

THE DEMOCRACY, STRAIGHT-UP! PROJECT

The Democratic Ownership of Law

Legislative Alienation, Political Agency, and Equal Sovereignty

— CHAPTER THIRTEEN —

Neighboring Traditions and Points of Departure

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Working draft · August 2026

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This work was developed collaboratively by Dahlia Hart and Tiffany Engels. Tiffany Engels is a fictional research collaborator representing the use of artificial intelligence as a partner in research, analysis, drafting, and editorial development. All interpretations, arguments, and conclusions presented in this work remain the responsibility of the authors.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Neighboring Traditions and Points of Departure

13.1 A map of neighboring arguments

The Straight-Up Philosophy does not enter an empty field. Nearly every value it invokes has been defended elsewhere: political equality, freedom from domination, citizen participation, public reasoning, direct decision, voluntary association, revocable delegation, dispersed authority, institutional learning, and respect for expertise. A theory that presented these commitments as discoveries without ancestry would be historically naive. A theory that merely assembled them into an attractive list would contribute little.

The relevant question is therefore not whether neighboring traditions contain insights that Straight-Up also affirms. They plainly do. The question is how those insights are arranged around the location of final authority.

Democratic theories often disagree because they are trying to protect different goods. Liberal democracy protects rights, pluralism, and peaceful competition. Republicanism opposes domination and arbitrary power. Participatory democracy treats political activity as a condition of citizenship and development. Deliberative democracy emphasizes public justification and the revision of preferences through reason-giving. Direct democracy gives citizens a vote on laws and constitutional questions. Liquid democracy makes delegation voluntary and fluid. Associative democracy moves governance into self-organizing civil society. Sortition seeks equality of selection and descriptive inclusion. Anarchism challenges hierarchy and concentrated authority. Marxism exposes class power and the political consequences of economic ownership. Popular constitutionalism returns constitutional meaning to the people. Principal-agent theory clarifies accountability and delegation. Polycentric governance studies multiple interacting centers of decision. Epistemic democracy asks how institutions can use knowledge well, while technocratic arguments ask whether competence should determine political authority.

Each tradition sees something that a theory of democratic ownership must see. Yet none of these goods, standing alone, settles who owns the legislative decision. Rights may be protected by judges who possess authority independent of the public. Participation may be intense but advisory. Deliberation may improve a recommendation that elected officials remain free to ignore. Direct votes may occur only when gatekeepers permit them. Associations may govern members while reproducing inequality between groups. Randomly selected citizens may deliberate admirably while everyone else remains outside the legal act. Experts may know more without acquiring a right to rule. Multiple centers of governance may disperse administration without distributing legislative sovereignty.

This chapter compares neighboring traditions through the conceptual framework developed in the preceding chapters. It asks, in each case:

- What democratic danger does the tradition identify most clearly?
- Where does it locate final authority?
- Is participation continuing, episodic, advisory, selected, or binding?
- How does it divide political labor?
- Can delegated authority be recovered by the person from whom it came?
- What does Straight-Up adopt from the tradition?
- What does it reject or qualify?
- What relationship does the tradition leave unresolved?

The purpose is not to award a winner. These traditions are internally diverse, and many contemporary theorists combine them. Liberal democrats can be participatory; republicans can favor sortition; deliberative democrats can defend referendums; socialists can be libertarian; anarchists can build formal federations; polycentric institutionalists can endorse strong public law. Labels identify families of argument, not sealed compartments.

Nor does the comparison claim that Straight-Up supersedes every neighboring theory. The Straight-Up Philosophy is narrower than many of them. It is a theory of legitimate legislative ownership and the institutional relations required to preserve it. It does not provide a complete account of justice, rights, economic organization, public reason, civic virtue, or social emancipation. It must therefore borrow, coexist with, and remain answerable to traditions that address questions beyond its scope.

Its point of departure is specific:

Democratic values do not become democratic government until equal members retain a consequential and recoverable relation to the final legislative act.

13.2 The comparative axis: function and authority

Much confusion in democratic theory arises because institutions are compared by visible form rather than by functional relation. Elections, assemblies, referendums, parties, courts, councils, juries, associations, and digital platforms can all appear democratic. Their democratic significance depends upon what they authorize participants to do.

A citizen may communicate a preference, offer testimony, select an officeholder, join an association, deliberate with others, draft a proposal, advise a committee, approve a constitutional amendment, or cast a binding vote on legislation. These are not interchangeable acts. They differ in object, timing, consequence, and recoverability.

The central distinction developed in this work separates political labor from political authority. Research, drafting, advocacy, interpretation, administration, negotiation, and communication are indispensable forms of labor. They may be highly specialized. They may require training, compensation, continuity, confidentiality, or professional standards. Nothing in equal sovereignty requires each citizen to perform them equally.

Authority is different. It identifies who possesses the standing to determine whether the work becomes binding law. The authority may be exercised directly or through another person, but its democratic character depends upon whether the underlying decision-right remains with equal members or becomes the independent property of an intermediary.

This distinction permits a more exact comparison among traditions. A citizen assembly may distribute deliberative labor more inclusively without relocating final authority. A referendum may relocate final authority for one question while leaving the ordinary legislative process untouched. Liquid democracy may make a vote recoverable while allowing proxy chains to concentrate power. Associative governance may distribute implementation while the state retains legislative supremacy. A constitutional court may protect equal status while also becoming the institution with the last practical word on the meaning of equality.

The comparison must also distinguish formal authority from practical control. A constitution may declare the people sovereign while parties control candidacy, committees control agenda access, donors control attention, and elected representatives possess the legal vote. Conversely, an officeholder may retain formal legal status while being practically bound by a transparent and enforceable public mandate. Democratic ownership concerns the whole relation through which decision becomes law, not merely the wording of a constitutional clause.

Straight-Up therefore evaluates neighboring traditions neither by asking whether they are "democratic" in a binary sense nor by asking whether they produce desirable outcomes. It asks what each tradition contributes to a system in which political labor can be widely distributed without alienating legislative authority.

