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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ÉTUDE ORIGINALE

Deliberative Campaigns

Afsoun Afsahi

Assistant Professor of Political Theory, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia, C310-1866 Main Mall, V6T 1Z1, Vancouver, Canada
Email: afsoun.afsahi@ubc.ca

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Abstract

This article advances the concept of deliberative campaigns as a structured, cyclical and party-integrated process to reinvigorate democratic systems under strain from exclusion, polarization and disengagement. Deliberative campaigns embed ongoing, reciprocal deliberation between citizens and representatives throughout and beyond election cycles, making party platform creation a continuous, participatory endeavor. Drawing on the systemic approach to democracy, the article argues that deliberative campaigns uniquely combine deliberation, representation and voting to better address empowered inclusion, collective will formation and collective decision-making. Unlike conventional campaigns, which tend toward elite-driven, one-sided communication and microtargeting, deliberative campaigns foster informed, inclusive dialogue that can rebuild trust, reduce polarization and enhance accountability. The approach offers both theoretical and practical contributions to democratic systems scholarship by showing how institutionalizing citizen–representative dialogue can create platforms that more faithfully represent collective priorities and strengthen responsiveness in partisan democratic politics.

Résumé

Cet article propose le concept de campagnes délibératives comme processus structuré et cyclique impliquant les partis politiques. L'argument avancé est que ce concept contribue à revitaliser les systèmes démocratiques touchés par l'exclusion, la polarisation et le désengagement. Les campagnes délibératives institutionnalisent une délibération réciproque et continue entre les citoyens et leurs représentants durant tout le cycle électoral. Conséquemment, ce concept suggère que l'élaboration des plateformes politiques est un exercice participatif et itératif. En s'appuyant sur une approche systémique de la démocratie, l'article soutient que les campagnes délibératives combinent de façon unique la délibération, la représentation et le vote pour mieux promouvoir les fonctions normatives d'un système démocratique, soit l'inclusion, la formation de la volonté collective et la prise de décision collective. Contrairement aux campagnes classiques, souvent marquées par communication unilatérale et microciblée dirigée par les élites, les campagnes délibératives

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favorisent un dialogue inclusif et éclairé, susceptible de rebâtir la confiance, de réduire la polarisation et d'accroître la responsabilisation des élus. Cette approche offre des contributions théoriques et pratiques contribuant aux études systémiques de la démocratie. Elle démontre comment l'institutionnalisation du dialogue entre citoyens et représentants peut rendre les plateformes politiques plus fidèles aux priorités collectives et renforcer la réactivité du système politique.

Keywords: deliberative campaigns; democratic systems; collective will formation; political parties; political participation

Mots-clés: campagnes délibératives; systèmes démocratiques; formation de la volonté collective; partis politiques; participation politique

Calls to reshape democratic institutions have multiplied with mounting crises in democracies, including populism and democratic backsliding (Lovett 2021; Landemore 2020; Guerrero, Edenberg, and Hannon 2021; Egidi 2023). Such crises have resulted from and continue to reinforce widespread feelings of exclusion and lack of representation, alienation from cultural debates and disengagement from decision-making, undermining the health of democratic systems and their ability to function. In this article, I put forth a proposal for deliberative campaigns as a mechanism to strengthen the ability of a democratic system to include individuals and groups in meaningful ways, bring them into democratic politics, foster the formation of shared priorities through the collaborative creation of party platforms and support collective decision-making.

Deliberative campaigns are structured, cyclical and party-integrated processes that institutionalize ongoing, reciprocal deliberation between citizens and representatives throughout the pre-election period and beyond, embedding this dialogue into the creation and continuous refinement of party platforms. They are unique interventions in two ways. First, deliberative campaigns empower citizens to collaboratively create party platforms through ongoing, structured dialogue with representatives. Second, their timing is distinctive: this engagement starts before and continues beyond elections—making platform creation a continuous, not one-off, process.

My proposal for deliberative campaigns draws upon the democratic systems approach which holds that systems are more or less democratic on the basis of how well they address three *problems*: empowered inclusion, collective will formation and collective decision-making (Warren, 2017). This approach identifies various generic practices (resisting, deliberating, representation, voting and exit) and argues that a system's democratic quality depends on how it uses these practices to address the aforementioned problems. The approach also recognizes key deficits in different generic practices. Given each practice's weaknesses, only their combined utilization can address the key democratic problems of empowered inclusion, collective will formation and collective decision-making. Using this framework, I posit deliberative campaigns as practical, scalable pathways for integrating citizens' voices into party platforms—fostering informed, inclusive and iterative dialogue that can (re)build trust, reduce polarization and open new avenues for accountability and responsiveness.

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This article makes two sets of contributions. First, I demonstrate how deliberative campaigns connect and integrate the practices of deliberating, representing and voting, directly addressing the unique deficits that each carries on its own. By stitching these practices together, deliberative campaigns provide a pathway to advancing genuine collective will formation that is inclusive and has a real impact on collective decisions. This constitutes a contribution to the democratic systems literature by proposing a mechanism that can address the deficits identified with practices of deliberating, representing and voting by demonstrating how they can be utilized together.

Second, I show that, through ongoing communication with representative agents, deliberative campaigns help citizens see themselves as integral to the democratic process and as co-authors of elected officials' decisions. I distinguish deliberative campaigns from modern conventional campaigns and show how they can address the two persistent challenges prevalent within conventional campaigns: one-sided communication and microtargeting that fragments agendas and polarizes viewpoints. In this way, my proposal intervenes in broader debates about democratic politics, party politics, and campaigns, highlighting how deliberative campaigns can make partisan democratic politics more participatory and responsive.

The article proceeds as follows: I begin by outlining the systemic theory of democracy that frames the normative discussion in this article. The second section sketches the proposal for deliberative campaigns and situates it among related interventions in the literature in order to clarify its distinctiveness. Section 3 presents a normative argument for deliberative campaigns as a mechanism for addressing the specific deficits of deliberation, representation and voting, reflecting the article's central intervention in debates about the strengths and weaknesses of core democratic practices. The fourth section turns to a comparison between deliberative campaigns and conventional campaigns, examining how deliberative campaigns respond to latter's persistent challenges of one-sided communication and polarizing microtargeting. The conclusion considers possible objections and reflects on the broader implications for understanding and improving democratic practice.

