Direct & Representative Democracy: Are They Necessarily Opposed?

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SUMMARY

This article argues that the rise of political parties has rendered classical distinctions between direct and representative democracy largely obsolete. This is particularly true for representative democracy where rather than selecting candidates as individuals, electors are now asked to choose between party policy packages. Party-mediated rather than unmediated policy voting is also the order of the day so far as direct democracy is concerned. The real contrast between the two thus boils down to periodic voting on medium term party programmes versus frequent votes on individual policy. We argue here that there is a place for both in any modern democracy that truly aims at creating a necessary connection between public policy and popular preferences.