13.3 Liberal democracy: rights, pluralism, and authorized government

Liberal democracy sees with great clarity that political power must be limited. Government is not legitimate merely because it acts in the name of a majority. Individuals possess interests, liberties, identities, and claims that cannot safely depend upon the goodwill of whoever wins a vote. Competitive elections, constitutional rights, freedom of expression and association, legal equality, due process, judicial independence, and peaceful transfers of office create a political order in which opposition can survive and power can change hands without civil war.

Liberal democracy also recognizes pluralism. Modern societies do not contain one unified public interest waiting to be discovered. They contain durable disagreements about religion, morality, economics, identity, and the purposes of government. A legitimate system must permit people who reject one another's comprehensive doctrines to coexist as political equals. Liberal institutions therefore protect spaces in which individuals and groups can organize, criticize, worship, publish, litigate, and compete.

These achievements are not secondary. A voter-sovereign system without liberal protections could become a machinery of organized persecution. Straight-Up adopts the liberal insistence that political equality requires more than majority rule. Rights, due process, open opposition, legal regularity, and institutional restraint form part of the constitutional environment within which democratic ownership can be exercised.

The point of departure concerns the ordinary location of governing authority. In most liberal-democratic theory and practice, citizens authorize government principally through elections. They choose among parties and candidates, thereby conferring office upon persons who possess independent legal authority until the next election. Liberalism then seeks to restrain those officials through rights, divided powers, judicial review, periodic accountability, publicity, and competition.

This arrangement can be highly preferable to dictatorship. It can also remain a relation of legislative alienation. The voter chooses who will possess the legislative decision but does not retain the decision itself. Rights protect the citizen against certain uses of authority; elections permit occasional replacement of its holders; civil liberties permit influence upon them. None of these relations necessarily gives the citizen a continuing and recoverable vote on the laws that govern her.

Liberal democratic theory sometimes treats this transfer as an unavoidable consequence of scale and complexity. The people are the source of authority, but representatives must exercise it. On this view, democratic legitimacy depends upon authorization, contestation, responsiveness, and accountability rather than continuous popular control. Robert Dahl's concept of polyarchy, for example, identifies competition and participation as the realizable institutional form of large-scale democracy, not the direct possession of every governing act by every citizen. John Rawls situates democratic decision within a constitutional structure protecting equal basic liberties and public reason. Joseph Schumpeter goes further, defining democracy principally as a competitive method for selecting leaders.

Straight-Up does not reject these protections or deny that elections can authorize. It rejects the inference that electoral authorization must alienate the underlying decision-right. Authorization can be specific, conditional, transparent, and revocable. Representatives can perform labor without owning the vote. Elections can remain useful for selecting administrators, judges, executives, delegates, or legislative servants without constituting the entirety of self-government.

The unresolved liberal problem is therefore not how to protect liberty from government, but how to reconcile liberal protection with continuing democratic ownership of government. Liberal democracy powerfully constrains rulers. Straight-Up asks why the governed must first create a separate class of rulers in order to constrain them.

13.4 Republicanism and non-domination: power that cannot be arbitrary

Republican theory contributes a relational understanding of freedom. A person may face no immediate interference and still be unfree when another possesses uncontrolled power over her. The benevolent master dominates because the servant's security depends upon the master's continuing goodwill. Freedom as non-domination therefore requires institutions that prevent arbitrary power rather than merely hoping it will be used kindly.

This insight aligns closely with the concept of legislative alienation. A responsive and benevolent representative may govern well while retaining an authority that citizens cannot recover between elections. The problem is not simply bad policy or malicious intent. It is dependency upon another's uncontrolled decision.

Contemporary republicanism, especially in the work of Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner, emphasizes the rule of law, civic equality, public justification, dispersed power, and contestatory institutions. Citizens must be able to challenge decisions, demand reasons, expose abuse, and force reconsideration. Republican institutions seek to make power non-arbitrary by requiring it to track common avowable interests under conditions of public control.

Straight-Up adopts the republican suspicion of dependence and its insistence that freedom is institutional. It also adopts contestation as a core democratic capacity. A sovereign public needs challenge procedures, appeals, transparency, opposition, independent review, and the capacity to reverse decisions. The question "Who holds the eraser?" is republican in spirit: a free person must not remain helpless before a decision that has gone wrong.

The point of departure is that contestability does not necessarily equal ownership. A citizen may be permitted to object, petition, appeal, litigate, or demand justification while someone else retains the final decision. Contestation can reduce arbitrariness without ending the relation in which authority belongs to an officeholder. The right to ask a ruler to reconsider is not the same as the right to recover one's share of the governing power.

Some republican accounts are more democratic than this criticism suggests. Pettit's later work develops ideas of popular control and institutional checks that extend beyond elections. Republican municipalism, civic assemblies, and radical republican traditions can place citizens much closer to decision. Yet republicanism commonly evaluates institutions through the degree of non-arbitrary control they provide rather than through equal individual possession of the legislative decision-right.

Straight-Up also qualifies the republican language of the common good. Public reasoning about shared interests is indispensable, but no institution can guarantee that officials, judges, experts, or deliberative bodies possess privileged access to a common good independent of the people subject to law. An authority becomes dangerous when its claim to discern non-arbitrary public purposes permits it to override equal citizens without a recoverable mandate.

The unresolved republican problem is the difference between control over power and participation in power. Straight-Up treats them as connected but not identical. Contestation is necessary because democratic publics are fallible. Ownership is necessary because the public should not be reduced to a permanent contestant before authorities who retain the decisive act.

13.5 Participatory democracy: citizenship through consequential activity

Participatory democracy sees that institutions shape citizens. Political preferences, capacities, confidence, and solidarities do not arrive fully formed before participation begins. They develop through practice. Carole Pateman's

reconstruction of participatory theory, C. B. Macpherson's critique of market models of democracy, Benjamin Barber's defense of strong democracy, and related traditions all challenge the image of citizens as private preference holders who periodically select political managers.

Participation has both instrumental and developmental value. It may improve decisions by adding local knowledge and affected perspectives. It may also cultivate political efficacy, public-mindedness, competence, and the ability to cooperate across difference. The workplace, neighborhood, school, association, and local government become sites in which people learn to act as citizens rather than consumers of government.