Systemic Theory of Democracy

The democratic systems approach critiques model-based theories of democracy (e.g., deliberative, direct and representative) which overgeneralize norms and practices, leading to dead-end debates over which practice is more democratic. Instead, the democratic systems approach provides criteria to assess a system's democratic quality on the basis of its ability to address three *problems* (hereafter referred to as problems of democracy):

1. Empowered inclusion: ensuring all relevant voices affected by decisions are included and heard
2. Collective agenda and will formation: developing a shared understanding of collective action's direction
3. Collective decision-making: establishing mechanisms that put this shared understanding into practice

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Warren identifies seven generic political practices, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, in addressing the three problems of democracy mentioned above: recognizing, joining, resisting, deliberating, representing, voting and exit. While not exhaustive, this list represents commonly utilized practices in political systems.

I focus my analysis on (1) deliberating, (2) representing and (3) voting. Deliberating excels at connecting individual preferences to collective agendas and wills through "advocacy, argument, persuasion, negotiation, and bargaining" (Warren 2017, 44). Deliberation can show what people care about, increase empathy and mutual understanding, help people see themselves as part of the collective will and make collective agendas more legitimate. Yet, it cannot empower inclusions, nor is it effective as a standalone mechanism for collective decisions. Representing can empower inclusions by giving people a seat at the table through accountable representatives. Since it is easier to discuss, negotiate and bargain in small legislative bodies, representing can also advance collective wills and form agendas that can be enacted through collective decisions. Yet, representation is challenged by the varied interests of citizens' and representatives' own strategic interests, mainly re-election. Voting can empower inclusions and collective decision-making but does not always communicate support and could result from lack of options, protest or lack of information.

For systems to solve the three problems of democracy, we need mechanisms that effectively combine different practices to leverage their strengths and address weaknesses (Warren 2017, 49). My proposal of deliberative campaigning seeks to connect practices of deliberating, representing and voting. Only when utilized together can these practices address the problems of democracy. Deliberative campaigns can facilitate this connection and help solve problems of democracy.[1]

A Sketch of Deliberative Campaigns[2]

In writing about a New England Town Meeting, Mansbridge (1976, 631) referred to a political system in which townspeople, each with "an equal right to attend, speak and vote," "discuss[ed] and decide[d] the laws, regulations, general policies, and taxes of the town" as "the purest ideal of democracy put into practice." What makes this town meeting a good representative of the "purest ideal of democracy put in practice"? I argue that it is because it demonstrates a healthy democratic system at work. It shows us how a system empowers inclusion by ensuring that townspeople can participate, be heard and decide on town laws and policies; forms collective wills and agendas through discussion where residents can hear from, be persuaded by and negotiate with fellow residents; and enables collective decision capacity by ensuring that those affected by regulations, policies, taxes and laws are making decisions.

This second function—forming collective wills and agendas—underpins the proposal for deliberative campaigns. Warren (2017) highlights collective will formation as the key step between empowered inclusion and collective decision-making. He argues that the fundamental principle is that individual perspectives and opinions must be communicated and deliberated to inform group decisions. This enables individuals to influence collective outcomes and maintain agency. For effective collective decision-making, individuals need to understand how their

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preferences align with broader judgments and comprehend the rationales behind decisions (see also, Habermas 1996).

Collective will formation and agenda-setting (something I refer to as simply collective will formation) has a long history and is rooted in the philosophical traditions of Kant, Rousseau, Hegel and Mill (to name a few). Habermas identifies an iterative process of representation as key to maintaining a robust principle of popular sovereignty: "parliamentary opinion- and will-formation must remain anchored in the informal streams of communication emerging from public spheres that are open to all political parties, associations, and citizens" (Habermas 1996, 171).[3] Other democratic theorists have also highlighted the importance of agenda-setting and agenda control as a crucial aspect of democracy as it allows members to decide which matters are placed on the agenda, keeping the democratic process open to change. For instance, Dahl ([1998] 2020, 38) emphasizes the exclusive opportunity that members should have to decide how and what issues are considered, ensuring policies are always open to revision. Schattschneider (1975), meanwhile, argues that political power involves selecting which issues enter the political arena, influencing public debate by determining which conflicts gain prominence.

Participation in processes such as will formation and agenda-setting enhances accountability within democratic systems. It is crucial for representative agents[4] not only to present their reasoning to constituents but also to be open to reconsidering their positions on the basis of constituent feedback (Williams, 1998: 232). Deliberative campaigns represent a transformative mechanism in democratic systems by enabling us to combine and institutionalize practices of deliberation, representation and voting in ways that better address the problems that Warren (2017) identifies: empowered inclusion, collective decision-making and especially collective will formation.

Deliberative campaigns are structured around two critical junctures—platform creation, and information sharing followed by an election—that embed sustained, reciprocal deliberation between citizens and representative agents into the electoral process. Unlike one-off deliberative interventions or post-election communication models, deliberative campaigns institutionalize deliberation as a cyclical, pre-voting practice, directly shaping party agendas as collective agendas. To clarify the distinctiveness of my proposal, I situate deliberative campaigns against four existing interventions: deliberative polls, Citizens' Assemblies to draft referenda platforms, Deliberation Day and the proposal of directly representative democracy highlighting contrasts in timing, purpose and democratic outcomes. Table 1 summarizes these differences.

On one end of similar proposals, scholars have posited deliberative polls to inform and gauge public opinion (e.g., Fishkin, Luskin, and Jowell 2000; Iyengar, Luskin, and Fishkin 2003; Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell 2002; Sanders 2012). Randomly selected participants answer questions on specific topics, deliberate among themselves with experts and possibly political candidates and then are asked their opinion again. Deliberative polls have shown that deliberation informs public opinion and can change it (Fishkin, Luskin, and Jowell 2000).

Citizens' Assemblies drafting referenda platforms ensure more direct citizen involvement in collective decision-making (e.g., Warren and Pearse 2008; Rose

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Table 1. Deliberative campaigns versus similar interventions

Proposal	Timing	Scope	Integration with political parties	Outcome
Deliberative polls	One-off, pre-vote	(Often) single issue	Not integrated	Opinion snapshot, not platform creation
Citizens' Assemblies	Episodic	Single issue	Not integrated	Referendum input, not platform creation
Deliberative polling	One-off, pre-vote	Multi issue	Not integrated	Voter education, not platform creation
Directly representative democracy	Ongoing, post-election	Multi issue	Loosely integrated in form of feedback	Policy feedback, potential for future platform creation
Deliberative campaigns	Cyclical, including pre-vote	Multi issue	Fully integrated	Platform creation

2007; LeDuc 2011). In fact, a range of additional deliberative mechanisms—such as Citizens' Initiative Reviews, Policy Juries, Priority Conferences and Design Panels—have been proposed as ways to enhance collective will formation (Gastil and Richards 2013, 253). By connecting mini-publics with referenda and having a "focal, mass decision-making moment" (Parkinson 2020: 497), mini-publics become more than just a recommendation vehicle.

