

The Right to Stand, The Right to Vote and the Democratic Value of Elections

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Must we make politics our profession to stand successfully as a candidate for legislative office? Or must we renounce the exercise of a right – the right to stand as a candidate, and to form part of a legislature if we win – because we want to look after our kids, and others who depend on us?

In a democracy, the answer to both questions, I believe, should be ‘no’. However, as a matter of brute fact, the answer in most countries at present is likely to be ‘yes’. It is likely to be ‘yes’ because our politics are still organised on the assumption that there is someone at home, looking after the kids, the house, the parents – a woman, as she is usually called. And democratic politics are now generally organised on the assumption that, unless you are exceptionally wealthy or well known, you cannot be a credible candidate for office unless you have devoted most of your life to serving a particular political party and moving up through its ranks.

But when you stop to think about it, being an ordinary MP, while difficult in ways that explain why the position should be voluntary, not mandatory, is unlikely to be beyond the competence of most people who have never imagined standing as a candidate for parliament. Too often we conflate the epistemic, political, physical, and moral demands of being a minister, a Prime Minister or President, with the demands on ordinary MPs, thereby exaggerating the individualistic aspects of the job, its exceptional, discretionary, and solitary character and ignoring its routinised, bureaucratic and solidaristic elements. (Ollion 2021) And, of course, most of us are quite ignorant about what the job entails – and how it might be designed and organised better to fit with contemporary norms and ideals. Hence, the challenge that motivates this talk: how better to imagine what democratic politics might mean or require in a world such as ours, where some forms of representative government is necessary – even if there is more scope for direct democracy that is often imagined (el-Wakil 2017; el-Wakil and McKay 2020) ?

This is a very new project, and my first presentation of some of these ideas. However, I hope today to be able to persuade you: 1 that the combination of the roles of voter and legislative candidate that democratic elections involve can be desirable, perhaps necessary, way for people to combine the personal and political aspects of life once they see each other as peers; 2. That exercise of a democratic right to stand cannot be dependent on membership of a political party; 3. nonetheless, political parties may have a democratic justification if they help to reduce the challenges of reconciling equality and accountability *amongst* legislators and *between* them and other citizens.

My starting point is the assumption that democracy can take many forms and be helpfully conceptualised, justified and institutionalised in different ways. However, I find it hard to take inspiration from the Greeks when the major challenge of contemporary democratic life is how to organise politics once most citizens must earn their own living and find time to look after the kids. Nor do I find it likely that randomly selected legislators can solve our problems once directly participative legislative assemblies, as in ancient Greece, are no longer on the cards. (A. Guerrero 2021; A. A. Guerrero 2014; Landemore 2020; Lever 2023c; 2023b; Destri and Lever 2023) In short, while lotteries, like rotation, are perfectly sensible ways to share scarce and desirable opportunities amongst democratic citizens, (Saunders 2008; Stone 2011; Duxbury 1999) it is hard to see how we can raise participation rates in randomly selected assemblies above the 4% current amongst ‘larger’ assemblies at present (ie bodies of 150-300 people), (Jacquet 2017; 2020) sufficiently to answer to democratic ideas of equality, freedom and self-government. (Stone 2024; Lever 2023c; Umbers 2021) Hence the importance of trying to rethink democratic politics, and of the democratic potential and justification of elections.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. For the purposes of this talk I assume that a democratic public/private distinction runs *through* not *around* political parties, although as Gideon Rahat observes, many countries treat parties as purely personal associations, making it difficult to study their internal decisions. (Rahat 2007; 2013) Seeing parties as purely political associations risks underestimating the scope for choice that democratic citizens must have in deciding whether to form/join a political party and, if so, what party to form/join. Hence, party membership is partly personal, generating powers, privileges, and duties for some citizens, and not others. (Shiffrin 2005; J. White and Ypi 2016; Rosenblum 2008a) If successful, however, parties help to constitute the membership of the legislature and even of the government, or ministerial corps. It is deeply implausible, then, that parties can be purely personal associations philosophically, whatever their legal situation.