Straight-Up adopts this developmental insight. "Freedom is the education" rejects the sequence in which citizens must first become qualified and only then receive authority. Consequential authority changes attention. People have reasons to learn when a decision belongs to them. They can discover political capacity through use rather than submit to a competence test administered by those already in power.

Participatory democracy also recognizes that voting alone is thin. An isolated ballot cast at long intervals does not create organized self-rule. Citizens need relationships, institutions, recurring work, agenda access, and opportunities to connect judgment with consequence. Straight-Up's emphasis on human-scale association and distributed political labor belongs within this participatory lineage.

The difficulty is institutional specification at scale. Participatory theory often provides a rich account of why participation matters while leaving uncertain how millions of citizens can retain authority over a continuous legislative agenda without demanding permanent labor from everyone. Some participatory models emphasize local institutions but do not explain how authority should aggregate across jurisdictions. Others imagine extensive meeting attendance that may privilege time-rich participants, activists, professionals, and organized groups. Still others supplement representative government with participatory forums whose decisions remain advisory.

Straight-Up departs from any model that equates democratic legitimacy with maximal participation. Equal authority does not require equal activity. Citizens may participate episodically, specialize by issue, delegate temporarily, or remain inactive without losing their standing. The architecture must make re-entry possible and ensure that intense participants cannot convert labor into permanent ownership.

Participation also varies in consequence. Consultation, co-production, deliberation, and community organizing can be valuable while leaving the legislative decision elsewhere. Straight-Up therefore asks whether participatory institutions possess a direct path to law or merely enrich the information available to representatives.

The unresolved participatory problem is how to preserve the developmental value of action without turning democracy into an obligation of heroic civic labor. Straight-Up answers by separating standing from workload. Everyone retains authority; some perform more labor; delegation remains recoverable; direct participation remains available. Participation can then educate because it is consequential, not because every citizen must live in continuous assembly.

13.6 Deliberative democracy: public reason without a new ruling class

Deliberative democracy sees that counting preferences is not enough. Political decisions require reasons, interpretation, evidence, listening, and the possibility of revision. Preferences may be incomplete, contradictory, manipulated, or based upon false beliefs. Public discussion can reveal consequences, expose interests, clarify values, and transform what participants want.

The tradition ranges from Jürgen Habermas's discourse theory and Joshua Cohen's ideal of free public reasoning to more institutional work by Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, James Fishkin, John Dryzek, Jane Mansbridge, and many others. Some accounts emphasize legitimacy through reasons that free and equal citizens

could accept. Others study deliberative systems in which many sites - media, movements, legislatures, courts, mini-publics, and everyday discussion - perform different communicative functions.

Straight-Up adopts the deliberative insistence that a democratic vote should emerge from an information environment capable of challenge and revision. It needs competing summaries, transparent sources, minority reports, public hearings, expert analysis, opportunities for rebuttal, and time for reconsideration. A bare electronic plebiscite would not satisfy the theory's institutional ambitions.

It also adopts deliberative humility. Voting does not convert preference into truth. Decisions need justification, and minorities need reasons they can inspect even when they lose. Deliberation can make disagreement more intelligible and correction more likely.

The point of departure is that deliberative quality cannot become an admission requirement for sovereignty. Someone must not acquire political authority merely because she reasons more fluently, has more time, speaks the accepted language of public justification, or has been selected into a carefully designed forum. Deliberative institutions can reproduce inequalities of education, confidence, status, rhetoric, and cultural style. Facilitation can mitigate these differences; it cannot turn deliberative competence into a natural title to rule.

A second departure concerns consequence. Many deliberative innovations are advisory. A mini-public studies an issue, hears evidence, and recommends a policy. Elected officials or the wider electorate may then accept, modify, ignore, or selectively invoke its work. The deliberation may be excellent while legislative ownership remains unchanged.

Straight-Up separates deliberative labor from sovereign authority. Selected groups, committees, experts, and public forums may perform intensive inquiry and drafting. Their findings deserve attention proportional to the quality of their methods and evidence. But the final legislative decision must remain traceable to equal members. Deliberation informs authority; it does not replace it.

Nor does Straight-Up require consensus. Consensus can be valuable where attainable, but a system that permits one participant to block collective action may convert inclusion into minority veto. Reasonable disagreement can persist after good deliberation. Democratic institutions must therefore provide a legitimate decision rule and preserve routes of appeal and revision.

The unresolved deliberative problem is how to connect the authority of reasons with the authority of persons. Straight-Up's answer is dual: reasons should influence judgment without determining who counts as a decision owner. Equal citizens may decide badly after hearing good reasons. That possibility warrants better information and stronger correction, not the transfer of sovereignty to those deemed most deliberative.

13.7 Direct democracy: the people voting on law

Direct democracy comes closest to the core Straight-Up claim because it places specific legal decisions before the electorate. Initiatives, referendums, recalls, and constitutional votes interrupt representative ownership and allow citizens to approve, reject, propose, or repeal public acts. They demonstrate that large electorates can make binding decisions on substantive law.

The direct-democracy literature also undermines several easy dismissals. Empirical work by Thomas Cronin, Arthur Lupia, John Matsusaka, David Altman, and others shows that direct-democratic institutions cannot be evaluated through anecdotes alone. Voter competence, campaign spending, agenda control, policy congruence, turnout, and institutional interaction vary across designs and contexts. Citizen-initiated mechanisms can check legislatures, but executive-controlled plebiscites can also strengthen incumbents and bypass ordinary constraints.

Straight-Up adopts the direct-democratic insistence that citizens need not be confined to candidate selection. The public can make law. It also adopts initiative and referendum as important tools of agenda access, correction, and constitutional control.

The point of departure is that conventional direct democracy is usually episodic. Citizens vote on selected propositions while representatives continue to own the ordinary legislative process: drafting, committee referral, amendment, appropriations, oversight, timing, and implementation. The direct vote appears as an exception to representative government rather than the organizing principle of legislative authority.

Agenda formation is therefore decisive. Who may place a question before the public? Signature thresholds, petition rules, judicial review, legislative referral, administrative wording, campaign finance, and ballot timing shape which issues become votable. A yes-or-no choice can conceal extensive prior control by sponsors, lawyers, officials, and funders.

