “How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change”*, is a deliberative mini public incorporated by the Government of Ireland, consisting of 99 citizen

members and one chairperson. Primarily, “the Citizens’ Assembly was an exercise in deliberative democracy, placing the citizen at the heart of important legal and policy issues facing Irish society”<sup>29</sup>. Members of the assembly were chosen at random and considered to be broadly representative of a multitude of demographic variables from Ireland’s census. While the assembly convened for over two years, specifically in relation to the issue of climate change governance, “Over two weekends they heard from 15 experts and 6 individuals who shared their personal experience of becoming a leader in the area of climate change in Ireland... and actively took part in over 26 hours of listening, discussion and deliberation”<sup>30</sup>.

Building on such an expansive arena of knowledge, participants of the assembly invited members of the public, activists, and citizen organizations as well as professionals in the fields of energy, agriculture, etc., to make submissions on the topic of climate change governance. The assembly received over 12,000 submissions with many detailing policy recommendations and alternative actions to existing governance models from local actions all the way to international<sup>31</sup>. After deliberating, the assembly made recommendations to the House of the Oireachtas on the topic of climate change governance in the country. According to the assembly’s final report “The recommendations were reached by ballot paper voting and followed two weekends of deliberation which focused on the energy, transport and agriculture sectors, international best practices and existing national policies and activities”<sup>32</sup>. These deliberations ultimately ended in the assembly voting by 80% or more in favor of the 13 recommendations of climate change presented to them.

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<sup>29</sup> The Citizens Assembly Website, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Laffoy, *Third Report and Recommendations of the Citizen’s Assembly*, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Laffoy, *Third Report and Recommendations of the Citizen’s Assembly*, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Laffoy, *Third Report and Recommendations of the Citizen’s Assembly*, 2018.

Using Dryzek's model of deliberative systems to assess the deliberative quality of Ireland's citizen assembly on "*How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change*", it is clear that the assembly meets the qualifications of deliberative systems on a national or international democratic stage. These qualifications being public space, transmission, accountability, meta-deliberation, and decisiveness<sup>33</sup>, which when met establish legitimate means of democratic action towards addressing climate change. The citizens assembly met the criteria of "public space" by providing a space for the inclusion of diverse viewpoints (including civil society actors and experts in an array of climate change policy areas). Furthermore, building upon the openness of accessibility through which the assembly provided to the general public, of the 1,200 submissions received in relation to climate change, 1,185 of them were published in the assembly's final report to the House of Oireachtas. In regard to meta-deliberation, which is "the reflexive capacity of those in the deliberative system to contemplate the way that system is itself organized, and if necessary, change its structure"<sup>34</sup>, the citizens assembly themselves went through multiple reconstructions led by the assembly's chairperson. Furthermore, reflection was inherently incorporated into the design of the assembly, exemplified by the fact that selection of members purposely skewed away from individuals already in civil societies related to the issues being considered. Meta-deliberation is thus still an applicable criteria of assessment at the national level as long as the deliberative processes allows for periods of self-analysis and reflection by the participating members themselves, regarding the overall goals and legitimacy of the process being carried out. Here, as will be further demonstrated in following sections, we can begin to see the interconnected internal mechanisms of deliberative processes and activist

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<sup>33</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.

<sup>34</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.

challenges to democratic norms. Through the incorporation of meta-deliberation into the construction of the mini public itself, deliberative institutions may respond and grow in real time to challenges and calls for action being made by activists and civil disobedients. Even if activists choose not to be personally included in the actual deliberations, when distributed purposefully throughout the process, meta-deliberation creates a responsive inclusionary nature to the very institutions of deliberation itself. Furthermore, the learning phases of mini publics almost always includes participants hearing from advocates and activists in additions to civil society and special interest groups.

