

## Assessing Democracy *In Vitro*, *In Vivo* and *In Actu* and the Role of Democratic Theory

### Today

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### Abstract

How can we define democracy today given the continuous changes that modern societies are undergoing? What is the role of a democratic theorist? This paper articulates a threefold argument in responding to these questions by analyzing the term of democracy *in vitro*, *in vivo*, and *in actu*. The first step is to secure a democratic minimum and the core principles of democracy. The second step involves studying democracy as an ongoing project and examining how the principles of this democratic minimum are encoded. In the third step we deploy the basic premises of discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe when evaluating a specific discourse of democracy, as this approach encompasses both discursive and non discursive practices. Utilizing this three-level evaluative framework for democratic theory will allow us to not only articulate normative principles but also evaluate them according to their mode of implementation.

**Keywords:** democratic minimum, democratic theory, democracy, representation

### Setting the Ground of the Inquiry

New models of democracy, new approaches, taxonomies, and interpretations, even new loci and modes are constantly evolving as political theorists and policymakers seek to respond effectively

to the complex challenges and transformations that societies are undergoing and to accommodate democratic practices as well as address queries for legitimate governance. Given that democracies are in flux, there is a need to reappraise features of democratic governance and review what democracy really means in the modern sociopolitical context. Democratic innovations in all their diversity and variety (Elstub and Escobar 2017; Smith 2009) aspire to combat citizens' mistrust, which remarkably is high in established democracies (e.g. Van der Meer 2017) while cultivating a belief that the democratic project is vibrant and capable of finding solutions to emerging challenges. Specific democratic innovations, such as the Citizens' Assembly in Ireland (e.g., Suiter, Farrell, and Harris 2016), participatory budgeting in Brazil (e.g., Barros and Sampaio 2016), and Participedia (Fung and Warren 2011), are actively bridging the gap between theory and practice, thus creating a fertile ground for the deepening and development of democracy. The continuous power struggle and the different manifestations of power that appear in modern societies are identified by Mouffe (2000) in her "agonistic pluralism" model as inherent features of society. Mouffe underlines the fact that new forms of social antagonisms have emerged in both national and international contexts and are manifesting themselves differently from the traditional forms (2005:64). Given that society, according to Mouffe, is always unfixed and subject to contingency, power struggle is in itself an inherent feature, as the "political" is necessarily characterized by continuous (ant)agonisms. Thus, the main task for democratic politics is "how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values" (Mouffe 2000: 14). Democracy, as already noted, is always a continuing and context-dependent project and, thus, inevitably reflects the social and political structures, problems, and challenges of a given era. To this extent the "crisis of democracy" particularly

attributed to representative democracy may also be the stepping point for societies to ask and enact further advancement and expansion of democracy.

The aforementioned multiplicity of approaches, interpretations, and empirical applications, coupled with several differentiations across political spaces, do not always provide a comprehensible framework of what democracy means and how it can be put into practice in different contexts. Various configurations of democratic norms, when implemented in different contexts, may be contradictory, providing ground for uncertainty and confusion. Conversely, ambiguity and semantic pluralism are ontologically inherent in the concept of democracy itself and can also be considered as a constructive conceptual “wealth.” Terms such as “liberal,” “deliberative,” or “green” democracy are only a few among the 2,234 descriptions of democracy that Gagnon (2018) has identified, providing evidence for this ontological pluralism while underlining the dynamics of democratic discourse. This paper is not arguing against this pluralism; rather, it endeavors to insert a three-level evaluation framework in the analysis of democracy that would ensure that this pluralism is preserved and further enriched *while* maintaining a basic commitment to a democratic core values system. Certainly, from the rich and dense literature in democracy, relevant interesting points were raised by Dahl (2000) and recently by A. Taylor (2019), who analyses democracy as “a balance of paradoxes” and urges for a more empirically based approach of the meaning of democracy rather than relying on abstract norms. Our proposed approach in understanding and evaluating democracy builds on previous works on democratic theory; it condenses and reorganizes basic insights in a new and concise way in order to provide a comprehensible three-stage evaluative framework. We thus aim to contribute to the debate about the definition and the role of democratic theory while underlying its importance for the project of democracy.

