RESEARCH

Weber's Concern on Immediate Democracy and the Mediation of Parliament

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Weber's judgement on the types of immediate democracy is ambivalent; he recognizes the reduction of institutional mediation and power as well as the possibility of a more direct intervention by the people on the one hand, but he also underlines the major difficulties to find a balance between political decision making and administration, or between the exercise of power and its control. The analysis focuses on the most relevant types of immediate democracy: direct democracy, the democracy of the street, and plebiscitary democracy, and dedicates a particular attention to the referendum as the most significant instrument of immediate democracy in Weber's view. The aim is to ascertain which aspects do not find a satisfying solution in the immediate forms of democracy, and therefore require and legitimise at the same time an institutional mediation which is fully accomplished only by a strong and effective parliament.

Premise

Weber's engagement in democracy is not only a late acknowledgment of the demands made during the First World War by the soldiers at the front, but it responds to the general conviction that modern nations can only rest on popular consensus expressed by universal suffrage. Already in 1904, he affirms that large states with a democratic system and strong parliamentary institutions show more political strength than the others (Weber 1904, 80). More explicitly, he declares in the writings on the Russian Revolution of 1905 that he is a partisan of the democratic institutions (Weber 1905, 270), and consistently, two years later, he states that the time of the complicated systems of voting has been overcome and that the final end can only be universal and equal suffrage for all citizens (Weber 1907, 306). Nevertheless, it is surely true that the long duration of the war and the discussion in 1917 on the possibility of a democratisation and a parliamentarisation of the German system inflames the debate and offers Weber the opportunity to reflect more circumstantially on the different features and forms of democracy. In his work *Suffrage and Democracy in Germany*, he underlines the significance for individuals of being citizens and exerting through a universal and equal vote

one's own political rights. Moreover, he stresses that the attribution of political rights is the unique way of compensating economic and social differences among the citizens, since it makes them feel that they are equal when they express their preference in the elections. He also thinks that there is no predetermined capacity of understanding politics gained through study, profession, familiar or social condition (Maley 2011, 57). This explains why all individuals have to be equally entitled to vote and legitimises the formation of the government on the basis of the electoral outcomes.

The interpretation of Weber as a democratic thinker finds support in the analysis of several critics. If it is true that numerous interpreters since Mommsen have stressed the centrality for him of plebiscitary power, others have highlighted Weber's commitment to parliamentary democracy. Colliot-Thélène (2009) remarks that, for Weber, the legitimacy of power can only derive from the assignment of the people through universal suffrage. Palonen (2019, 3) stresses that Weber is a supporter of parliamentary democracy and highlights (Palonen 2010) that this acknowledgement also conditions his method for seeking truth in the sciences by means of a fair and ordered discussion of arguments. Duran (2009) notes that Weber is looking for an ordered democracy with a strong parliament, while Maley (2011) recognizes his commitment to a competitive-elitist model of parliamentary democracy. Bruhns (2017) underlines that Weber had taken position in favour of parliamentary democracy already before the First World War. Some interpreters go further and state that Weber's theory even entails some elements of direct democracy. For Breiner (1996), Weber considers politics as the capacity of sharpening political judgement and exerting prudence, which can be extended to all individuals, while Kelly (2003; 2004) stresses the importance of a general political education. Breuer (1994) ascertains that Weber has developed a classification of different models of democracy and shows that, for Weber, democratic legitimacy entails an antiauthoritarian and revolutionary aspect; however, while Weber thought that the system of the parties was destined to overcome direct democracy, Breuer argues that it is possible to integrate some of its ideals also in a developed multiparty system.

Yet it can be objected that not all forms of democracy are equally effective, in Weber's view. In his analyses, he distinguishes between different patterns which show specific ideal-typical characteristics. Their diverse configuration contributes to creating differentiated conditions and provokes at least partially distinct ways of organisation. Particular attention is dedicated to the types of immediate democracy which imply a reduction of institutional mediation and power. Although Weber himself does not draw up a systematic list of the different forms of democracy, he formulates in his works precise distinctions and characterisations which permit us to reconstruct different types (Kaesler 2003, 213). Especially in the political works, where Weber allows himself to take position because they are not strictly scientific, he also expresses critical remarks which are partly political and partly connected with technical and institutional issues. The aim of the present analysis is to reconstruct the types of immediate democracy taken into account by Weber and includes at first 'direct democracy', followed by the remarks he makes in relation to its most common instrument in modern time, the referendum. Then the focus will be centred on the types of immediate democracy with reference to the intervention of the masses in politics from the French Revolution onwards, which Weber respectively defines as the 'democracy of the street' and as 'plebiscitary democracy'. The aim of the analysis is to show how the typologies of direct democracy constructed by Weber simultaneously show their deficiencies and furnish themselves with arguments which support the model of parliamentary democracy. Finally, and also through their comparison, it should be ascertained which functions Weber ascribes to the institutional mediation and especially to parliament in order to ensure an effective democracy, and which elements of immediate democracy are worth maintaining.

