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<th>Representative Democracy Takes a 'Deliberative Turn'</th>
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Representative Democracy Takes a ‘Deliberative Turn’

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FIRST DRAFT
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Representative Democracy Takes a ‘Deliberative Turn’

Democracies are transforming before our very eyes. Contemporary Ireland provides a good example of this. For the past 90 years or so, the picture Ireland presented was one of relatively little reform, at least when compared with other established democracies. The original 1937 Constitution drafted by Eamon de Valera has stood the test of time: in the 70 plus years since its promulgation there have been constitutional referenda and various discussions and debates over constitutional reform, but for the most part the fundamentals of de Valera’s constitutional design remain unaltered. Until today, when in the midst of the worst economic crisis in our history political reform has arrived at the top of the political agenda (Suiter and Farrell 2011). The current Fine Gael/Labour coalition government has already implemented a series of reforms\(^1\) and other reforms are promised,\(^2\) including the decision to establish a constitutional convention to consider a number of specific areas for reform. Within the next few years we could well be looking at a pretty different political landscape.

And it is not as if this is not overdue, as Peter Mair stressed in a highly regarded lecture to the MacGill Summer School in Ireland in the summer of 2011 – weeks before his untimely death. In a nutshell, he was not happy about the state of representative democracy in Ireland. He talked of a political culture personified by ‘cute hoors’, ‘strokes’ and ‘amoral localism’, of a ‘stagnant politics’ (Mair 2011: 39-41). He referred to the country’s loss of economic sovereignty as a result of Ireland’s EU/IMF bailout. He called for urgent reform centred on and involving citizens, so that ‘we can begin as citizens to engage in running our own State and taking back control over our own state’ (p. 44).\(^3\)

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\(^1\) For instance, in such areas as gender quotas, party funding, and reducing the size of the parliament.

\(^2\) Such as a referendum to propose the abolition of the second chamber of parliament; reform of the freedom of information legislation; new legislation to facilitate whistleblowing and to regulate lobbyists.

\(^3\) Were he with us today, I have no doubt that Mair would be critical of the shortcomings in the Irish government’s reform agenda, but at least it has gone some way to considering reforms that he promoted, notably by involving ordinary citizens in the constitutional
Mair’s pessimism was not just confined to Ireland. In a set of papers published in his final years, he expressed strong and ever more urgent concerns over the state of party politics and the future of representative politics itself (e.g., Mair 2005, 2006, 2006a, 2008, 2009). The aim of this paper is to examine his thesis. I start in the next section by setting out the main points of Mair’s arguments on party and democratic failure. Next consider the question of whether the evidence supports such a perspective, or whether in fact there are signs of adaptability and change. This then leads to a discussion about the reform agenda in established representative democracies, an agenda that in a growing number of cases is bringing deliberation centre stage.

The ‘failure’ of political parties

The rather grim picture Mair painted was of a growing indifference (even hostility) towards democracy shared by citizens and elite alike whose ‘mutual withdrawal’ from electoral politics has resulted in a ‘hollowing out’ of democracy, of democracy without a demos.

According to Mair the citizen withdrawal is manifested in a series of (now well-known) trends, notably: declining electoral turnout, rising voter volatility, declining party identification, and declining numbers of party members – each of which he tracks with his typical clarity and thoroughness. While he readily admits that a number of these changes are (still?) relatively small scale – ‘in some instances a trickle rather than a flood’ (2006: 44) – for him the telling points are that in combination they all point in the same direction, and they are consistent across pretty much all advanced democracies. ‘The conclusion’, he says, ‘is unambiguous … citizens are heading for the exits of the national political arena’ (2006: 44).

Something similar is happening to the political elite. Building and developing on his earlier work with Richard Katz on the cartelization of party politics (Katz and Mair 1995), Mair outlines two sets of changes in party politics that indicate a similar

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4 The following summary of Mair’s arguments draws variously on these five papers.

5 In passing it is worth noting his fascinating cross-referencing of climate change studies (e.g. Mair 2006: 36) as a means of better understanding gradual and lumpy changes over time.
cutting loose from electoral politics by the political elite, which he summarizes as identity and locational shifts. The shift in identity relates to the reduction in ideological polarization of party systems together with a bi-polarization of party competition (to offer voters choices between alternative coalition governments), and the willingness to accept all parties – however, extreme the bed fellows – into government, so that: ‘[a]s more or less all parties become coalitionable, coalition-making has become promiscuous’ (Mair 2008: 216).