While these four requirements of legitimate deliberation were met, the crux of the argument for deliberative democracy in climate governance stands on whether such processes lead towards actionable recommendations and decisive policy making, or as Dryzek characterizes in his conception of global governance, “decisiveness”. In his article on deliberative global governance, Dryzek writes, “In the context of environmental affairs in particular, the desirability of its applicability rests in addition on both theoretical and empirical claims about the efficacy of deliberative democracy in resolving complex problems and providing public goods”<sup>35</sup>. Clearly, in the realm of climate change governance in democratic regimes, deliberative processes can be judged either by their ability to solve complex issues or provide coherent recommendations of collective action and the provision of public goods through such collective action. In this case, the Irish citizen’s assembly can be analyzed as being successful in both instances. Through the goal of the assembly itself, that is, how to make the state a leader in climate change, the assembly made recommendations for the creation of an independent governmental body solely resourced to ensure that climate change sits at the center

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<sup>35</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.



of policy-making in Ireland. Specifically, the recommendations made by the assembly helped shape Ireland's "Landmark Climate Action Plan" released in 2019<sup>36</sup>. The climate action plan "follows the British model of commissioning an independent body – the Climate Action Council – to set five-yearly "carbon budgets" and monitor government performance" while also going further than the UK by requiring the government to set emissions targets for each sector of the economy. While the citizen's assembly cannot solely be attributed with the success of moving Ireland's government in the direction of successful governance, the deliberative process, because of its legitimacy as a quasi-representative body worked as a direct line of influence from constituent to representative. When left to normal modes of democratic processes such as elections and legislative policymaking, representatives are likely to pay more credence to policy issues with immediate results for their constituents, while the citizen's assembly allowed for citizens to engage in both policy formation/knowledge transmission and the creation of an institution, both of which require long-term planning.

Ultimately, by laying out these three specific cases of deliberative mini publics, ranging from city governance to national policymaking, I aimed to establish a bi-focal argument for a broader deliberative systems approach to tackling climate change. Firstly, the specifics of each case when analyzed through Dryzek's model demonstrates the efficacy of deliberative mini publics for creating and collecting collective opinions on both broad goals and policymaking on a complex topic. Yet, when keeping in mind the broader argument of this paper, which aims to establish an argument for a deliberative systems approach to climate change, in which activism and mini publics are complementary, these examples only carry us halfway. Thus, it is with this acknowledgment that the following sections dually aim to demonstrate the complementary

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<sup>36</sup> Coleman et al., *Ireland's world-leading citizens' climate assembly. What worked? What didn't?* Climate Home News, 2019.

nature of activism and mini publics, while recognizing that as a tool for effective governance, deliberative mini publics may not always fit the bill, necessitating a deliberative system that can integrate activists beyond the use of mini publics.

## Activism: Opening Deliberative Democracy

In each case study provided above, the entire process of the individual mini publics, from establishment to incorporation of assembly recommendations, were founded on predefined normative notions of politics in general and climate politics specifically. According to Dryzek's work on global climate governance, climate discourses fall under two broad spectrums; economic and political where in which economic discourses are either "reformist or radical" and political discourses are either "conservative or progressive"<sup>37</sup>. With respect to deliberative democracies, this insight has massive implications given the fact that dominant national and international norms fall under the umbrella of neo-liberal systems of sustainable growth. Meaning that discourses on governance models can be heavily tilted away from a combination of radical-progressive modes of action. The question then arises, what legitimate form of democratic practices exist or can be implemented so as to push the boundaries of national governance systems so that the status quo does not always prevail even when deliberation takes place?

In her transformative article *Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy* Iris Young lays out a framework for understanding the importance of activism in pushing deliberative democracies into a truly inclusive and more radical light. For Young, inclusive deliberative processes are not enough because "In a society structured by deep social and economic inequalities...formally inclusive deliberative processes nevertheless enact structural biases in which more powerful and socially advantaged actors have greater access to the deliberative process and therefore are able to dominate the proceedings with their interests and

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<sup>37</sup> John Dryzek & Hayley Stevenson, *Global democracy and earth system governance*. Ecological Economics, 70 (2011) 1865-1874.

perspectives”<sup>38</sup>. Yes, deliberative systems increase citizen involvement and strengthen the legitimacy of representative action, but when they are enacted by democratic institutions already rampant with structural inequalities, there is no doubt that unequal power relations will persist. As the United States has recently witnessed, even with decades of legislative actions such as the *Freedom of Information Act*, public mistrust arises out of elitist dominance over discourses stemming out of institutions of knowledge which for many are unreachable. Hence, for climate change governance to truly be strengthened by deliberative processes as I am proposing in this paper, there must be room for radical actors aiming not to reform current systems of structural inequality but to challenge hegemonic discourses in favor of a new direction.

