Can Rational Irrationality be an Effective Explanation for Democratic Failure?

-- Annotation on the Dilemma and Way Out of Electoral Democracy

Xurui Li
Zhou Enlai School of Government Management, Nankai University, Tianjin, 300350, China

Abstract: Bryan Caplan's book The Myth of the Rational Voter takes the "rational economic man" hypothesis as its starting point, and innovatively proposes the concept of "rational irrationality" to give a new explanation for the internal logic of democratic failure while criticising "rational ignorance". While criticising "rational ignorance", the concept of "rational irrationality" was innovatively put forward to give a new explanation to the internal logic of democratic failure. However, rational irrationality has not reached a complete rejection of rational ignorance, and the solution to democratic failure given by Caplan is still questionable. These remaining questions have led to further reflection on how to improve the democratic system and on the dilemma and way out of electoral democracy.

Keywords: Rational Irrationality; Democratic Failure; Electoral Democracy; Rational Ignorance; Consultative Democracy.

1. The Core Concepts of This Book and the Logic of Democratic Failure

Caplan's book The Myth of the Chosen People consists of four main keywords: the miracle of aggregation, systematic bias, rational ignorance and rational irrationality. The logic of The Myth of the Rational Voter is as follows: Caplan argues against the miracle of aggregation from the perspective of presuppositions by pointing out that there is a systematic bias in the public's perceptions. Next, the author discusses the cause of the systematic error of public opinion, i.e., "rational ignorance," as an explanation and answer to the argument that the failure of democracy stems mainly from compliance with public opinion. Finally, it is suggested that the focus should be shifted to "irrationality" by denying that "rational ignorance" is an effective explanation for democratic failures.

1.1. Systemic Bias: Overturning the Miracle of Aggregation under the Logic of Democracy

Systemic bias is a concept that Caplan proposes to criticise the theory of the "miracle of aggregation". Firstly, the miracle of aggregation addresses the problem of democratic failure by denying that democracies often introduce bad policies. In this theory, voters randomly choose between good and bad policies, so that the probabilities of both are equal, thus cancelling each other out and having little effect on the final outcome of the election. Moreover, the informed voters among them will choose the good policies and become the main force in determining the outcome of the election. In short, individual ignorance can eventually be transformed into collective wisdom.

However, in Caplan's view, he argues that the miracle of aggregation, while recognizing the ignorance of the electorate, fails to take into account the possibility of the emergence of systematic error on the part of the electorate. By systematic error, he means that voters have a consistent notion of bias, which leads to collective mistakes in decision-making. For the concept of systematic bias, Caplan summarises four of the common types of systematic bias, namely antiforeign bias, employment bias, antimarket bias and pessimistic bias. The general public tends to interpret economic policies related to foreign relations in terms of "foreigners exploiting their own people". Employment bias stems from a fear of unemployment and equates economic prosperity with employment. The antimarket bias is reflected in the public's failure to see supply and demand as determining prices and to recognise the market's ability to reconcile private and public interests. The pessimism bias comes in the form of forecasting, in which the public becomes dissatisfied with the current situation despite economists' belief that the economy is improving. The next whole chapter is devoted to presenting the gap between the public's and economists' perceptions of the economy, thus validating the fact that the miracle of aggregation is not only occasionally wrong, but in the field of economics it manifests itself as a dysfunctional factual situation on a more regular basis.

1.2. Rational Ignorance: Mainstream Explanations for Democratic Failure

"Rational Ignorance" was first proposed by Anthony Downs in 1957 in his book The Economic Theory of Democracy. Anthony Downs applied the rational man in economics to the analysis of political subjects, arguing that human beings are selfish and will rationally make choices to maximise their utility, which in the realm of politics is the quest to maximising political interests. Since the cost of acquiring political information is large, and in the political field, it is extremely unlikely that a single vote in the hands of an individual voter will change the outcome of an election, then rational voters will choose not to learn, which is the explanation of "rational ignorance". In this regard, Downs has a classic and authoritative interpretation: "It is irrational to seek political erudition because the low returns that such information can provide simply do not compensate for the cost of their time and other resources." This quote is also cited by Caplan in his book and is meant to illustrate that informing voters about a candidate is difficult and demands a high level of decision-making analytical skills, while voters'
expectations of returns also influence their choices. In Downs' conception, rationality is emphasised more as a means than an end, and elections are only for the purpose of electing a government. The goal of a political party is to win the election and maximise votes; the goal of the voter is to choose the party or policy that will maximise his or her interests by voting. It is precisely because of the ignorance of the electorate that the initiative has been ceded to interest groups and politicians, allowing a minority to exploit the majority for their own benefit, that democracy has failed.