Substance and Limits of Direct Democracy

In *Economy and Society*, Weber depicts direct democracy as a form of rule which is, at least in its tendency, alien to power, or, more exactly, which strives to reduce power. By illustrating this form of political organisation, he underlines the central role of the assembly where all citizens convene, and to which every decision is ultimately ascribed and must be submitted. Weber explains: 'This means that persons in authority are held obligated to act solely in accordance with the will of the members and in their service by virtue of the authority given to them' (Weber 1968, 289). Hereof, the assembly of the members is the real sovereign and power-holder, while its delegates are essentially spokespersons who report its will and implement it conformably. In this sense, direct democracy can be defined as a leaderless democracy, aiming at avoiding the formation of strong personalities seeking power and offices, and underlining by contrast the priority of the assembly for all state affairs. Because of this close relation to the assembly in its quality of power-holder, its ideal place is a political entity with a limited territory and a modest number of inhabitants: 'This is best achieved in small organizations whose entire membership can be assembled in one place, who know one another, and who treat each other as equals' (Weber 1919–1920, 207; 2019, 433). On the other hand, Weber sustains the inadequacy of this form for large political entities, although he admits that the attempt to realise a direct democracy has been undertaken in history on many occasions. However, faced with large-sized organisations, the pattern of direct democracy rapidly unveils for him its inefficiency and its limits (Maley 2011, 62). According to Weber, this depends not only on a quantitative criterion, but also on a qualitative one, since direct democracy suits only to organisations which are not very developed, and which do not yet need a high specialisation and specification of tasks. In the case of the enhancement of complexity for the organisation, direct democracy fails because of the dilettante capacities which it relies on in consequence of its negative attitude to stable offices and exertion of power.

The difficulty of extending the pattern of direct democracy to large-scale states with differentiated competences and tasks of administration is further confirmed through the main characteristics which pertain to direct democracy. With respect to this, Weber ascertains eight main properties:

1. Short duration of office
2. Constant possibility of recall
3. Rotation or selection by lot
4. Imperative mandate
5. Obligation to accountability to the general assembly for every single item
6. Obligation to submission of every new question to the assembly or to a committee representing it
7. Numerous juxtaposed offices provided with the assignment of special tasks
8. Offices as an additional occupation.

In Weber's view, all these qualifications contribute to diminishing the persistence and concentration of power, but at the same time they hinder the increase of knowledge and specialisation. The short duration of office, joined with the continual possibility of recall, impedes the acquirement of expertise, which can be compensated through civic engagement in small and not developed organisations, but becomes indispensable with the specification of tasks and abilities. Additionally, recall enhances the sense of precariousness and instability which can render officials insecure and less effective. Rotation and selection by lot, on their part, exclude that an adequate and purposeful education is taken on in advance, and hinders the choice of qualified people.

A particular critical stance concerns imperative mandate which undermines for Weber every chance of developing an autonomous political personality capable of making independent decisions. Through the imperative mandate, argues Weber, representatives act only as spokespersons and, moreover, they convert into the mere emissaries of the assembly and into the servants of the people: 'If this principle is radically applied, the elected person is formally the agent and hence the servant of his voters, not their chosen master' (Weber 1914, 502; 1968, 1128). For Weber, this signifies the try to eliminate every charismatic element and every form of power, but also, since politics pursues power, the attaining of a depoliticisation of the system and of society on the whole.

In general, direct democracy entails a strict dependence on the assembly for every activity and handicaps every form of personal initiative and individual decision making or search for solutions. It also implies a fragmentation of the tasks, which reduces the field of one's own personal action, and segments the guarantee of continuity in the implementation. In this respect, this kind of agency attains a general diffusion of political activity, which means a spatialisation of politics, while the dimension of time is fragmented and often interrupted. This is confirmed by the fact that on the one hand, political concern is conferred on all citizens and also implies their taking on responsibility directly by being charged with public tasks, and on the other hand, their short duration and turnover impede the acquisition or application of purposive knowledge as well as the elaboration and implementation of long-lasting programmes (Colliot-Thélène 2014, 92). Also the refusal of transforming political commitment into a professional activity testifies to the short endurance ascribed to political tasks and the exiguity of their temporal dimension.

The reduction of personal initiative and possibility of decision making, which is identified by Weber with the diminution of power and the transformation of political processes into merely administrative ones, concerns all procedures of politics which constitute an approach to the practices of direct democracy. In the course of time, this implies a reduction of the capacities to decide and to take on responsibility, which are for him indispensable elements of politics, and entails a paradoxical similarity to the depoliticisation enacted by bureaucratic procedures, although it opposes their claim to specialisation. In this sense, Weber is also sceptical about means which are usually considered as indispensable to implement a form of more direct democracy, such as the formation of long electoral lists of candidates by the parties and about proportional suffrage. In his view, this implies a bureaucratisation of politics, since the decisions about the representatives are de facto subtracted to the people and entrusted to the parties' secretariats. Moreover, the setting up of lists favours the evidence of fidelity and reliability to the party, which are a demonstration of obedience, but not of the capacity for political leadership. Through the choice of the representatives by means of lists, politics loses the ability to develop arguments and to arouse lively debates, and in doing so it diminishes the chance of getting the public opinion and the people involved. Simultaneously, it increases a policy of bargaining and of distribution of offices among the parties.

