

Epistemic approaches to deliberative democracy

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Abstract

This article offers a comprehensive review of the major theoretical issues and findings of the epistemic approaches to deliberative democracy. Section 2 surveys the norms and ideals of deliberative democracy in relation to deliberation's ability to "track the truth." Section 3 examines the conditions under which deliberative mini-publics can "track the truth." Section 4 discusses how "truth-tracking" deliberative democracy is possible through the division of epistemic labor in a deliberative system.

1 | INTRODUCTION

This article offers a comprehensive review of the major theoretical issues and findings of the epistemic approaches to deliberative democracy. Section 2 surveys the norms and ideals of deliberative democracy in relation to deliberation's ability to "track the truth"—deliberation's ability to produce, pool, aggregate, and transmit knowledge distributed across civil society. Section 3 examines the conditions under which deliberative mini-publics (e.g., Deliberative Poll®, citizens' juries, and consensus conferences) can "track the truth." Section 4 discusses how "truth-tracking" is possible through the division of epistemic labor between experts and citizens in a deliberative system.

2 | NORMATIVE FOUNDATIONS OF EPISTEMIC DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Deliberative democracy is a democratic theory that emphasizes deliberation as the source of democratic legitimacy and the mechanism for democratic decision-making.¹ Epistemic democracy is another democratic theory that privileges the "truth-tracking" ability of democracy as a normative justification of democracy.² Because deliberative democracy values reason-giving, justification, and evidence, many deliberative democrats are drawn to epistemic defenses of democracy. However, the relationship between deliberative democracy and epistemic democracy remains controversial.

While some theorists eschew the epistemic theories of deliberative democracy (Saffon & Urbinati, 2013), others believe that deliberative democracy can be justified on its epistemic merits. For example, Talisse (2009) argues that deliberative democracy—because of its emphasis on reason-giving and justification—all deliberative democratic theories are epistemic theories. More tempered defenses of epistemic versions of deliberative democracy can be found in Estlund (2008) and Peter (2008), among others. More recently, Landemore (2017) pronounces that

deliberative democracy has taken an “epistemic” turn. Surveying the empirical deliberative literature, Habermas (2006) recognizes that deliberative democracy still has an epistemic dimension.³

2.1 | Deliberative democracy and democratic legitimacy

Legitimacy is one of the central normative concepts for deliberative democracy (Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2010; Thompson, 2008). There are two ways to understand democratic legitimacy: procedural and substantive. According to procedural interpretations of democratic legitimacy, democracy (or democratic decision) is legitimate if and only if its outcomes satisfy certain procedural conditions.

The first condition is fairness. Deliberative democrats usually interpret procedural fairness as inclusive participation: Outcomes should be justifiable, in principle, to all those affected by them. Laws resulting from a robust deliberation in which everyone has the chance to participate are justifiable to all those living under them (Chambers, 2003; Manin, 1987). The difficulty with this procedural condition is that it is incapable of judging what constitutes a good or bad outcome—a procedurally fair deliberation is not equivalent to a good deliberative outcome.

The second condition is freedom, equality, and rationality. Joshua Cohen (1997) argues that “outcomes are democratically legitimate if and only if they could be the object of a free and reasoned agreement among equals” (p. 73). These procedural considerations are captured by an ideal deliberative procedure. Such procedure “captures the notion of justification through public argument and reasoning among equal citizens, and serves in turn as a model for deliberative institutions” (p. 72). The difficulty with ideal proceduralism is that the good outcome is evaluated against the ideal deliberative procedures, but the ideal deliberative procedures are insufficient to explain why the outcome is good or bad.

Some theorists turn to substantive interpretations of democratic legitimacy which require that the legitimacy of democratic outcomes be measured against some substantive standard (Estlund, 2008; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson express the relationship between the quality of deliberation and the legitimacy of deliberative outcomes as follows: Legitimate outcomes do not only meet the procedural conditions of reciprocity, accountability, and publicity but are also constrained by constitutional principles of basic liberty, basic opportunity, and fair opportunity. The latter three constitutional principles are substantive constraints on the acceptable outcomes produced by a deliberative procedure (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996, 2004).

