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Popular Rule in Schumpeter's Democracy

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In this article, it is argued that existing democracies might establish popular rule even if Joseph Schumpeter's notoriously unflattering picture of ordinary citizens is accurate. Some degree of popular rule is in principle compatible with apathetic, ignorant and suggestible citizens, contrary to what Schumpeter and others have maintained. The people may have control over policy, and their control may constitute popular rule, even if citizens lack definite policy opinions and even if their opinions result in part from elites' efforts to manipulate these opinions. Thus, even a purely descriptive, 'realist' account of democracy of the kind that Schumpeter professed to offer may need to concede that there is no democracy without some degree of popular rule.

Keywords: Schumpeter; popular rule; popular will; elite democracy; popular control

Joseph Schumpeter famously offers a minimalist account of democracy that shears it of its traditional connotations of popular rule and self-government and identifies it solely with the selection of rulers through competitive elections. Democracy, he tells us, 'does not and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of "people" and "rule" '. Instead, it 'means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them'. His deflationary identification of democracy with electoral competition is supposed to be 'truer to life' than the view according to which democracy implies popular self-rule (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 284, 285 and 269). In Britain, the US and other countries that we call democracies, there is nothing recognizable as popular rule; thus, popular rule cannot be a necessary condition of democracy. But these regimes do hold competitive elections in which the people accept or refuse bids for leadership. If we want to identify the distinctive features of these regimes that set them apart from non-democracies, their method of selecting leaders through competitive elections has the advantage over popular rule of being a feature they actually exhibit.

In this article I argue that existing democracies might well be instances of popular rule even if most of what Schumpeter presents as evidence against this view is true. They might establish a meaningful form of popular rule even if their citizens lack definite policy opinions and even if their opinions result in part from elites' efforts to manipulate them. Democracies can be fairly described as establishing popular rule, I will claim, if they establish popular control over policy and no agent or group of agents has dominating control over public opinion. Popular control over policy requires a particular causal relationship between policy and citizens' policy opinions, but this relationship may hold even when citizens have no policy opinions and even when the opinions they do have result from elite manipulation. This control may not amount to popular rule if elites have not merely influence but also dominating control over public opinion. But, I will argue, there is no reason to expect elites to have dominating control over public opinion if the political environment is genuinely competitive.

Unlike other lines of criticism in the literature, these arguments make for an internal critique of Schumpeter's democratic theory.[1] Some commentators reject the possibility or value of a purely descriptive theory of democracy, go on to assess Schumpeter's thesis instead as a normative claim about what kind of democracy is desirable and then find it lacking (Held, 2006). I grant, for the sake of argument, the validity of the purely descriptive approach that Schumpeter professes to take. In response to his claims about 'human nature', Schumpeter's critics have argued that he neglects the potential transformative and educative effects of more participatory or deliberative forms of democracy (Medearis, 2001; Pateman, 1970). I grant, again for the sake of argument, his claims about the ignorance and disengagement of ordinary citizens and their susceptibility to manipulation by elites. But I argue that it is a mistake to infer from these premises, as Schumpeter does, that democracy does not imply popular rule. Popular rule is compatible with apathetic, ignorant and suggestible citizens.

The point of this argument is not to deny that democracy requires informed and engaged citizens, capable of thinking for themselves, in order to function well and realize many of the values we associate with democracy. But citizens do not need to have these qualities in order to be credited, collectively, with a meaningful degree of popular rule. The purpose of the argument is to make room for the view that, even if democratic citizens fit Schumpeter's description, it remains the case that a distinctive feature of actual democracies – a feature that sets them apart from non-democracies and helps to explain their value – is the degree of control over government and policy that they confer on their citizens. The conception of popular control at the heart of this argument may appear too minimal at first, but there are good reasons to value it.

The next section reviews Schumpeter's critique of popular rule and its reception in political theory. In the sections following this summary I examine his claim that popular rule implies that citizens have determinate policy opinions and his claim that popular rule is incompatible with elites' manipulation of ordinary citizens. The final section concludes with thoughts on the normative significance of the kind of popular rule that may be said to exist in Schumpeter's democracy.