2. I assume that democratic citizens have interests in *not* being part of a democratic legislature as well as interests in being part of one – and that, *a priori* we have good reason to treat them as equally compelling. We may want to be candidates in future, not now, for reasons of principle and strategy (Ollion 2021); and we can have principled as well as practical reasons to reject electoral politics or to embrace it. (Lever and Volacu 2018; Lever 2010) Democracies can force citizens to do a variety of things that they do not want: to pay taxes, serve in the military, serve on juries for example. But these forms of coercion require justification, as would a duty to serve in either a randomly selected or elected legislature. I am sceptical that such a justification can be produced but, whether it can or not, it will have to take into account the legitimate reasons why citizens might not want to *serve* – or, in the case of elections, even to *compete* for office.

3. Finally, I assume that there are multiple reasonable ways to understand the concepts/variables with which this talk is concerned with– e.g., equality, democracy, rights, voting. I will try to avoid taking a stand on them today. However, because democracy is a competitive as well as a cooperative matter, the right to stand and the right to vote are not a right to get what you want; and what it means for those rights to be equal, and for citizens to have an equal opportunity to exercise them, is hard to determine.

For the moment, I focus on national legislative politics, both because this seems to be where dissatisfaction with contemporary democracy is most obvious and most distressing, and because it may provide helpful clues to what is necessary, possible, and desirable in other areas of government, whether local, supranational, occupational and so on. I will start by highlighting the absence of a philosophical literature on the right to stand – or, indeed, much of a social-scientific literature for that matter, either. I will then suggest a way of thinking of it as a democratic right that, when suitably defined, justified and institutionalised, works in conjunction with the right to vote to help citizens reconcile the personal and political aspects of their lives. I then turn to the implications of this approach to the right to stand and to vote for the justification of the role and

powers of political parties in a democracy before briefly concluding with the importance of the right to stand for an account of elections as ‘instruments of democracy’. (Powell 2000)

A. The state of the literature

Democratic elections are meant to express the political authority and agency of ordinary citizens: people who, despite lacking special virtues, knowledge, or resources, are able, and entitled, to govern themselves. (Beerbohm, Eric 2012; Weale 1999; Ceva and Ottonelli 2022) Democracy, therefore, is meant to protect us from governments that are insensitive to our needs, impervious to our agency, and indifferent to our aspirations. Hence the democratic ideal of a government ‘by, for and of the people’ captures three central and intuitive ideas about what democratic government is, who it is for, and what it should look like. It is *by* us, because *we* are the agents of government, the people with sufficient virtues, knowledge, and resources to shape and guide our collective affairs. It is government *for* us because it is government concerned with *our* rights and wellbeing, our duties and relations to others, our place in a wider world. Finally, it is government *of* us because *we* are the ones whose authority and agency, whose virtue, knowledge, and resources are to be fostered and shaped by our government. (Christiano 2008; J. Cohen 2009; Estlund 2008)

If *that* is what democracy is, on widely shared premises about its nature and importance, there is something puzzling about the way philosophers, social scientists and citizens talk about it, and think about its practice. Given this picture of democracy we might expect them to be as keen to debate the content and justification of the right to *stand* as candidates for electoral office, and to serve if selected (‘the right to stand’ for short) as to debate their rights to *vote* – perhaps more so, given that the successful

exercise of our rights to stand entitle us to be *legislators*, which the successful use of our rights to vote cannot. Rights to vote without rights to stand – or the ability to exercise them freely – are a recipe for elected oligarchy and dictatorship, not electoral democracy. Yet, while the right to vote and its democratic significance, have received ample philosophical attention,(Beckman 2018; 2006; 2009; Mráz 2021; 2020; Poama and Theuns 2019; Volacu 2020; Lippert-Rasmussen 2011) the right to *stand* is the neglected child of democratic theory. For example, Dennis Thompson’s important book on electoral justice, *Just Elections*, (Thompson, 2002); has nothing to say about the right to stand directly; nor does the just-published *Routledge Handbook of Political Parties* (2023). That neglect makes it hard to know what fairness to *candidates*, as distinct from *voters* or *parties* should play in the theory and practice of democracy. (Bhatia 2020; Moore 2023). Even anguish over citizens’ failure to vote, (Lijphart 1997a; Birch 2016; Hill 2002; Maskivker 2019) has no counterpart for the right to stand, although citizens can do far more as elected representatives than they can as voters.

