

EM DEBATE

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DOSSIÊ: MÍDIA GANHA ELEIÇÃO?

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MEDIA, DELIBERATION AND PUBLIC OPINION

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Em Debate: Professor, do you consider that the media acts as a locus of deliberation prepared to receive the communication flows coming from the periphery of the political administrative center, or the civil society?

John Dryzek: Right. Ok, I'm not a media scholar myself, but I think the media does have an important role to play in any deliberative democracy. This is, as soon as we think about deliberation in the large public sphere then the role of media is crucial. But of course, the role of the media is also problematic for some very well known reasons, in terms of the... its domination by... well, some commercial imperatives often by the very sensationalist....deliberative coverage. So the media, I think, is essential but also problematic and so it definitely does have a role, yes.

ED: To a deliberative process is necessary discursive interaction without constraints between individuals who are equal moral and politically, viewing the prevalence of the better argument. Do you think that people in general have an interest and expertise - knowledge - to participate in this debate?

JD: I think people, in general can. And I think ordinary people can. But it's not given them the opportunity to do so. There is really two ways of answering this question. One is to say that there is a role for everyday-talk in a deliberative system. And this is actually, this is the thing... with a very

important paper by James Mansbridge, which was published in 1999. Because everyday-talk, it doesn't look like it's deliberative. But it does have a role to play in... it just don't get people thinking about, about issues and then they may be away of transmitting the results of everyday-talk and into... more discursive deliberative arena. Of course most people that engage their right in everyday-talk themselves, never make that transition. But I think that, well, in my experience at least ,most individuals are capable of that transition, if you give them the right occasion, the right opportunity. And this is why I am interested in things like the citizens' forums, the citizens parliament in Australia, that I recently helped to organize, and there is really amazing that people have now prior, interest in, involvement in or expertise in politics if you give them the opportunity, put them in a situation where they have time, where they have information, where they have access to expertise, where they have facilitation of that discussion. It's amazing what they can do, and just how they really can, can major up to the idea of the deliberative democracy.

ED: Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory argues that the media and public opinion tend to reinforce the hegemonic discourse. How the minorities, individuals symbolically stigmatized, can reverse the process of the discursive interaction in their favor?

JD: Well, partly is a matter of public activism and I believe, well, I mean... the defense that we hear today by Ricardo Fabrino, is very much a case of that sort of activism which can bring different voices and very marginal voices into public deliberation. So, I think that's an important part. Yes, I understand the dynamic of the spiral of silence, but it seems that there are ways to break the spiral as well. And certainly political activism is one of those. And also just the design of different processes in which people can give voice and not feel socially constrained in so doing, where they can really express their true opinions rather than the socially accepted opinions.

ED: The so-called virtual public sphere, the media, has an increasingly central role in contemporary politics. But how to exercise that role in a context of high concentration of the media, as happens in Brazil?

JD: Right. Yeah, the media I think is even more highly concentrated in Australia, we have maybe, you know, two or three big corporations that dominate all the media in the country. So that is the real problem. I mean, the good thing is that certainly with the internet we now have access to more alternative forms of media, and so that can be even media in different countries. Of course the problem is that ... well, just only minorities of people

have access to the internet... actually, maybe not a minority, but only a minority have access and knowledge to use diverse sources on the internet, so that can be an issue too. But I think certainly new communication's technology, and specially the internet, make more diverse sources of information available and so they help counteract the concentration of ownership. But I think there's too... still role for a much more conditional approach of this which is to have a publicly owned broadcasting corporation so... I don't know if you have this in Brazil, but, like in Australia we have the Australian Broadcasting Council, which runs television and radio which are publicly financed, which not owned by corporations, which do not depend on advertisement revenue and so that they can still have a more independent voice on many issues and also a voice which I think often many people believe more than the particularly owned media.

ED: Bernard Manin, as some other theorists, argues that today the parties are not the main link between the government and the electorate. How could then be reconstituted this link between representatives and represented?

JD: I think it seems rather well that political parties are in decline. I don't know what the situation is in Brazil, but I think in most countries the membership is falling and increasingly, there's just a very narrow social basis of membership in each party. So, there's not really much scope for the parties channels and by which public opinion is represented in the system. Of course political parties and elected politicians claim that even so they still are legitimate representatives on the basis they're being elected. Well, that's true, but I think in a complex world is very hard for political parties and elected representatives to represent all the variety of concerns that exists in the society, ones that may be dispersed across many different political, that may be just very hard to articulate in election campaign. And so, I think is important to have different kinds of representatives. I've worked myself with the idea of discursive representatives; it systematically represents the variety of discourses in society; other people have talked about very kinds of non-elected representatives having an ultimate role, offer themselves, they may represent social movements, they may represent emerging concerns which are probably... which may not be widespread enough to actually be reflected in the electoral politics at least If you can't be elected or if you just substantiate that concern. So there's just a... I think is important to have different forms of representations. Electoral representation is still crucial, of course the elections still have a role, but I think they must be supplemented by other

forms of representations, just to make sure that the full variety of concerns, and interests, and discourses are represented.

ED: How can the combination of deliberative and representative forums improve the democratic system?

JD: Oh, that's a big question. I think there are so many ways in which this can be done. Obviously I'm a believer in deliberative democracy, I've been working in this area since... well, actually since before I had a name, around thirty years now. And I see deliberation can, deliberative forms can contribute in so many different ways and they help make social problems-solving more effective, by giving voice to the variety of perspectives on complex issues that may be integrated into resolving social problems. That's just one way. The second is that deliberative democracy has I think an intrinsic value in the sense that it does allow people to give voice to their concerns, and can contribute to the legitimacy of collective decisions... I mean, this is really one the core ideas of deliberative democracy, that a division of would be extended to the people who are subjected to it, have a chance, or a right, or an opportunity and the capacity to participate in deliberation. So I think there are many ways in which deliberation can improve the way in which politics functions. It can, of course, be combined with representative democracy, and sometimes we think, we often think of deliberation and representation as being different spheres, but that's not necessarily true. We can think about ways of making representative democracy itself more deliberative. And so there's been some work done on how parliaments, for example, can be made more deliberative. And then we need to think about the ways that citizens' forums can be connected more closely with parliamentary democracy. They offer them a big difference... in many systems, members of parliament think that they are the central of politics, they should debate and really are not that interested in citizens' forums. We can also imagine bringing citizens' forums and parliaments closer together, and that's been done in some countries. It's been done very successfully, for example, in Denmark where parliament always I mean by must respond to the recommendations of particular kinds of citizens' forums. So there are certain many ways in which that combination can be very fruitful.

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