Subsequently, David Estlund (2008) argues that democratic legitimacy requires *both* procedural fairness and the substantive qualities of decisions. The substantive constraint on acceptable outcomes is given an *epistemic* interpretation in Estlund's theory: Democracy has the tendency to produce correct or just decisions better than random, and it is better than non-democratic alternatives acceptable from the standpoint of public reason (Estlund, 2008).⁴ According to Estlund, even if democracy may not be the best epistemic version possible, it is still more desirable than many alternatives.

Although there is a considerable theoretical disagreement about the role of procedural fairness and epistemic competency, theorists generally accept that both features are necessary for democratic legitimacy.⁵

2.2 | The problem of epistocracy

Given the desideratum of epistemic competency, should we expect epistemic elites to make all collective decisions? Epistemic experts, by definition, know more about a given topic than others, and they are identifiable as credible knowers on a given topic.⁶ If you have a heart issue, then you go to a cardiologist who knows all about things related to the heart. Cardiologists have necessary expertise (in terms of education, training, and knowledge) to make good decisions.

Analogously, political decisions should be left to experts who know more than others and can make good decisions. Since political decisions are complex and often technical in nature, it makes sense to appeal to experts. Some political problems lend itself to a technical solution—for instance, if we need to decide how many fire hydrants we need in a city, we would consult an expert who could do a cost–benefit analysis, and the problem is solved. The fire hydrant example involves factual things in nature. If one were to give deference to experts based on their superior knowledge, then one would be committed to *epistocracy*.

Epistocracy is a thesis that one's superior knowledge of political truths authorizes one's rule over the many. According to Estlund's (2008) influential formulation, epistocracy is composed of three tenets. First, the truth tenet implies that there are political truths. Second, the knowledge tenet means that some subsection of people (i.e., political experts) knows the political truths. Third, the authority tenet implies that one's superior knowledge of the political truths authorizes one's rule over the many.

Giving authority to better knowers constitutes the expert/boss fallacy: You might be an expert, but what made you boss? The fallacy occurs, according to Estlund, because even if it is true that political experts know political truths, this does not justify political authority. Epistocracy is not a *decision procedure* that can be acceptable to the qualified points of view because it is controversial from the qualified points of view to make invidious comparisons among better knowers.⁷ Unlike universal suffrage where every adult gets a vote, epistocracy brings in an added burden of political justification because the claim that the wise gets to rule over the rest is subjected to reasonable (or qualified) disagreement (Estlund, 2008). Epistocracy, in other words, does not satisfy the desideratum of procedural fairness.

2.3 | The truth-tracking capacity of (deliberative) democracy⁸

Apparently, democracy is a better alternative than epistocracy in terms of procedural fairness, but is it the case for the dimension of epistemic competency? Epistemic democrats think so. List and Goodin (2001) suggest that:

For epistemic democrats, the aim of democracy is to “track the truth.” For them, democracy is more desirable than alternative forms of decision-making because, and insofar as, it does that. One democratic decision rule is more desirable than another according to that same standard, so far as epistemic democrats are concerned (List & Goodin, 2001, p. 277).

To say that democracy “tracks the truth” is to imply that there is a procedure-independent standard by which we measure a decision. Fabienne Peter (2008) conceptualizes the connection between an independent standard of correctness and truth-tracking as follows:

By the standard account I shall denote any characterization of epistemic democracy which centers on the truth-tracking potential of democratic decision-making processes, and in which truth refers to a procedure-independent standard of correctness. According to such accounts, there exists, independently of the actual decision-making process, a correct decision—for example the one that “truly” realizes justice, or the one that is the “true” common good—and the legitimacy of democratic decisions depends, at least in part, on the ability of the decision-making process to generate the correct outcome (Peter, 2008, pp. 33–34).

The epistemic conceptions of democracy may appeal to several different conceptions of truth. One prominent conception is the correspondence theory of truth which states that a belief or statement is true if and only if it corresponds to the relevant fact (Putnam, 1978). Arguably, such truth exists at least for factual or positive statements. For example, “Donald Trump was elected the 45th President of the United States” is a true statement, as it corresponds to the political fact. Democracy is said to track the truth if it generates a certain outcome that

corresponds to the relevant fact. One might, however, object that such theory posits metaphysical realism about the existence of reality corresponding to the proposition.⁹

As an alternative, Estlund (2008) uses a disquotational (or deflationary) conception of truth, where proposition p is true if and only if p is true. According to the disquotational theory of truth, " p " is true if and only if p . "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white. "It is unjust to punish innocent people" if and only if it is unjust to punish innocent people (Estlund, 1993, 1997, 2008). It is a minimal conception that does not attempt to capture the nature of truth— p if and only if p , and that is it.