Another proposal is establishing a Deliberation Day prior to elections (Ackerman and Fishkin 2003; Schkade, Sunstein, and Hastie 2007). Deliberation Day would follow a televised debate between candidates. Initial deliberation within small groups is followed by a 500-member Citizens' Assembly in which representatives of major political parties address questions from participants (Ackerman 2013, 311-312). This process repeats to ensure that citizens gain understanding beyond watching a televised debate.

Directly representative democracy proposes a more interactive form of governance where elected officials engage in discussions with constituents through technology-enabled platforms. This approach aims to revitalize the relationship between citizens and representatives by facilitating online consultations. Unlike traditional town-hall meetings, it fosters constructive dialogue and mutual understanding. It empowers citizens to express interests and learn about policies, while allowing representatives to persuade through reasoned arguments (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018). This model seeks to overcome historical limitations of scale and complexity. While I contrast my proposal with each of these, this final intervention is closest to what I am proposing with deliberative campaigns.

Deliberative campaigns are unique comparatively for two core reasons: first, they are fully integrated with political parties and turn platform creation into a collaborative, ongoing process with citizens and representative agents working together; and, second, they synchronize this with a timeline that begins years before elections and continues afterward.

Like similar deliberative interventions, deliberative campaigns include information sharing and elections. Unlike them, they are focused on platform creation.

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During this process, recurring meetings would be scheduled at specific intervals. In non-election years, these meetings can occur quarterly, providing a platform for citizens and representative agents to discuss issues and refine party platforms. As elections approach, meeting frequency would increase to monthly within 12 months of elections. This intensified schedule allows citizens and representative agents to address emerging issues and finalize party platforms.

The temporal integration of deliberating with representing and voting also makes deliberative campaigns different from similar proposals: they begin years before elections, allowing agendas to mature through iterative refinement. This contrasts with deliberation days (Ackerman and Fishkin 2003; Schkade, Sunstein, and Hastie 2007) occurring two weeks before elections to inform voters about existing platforms rather than shape them. The early-cycle engagement ensures that citizens influence agenda-setting before platforms ossify into campaign slogans. Deliberative campaigns differ from directly representative democracy which prioritizes post-election town halls for policy feedback, limiting citizens' ex ante power to co-create platforms. This is despite the acknowledgement by Neblo et al. (2018, 4) of the importance of citizens "[having] a direct role in advising (ex ante) and evaluating (ex post) the reasoning and policy actions of their representatives." While, under directly representative democracy, representatives seek input on already-drafted legislation, deliberative campaigns enable citizens to shape the legislative agenda itself during the pre-election phase.

Deliberative campaigns can be implemented in established democracies, including Canada, the USA, the UK, Western Europe, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. This mechanism is particularly useful in electoral systems where first-past-the-post creates formal or informal two-party systems. Power typically alternates between two major parties, with third parties sidelined in decision-making. This often leads to "double haters" reluctantly choosing a major party (Miller et al., 2024), voting for a third-party candidate with little chance of winning, voting strategically against a party or abstaining. In countries with proportional representation, open party lists and preferential voting, small parties usually arise from social movements (e.g., Denk or BIJ1 in the Netherlands) but govern in coalitions. Deliberative campaigns can ensure that smaller parties are not absorbed by larger counterparts. Attention to these smaller parties is important. As White and Ypi (2016) argue, while parties have experienced declining membership and support, signs of renewed partisan engagement exist, particularly in new parties emerging from social movements.

Deliberative campaigns can be organized for both local and national elections, addressing a unique situation in voter engagement. While people are generally more affected by daily local decisions, they often show greater interest in national elections. However, this interest is paradoxically coupled with a sense of disconnection from the national electoral process. These campaigns can bridge this gap at the national level by making politics more accessible and relevant to everyday life. At the local level, they can highlight the importance of local elections and decision-making, potentially shifting some of the interest typically reserved for national politics toward local matters.

Each session would typically bring in 300–800 citizens per electoral district. These large groups are divided into smaller clusters of 8–10 individuals for

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meaningful discussions. Participants are selected using a hybrid recruitment method, combining random selection with open participation. The random selection component addresses the potential lack of representativeness from open participation alone (Goidel et al. 2008). While citizens engage with their representative agents, deliberative campaigns can also include policy experts, thinktank members and interest groups, depending on the issues discussed; For example, during a financial crisis, experts in financial systems and regulations could provide valuable insights. Sessions are facilitated by trained moderators using various techniques, such as timed speaking and perspective-taking exercises, to ensure structured and productive discussions (Afsahi 2022; Muradova 2021; Jungkunz 2013). After each session, facilitators compile a summary report that is shared with all constituents in the district. Amendments and objections to the summary can be made and addressed at the next meeting.

Deliberative campaigns would be set up by political parties responsible for the costs of setting up these meetings, which can take place in-person, in a hybrid format, or fully online.[5] While many meetings will likely be limited to representative agents from one political party (with rivaling political parties holding their own meetings), in many multiparty systems, which typically have smaller parties as part of governing coalitions, representative agents from two or more parties can hold such events. This makes deliberative campaigns similar to the proposal of directly representative democracy but different from deliberative polls and Citizens' Assemblies.

Attendance at these meetings is not limited to already-registered members of these political parties. Random selection ensures diverse perspectives. The aim remains clear: create rival political party platforms that result from a recursive conversation between voters and representative agents. Far from getting rid of the competitiveness necessary for the practice of voting, deliberative campaigns aim to facilitate the creation of party platforms that result from ongoing deliberations between representative agents and their (would-be) constituents and remain competitive.

There are functional and normative reasons why parties should be in charge of organizing deliberative campaign meetings. First, functionally, political parties have an interest in having the public more or less on board with their actions. We see examples of this when governing parties or those in the opposition set up consultation processes (e.g., Canada pre-budget consultations). Such consultations would be strengthened if, instead of a one-off expression of (likely less informed) views, there was a dialogue about trade-offs and a back-and-forth conversation that connected different budget priorities together instead of presenting them as zero-sum options.[6]

Second, normatively, parties and partisanship are "indispensable to the kind of political justification needed to make the exercise of collective authority responsible to normative concerns" (White and Ypi 2016, 5).[7] This role is further underscored by the way parties can structure and inform political discourse. Budge (2012), in his discussion of mediated direct democracy, highlights how political structures, such as parties, can ensure that political decisions are well-informed and stable by framing key issues and providing necessary information to voters. The capacity of parties to mediate and structure political engagement supports the idea that they are essential

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for a proposal such as deliberative campaigns. While parties are the key actors responsible in setting these events up, they can do so in partnership and collaboration with organizations invested in increasing citizen engagement such as the Harkin Institute for Public Policy and Citizen Engagement (USA), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (Canada), ProDemos (the Netherlands) or the McGuinness Institute (New Zealand).