Locational shifts refers to parties moving along the continuum from being defined primarily as social actors to ‘one where they might now be reasonably defined as state actors’ (2006: 45). Indicators of this include: the sidelining of party activists,\(^6\) weakening of wider community and social ties (e.g. sister or affiliated organizations) associated particularly with mass parties, growing reliance on public funds and state support, the growing regulation of their activities (and organization) giving them quasi-official status, and ‘according increasing priority to their role as governing (as opposed to representative) agencies’ (2006: 47).

Both sets of changes (identity and locational) amount to a scenario in which ‘[p]arty-voter distances have been stretched, while party-party differences have lessened’ (Mair 2006: 45), between them feeding the growing distrust of parties and political institutions by the public.

Mair draws all this together by linking back to Elmer Schattschneider’s much quoted warning that ‘modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties’ (1942: 1), which generally has been seen along the lines of democracy providing a bulwark to parties, thus ensuring their ultimate survival. On the contrary, Mair suggest that the unthinkable may well be happening, that parties are failing (even if they’ve not as yet failed) and democracy with them, or at least democracy as we know it. In his view democracy is being ‘redefined’ to downplay popular sovereignty. This entails a heightening of the distinction between Dahl’s (1956) ‘constitutional’ (‘Madisonian’) and ‘popular’ democracy combined with a downgrading of the latter – in essence a

\(^6\) A point he first drew attention to decades ago, and which is generally referred to as ‘Mair’s paradox’ (see Mair 1994: 13-14).
‘stripped down’ democracy, that is ‘about rights rather than voice, about output rather than input’ (Mair 2006a: 8).

In short, all this suggests a pretty dismal state of affairs: a growing divide between citizens and their leaders, political parties seemingly in their death throes, and democracies shorn of their populist roots. And it is not as if Peter Mair is alone in presenting such a perspective: another prominent exponent is his former EUI colleague, Philippe Schmitter whose view of political parties is that they ‘are not what they once were’ (2001). Nor, for that matter, is this perspective that new: the ‘parties in decline’ thesis dates back a number of decades. What marks out Mair’s work from the rest are a number of points: the typical painstaking use of evidence to back up his arguments; his leadership in the field of party politics; and – most of all – the striking contrast he presents from his earlier writings that placed great emphasis on the ability of parties to adapt and weather the storms of change.7

Adaptability rather than failure?8

Mair’s perspective may seem persuasive, but does that mean it is right? Certainly there is no denying the trends he cites on citizen withdrawal from electoral politics – falling turnout, declining partisan attachment and rising volatility, falling membership levels; nor, for that matter, is there any doubt that parties are becoming ever more reliant on and attached to the state apparatus. But how much of the former is entirely down to a specific ‘failure’ of parties, and to what extent can the latter actually be seen as a weakening of parties?

Let me take the last of these first. The greater reliance by parties on state resources to buttress their positions is seen, by Mair and a number of other prominent party scholars, as an indicator of how they have ‘become absorbed by the state and begun to act as semi-state agencies’ (van Biezen 2008: 339; see also Katz 2004). But to suggest that the greater dependence of parties on the state is in some ways an insidious

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7 For an example of his earlier, more positive, perspective, see Mair (2003). In the more recent papers, referred to in this section, he suggests that his earlier perspective may have been ‘too sanguine’ (2006: 49-50). Clearly these later papers were part of a larger project he never got to complete, as evidenced from draft papers in the Mair collection housed in University College Dublin.

8 Much of this section is drawn from Dalton, Farrell and McAllister (2011: chs. 1 & 2).
development – even a threat to the position of parties – is rather missing the point. From its origins the classic ‘party government’ framework has viewed parties as effectively synonymous with the state (Katz 1986), and this always have been so (at least since the origins of representative democratic systems). The fact that the level of support may be greater merely reflects decisions by the parties (qua state) to provide it. But are they any weaker for it?