Above all, neglect of the right to stand makes it difficult to respond to claims that elections are an undemocratic, not a democratic way to select people to office, and that it is reliance on them, as much or more than anything else, which explains ‘the pathologies’ of contemporary democracy, as Guerrero calls them. (Landemore 2020; Owen and Smith 2018; Abizadeh 2020; A. Guerrero 2021). Hence the problem with most ways of measuring democracy at the moments which, following Robert Dahl’s influential study of polyarchy, conceptualizes the ‘eligibility to participate in elections’ in terms of the right to vote, with no reference to the right to stand. Instead, the latter is folded into other variables in ways that obscure its distinctive significance to the differences between democratic and undemocratic elections. (Dahl, Appendix A, p 231 and p 236 and V-Democracy Report, 2023 p 54.)

Unfortunately, recent developments in the political theory of representation may have deepened the obscurity around the right to stand, albeit unintentionally, even as they underlined the moral and political importance of an embodied conception of legislators. Since the 1990s, democratic theorists and practitioners fighting sexual and racial inequality have drawn attention to the importance of citizens’ ascriptive, not just their

voluntary, associations to their freedom and equality as voters (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1998; Williams 1998; Guinier 1994). They showed that the scarcity of women as candidates for legislative office means that women can politically represent only the interests they share with men, whereas the overwhelming number of male candidates enable men politically to represent the interests that distinguish them from other men *and* any interests *qua* men, that distinguish them from women. The problem of securing adequate representation for ascriptive racial and ethnic minorities is similar, but likely to be particularly acute in majoritarian systems (Guinier 1994; Abizadeh 2021b). Hence, the ‘politics of presence’, as Anne Phillips called it, formed the basis for egalitarian arguments in favour of more descriptive/group sensitive forms of representation (Phillips 2020), including preferences for proportional over majoritarian electoral systems.

Importantly, these arguments for more descriptively adequate representation were based on the claims to equality of citizens as *voters*, rather than their claims to equality as *candidates*. Phillips, herself, was sceptical that the latter would provide an adequate basis for more egalitarian political practices because no one has a right to be a legislator (Phillips 1998, 62, 81). Hence, she thought, claims for more representative legislatures based on the right to stand can at best be ‘negative’ arguments against prejudice, and would lack the positive case for structural change available by focusing on the equality of voters. However, citizens interests in standing are distinct from, and not reducible to, their interests in voting. I may lack reasons to vote, given the inadequacy of the choices on offer but, for that very reason, feel compelled to stand, and try to change our inadequate institutions. I may also be moved by the desire to share in ‘the realization of self which comes from a skilful and devoted exercise of social duties’, as Rawls put it (Rawls 1971, 1.14; Weber 1972). In both cases, it would seem, citizens’ claims to stand are as capable of justifying structural change, and more egalitarian political opportunities, as their claims to vote (Edmundson 2020; Krishnamurthy 2013, Rawls 1971). There is therefore no need to reduce the one to the other.

We might assume that if voters have an adequate range of candidates from which to choose, candidates will *also* have adequate opportunities to stand for office. Given the notorious difficulty of understanding what it is for opportunities to be equal, if people are entitled to do different things with their lives and resources, the theoretical and practical

advantages of distinguishing rights to vote and to stand, without having to distinguish the *opportunities to exercise* those rights, are very considerable (Wolff 1991; Wolff and de-Shalit 2007; Walzer, Michael 1983; Miller 2006; O'Neill and White 2018). Disadvantages and inequalities can 'cluster', as Wolff puts it (Wolff and Shalit 2007), or 'intersect', as Crenshaw describes a similar phenomenon (Crenshaw 1991; 1989). Strategies for combatting one form of inequality (being poorer and more infirm than others say) may therefore help to combat others (e.g., the likelihood of imprisonment for illegal drug use because you are a poor black drug user, not a wealthy white one) (Roberts 1997), without anyone deliberately have to seek both ends. Wolff and Shalit conceptualise the phenomena in terms of the reasons to promote 'fertile functionings', such as the ability to maintain social relations with others, or to feed, clothe and shelter oneself and one's family, and the removal or mitigation of 'corrosive disadvantages', such as illiteracy, chronic ill-health, physical insecurity. So, the things that promote equal opportunity for voting may do so for standing, too.