Downs, however, ignores political irrationality. He defends his decision to ignore irrationality by arguing that political irrationality possesses complexity, is incompatible with his model of purely rational behaviour, and cannot be argued through logical deduction alone. Caplan argues that support for the assumption of rational expectations is essentially a tacit admission that systematic errors do not occur. And in the first part of The Myth of the Rational Voter, Caplan has demonstrated the existence of systematic errors in public opinion.

Caplan's refutation of "rational ignorance" begins with a refutation of the idea that "well-informed voters are capable of making the right choices." Caplan argues that while there is a clear correlation between making the wrong choice and having insufficient information, the factors that can cause errors are not limited to errors, or else sufficient information would imply cognitive omnipotence. For even with sufficient information, voters are still influenced by their emotional identity, beliefs, and other non-economic factors. The logic of explaining democratic failure by rational ignorance is as follows: Voter ignorance means that voters are in a "dark room", where they are not privy to the entire political operation of the election, and therefore voters have no way of knowing what politicians do or say, and so politicians can do whatever they want regardless of the will of the voters. The flip side of rational ignorance is "insider" expertise, where interest groups know much more than ignorant voters. Second, Caplan argues that the miracle of aggregation is the wrong counterargument. Voter ignorance does not mean that voters are manipulated by the content of political propaganda and surrender their initiative to interest groups and politicians. Ignorance is not the same as total irrationality, and it's usually not a lack of information that leads to negative outcomes, but rather a bias for information. An ignorant but still rational voter is one who will remain distrustful of politicians and interest groups and will not be manipulated by them. In this case, voters can even exert control over politicians. Caplan uses the lens of criminal economics to understand this problem; when voters discover a political leader who is misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to punish him or her severely. If the harshest penalties are still not enough to keep politicians loyal, misbehaving, they have to pun...
Voters remain rational when there are no preferred ideas to influence them; when there are preferred ideas, voters make decisions considering the material costs of mistakes. In this section, Caplan selects cases from different fields to analyse to support his argument. One of the cases chosen here explains that there is a practice of sati in Hinduism, where sati may be rewarding and the family of the deceased husband will try, but most of the widows choose to refuse sati. Secondly, Caplan analyses it from the perspective of political behaviour. Caplan argues that the likelihood that a voter's wrong policy ideas will lead to a wrong policy outcome among a large number of voters is almost zero. This is because in the subconscious mind of most voters everyone understands that a vote can hardly make a difference. Therefore, the price of irrationality is zero, and the zero cost makes voters only adopt bad cognitive behaviour. Next, Caplan relates experimental data to the analysis, arguing that it is more reasonable to assume that all people are perfectly rational at all times than it is to assume that people's level of rationality varies with the cost of their mistakes. Finally, Caplan then draws inspiration from Jeffrey Brennan and Lauren Lomasky's model of expressive voting, arguing that, like the purpose of cheering at a fan's football game, citizens may not be voting in order to help policies in their favour win, but rather to express preferences such as patriotism, compassion, and love of the environment. This explanation shifts the focus from micro effects on policy to psychological gains for voters. Voters' political behaviour is determined by their preferences over beliefs mainly because the cost of mistakes in political behaviour is so low that voters' political actors do not activate rationality. Caplan argues that classical public choice theory completely equates political behaviour with economic behaviour, and therefore cannot provide an explanation for the "irrationality of rationality". In fact, systematic biases are created by voters' uniform conceptual preferences. And because of the psychological benefits of systematic biases, systematic biases are persistent and pervasive. Guided by systemic errors, electoral democracy produces bad policies.