As regards the issue of citizen withdrawal, the trends need to be considered in the wider context of societal change that has affected institutions beyond political parties. Societal change has contributed to a breakdown of collective identities as citizens become increasingly individualized. Rudy Andeweg uses poetic license to illustrate this point succinctly: ‘religion is increasingly expressed outside churches, interest promotion is taken care of outside interest associations, such as trade unions, physical exercise outside sports clubs… work outside permanent employment, love outside marriage, and even gender differences are becoming divorced from sex differences’ (2003: 151). Little wonder, then, why parties should have fewer members, few loyal followers, and face growing competition from other non-party actors.

It may be impossible to return to the halcyon days of the past when parties had larger memberships, more people voted, and more people identified with a political party. But changes in the public can be separate from the actions of parties as political institutions. Moreover, it could be argued that some of the observed changes in modern parties reflect an attempt to adapt to social and political changes in democratic publics. Indeed, to succeed and persist, political parties have to adapt to changing political conditions in order to contribute to the process of representative democracy.

Some of the concerns raised about the state of parties may reflect an underlying (implicit) hankering after a supposed Golden Age of ‘mass party’ politics personified

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9 This point is also made by Katz in a recent essay in which he questions whether declining party membership ‘should be attributed to failures by the parties’. He continues: ‘there are good grounds to believe that … the decline has been a by-product of social changes that neither can – nor in most cases should – be reversed’ (forthcoming).

10 As we have seen, this is a perspective that Mair used also share in his earlier writings, before feeling that such views were “too sanguine”.
by Duverger’s classic account (1964). The mass party model emphasized a loyal supporter base, the representation of particular social groups, and large mass memberships – all of these the very features that are singled out as evidence in support of the party decline thesis. But arguably this model was more an ideal typical than a widespread political reality (Scarrow 2000; Whiteley 2011). Writing in an American context, John Aldrich makes much the same point, observing that rather than decline, we have witnessed a shift from the ‘party in control’ form of the Van Burren era to a ‘party in service’ (1995: 245, 282). In other words, the party has changed, but it is not necessarily any weaker as a consequence. As Michael Saward puts it: ‘It may be, in the words of Schmitter, that these shifts lead to the conclusion that “parties are not what they once were”, but that does not necessarily mean that they are less than they once were’. (2010: 133, emphasis in the original).

The corollary of fixating on a particular model of party is a tendency to pay undue homage to a style of democracy that may well be past its sell-by date. We saw in the previous section how Mair, for instance, places Schattschneider’s ‘unthinkable democracies’ on its head by arguing that not only were parties failing but, with them, so was popular democracy. However, again this sort of perspective fails to recognize the potential for adaptability, in this instance of democratic forms.

Michael Saward makes this point when he tracks a shift from one ideal typical from democracy, which he refers to as the ‘popular mode’ – the form of democracy lauded by Mair – to alternative ideal typical modes, such as ‘statal’ or ‘reflexive’ modes. Saward’s point is that such a shift ‘do[es] not necessarily add up to a picture that is less democratic. It can, rather, be differently democratic’ (2008: 283). At the heart of Saward’s vision of representative democracy is its very adaptability, of representation that is ‘a dynamic process of claim-making’ (by those who would wish to represent) ‘and the reception of claims’ (by those being represented) (2010: 8). ‘In the end’, he concludes, ‘whether democracy is unthinkable save for political parties may no longer be the question we need to ask. Rather, we may need to ask: what kinds of representative democracy are thinkable. And what forms of party claims, if any, are appropriate to them?’ (2010: 136-7).
The ongoing reform agenda

We face something of a puzzle. In a parallel universe to the doom-laden world of many (if not most) party scholars, there is another body of scholars who, on the whole, view recent developments in pretty upbeat terms.\textsuperscript{11}

For instance, as Russell Dalton and his colleagues observe: ‘Although electoral participation is generally declining, participation is expanding into new forms of action’ (2003a: 1)\textsuperscript{12} as more of us engage in new, less conventional (sometimes even unconventional) forms of political action, as more of us become ‘good’ (Dalton 2009) or even ‘critical’ citizens (Norris 1999), seeking a more active (less passive) role in the political system, prepared to challenge (and thereby engage with) existing systems and norms. Dalton, Cain and Scarrow (2003b: 274) argue that a ‘new model of democracy is evolving. The contemporary democratic process requires more of its citizens. It also challenges politicians and bureaucrats to figure out what it means to move past a trustee model of politics without abdicating political leadership. But the result may be a further democratization of advanced industrial democracies, and the betterment of society and politics that this may produce.’ What all of this amounts to is evidence of a behavioural shift among (at least some) citizens, to a citizenry that is changing in its expectations of the political system and its approach to the system.