Unlike public opinion polls, the product of deliberative campaigns is "not an aggregate of individually gathered, privately expressed opinions held by isolated persons" (Habermas 1996, 362). It is neither a wish list of citizen demands nor a technocratic manifesto drafted by party elites. The final products are, instead, a number of party platforms including a common section outlining general principles and a district-specific section which connects the issues brought up with the general principles and sets of priorities. These platforms are shared with all constituents in the district, regardless of their participation. This process diverges sharply from deliberative polls, which capture informed opinion snapshots on isolated issues (e.g., climate policy via Fishkin, Luskin, and Jowell 2000) but lack mechanisms to translate these into comprehensive, actionable agendas. It is also different from Citizens' Assemblies (e.g., Ireland's abortion reform panel) which excel at deliberating single-issue reforms or policies (Warren and Pearse 2008), rather than multi-issue electoral mandates, limiting their scope to referendum outcomes.[8] This first juncture lays the groundwork for collective will formation. The second juncture builds upon this foundation, ensuring that party platforms are effectively communicated to the broader public and so they can ultimately form the basis of collective decision-making.

The second juncture is a period of information-sharing, whereby the platform as well as a summarized version of the deliberation is shared with the members of public at large who may have not participated in the ongoing deliberations. This juncture is frequently discussed in the literature on mini-publics as a crucial step in scaling up the legitimacy and impact of the mini-publics. As Curato and Böker (2016, 177) argue, "the epistemic quality of mini-publics' outcomes is only as good as the process that feeds it back to public authorisation and accountability." In deliberative campaigns, this juncture is important for two reasons. First, not every citizen can, will or even wants to take part in ongoing recursive deliberations with their representative agents. We have to accept and even appreciate a division of labour within a democratic system.[9] Citizens who do not participate or follow the summary reports frequently, or at all, can rely on the final platform knowing that it has been the result of recursive dialogue and see participants in deliberative campaigns as "facilitative trustees" or "trusted information proxies" that can "help citizens make good judgments by compensating for their scarce cognitive resources" (Warren and Gastil 2015, 568).

Second, and connectedly, such a process also has the potential to increase the uptake of information by non-participating citizens. Since the information shared is not simply an instruction from the campaigns and political parties but instead a form of expert synopsis as a result of deliberation with fellow citizens, they are more likely to receive and make use of this information (Muradova, Culloty, and Suiter 2023; Scudder 2020a). This juncture is similar to citizens' assemblies and citizens' juries that also rely on facilitative trustees to generate legitimacy in their decisions

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(Geisler 2023; Muradova, Culloty, and Suiter 2023). Moreover, citizen participants can become discursive representatives in their own districts, persuading others of the value of one proposal or platform over another.[10]

These two junctures are followed by an election. Parties can run on platforms they have devised as a result of deliberations with citizens. Citizens will vote for parties with platforms they have had a hand in creating and "the success of each candidate would be tied to the dialogue contribution they [have made]" during the course of the campaign and in dialogue with their constituents (Simon 2002, 25).

A Normative Case for Deliberative Campaigns

As noted above, practices of deliberation, representation and voting have weaknesses that can be addressed through deliberative campaigns. Representation, for example, is often not as responsive as it should be (Warren 2017, 49). Even when voters are presumably able to hold their representative accountable through the ballot box, they are often unable to do so. Furthermore, representatives have to balance different pressures—they are accountable to their voters, must cooperate with their political party (whether it is in power or not) and need to work with other representatives. These competing demands and interests can undermine the collective will formation function of representation.

Deliberative campaigns, as a mechanism connecting deliberating, representing and voting, can ameliorate these weaknesses in two ways. First, through introducing spaces for ongoing and recursive dialogue between voters and representative agents, deliberative campaigns offer a new avenue for monitoring representatives beyond simply relying on the ballot box. Second, deliberative campaigns also introduce new, and potentially reshape existing, incentives held by representative agents. Since voters are more involved in the process of party platform creation, representative agents may have fewer conflicting interests in responding to their constituents and their parties. Moreover, deliberative campaigning facilitates the kind of deliberation that remains practical about what can and cannot be accomplished in the context of budgetary constraints, time limits, but also the recognition of the strategic incentives created by partisanship (i.e., the importance of winning in politics). This can also reshape the strategic incentives of representative agents. By having the space to include strategic incentives, feasibility constraints and the realities of partisanship in the discussion and process of collective will and agenda formation, representative agents will be less encumbered in their attempts to juggle often conflicting interests.

Deliberative campaigns can also address some of the weaknesses of voting. As Warren (2017, 49) argues, voting "communicates only in the form of low information signals." One cannot rely on results of elections to get a sense of what the voters want. Voting can reveal multiple, often contradictory, preferences. For example, voters in a state or province can vote for a number of ballot issues that are clearly part of a leftist political agenda (i.e., raising the minimum wage or guaranteeing paid family leave) but end up voting for the right-wing political candidate at the same time.[11] Voting is best at aggregating preferences, and it is not good at that either. Preference cycling or the paradoxical result of voters choosing "A over B, B over C, but C over A" can happen (Warren 2017, 49).

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Moreover, voting, even combined with representing, can give us decisions that do not seem to correspond to a collective will. Milstein (2021, 557), looking at the 2016 referendum on Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, argues that what was, at the time, jarring about those results was that "these were putatively 'democratic' decisions, which citizens and elites alike nevertheless [found] difficult to interpret as the valid expression of a collective democratic will." Why was this the case? As Milstein argues, in a democratic system—one that is able to solve the problems of empowered inclusion, collective will and agenda formation and collective decision-making—the legitimacy of collective decisions ultimately depends on their connection to a shared democratic intent. In other words, we see collective decisions as legitimate when we see them as representative of a collective will. For Milstein, both those who benefit from a decision and those who do not should be able to see themselves as equal contributors to its creation and development.

Deliberative campaigns can do what representing and voting, alone or combined, cannot do. They can help voters clarify and organize their preferences, enabling them to make informed decisions when voting directly on issues and when selecting representative agents who will make decisions that accurately reflect the voters' priorities. This is because deliberative campaigns involve voters in a collaborative process of collective will formation and agenda-setting, allowing them to actively contribute to defining the issues and priorities that shape political decisions. By engaging in open dialogue with candidates and other citizens, voters can ensure that their values and interests are integrated into the political agenda in ways unfeasibly within conventional campaigns.