Direct democracy can also bundle complexity into a single proposition. Voters may have no practical way to amend language, reconcile related policies, or assign detailed implementation. Referendum campaigns can become expensive media contests. Low-turnout votes may bind an entire polity. Repeated propositions can impose participation burdens and generate incoherent policy sequences.

Straight-Up seeks to generalize the direct-democratic principle while embedding it in an organized legislature. Citizens retain a direct vote, but they also possess human-scale association, layered agenda routes, delegated labor, committee work, drafting capacity, amendment procedures, and continuing correction. Direct override is one component of the system, not its whole architecture.

The unresolved direct-democratic problem is the distance between voting on laws and owning the legislative process. Straight-Up treats public voting not as an occasional escape valve but as evidence of a broader principle: if citizens may decide a constitutional amendment or referendum, the burden lies on anyone who claims they must surrender ordinary legislative authority to representatives.

13.8 Liquid democracy: recoverable delegation and its unfinished constitution

Liquid democracy identifies one of the most important design possibilities in contemporary democratic theory: citizens need not choose permanently between voting themselves and surrendering decisions to fixed representatives. They can vote directly or delegate their vote, often by issue, to another person. Delegation can be withdrawn or redirected. Christian Blum and Christina Zuber describe liquid democracy as a hybrid of direct and representative forms, while Chiara Valsangiacomo emphasizes the voluntary and flexible character of proxy voting.

This is a major point of convergence with Straight-Up. Revocable delegation changes the moral character of representation. A delegate who exercises authority only while the principal permits it does not own the decision in the same way as an elected legislator who retains legal independence for a term. Direct participation and specialization can coexist. Citizens who lack time or expertise need not abstain, while those who wish to decide may do so.

Straight-Up adopts this insight without reservation. Recoverability is central to non-alienated delegation.

Yet liquid democracy is often specified primarily as a voting rule. It explains how voting weight moves through a network but may say less about how proposals are generated, researched, drafted, amended, scheduled, administered, audited, and corrected. A legislature is not merely a tally. It is an organized production process in which power can enter through many stages before the final vote.

Liquid delegation also creates risks of concentration. Popular proxies may accumulate vast voting weight. Delegation chains can become long, unstable, or opaque. Cycles can produce abstention or require special

resolution rules. Citizens may overdelegate to visible personalities, experts, employers, celebrities, or partisan organizations. Formal revocability may coexist with practical dependence when principals cannot observe performance or identify alternatives.

Privacy and accountability create another tension. A principal may need to know how her proxy voted in order to judge performance. A secret ballot may conceal that information. Public delegation may expose citizens to pressure from families, employers, organizations, or political communities. Technical design does not eliminate these conflicts.

Straight-Up departs from thin forms of liquid democracy by embedding delegation in human-scale relationships and bounded layers. Delegates emerge from groups in which principals can know, question, and replace them. Authority is aggregated without requiring unbounded chains. Direct override remains available. Roles, mandates, and records are visible. The goal is not simply liquid voting weight but organized self-rule.

The exact relationship remains open to empirical testing. Human-scale groups may reduce celebrity concentration, or they may reproduce clique power. Bounded delegation may increase accountability, or it may reduce flexibility. Straight-Up therefore treats its design as a constitutional hypothesis rather than the completed form of liquid democracy.

The unresolved liquid-democratic problem is how to transform recoverable proxy voting into a complete and resilient legislative institution. Straight-Up's claim is that liquidity needs social structure, procedural completeness, concentration controls, and constitutional exit if revocability is to become practical sovereignty rather than a formal option.

13.9 Associative democracy: self-government through voluntary organization

Associative democracy sees that state and market are not the only forms through which collective life can be organized. Voluntary associations, cooperatives, unions, professional bodies, community organizations, mutual-aid networks, and self-governing service providers can perform public functions while remaining closer to participants than centralized bureaucracy.

Paul Hirst's associative democracy proposes transferring substantial social and economic governance to democratically organized associations while preserving public funding and accountability. Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers analyze how secondary associations can improve representation, information, coordination, and governance under appropriate public conditions. The tradition overlaps with pluralism, corporatism, civil-society theory, and functional decentralization.

Straight-Up adopts the associative insight that agency is socially organized. Individuals need durable relations through which they can share information, coordinate labor, develop trust, and act together. Voluntary affinity can provide a more realistic foundation for political organization than compulsory geographic subdivision alone. Human-scale Circles reflect this debt.

Associative democracy also recognizes distributed competence. Different groups possess situated knowledge and can govern functions that central institutions understand poorly. It offers an alternative to the assumption that every public task must be performed by a single bureaucracy.

The point of departure concerns membership and final authority. Associations are not automatically equal or inclusive. Resources, education, time, status, and organizational skill are unevenly distributed. Some people belong to powerful associations; others remain isolated. Voluntary groups may exclude, dominate internally, or claim to speak for categories whose members did not authorize them. Public policy organized through recognized associations can harden into corporatism, where established groups acquire privileged bargaining status.

Association also creates a problem of overlapping jurisdiction. A person may belong to multiple organizations with conflicting claims. Public law must determine which associations may exercise what authority, how outsiders are protected, and how decisions affecting the whole polity are made. Functional self-government cannot by itself answer who owns general legislative power.

Straight-Up therefore treats small groups as supports for individual agency, not as sovereign corporate persons. A Circle does not own its members' political standing. Individuals retain direct voting rights, may change groups, reclaim delegation, and challenge internal arrangements. Group authority is derivative and bounded.

The system also requires a public option for association. If voluntary affinity is the only route to effective participation, isolated, stigmatized, disabled, geographically remote, or socially marginalized citizens may be excluded in practice. Matching, open Circles, accessibility, appeals, and direct participation must ensure that freedom of association does not become a license for political abandonment.

The unresolved associative problem is how to gain the organizational benefits of group life without allowing groups to become unequal owners of public authority. Straight-Up adopts association as infrastructure while locating sovereignty in the equal member.