There is also growing evidence of widespread institutional reform, in large part in reaction to the growing clamour from citizens, and to a large degree driven by parties (in government). There is no shortage of examples: here are some of the more prominent ones:\textsuperscript{13}

- Austria’s decision in 2008 to reduce the voting age to 16;
- Belgium’s long road to federalization;
- Finland’s 2000 reforms to reduce the power of the presidency;

\textsuperscript{11}To a degree this argument overlaps with van Biezen and Saward’s observations about different sets of scholars not ‘talk[ing] to each other’ (2008), though in their line of vision were party scholars and normative theorists.

\textsuperscript{12}Of course, it could be argued that these new forms of ‘political action’ were already emerging decades earlier (Barnes and Kaase 1979).

\textsuperscript{13}This list is based on data reported in Annex 2 of Bedock et al. (2012).
- Reforms in France (2008) and the Netherlands (2004) introducing the right for citizens to petition for referenda;
- Italy’s various stages of electoral reform;
- The ongoing devolution agenda in the UK.

The most comprehensive evidence to date is provided by Bedock, Mair and Wilson (2012) who examined the trends across seven main dimensions of institutional reform in 18 established European democracies over a 20-year period from 1990-2010. Summary indicators are provided in Table 1, showing a total of 173 reforms across the period, 51 of which were deemed ‘substantial’ – defined as: ‘significantly alter[ing] the balance of power and/or the nature of the relationship between parties … citizens and elites’ (Bedock et al. 2012: 9). As they note, this amounts to an average of 9.5 reforms (3 of them substantial) per country. The evidence is emphatic: ‘institutional reform is far from a rare occurrence and indeed occurs quite frequently’ (p. 17).

More recent work by Alan Renwick (2012) supports the findings of Bedock and her colleagues and also the Cain et al. thesis of ‘democratic transformation’ (2003). He also finds evidence of this accelerating in the light of the ongoing economic crisis.

Included in the mix of institutional reforms are a series of measures that specifically cater for a citizenry more interested in political action outside of the election cycle. In countries across the globe the evolving pattern is one of ‘democratic innovations’ (Smith 2009), of institutions being (re)designed for citizen participation. Dalton and his colleagues (2003a; see also Warren 2003) refer to this as a ‘second wave of democratic reform’, personified by the creation of new institutions and the redesign of existing ones with the principal aim of facilitating greater citizen participation, or as Smith puts it, ‘to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process’ (2009: 1).

**The ‘deliberative turn’ in practice**

According to John Dryzek (2000) the final decade of the last millennium saw democratic theory take a ‘deliberative turn’. The question posed in this paper is
whether and to what degree this has been matched in practice. There is no doubt that when it comes to contemporary democratic institutions things are not as they once were. But this is only to be expected ‘when nineteenth-century concepts meet twenty-first century realities’ (Warren: 2001: 226). Institutions must change and are changing with the times (of course, in some cases more quickly than others): ‘a new model of democracy is emerging’ (Dalton et al. 2003b: 274), one that is more ‘talk-centered’ rather than ‘election-centered’, with citizens being ever more drawn into the policy process in-between elections (Steiner 2012: 37).

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 illustrates some of the key changes that are associated with this democratic transformation. I am particularly interested in the last of these – deliberative approaches to engage with citizens between elections. As implied in the table, these can come in a range of forms – participatory budgeting, consensus conferences, citizens’ juries, deliberative polls, citizens’ assemblies – but what they all share in common is an ambition to allow ordinary citizens to have a say, to ‘speak’ (Fishkin 2009), even to ‘decide’ (Fournier et al. 2011).

The precise details of how the various deliberative approaches operate is beyond the scope of this paper (for more discussion, see Fishkin 2009; Fournier et al., 2011; Smith 2009), but in summary, there are a number of traits that are common to most, as follows:

- The entity (jury, assembly, etc.) is established with a particular purpose in mind;
- It is given a clearly defined agenda;
- It is made clear to its members how their recommendations will be followed up on;
- Its operation is time-delimited; after its work is completed it ceases to exist;
- Its members are selected randomly: they are not elected, nor are they selected to represent different sectors;
- There is an important role for experts, not as participants, but rather as witnesses;
At the heart of the enterprise is deliberation – ‘the process by which individuals sincerely weigh the merits of competing arguments in discussions together’ (Fishkin 2009: 33).