1.4. Generation of Bad Policies: The Ultimate Expression of Democratic Failure

In the next part of the book, Caplan describes the process by which the irrational micro foundations of individual voters derive the macro-outcomes of democratic policies. Given the complexity of the real world, Caplan uses thought experiments as a starting point, while gradually increasing the complexity so that the relationship between irrational perceptions and ineffective public policy remains constant. It concludes with a discussion of the factors that mediate the policy consequences of voter irrationality. Caplan argues that when all voters have the same preference endorsement, the vast majority of biases translate into bad policy, especially on issues that are laced with emotional components, and errors reinforce each other rather than counteract each other. When voters are divided, the situation is closer to a realistic model of democracy. In this case, every policy tries to win over the position of the middle voter. If the miracle of aggregation holds, bad policies can be avoided. In the third thought experiment, Caplan assumes that voters all want to maximise social welfare, that voters are selfless, and that motivations are socially oriented rather than privately oriented. But there is also the potential for selflessness to make democracy dysfunctional, because the misconceptions of selfless voters can easily reach a misguided consensus that arrives at the wrong place, while selfish voters lack cohesion because of their ongoing disagreements.

Finally, Caplan assumes that voters hold systematic biases against policies but are able to view and evaluate policy outcomes objectively. The incentives here are analogous to retrospective voting, which pushes politicians to provide better policies than what voters want. For politicians, good policies are difficult to support without listening to public opinion, and listening to public opinion all the way through can result in bad policies being chosen. But voters have an irrational admiration for elected leaders, which gives them room for manoeuvre and manoeuvre to facilitate politicians to avoid acute problems and evade their responsibilities. The modern political system is one of empowerment, with decision-making moving down the chain of the system, and the question of who is in charge of the wrong issue can also have a large political impact. When policy outcomes make voters dissatisfied, the public usually does not pursue accountability across hierarchical levels, choosing instead to pursue the officials directly responsible. It is this public perception of recrimination that higher-level officials will exploit to avoid becoming unpopular with the public. In order to maintain their political status, politicians will make decisions that appeal to the will of their constituents, continue to produce bad policies, and endeavour to do something to prevent the bad consequences of the policies from continuing to be produced.

For the solution to bad policy, Caplan argues for greater reliance on private choice and the free market. He starts at the irrationality of voters and explores ways to make them rational voters. According to Caplan's findings on the comparison of the public's perceptions of the economy with those of economists, we can find that the enhancement of a number of factors will make the voters' perceptual preferences more similar to those of economists. As a result, Caplan suggests several possible ways to improve the economic literacy of intermediate voters, such as giving voters with higher economic literacy a greater weighting of the vote, reducing or even eliminating voter turnout, providing voters with more education in order to cultivate better voters, and using one's liberal authority to improve policy. And, Caplan argues that leaders possess a certain amount of hypocrisy in order to strike a balance between policies that are perceived by the public to be effective and those that are actually effective.

However, Caplan's solution to the problem of bad policies is in fact biased; it is also one-sided and lazy thinking to choose the market so decisively after democracy has failed. Democracy and the market are not two opposites, and it is not possible to resort exclusively to the market after democracy has failed. Moreover, although Caplan's proposal of "rational irrationality" as an explanation for the failure of democracy has great innovative significance, its analytical process also involves a misunderstanding of the democratic process. Therefore, the following section will focus on these issues and the process and dilemmas of electoral democracy.

2. Democratic Failures and the Inherent Flaws of Electoral Democracy

2.1. Democracy and Electoral Democracy

As the definition of the term democracy is rather ambiguous, and philosophical analyses of the concept of
democracy are not effectively relevant to the realisation of
democratic ideals, the discussion of the concept is restricted
here to the political sphere. Democracy is derived from the
Greek words for people (demos) and rule (kratia), which
originally meant rule by the people or governance by the
people, and the practice of democracy in the Greek city-states
was realised through citizens' assemblies. This most classical
conception of democracy was the basis for all subsequent
theories of democracy. However, while the classical concept
possesses its concise generality, it is also accompanied by the
defect of being too abstract and lacking in concrete guidance.
In addition to understanding democracy at the macro level,
such as from the perspective of institutional design, we should
pay attention to the concept of democracy at the micro level.
Democracy of the "people" as a group concept is meaningless
to the individuals in the group if the democratic will of the
individuals is not effectively responded to. In order to
understand the phenomena in politics and society, one should
look at human beings, and they must be concrete individuals.
When the concept of the people becomes synthetic, then this
kind of democracy, which is detached from the individual, can
even have a negative effect on the realisation of democracy,
because in this case it is possible that a dictatorship will be
imposed in the name of the people. Democracy, therefore,
means that each specific individual is able to influence public
affairs that concern him or her.