Conventional and Deliberative Campaigns Compared

As contests over candidates or parties (election campaigns) or issues (referendum campaigns),[12]conventional campaigns are characterized by intense, widespread information flows that temporarily engage even typically inattentive citizens with political content (Cho et al. 2009, 67). Campaigns can increase turnout, raise candidate profiles, increase issue salience and persuade citizens that a representative agent or party is best suited to deliver on a particular matter (Jacobson 2015). They have limited impact on hard-core partisans but tend to influence late deciders (Lachat and Sciarini 2002; Pammett and LeDuc 2001; McAllister 2002; Fournier et al. 2004). While political campaigns can play an instructive role (Arceneaux 2024; Simon 2024),[13] the extent to which campaigns actually inform voters remains contested. Many scholars argue that campaigns are more about controlling the agenda and steering attention to issues favourable to each political party (Gidengil et al. 2002, 76; see also Petrocik 1996; Budge 2000).

Modern campaigns are also characterized by the mediation of their message through media. Media do not act as neutral intermediaries between parties and voters (Gidengil et al. 2002, 76)[14] but, instead, focus on attracting and segmenting audiences to sell to advertisers, prioritizing targeted content over serving the general public's needs (Pilon 2009, 5).[15] Social media, meanwhile, have transformed campaign communications, allowing politicians to bypass traditional media and reach voters directly (Hong and Nadler 2012; Enli 2017; Spierings and Jacobs 2014).

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This shift has benefitted smaller parties and outsider candidates, who can use social platforms more intensively for outreach.[16]

Deliberative campaigns differ from conventional campaigns in their purpose and structure. The purpose of deliberative campaigns is to facilitate collective will formation and the creation of competing party platforms through a mutual supplementation of perspectives. Instead of periods of information flows at high intensity, deliberative campaigns are marked by an extended period of low to medium intensity activity, centring around recursive and open-ended communication between representative agents and citizens.

Deliberative campaigns create and sustain a different kind of relationship between representative agents and their constituents than one we commonly witness today. This relationship, which is much more recursive and responsive (Mansbridge 2018; Fossum 2018), is much closer to the relationship between constituents and representative agents that we would ideally want to see. This relationship is created both because of and in spite of the competitive nature of political campaigns. Instead of open-ended discussions between constituents and representative agents, deliberative campaigns increase the stakes and impress upon constituents that there is something of worth and value in their participation: co-authoring party platforms.

This mechanism of competition in deliberative campaigns is crucial. By institutionalizing structured, meaningful engagement, these campaigns create incentives for both parties and constituents that are often missing in existing democratic systems. Constituents are motivated to participate because they have a real opportunity to shape party platforms in ways that directly affect their lives. This is not merely symbolic: their input can have tangible effects on policy and party direction, making participation consequential and rewarding. At the same time, parties and their representatives benefit from this mechanism by gaining deeper, more nuanced insights into constituent preferences and priorities. This reduces the risk of overlooking important demands or misreading the electorate—mistakes that can lead to electoral defeat.

This alignment of interests is crucial, especially given the real possibility that deliberative processes can backfire if participants feel their contributions are ignored (Jacquet 2017; Van Crombrugge 2020). The risk of disillusionment is real when parties fail to act on the outcomes of deliberation. However, the competitive structure of deliberative campaigns is specifically designed to address this challenge: because parties' responsiveness to citizen input is both visible and electorally significant, they have strong incentives to demonstrate genuine commitment to the platforms co-developed with citizens. In effect, the logic of competition makes top-down follow-through not just desirable but essential—helping to ensure that engagement remains meaningful and that both parties and constituents are mutually accountable.

Through sustained communication between citizens and their representatives, deliberative campaigns foster a sense among citizens that they are essential participants in the democratic process and active co-authors of the choices made by their elected officials. This stands in stark contrast to conventional campaigns which, I argue, suffer from two persistent challenges: one-sided communication and the use of microtargeting strategies that fuel polarization.

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First, conventional campaigns are, primarily, elite-driven and one-sided. Information flows from "campaign organizations like parties, candidates' support organizations, government institutions or interest groups" (Schmitt-Beck and Farrell 2002, 5; see also, Norris et al. 1999).[17] Rather than fostering "intense exchanges of political information" (Nadeau et al. 2008, 229), campaigns function more as instructions. Social media has not changed this. Political agents have used social media to expose voters to the same message repeatedly (Ritchie 2022) and to control the conversation and amplify their message (Guerrero-Solé 2018). Social media has also bred misinformation and racism (Olaniran and Williams 2020)—at times spread by politicians themselves.

There are limited moments of interactive communication during campaigns, and the moments of communication in campaigns are not truly communicative. Campaigns check "whether [campaign] strategies are working" (Schmitt-Beck and Farrell 2002, 5) through public opinion polls and election results, but these rarely lead to mid-campaign changes that reflect voters' collective will.[18] Voting itself, as Warren (2017: 49) points out, is a "poor means of communication," and trying to interpret complex messages from voting is as unreliable as consulting a cartomancer. Politics is plagued by short-termism, and election cycles are no exception—there is no guarantee that a message from one cycle will remain relevant or be properly understood in the next (Scudder 2020a).

Door-knocking and town-hall meetings, pivotal opportunities for communicative engagement, also fall short. Door-knocking focuses on disseminating information and reinforcing key campaign messages, sticking to a one-sided, instructive format like other campaign tools. Canvassers follow a structured script, repeating issues set by campaign leaders. The main goal is to get out the vote, so canvassers avoid homes likely to support another candidate or party. As a result, door-knocking limits conversation, giving voters little chance to influence the campaign narrative. There is no collective will formation through door-knocking.

Town-hall meetings are similarly constrained. While they offer a clearer platform for citizens to express their views than door-knocking, several factors limit their role in collective will formation or in ensuring that voter views influence campaigns. Town-hall meetings occur too late in the campaign to impact its agenda. Town-hall meetings held by elected representatives are usually for justifying actions, not for campaign input. Their structure prioritizes information presentation– again, instructive and one-sided—over genuine interactive exchange that could shape a candidate's priorities or a party's platform.

Moreover, the process of party platform creation is often overwhelmingly one-sided, concentrated in the hands of a small group of party elites. Platforms are often drafted and finalized by top party leaders, executives and select insiders with little to no formal consultations and conventions serving mostly symbolic roles. Ordinary party members, local associations and even some organized interests have minimal influence unless they are ideologically close and loyal to party leadership (Victor and Reinhardt, 2016; Katz and Mair 2009). Just as one-sided communication shapes how parties present themselves to the public, the elite-driven platform process reinforces internal hierarchies and limits public input (Schumacher and Giger 2017; Lioy et al., 2019; see also, Wang 2023).