Unfortunately, that will often not be true. The best way to ensure choice for voters may be for parties to select the most advantaged members of each social group, rather than equalizing the opportunities of citizens as candidates across the social ladder (Johnathan Wolff and de-Shalit 2007; S. White 2019; Johnathan Wolff 2019; G. A. Cohen 1995). (These issues are a staple of the literature on affirmative action but apply in principle to any policy area.) If it is important for parties to offer *substantively different* political programmes to voters (Dennis F Thompson 2002; Rahat, Gideon 2013; 2007; J. White and Ypi 2016; Rosenblum 2008b), a *descriptively adequate* choice for the most disadvantaged may mean limiting the opportunities of their best off members, in order to encourage them to develop and/or exercise their skills as *candidates*, rather than in business, journalism or the arts. That need not mean threatening or coercing them to stand, rather than playing on feelings of guilt and/or solidarity, so that instead of trying to equalize their *own* opportunities, they devote themselves to the service to others. (Compare the conceptions of our egalitarian duties in G. A. Cohen 2002; 2008 and Alcock 1991; with those in John Rawls 2001; Dworkin 2002; Clayton and Williams 2002.)

In short, the moral and strategic dimensions of choice mean that we must distinguish opportunities to stand and to vote for individuals and for voluntary and ascriptive groups

to know when citizens' opportunities are equal and to evaluate the options when (or if) they are not. This is likely to be a challenging task – though one that is worth doing and which I hope to be able to work on soon.

B. The Right to Stand and the Right to Vote

Fortunately, for our purposes we can set aside the challenge of determining when people's political opportunities are equal and focus instead on the way that democratic elections create two distinct, though overlapping, political roles: that of *voter* and that of *candidate* for office. As we have seen, the content and justification of the one cannot be reduced to the other, because we can have interests in taking part in the legislature of our country whether or not we have anyone to vote for, and interests in selecting our legislature whether or not we wish to be a candidate for it.¹

Importantly, in a democracy, some people can and will fit both roles at once, being candidates for the votes of others and, themselves, eligible also to vote in an election for which they are candidate. It is important that citizens can fill both roles simultaneously so that they are not forced to relinquish one of the defining political rights of democratic citizenship to exercise the other. Not only would that be unfair to unsuccessful candidates, but it would ignore the fact that the one right *is not a substitute* for the other, nor are the opportunities to exercise that right as equals. The right to vote and the right to stand, in other words, enable citizens to do different things; things that would be unavailable to them were they not citizens of a democracy and that are important to the definition and justification of democratic politics.

Bi. Elections create the *role of voter* and, in so doing, set a floor under the ability of citizens to participate in legislative politics.² They mean that even if citizens cannot or

¹ For more on our interests in standing – or, at least, a preliminary presentation of them, see Lever and Mraz (Lever and Mráz 2022) an unpublished manuscript.

² I borrow the language of floors from an important article by Arend Lijphart, advocating compulsory voting. Assuming that equality always requires both floors and ceilings, Lijphart argued that one person one vote sets the *ceiling* for political participation as a voter and that compulsory voting is necessary to construct *the floor* beneath it. However, the idea of the right to vote as a *ceiling* on voter participation appears to overlook the other ways in which citizens can participate in elections while also voting; which suggests that it is more plausibly understood as a *floor*, in so far as we are concerned with a range

do not want to take up other political roles available within a democratic political system – eg candidate, party member and partisan, electoral assistant etc – they can at least take part as equals in selecting amongst candidates for office.