Apart from the fundamental concept of democracy, that is, the
people deciding the affairs of the country, there are two other
basic concepts, namely, equality and freedom. By
equality, as Robert Dahl puts it, "they must have a full and
equal opportunity to set the issues and to express their reasons
in favour of one outcome over another". .... Every citizen
should have full and equal opportunity". People with
citizenship are able to participate in decision-making in public
affairs, and each citizen's ideas about policy must be seen to
have equal validity. The principle of liberty, on the other hand,
has two intrinsic meanings: firstly, the ability of citizens to act
as they wish without being interfered with or constrained by
the outside world; and secondly, the ability not to interfere or
meddle in the private affairs of others. While ensuring one's
own freedom of action, it is also necessary to respect the
freedom of others, so that the right of everyone to freedom
can be realised. In this sense, the concept of freedom and the
concept of equality are interconnected and linked. A
procedure that comprehensively conforms to the above
concepts can actually be a perfect democratic process.
However, due to the many concepts of human nature in reality,
this kind of perfect democracy will not exist in reality, and
democracy serves more as an ideal to guide reality. In order to
realise this abstract and ideal democracy in reality, various
prefixes have been added to the vague concept of democracy
to make it more and more pluralistic and clear, such as liberal
democracy, electoral democracy, elite democracy,
constitutional democracy, and so on. By the time the concept
of electoral democracy appeared to develop, the concept of
democracy had reached extreme clarity, becoming indirect,
procedural, and elite democracy.

Electoral democracy, the most common manifestation of
contemporary democracy, was introduced by Schumpeter. He
articulated democracy as the unity of two social processes, the
competition for power by elites and the selection of political
leaders by the masses. Based on this, democratic politics has
moved to the opposite of the Athenian conception of
democracy, and modern democracy no longer implies that the
people are actually ruling, but only have the right to choose
whether to accept or reject their rulers. Schumpeter was very
outspoken about the fact that democratic politics is really the
rule of politicians and questioned the concept of the people as
a unity. He noted that "Americans do not allow Orientals,
Germans do not allow Jews to acquire citizenship; and in the
American South Negroes are often denied the right to vote".
Huntington even further elaborated on electoral democracy,
arguing that elections are the essence of democracy. In
modern Western political philosophy, election is democracy.

2.2. Democratic Failures and Their Solutions:
A Re-Examination of Rational Hocus-
Pocus and Recourse to Markets

Democratic failure is primarily a failure of public opinion,
i.e., public opinion often opposes effective policies and
catalyses and supports ineffective policies. Therefore, the
reason why "democratic failure" is defined as a failure of
democracy is because the logic behind the failure is due to the
fact that public opinion is followed rather than violated.
Caplan's enquiry into the causes of democratic failure focuses
on the electorate, arguing that it is the systematic bias of the
electorate that is followed that ultimately leads to bad policies.
But given the reality of the electoral process, the influence
that voters have on final policy decisions is not as great as
Caplan describes in his book. Situations such as the one
Caplan argues in which politicians will cater to the needs of
voters or even endeavour to avoid being abandoned by voters
by adopting certain ways of preventing the undesirable
consequences of their policies are virtually non-existent in
reality. This is because large groups of voters will face
collective action dilemmas in monitoring their elected
representatives. Moreover, politicians are not necessarily
punished by voters if they do not respond to their demands.
Thus, elections are not sufficient to make politicians
subservient to their constituent groups, and politicians
actually lack sufficient incentives to pander to voter opinion.
Other agents in the political process, such as political parties
and interest groups, all have greater influence on election
outcomes and policy generation than voters. At the same time,
Caplan's idea of systematic bias, that is, the tendency of voters
to converge on their biases, is not true, but in reality, voters
have a wide range of perceptual preferences, and the
likelihood that they will make the same decision based on
their own misguided biases is very small.