In defining some basic principles of democratic discourse, we do not aim to impinge upon its development nor to overlook or underestimate structural changes in modern societies but rather to delineate a set of tenets in which democratic theory should be submitted despite any interpretative pluralism it may adopt. Admittedly, globalization, internet communications, and increased social and transnational mobility have been inviting democratic scholars to reappraise democratic discourse and situate it within multiple contexts. The conceptual pluralism we have already acknowledged enables democracy to accommodate all these challenges without, however, having to compromise on its principles. The approach employed in this paper is aligned with the “gradualist” interpretation of democracy (Bohman 2005:294), which acknowledges that these changes may impose different actualizations to the *form of democracy* and not to the *idea* of democracy and its core values. Bobbio (1993), for example, has not adopted the idea of a “crisis of democracy” but the term of “transformation of democracy,” which implies again that its substance remains intact.

In this blossoming and constantly evolving field, what is the role of democratic theory and of a democratic theorist? First, we should clarify that the term *theory of democracy* is perhaps better situated to describe our argument in this paper than the term *democratic theory*. These two terms, although used interchangeably, bear a basic semantic difference. The term *theory of democracy* signifies a theory *about and of* democracy, as the concept of democracy is substantiated by its basic principles. *Democratic* is essentially a derivative term, which stems from the noun *democracy*. Therefore, its use needs to be examined in relation to what the speaker understands as democracy, and thus it involves an evaluation procedure. In order to provide an answer to what the theory of democracy is and, consequently, what is the task of a theorist of democracy, we need to define the conceptual grounds upon which such an inquiry sits, hence

explicating more specifically on the basic principles that construct the “democratic minimum” (Bohman 2005:295).

A single all-encompassing definition of democracy is beyond the scope of this paper and nor do we consider it a feasible task. Instead, we will demarcate the norms and principles that should govern the discourse of democracy despite its multiplicity and semantic diversity while allowing it to expand, improve, or be further developed. By delineating this democratic minimum, the objective is to specify the area of political theory in which the theory of democracy evolves and, second, safeguard democracy from potential misinterpretations, misconceptions, and misuses. This signification strategy will also ensure that the semantic plurality of democracy does not turn to vagueness, where “a term that means anything means nothing” (Dahl 1989:2). We identify different interpretation paths as inbuilt in democratic discourse, but we also argue that this plurality should be addressed with the proper sensitivity and circumspection so as to strengthen the semantic nexus of norms that construct democratic discourse. In this way we also believe that we protect the discourse of democracy from an endless striving for semantic clarity, which may also be susceptible to improper interpretations. In brief, our argument is threefold and is structured according to the following propositions:

- a) Delineate the basic features and norms that should be attributed to the term of *democracy* so as to define its principles *in vitro*.
- b) Suggest the study of democracy *in vivo* and, therefore, understand contemporary circumstances in societies in which democracy occurs and accordingly acknowledge new terms and reappraise how old terms are inscribed in new contexts and domains.
- c) Study *particular* discourses of democracy *in actu* as the essential step to bridge the gap between theory of democracy and reality of democracy or living democracy. For this task

we consider the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) the appropriate analytical framework, as it does not distinguish between discursive and non discursive practices and, therefore, enables us to address a specific democratic discourse in all its discursive and material dimensions.

Across these three propositions our approach narrows from abstract thinking to specific assessment. The first proposition is nuanced in a more normative philosophical domain in which we aspire to construct an "archetype" or a set of democratic principles with a minimum agreed content, usually an ideal one. The second proposition establishes a dialogue between the archetype (democracy *in vitro*) and its current forms (*in vivo*). The final proposition engages a different approach in how we may study *specific* discourses of democracy and, thus, how democracy *in vitro* is (re)constructed and operationalized in specific contexts and domains. We will proceed to the analysis of these propositions while emphasizing the role of democratic theory(-ists) across these lines.

### **Defining the Inquiry**

Regarding point *a*, somebody could argue that the definition of democracy and its fundamental principles is a task already undertaken successfully by ancient Greek philosophers and, in particular, Aristotle. For Aristotle freedom and equality form the basic components of democracy in comparison with other regimes (1975: D1292b 20–45). Ancient Athenian democracy provided the essential institutions to support a direct democracy, the implementation of which, however, is subject to geographical and a number of other factors (Held 2003: 25–46). Furthermore, the etymology of democracy as a Greek word (*demos*+*Kratos* = *δημος+κρατος*) speaks for two basic elements: *demos*, or the people, and *kratos*, which refers to

power/authority. *Kratos* comes from the verb *krato* (*κρατε-ω*), which actually means “I have the power.” In simple terms the etymology of the word democracy reveals its basic substance; democracy is a regime where the power to govern belongs to the people<sup>1</sup>. As the people (*demos*) rule, we speak initially of a self-legislating, self-governing body. *Demos* then delegates power to an authority to exercise it according to the mandate given. The nature and the level of binding of the mandate differs according to which definition is adopted. By considering our previous points, democracy can be understood initially as a *relation* between *demos* and the governing authority (to whom power is delegated, e.g., *Kratos*=state).

