

Proposal for Research

**“Government transformed: Stakeholder experiences and interpretations in the shift from elections to random selection and rotation”**

Submitted to:

**Academic Advisory Sub-Committee**  
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**Central research theme and innovation.** There is a growing recognition that governance systems centred on representative democracy and elections, despite their ubiquity, can be ineffective, exclusive, and unrepresentative. Scholars, practitioners, and citizens are beginning to identify and experiment with promising ways of structuring community and organizational governance that may overcome the limitations of representative democracy. In particular, approaches centred on random selection and deliberation – including Citizens’ Panels and Citizens’ Assemblies – show great promise in increasing representativeness, inclusion, empowerment, and the quality of decisions. While current research begins to measure the impact of these new approaches and practices, research on how a wide range of organizational members experience and interpret them is curiously limited. This research gap is particularly salient in the context of permanent institutions in which new governance systems replace long-standing election-based systems. Understanding how people experience and interpret this change can provide crucial research and practical insights into potential barriers and enablers of transforming governance systems into those that are more participative and deliberative. Our study aims to address the aforementioned research gap and contribute to this understanding by exploring a novel school-based program in which elected student governments have been replaced with those that are randomly selected and rotated.

**Research question and aims.** Our overarching research question is: How do various stakeholders – students, student government members, and teachers – experience and interpret the replacement of a hierarchical election-based student governance system with one based on random selection, rotation, and deliberation among equals? Our research aims are to:

- 1) Uncover how students, student government members, and teachers experience and interpret the change in governance systems
- 2) Investigate how and why experiences and interpretations evolve over time
- 3) Develop theory regarding the barriers and enablers associated with transforming governance systems from those that are election-based to those that are based on random selection, rotation, and deliberation

**Research design and methodology.** We plan to undertake an inductive, emergent study at either one or two schools in Bolivia where – under the aegis of Democracy In Practice – projects replacing elected student governments with those that are randomly selected and rotated are currently in their second year. At these schools we have replaced hierarchical elected student governments with those that are randomly selected, rotated, and horizontally structured. We will undertake fieldwork at the schools between August, 2015 and December, 2015. We will gather data from three sources: approximately 30 semi-structured interviews with students, student government members, and teachers at each school; field notes based on the principal investigator’s on-the-ground participant observations; and the collection of archival data in the form of news articles, promotional materials, and minutes of student government meetings. Shortly after commencing data collection, the research team will begin analyzing the data using the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978), beginning by treating each school as its own case and continuing by identifying patterns across both schools

(Eisenhardt, 1989). Our detailed interview protocol for each of the three groups of respondents is available upon request.

***Expected contribution to existing knowledge on deliberative democracy.*** We expect our study to make an important contribution to existing theory on deliberative democracy, particularly that which involves random selection as a tool to achieve more deliberative democratic ends. Our study contributes to a growing body of research that investigates how participants experience novel deliberative democracy initiatives (e.g. Carson, 1995; Curato & Niemeyer, 2013; Iredale & Longley, 2000). This body of research has made major contributions by helping identify how factors such as the promotion and structure of these initiatives influence participants' experiences and how participants' experiences, in turn, might shape initiative outcomes. For instance, Iredale and Longley's (2000) study found that Citizens' Juries were perceived by a range of participants as very effective, but that participants also had some negative perceptions about topics such as the initiative's budget and the overall scope of topics covered – both of which could be addressed in subsequent Citizens' Juries. Understanding participant experience is particularly important as democratic innovations aim to go beyond temporary or one-off initiatives toward more permanent incorporation into governance. In such contexts, the success, legitimacy, and sustainability of such initiatives are all the more dependent on participant experience.

Our study will make unique contributions that go beyond those of prior studies, investigating the incorporation of random selection and deliberative practices into *standing* government bodies that were previously centred on elections and hierarchical executive decision-making. Within this particular context, participants and stakeholders may have experiences that differ substantially from those participating in one-off initiatives like Citizens' Juries. To date, research on utilizing random selection to populate standing bodies has remained theoretical and centred on the potential effects of changes to governance practices. For instance, Zeitoun, Osterloh, and Frey (2015) theorize about the advantages and disadvantages of using random selection procedures to appoint stakeholder representatives to company boards, while Carson and Lubensky (2009) theorize about utilizing random selection for public appointments to boards and committees. Our study will make an important contribution to this field of research by shedding light on how participants and other stakeholders experience and interpret these changes as well as by illuminating potential challenges to implementation and how they might be overcome. In doing so, our study will provide insight into the ways in which the incorporation of random selection – as a mechanism to create more inclusive, representative and deliberative democracy – interacts with dynamic, pre-existing social and political contexts.