"Rational irrationality", as a typical manifestation of the
"maximisation of interests under different constraints",
expands on the conceptual meaning of "rational ignorance"
for the political sphere, adding irrational factors such as
emotional identity to "ignorance", and discovering the reality
of widespread systemic bias. Expanding on "rational
ignorance", the conceptual meaning for the political sphere
adds irrational factors such as emotional identity to
"ignorance", and discovers the reality of pervasive and
systematic bias. But both are still based on the assumption of
the rational man. The "irrational" in "rational irrationality"
means that voters, after rationally comparing their costs and
benefits, rationally make choices to irrationally embrace
mistakes. Caplan's use of irrationality based on rationality to
dismiss rationality is ill-considered and unsupported. The
logic behind it is actually similar to that of "rational
ignorance", which is still a rational choice process, but a
rational choice between price and preference, which is still
fundamentally based on the assumption of rationality.
As a solution to bad policy, Caplan argues that it is important to avoid handing over the problem to public opinion in the first place, and he therefore advocates replacing democratic public choice with the market in order to avoid public policy being biased by indulgence of public opinion. But simply dismissing democracy and replacing it with the market seems crude and simplistic; the opposite of democracy is not the market and individual choice. In reality, individuals in the market are the same as those in politics, and the so-called market omnipotence is still based on the theoretical assumption of rational man. Yet at all times, as Simon says, human rationality is limited, and the so-called purely economically rational person does not exist and cannot attain complete rationality. Following this line of logic, if we want to avoid the indulgence of public opinion, the theoretical landing point can only be one step forward, focussing on changing the systematic misconceptions of the electorate. However, according to the limited rationality of human beings, it is not feasible to change the malfunctioning of democracy by changing the quality of the voters or by demanding higher economic knowledge from the voters from an individual point of view, and it is easy to push democracy into a dead corner.

In this way, democracy seems to have reached a dead end, but in conjunction with the clarification of the concepts of democracy and electoral democracy in the previous section, we can see that democracy in fact contains two dimensions: value and procedure, one of which is modern and the other classical. In the context of "realising democracy through electoral democracy", the former is procedure and the latter is value. In the long-term political practice, due to the association of democracy with election and parliamentary forms, people even regard democracy as these institutional forms and forget that democracy requires effective decision-making on the basis of public opinion. As a result, when the democratic process in reality fails to achieve the ideal democracy, democracy is doubted and Caplan therefore abandons democracy and goes to the market. However, the so-called democratic failure is not fundamentally a failure of democracy, but a failure of a democratic system.

Therefore, we should look at reflecting on the democratic system. Since compliance with public opinion has led to bad policies, it is no longer desirable to follow public opinion alone. Then we should change our thinking, through improving or restricting the democratic system to ensure democracy and at the same time to make reasonable use of public opinion, so that the preferences of public opinion that have a negative impact on the public interest can be transformed.

2.3. Dilemma of Electoral Democracy

Modern democracy is largely equated with elections, but the current electoral democracy has dilemmas and shortcomings for the realisation of democracy. Electoral democracy consists of two interrelated processes, campaigning and voting, and the electoral process is the choice of political citizens over political elites. It contains two elements, one is that the electoral process is the process of competition among many candidates, and the other is that the ruling power is transferred from the citizens to the politicians. Both of these important features create obstacles to the manifestation of public opinion.

2.3.1. Competitive Elections as a Guarantee

According to Huntington "the central process of democracy is the selection of leaders by the governed people through competitive elections". Competition refers to a candidate's moral and political image of himself or herself, with the inherent implication that the candidate makes a political and moral commitment to the electorate. It is in fact a tacit admission that competitive elections guarantee that the government and elected representatives will be accountable to the electorate. By arguing that competitive elections are the only effective way to achieve accountable government, Fukuyama tacitly recognises the strong causal link between the two. This political and moral commitment creates a potential contract between voters and candidates, and it is this contract that gives voters the power to monitor and control candidates.