Another alternative is the pragmatic conception of truth. Cheryl Misak (2008) describes such conception as follows:

The Peircean view captures the important thought at the heart of minimalism: There is nothing more to "p is true" than the assertion of p itself, but insists that something has now been said about the very nature of truth. The question of the truth of a statement is the question of whether it is assertible and if a statement really is assertible—really would stand up to all the reasons and evidence were we to investigate as far as we fruitfully could on the matter—then it is true (Misak, 2008, p. 99).

Misak's point is that a truth statement is what can be asserted if we were to conduct inquiry on a matter. In saying this, we should be careful not to read C. S. Peirce for arguing "simply the ideal endpoint of inquiry," or "the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate" (MacGilvray, 2014, p. 4). Misak and Talisse (2014) criticize MacGilvray's interpretation of Peirce by saying that "truth is what would really stand up to all the reasons and evidence. Peirce's point is that we (implicitly) employ the truth predicate whenever we adopt a belief or assert a proposition, and in doing so we affirm that the proposition believed or asserted will withstand scrutiny" (p. 3).

Regardless of which conception of truth epistemic democrats advocate for, they must posit the concept of truth. For instance, when a group comes to deciding whether there is biodiversity loss in their surrounding region, there are at least two possible states of the world, one of which serving as the truth. Either there is biodiversity loss in the region or there is no biodiversity loss in the region. A democratic mechanism tracks the truth insofar as (a) it indicates that there is biodiversity loss given that there is biodiversity loss, and (b) it does not indicate that there is biodiversity loss given that there is no biodiversity loss.

It is important not to confuse conditions (a) and (b). Condition (a) stands for truth-tracking in a positive sense—a belief/statement is considered true given that the belief/statement is true. Condition (b) stands for truth-tracking in a negative sense—a belief/statement is not considered true given that the belief/statement is false. Both conditions can be expressed as conditional probabilities—"positive reliability" and "negative reliability" respectively—for assessing how likely a democratic mechanism tracks the truth (List, 2005).

2.4 | The epistemic benefits of deliberation

Deliberative democrats argue that good decisions result, not from deliberation among epistemic elites, but from democratic deliberation. Deliberation is a rational capacity of all human beings for weighing and evaluating decisions, options, and action. *Public* deliberation is a dialogical activity in which reasons are proffered in defense of a proposal or policy. According to the deliberative paradigm operative in this paper, we might say that deliberative democracy is an exercise of practical reasoning, which aims at rational decisions with decision procedures being truth-conducive and not error-prone.

There are at least three widely recognized reasons for the claim that deliberative democracy can track the truth.¹⁰ First, deliberation can detect bad reasoning and logical fallacies. Because deliberation involves exchange of reasons and arguments, it provides an opportunity to point out errors in one's own and other people's reasoning process. Second, democratic theories inspired by rational choice theory stipulate that preferences are fixed and that the voting procedure aggregates those preferences. Deliberative democrats counter that preferences can be transformed as a

result of deliberation.¹¹ Most robust evidence comes from Fishkin and Luskin's Deliberative Poll® that shows that preferences can change after deliberation (Fishkin, 2009; Fishkin & Luskin, 2005). Third, deliberation facilitates the exchange and pooling of information, including information about the interests of those who are affected by the decision (Marti, 2006).

Landemore (2012) suggests that deliberation can make correct decisions by harnessing the cognitive diversity of citizens. This is reflected in the “wisdom of the crowd” thesis. Aristotle, its earliest exponent, argues that deliberation among many is epistemically superior to deliberation among few (Aristotle, 1998). Rawls has further elaborated this insight:

The benefits of discussion lie in the fact that even representative legislators are limited in knowledge and the ability to reason. No one of them knows everything the others know, or can make all the same inferences that they can draw in concert. Discussion is a way of combining knowledge and enlarging the range of arguments (Rawls, 1971, pp. 358–359).