Schumpeter's Critique of Popular Rule

Chapter 21 of Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* takes aim at what he calls the 'classical doctrine of democracy'. As Schumpeter defines this doctrine in section I of the chapter, its thesis is that 'the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 250). So formulated, the doctrine is, as David Held (2006, p. 146) puts it, 'a curious amalgam of theories' – some Rousseau, a bit of Bentham. Everyone agrees it is a largely mythical target for Schumpeter's critique (Medearis, 2001; Pateman, 1970).[2]

However, it is not the only target of Chapter 21, and commentators err when they represent Chapter 21 as an attack solely on this straw man. In fact, Schumpeter sets it aside after only a few critical paragraphs in section I. Section II then opens with the admission that 'however conclusively those arguments may tell against this particular conception of

the will of the people' – defined relative to an independent common good – 'they do not debar us from trying to build up another and more realistic one'. These 'more realistic' conceptions of the popular will are never given explicit definitions, but what Schumpeter has in mind appears to be non-metaphysical conceptions of the popular will that treat it as a function, not of the common good, but instead of individuals' given wants and opinions. One of his first criticisms of these 'more realistic' conceptions is that the moral value of respecting the popular will, so conceived, is no longer self-evident, 'since *that* will is no longer congruent with any "good" ' (emphasis in the original). But this is not the main problem with the more realistic conceptions of the popular will. Even if we set this criticism aside, 'the dropping of the utilitarian common good still leaves us with plenty of difficulties on our hands' (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 252 and 253). He then gives a preview of the two principal difficulties that the rest of the chapter will explore.

First, the idea that in a democracy, the popular will – understood not as something metaphysical but rather 'realistically' as a function of citizens' actual opinions – determines policy presupposes that citizens actually have opinions. 'If we are to argue that the will of the citizens *per se* is a political factor entitled to respect, it must first exist. That is to say, it must be something more than an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions. Everyone would have to know definitely what he stands for' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 253).

Second, if we wish to claim that the popular will is the motor behind the democratic process, then the work of forming such judgements is one each citizen 'would have to perform for himself and independently of pressure groups and propaganda, for volitions ... that are imposed upon the electorate obviously do not qualify for ultimate data of the democratic process' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 254).

Determining whether these presuppositions of popular rule are met is the task of section III, where Schumpeter presents his account of 'human nature'. He argues there that on most political issues, the typical citizen has no definite opinions because the issues do not directly concern him. With some exceptions, 'the great political questions take their place in the psychic economy of the typical citizen with those leisure-hour interests that have not attained the rank of hobbies', and so 'he expends less disciplined effort on mastering a political problem than he expends on a game of bridge' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 261). He remains ignorant of the relevant facts despite an abundance of available information. 'His thinking becomes associative and affective', with the consequence that his political opinions can be manipulated (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 262 and 263). Just as advertisers can create consumer demand, strategic politicians and interest groups can manufacture public opinion. They 'are able to fashion and, within very wide limits, even to create the will of the people' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 263).

We are meant to conclude that even if we adopt a realistic conception of the popular will – one divorced from the concept of the common good and defined simply by individuals' given opinions and volitions – democracy cannot be understood as a method by which the people, through the election of representatives, are able to impose their will on the policy-making process. There is usually no will to be imposed. When there is a popular will, it is not an independent force to which political parties and officeholders respond. What Schumpeter takes himself to have established with these arguments is that

'democracy does not and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of the terms "people" and "rule" ' (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 284 and 285).

In what follows I will argue that this conclusion does not follow from Schumpeter's claims in Chapter 21. The arguments I present use analogies between popular and autocratic rule. The analogy between the people in a democracy and the autocrat is an old device in political theory, deployed originally in critiques of Athenian democracy (Forsdyke, 2009). It is useful in this context as a means of disabusing the reader of errant intuitions about what popular rule requires – intuitions which Schumpeter exploits. Before moving on to those arguments, I close this section with comments on two alternative interpretations of Schumpeter's critique.