For our analysis here, we will call *demos* the “subject” and the delegated authority as the “correspondent.” In democracy the relation between the subject and the correspondent is based on freedom and the free will of the former. In liberal constitutional democracy this relation is articulated on the grounds of constitutional institutions that prescribe, support, and guard the legitimacy of this scheme and establish the rule of law. We shall call the relation between the subject and the correspondent a *vital connection* because if this connection is broken or malfunctioning for some reason, then we literally speak of a “dead democracy,” which essentially is not democracy at all. This “vital connection” can be identified as the principle of representation in modern democracies. What makes this connection democratic is predominantly the free unconstrained will of the people, and what makes it rewarding and socially productive is the submission or the expression of this will in the context of common will, as defined in Rousseau’s work (1968) following a communitarian rationale. Interestingly, for Aristotle, democracy reaches its ideal level as a regime called *Politeia* (*Πολιτεία*), when it serves the common good and not partisan interests. Aristotle considers democracy a “digressive” regime when it does not serve the common good. We consider this point of Aristotle’s as one warning of the differences between a

real democracy and an euphemistic one when it does not serve the interests of people. It is also important to underline that this “vital connection” is not the only assessing point; it should be assessed in conjunction with other variables as well. We will delve more deeply into these issues in the following sections (*in vivo* and *in actu*).

Arguably, all political regimes connect the *subject* with the *correspondent* somehow. The difference among them refers to how they conceptualize *demos* and the correspondent, the criteria, and the rules that pertain to the relation between the subject and the correspondent. Weber (1987) has provided a classification of the basic types of authority and explained this relation in terms of legitimate power and its sources. The ideal types of authority and legitimacy of Weber remain always topical for political theory, but democracy and societies are characterized today with such a complexity that this basic classification can no longer suffice.

The democratic discourse defines equality and freedom of expression as basic principles that should be present regarding the *subject*. The *connection* is operationalized through regular elections, the rule of law, freedom of expression, free flow of information, political pluralism, equality, and transparency. The *correspondent* should administer the bestowed power with respect to constitutional liberties and provisions that stipulate how this power should be exercised. Liberal democracy prescribes that both the subject and the correspondent should be submitted to the rule of law, and this constrains while simultaneously securing their freedom. Thus, while elections are the prominent mechanism (connection) of democracy, equal attention should be paid to civil liberties.

Certainly, in representative democracies the proper functioning of parliaments, which is representative of *demos*, is critical. These principles speak to the “heart” of modern liberal democracy that we consider the most comprehensible and functional set of ideas that can

entrench discourse of democracy to the “knots “of the democratic minimum “net.” This minimum or “semantic net” is neither “sterilized” nor rigid in its interpretation. It can be flexible (as a net), and it can also be stretched but only up to the point of tearing. Thus, this stretching has to be true to its principles and able to retain its cohesion. The aforementioned principles do not fully establish a democratic minimum nor do they confine it in a univocal interpretation; they rather delineate or clarify the grounds of democracy. We consider the commitment to this minimum a prerequisite for the theorist who analyses democracy; this commitment, however, should not interfere to the breadth of analysis that can be performed. Hyland identifies this quest for the encapsulation of the “minimum” as “specifying the programmatic core of democracy” (1995:40). At this point we argue that this abstract yet simultaneously specific predefinition of some principles even at a philosophical or ‘normative’ level can function as a reference point, which does not define the principles in their finality but rather stabilizes democratic discourse. As such, the democratic minimum establishes boundaries not borders.

This brings us to point *b*. The study of democracy *in vivo* means that we need to understand the challenges that the democratic minimum faces in the process of its *transposition* to modern societal structures. At this level the democratic minimum operates as an interpretation framework that is used to scrutinize manifestation(s) of democracy across differentiated contexts and evaluate new democratic practices that enact these principles.