This view is consistent with the celebrated Condorcet Jury Theorem from social choice theory. The Condorcet Jury Theorem asserts that if a proposition has a binary choice, if people are more likely to get things right than wrong, and if their judgments are made independently, then a larger group can track (factual) truth better than a smaller group (Anderson, 2006; Cohen, 1986; Coleman & Ferejohn, 1986; Estlund, 2008; List & Goodin, 2001; Landemore, 2012).

2.5 | Criticisms of epistemic approaches to deliberative democracy

The epistemic defenses of deliberative democracy have been criticized from several fronts. One might question the claim that there are “correct answers” to democratic politics. To say that democracy tracks the truth presupposes that there are correct answers according to a procedure-independent standard of correctness. Given the state of reasonable pluralism—that there are multiple reasonable value systems—there is a disagreement about what the correct answer is (Schwartzberg, 2015, p. 199).

This skeptical conclusion can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, in principle, there is no right-or-wrong or better-or-worse answers in politics. When simple preferential matters are at stake—choosing strawberry ice cream or chocolate ice cream at a local fundraising event—the idea of right-or-wrong answer makes little sense. However, when it comes to serious political problems, we would have to posit that there are right answers (at least better answers than alternative). Secondly, the skeptical conclusion could also mean it is hard to know what those answers are. This interpretation is more plausible because given the pluralism of values, it is hard to know whether citizens have cognitive access to or know what the right answer constitutes for a political decision.

Others might object that the aim of epistemic versions of deliberative democracy focuses on the wrong political good. Saffon and Urbinati (2013) have recently argued that procedural democracy is the “bulwark of liberty”—“the modern democratic procedure ... is the best way of respecting equal liberty in a context of pluralism and dissent” (p. 442). While we agree that respect for equal liberty is an important political good, procedural democracy itself is not sufficient to justify democracy over other political arrangements. The epistemic dimension of democracy is also necessary because procedure itself is not sufficient to bring about substantively good decisions. But political decisions can have enormously consequential effects, and poorly designed laws create real injustices for real people. Hence, there is no reason why the epistemic dimension can be omitted from democracy.

The necessity of the epistemic dimension for deliberative democracy raises a central difficulty for epistemic approaches to deliberative democracy. Even if democracy could track the truth (under suitably ideal conditions), it is unclear as to whether democracy tracks the truth in real political situations (Muirhead, 2014; Schwartzberg, 2015). This is worrisome because if deliberative democracy were not better at making, in practice, better decisions than other types of democracy, then its desirability would be questionable (Landemore, 2017). Cristina Lafont

admonishes that the improvement of quality of deliberation—its truth-tracking potentials—is a “non-negotiable aim for the realization of deliberative democracy” (Lafont, 2015, p. 7).

Muirhead, Landemore, and Lafont are all getting at the heart of the issue for epistemic versions of deliberative democracy: Epistemic democracy is fundamentally an instrumental justification of democracy; that is, democracy is desirable as long as it can lead to certain effects. If, in the long run, deliberative democracy cannot deliver the goods, then the epistemic approaches to deliberative democracy would ultimately be indefensible. In the following section, we study an example of real-life deliberative democracy—citizen deliberation in “mini-publics”—and examine under what conditions it can track the truth.

3 | TRUTH-TRACKING IN DELIBERATIVE MINI-PUBLICS

Mini-publics are institutional devices of deliberative democracy which come in different shapes and sizes. Some produce common statements as outcomes, such as consensus conferences and citizens' juries, whereas others survey individual opinions after deliberation, such as Deliberative Poll®. The former seeks to produce collective decisions, while the latter aim to produce a profile of (changed) individual opinions (Elstub, 2014).¹² Some mini-publics, notably Deliberative Polls®, recruit up to 500 participants through random selection. Other mini-publics recruit as few as 10 participants via self-selection or quasi-self-selection, such as consensus conferences and citizens' juries (Ryan & Smith, 2014). In this section, we look at the ways through which truth-tracking can be achieved in deliberative mini-publics.

3.1 | Enhancing individual competence in deliberation

The first factor for truth-tracking in deliberative mini-publics is competence of individual participants. Such competence refers to the likelihood of each participant being correct in the belief(s) or statement(s) concerned in the deliberation.