One way to misinterpret the critique is to attribute to him the view that the popular will *never* exists or the even stronger view that references to the popular will are meaningless. (One might err in this way if one thought that the Rousseau-Bentham amalgam from section I represented the object of Schumpeter's critique throughout the chapter.) Schumpeter cannot hold these stronger views because he claims that elites can 'fashion' and 'create the will of the people' – but if there is never a popular will, then *a fortiori* there is never a popular will fashioned and created by elites. Other pieces of textual evidence corroborate this thesis. At the end of section II he suggests that undemocratic arrangements would sometimes bring about what the people want more reliably than democratic arrangements; he gives Napoleon's handling of church-and-state issues as an example (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 254–6). Schumpeter is not skeptical in general of the possibility of group volitions. In Chapter 22 he counts it as a virtue of his theory that it does not neglect the existence of 'genuine group-wise volitions', such as 'the will of the unemployed to receive unemployment benefit or the will of other groups to help', but rather emphasizes how these group volitions, '[e]ven if strong and definite, ... remain latent, often for decades, until they are called to life by some political leader who turns them into political factors' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 270). The problem with the idea of a popular will – once it is conceived not as the counterpart to some metaphysical common good, but rather as an aggregation of individuals' actual opinions – is not that it is meaningless or never exists. The problem is rather that it *often* fails to exist, simply because citizens *often* lack opinions; and, when it does exist, 'the will of the people is the product and not the motive power of the political process' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 263).

A second alternative interpretation is to read Schumpeter as holding that electoral competition gives the electorate a controlling, restraining influence over elected leaders' decisions. Some commentators' descriptions of Schumpeter's views on electoral competition give this impression:

> [F]rom [Schumpeter's] perspective, the value of competition is twofold: it disciplines leaders with the threat of losing power in the same way that firms are disciplined by the threat of bankruptcy, and it gives would-be leaders the incentive to be responsive to more voters than their competitors (Shapiro, 2003, p. 58).

It may be that Schumpeter believes political competition imposes a kind of discipline and constraint on political leaders (although he does not express this opinion in the single passage

of Chapter 22 that explicitly compares political competition with economic competition[3]). But if so, the imposed constraint is not respect for voters' opinions about the decisions that leaders confront. If there is some sense in which they have incentives 'to be responsive to more voters than their competitors',[4] the pattern of responsiveness is not one of leaders taking note of voters' opinions and choosing the policies that most of them want. On the contrary. The virtue of his minimal theory, he believes, is that it does *not* imply that elected officials act as the people's 'representatives', enacting the policies they want.

> It will be remembered that our chief troubles about the classical theory centered in the proposition that 'the people' hold a definite and rational opinion about every individual question and that they give effect to this opinion – in a democracy – by choosing 'representatives' who will see to it that that opinion is carried out (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 269).

By contrast, on his theory 'the role of the people is to produce a government' (p. 269). Electorates 'normally do not control their political leaders *in any way* except by refusing to re-elect them' (emphasis added).[5] When popular 'revulsions ... upset a government or an individual minister directly or else enforce a certain course of action [it is] contrary to the spirit of the democratic method' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 272). The core of Schumpeter's vision, as John Medearis (2001) has persuasively argued, is elite domination of politics.

His principal reasons for rejecting popular control over elected leaders, in the sense of 'enforcing certain courses of action' on them and compelling them to do as the people want – 'popular rule', as he calls it – is that ordinary citizens normally lack determinate opinions and, when they exist, their opinions are not independent but rather the products of manipulation. Let us now examine whether these inferences are sound.

Whether a Popular Will Must Exist

Schumpeter argues that with respect to most policy issues ordinary citizens lack determinate political opinions, and so for most issues the people have no will as to what should be done. Why would this claim, if accepted, be problematic for a theory according to which democracy involves popular rule? Schumpeter does not lay out the steps, but here is one way to reconstruct his reasoning.

> A1 The people have control over a policy issue only if they have a collective will as to how the issue should be decided.
>
> A2 The people have a collective will as to how a policy issue should be decided only if each citizen has a will as to how it should be decided.
>
> A3 For most policy issues, the typical citizen lacks a will as to how it should be decided.
>
> A4 Thus, the people do not have control over most policy issues.