In arguing for the strengthening of deliberative processes through activism in democratic governments, I acknowledge that under the umbrella of deliberative systems, mini publics may not be the best institutional tool for this job. Not only do some progressive activists see mini publics as difficult to control but also, not all activism is progressive in nature. One only needs to turn to the United States over the past decade to witness a reactionary version of activism exemplified by the rise of the Tea Party and the existence of Qanon. Thus, here I shift away from solely theorizing the potentiality of deliberative mini publics in strengthening climate change governance in democracies, towards a broader yet just as vital argument for the cohesion of activism and deliberative systems. Different institutions in democratic processes serve largely different purposes for the creation of policies or institutions. While deliberative mini publics may serve to strengthen collective public opinion, other deliberative processes may work better in challenging hegemonic discourses through activism.

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<sup>38</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy*. Political Theory, Oct. 2001. Vol. 29, No 5, pp. 670-690.

This section explores how it is vital for deliberation to incorporate climate activists into governance making, thus allowing for an increase in both innovations in policy and institutional designs. I accomplish this by using the typology of youth activist described in an O'Brien et al., article *Exploring youth activism on climate change: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent*, as well as by already having established how deliberative mini publics can be used as a direct tool for creating legitimate climate change governance by democratic regimes. These typologies differ not on the goals or intentions of the activists, but rather on the ways in which each is viewed through the lens of those with political power. While dutiful dissenters aim to work in the bounds of existing institutional structures, both disruptive and dangerous dissenters challenge existing institutions by aiming to change or even replace them. A Deliberative Democratic system may provide the means through which various types of activists interact with institutions like mini publics. While dangerous dissenters may see mini publics as an institution unable to shift and challenge hegemonic discourses, other deliberative mechanisms engaging with demonstration and advocacy can serve as a democratically legitimate means to connecting activists and deliberative systems in the timeline needed to make a difference when it comes to climate change.

According to O'Brien et al, "Many young activists concerned about climate change are expressing dissent through actions that challenge business-as-usual economic and social policies, including their emphasis on economic growth"<sup>39</sup>. Actions accomplished by shifting power relations through activist campaigns of divestment, marches, and boycotts, and in some cases acts of civil disobedience. Importantly, while activism does not stand on what is normatively thought of as deliberative, "in the sense of engaging in orderly reason giving, most activist

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<sup>39</sup> Karen O, Brien et al., *Exploring youth activism on climate change: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent*. Ecology & Society, Oct 2018, Vol. 23, No 3.

political engagements aim to communicate specific ideas to a wide public... They use slogans, humor, and irony to do so because discursive arguments alone are not likely to command attention or inspire action”<sup>40</sup>. Through this understanding of activism and dissent, a direct correlation between the goals of both deliberation and activist claims can begin to be sketched.

Importantly, the power of these three typologies defining youth activism arises out of the implicit benefits of deliberation itself. These being the idea that through deliberative mechanisms like mini publics, topics which may have previously been too complicated for the public to consume and discuss in a short period of time, are brought forth into a more approachable mode of knowledge transmission. Similarly, issues which may be interconnected but are largely under discussed or not normally brought under the scope of policy action, can be connected in the minds of all parties involved. As O’Brien et al., notes when discussing the engagement of youth activists in modes of dissent under the auspices of climate change, “such dissent is closely linked to issues of social justice, poverty, and violence, as well as environmental issues such as pollution and biodiversity loss”<sup>41</sup>. Beyond providing methods through which citizens can dutifully relay their conscience and air their grievances with current policies addressing climate change, the connection of dissent or civil disobedience broadens the ways in which the status quo is conceptualized and understood in all interrelated areas of dissention.