Democracy *in vivo* is always context dependent. As Saward asserts, democratic principles “gain their meaning and force through enactment,” which can be articulated in a number of ways (2003: 169). At this level we endorse the reflective proceduralism proposed by Saward, who points out that democratic principles come alive through their activation from decisional devices and are dependent and justified on the performance of these devices (2003: 165–166). However,

on another note, we would disagree with Saward and argue that there is a need for the presence of a *philosophical external* while assessing these enacted principles—although we do admit his approach of “reasonable” and “acceptable” meanings of principles—presupposes at least an *interpretive* minimum. We argue that the rather performative stance undertaken by Saward and other scholars should not evaluate democracy *in vivo* by ignoring the substance of democracy (*in vitro*).

It is indeed a very difficult—although constructive—endeavor for the democratic theorist to comprehend the new circumstances in which democracy is embodied and evaluate critically, if and how, these embodiments correspond to the basic democratic core. Presumably then the level of correspondence will define how “democratic” a specific manifestation is. It is critical to keep in mind in this enquiry that whatever is called *democracy* is not essentially democratic. For instance, as Taylor (2019) points out, North Korea calls itself a “Democratic People’s Republic,” yet it is not democratic at all. Such examples depict the perils of accepting the term *democracy* without evaluation, without comparing and contrasting them to the basic principles of democratic minimum. To this extent Mouffe’s suggestion that democratic theorists should engage in a “vibrant agonistic public sphere of contestation” (2005:3), which will allow for clarifications on the meaning of democracy and its manifold manifestations, is a really useful one. Performance, articulation, and reference to democratic principles should not be taken for granted unless they are truly corresponding and substantiating the democratic minimum.

Analyzing democracy *in vivo* is not limited in addressing these challenges. It also refers to a more difficult “institutional” task in which a political theorist needs to assess regimes that declare their democratic credentials, yet they are “less than minimal democratic” (Diamond 2003: 36). In these regimes some of the features of constitutional institutions and electoral democracy

exist, but they just mask authoritarian domination and practices. These are “pseudo democracies” (Diamond 2003: 37). In general, *in vivo* assessment is critical in order to identify *beyond* words and declarations and assess when a regime really corresponds to the democratic minimum.

Analyzing democracy *in vitro* may require the assessment of not only the vital connection and the normative framework, which secures it, but also the redefinition of both the subject and the correspondent. Although assessing the vital connection usually directs us to the multifaceted discussion and critics of representation, assessing or even identifying the subject and the correspondent is an even more demanding procedure. Let us consider how the subject—the demos—is constituted and conceptualized in modern democracies with new forms of politics and new political entities emerging and challenging the representative monopoly that the state has held for many years. Demos (people) may employ the *strict sensu* meaning of the electorate, while the *lato sensu* meaning refers to the people who are legally residing in a specific state. But what about the different social grouping of interests that go beyond these predefined categories, that claim to have the power to express the interests of people more substantially and, indeed, are sometimes conferred with a power that is not necessarily commensurate with democratic rules?

Old “nation-state” politics and the correspondence of demos with a specific political—geographically defined—entity is highly contested in the era of cosmopolitanism and continuous cross-country mobility (Connolly 1991 as cited in Held 2003:516). The transition from demos to demoi imposes existential challenges to the democratic minimum and may also be understood as a perturbation of the old traditional nation-state democratic system as we know it or as a discrepancy from its regular norms. The “demoi problem,” as Bohman (2005:298) names it, needs to address multiple demoi that sometimes converge in the same political space, reconcile and potentially accommodate them in a legitimate political space. This multiplicity in the nature

of the subject may bring us to the model of polyarchy that Dahl has analyzed (1956) but in a reversed mode as here; we have *poly-demos* (multiple demoi), which does not by definition lead to *poly-archy* (many correspondents/bodies that rule). Logically one entails the other or emanates from the other, but this causal relation is not necessarily the only one. Offe and Preuss (2016, for instance, notice an important oxymoron scheme in their analysis of the most distinctive form of modern political entity, the EU. While the EU consists of multiple political entities (states), it (the EU) addresses European citizens as one citizenry, thus as one subject (Offe and Preuss 2012: 11–12). It becomes evident that these changes in the subject of democracy impose changes to the vital connection and to the correspondent as well. We may argue that not only the vital connection is transformed but the *nature* of this connection undergoes a critical redefinition as both the subject and the correspondent are under reappraisal. In our understanding of the vital connection, we may consider the term of *voice* that Couldry (2010: 100) inserts, which refers to a broad sense of interests and their representation and “the scale on which individuals interact directly to each other.”