If Weber clearly opposes the tendency to reduce politics to the administrative execution of tasks, he also contrasts the attempt by direct democracy to transform administrative functions into elective mandates. By being carried out through elections, administrative offices can profit neither of knowledge nor of experience. This means that they will be implemented by people who are, as a rule, dilettantes. Furthermore, the limitation constituted by the terms impedes the gradual accumulation of expertise and operates against a specialisation and professionalisation of administration in the long run. The election of officials, besides, compels people who do not possess specialised knowledge to make difficult choices by being called to

decide which persons are suitable for technical tasks, choices which are rendered even more difficult by the fact that often the candidates are not known by the voters. Weber objects that it is much more advisable to choose politicians who thereafter are made directly responsible for selecting a staff of collaborators, and then to supervise their activity. In Weber's opinion, this increases effectiveness and also reduces the risk of corruption.

From this perspective, Weber also criticizes collegiality, which shares with direct democracy the intent of minimising power. Collegiality is in reality not an exclusive characteristic of democracy, since it is also present in aristocratic systems with the intent of contrasting the domination by a single power-holder. However, it also characterises political organisations which try to avoid a personalisation of power and make the attempt to obtain a horizontal distribution of responsibility. Politically, collegiality creates obstacles against the chance of precise and rapid decision making (Savés 2017, 28). Moreover, once again, collegiality hinders specialisation and the acquisition of adequate knowledge. It also makes it more complicated to attain a clear distinction of tasks among the appointed members. As happens with many of the structures and procedures which qualify direct democracy, these forms of arrangement are suitable, according to Weber, only in the first phase of the organisation, when this is not yet developed and its functions and tasks are not so differentiated. With the increasing of tasks and offices, a clear separation of competences is unavoidably required, which rather demands for stable structures and responsible heads. This reveals the shortcomings of a horizontal diffusion of power lacking specialisation in general, and of a system of direct and immediate democracy in particular.

The Referendum Dilemma

Weber dedicates particular attention to the most common and authoritative instrument of direct democracy: the referendum. With the referendum, citizens are intended to be consulted on political questions directly, and especially on concrete contents concerning the public sphere. On principle, therefore, referendum is thought to play a very significant role in enhancing democracy. On the one hand, it prompts people to confront themselves with urgent political questions, which lead them to get informed about the specific topics concerned and to become acquainted with the different existing positions and their reasons. On the other hand, a referendum represents a procedure overcoming mediations and giving a direct voice to the people, so that it confers into their hands the decisional power and performatively demonstrates that common will bases in the leading opinion of the citizens. Summing up, a referendum implies promoting participation and the featuring of politics.

Nevertheless, Weber observes that a referendum first does not attract the interest of people as could be expected and second is as a rule not an innovating instrument, but on the contrary tends to confirm the traditional state of things and to conserve it also for the future. Weber comments: 'Should referenda, say, cater for legislation? […] In a mass state a referendum would mean a powerful mechanical brake on all progress' (Weber 1917, 395; PW, 128), and further: 'The approval of parliamentary decisions through referendum results primarily in a considerable strengthening of all irrational powers of inertia' (Weber 1914, 502; 1968, 1128). Starting from these statements that he considers as empirical evidence, Weber furnishes a range of different reasons which illustrate the difficulties included in the procedure of referendums.

First of all, it is a question of custom; referendums are more successful where the habit of asking people on political issues through them is deep-rooted. With respect to this, Weber cites the examples of Switzerland and the United States, where the practice of asking via referendum people's opinion is frequent and historically underpinned.

Then, it is also a question of contents. Also in countries which are accustomed to making use of referendums frequently, they are not useful to decide on budget or taxes, because in that case the direct involvement of the people would induce them to choose following their particular interest and favouring their contextual point of view. By contrast, the established function of representatives and members of a public institution, still not completely guaranteeing against the pursuit of personal interests and advantages, allows for a more distanced weighing and is additionally subjected to the restricting measures of publicity and supervision by the people and the other institutions. The use of referendums, instead, can allow for manipulation behind the scenes. Hereof, Weber entertains the suspicion that referendums can also be misused in order to support specific private interests and advantages of the few.