Exchanges of information and arguments are central to all kinds of mini-publics. Chappell (2011) points out that such exchanges can lead to improved, decreased, or unchanged level of participants' competence. Improved competence can be a result of new information, while decreased competence can be due to false or misunderstanding of information, or participants being swayed by vivid arguments. If, on the other hand, participants do not receive sufficient information or are unable to understand the information received, their competence will remain unchanged.

The misunderstanding of information is associated with both attribution and confirmation biases. On one hand, people tend to evaluate their own behavior and the behavior of others by attributing it to different factors, which would hinder the exchanges of information and arguments. On the other hand, people tend to look for evidence and arguments to confirm their prior beliefs and disconfirm beliefs that challenge their priors. Sunstein (2002) identifies that confirmation biases in deliberation can lead to group polarization in which participants move to a more radical position from their initial inclination (Morrell, 2014).

To enhance truth-tracking, we can minimize the likelihood of attribution and confirmation biases in deliberation. Morrell (2014) argues that empathy is likely to reduce both biases in mini-public deliberation. Participants can be induced to empathize by including stories of the effects of different policy alternatives on specific individuals in the information packet, rather than merely arguments of both sides of an issue. Alternatively, individuals who are potentially affected, rather than merely experts, can be invited to speak in the question and answer session.

Both biases above can also be minimized with appropriate recruitment methods. Group polarization, for example, can be reduced by increasing the diversity in group composition, and hence the inclusiveness of different opinions and interests (Chappell, 2011; Morrell, 2014).¹³ Generally speaking, mini-publics which select participants using quotas or *stratified* random sampling are more representative in their composition, compared to those which randomly select participants but without stratified sampling. By contrast, mini-publics which recruit participants through (quasi-)self-

selection are likely to result in limited diversity in their composition, compared to those which recruit participants through pure random sampling.

How much individual competence is required to generate deliberative outcomes that track the truth? A minimal benchmark would be that it is more likely than not to produce correct outcomes. In other words, for a mini-public to be truth-tracking, its probability of producing correct outcomes should be greater than 0.5 (and smaller than or equal to 1).

3.2 | Managing the size of mini-publics

We have distinguished between two types of mini-publics, with one producing a profile of individual opinions and another collective decisions. For the former type, truth-tracking mainly depends on the (average) competence of individual participants. For the latter type, truth-tracking depends on not only individual competence but also the size of mini-publics. We discuss below the “size” factor for truth-tracking in mini-publics (List, 2005; Wong, 2015).

Take consensus conferences as an example. Participants are asked to formulate common statements or reports of recommendations through consensus after deliberation. Formally, this is equivalent to making collective decisions based on unanimity rule.¹⁴ The unanimity procedure requires that all individuals agree on a decision alternative in order for that alternative to become the collective decision. If there is no such universal agreement, there is no collective decision.¹⁵

Suppose, in a consensus conference, there are 10 participants with the average individual competence over 0.5 (and below or equal to 1), say, 0.6. As unanimity rule is used for decision-making after deliberation, the positive reliability is 0.6^{10} , whereas the negative reliability is $1-(1-0.6)^{10}$. The value of negative reliability is greater than that of positive reliability. Besides, as we increase the number of participants to 20, the positive reliability further decreases to 0.6^{20} , whereas the negative reliability further increases to $1-(1-0.6)^{20}$. In other words, as the size of the consensus conference increases from 10 to 20, its positive reliability decreases, but its negative reliability increases.

Now, suppose the above assumption no longer holds, such that each participant is more likely than not to be *incorrect*. For example, the average individual competence is 0.4. Based on the unanimity procedure, the positive reliability is 0.4^{10} , whereas the negative reliability is $1-(1-0.4)^{10}$. Similarly, the value of negative reliability is greater than that of positive reliability, and as the number of participants increases to 20, the positive reliability decreases to 0.4^{20} , and the negative reliability increases to $1-(1-0.4)^{20}$. We can see that, regardless of whether the average individual competence is above or below 0.5, a similar conclusion can be drawn concerning the relationship between the size of the consensus conference and its positive and negative reliabilities. However, the values of both reliabilities are smaller for cases with the average individual competence below 0.5.