This tension between modern nation-state and changing forms of political association denotes the complexities of democracy and redefines our understanding of the “spatial” (Held 2003: 516–517). Globalization imposes and demands a new approach to democracy in cosmopolitan terms, which is constructed around the new economic reality, globalization of communications, environmental problems, and new systems of legal regulation, changes that have already shifted the weight to an “alternative organizing principle of world order” (Held 2003: 517–520). These progressive transformations are expected to affect local, national, regional, and global levels and, according to Archibugi and Held (2011), are better described under the term of *cosmopolitan democracy*. Archibugi and Held (2011: 437) acknowledge the

uneven ground in which these transformations are taking place, combining idealistic and materialistic expectations that do not always pursue a democratic project, and thus they suggest a number of paths to reach the potential of cosmopolitan democracy, which certainly has supporters and opponents in democratic theory.

Markedly this discussion is tied to the concept of representation, one of the most contested and analyzed elements of democracy among theorists (e.g., see the basic ground for this discussion at Saward 2008). Representation as a *concept* and a *procedure* is the cornerstone of modern parliamentary democracy, although political thought has been highly critical of it on several occasions (see Rousseau, J.S. Mill) when evaluating the linkages between democracy and representation. However, in large scales democratic representation is the only element that can make this vital connection feasible. In today's dispersed and highly fragmented democracies, the question, as we understand it, is probably rephrased as: Is there a representation deficit in modern democracies or a new *representation potential* in which citizens are identified with more than one identity and polity?

Whatever the answer to the previous question might be, "full representation" translated as the potential for any entity to be completely representative of its polity is not easily achievable in large democracies, if not impossible. This is not to say that nation-state politics have died but that as new also transnational political spaces emerge and new associations of interests and opinions are formed, the inquiry into *new forms of correspondents* is inevitable. No doubt the ability for the state to provide the guarantees and mechanisms for the preservation of equity, openness, and democratic settlement of disagreements remains essential for democratic stability around the world. To tackle the emergence of new political spaces and civil associations, traditional representation mechanisms (e.g., political parties) are complemented to a different

degree in each country, with several direct democratic tools such as referenda, citizens' assemblies, and other initiatives that aim to insulate representative democracy with further credentials but not to replace it.

However, the (modern) term (of *representation* requires a scrutiny (also see the discussion in Urbinati and Warren 2008) as these new associations, when they are not submitted to and safeguarded by the democratic minimum, can easily slip to forms of domination by individuals or bodies that have the power either to manipulate interests or to undermine their representation. As we have already mentioned, in all likelihood people are identifying themselves with multiple identities and, consequently, are able to be represented simultaneously by different constituencies or correspondents creating the potential of "multiple polities" (Warren 2018:243). Political theorists are "sensitive" when analyzing these new voluntary associations with regards to the input they provide to democracy and also in relation to the "class-biased" associationalism that usually characterizes them and favors high-profile individuals over others (Putnam 2003:159). To sum up, in order to speak of representation, a theorist should consider current circumstances of (a) cases of detachment of representation to its territorial connotations, (b) the multiplicity in how subjects of demos identify themselves in a community, and (c) the possible correspondent that *seeks* to represent them. This point is clearly related to the broader discussion of modern citizenship, but the purpose of this paper and the limited form of this contribution does not allow us to expand further.

But is the definition of democracy either *in vitro* or *in vivo* enough? Certainly not. There is nothing more dangerous than the loose, if not distorted relation of the *signifier* of democracy with the *signified* of democracy (i.e., how it is actually portrayed and operationalized). Which brings us to point *c*: democratic scholars should critically examine the context and

practices that are implemented in democratic regimes. Unfortunately, it is not that rare to be confronted with a case in which democracies are so-called, yet in practice what we see as a living reality is literally an illiberal democracy. We consider the term *illiberal democracy* one of the inherent paradoxes of democracy and one that proves that to excessively focus only on the implementation of electoral procedures may distract our attention from other equally important parameters. Democracy that deprives citizens of their liberties cannot be named democracy, thus the adjective *illiberal* literally negates the noun “democracy.” In these situations, citizens exercise their right to vote and assign the power to an authority/government that then gradually works against democratic accountability and citizens’ freedoms and turns the state slowly but steadily to an undemocratic status. This phenomenon has been acknowledged recently as “rule of law backslide” (Pech and Scheppele 2017), and it is inextricably associated with a democratic backslide. The recent examples of Poland and Hungary indicate how, within the context of an alleged democracy, the correspondent may gradually derail democracy from its core principles and procedures, create an illiberal state, and lead steadily to the “rule of law backslide” (Pech and Scheppele 2017).

