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The Elusiveness of Preferences

How adequately do the two models of democracy, representative and deliberative, recognize citizens' preferences?

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Abstract

This thesis considers the way in which political decisions are made in New Zealand and how well the core democratic principles of equality and liberty are acknowledged. I begin by acknowledging the definition of deliberative democracy by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson and consider the three ways of doing politics set out by Jon Elster. I give special attention to Jürgen Habermas's belief that political decision-making is a public matter and therefore dependent on the speech acts involved, as expressed in his theory of communicative action. This is a demanding theory but one which supports the deliberative ideal that all those affected by a decision are entitled to participate in arriving at the solution. One of the criticisms of deliberative democracy is that there is no procedure to legitimize the decision. Joshua Cohen disagrees. I look at his 'intuitive' belief that the process of arriving at the solution gives that solution legitimacy and he outlines the institutions that would assist in this process.

The two case studies are examples of the two models of democracy in action: representative, the by-election, and deliberative, the proposed reorganisation of local government. As a region, Northland has challenges that have not been addressed; this suggests that our present political arrangements do not acknowledge citizens' preferences adequately. In seeking a solution for a plural society, I look at the work of Jane Mansbridge, Anne Phillips, Will Kymlicka and Iris Marion Young, in particular, and also suggestions from local bloggers.

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