The background assumption behind this reconstruction is that popular rule implies that the people have control over most policy issues, so the conclusion would refute the hypothesis of popular rule. Premise A2 is implicit in Schumpeter's argument and A3 expresses one of his primary theses in section III.

Even if we grant both premises A2 and A3, the argument fails, for the first premise should be rejected. To see why, take the analogous claim that an autocrat has control over a policy

issue only if he has a will as to how the issue should be decided. If we reject this claim, we should reject A1, barring some good explanation for why the analogy is inappropriate.

Consider an autocratic regime in which the central bank lacks independence from the executive. The autocrat appoints the head of the central bank and can remove him at will. One likely effect is that the central banker adopts the monetary policies that he believes the autocrat wants, because he fears dismissal if he fails to do so. If the autocrat's power of dismissing the central banker has this effect, then there is a clear sense in which the autocrat has control over monetary policy. The central banker's actions depend counterfactually on the autocrat's will: for any particular monetary policy, if it were the autocrat's will that the banker adopt this policy, then the banker would do so in order to keep his job.[6]

Suppose now that the autocrat does not bother himself with the details of monetary policy. On account of his ignorance he lacks determinate opinions about many of the decisions confronting the central bank and has no will as to which decisions the central bank should take. Nonetheless, the autocrat has control over the central bank and its actions so long as, for any particular policy, if it *were* his will that it be chosen, then it would be chosen. This counterfactual conditional may be true even if he does not in actual fact have a will regarding the choice of monetary policy. Were he to form a will, then he would make it known to the banker and the banker, fearing dismissal, would act accordingly. When the autocrat is indifferent but these counterfactual conditionals hold, then he has control in the manner of a rider who lets his horse go where it will: were he to want the horse to go this or that way, then it would (Pettit, 2013, pp. 156 and 157). Thus, in the case of an individual, it is false that an individual has control over an issue only if he has a will as to how it should be decided.

To claim otherwise would be to commit a mistake reminiscent of the 'exercise fallacy' in the literature on power (Lukes, 2005, p. 109). It may be that an agent can only *exercise* control if she has a will as to how to exercise it. But she can *possess* control without having a will as to how to exercise it; whether she possesses control is, conceptually speaking, independent of the desires she happens to have.[7] It is not as though the autocrat suddenly comes to have control over the central bank at just the moment that he forms a will as to what the bank should do.

This example indicates why one should reject premise A1. The natural extension of the working definition of 'control' to the people in a democracy would be the following:

> *Definition of 'popular control'*: The people have control over policy (within a given policy domain) if, for any particular policy (in this domain), if it were their collective will that it be enacted, then it would be.

Given this definition, the people may be said to have control over a policy issue even if they lack a collective will as to what should be done.

The claim here is not that the people, even lacking a collective will, might have control in the present because they will form a will in the future, which elected officials anticipate and implement in the present – roughly speaking, what is sometimes called 'anticipatory representation' (Mansbridge, 2003). The claim is rather that they may have control with respect to a policy issue even if they lack – now and continuing indefinitely into the future – a collective will as to what should be done. For whether they have control depends on

what would happen if, *counterfactually*, they did have a collective will as to what should be done. It does not depend on whether they *actually* have a will.

The claim being advanced is a claim about the concept of popular control, not a claim about the mechanisms that sustain popular control. Nonetheless, it may help to have an example of such a mechanism. One possibility is the sanctioning mechanism that operates in the example of the autocrat's control over the banker. If elected officials wish to retain office, and voters are less likely to vote for them when they have enacted policies that the voters oppose, then elected officials have incentives to choose the policies that the people want when such policies exist. If they value re-election enough, then the effect will be that for any particular policy, were it the will of the people that it be enacted, then elected officials would enact it. Of course, this mechanism may not work in practice, or it may work in conjunction with other mechanisms. What matters for the argument is that whether popular control over policy arises from the sanctioning mechanism or some other mechanism, it is compatible with general indifference to policy.