The role of voter is symbolically important but, also, of real political importance in systems where any built-in advantages of incumbents are not needlessly exaggerated by *other* advantages (as in the US Senate) and where voters have multiple attractive options before them, so that the outcome of elections is not a foregone conclusion. Importantly, the role of voter is a role of *chooser*, and reflects the democratic idea that government is by and for citizens with a capacity for political agency and responsibility. Hence, *their* views about the purposes of government, the best way to achieve those purposes and the people best suited to organise and direct collective efforts, need to play a suitable role in determining who governs them and how. (Ceva and Ottonelli 2022; Destri and Lever, 2023)

This role for citizen choice might seem peculiar in forms of direct democracy where citizens are guaranteed a place in framing laws that bind them – as in ancient Athens, for instance. But once that is no longer possible, I can think of no plausible alternative to it. Hence, if we share ancient Greek, as well as contemporary, concerns that regular rotation is necessary or desirable for democratic government (Owen and Smith 2018) – as I do – term limits may be an appropriate constraint on the electoral choice of citizens;³ and something similar is true if one also believes that quotas, reserved seats and other such devices might be necessary or desirable to ensure *equality of opportunity* for legislative candidates and adequate opportunities for the descriptive representation of voters. (Mráz 2021) In short, the position of voter, defined by

property that can be conceptualized *vertically* rather than *horizontally*, or as a *standard* or *injunction*, limiting variation. (Lijphart 1997b)

³ Term limits constrain the choice of voters, candidates and parties in ways that need justifying – though the difficulties of doing that should not be exaggerated. The main problem, as I see it, is that term limits are likely to exacerbate problematic tendencies to short-termism, with which even 5 year electoral cycles are associated. However, the main alternatives, which I find appealing, involve facilitating electoral challenges to candidates and the promotion of new candidates. These, too, are likely to promote incumbent anxiety about their chances of re-election, even if they are designed to promote more inclusive and egalitarian legislatures. But given incumbent advantages, those anxieties may be justified and bearable.

democratic elections, seems designed to set a *participatory floor* under citizens, securing rights to participate as equals in collectively important decisions, regardless of their personal circumstances, professional aspirations, and current resources. Hence the right to vote needs to be institutionalised, justified, and regulated with this *democratic* function firmly in mind.

Bii The second role created by elections is that of *candidate* for legislative office. It enables citizens to modulate their participation in legislative politics above the floor set by the right to vote, in ways that maximise the possibilities of combining political participation with personal duties and aspirations – at least where the right to stand is embedded in suitable institutional and support systems, including job-sharing, personal entitlement to financial and other support as candidates and, if successful, as elected legislator.

The key points here are that people who must earn a living are likely to incur *obligations* to others – to employers, employees, co-workers, relatives, customers and so on – that cannot be easily dropped from one moment to another. (The difficulty with randomly chosen assemblies, where you don't know whether you are likely to be selected until you are). In addition to those obligations, citizens are likely also to have legitimate *aspirations* about the sort of work they do, and its place in their lives. These obligations and aspirations have a role in determining what opportunities citizens must have to exercise their right to stand, or to participate in democratic politics as candidates for office. Otherwise, an equal right to stand will become – as it currently is – a purely formal right for most citizens, defined, justified, and institutionalised in ways that are indifferent to the needs, the freedoms and equality of the people for whom it is meant to be fundamental. Indeed, what is true for democratic citizens – once slavery, or dependence on the exploited labour of others (at home or abroad) is no longer considered a right - is true for their personal relations as well, because they can be assumed to have *aspirations* not just *obligations* in personal matters that affect the forms of love, care and support they can offer to others and that they can ask for in return.

If democratic politics is to be a politics for ordinary citizens, rather than for a privileged elite or a set of rather peculiar, even alienating, and unattractive characters, the right to stand needs to be interpreted, justified, and organised in a way that reflects these challenges to citizen participation. The democratic ideal, as I see it is that, within the bounds of equality, the twin roles of voter and candidate give people the freedom to modulate their political role in response to their circumstances, and to plan ahead, in so far as they know that participation as a legislative representative is something they might want to try, or for which they feel a calling.