An important thing to note about deliberative approaches, particularly as applied to debates over political reform, is their dual role in both personifying the institutional shift that is at the heart of the democratic transformation and also in facilitating the behavioural shift of enabling citizens to be involved in the reform process itself (Farrell et al. 2013). This is particularly the case whenever deliberation is used as part of the process of debating institutional (or constitutional) reform, such as through the establishment of what I shall refer to as ‘people’s conventions’.14

[Table 3 about here]

For the most part, and especially until quite recently, the use of deliberation has tended to be focused on administrative or policy-related questions and often at the local level (for reviews, see Fishkin 2009; Smith 2009; Steiner 2012). People’s conventions are different in that they are national (or at least state wide) endeavours with a focus on major issues of constitutional or institutional design (see also Warren 2008). They are one form of the wider species of deliberative practices; and they come closest to one of Dahl’s proposals for solving the ‘Goldilocks dilemma’ of how to find ‘units of government that are “just right” – small enough to facilitate participation and yet large enough to exercise authority so significant as to make participation worthwhile’ (1970: 158). His proposal was for the establishment of advisory councils comprising ordinary citizens elected by lot (p.149; see also his later discussion on ‘minipopulus’ – Dahl 1985: 88). People’s conventions would seem to fit that bill.

Table 3 summarizes the main features of variation among the people’s conventions that have occurred to date (for more details, see Table A.1). Of the six cases presented

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14 As yet, there is no agreed title for what I’m referring to as people’s conventions. Included in the mix of names used so far are: citizens’ assembly, citizen summit, constitutional convention, or constitutional council. Mark Warren refers to them as ‘citizen representative bodies’ (2008: 52).
in the table, one of them (the Australian constitutional convention established by prime minister John Howard in 1998 to consider whether Australia might become a republic) did not follow the usual principles associated with deliberative processes, notably: they used election rather than random selection to pick the citizen members, and the mode of discussion followed parliamentary norms of debate and position taking rather than deliberation and dialogue (Constitutional Convention 1998; Warhurst 1999; Williams 1998). Nevertheless, the fact that ordinary citizens were included in the membership was a striking departure from previous practice for Australian constitutional review (McRae and Mullins 1998).

The membership of the 2011 Icelandic Constitutional Council was also elected. Established in the heat of the country’s economic and financial meltdown, it was tasked with considering root and branch reform of the country’s constitution. At this juncture it is hard to judge the extent to which it followed deliberative procedures; the coverage on social media suggested that it did.

It is our next three cases that have attracted the most scholarly attention – the citizen’s assemblies on electoral reform in the Canadian provinces of British Columbia (2004) and Ontario (2007) and the Dutch citizen’s forum (BürgerForum) of 2006 (Fournier et al. 2011; Warren and Pearse 2008). Only ordinary citizens were involved in these cases. They were selected at random. These assemblies/forum met at weekends over a number of months: 11 months in British Columbia, eight months in Ontario and nine months in the Netherlands.

Ireland looks set to join this small band of cases. The government is committed to establishing a constitutional convention, which will be given a year to consider a

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15 For discussion on the virtues of random selection (or ‘sortition’) in democratic politics, see Dowlen (2009), Stone (2011).
16 Furthermore, judging by some of the citizen participants’ reflections on the experience, there is clear evidence of a sense of empowerment and engagement that is so often associated with deliberation (http://www.abc.net.au/concon/diaries/default.htm).
17 The election result was declared null and void by the courts on legal grounds. In response the parliament appointed the 25 citizen members who had been successful in that election.
18 This is something to be looked at in more detail in the future.
number of constitutional reform issues (of varying importance). The membership shall be a mix of professional politicians (one third) and randomly selected citizens (two thirds), and it is intended that it should operate in a deliberative fashion. While the Irish case bears some similarity to the Australian one in mixing ordinary citizens with professional politicians, the decision to select the citizen members at random rather than by election and to seek to operate the convention along deliberative lines puts it more on a par with the Canadian and Dutch cases.