Another restriction which Weber makes on referendums is about the extension of their application. Similarly to the other instruments and procedures of direct democracy, referendums are for Weber suitable for small territories, while they encounter difficulties in being efficacious and valuable for large-sized states. The major reason resides in the fact that large territories usually present differences in their social, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic composition. As a rule, referendums prove to be valuable in homogeneous territories, where people have a stronger feeling of belonging and a near interest to the question debated. In large political entities, by contrast, differences are more accentuated and end up by conditioning the vote and prevailing over the specific contents of the questions involved. Additionally, in extended political entities, the organisation of referendums implies high costs. For Weber, all these aspects contribute to enhancing the idea that referendums are not so effective for large states and should be limited in their frequency, still preferring as a rule decision making by the existing representative organs.

The most fundamental objection that Weber raises in relation to referendum nevertheless concerns the reductive procedure which it introduces, consisting of contracting political decision to a pure 'yes' or 'no', which do not give room to any possibility of bargaining, compromise, and modulated solution.

> Both as an electoral and a legislative instrument, the *popular referendum* has inner limits which follow from its technical peculiarity. The only answers it gives are 'Yes' or 'No'. […] In a large mass state it would also be a most worrying obstacle to the creation of any laws which rested on a compromise between conflicting interests. The most conflicting reasons can give rise to a 'no' if there is no means of settling conflicts of interest through a process of negotiation. The referendum knows nothing of compromise, and yet it is inevitable that the majority of laws must be based on compromise in a mass state with an internal structure characterised by powerful regional, social, religious and other oppositions (Weber 1917–1918, 544; PW, 225).

The problem of referendums, in synthesis, is that they simplify political options and reduce them to a polarisation between the positive and negative answer. No consideration for regional, cultural, social, and structural differences is taken into account or contemplated; no place for mediation and amendment is provided or even hypothesised. This suggests itself that referendum can create beyond the specific question at stake a deep rift within the political entity. It further implies—Weber will add in a publication after the war—that possible negative side effects of the decision entailed in the referendum cannot be corrected or modified (Weber 1918, 135), and all chances of compromise and adaptation to the different circumstances are excluded. Thus, there is no possibility to adjust the contents in order to meet the objections or avoid possible troubles. Also, the political dialogue is de facto undermined,

because parties or groups can opt for one of the two possibilities, but they have no room for alternative proposals or for modification. The result, in Weber's opinion, will therefore tend as a rule to confirm what already exists and to conform to tradition, because the reasons for avoiding the change will be multiple and will sum to each other. This explains for Weber the conservative tendency of the referendum, its limited range of action in featuring politics, and also the objective difficulty for politicians and experts of interpreting a negative vote, since the reasons of the 'no' are different and not compellingly congruent to one another.

Also about the question of the educative function of referendums for the citizens, Weber ascribes to them only a limited value, and refers to the entanglement of pros and cons that their use originates.

> Obligatory popular elections and referenda are, it is true, the diametrical opposite of the often regretted fact that the only political contribution made by the citizens in a parliamentary state consists in placing a voting slip (pre-printed and provided for him by the party organizations) into a ballot box every few years. The question has been asked whether this is a means of political education. Undoubtedly, it can *only* be educative under the conditions of open administration and control of the administration […], since these things accustom the citizens to keeping a watchful eye on the way affairs are administrated (Weber 1917–1918, 545; PW, 226).

Thus, referendums are not decisive for increasing political awareness and education among the people, since a too frequent call to the ballot box can provoke estrangement from politics. Much more impressive can be rather the enlivening of attention and the constant information joint to transparency about political affairs.

In synthesis, Weber thinks that citizens can be involved more substantially in politics if they are updated and made acquainted with present political debates, and then put into the condition of choosing (and judging) politicians on the basis of their programmes. Additionally, he pleads for avoiding that referendum results can take influence on the government itself and be considered as a judgement on its political activity on the whole, which means that no government crisis should follow if the referendum has a negative outcome. This does not speak definitively against referendum, but pleads for a moderate use of it, by simultaneously privileging the activity of representatives, which is enabled to bargain solutions and to find practicable and useful compromises (Senigaglia 2017, 384–385). At the end of his considerations on referendum, he namely remarks:

> All of this, however, is no argument against the use of the referendum as the *ultima ratio* in appropriate cases, despite the fact that conditions in mass states differ from those in Switzerland. But it does not make powerful parliaments superfluous in large states. Even in electoral democracies parliament is indispensable as an organ for controlling officialdom and ensuring public scrutiny of the administration, as a means of excluding unsuitable leading promises between the parties (Weber 1917–1918, 546; PW, 227).

Thus, an appropriate form of democracy involving the citizens and aiming at enhancing political culture and commitment cannot rest only on direct democracy, but needs also a representative system based on a strong parliament which creates an intensive interchange with the citizens, and which integrates, without being overwhelmed, some elements of direct democracy in its functioning and procedures.