13.10 Sortition and citizen assemblies: equality of selection and the authority of the selected

Sortition begins from a powerful democratic intuition: public office should not belong only to those who can win campaigns, attract donors, master party organizations, or build professional political careers. Random selection gives ordinary citizens an equal chance of being chosen. Stratified sampling can produce bodies more descriptively representative than elected legislatures. Compensation, time, facilitation, and access to expertise can permit selected citizens to study complex issues under conditions unavailable to the general electorate.

Bernard Manin's history of representative government helped recover the democratic significance of lot. James Fishkin's deliberative polling, John Gastil and Erik Olin Wright's work on empowered participation, David Van Reybrouck's advocacy of sortition, and Hélène Landemore's open-democracy proposals have made randomly selected assemblies central to contemporary reform.

Straight-Up adopts several sortitionist insights. Political labor should not be monopolized by a professional class. Random selection can widen access to committees, oversight bodies, review panels, juries, auditing teams, and drafting processes. Mini-publics can investigate questions, hear competing evidence, and generate proposals or reports. Sortition can reduce campaign incentives and provide a check upon parties and organized wealth.

The point of departure concerns the difference between equality of opportunity to rule and equal ownership of rule. A randomly selected assembly gives each citizen an equal chance of becoming a decision-maker. Once selected, however, a small subset possesses authority that the unselected public does not exercise. The relation may be statistically representative, but it remains representational.

This does not make sortition undemocratic. A jury can exercise legitimate authority within a constitutional role. A selected assembly may outperform an elected one in inclusion, deliberation, or independence. The question is whether selection should substitute for the continuing legislative standing of everyone else.

Citizen assemblies are often advisory. Their recommendations return to elected legislatures or public referendums. When they are binding, difficult questions arise about mandate, accountability, replacement, and the relationship between selected judgment and public disagreement. Selected citizens may deliberate intensely, but the wider public may not identify with their conclusions. Randomness removes electoral incentives; it also removes the ordinary mechanism of retrospective accountability.

Straight-Up separates selected labor from universal authority. Sortition can allocate demanding tasks while the final decision remains with the electorate or its recoverable delegates. A randomly chosen committee may investigate, draft, audit, or recommend. Its authority should be bounded by transparent procedure, review, and direct override.

There is room for stronger use. A sovereign public could choose to delegate certain decisions to randomly selected bodies, just as it might delegate to experts or committees. The democratic test would be whether the delegation remains authorized, limited, inspectable, and recoverable.

The unresolved sortitionist problem is whether a representative sample can stand in for the people as sovereign rather than serve them as a specialized organ. Straight-Up answers that statistical likeness is valuable but does not erase the moral difference between being represented and retaining one's own legislative standing.

13.11 Anarchism: authority under permanent suspicion

Anarchism sees more clearly than most traditions that institutions justified as instruments can become masters. Centralized authority develops interests of its own. Hierarchies reproduce dependence. Bureaucracies convert coordination into command. Parties, states, and revolutionary leaderships that claim to act for emancipation can establish new structures of domination.

The anarchist family is broad: individualist and socialist, pacifist and revolutionary, philosophical and organizational. Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, later libertarian socialists, communalists, and social ecologists differ sharply. They share a skepticism toward coercive hierarchy and an attraction to voluntary association, federation, mutual aid, direct action, and self-management.

Straight-Up adopts the anarchist refusal to treat authority as innocent merely because it bears a democratic label. It shares the preference for distributed organization, voluntary association, revocable delegation, mutual aid, federation, and the dismantling of permanent ruling roles. Its critique of legislative alienation is, in part, a critique of hierarchy disguised as popular sovereignty.

Anarchism also supplies a warning against transition. A movement that centralizes power in order to abolish domination later may discover that the transitional apparatus has become durable. This warning reinforces Straight-Up's insistence that democratic relations must be built into the means of change rather than postponed until after victory.

The point of departure is that Straight-Up does not reject public authority or binding law as such. Modern political communities must coordinate infrastructure, public health, environmental protection, taxation, rights, adjudication, and the use of coercion. Some decisions affect people who have not voluntarily joined the association making them. A theory of free agreement alone may not resolve conflicts over shared resources, externalities, vulnerable persons, or persistent wrongdoing.

Anarchist practices often rely upon consensus, exit, federation, and local autonomy. These can work well in bounded voluntary settings. At larger scales, consensus can conceal informal veto power, exit may be costly or impossible, and local autonomy can protect local domination. Federations require rules about jurisdiction and conflict. Once those rules are binding, the question of who makes and revises them returns.

Straight-Up therefore seeks not the abolition of legislative authority but its de-alienation. Law remains capable of coercion, which is precisely why equal members must own the process through which it is made. Delegates, administrators, and experts remain necessary, which is why their authority must be bounded and recoverable.

The unresolved anarchist problem is how to preserve radical suspicion of hierarchy while constructing durable institutions for common decisions among millions of interdependent strangers. Straight-Up accepts the anarchist

diagnosis of domination but offers a constitutional rather than abolitionist response: organize authority so that it returns toward the member instead of separating into a sovereign apparatus.

13.12 Marxism and democratic socialism: class power and the ownership of law

Marxism sees that formal political equality can coexist with profound material inequality. A citizen may possess one vote while lacking security, time, education, workplace power, media access, or the resources required for sustained organization. Owners of capital can shape investment, employment, production, information, and the feasible choices presented to government. The state does not float above these relations.

Democratic socialism extends this critique into proposals for social ownership, worker power, public provision, decommodification, and economic democracy. Its strongest traditions insist that democracy must enter workplaces and the economy rather than stop at the ballot box. Rosa Luxemburg, guild socialists, council communists, democratic Marxists, social democrats, and contemporary democratic socialists offer different accounts of how political and economic democracy should relate.

Straight-Up adopts the analysis of concentrated economic power. Wealth can purchase access, organization, expertise, media, litigation, and endurance. A theory of equal legislative standing that ignores these inequalities would confuse formal rights with equal practical influence.

It also adopts the socialist claim that property arrangements are political questions. Markets and ownership are not natural facts beyond democratic judgment. A sovereign public may revise them.