C. *Implications for democratic parties*

In a democracy the exercise of a right to stand should be no more dependent on a willingness to form or join a political party than our exercise of the right to vote. (Wolf 2014)⁴ Yet, routinely, debates about the selection, promotion, financing, and discipline of candidates to the legislature are reduced to the rights of political expression, association, and choice of *parties* or - as in debates about the merits of open and closed primaries - about the claims of citizens as *voters*, as compared to as party members. (Rosenblum 2008b; J. White and Ypi 2016; Bonotti 2017; Wolkenstein 2020; Moore 2023). The result are conceptions of electoral democracy that confuse democratic competition with the confrontation of electoral cartels, however appealing.

Taking seriously the twin roles of voter and candidate in democratic elections highlights the importance of distinguishing the claims of individuals to stand for election – and to have a place in the legislature if successful – from those of parties. The animus against parties and partisanship, common in the literature on randomly selected legislatures, is exaggerated, (Lever 2023b; 2023a; Landa and Pevnick 2021) ignoring the reasons why the organized confrontation of competing perspectives can be collectively beneficial, as well as a legitimate expression of reasonable differences of opinion, affiliation and interest. Still, it is unclear why legislators should be members of organized political parties, whatever the value of the latter in articulating and promoting competing visions of the common good or advancing partisan but legitimate differences of interest. The

⁴ Loammi wolf's article is a critical evaluation of a decision by the South African Constitutional Court that refused to allow non-party-affiliated legislative candidates and members.

fact that parties might have a legitimate role in preparing partisan electoral platforms and in *campaigning* for them does not mean that they have a legitimate role in *government*.⁵ To suppose otherwise underestimates the challenges of justifying party discipline in a legislature that is meant to govern in the interests of all, and in which successful candidates are likely to have significant duties to each other because they are all, equally, the repository of the hopes, fears, aspirations, and calculations of a democratically constituted electorate.

Some of those difficulties might be alleviated by a clearer sense of the rights of independently successful candidates within the legislature to financial aid for staff, to offices, to desirable positions on committees and so on. For example, some countries like Portugal or Italy, group legislators with no party affiliation together *as though they were a party* for the purposes of distributing legislative resources, opportunities, and offices. (Wolf 2014) Not only might this provide a model for the equal rights of independent candidates to state financial support, media access and the like prior to an election, but it suggests a way in which party discipline, even within a legislature, might be made compatible with the rights of candidates to ‘exit’ their parties on grounds of conscience, without thereby exiting the legislature or being forced to join an existing party or to try to create a new one, themselves.

In short, attention to the dual positions of voter and candidate highlights the importance of distinguishing political parties as *agents of government*, from their role in forming and *campaigning* for partisan political objections. Although the two roles cannot be sharply distinguished, in so far as parties are entitled to select and promote candidates to the legislature⁶, the fact that one was elected as a member of a particular party and/or with

⁵ Pascal Sciarini explains that Swiss political parties originated as campaigning associations in the context of *referenda* and therefore originally had no place in the legislature. This origin may help to explain why they are still considered purely private associations, with no obligations to reveal their finances, or to limit the amounts they can raise and spend at election time. Whatever the case historically, the current situation is clearly inadequate democratically.

⁶ It is the role in *selecting* rather than just *supporting* or *promoting* legislative candidates that seems to distinguish political parties from other democratic associations such as unions, churches, families; as well as their presence in the legislature and their right to discipline legislators politically – rather than, say, by threatening them with excommunication or the withdrawal of their union membership. But whether that distinction is justified and if so, why, requires the ability to differentiate amongst democratic associations in ways that are likely to be quite complicated unless there is some reason why associations should only have one function.

its support, hardly means that one is entitled, let alone obliged, to *remain* a party member once one is a legislator, any more than it implies that married candidates who are successful cannot subsequently seek a divorce. Hence – or so it seems to me – the challenges that a democratic conception of elections poses to parties cannot be limited to their role *prior* to an election, (or the constraints that they pose on an equal right to stand and to vote) but extend also to their relationship with successful candidates and their duties to *other legislators* and the *voters* who selected them.