It may be pushing things to say that these six cases of people’s conventions amount to a trend. But when combined with the other areas of democratic transformation summarized in Table 2 it cannot be denied that things are changing, and the fact that gradually there are more and more cases of citizen-oriented reforms would seem to support the contention of a ‘deliberative turn in practice’.

There are two obvious areas of criticism of these people’s conventions that must be addressed. First, there is the plain fact that they have not exactly had a notable record of success: the referenda in Australia, British Columbia (on two occasions) and Ontario were defeated; the Dutch process in large part disintegrated with the collapse of the government; we wait the see the result of the Icelandic referendum in a few weeks. In their detailed study of the Canadian and Dutch cases, Fournier et al. (2011) find that a lot of the explanation for these poor results was due to a mismatch between the deliberative ideals in which these conventions operated and a wider societal and political setting that was not the most receptive. In other words, they suggest, there are lessons to be learned from these episodes.

Secondly, criticism could be made of the restricted agenda of these conventions and the fact that, for the most part, their role is limited to advising – or, at most, proposing – rather than deciding. Robert Goodin, for one, does not see any particular problem with this. He readily admits that these conventions can appear ‘toothless’. But, he continues, the very act of involving ordinary citizens ‘might afford otherwise

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20 Certainly that has been the case in Ireland where a number of concerns have been raised over the restricted agenda of the constitutional convention and the fact that some of the items on the list (e.g. over the term of office of the presidency) are hardly earth shattering.
powerless people some real power over the policy process and the outputs that eventually emerge from it’ (2003: 167). They get to speak; those in power get to hear them speak and learn how they frame issues; and the real potential is there to influence outcomes.

John Ferejohn’s observation of the British Columbia citizens’ assembly is that it was ‘an important institutional innovation’ (2008: 197). For Mark Warren processes such as this form ‘a potential part of the ecology of democratic institutions’ (2008: 69). They are a complement to other representative institutions, but they have a limited application. In his view, they are best aimed at certain kinds of issues: intractable and/or important problems that require careful deliberation and the seeking of board consensus; or those issues that pose a conflict of interest for elected representatives (such as electoral reform). By no means are deliberative approaches, such as people’s conventions, a be all and end all; but they do represent significant additions to our repertoire of representative institutions.

**Conclusion**

Van Biezen and Saward make the observation that ‘[s]cholars of political parties have largely ignored the “deliberative turn” in democratic theory’ (2008: 30). And certainly it is not something that is viewed with any great enthusiasm. A question to be resolved, therefore, is how do deliberative developments such as those outlined in the previous section square with the rather grim perspective painted by Mair and other party scholars? For that matter, ultimately what relevance does all of this have for the state of political parties today?

Of course, it is not as if Mair was unaware of the sort of reform (and deliberative) developments outlined above (in this, as so many other areas, he was an exception to van Biezen and Saward’s rule). He knew about them, it is just that he did not rate them much. His perspective was that a lot of the discussions and debates over political reform favoured ‘options that actually discourage mass engagement’ (2006: 28). And specifically in the case of deliberative approaches, he saw these as ‘exclusive’, as not offering ‘much real scope [for]… conventional modalities of mass democracy’ (2006a: 8).
Was Mair too quick to dismiss the significance of deliberative approaches? Was he correct to characterize them as exclusive and discouraging of mass engagement? In an attempt to answer some of this and to draw this paper to a conclusion, let me pose and attempt to answer two questions. First, was he being unfair in his characterization of the reform and deliberation trends? Recall some of his criticisms of the state of parties and representative democracy – for instance, his bemoaning the loss of societal linkage, or his references to stripped-down Madisonian democracies fixated more on outputs than on inputs.

I believe the evidence presented in the previous two sections indicate that Mair might well have been unfair. The reforms have been widespread, and in a number of areas pretty extensive. The trend has been largely towards engaging with citizens, of increasing the scope for ordinary citizens to have a say. The reforms represent a serious intent by political parties (in government) to re-engage with society. And, as many theorists have observed, these changes represent a step towards a form of democracy that seeks to place the citizen centre stage – a democracy, in Goodin’s estimation (2003), actually centred more on inputs than outputs.