The Type of the Immediate Protest: The Democracy of the Street

Weber depicts another political configuration which can be considered as a form of immediate democracy: the democracy of the street, whose appearance had gained relevance and frequency through the more or less spontaneous protests which broke out especially in the last phase of the war. Its immediacy, however, does not concern a set of instruments and equipments guaranteeing a ruled expression of the will of the citizens and subjecting the agency of the delegates to the direct control of their assembly, but the expression of an immediate emotion through which people coalesce together and give rise to a spontaneous action. Speaking about the democracy of the street, Weber (1919–1920, 15; 2019, 100) bore in mind the work of Gustave Le Bon (2001) of 1896, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, in which the author maintained that people forming a crowd act in a different way from the single individuals taken one by one; hence, the action of a crowd is potentially much more emotional and can also produce destructive effects, because people feel less responsible and are much more subject to the influence of the unconscious and its uncontrolled instincts.

Referring to this, Weber opposes a conception of democracy based on universal suffrage, in which every single individual is called upon to think and take a personal decision, to the reaction of the masses that pour out into the street and try to provoke an upheaval of the existing political conditions. Actually, Weber does not always use the expression 'democracy of the street' consistently, since sometimes he prefers to speak of the 'politics of the street', arguing that this form of uncontrolled political action has also existed in non-democratic governments. However, he notes that it has become a frequent instrument of doing politics in consequence of the process of democratisation which has progressively involved the masses in active politics, and this justifies its definition as the 'democracy of the street'. Although all types of immediate democracy relate directly to the people, this one is in several respects the exact opposite of direct democracy, which is rational, well-ordered, and tries to reduce power by distributing it among the citizens. Using an expression that Weber had adopted by commenting inadequate forms of democracy, it could be said that the democracy of the street is '*the influence of the rabble without democracy*, or rather, *because we lack an orderly democracy*' (Weber 1917–1918, 538; PW, 220).

From a geopolitical point of view, the democracy of the street is typical for countries and situations in which the political system, parliament, and especially the parties are not well-organised or do not consistently partake in the political debate.

> As far as national politics is concerned, the *un*organised mass, the democracy of the street, is wholly irrational. It is at its most powerful in countries with a parliament that is either powerless or politically discredited, and that means above all where *rationally organised parties are absent* (Weber 1917–1918, 550; PW, 231).

In general, the democracy of the street corresponds to a movement called into being by people living at the fringe of society, meeting and discussing politics in coffee-houses. Their movement is abrupt, rash and thoughtless. In fact, comments Weber, "the 'mass' as such (no matter which social strata it happens to be composed of) thinks only as far as the day after tomorrow. As we know from experience, the mass is always exposed to momentary, purely emotional and irrational influences" (Weber 1917–1918, 549; PW, 230). As a matter of fact, the democracy of the street aims at penetrating and invading all the public space and wants to politicise it, excluding the temporal dimension of reflection, the weighing of arguments and of the possible consequences (side effects included) before taking decisions. Therefore, the democracy of the street opposes every form of rational thinking and organization (Maley

2011, 94). This means that it can be kept in check only where parties, trade unions and the like provide for the organisation of political activity. With reference to the German situation of his time, Weber ascertains that "organisations like the trade unions, but also the Social Democratic Party, create a very important counterbalance to the rule of the street which is so typical of purely plebiscitary nations and so prone to momentary and irrational influences" (Weber 1917–1918, 550; PW, 231). For Weber, these organisations have proven to be able to dominate the street and to use protest in an effective and resounding way. 'Compared with those wholly irresponsible elements, however, it is a force which is at least capable of being ordered and led by its trusted representations, which is to say by politicians who think rationally' (Weber 1917, 391–392; PW, 125). In Weber's view, mediation and orderly organisation are indispensable also when protests are raised and transformations in the political system are striven after. They allow for avoiding disorder and for aiming at politically significant outcomes. Thus, through the criticism of the democracy of the street Weber elaborates further arguments pleading for a form of democracy which requires a higher degree of institutional setting.

The Immediate Transfer of Power: Plebiscitary Democracy

Immediate democracy can also imply a direct transfer of power from the people to the power-holder. The decisive difference from the other forms of immediate democracy resides here in the presence of the charismatic component, which confers on the power-holder an extraordinary legitimacy. Different from the pure form of charismatic dominion, however, plebiscitary democracy includes, as a necessary moment, the investiture by the people, i.e. their explicit expression of will. This entails, nevertheless, their entrusting the power into the hands of a centralized and personal leadership. This type of democracy already existed in ancient times—Weber refers to Caesar—and was connected with a strong charismatic component emanating from the leader which made people believe in his extraordinary qualities and engendered spontaneous trust and will to obedience by the followers. A revival of this attribution of power nevertheless concerns also the modern time as a consequence of the process of democratisation and the intervention of the masses in active politics. Their presence raises a need for demagogic capacities, where demagogy is taken by Weber in its neutral original etymology of 'leading the folk', without nonetheless ignoring or playing down the fact that its emotional and irrational elements can bear risks for the stability and legality of the political organisation. Demagogy exists in some form in each democratic regime and responds to the need of mass society for a strong leadership (Mommsen 2004, 426–427). This is what Weber defines as the Caesarist component of mass democracy, which resides in conferring the power on someone who can gain the trust of the masses and arouse their faith:

> Active democratization of the masses means that the political leader is no longer declared a candidate because a circle of notables has recognised his proven ability, and then becomes leader because he comes to the fore in parliament, but rather because he uses the means of *mass* demagogy to gain the confidence of the masses and their belief in his person, and thereby gains power. Essentially this means that the selection of the leader has shifted in the direction of *Caesarism*. Indeed, every democracy has this tendency (Weber 1917–1918, 538–539; PW, 220–221).