Admittedly, the working definition of 'control' is plausible only when applied to an entity that is at least *capable* of having a will. It would not be plausible to claim that mountains and rivers have control over their environs because, in a counterfactual animist world in which mountains and rivers had desires, their environs would conform to their desires. While the entity to which control is imputed need not have a will in actual fact in order for the imputation to be legitimate – it can be indifferent – it must in actual fact be capable of having a will (unlike mountains and rivers). It is not enough for there to be a counterfactual world in which it is capable of having a will. In other words, the definition should run something like this: an entity has control over a variable if it is (in actual fact) capable of having a will regarding the variable and the variable would (counterfactually) conform to its will if (counterfactually) it had a will. We are therefore not obliged to say that the autocrat has control over policy even if, say, he lies comatose; if he is incapable of having a will so long as his coma persists, then the amended definition implies that he does not have control over anything.

Note, in connection with these remarks, that the claim being advanced is *not* that Schumpeter's critique fails because there is a counterfactual world in which citizens are different from how he describes and in which the people consequently have control. The claim is rather that Schumpeter gives us no reason to doubt that the people have control over policy in the *actual* world – or rather, the world as Schumpeter imagines it and as we are conceding it to be, for the sake of argument. They can have control even if they lack a will regarding most policy issues. While it needs to be true that they are actually capable of forming a will, it does not need to be true that they actually have a will.

Now, a critic might argue that the people are indeed not the kind of thing capable of possessing a will. We can identify two variants of this objection, one more troubling than the other. The first, less troubling objection is that the typical citizen is incapable of forming a will regarding policy issues. Since the people are surely incapable of having a collective will if individual citizens are incapable of having individual wills, the implication would be that the people lack control over policy, given our (amended) working definition of 'popular control.' But this assertion is implausible. Not even Schumpeter is prepared to claim that the typical citizen is *incapable* of forming a will. The second, more troubling

version of the objection concedes that individual citizens are capable of forming wills, but denies that there is any meaningful sense in which their individual wills aggregate into a well-defined *collective* will. This objection necessitates a brief diversion from the main line of discussion.

One interpretation of the definition is to understand 'their collective will' as referring to the will of the majority. The identification of popular rule with rule by the majority is familiar: as Tocqueville puts it, 'in all countries where the people reign, the majority rules in the name of the people' (Tocqueville, 2000, p. 173). The claim would be that the people have control over policy if, for any policy, were it the will of the majority of citizens that the policy be enacted, then it would be. Schumpeter balks at the identification of the will of the majority with the will of the people (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 272). But his claim that 'democracy does not and cannot mean that the people actually rule *in any obvious sense* of the terms "people" and "rule" ' would be false if democracy means rule by the majority, which is a fairly obvious and common interpretation of what popular rule means (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 284; emphasis added).

There is still a potential objection to this interpretation of popular control. References to the 'will of the majority' may be ill-defined for the reasons illuminated by social choice theory. Which of three policies x, y and z corresponds to the 'will of the majority' if a majority prefers x to y, another majority prefers y to z and a third majority prefers z to x? One may argue, as William Riker did, that such paradoxes render the idea of popular rule incoherent (Riker, 1982).

I will bracket these issues and operate on the assumption that a reconstructed conception of popular control, with whatever amendments and refinements are needed to make it consistent with insights from social choice theory, will be no less and no more vulnerable to Schumpeter's criticisms than the simple, 'naïve' conception defined above.[8] This assumption is safe, I believe, so long as popular control over policy involves some relationship of counterfactual dependence between policy and citizens' preferences, however these are aggregated.

Before proceeding to Schumpeter's other line of attack, let us pause to take stock of the argument so far. Schumpeter sets out to show that democracy does not imply popular rule. His strategy is to argue that what we know about public opinion and the role of elites in shaping it prevents us from viewing existing democracies as instances of popular rule – thus, democracy cannot imply popular rule. But, I claim, actual democracies may be instances of popular rule even if much of what Schumpeter says about them is true. One of his arguments, which I have reconstructed above, is that actual democracies are not instances of popular rule because the typical citizen normally lacks determinate opinions. But, I claim, the critical premise – that the people have control over a policy issue only if they have a will regarding the policy issue – is false. Just as an indifferent autocrat, who in actual fact lacks a will regarding a policy issue, may still be credited with control so long as policy depends counterfactually on his will, a people may also be credited with control even if in actual fact they lack a will, so long as policy depends counterfactually on their will. To be sure, they must be the kind of thing capable of having a will: they cannot be analogous to a comatose autocrat or an inanimate object. But, as explained in the previous section, Schumpeter does not dispute that they are capable of having a will. While social

choice theory may furnish reasons for doubt, they must be bracketed here when assessing Schumpeter's critique.