The point of departure is the priority assigned to economic transformation. Marxist analysis often treats representative institutions as expressions, instruments, or condensations of class power. If capitalist ownership is the underlying cause, then socializing production may appear to resolve the political problem. Chapter Five argued that this does not follow. Economic ownership of production and political ownership of legislation are distinct axes.

A party, committee, or state bureaucracy can govern in the name of workers while workers remain alienated from the legislative decision. Public ownership can coexist with concentrated political authority. The proletariat can be declared the ruling class while ordinary proletarians possess no continuing and recoverable control over law.

Straight-Up therefore rejects the Wealth-First Trap: the claim that concentrated wealth must be defeated before people can acquire legislative sovereignty. Economic power is a serious obstacle, but sovereign political organization can become the means through which citizens govern wealth. Waiting for prior economic equality leaves legislative authority in the institutions through which wealth already exercises influence.

This point does not imply that voter sovereignty automatically neutralizes capital. Wealth will continue to finance arguments, shape attention, organize interests, and threaten exit. Straight-Up seeks to separate those forms of influence from ownership of the legislative act. Capital may advocate; it may not possess a privileged route to the governing decision.

The unresolved Marxist and socialist problem is how to ensure that collective economic power does not reproduce a separated political apparatus. Straight-Up adopts economic democracy as a possible object of public choice, not as a substitute for equal legislative sovereignty. Social ownership without democratic ownership of law remains politically incomplete.

13.13 Constitutional popular sovereignty: the people as authors of higher law

Popular constitutionalism challenges the idea that courts possess exclusive authority to determine constitutional meaning. The people, not judges, are the ultimate authors of the constitutional order. Larry Kramer reconstructs an American tradition in which constitutional interpretation remained part of ordinary political struggle. Bruce Ackerman's account of dualist democracy distinguishes periods of normal politics from moments of mobilized constitutional transformation. Mark Tushnet, Richard Bellamy, Jeremy Waldron, and other political constitutionalists criticize judicial supremacy from different directions.

Straight-Up adopts the principle that constitutional law cannot be removed entirely from democratic authority. Courts are essential for reasoned adjudication, due process, and rights protection, but judicial independence does not create a natural title to final political sovereignty. Constitutional meaning develops through institutions, public argument, amendment, litigation, resistance, and political judgment.

Popular constitutionalism also sees that "the people" must be more than a ceremonial source invoked at founding moments. Constitutional authority can remain active through mobilization, amendment, elections, and public contestation.

The point of departure concerns temporality and mediation. Many accounts of popular sovereignty are episodic. The people appear during ratification, constitutional crisis, social movements, or transformative elections, then recede while ordinary institutions govern. Ackerman's constitutional moments are extraordinary precisely because normal politics remains representative. Kramer returns constitutional interpretation to popular politics, but the people's practical action still often travels through parties, officials, elections, and movements.

Straight-Up asks why popular sovereignty should be strongest at the rare level of constitutional transformation but weakest in the ordinary legislative decisions through which government acts every day. If the people may authorize the constitutional framework, why must they alienate the lawmaking authority exercised beneath it?

A second difficulty is aggregation. Invoking "the people" can conceal who actually speaks. Presidents claim mandates; movements claim public will; legislatures claim electoral authorization; courts claim constitutional fidelity. Without institutions that connect claims to equal members, popular sovereignty becomes available to every actor as a legitimating vocabulary.

Straight-Up gives popular sovereignty an ordinary institutional form. Equal members retain standing in legislation, delegation is recoverable, and constitutional revision remains subject to public authority under more demanding procedures where appropriate. The people need not be imagined as a mystical collective voice. Their sovereignty is built from traceable decision-rights.

The unresolved popular-constitutional problem is how to transform constituent power from an intermittent source of legitimation into a continuing relationship of government. Straight-Up treats ordinary legislative ownership as the missing bridge between "We the People" and the institutions that make law in the people's name.

13.14 Principal-agent theories of representation: accountability without presumed ownership

Principal-agent theory provides a disciplined language for delegation. A principal authorizes an agent to perform tasks because the agent possesses time, skill, information, or access the principal lacks. The relationship creates risks: the agent may pursue her own interests, conceal information, exploit monitoring costs, or become captured by another principal. Incentives, reporting, sanctions, competition, and removal can reduce agency loss.

This framework illuminates elections, bureaucracies, parties, committees, international organizations, and many other institutions. It helps explain why authorization alone does not guarantee faithful representation. It directs attention to monitoring, information asymmetry, moral hazard, adverse selection, and the cost of replacement.

Straight-Up adopts this analytical machinery. Delegates must report, mandates must be visible, vote histories must be auditable, principals must be able to replace agents, and institutional design must reduce the cost of correction.

The point of departure is that elected representation does not fit the ordinary principal-agent model as neatly as democratic rhetoric suggests. A legal representative is not merely an agent carrying out a principal's instructions. She often possesses constitutional discretion, a fixed term, independent judgment, agenda power, staff, privileged information, and duties to a district or polity whose members disagree. Voters cannot ordinarily withdraw their individual authorization or reclaim their share of the legislative vote.

The representative is therefore both agent and temporary decision owner. Elections select and sanction her, but they do not create the kind of continuously controllable agency relationship found in a revocable mandate. The language of principal and agent can obscure this difference by implying a degree of control that voters do not possess.

Representation theory adds further complexity. Hanna Pitkin distinguishes formal authorization, descriptive representation, symbolic representation, and substantive acting-for. Jane Mansbridge identifies anticipatory, gyroscopic, surrogate, and other forms. Representatives communicate, interpret, advocate, bargain, embody identities, and sometimes lead rather than follow. Straight-Up does not reduce these functions to mechanical instruction.

It does, however, separate them from ownership. A person may exercise judgment, explain consequences, negotiate amendments, and advocate a course of action while remaining subject to a recoverable mandate. Revocability does not require constant micromanagement. It establishes who holds the residual decision-right when principal and agent disagree.

The unresolved principal-agent problem is the constitutional status of the residual. Who owns authority not specified in the mandate? Under representative government, the officeholder ordinarily does. Under Straight-Up, residual authority remains with the member or collective public, even when agents receive broad discretion. This reversal turns accountability from periodic punishment into continuing recoverability.