The most immediate form to confer (or to ratify) the power on a leader is the plebiscite, which is not an election in the strict sense of the word, but a form of confirmation by acclamation put on the stage by the leader him- or herself (Palonen 2017, 59). In *Economy and Society*,

Weber defines the plebiscite as an only seeming expression of popular will: 'Here it is not important what its real value as an expression of popular will is; *formally*, it is the specific means of deriving the legitimacy of rule from the freely given trust of *those who are ruled*, even though this be only formal, or possibly a fiction' (Weber 1919–1920, 191; 2019, 406). The immediacy of the plebiscite consists then only in the formal semblance of being an act legitimising power thanks to the approbation of the people. In reality, the act is performed by the power-holder, especially when he (Weber gives the examples of Napoleon I and Napoleon III) intends to react against an apparent loss of dominion and retake full control.

The plebiscite is therefore not a real feature of democracy, and in this sense it cannot be integrated and accepted as such, as a form of election or expression of popular will. Nevertheless, in Weber's view, a plebiscitary component is an ineradicable element of mass democracies, which is tempered but comes to the fore whenever the State President or the Prime Minister is directly elected by the people. In order to illustrate the difference, Weber, in his later years, introduces a distinction between merely 'plebiscitary dominion' and 'orderly plebiscitary dominion' (Weber 1920, 100–101). In the first case, the power is exclusively in the hands of the chosen or elected leader who uses plebiscites in order to receive a confirmation for the activity done and intentionally organises them with the intent of having a popular investiture or legitimisation. In the case of an orderly plebiscitary dominion, by contrast, the plebiscitary moment is integrated into a regular election with more candidates among whom people are allowed to choose, it is limited in the time through the fixed duration of the terms, and it includes instruments in order to control the power and to express a vote of no confidence in the case of its misuse or of a loss of trust by the masses. It is interesting to remark that this distinction was formulated by Weber in his general lecture on the state (*Allgemeine Staatslehre*) after the war. This shows that, although Weber pleaded at that time for a stronger power to be conferred on the State President (Weber 1919, 214–224; PW, 304–308), he nevertheless continued to advocate a political system controlled by the parliament and the other institutions. Through this system, according to Weber, the candidates have to enter into a direct competition with one another; thus, all of them have to struggle to obtain the consensus of the people (Palonen 1998, 166–167), and this consensus can also be denied or revoked. In this way, mass democracy appropriates the possibility to include a charismatic component, which nevertheless is not any longer imposed on the followers, but it is subjected to the judgement of the people themselves. This is the result of what Weber calls 'the antiauthoritarian transformation of charisma' (Weber 1919–1920, 190; 2019, 405), which implies a democratic form of integrating charisma by still maintaining a room for a decision from below, and in considering plebiscitary democracy as a question of popular choice. However, Weber is aware that this formal change can be subject to the demagogic and instrumental use by the leader who influences the masses and takes power over them (de Villiers 2018, 113). Weber's sensitivity towards this problematic had already arisen during the war and had been progressively enhanced, insofar as Weber had come to accentuate the necessity to have political leaders demonstrating a steadfast capacity of decision and taking on personal responsibility for their leadership. Now as before, strong leadership requires for him the elaboration of a system of institutional control and limitation of power.

Between plebiscitary and parliamentary democracy, therefore, an irrepressible tension exists and cannot be removed. It resides in the non-institutional or anti-institutional tendency of plebiscitary democracy which opposes the legal frame of parliament. Yet this tension is judged by Weber to be useful and valuable, provided that parliament conserves some fundamental powers in ruling and supervising the plebiscitary leader:

> The existence of parliament guarantees the following things: (1) the *stability* and (2) *controlled nature* of his position of power; (3) the preservation of civil *legal safeguards* against him; (4) an ordered form of *proving*, through parliamentary work, the political abilities of the politicians who seek the trust of the masses; (5) a peaceful way of *eliminating* the Caesarist dictator when he has *lost* the trust of the masses (Weber 1917–1918, 540; PW, 222).