The next two sections focus on Schumpeter's other main objection to the identification of democracy with popular rule. The people cannot be said to rule in actual democracies, he argues, because elites can manipulate citizens' policy preferences and 'manufacture' the popular will. This inference can also be questioned.

Whether Elite Manipulation Subverts Popular Control of Policy

Since citizens lack informed and rational opinions, they are said to be vulnerable to manipulation by political elites and interest groups. As Schumpeter describes it, electoral competition consists mainly in elites' efforts to exploit voters' myopia for electoral gain. The popular will, when it exists, is 'not a genuine but a manufactured will' (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 263). If citizens are easily manipulated by political elites, then surely it is elites, and not the people, who rule.

As with the first criticism of popular rule considered above, Schumpeter nowhere spells out explicitly why popular rule is incompatible with citizens' manipulability. As before, it will help to reconstruct an argument on Schumpeter's behalf, so as to focus attention on the key premise and its role:

> B1 The people do not have control over policy if elites are capable of manipulating their collective will as to which policy should be chosen.
>
> B2 If elites are capable of manipulating the opinions of individual citizens, then they are capable of manipulating the people's collective will as to which policy should be chosen.
>
> B3 Elites are capable of manipulating the opinions of individual citizens.
>
> B4 Thus, the people do not have control over policy.

As before, the background assumption is that popular rule implies that the people have control over policy, so the conclusion implies that the people do not rule.

The second premise will come under closer scrutiny in the next section, but for now let us grant it, along with the third premise, for the sake of argument. We should reject the first premise: even if Schumpeter is right that elites can manipulate the people's collective will, the people can still be said to have control over policy.

Consider an autocrat who, before choosing a policy, solicits his adviser's opinion about its effects on unemployment. He worries that excessively high levels of unemployment would undermine the stability of his regime. The adviser's powers of persuasion are such that the adviser can convince the autocrat of any conclusion about the policy's effects, whatever its actual effects. He can thereby manipulate the autocrat's will regarding the policy. Does it follow that the autocrat lacks control over whether the policy goes into effect? No, for whether the policy goes into effect still depends counterfactually on the autocrat's will. If implementing the policy is the autocrat's will, then it will be implemented; if not implementing the policy is the autocrat's will, then it will not be implemented. Whether these counterfactual conditionals are true does not depend on the provenance of his will or the role of another agent in shaping it.

Moreover, this implication is a *virtue* and not a defect of the working definition of 'control'. If the adviser cares about whether the policy goes into effect, then he will have a reason to manipulate the *autocrat's* will – as opposed to the will of some other agent – because it is the autocrat who has control over whether the policy goes into effect. The adviser would have no reason to manipulate the autocrat's will if the policy were out of the autocrat's control.

If the provenance of the autocrat's will is irrelevant to the question whether he has control over policy, then we should conclude that the provenance of the popular will, and in particular the role of elites in shaping it, is likewise irrelevant to the question whether the people have control over policy. That is, we should reject B1. Even if elites and other groups can manipulate citizens' attitudes and thereby manipulate their aggregate will, it does not follow that the people lack control over policy. Policy may still depend counterfactually on the popular will, even if the popular will is 'manufactured'.

None of this is to deny that susceptibility to manipulation would be troubling for anyone who upholds popular control as a democratic ideal. But the worry should not be that this manipulation subverts popular control over policy.