The second question is whether Mair was premature in drawing such negative conclusions? It might be argued that we have yet to see the full potential that deliberation could yet play in the life of party politics and representative democracy. For instance, van Biezen and Saward make some interesting proposals for how parties could embrace their role as ‘vehicles for deliberative democracy’ (2008: 30). But quite apart from the issue of how the practice of deliberation could facilitate changes to the internal dynamics of party politics, there is the larger question about how it might help in maintaining and developing the links between our political institutions and wider society – one of the themes at the heart of Mair’s perspective about elite withdrawal. Obviously, it is too soon to know for sure, but we can at least speculate as John Ferejohn does about how the practice of deliberation could yet provide ‘a way to redeem, to some extent, the ancient promise of democracy as a form of popular government – in Lincoln’s words, as government “by” the people’ (2008: 213).
Bibliography


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<th>Table 1: Institutional reforms in Europe: 1990-2010 (number)</th>
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*Source: Bedock et al. (2012: Figure 1)*
**Table 2: A new democratic transformation?**

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<tr>
<td>● Dahl’s ‘polyarchy’</td>
<td>● Introduction of elections for more offices (e.g. elected mayors; regional assemblies)</td>
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<td>● Introduction of elections to most offices</td>
<td>● Greater competition between and within parties</td>
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<td>● Mass suffrage extension</td>
<td>● Greater engagement with administrative processes (e.g. Freedom of information)</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Freedom for all parties to compete in elections</td>
<td>● Greater focus on periods between elections (e.g. citizens’ assemblies, citizens’ juries, participatory budgeting)</td>
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Table 3: Variations in people’s conventions in the modern era

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<th></th>
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<th>Agenda</th>
<th>Mode of discussion</th>
<th>Promised outcome</th>
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<td>Limited</td>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>Referendum</td>
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<td>Iceland</td>
<td>Citizens only</td>
<td>Election</td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Referendum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Citizens only</td>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>Citizens only</td>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Deliberation</td>
<td>Referendum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Shaded cells are seen as preferable options. See Table A.1 for further details about these cases.
Table A.1: The people’s conventions to date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual cases</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Agenda</th>
<th>Promised outcome</th>
<th>Result/potential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2 weeks in Feb 1998</td>
<td>Constitutional Convention</td>
<td>76 elected citizens plus 76 delegate (half of these parliamentarians) appointed by federal &amp; state governments</td>
<td>Whether to become a Republic</td>
<td>Referendum</td>
<td>Defeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>Jan-Nov 2004 (weekends)</td>
<td>Citizens’ Assembly</td>
<td>Random selection of 160 citizens</td>
<td>Electoral reform</td>
<td>Referendum</td>
<td>Defeated (twice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>Sep 06-Apr 07 (weekends)</td>
<td>Citizens’ Assembly</td>
<td>Random selection of 103 citizens</td>
<td>Electoral reform</td>
<td>Referendum</td>
<td>Defeated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Proposed      |       |       |            |        |                  |                  |
| Ireland       | 2012-13 | Constitutional Convention | Random selection of 66 citizens plus 33 elected politicians | Constitutional changes (8 items +) | Ministers to decide | About to be established |

| Possibilities? |       |       |            |        |                  |                  |
| UK            | n.a. | Constitutional Convention | n.a. | Constitutional reform? | n.a. | The potential being discussed by the Political & Constitutional Reform Committee of the HoC |

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a The intention here is to focus on cases in ‘modern times’: i.e. since about the 1980s.
b Not included here are the various US state-level conventions, of which there have been 233 to date (see [http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/Constitutional_convention](http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/Constitutional_convention)). Oregon’s Citizens’ Initiative Review ([http://healthydemocracyoregon.org](http://healthydemocracyoregon.org)) offers another interesting alternative that might be worth including. The CIR convenes small deliberative groups of randomly selected citizens to intervene in the state’s initiative process.
c The courts found the election null and void on technical grounds. In response, the parliament decided to appoint those citizens who had secured the election as members of the Constitutional Council.
d Not included here are proposals (for examples, see [http://snider.blogs.com/citizensassembly/](http://snider.blogs.com/citizensassembly/)) for the establishment of people’s conventions that have little chance of being adopted. A current example is the proposal before the Hawaiian state legislature to establish a citizens’ assembly that seems to have run into the sand (for more, see [http://capitol.hawaii.gov/Archives/measure_indiv_Archives.aspx?billtype=SR&billnumber=76&year=2011](http://capitol.hawaii.gov/Archives/measure_indiv_Archives.aspx?billtype=SR&billnumber=76&year=2011)).