In the tension with the plebiscitary component, parliament is judged as fundamental first of all because it is an institutional organ elected by the people directly, democratically, and without distinction of vote (i.e. following the principle: one person, one vote). The fact that the existence of parliament is ruled by law and contemplated in the Constitution is furthermore a guarantee for the stability and the limits of power ascribed to the plebiscitary leader (Palonen 2017, 63). Through parliament, on the other hand, also the rights of the citizens are ensured and protected by means of their representatives, and the citizens themselves are put into the condition of getting to know how potential or appointed leaders act and which position they take. Finally, parliament offers for Weber the guarantee that a leader who has lost the support of the people can be dismissed in an orderly way without putting at risk legality and the maintenance of order. To sum up, the guarantees listed by Weber are all connected with its institutional role of mediation and its legitimacy obtained thanks to the people. By means of this indirect demonstration which goes through the evidence of the indispensable role of parliament, Weber shows also in this case the incapacity of the forms of immediate democracy to provide alone the instruments for their autonomous existence. In doing so, he explains that they require a representative institutional setting which be capable to encase and regulate their activity, and that this mediation ends up with modifying the organisation of the system in direction of an effective and more sophisticated parliamentary democracy.

Direct and Plebiscitary Democracy in Comparison

The different forms of immediate democracy have, despite their diverging results, a common impulse at their origin: the expression of an antiauthoritarian power which aims at stressing the significance of the popular will. In the direct democracy as well as in the plebiscitary one the focus is a direct 'investiture'—as Weber calls it—by the citizens, which is normally performed by elections, since these are interpreted as the most straightforward way to confirm the legitimacy of the power assignment by the people (Colliot-Thélène 2014, 96). As a matter of fact, institutions have, in this case at least, formally a subordinate role, since they partake in the suffrage only as warrants of the correct functioning of the procedure and as supervisors against possible pressure or manipulation. In this sense, elections are seen also in representative democracies as the moment in which power comes back to the people and is distributed or conferred again.

   Nevertheless, through the Weberian analysis it becomes clear that the outcomes of the two main types of immediate democracy, direct and plebiscitary democracy, pursue opposite aims (the democracy of the street being rather an uncontrolled and ephemeral form). In the case of direct democracy, all procedures chosen intend *to maintain power in the hands of the citizens*. Therefore, their representatives are de facto delegates mostly with an imperative mandate and are strictly subject, for every single action, to the monitoring and the judgement of the assembly (whose members are ideally all citizens or as numerous as possible). By contrast, plebiscitary democracy aims at *transferring power to the elected*. The popular will concerns the choice of the leader(s) charged with the target to govern and therefore called to exert a

dominion over them (Breuer 2006, 123). In its democratic form, this does not exclude the charge with responsibility (Blanc 2014, 139) or even the possibility of removal from power, but it presupposes as a rule the exercise of a leadership empowered with effective decision making and with the objective of realising its own political programme.

A further distinction resides in the different states of mind guiding the various forms of immediate democracy. According to Weber, direct democracy is a *rational* form of doing politics. It pursues the purpose of minimising power (*Herrschaft*) by maintaining the decision making in the hands of the general assembly and to appoint delegates who essentially implement the popular will. In this sense, direct democracy entails the right and duty to exhaustive information of the public, a practice of supervision enacted by the assembly, and a system of lot or turnover which regulates appointments to offices and avoids long-term charges, exposed to the risk of enhancing privileges and power positions. On the contrary, plebiscitary democracy is fundamentally guided by *emotion*. Although people are called to express their opinion and their choice through the ballot, plebiscitary democracy essentially points at selecting charismatic leaders with an extraordinary 'aura' and qualities which are intuitively considered as apt to support effective leadership. The emotional attachment to the leader is at bottom irrational, and therefore expresses the tendency to entrust 'the chosen' without caring too much about guarantees, the defence of individual rights, and public control.

What both main forms of immediate democracy unveil through their comparison is nevertheless a strong tendency to polarisation. Immediacy in political relationships, especially if applied to democracy, seems to direct itself too sharply in one of two opposite directions, without integrating in some form the opposite component. The systematic minimisation of power and the short-termed attribution of offices tend to reduce politics to administration, to annoy people with too frequent elections and lists of complicated (and often too technical) questions, and to hamper rapid and efficient decision making. Conversely, the nearly blind trust in the chosen leader confers too much power on a single person by simultaneously limiting the chances of opposition and control as well as of maintaining a sphere of autonomy and freedom for the individuals.

In order to mitigate these extremes, Weber confides above all in a stable frame of laws and institutions which rationalise the system (Lepsius 2016, 25ff), since they are intended to avoid stagnation in decision making and a bureaucratisation of politics on the one hand and violation of legality and rights on the other (Savés 2017, 24). This legal setting includes for Weber a powerful representative institution, because only a strong parliament can be enabled to ensure an efficacious and timely decisional process, and also rules which establish in advance and precisely how members of parliament and governments have to act, which is the range of their competences, and how turnover and poll procedures have to be carried out. Additionally, a stable institutional frame also indicates which are the monitoring persons or settings, guaranteeing that an effective control is exerted on the government and that the concerning rules and procedures are respected and correctly applied. Finally, it provides ruled opportunities for the political debate within and outside the institutions (Palonen 2010, 46–47). In doing so, the different opinions are conveyed to the people, who can acquire better information and become more aware about the main issues at stake.