Still, I think there is a way to understand the democratic role of parties within legislatures that reflects the claims of citizens as successful candidates, not just as voters. If my hunch is right, it also gives us a way to think about the transition in countries like Britain, from a parliament of wealthy candidates, each with a personal vote, loosely associated together in political parties, to a democratic conception of legislatures in which political parties are entitled to play a substantial, and disciplinary role, albeit one that may be rather different from what is currently the case.⁷ The idea occurred to me when reflecting on the problems of governing as a member of a randomly selected legislature. While it will not surprise those of you who work on legislative studies that my story turns on parties as solutions to coordination problems, what interests me as a political theorist are the ways that this story, if plausible, highlights the morally creative power of institutions, to borrow a formula from Barbara Herman. (Herman 1993)

Parties, Political Responsibility, Equality

The story goes roughly like this: voters have both the right and the duty to hold their representatives to account for the harms that they do or cause through their negligence. But given modern conditions, it is almost impossible for most voters to know what their representative has done, or failed to do *personally*. Hence citizens in a legislature where voters must judge legislators individually – as would be the case in a randomly selected assembly, or one in which legislators are elected for their personal attributes – run the real risk of punishing legislators unfairly, if they punish them at all – or

⁷ I've not been able to work on this yet, but I ran the idea by Jonathan Perry (who I've yet to meet) and he found it very plausible, so I'm hoping that there might be something to this historically, not just normatively – though, of course, for good and bad, the one doesn't depend on the other.

misallocating praise, as well as blame. The problem is particularly acute because citizens cannot know much of what legislators tried, but failed, to do because of the uncooperative behaviour of others; nor how far that uncooperative behaviour was justified. There is thus a real risk of voters treating legislators in ways that undermine their equality with each other and, if the punishments that voters are allowed to impose on legislators are severe enough, of undermining their equality with non-legislator citizens. Put simply, where legislators have no reason to trust, support and sacrifice for each other it is not only likely that they will govern badly, but it is also likely that citizens will find it impossible to reconcile the demands of equality and accountability.

Political parties do not prevent those problems completely, but they help to mitigate them, by creating a distinctively *political* form of responsibility that citizens can use to hold their legislators to account in addition to whatever sanctions and rewards are available through *legal* or *social* means. That responsibility is collective and, being collective, helps to mitigate the informational challenges of judging legislators as individuals (challenges that, importantly, depend on what *does not* happen, quite as much as what *does*). In so far as that responsibility is collective, citizens need only know about the particular goals, and aspirations of the party, and the steps it took to realise them (and their consequences) – rather than trying to decide whether those of the particular candidates made sense in themselves, or in relationship to the possibilities for action created by the *other* members of the legislature. Above all, absent evidence to the contrary (perhaps particularly effective or helpful work in the constituency, if there is one; explicit dissent from party positions or interparty initiatives), judgements of individual legislators are based primarily on that of the party to which they belong, and the alternatives to it. To that extent, *personal* blame is mitigated and shared, though not avoided, based on one's public and political ties to others.

So understood, the point of political parties from a democratic point of view is to facilitate effective government, by mitigating collective action problems *and* creating the conditions for democratic forms of accountability amongst legislators and between them collectively and the population at large. If that is their point, we would have a justification for party affiliation – and a variety of forms of party discipline – *within* the legislature – as well as standards for determining what types of parties, party-systems

and party-discipline are compatible with democracy. Because political parties can play that role in the presence of legislative members who are not members of any party – a democratic case for legislative parties does not require legislators to be members of party nor determine a particular proportion between independent and party-affiliated legislators.⁸

Hence, attention to the right to stand can help to provide a democratic justification for political parties as agents of *government*, not simply as vehicles for political campaigns. From the perspective of candidates and would-be legislators, parties, if suitably constituted and regulated, help to meet the legitimate demands for effective government and for accountability by voters, while reflecting the limits of what a single legislator can do absent cooperation from others. They create the possibility of distinctively political forms of accountability (to voters and to fellow candidates and legislators) for their exercise of the powers and opportunities that come with being the representatives of a democratic electorate. Those forms of accountability involve distinctively political forms of reward and sanction, which are not reducible to those appropriate to the violation of legal or social norms, or to purely moral injunctions. As a result, they help to preserve equality amongst legislators and between them and the electorate in ways that prevent the confusion of political weakness, misjudgment and error with crime, while reducing the likelihood that political grievances will find their outlet in extra-legal threats, force, and violence.⁹ Hence, attention to the right to stand can illuminate the democratic justification for parties in ways that are difficult if we focus only on *voters*, (since voters have no place in the legislature) or on *parties* (given that it is unclear why they should be entitled to do what voters or other secondary associations, cannot).