The electoral process is a competition between candidates, and the intensity of this competition is such that candidates do not shy away from resorting to some form of theatre to solicit votes for themselves. Considering the limited knowledge of voters about political issues, voters often feel that they have no way to make judgements and lack of basis when making choices, thus providing room for candidates to irresponsibly give voters empty promises to guide them. In addition, in a free market economy, the electoral process in the West is controlled and manipulated by capital, and money can exert a great deal of influence on the electoral process, turning a fair and open electoral process into a corrupt political process. Given that the political will of voters is to a large extent shaped by the news media, candidates often adopt the method of public opinion control to promote themselves while cross-examining and exposing their rivals in order to compete and defeat their rivals, so as to win the election. Taking the polling mechanism in the election process as an example, the polls were originally used as a means to consolidate and reflect public opinion in the election process, but they have gradually turned into a political tool to manipulate and control public opinion.

In the contemporary era of highly developed information media, the media, as an important platform in the process of political consensus-building, can be controlled by politicians to selectively convey information to voters. As a result, there is a division between media politics and real politics. During the election period, candidates' political values are guided by polling data, and they can change their political views at any time for the sake of public preference, which also explains why there are conflicting or even completely different policy ideas from those during the election period after a candidate has been elected. This shows that there is not a causal relationship between competitive elections and the government in charge, and that there are many variables in the electoral process.

2.3.2. Practically Embodied Elite Rule

Schumpeter made it clear that democracy is the rule of elected politicians, not the rule of the real people, and that the meaning of democratic politics has been transformed into the opportunity for the people to accept or reject those who will rule them in the future. The rule of politicians replaces the rule of the people, and the attribution of power then loses its popular character; the people elect politicians to act in their place through elections, yet the politicians who are given the power then act according to their own will. Electoral democracy, from the perspective of the reality of who informs the rule, is nakedly elitist politics.

One concept that needs to be clarified is that the conformity to voters' preferences adopted by politicians during their participation in elections is in fact their own behavioural
choices rather than the real realisation of the people's will, and that the realisation of the people's will need to be judged by taking into account the results of the policy behaviour after the elections. However, after the election, the people lack effective supervision and constraints on politicians, who can make policy decisions without the will of the people, and the voters revert to a state of powerlessness, and the representative status of politicians is dissolved by themselves, thus breaking the logic of legitimacy of electoral democracy. The right to vote is manifested only in the moment of "voting," and the right to democracy seems to disappear in other moments. In other words, the political legitimacy of electoral democracy is only formal; this system of choice does not democratise the leadership, but gives the elite, or politicians, the right to rule in practice. This is, in fact, a mutation of power, whereby the people have the name of masters of the country, but not the reality of masters.

This is essentially due to the principal-agent relationship in electoral democracy, where the relationship of responsibility between agent and principal is often not effectively guaranteed. The promises made by the agent to the principal are often pandering promises made to obtain the principal's mandate, which in the case of elections is reflected in the promise made to get elected. Once a candidate has been elected, i.e., once the moment when the voters are empowered has elapsed, the candidate may renege on his or her promises and simply fulfil his or her own interests and objectives. And because of the huge information gap between the candidate and the voters after the election, very often the voters are unable to monitor the candidate effectively. Even the principal may be psychologically controlled by the agent and lose the ability to judge and supervise.

Since electoral democracy is based on the ability of voters to transform their needs into outcomes through their influence on the political decision-making process, and since the obstacles are so repetitive in reality, the probability of voters being able to realize democracy through elections is negligible. Electoral democracy, although formally democratic, does not mean that democracy can be achieved in terms of results.

3. Cracking the Electoral Democracy Dilemma: How Democracy is Achieved

From the above analysis of electoral democracy, it can be seen that under electoral democracy power is transferred to the hands of the elite and the people, as the masters of the country, are passive and powerless, thus showing a negative attitude towards political participation. If the majority of voters show a detached attitude towards politics, then it will intensify the elite's hold on political power. The functioning of politics becomes a complete institutional arrangement. Secondly, politics in electoral democracy has taken on market characteristics, between which there is no expectation of the competition and collision between different interests and candidates, through voting based on the principle of preserving individual rationality, which emphasises the power of the individual to adjudicate his or her own preferences, and personal autonomy in the public sphere is expressed through representatives elected through competitive elections to convey the preferences of the voters. However, voters' opinions and preferences may be betrayed by politicians during the election process, and this combination of procedural democracy and non-democratic results reflects the fact that electoral democracy can be called a kind of "weak and strong" democracy to a certain extent. Although elections are procedurally democratic in the sense of values, they do not really realise democracy through elections. Therefore, the improvement of democracy needs to start from the perspective of transforming the "weakness" of electoral democracy into "strength", i.e., the effective realisation of democracy in reality.