***Communication of research findings.*** We plan to communicate our findings through three major outlets. First, we aim to have our findings published in a peer-reviewed academic journal in order to make a strong academic contribution to our field. Second, upon completion of our project we will create a practitioner-focused document summarizing our work and our key findings for a broader non-academic audience. Third, we plan to share our work and our results using videos and social media to connect with everyday people who are less accessible through

the first two outlets. Beyond these three mediums, we are happy to communicate our results in other ways based on nDF's preferences.

***Proposed timeline (with key milestones for completion).*** We plan to undertake our study during the period of August, 2015 to December, 2016. Our key activities are:

- August 2015 – December 2015: Complete approximately 30 interviews with students, teachers, and student government members at each school included in our study
- September 2015 – March 2016: Analyze our interview data and field notes
- March 2016 – June 2016: Write up our findings in preparation for submission to a peer-reviewed journal
- July 2016: Submit a research paper to a relevant peer-reviewed journal
- July 2016 – August 2016: Write a practitioner-focused article
- July 2016 – August 2016: Promote our study and findings via social media and video

***Proposed budget and justification.*** Our total anticipated budget to undertake this study is \$5,700. Our expected costs are:

- Research fieldwork stipend (Adam Cronkright): \$3,600 (12 months x \$300)
- Project manager stipend (Raul Olivera Pereira): \$1,200 (4 months X \$300)
- Office supplies to undertake research and writing: \$200
- Transportation to and from schools: \$200
- ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software: \$500

*Notes:*

- 1) *Raul Olivera Pereira is a current employee of Democracy In Practice who will support and coordinate the student government projects during the four months of fieldwork at the schools.*
- 2) *Both Simon Pek and Jeffrey Kennedy will be undertaking this research on a voluntary basis without any stipend.*

***Background and role of researchers and their institutions.*** Our team consists of three principal investigators with various research roles, whose profiles are described below. All three are co-founders of Democracy In Practice, an internationally-collaborative non-profit organization focusing on democratic innovation, experimentation and capacity-building ([www.democracyinpractice.org](http://www.democracyinpractice.org)). In addition to this team, our organization has access to a network of Advisors, some of whom are experts in the field.

Simon Pek: Simon is a co-founder and Research Director of Democracy In Practice and a PhD Candidate in Business Administration at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. Simon is responsible for designing and coordinating the study and will be leading the data analysis. In his own research, he is currently undertaking a longitudinal analysis of sustainability-related organizational change at the Mexican, Canadian and Chinese sites of a global organization. Throughout this study he has interviewed over 120 people, approximately 30 of which were interviewed in Spanish, and has demonstrated the ability to analyze qualitative data. He is also a

co-author on an article investigating a novel creative sentencing experiment in Alberta, Canada. He has an advanced understanding of written and spoken English, Czech, and Spanish.

Jeffrey Kennedy: Jeffrey is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Law at McGill University (Montreal, Canada), where he also serves as Coordinator of the Institute of Comparative Law. Prior to his doctoral studies, he earned his B.A. (Queen's University), LL.B (University of Leicester), and LL.M (McGill University). His work has been presented at conferences internationally, and he holds numerous awards at McGill, including the Saul Hayes Graduate Fellowship and the Chief Justice RA Greenshields Memorial Scholarship. His current research involves exploring the implications of deliberative democratic theory for public decision-making in the context of criminal justice. Passionate about citizen engagement, he is a co-founder of Democracy In Practice and is heavily involved in prisoner reintegration initiatives in Montreal.

Adam Cronkright: Adam is a co-founder of Democracy In Practice and earned a degree in both Economics and Global Development Studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Canada. Adam will be responsible for gathering all primary data during this study. As Democracy In Practice's Program Director, he works directly in Bolivia and thus has a strong understanding of the local context, the state of its projects, and a large network of relationships and connections. He is fluent in English and Spanish and has extensive experience conducting interviews and facilitating meetings in both languages and in a variety of cultural contexts.

## References

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