13.15 Polycentric governance: many centers, but whose centers?

Polycentric governance rejects the assumption that complex problems require a single sovereign center. Vincent and Elinor Ostrom show how multiple decision centers with overlapping jurisdictions can coordinate through competition, cooperation, mutual adjustment, learning, and nested rules. Local actors possess knowledge central authorities lack. Institutional diversity permits experimentation and adaptation. Different scales may govern different aspects of the same resource or service.

Straight-Up adopts polycentricity as both an analytical and design principle. A large political system should not force all information, labor, and correction through one bottleneck. Human-scale groups, layered aggregation, committees, local jurisdictions, professional bodies, courts, agencies, and independent information institutions can perform different functions. Multiple channels improve resilience and make capture more difficult.

Polycentric governance also contributes an empirical discipline. Institutional arrangements must be evaluated in context. Rules that work for one commons may fail for another. Successful systems often combine local autonomy with monitoring, graduated sanctions, conflict resolution, and nested organization.

The point of departure is that multiple centers of decision are not automatically democratic. A polycentric system may contain agencies, firms, courts, municipalities, nonprofit organizations, private standards bodies, and professional networks whose members possess unequal authority. Fragmentation can disperse power, but it can also make responsibility difficult to trace. Wealthy actors may navigate multiple venues more effectively than ordinary citizens. Overlapping jurisdictions may permit forum shopping and blame shifting.

Polycentricity answers where governance occurs, not necessarily who owns it. A society can have many decision centers while citizens remain clients, consumers, subjects, or occasional voters in each. Administrative decentralization does not by itself distribute legislative sovereignty.

Straight-Up therefore adds a vertical test to the horizontal map. At every center, authority should be traceable to equal members, bounded by jurisdiction, open to challenge, and connected to routes of correction. Polycentric centers may possess real autonomy, but their authority cannot become unreviewable ownership detached from those affected.

The system's recursive architecture is polycentric in a qualified sense. It creates many sites of association and labor, but they are connected through a common constitutional relation of voter sovereignty. Recursion is not merely decentralization. It is a method for preserving member control while coordinating across scale.

The unresolved polycentric problem is legitimacy under distributed complexity. Straight-Up adopts multiple centers but asks a question institutional analysis sometimes leaves secondary: when centers conflict, whose decision-right is being exercised, and how can the affected member recover it?

13.16 Technocracy and epistemic democracy: knowledge without title

Technocratic arguments begin from an undeniable fact: governing requires knowledge. Public decisions can cause immense harm when based upon ignorance, wishful thinking, propaganda, or misunderstood evidence. Medicine, engineering, climate science, finance, law, logistics, cybersecurity, and administration contain specialized knowledge that cannot be recreated through intuition or a majority vote.

Some technocratic and epistocratic arguments infer that greater competence should bring greater political authority. Jason Brennan, for example, questions equal suffrage under conditions of widespread ignorance. Other models assign experts substantial insulation because complex policy must be protected from electoral pressure.

Epistemic democracy takes a different path. David Estlund argues that expertise cannot justify authority when the standard of expertise is reasonably contestable and its distribution is politically biased. Hélène Landemore emphasizes cognitive diversity and the capacity of inclusive groups to solve problems better than narrow elites. Elizabeth Anderson, Robert Goodin, Christian List, and others examine how democratic procedures can produce, aggregate, and correct knowledge.

Straight-Up adopts the epistemic concern but rejects political rule by the knowledgeable. Expertise deserves epistemic weight: evidence should be evaluated by methods appropriate to the field; specialists should explain uncertainty; technical work should be performed by qualified people; false claims should not receive equal credibility merely because speakers possess equal votes.

Epistemic weight is not political title. Knowing more about a matter does not establish a right to govern those who know less. Experts disagree, make value judgments, depend upon institutional incentives, and possess limited knowledge outside their domains. Most policy questions combine factual uncertainty with contested values and distributions of risk. The person who can model an effect does not thereby own the decision about who should bear its cost.

Straight-Up therefore separates knowledge production from legislative ownership. Experts may investigate, draft, forecast, audit, advise, administer, and warn. Their work should be visible and protected from partisan

retaliation where necessary. Competing expertise, source provenance, uncertainty labels, peer criticism, and independent institutions can improve public judgment.

The public retains authority because policy binds citizens as equals, not because every citizen possesses equal technical competence. A voter may rationally rely upon specialists, trusted delegates, or institutional summaries. She may also reject an expert recommendation because she assigns different values to risk, liberty, equality, or cost.

The system must avoid anti-intellectualism. "The voters decide" cannot mean that evidence is optional or that technical constraints bend to preference. A bridge will collapse regardless of the vote. But the engineer's knowledge of load does not determine whether the bridge should be built, where resources should come from, whose land should be used, or what level of risk is acceptable.

The unresolved epistemic problem is how to respect knowledge without converting asymmetry of knowledge into asymmetry of sovereignty. Straight-Up's answer is institutional rather than rhetorical: give experts robust roles in labor and information while preserving direct override, transparency, plural analysis, and equal final standing.

13.17 What Straight-Up takes - and what it refuses to surrender

The comparison reveals that Straight-Up is deeply synthetic. It takes:

- from liberal democracy, rights, pluralism, opposition, and legal restraint;
- from republicanism, non-domination, contestation, and institutional freedom;
- from participatory democracy, developmental agency and consequential citizenship;
- from deliberative democracy, reason-giving, information, and preference revision;
- from direct democracy, the public's capacity to make binding law;
- from liquid democracy, voluntary and recoverable delegation;
- from associative democracy, voluntary organization and social infrastructure;
- from sortition, equal access to political labor and descriptive inclusion;
- from anarchism, suspicion of hierarchy, federation, and mutual aid;
- from Marxism and democratic socialism, the analysis of class and economic power;
- from popular constitutionalism, the people's continuing authorship of public law;
- from principal-agent theory, monitoring, incentives, and agency loss;
- from polycentric governance, multiple centers, nesting, and institutional learning;
- from epistemic democracy, cognitive diversity and organized knowledge.