Political debates, however, are not only useful for the people, since they constitute the premises thanks to which decisions are taken, alliances and coalitions are formed, and compromises can be found (Palonen 2010, 165). Through the representative institutions, it is possible to create the conditions for executing that mediation which appears so difficult to be instantiated through the formulation of appropriate questions in a referendum. With

respect to this, Weber openly criticises the polarisation between yes and no attained through the referendum, but the same scruples also regard the alternative between the complicatedness of direct democracy on the one hand and the decisionism of the plebiscitary form on the other, or the alternative between rationality and emotionality taken to the extremes (Heins 2007, 717). The institutional mediation through representation with an effective parliament embodies the capacity to accept some practices of immediate democracy and some emotional components of plebiscitary dominion by integrating them at the same time into the legal frame overseeing over them.

What Weber aims at is in fact the creation of a dynamic balance between rationality and emotion, competent decision and effective, charismatic leadership. According to Weber, in the mass society an element of the dramatisation of politics is indispensable and unavoidable: indispensable, because people need some stimuli in order to be attracted by political questions and to seek continual and updated information; unavoidable, because mass society and democratisation require the centralisation of leadership and at the same time the popular confidence (Monod 2014, 120). A democracy based on the systematic and persistent interrogation of the people on every single question would fatigue and reduce in the long run their commitment. On the other hand, pure plebiscitary power would convert into an arbitrary decision making and a cult of personality around the power-holder, which could not provide room for opposition, the building of alternatives, and a serious consideration of feasible different solutions.

In this sense, the fundamental task for citizens consists, in Weber's view, not in giving their opinion on all specific issues, but rather in orienting themselves to basic ideal conceptions—Weber still admits the existence of ideals or *Weltanschauungen* and parties representing them—and in selecting individuals with leader's capacities. For him, leaders have to demonstrate a rhetorical ability in presenting the questions at stake and in competing with other leaders joint to a form of competent and objective (*sachlich*) judgement (Palonen 1998, 203). This is the reason why it becomes for him so important to ascertain the leader's essential qualities and the traits of their profession (Palonen 2002). Furthermore, this has to be conveyed in both directions: to the politicians themselves, so that they can improve their attitude and their expertise, and to the citizens, who are charged with the task of making a conscious choice. This is not an occasional task, because it implies also information, the supervision of power, and readiness to mobilise themselves in the legally provided ways, if the government is not matching the expectations. It can also be completed with some tools of direct democracy, but the paramount way of finding political solutions, compromises, and lasting agreements needs for Weber the mediation of professional politicians operating in an effective parliament.

Conclusion

Weber's analysis of the different types of immediate democracy provides an articulated spectrum of governments basing their consensus less on the institutions and more on the people. Although the list is not exhaustive, it offers a selection of significant ideal-typical forms to feature democracy through a direct or directly entrusted exertion of power. In doing so, Weber offers sophisticated analyses of the major differences and consequences. His attitude, which comes to the fore especially in the political—and therefore not strictly scientific—writings, varies correspondingly. While Weber shows no sympathy for the 'democracy of the street', his attention is much more focused on the questions concerning 'direct' and 'plebiscitary democracy', albeit their divergences. The kind of analysis is also adapted to the different

characteristics pertaining to them. Thus, Weber dedicates a specific attention to the different mechanisms and procedures of direct democracy, while concentrating on the element of charisma in the plebiscitary constellation. Despite differences, however, Weber sees for them a common solution, consisting of the encasement in a politico-institutional framework formed by parties, trade unions and above all an effective parliament supervising on the maintaining of rules and legality. Political mediation also signifies for him not simply horse-trading, but a chance for compromise, adjustment, discovery of innovative and feasible solutions, and the consideration of territorial, ethnical, cultural and social differences. This specific concern becomes particularly clear in relation to the instrument of referendum, where Weber complains about the difficulty of shaping politics exclusively through yes and no which do not concede room to compromises, modifications and the consideration of the different contexts of application.

By following Weber in his arguments, immediate democracy cannot be maintained or implemented as such. However, he admits that some of its elements can be integrated into parliamentary democracy and can play an enlivening and improving function. In the case of referendums, for instance, Weber does not deny that they can have, in some situations, a useful function, provided that they are not too frequent. Moreover, their results should not provoke a government crisis, since consulting people on specific contents should not imply questioning the activity of the executive as such. Following his arguments, it could also be deduced that referendums should entail more specific questions, more options and more room for political mediation and formulation of compromises. The same attitude concerns the other pole, i.e. plebiscitary democracy. For Weber, some charismatic and plebiscitary components can be introduced in parliamentary democracy, because they arouse interest in politics, involve people closely and enhance the meaning of leadership. However, these components can also be risky and endanger the freedom of the citizens. Institutions and especially parliament are the major guarantees against excesses of all sorts.

Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

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