In understanding the theoretical and actual power of dissent through activism in pushing governance systems towards action and broadening general knowledge on a complex issue, the question arises on how deliberative systems successfully incorporate activists into the deliberative process. According to Young, “we can deny that deliberative democracy

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<sup>40</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy*. Political Theory, Oct. 2001. Vol. 29, No 5, pp. 670-690.

<sup>41</sup> Karen O, Brien et al., *Exploring youth activism on climate change: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent*. Ecology & Society, Oct 2018, Vol. 23, No 3.

recommends that citizens be willing always to engage discursively with all interests and social segments, reasonably expressing opinions and criticizing others”.<sup>42</sup> Instead of judging the ideals of deliberative democracy through such a stratified understanding of deliberation, communication and transmission of knowledge must be understood “in a vibrant democracy as far more rowdy, disorderly, and decentered”.<sup>43</sup> This expansion and inclusion of activist approaches to communication allows for greater articulations of appeals to justice, challenging hegemonic norms within governance systems and connects critical theory with multiple points of structural inequalities in law and policy-making. Here, the modes of communication characteristically used by activists and generally dismissed by normative democratic discourses can relate to the necessary mechanisms of transmission and meta-deliberation characterized by Dryzek. By designing deliberative processes through modes of meta-deliberation, discourses created through communicative action that falls outside norms of pragmatic deliberative discourse are more likely to heard and accepted.

In assessing deliberative systems on their ability to solve complex issues or provide coherent recommendations of collective action and the provision of public goods, it is still the case that even through uses of mini publics which use stratified sampling to choose participants, those who are incorporated into the deliberation are people who already feel a part of the broader democratic system. The real difference between democracies and increasingly neo-liberal authoritarian regimes stands not merely in the perceived legitimacy of policymaking but in the ability of the loyal opposition and disenfranchised to be heard. This vital point of democratic freedom does not just apply to the immediacy of accepted election results but must be accepted

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<sup>42</sup>Iris Marion Young, *Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy*. Political Theory, Oct. 2001. Vol. 29, No 5, pp. 670-690.

<sup>43</sup>Iris Marion Young, *Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy*. Political Theory, Oct. 2001. Vol. 29, No 5, pp. 670-690.

more broadly to all institutions. Relative to this incorporation of minority viewpoints and a loyal opposition, in her seminal work on “Civil Disobedience”, Hannah Arendt makes it abundantly clear that in the realm of American society, civil disobedience is not only an acceptable human action but is an action which should be protected under a Constitutional Amendment.

The protection of a fundamental right to dissent rests on a prime distinction between the common law breaker and the civil disobedient, which although may seem obvious, is a very important point. In distinguishing between the criminal and civil disobedient, the criminal always acts for the benefit of himself as an individual while the civil disobedient “acts in the name and for the sake of a group, he defies the law and the established authorities on the ground of basic dissent, and not because he as an individual wishes to make an exception for himself and to get away with it”<sup>44</sup>. Here the civil disobedient or “dangerous dissenter” stands in relation with Dryzek’s conception of collective action under the auspices of the common good. Arendt believes that because the American Government as a representative democracy derives its power from the consent of the governed, there is an inherent right of dissent which comes along with this social contract. Meaning that in cases of exclusion within deliberative processes, civil disobedience and “Activities of protest, boycott, and disruption are most appropriate for getting citizens to think seriously about what until then they may have found normal and acceptable...Activities of deliberation, on the contrary, tend more to confer legitimacy on exiting institutions and effectively silence real dissent”<sup>45</sup>. Yet, when viewed as two tools aimed at accomplishing similar goals (in this case drastically more efficient and better climate governance regimes), both activism and deliberation can work hand in hand. It is with this thought that

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<sup>44</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Civil Disobedience*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.