For this reason it is crucial for democratic theory to not only inform the discourse of democracy but also to examine and correlate democracy with its empirical implementation and conclude whether this implementation deserves to be named as democracy. As to why this task should be undertaken by political theorists and not political scientists, we argue that this is a dual-faced task in which both should contribute. The role of the political theorist is to deconstruct and critically scrutinize a specific discourse of democracy while using as a reference point the “archetype” of democracy (*in vitro*); conversely, a political scientist will engage in more empirical work while assessing and testing democratic discourse by utilizing various

democratic measurement indexes and methods. Cooperation between political theorists and scientists may (1) inform theorists of how ideas and principles are actualized and, thus, provide insights on how theory is *read in* the empirical world, and (2) supply scientists with the essential theoretical and conceptual framework that will be the guide in setting the criteria for their assessment plan and understanding new approaches in democracy as these are analyzed in theory.

What is a necessity, despite this division of labor between political theorists and scientists, is that democracy *in actu* should not be evaluated only discursively but rather as a discourse in action that involves both the evaluation of discursive and non discursive practices.

Again, a theorist should deconstruct a specific discourse of democracy to be able to evaluate its democratic nature or not. This, of course, could be done in a number of ways, but the “deconstruction” applied by the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) enables a theorist to examine a specific discourse in its articulation and, thus, its ontology. This approach demystifies discourse and unravels how its chains of signification are constructed. It is important to see how a specific discourse (of democracy) turns *elements* into *moments* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) and analyze the chains of signification and the nodal point(s) that create(s) and signify discourse. We consider that the highly critical discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe at this level can reveal the *semantic knot* of a specific discourse and, thus, provide the researcher useful illuminations in order to clarify declarations of democracy and relations (or not) to theory of democracy. In addition, Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory provides the analytical framework in order to evaluate a particular discourse of democracy both discursively and in its actualization (non discursively)—so how it is manifested and implemented in real world. We should clarify at this point that we employ this deconstructive approach *only at the third* proposition, so only at

the level of specific discourses and not at propositions *a* and *b*, which follow a literally *opposite approach* and rationale in relation to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and philosophy.

This social constructivist approach for *c* proposition does not necessarily clash with an empirical measurement of democratic indicators; rather, it can be combined with it. Departing from different methodological indices, Warren proposes a problem-based approach in order to "assess practices and their institutional combinations in light of their normatively democratic functions" (2017:51), an approach that certainly employs or presupposes a comparative task. Thus, democratic theory should adopt a *contextual, case-sensitive approach* that can analyze the correspondence of a specific "democratic" discourse to the democratic minimum as we delineated briefly in points *a* and *b*. This approach is also aligned, but it is not the same as Mark Warren's suggestion of "nonutopianism," which urges theory to work closely with "circumstances of politics" in order to be progressive (2018:238). It can also be seen as a systemic approach but at another level, as the systems approach speaks for the evaluation of democracy in different social spaces but within the framework of a specific discourse. Thus, whichever approach we may decide to employ for this analysis, we aim to interpret democracy as *substance* and not as *ritual*.

## **Conclusion**

As democracy has always and will always oscillate between theoretical norms and empirical manifestations, the theorist of democracy should ensure that democracy cannot be addressed solely as an idea; rather, it needs to be analyzed as *living experiment* by taking under close scrutiny the reality in which it is situated and constructed. The democratic minimum should be understood as the core of the discourse of democracy, and any discourse declared as "democratic"

should be analyzed in comparison or with reference to it. Our threefold evaluative framework can be seen as an evaluation path and a new organizing framework of relevant literature toward this effort. Again, the discourse of democracy can be seen neither as a normative limit nor as a limit to develop different models of democracy, yet a notion of normativity should be present. However, models of democracy, deliberative or agonistic or any other, are only structural representations of democracy, and thus any failure of them should not be considered as a failure of democracy.

A theorist of democracy, then, is confronted with a continuous challenge to critically examine and combine the emerging conceptualizations of the *subject* and the *correspondent* by paying specific attention to the *vital connection* and how this is operationalized and secured, as this, in the end, defines the legitimacy and quality of the democracy in question.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See the very interesting analysis of Manitakis at [http://law-constitution.web.auth.gr/manitakis/files/kratos\\_polt\\_dimokr.pdf](http://law-constitution.web.auth.gr/manitakis/files/kratos_polt_dimokr.pdf).