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This more top-down characteristic of campaigns reduces their capacity to effectively contribute to solving the democratic problems of empowered inclusion and collective will formation. After all, voters are not empowered to partake in campaigns or contribute to collective will formation. Campaigns might not even be succeeding at facilitating collective decision-making. The political (and partisan) plans of action or agendas that form the basis of campaigns—essentially the promises of what the focus of representative agents will be and what priorities and policies will be pursued—may be unrepresentative of the collective will of voters.

Instead of one-sided communication that typically characterizes ordinary campaigns, representative agents in deliberative campaigns are engaged in on-going dialogue with the purpose of party platform creation. This can lessen the disconnect between voters and representative agents by creating the conditions under which the type of recursive representation described by Mansbridge (2018, 300) can occur whereby "both constituents and representatives can learn from one another through interactions in which those on each side hold open the possibility of changing their positions, concepts, and conclusions on the basis of what they learn." By bridging the gap between the voters and representative agents, deliberative campaigns can better ensure that party platforms are more aligned with the needs and interests of the voters.[19] This, in turn, can increase trust in the political system and encourage more active civic participation, ultimately strengthening the democratic system.

Deliberative campaigns allow voters to gain a deeper insight into the factors that shape the decisions of representative agents. By learning about different incentives and constraints (political, economic or otherwise), voters are able to amend their own accounts of their political preferences. This increased understanding can help reduce voter apathy and frustration, which often stem from feelings that the government is not doing enough or is prioritizing the wrong issues.[20] Much like regular town-hall meetings held by representative agents, the ongoing dialogue in deliberative campaigns also holds representative agents accountable.

In sum: citizens can articulate grassroots priorities, such as infrastructure issues or healthcare concerns, while representative agents can clarify constraints such as budgetary limitations and legislative challenges. The goal is to produce a transparent documentation of trade-offs, quantifying preferences between competing priorities (e.g., 70% support for expanded healthcare coverage versus tax cuts). Deliberative campaigns do not aim to eliminate partisanship or differences in platforms, but rather to ensure that these platforms reflect interests, needs and positions of voters formed into collective wills.

The one-sided nature of communication in campaigns is not the only persistent challenge of conventional campaigns. Modern campaigns are highly professionalized and targeted (Luntz 1988). In seeking to draw strategically sharp lines between political candidates, political marketers make it more difficult to see a mutual exchange of ideas as possible.

The professionalization of modern campaigns emerged to help make sense of the "campaign environment," including voting records, issue positions and district information (Medvic 2006, 20). Through "segmentation and voter profiling [. . .] politicians understand voters and volunteers," then group them for targeted outreach (Lees-Marshment 2019, 5). Consultants use polls to refine party messaging and determine which messages resonate. They employ priming and framing

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strategies, based on the idea that "campaigns must draw distinctions between candidates" (Medvic 2006, 24; Simon 2002). By depersonalizing campaigns, such tactics turn voters into passive consumers (Norris 2002, 127). This targeting, as evidenced by the Cambridge Analytica case, has become much more effective with the rise of social media (Heawood 2018, 431).

By manufacturing conflict and forming a political agenda with sharp differences in mind, political marketers increase polarization. While polarization can be problematic in and of itself (Abramowitz and Ebrary Academic Complete Subscription 2010; Mackie 1986; Stasavage 2007; Sunstein 2003), there is increasing research that suggests a strong correlation between polarization and the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories (Vasist, Chatterjee, and Krishnan 2023; Zhu and Pechmann 2025; Marino and Iannelli 2023). Briefly put, polarized environments or echo chambers facilitate the consumption and dissemination of misinformation by creating ongoing and reinforcing confirmation bias (Del Vicario et al. 2016) and creating alluring or alarming "forbidden knowledge" that is supposedly suppressed or censored (Parker et al. 2024). Misinformation and conspiracy thinking can then in turn reinforce polarization (Marino, Benitez-Baleato, and Ribeiro 2024).

While polarization is not new, the ongoing digitization of the public sphere, especially through the dominance of social media, have indeed made it harder for people to see different viewpoints. The content on social media is often filtered to show users content that matches what they already believe, creating echo chambers. This can lead to people having less information about other perspectives and becoming more divided in their opinions—making the job of democratic systems more difficult (McKay et al. 2021). Conspiracy thinking also poses problems for democratic systems. Robert Dahl identified enlightened understanding as one of the criteria of democracy—thus requiring that "each member [in the democratic association] [. . .] have equal and effective opportunities for leaning about the relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences" (Dahl [1998] 2020, 37). Conspiracy thinking, in effect, undermines the possibility of this.

It is important to emphasize that political marketers do not simply study and analyze what is already present in the public and shape the message (and ultimately the agenda) on the basis of public opinion. The represented public is not an already existing, apriori set of groups that are then represented. In representing them, representative agents (with the help of political marketers) contribute to the creation of their own constituencies (Disch 2011; 2021; Saward 2006, 2014)—ones that are, partly owing to marketing strategies, similarly sharply divided and conflictual. This effectively means that campaigns create a multitude of demoi with little to no mutual understanding between them. This not only makes it impossible to address the problem of collective will formation but also can undermine collective decision-making. As Warren (2017: 49) argues,

> the effectiveness of voting as an empowerment depends upon the existence of a relevant demos to which voting-based empowerments can be distributed. When there are mismatches between the ways demoi are organized and issues that affect people, voting is a weak empowerment or fails to empower at all.

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While deliberative campaigns are unlikely to completely eliminate polarization and conspiracy thinking, they may contribute to the amelioration of their effects in two ways: first, they can reshape the role played by political marketers which contributes to polarizing agendas; and second, they can increase the levels of trust between representative agents and voters.

First, deliberative campaigns can significantly alter the role of political marketers by shifting their focus away from targeted advertising strategies. As deliberations within deliberative campaigns inherently limit the ability to tailor messages to specific demographic groups through specialized advertisements (Ackerman and Fishkin 2003, 211), political marketers must adapt their approach. Instead of leveraging public opinion to create distinct boundaries and market specific ideas, they will likely need to concentrate on assisting political actors in crafting compelling cross-cutting messages. This involves identifying ways to share persuasive reasons and rationales across diverse groups, thereby fostering a more inclusive and nuanced political discourse. This will reduce the degree of polarization that is synthetically and artificially created through mainstream marketing strategies.[21]

Second, deliberative campaigns have the potential to increase the trust between voters and representative agents. We know from research in both political communication and deliberative democracy that, all things equal, "voters do want candidates to engage in more interactive campaign forums" including town-hall meetings (Lipsitz et al. 2005, 345). When there is chance to make an impact on the political agenda, voters are willing to participate in deliberations with one another as well as with their representative agents (Neblo et al. 2010). More direct, even if mediated by political parties, forms of democratic engagement might be particularly attractive for those prone to conspiracy thinking. For example, in a tri-part study, Pantazi et al. (2022) found that conspiracy beliefs are linked to support for more direct methods of democracy, challenging the notion that conspiracy beliefs are necessarily in conflict with support for democratic governance.