The entry point for this transformation can be found in the question of voter preferences in electoral democracy. The pursuit of one's own interests or the fulfilment of one's own preferences are legitimate manifestations of the individual's pursuit of democracy, but, as Hume argued, if everyone had the foresight to ensure that he or she believed in justice and fairness, in the general good and the good of the future, then there would be no governments or political associations, and everyone would be able to live in harmony, guided by his or her own innate rationality. What we can do to improve this is to suppress the individual, local and short-term interests of the voters, so that the public, global and long-term interests and preferences can be selected and reflected, so that the democratic process achieves a "meritocratic" result. Based on this, consultative democracy can be a complement to electoral democracy.

In contrast to electoral democracy, which is "vote-centred", consultative democracy is "dialogue-centred". The theory of consultative democracy focuses on communication and discussion as the mode of decision-making, and the process of consultation is the process of critique and contestation of various viewpoints. Compared with "voting" consultative democracy stresses "dialogue" and the right of citizens to "participate", turning citizens from referees to participants. Individuals in the process of negotiation, many individuals due to their different social relations and less privileged perspective, and therefore can reveal the relative bias and relative blindness, they are responsible for their own at the same time also responsible for others and society. In response to the systemic bias that may arise in electoral democracy, the narrowing of differences brought about by consultation will have a modifying effect on the systemic bias. This public rationality in the process of consultative democracy will help to overcome the limited rationality of human beings by prompting them to transform their narrow preferences and make them fair and reflective of the public interest. It can be seen that on the issue of preferences, consultative democracy focuses on the transformation of preferences and the formation of collective preferences in line with the public interest, and in this respect, it goes beyond the representative democracy that simply expresses and aggregates preferences.

The dialogue-centred concept of consultative democracy is also reflected in the improved experience of citizen participation; participants in the consultative process must respect and listen to the views of others in addition to their
own in the process of exploring the collision of viewpoints, which is a return to the democratic concept of freedom and equality. The emphasis of consultative democracy on public reason and equal and free dialogue does not mean that it is a departure from individual freedom. As Williamson and Muravchik argue, democracy is not a blueprint or a promise of a particular outcome, but simply a principle about how vastly different or conflicting human goals can be reconciled. Expression and dialogue in a pluralistic society does not abandon the individual perspective, and through such a democratic discussion and decision-making, participants in the negotiation process are able to learn more and more about the broader social information and experience, which in turn enables them to make better informed decisions to solve collective problems. Compared with electoral democracy, in which voters periodically elect leaders to make decisions on their behalf, consultative democracy involves citizens’ participation in more ways and more frequently, and at a higher level of democratic participation. Thus, only consultation based on public reason and public justification can result in public decisions that are in the public interest.

It is important to note that consultative democracy, while improving on electoral democracy in the above respects, cannot replace electoral democracy. Consultative democracy provides a criterion to critique modern electoral democracy from the perspective of understanding the value of democracy. It complements and reflects on individual rationality from the perspective of public rationality. The absence of either will lead to a tilt in the direction of irrationality in the other direction. At the same time, the pursuit of democracy should be based on the basic requirement of good governance, rather than the mere pursuit of the so-called democracy even leads to the lack of governance performance. Among the multiple values of governance, democracy cannot be used as the sole criterion to judge the degree of realisation of electoral democracy. In addition to democracy, stability, rule of law, freedom and other values should also be taken into account, and it is up to different countries and regions to choose which one to have more of and which one to have less of, according to their own circumstances.

When electoral democracy is plagued with drawbacks and problems, it is at all times undesirable to simply and arbitrarily dismiss democracy itself, what should be done is to carefully probe into the problems and continuously explore the way out, so as to sound and perfect democracy through other means. The development of democracy is a spiral and gradual process. Too much emphasis on the role of democracy in electoral democracy will, on the contrary, give rise to great disappointment after great superstition, and ultimately lead to scepticism.

References