From the analysis above, we notice that size matters for truth-tracking in mini-publics.¹⁶ For mini-publics which formulate common statements/reports of recommendations through consensus, their positive reliability, or the likelihood of identifying correct outcomes, decreases as their size increases. By contrast, their negative reliability, or the likelihood of avoiding incorrect outcomes, increases as their size increases. This holds regardless of whether individual participants are more likely to be correct or not. That said, both reliabilities are higher for mini-publics with higher average individual competence.¹⁷

3.3 | Lessons learnt

In this section, we have focused on one institutional arrangement of deliberative democracy—mini-publics—and examined how truth-tracking can be achieved. To track the truth, we can enhance the individual competence of participants. We can reduce attribution and confirmation biases by inducing participants to empathize during deliberation or minimize the chance of group polarization by enhancing the diversity of the composition of mini-publics.

Alternatively, we can manage the size of mini-publics. For example, for mini-publics that seek to produce collective decisions through consensus, if we are to identify correct, substantive outcomes, a smaller size is preferable, but if we are to avoid incorrect outcomes, a larger size is preferable instead.

Of course, in real-life mini-publics, the social processes of deliberation are likely to be complex, where the epistemic quality of deliberative outcomes may be attributable to factors other than competence and size. While this is an issue to be explored in future research, at least we can claim that, from a formal-theoretic perspective, truth-tracking deliberative democracy is realizable as in deliberative mini-publics.

4 | DIVISION OF DELIBERATIVE LABOR FOR TRUTH-TRACKING

In addition to the rather small-scale mini-publics, how is truth-tracking deliberative democracy possible on a larger scale? The normative force of this question is that deliberative democracy is not only about making good decisions *inside* mini-publics but also about how the outcomes of these mini-publics would shape collective decisions in the real world. One response would concern the division of deliberative labor in a deliberative “system.”

4.1 | Experts and ordinary citizens in deliberative systems

The systemic approaches to deliberative democracy “recognize that most democracies are complex entities in which a wide variety of institutions, associations, and sites of contestation accomplish political work” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p. 2). This approach conceives of deliberative democracy in terms of a complex system, where each deliberative moment becomes a node in the larger system. An analysis of a deliberative system examines deliberation as mass-scale discursive process, with various instances, institutions, and spheres (“nodes”) connected into a system (Dryzek, 2010; Chambers, 2012).

An important interaction within a deliberative system is the division of labor between experts and ordinary citizens. On one hand, experts have technical knowledge of the natural sciences, social sciences, economics, law, and policy. They also have reputation and credibility as experts in specific domains of scientific and policy inquiry. On the other hand, ordinary citizens have local knowledge generated through their lived experience (Young, 2000), and they are able to figure out the aims of collective decisions (Christiano, 2012). Ordinary citizens also know the consequences and effects of policies since they are those who bear the brunt of these policies (Dewey, 1984).¹⁸

The epistemic relationship between experts and ordinary citizens in a deliberative system is interactive and mutually reciprocal (Christiano, 2012, p. 47; see also Moore, 2016). Christiano (2012) argues that experts and ordinary citizens are charged with different tasks—ordinary citizens (usually as groups) deliberate on the aims of the society, whereas experts deliberate on various theories that help them design the means for achieving those aims. Ordinary citizens act like agenda setters who inform experts (and policy-makers) about what legislation and policy should be pursued, while experts act as external filters to choose how such legislation/policy should be pursued, ruling out any inappropriate or unworkable means. This model emphasizes specialization between experts and ordinary citizens.

On the other hand, Moore (2016) argues that experts' deliberation and judgments are subject to the scrutiny and critique by ordinary citizens from mini-publics and the wider citizenry in the public sphere. Experts act as agenda setters and decision makers, but their deliberation and judgments are open to challenges and further debate by/among ordinary citizens. This model emphasizes the values of openness and public scrutiny of experts' deliberation and judgments.

One epistemic source of expert-citizen competence in a deliberative system is diverse perspectives (Parkinson, 2012). Multiple perspectives are helpful in reducing cognitive and social biases, as well as creating a more objective picture of the social world in which people occupy. Discussion among people of diverse perspectives can help enlarge the range of arguments and reasons in a public discourse, as spelt out in Section 2 above (Rawls, 1971).