Deliberative campaigns aim to involve citizens more directly in the process of collective will formation. This cannot only increase the trust of voters in the process and their representative agents but also encourage "becoming informed in order to participate effectively" (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018, 72–73).[22] Deliberative campaigns are not a panacea to all forms of polarization and low information, nor will they eradicate all epistemic bubbles, but they do create different incentives for citizens who can now see themselves more in the platforms and agendas of political parties.

In sum, conventional campaigns suffer from the one-sidedness of campaign communication and microtargeting and the polarization of voters. Without a real possibility for citizens to be part of the collective will formation process and to have their views shape the context of political campaigns, they feel disconnected from politics; representative agents, meanwhile, can be more or less left in the dark about the reception of the plans and strategies until after voting has taken place—if then.

This leads to de-legitimation of processes and demobilization of voters. Since voters are unable to shape the contents of the campaign and platforms of political candidates, they do not have much say in the range of options that are then presented to them. It is of no wonder that, in the most recent elections in the USA,

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the UK and Canada, the block of non-voters (between 36% in the USA and 40% in the UK) was larger than any block supporting any political party (Elections Canada 2021; UK Parliament 2024; Election Lab 2024). Similarly, it can disconnect voters and representative agents who will remain unaware of the priorities and interests of the voters. This was evident during the 2015 Republican Primary Elections, where most candidates, unaware of the rising discontent in their own constituencies, were caught off-guard by the popularity and support of Donald Trump (Milstein 2021).[23] Deliberative campaigns are one tool to counteract these two problems.

Conclusion

This article has put forward deliberative campaigns as a practical mechanism for connecting the practices of deliberation, representation and voting within democratic systems. By making the process of creating and refining party platforms an ongoing and collaborative effort between citizens and representatives, these campaigns strengthen citizens' roles in setting agendas and shaping decisions. This approach makes party platforms more responsive to collective priorities and increases opportunities for reciprocal engagement between voters and representatives, enhancing participation, trust and overall democratic quality. Unlike conventional campaigns—which rely on one-sided, elite-driven communication and microtargeting that fragments agendas and restricts authentic citizen influence—deliberative campaigns are characterized by open-ended, participatory processes. In this way, they break down barriers to citizen inclusion in agenda-setting, help counteract polarization and restore a sense of agency and authorship to ordinary voters in the development of political platforms.

A full evaluation of deliberative campaigns, however, should acknowledge their potential limitations. I categorize these under three main categories: deliberative versus strategic politics, effectiveness and realism of deliberative proposals and practical implications (costs). First, scholars such as Budge (2000) and Thompson (2013) highlight the inherently strategic and competitive nature of political campaigns. They are, after all, "winner-take-all contests, not win-win negotiations" (Thompson 2013, 374). This line of criticism highlights a real tension. Eliminating competitiveness and strategic communication altogether is unlikely and harmful, but deliberative campaigns can work within it. Deliberative campaigns maintain strategic incentives created by partisanship (i.e., the importance of winning in politics). Non-deliberative or even anti-deliberative elements have long been recognized as playing an important part in democratic politics (Afsahi 2020, 2022; Mansbridge et al. 2012) and play a role in deliberative campaigns. Deliberative campaigns seek to enhance the process leading up to competitiveness by involving citizens in platform development through ongoing deliberations and seek to advance the kind of partisanship that White and Ypi (2016, 64) discuss—the kind that "breeds the conditions of adversarialism necessary to the generation and testing of acts of justification."

Thompson (2013) and Gardner (2009) raise further potential concerns for the effectiveness and realism of deliberation, in particular whether voters are open to changing their minds through deliberation and whether campaigns are the right time for such efforts. They argue that voting choices are typically shaped by

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longstanding factors such as economic performance, partisan alignment and ideology—not campaign persuasion (Thompson, 2013)—and, as elections approach, the range of candidate positions is usually already limited (Gardner, 2009). The proposal for deliberative campaigns takes these concerns seriously by focusing on early and ongoing engagement, which can enrich the democratic process before the final competitive phase of campaigns. This early engagement aligns with Gardner's suggestion that deliberation might be more effective when held before candidates emerge (Gardner 2009). It also assuages Thompson's concerns as the performances of representative agents and parties will become part of his list of pre-existing factors that voters use to make decisions.

Finally, there are practical concerns regarding the potential costs of deliberative campaigns. These concerns are important, though not insurmountable. First, by leveraging technology, particularly online and hybrid forums, the costs of deliberative campaign processes can be significantly reduced (Neblo, Esterling, and Lazer 2018). Second, campaigns are already expensive events. In the 2021 federal election in Canada, during a 36-day period, nearly $83 million was spent on campaigning (Benson 2022). This number is dwarfed by the nearly $15 billion that was spent in the 2024 elections in the USA—which admittedly has a much longer election cycle (PBS NewsHour 2024). Deliberative campaigns reduce the need to spend so much on targeted advertising, which is usually behind the most costly items in campaigns.

These concerns help clarify the limits of what deliberative campaigns can offer, even as they underscore the potential benefits of engaging voters in collective will formation. My proposal is not the only means to connect democratic practices or ensure a healthy democratic system, but it offers significant benefits by fostering active citizen participation. By integrating deliberation into campaigns, citizens can engage more deeply with political issues, leading to a more informed and inclusive democratic environment. This approach can help bridge gaps in current democratic systems, even if it is part of a broader suite of reforms needed to strengthen democracy.

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Biographical Information. **Afsoun Afsahi** is an Assistant Professor of Political Theory in the Political Science Department at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests centre around deliberative democracy, democratic theory, inequality, justice and gender. Her most recent publications can be found in the *European Journal of Political Research*, *Political Theory*, *Political Studies* and *Philosophy and Social Criticism*.

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Notes

1 Lacelle-Webster and Warren (2023) point out that, when used within elections, Citizens' Assemblies can both represent traditionally excluded voices (thus contributing to a solution to empowered inclusion) and improve deliberation within campaigns and reduce polarization in partisanship.

2 I am not the first to use the term "deliberative campaigns." Gastil (2000), in his book *By Popular Demand* (2000), uses the terms "deliberative campaigns" (p. 5) and "nondeliberative campaigning" (p. 67). However, neither term is comprehensively defined, and we use the terms to mean different things.