⁸ If there are too many independents, it might make threaten party discipline and the ability of parties to do their job; but it may simply provide evidence that neither legislators nor voters find parties to be fulfilling their democratic function adequately and need to be reconstituted in some form.

⁹ I need to think more about McCormick's views of democratically legitimate punishment, based on the Roman republic, but I'm inclined to think that limitations on the right to stand in future (or the exercise of other political offices) are better treated as the democratic equivalent of exile/banishment/ostracism in ancient Greece. (Forsdyke 2005) The forced dissolution of a political party would be the collective form of this sort of sanction. But I have not started to think about these issues and their bearing on the reduction of personal violence within elected legislatures. *Find NYRB review ?gary wills on physical violence within pre-civil war American legislatures.*

If this way of thinking about political parties is persuasive – one that focuses on them as instruments of *government* rather than as *campaigning* entities primarily- it is likely that political parties are not as antithetical to random selection as proponents of the latter suppose. Independently selected legislators have interests in effective governance, as do other citizens. Unlike the latter, however, they are liable to blame for failing to use the powers entrusted to them effectively. Hence, it is quite likely that they will seek to organize themselves into working groups of the like-minded and trusted –with their own objectives, forms of reward and punishment and ways of approaching the task of government. But that is just to say that the justification of political parties presented here takes seriously the difficulties of protecting equality *amongst* legislators, not simply *between* them and other citizens – once one is forced to confront the threats to equality posed by the conjunction of radical collective action problems and otherwise reasonable demands for accountability.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

I hope to have persuaded you that attention to the right to stand, and its implications for accounts of the rights and duties of voters, candidates and parties can illuminate the democratic value of elections. Neglecting the right to stand – as is common in both the philosophical and social scientific literature – leads to exaggerated and implausible

¹⁰ Abizadeh, for example, focuses only on the challenges of securing equality and accountability between legislators and non-legislative citizens, whereas there is a *horizontal* not just *vertical* dimensions to these demands in a democracy. (Abizadeh 2021; 2020). Part of the difficulty arises because of Abizadeh's implausibly sharp distinction between equality and accountability, which he sees as inevitably in conflict and therefore appropriately institutionalised in completely different ways – one in an elected and the other in a selected legislative chamber. However, some of the problems with his account come from a failure to recognise the severity and predictability of the collective action problems randomly selected legislators will face, and the temptations to blame shifting and credit claiming they create. See also Guerrero, (A. Guerrero 2021) who seems to believe that blame shifting and credit claiming are unique to partisan politics; or Landemore (Landemore 2020) who seems to think that accountability can be largely legal or devolved to another randomly selected assembly. (Destri and Lever 2023). See also Owen and Smith, (Owen and Smith 2018)

who appear to have collective action problems in mind when they insist that a randomly selected legislature couldn't set its own agenda; but then beg the question when it comes to their ability to govern, or to how accountability can fairly operate in those circumstances. The common assumption seems to be that a randomly selected assembly should be held to account collectively, rather than individually, but the assumption is never made explicit and its justification is unclear given that randomisation means there was no reason to suppose that they would be able to work together effectively.

claims about the rights of voters and parties, and inadequate attention to citizens' claims to take part in governing, rather than just electing those who govern. Neglect of the right to stand, then, makes it difficult to distinguish democratic from undemocratic rights, duties, and opportunities and to see electoral democracy as anything other than a false promise, or a contradiction in terms. Such consequences are hardly surprising if the conception of electoral democracy we are using is radically incomplete and biased in all sorts of ways. Hence, I hope that further attention to the right to stand, and its relationship to the right to vote and implications for political parties may help us improve the theory and practice of electoral democracy.

Thank You.

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