The diversity of perspectives can be generated through the discursive features of the “lifeworld” where ordinary citizens discuss the political through the mechanisms of “everyday talk.” The epistemic resources will be differentiated and context-dependent. For example, epistemic resources supplied in formal locations such as academia will be rational and cool, whereas epistemic resources uncovered in the social movements and activism will track what Miranda Fricker calls “epistemic injustice” (Fricker, 2007). The generation of diverse perspectives can then be used in future deliberation and in the decision-making process.

Because the perspective gained in one deliberative moment might not have an effect in a different moment, there is an important question of how to pool and transmit different perspectives and prioritize them so that it can be pragmatically valuable, such as for truth-tracking. The flow of perspectives from one part of the system to the next concerns the transmission in deliberative systems.

4.2 | Transmission in deliberative systems

One fruitful place to start this investigation is Habermas's so-called “two-track” conception of deliberative politics. It conceives of the opinion-formation in the informal public spheres—the “wild” and unregulated informal public sphere—and the will-formation in the formal institutions of the state where binding collective decisions are made. Elections and the mass media are the transmission mechanisms between opinion-formation and will-formation. The knowledge generated in the opinion-formation process has to be transmitted to the formal decision-making body like the legislature.

One problem with Habermas's two-track conception is its vagueness about the role of other civil society actors like interest groups and activists (Hendriks, 2006). Dryzek (2010) develops a vision of deliberative systems that incorporates civil society actors like interest groups and activists. Dryzek articulates elements of a deliberative system, including “public space,” “empowered space,” and “transmission.”¹⁹ The public space is the informal public sphere “ideally hosting free-ranging and wide-ranging communication, with no barriers limiting who can communicate” (Dryzek, 2010, p. 11). In this space, contributions can come from political activists as well as ordinary citizens. The empowered space is “home to deliberation among actors in institutions clearly producing collective decisions” (p. 11).

Transmission is “some means through which deliberation in public space can influence that in empowered space” (p. 11). The mechanism of knowledge transmission can be traditional opinion polling, internet and social media, or political media (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Take, for instance, the political media. “Any democracy,” Mansbridge et al. (2012) argues, “needs the political media to play the role of transmitter of reliable and useful information, to help citizens interpret facts and make connections between facts, roles, and policies, and to act as watchdogs, critics, and investigators” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, p. 20).

One source of worry is that hegemonic discourses can co-opt the transmission function of the political media. But there are several countervailing forces to hegemonic discourses. First, citizen journalism in the internet public spheres serves as “watchdogs” and “critics.” Indeed, citizen journalists use Twitter feeds and Facebook pages to transmit information to the public, bypassing the traditional political media. Second, there have been reasoned discussions at media sites like the Boston Review. These varied fora and venues are opportunities to develop alternative discourses and perspectives that can enrich deliberation. The advantage of Dryzek's model is its inclusion of civil-society actors like interest groups, activists, academics, and citizen journalists in theorizing how knowledge is transmitted in a deliberative system.

In sum, truth-tracking deliberative democracy is possible on a larger scale through the division of deliberative labor in a deliberative system. The interactive relationship between experts and ordinary citizens produces diverse perspectives which are essential epistemic resources. The transmission mechanism in a deliberative system enables us to pool, transmit, and prioritize these diverse perspectives, so as to achieve collective outcomes with epistemic values.

5 | CONCLUSION

The Oxford Dictionary named “post-truth” as the International Word of the Year in 2016. If what we have shown in this article is true, then deliberative democracy can track the truth. From a deliberative democratic point of view, especially given the systemic turn, “post-truth” politics is alarming. The antidote is a deliberative culture in which the citizens are sensitive to facts and values, respect for the perspective and opinions of fellow citizens (including experts), and the spirit of the public sphere to contest decisions and policies of experts, are all necessary preconditions for a healthy deliberative democracy.²⁰