3 Collective will formation comes about through a process of dialogue among ordinary citizens, interest groups, advocates, politicians, intellectuals, expert, media professionals, etc. While this dialogue can be a reasoned deliberation, it can also have elements of negotiation, advocacy and bargaining (Warren 2017). Through these interactions, the originally stated preferences of citizens are often adjusted on the basis of shared information. Institutions such as the media and legislature provide a framework for update of this dialogue.

4 This article uses the term *representative agents* to refer to both current representatives (elected officials) as well as those planning on running in the next election cycle (would-be representatives). The term is borrowed from Mark E. Warren's *A Problem Based Approach to Democratic Theory* (2017).

5 While online sessions offer reduced costs, it is important to consider the limitations of stable internet access and digital literacy. Therefore, while online sessions may be the most common, in-person and hybrid options should remain feasible.

6 https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/programs/consultations/2025/pre-budget-consultations-2025.html

7 Popkin (1991, 54) makes this clear by noting that, while party identification is not "impervious to change," it is not "devoid of political content [either]. [. . .] There is feedback from issues and performance to partisan identification." Therefore, investing in deliberative campaigns and creating genuine institutions for voter participation in collective will formation and agenda-setting will be part of "running tally of [. . .] party assessment."

8 Campaigns are not wasteful extravaganzas but opportunities to provide voters with valuable information. Voters are capable of drawing on past experiences, daily life, media coverage and campaign information to assess candidates and make political decisions (Popkin 1991). With the right setup, voters would be more than capable of contributing to this process of collective will formation.

9 Division of labour has been theorized by scholars of systemic theories of deliberative democracy. The idea is that, when we think about democracy (or deliberation) as a system, we cannot expect every practice of democracy to have the same function. Voting and organizing are different practices. Voting can do work that organizing cannot, and vice versa. Similarly, my proposal for deliberative campaigns recognizes that some degree of division of labour is necessary: legislators still legislate so that citizens are not required to take on that task. Not all citizens will want to or have to participate in the process of deliberative campaigns, although the process of information sharing post.deliberation makes up for the information gaps. (For an account of division of labour, see, Mansbridge et al. 2012; Chambers 2013; Afsahi 2020.)

10 Neblo et al. (2018, 114) refer to this as *scaling-out*. They found that "the constituents who participated in [their] larger session were so enthusiastic about the events that they talked about them with friends and family, and even tried to persuade others to support specific policies and candidates for office."

11 This was the case in lots of places in the 2024 Presidential Election in the USA, where many issues that are squarely part of the platform of the Democratic Party (including abortion rights, minimum wage hike and paid family leave) won on the same ballots where the district-wide or state-wide Republican candidate also won. In fact, in many districts, many voters chose to protect abortion rights and increase the minimum wage but to elect Donald Trump.

12 This article is concerned with election and referendum campaigns that persuade and mobilize voters, but campaigns can also take place in the absence of a contest. Campaigns that attempt to raise the importance of an issue (issue-based campaigns) and those that seek to "paint the public perception of some political actor in a more favourable light" (image campaigns) (Schmitt-Beck and Farrell 2002, 2–3) do not require mobilization of voters; instead, their key tasks are informing and persuading voters.

13 Research consistently shows that groups already disadvantaged in terms of knowledge—such as the information poor (Nadeau et al. 2008, 231), women, particularly older and less-educated women (Mondak and Anderson 2004; Fraile 2014), racial and ethnic minorities (Abrajano 2020; Verba et al. 1993), those from

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lower socio-economic backgrounds (Jerit 2009) and individuals with less formal education (Eveland and Scheufele 2000)—are least likely to experience informational gains.

14 Donald J. Trump's success at winning the candidacy and later the election could be at least partly attributed to the sustained copious coverage of his campaign by mass media (Reuning and Dietrich 2019) as well as priming by the media about the importance of campaign issues such as immigration on which Donald Trump had been most vocal.

15 With the increasing influence of private interests, media have become more market-driven, commercialized and commodified (Habermas 1991, 188; see also, McNair 2012, 7).

16 In the 2015 primary season, both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders used social media more and more effectively. Smaller parties also take advantage of social media. In 2012 Quebec elections, Option Nationale (ON) and Québec Solidaire were more likely to fully embrace social media for campaign organization and strategy, while larger parties tended to adapt these tools into existing practices more cautiously (Giasson, Le Bars, and Dubois 2019). Moreover, while Twitter use did not increase US candidates' coverage in 2012 (Hong and Nadler 2012), by 2024, campaigns such as Donald Trump's relied primarily on platforms such as Truth Social and X.

17 While they may increase everyday political talk among citizens (Pan et al. 2006, 315), such discourse is often filtered within social groups and disconnected from the campaigns themselves. Moreover, research has shown that political talk is often filtered heavily within particular social groups and, thus, individuals are often talking with those with who they are likely to agree (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Huckfeldt et al. 1995). Men, more than women—especially women from minority backgrounds and those with children—are likely to engage in such discussions (Beauvais 2020).

18 A good example is the 2025 Canadian elections, where Pierre Pollievre (CPC) was unable to change his message quickly enough to respond to voters' new concerns regarding Donald Trump (Groen 2025).

19 I do not wish to suggest that there is a single will or agenda that fits all voters. However, even within competitive systems, the will of voters who would support different parties is often not reflected in those parties' platforms.

20 Disillusionment and disengagement have been contributing factors in the rise of anti-establishment and populist figures, often aligned with far-right forces, railing against political elites disregarding the *will* of the people. Rush Limbaugh is a good example of how commentators can gain a following by railing against the disconnect between politicians and *the people*. He famously once said that "We're [Conservatives like him are] interested in power, too, but power for you, the people, not power for bureaucrats and politicians and officeholders and all the like" (Limbaugh 2010).

21 While one might point out that polarization might make deliberation between voters and representative agents impossible, we have evidence to the contrary. In their experiments, Neblo, Esterling and Lazer (2018) dispel this assumption and prove the opposite.

22 It is important to note that it is not just deliberative campaigns that can do this. Antonin Lacelle-Webster and Mark Warren (2023, 106) highlight how "[Citizens' Assemblies] can push back against epistemic bubbles, polarization, and low information, [. . .] because they do not self-select for motivated reasoners."

23 Molly Scudder refers to this as a case of *infelicitous uptake* whereby the support or "opposition to a certain policy [or agenda] was registered by [. . .] fellow citizens [and politicians], but they misunderstood [the] specific concerns or they underestimated the strength of my opposition" (Scudder 2020a, 514; Scudder 2020b, 173; see also, Austin 1962).

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