<sup>45</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy*. Political Theory, Oct. 2001. Vol. 29, No 5, pp. 670-690.



democratic theories and practices must be designed so as to affirm the practices of each while also recognizing the tension between them.

The basis for many democratic political systems relies on the creation of “voluntary associations” which pursue short-term goals but dissolve once the goal has been achieved. These voluntary associations are for Americans the main method for action in the political realm. In our representative government, voluntary associations allow groups of people to affect change. Arendt believes that “...civil disobedient’s are nothing but the latest form of voluntary association, and that they are thus quite in tune with the oldest traditions of the country”<sup>46</sup>. The real threats to these associations are divergent ideologies as well as violence. As soon as voluntary associations and civil disobedients split in their ideological goals they lose the quality of political action, which allows their group to enact change. An example of climate activists who have been able to open democratic systems towards climate governance, is the activist group Extinction Rebellion (XR). A group which broadly falls under the typology of dangerous dissenters through acts of civil disobedience and calls for deliberative processes. This theoretic label identifies climate activists engaged in “mobilizing against the systems and institutions they perceive as maintaining unsustainable and unjust policies and practices... this involves questioning not only the “script” of hegemonic powers and institutions, but also the actors who perpetuate them in their own interest”<sup>47</sup>

Mass mobilizing in 2019, members of the activist group “shut down roads and bridges around Parliament in London and said they would occupy the sites for up to two weeks, resisting efforts by the police on Tuesday to move them to Trafalgar Square, another prominent site where

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<sup>46</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Civil Disobedience*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.

<sup>47</sup>Karen O, Brien et al., *Exploring youth activism on climate change: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent*. Ecology & Society, Oct 2018, Vol. 23, No 3.

they would have less effect on traffic”<sup>48</sup>. The group went so far as to purposely get arrested to move the platform of climate action into the judicial system where many climate advocates have had recent success in establishing norms of environmentalism on a legal basis. This act of non-violent mass disruption in tandem with other similar acts of civil disobedience led towards the British Parliament to declare a climate emergency, one of three public demands made by the group towards the UK government. Interestingly one of the other demands made by the activist group charged the government to create a citizens’ assembly (a form of deliberative mini publics) to hear climate change evidence and devise policies. This call for the creation of a citizens’ assembly demonstrates how the goals of climate activism can be proactively connected with opening avenues of deliberation. Interestingly, Extinction Rebellion has openly lauded Ireland’s Citizens Assembly on climate change, citing it as a successful example of deliberative processes needed for societal shifts in openly challenging the status quo. When identifying further connections between activism and contemporary hubs of governance, Extinction Rebellion’s use of effective activist tactics directly correlates with Simon Curtis’ conception of the global city as the center of national and international policy transmission. Not only did the activists make their claims and demands at the heart of policy creation at Parliament in London, but by doing so they centered the problems they were highlighting within the city itself, creating a lasting effect in the minds of those who observed.

Activism is by no means a one size fits all approach to establishing effective governance regimes nor does it necessarily always work seamlessly in concert with deliberative systems. With this in mind, given the immediacy of the issues at hand, radical approaches calling for completely new systems of municipal, regional and national governance will most likely need to

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<sup>48</sup> Alex Marshall, *Arrest Us, Please! Extinction Rebellion’s Path to Success*. The New York Times, 2019.