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Deliberative democracy has a huge literature by now. For helpful overviews, see Bohman (1998), Chambers (2003), Thompson (2008), and Owen and Smith (2015). For useful essays in edited volumes, see Bohman and Rehg (1997), Besson and Marti (2006), and Mansbridge and Parkinson (2012).
- ² Epistemic democracy has a growing literature. For major statements, see Cohen (1986), List and Goodin (2001), Estlund (1997, 2008), Peter (2010), and Landemore (2012). For a helpful overview, see Schwartzberg (2015).
- ³ That said, we acknowledge that not all deliberative theories are epistemic theories and vice versa.
- ⁴ Estlund gives a Rawlsian interpretation of epistemic democracy. For pragmatic perspectives, see Putnam (1990), Festeinstein (2004), Talisse (2005), Anderson (2006), Misak (2008), MacGilvray (2014), and Misak and Talisse (2014). We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.
- ⁵ For those who argue in favor of both procedural and epistemic features as necessary components of democratic legitimacy, see Anderson (2006, 2008), Estlund (1997, 2008), Peter (2007, 2008, 2014), Landemore (2012, 2017), Kelly (2012), Misak and Talisse (2014), Min (2016), Muirhead (2016), Schwartzberg (2015), and Moore (2017).
- ⁶ This definition comes from Goldman (2001).
- ⁷ There is a further complication that there is not just one form of knowledge or wisdom, but multiple forms of knowledge or wisdom. See Haraway (1988) for a discussion of situated knowledges. We are grateful to John Dryzek for this suggestion.
- ⁸ One might object that not all epistemic theories of deliberative democracy need to be truth-tracking. While we agree with this criticism, the standard view of epistemic democracy is the “truth-tracking” view - or what Goldman (1999) calls the “veritistic” view. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.
- ⁹ In any case, this should not be equated with political cognitivists who argue that there is an objective moral or political truth independent of the political procedure at hand. An alternative to this correspondence theory is the coherence theory of truth. It states that a belief or statement is true if and only if it coheres with a “specified” set of propositions. These “specified” propositions are assumed to be true according to what people are currently believing (Young, 1995) or what they will believe upon reaching a certain limit of enquiry (Putnam, 1981). The belief or statement under consideration is regarded as true if and only if it is logically entailed by the “specified” propositions.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Marti (2006) for a helpful discussion of epistemic benefits of deliberation.
- ¹¹ Cf. Elster (1997, p. 11). Also see Manin (1987)—“We can, therefore, state that during political deliberation, individuals acquire new perspectives not only with respect to possible solutions, but also with respect to their own preferences” (p. 350).
- ¹² This classification roughly resembles Morrell's (2014) distinction between Kantian deliberation and Madisonian deliberation, in which the former focuses on the legitimatizing function of deliberation for democratic decision-making, while the latter focuses on reflective consideration of the views of citizens and members of congress.
- ¹³ Another way to reduce group polarization is to uphold deliberative standards, including the provision of information, discussion rules, and moderators, which can alleviate the negative effects of discussion in groups with limited diversity. See Grönund, Herne, and Setälä (2015).

- ¹⁴ That said, we recognize that, in practice, there may still be consensus even if there is no unanimity. For example, an individual may be able to live with a collective decision that he/she cannot agree with during the moment of decision-making. We are grateful to John Dryzek for this suggestion.
- ¹⁵ It is worth noting that, according to Setälä, Grönund, and Herne (2010), mini-publics that seek to formulate common statements as deliberative outcomes are more likely to generate better knowledge, which would reasonably reduce confirmation biases and enhance average individual competence.
- ¹⁶ The same reasoning can be applied to analyzing the cases of citizens' juries and other mini-publics that seek to produce collective decisions in the end.
- ¹⁷ See Wong (2015) for discussion on the epistemic effect of majority voting on collective decision-making in mini-publics.
- ¹⁸ That said, citizen competence in the real world has been much doubted in the social scientific literature. For example, Anthony Downs's economic analysis of democracy does not give much credence to citizen competence. Christiano (2012) points out, however, that Downs's analysis of democracy assumes a minimum competence of its citizens, even if they might not choose to exercise their competence due to costliness of information and time.
- ¹⁹ The other capacities include accountability, meta-deliberation, and decisiveness. See Dryzek (2010), chapter 1, for this discussion.
- ²⁰ For helpful discussions of deliberative cultures, see Sass and Dryzek (2014) and Böker (2017).

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