This breadth creates a legitimate objection. Is Straight-Up merely eclectic? Does it borrow appealing elements without resolving the conflicts among them?

The response is that the synthesis is governed by a single constitutional distinction: labor may be distributed; legislative ownership may not be alienated. The theory accepts neighboring practices when they support equal members and rejects them when they become substitutes for equal standing.

Rights constrain the use of public authority but do not assign general sovereignty to judges. Deliberation improves judgment but does not make eloquence a qualification for rule. Expertise carries evidentiary authority but not a superior vote. Sortition allocates work but does not extinguish the standing of the unselected. Association organizes agency but does not make groups sovereign over members. Delegation distributes attention but remains recoverable. Polycentric centers coordinate functions but remain constitutionally traceable. Economic democracy may transform property but does not replace political democracy.

The principle also exposes real tensions. Judicial independence may require temporary insulation from popular retaliation. Administrative discretion may be necessary when rules cannot specify every case. Secret ballots may conflict with proxy accountability. Emergency action may precede consultation. Rights may constrain majorities.

Experts may need authority to halt dangerous procedures. A serious system cannot resolve these tensions by repeating that the voters are sovereign.

Sovereignty is not the performance of every act. It is the residual and constitutive authority under which acts are organized, delegated, reviewed, and revised. A sovereign public can establish independent courts, professional agencies, emergency powers, and constitutional rights. The democratic question is whether these institutions become permanently self-authorizing or remain embedded in a constitutional order whose equal members retain meaningful routes of amendment, correction, and control.

Straight-Up therefore refuses only one surrender: the conversion of necessary political labor into an independent title to govern. Every neighboring tradition contains reasons why specialists, representatives, selected bodies, associations, courts, parties, or experts should perform important functions. None establishes why the people subject to law must cease to own the legislative authority exercised through those functions.

13.18 The problem the neighboring traditions leave unresolved

The traditions surveyed here have transformed democratic thought. Together they explain why elections alone are inadequate, why rights matter, why domination can exist without interference, why participation develops capacity, why deliberation improves judgment, why direct voting is possible, why delegation can be fluid, why associations matter, why random selection can broaden inclusion, why hierarchy deserves suspicion, why economic power distorts politics, why constitutional meaning belongs to the people, why agents drift, why distributed systems can learn, and why knowledge must be organized.

Yet a common ambiguity remains.

The people are repeatedly described as sovereign while practical authority is assigned to someone else for good reasons. Representatives provide judgment. Judges protect rights. Experts provide knowledge. Parties organize choice. Assemblies deliberate. Associations coordinate interests. Bureaucracies administer. Movements mobilize. Each function is necessary or valuable. The accumulation of necessary functions then appears to justify the independent authority of those who perform them.

This is the labor-authority fallacy at the level of democratic theory.

Because governing requires work, those who do the work are treated as the natural owners of the decision. Because citizens cannot all research, draft, negotiate, administer, and deliberate continuously, they are asked to transfer legislative authority to those who can. The transfer is then redescribed as self-government because the public selected, authorized, influenced, resembled, or may eventually replace the recipient.

Straight-Up does not deny the need for intermediaries. It denies that intermediation requires alienation.

A democratic institution should therefore be evaluated by a sequence of questions:

Who may initiate?

Who performs the work?

Who controls the agenda?

Who can inspect the information?

Who may amend?

Who casts the binding vote?

Who can reclaim delegated authority?

Who can challenge the result?

Who can alter the institution itself?

The answer "the people" has meaning only when these questions can be connected to equal members through actual procedures. Otherwise popular sovereignty remains a legitimating abstraction surrounding institutions in which practical ownership lies elsewhere.

The distinctive Straight-Up claim is not that every citizen must decide everything. It is that no citizen should be structurally transformed from a co-owner of legislative authority into a petitioner before those who own it. The system may rely heavily upon representation, deliberation, expertise, administration, association, selection, and delegation. Its democratic character depends upon whether those functions remain subordinate to recoverable member authority.

13.19 A neighboring tradition of its own

Straight-Up should not present itself as the final synthesis of democratic theory. It is a developing tradition with unresolved questions, empirical risks, and constitutional tensions. Its own vocabulary can harden into dogma. Its four parameters can be treated as magic words. Delegates can accumulate power. Human-scale groups can exclude. Software can become sovereign. Direct override can be burdensome. Majorities can act unjustly. The theory must remain open to correction by the traditions it critiques.

Liberalism will continue to ask whether rights are secure. Republicanism will ask whether dependence and arbitrary power persist. Participatory theory will ask whether ordinary people actually develop agency. Deliberative theory will ask whether reasons and perspectives are heard. Direct-democracy research will ask how money, wording, and agenda control shape votes. Liquid-democracy research will ask whether proxies concentrate. Associative theory will ask whether social organization is inclusive. Sortitionists will ask whether political labor remains monopolized. Anarchists will ask whether hierarchy has merely changed form. Socialists will ask whether formal equality masks material domination. Popular constitutionalists will ask whether institutions still speak over the people. Principal-agent theory will ask whether monitoring and sanctions work. Polycentric analysis will ask whether complexity produces learning or evasion. Epistemic theorists will ask whether the system knows enough to govern responsibly.

These are not external attacks to be defeated. They are tests the theory needs.

Straight-Up's contribution is to add one question to this continuing democratic conversation:

After every valuable function has been assigned, who still owns the legislative decision?

A tradition that answers rights, deliberation, participation, expertise, and representation without answering ownership remains incomplete. A theory that answers ownership while neglecting rights, knowledge, organization, and correction is equally incomplete.

The democratic ownership of law is therefore not an alternative to the neighboring traditions. It is a proposed constitutional relation among their insights. It asks liberal rights, republican contestation, participatory development, deliberative reasoning, direct voting, liquid delegation, voluntary association, sortition, anti-hierarchy, economic analysis, popular constitutionalism, agency theory, polycentricity, and expertise to coexist without allowing any one of them to become the justification for a separate ruling class.

The result is not democracy without representation, leadership, expertise, administration, or law.

It is democracy in which none of those necessities acquires independent ownership of the authority they exist to serve.

Political labor may have many centers. Legislative sovereignty must remain with equal members.

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