be curtailed if the ideas carried within these movements are to be put into actual policies or norms. Just as activists aim to open deliberative systems towards more inclusion outside the bounds of structural inequalities, so to do normative democratic processes have the ability to co-op activist concerns, bringing them under the umbrella of already existing institutional designs. This does not mean that radical suggestions for restructuring how environmental governance is carried out should be abandoned, rather this is a warning towards activists to not spend all their energy focused on tearing down systems only to look up and realize that time is out to act in a positive light. As is demonstrated by both Arendt and O'Brien et al, dissent through activism or civil disobedience does not solely work as a means of replacement but can arise out of a desire to push halted or flawed governance towards action, represented by the necessity for such dissent to be non-violent. Additionally, while deliberative mini publics may find their participants largely through random stratified sampling, this purposely does little to create large scale knowledge of an issue. Thus, in tandem with deliberative mini publics which aim to make a representative population of constituent's experts on the issues, active dissent, or civil disobedience in the name of activism works as a mechanism of shock aimed at not just policymakers but the general public as well, as "visible critiques and symbolic acts of dissent can trigger awareness and social reflection, generate debate, open spaces for new actors and issues, and create momentum for social change"<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Karen O, Brien et al., *Exploring youth activism on climate change: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent*. Ecology & Society, Oct 2018, Vol. 23, No 3.

## Conclusion

Can democratic governments and institutions effectively address the issues arising because of climate change before it is too late? This is a question that depending on the answer, has massive implications for both the viability of our planet to survive as well as the survival of free democratic processes themselves. On a broad international level, the world is possibly witnessing the decline of democracy with the rise of right-wing populist parties and the apparent successes of authoritarian tendencies led by China. Specifically in relation to governance models established to address climate change, dominant discourses have turned their attention towards international agreements and local systems “led” by corporations and non-governmental organizations. Thus, it is with this picture of the international stage in mind, it becomes clear that in order for democratic systems to prove that they can still be the dominant normative sphere founded on legitimate policy-making, innovations towards deliberative governance can and should be incorporated. This does not mean that all deliberative mechanisms be established overnight or even that all deliberative processes produce actual policies. As Niemeyer notes, “improving environmental outcomes may not require achieving ideal deliberation in all sites in the public sphere, as much as developing the capacity to avoid the distortion of public opinion by entrenched interests... Achieving this likely involves the steady building of deliberative capacity and development of deliberative cultures that are inured to the blandishments of elites making claims counter to the public interest”.<sup>50</sup> Given recent trends in areas of both deliberative innovation and activism, roadblocks for more efficient legitimate mechanisms of governance aimed at tackling climate change can arise, especially within democratic nations.

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<sup>50</sup>Simon Niemeyer, *Democracy and Climate Change: What Can Deliberative Democracy Contribute?* Australian Journal of Politics and History: Volume 59, Number 3, 2013, pp. 429-448.

Claims arguing that democratic systems are not built in a way to quickly incorporate deliberative mechanisms of governance into existing institutions are not wrong. Democracies or rather stable democracies are built on foundations of incremental change, ensuring protection of the democratic institutions themselves. This fact alone does not mean that radical change is impossible. When left to their own devices of “business-as-usual”, democracies may move slow, but when inundated with activism, there are instances where systems have been changed and solutions proposed. Although the outcomes of the civil rights movements in the United States were far from perfect, peaceful activism and civil disobedience calling for inclusion led to definitive positive change. Climate activists such as Extinction Rebellion can use activism not necessarily to create policies, but to open systems of deliberation, allowing them to incorporate radical ideas outside the bounds of normative structures. In addition, the ability of many democracies to integrate a flow of democratic ingenuity such as mini publics through a federalized nexus, creates laboratories of governance systems that can be transferred from global cities to national governments and vice-versa.

This paper set out to demonstrate how through the incorporation of deliberative systems and constructive climate activism, democratic states can still be fundamental in developing effective climate governance regimes. There is no denying that because of the global scope of destruction caused by climate change, dominant modes of governance will continue to develop at international levels. Even so, world politics is still underlined with the boundaries of state sovereignty where systems of governments range from liberal democracies to authoritative hegemonic regimes. This means that to a large extent, debates over which regime types are best able to address climate change will continue. Through the incorporation of deliberative mechanisms such as mini publics, democracies can create forums of collective action legitimized

through modes of deliberation that are truly pluralistic in terms of demographics as well as ideological values. This alone does not ensure that democracies will ultimately succeed, but given the necessity for quick adaption, it is clear that deliberative processes can work, especially when opened through avenues of activism that suggest or demand alternative heuristics.

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