One possible explanation for why the manipulation would be troubling is that it would subvert popular control not over policy but over things more important than policy. If elites can manipulate the people's will by manipulating their beliefs about the effects of economic policy, then the people may have control over economic policy but not over unemployment, inflation and other variables that they hope to influence through economic policy. Another analogy illustrates the point: if someone who is financially illiterate is given control over an investment portfolio, and his self-serving financial adviser can manipulate him into making bad investments in which the adviser has a conflicting selfish interest, then two things are true. First – and trivially because it is true by hypothesis – the financial naïf has control over his investment portfolio. Second, the manipulation undermines his control over when he retires. It upsets his control over the variables that his investment decisions affect. Analogously, elite manipulation of the popular will may subvert popular control over the outcomes that policy affects, even if it does not diminish popular control over policy. If the people are vulnerable to manipulation, their control over policy may do them less good than it otherwise would. But poorly exercised control is, trivially, still control.

Thus, while elite manipulation of the popular will may be inconsistent with various democratic principles, including a principle of popular control over the outcomes that policy affects, it is nonetheless compatible with popular control over policy. The right response is not to reject the definition because it has this implication, but to recognize that the democratic principles which underlie our intuitive resistance to this conclusion must require something more than mere popular control over policy. The next section pursues this idea.

So far we have seen that popular control over policy is compatible with two of Schumpeter's main theses about democracy: that there is no popular will regarding most policy issues, and that the popular will, when it does exist, results from elite manipulation. Even an apathetic and manipulable citizenry may be said to have control over policy. Thus, if popular control over policy suffices for popular rule, then Schumpeter is wrong to

conclude from his two theses that existing democracies do not establish popular rule. But perhaps his conclusion holds if popular rule is taken to require something beyond popular control over policy. The next section asks whether Schumpeter's conclusion holds when popular rule is taken to imply not only popular control over policy, but also the absence of elite control over the people's will.

Whether Elites Have Control over Public Opinion

Suppose now that the adviser has control over the autocrat's will more generally: his powers of persuasion are so strong and the autocrat's defenses against manipulation so weak that, for any particular policy, if the adviser wanted the autocrat to want this policy, then the autocrat would want it. Since policy is counterfactually dependent on the autocrat's will and the autocrat's will is now counterfactually dependent on the adviser's will, the implication is that the adviser controls policy. The adviser controls policy, *because* the autocrat controls policy and he controls the autocrat's will. The adviser controls policy, not with but *through* the autocrat.

Similarly, it is coherent on our working definition of 'control' to say that elites control policy *because* the people control policy and elites control the popular will. Aristotle recognized such a possibility in a democracy dominated by demagogues: 'For it happens that they [the demagogues] become great because the demos has the supreme power over all things, while they have the supreme power over the opinion of the people; for the multitude is persuaded by them.'[9]

That our working definition implies the possibility of such patterns of control is neither surprising nor embarrassing. (The patterns themselves may be objectionable and embarrassing for anyone defending the democracy in which they occur, but it is no objection to the definition of 'control' that it implies their possibility.) Just as there are chains of cause and effect, there are chains of control in which one agent's will is both cause and effect: cause of the events under his control and effect of other agents' wills.

Yet while this implication does not embarrass the definition of 'control', it may make us wonder about the polemical value of refuting a premise like B1. Aristotle's description of a democracy ruled by demagogues was, after all, offered as criticism. Defeating Schumpeter's critique with this concept of popular control, which tolerates elite control over the people's will, may be a pyrrhic victory. Whether or not such elite manipulation is consistent with *popular control over policy*, someone who sympathizes with the ideals Schumpeter attacks will feel it is inconsistent with *democracy*.

One way to express this thought would be to say that democracy requires popular rule and popular rule in turn requires not only that the people have control over policy, but also that elites not have control over the popular will. In the scenario of the autocrat, one might say that while the autocrat has control over policy, the adviser is the genuine ruler. The autocrat is merely the unwitting agent of the adviser's covert rule. Analogously, Schumpeter might argue that even if the people have control over policy, elites are the genuine rulers because they manipulate and control the popular will.

> C1 The people rule only if they have control over policy and no other agent, or group of agents, has control over their will regarding policy.

C2 Elites have control over the people's will regarding policy.

C3 Thus, the people do not rule.

Even if we reject B1 from the previous argument for the reasons given, this argument may chart a successful path to Schumpeter's desired conclusion.

Is there any evidence for the second premise? Schumpeter offers only personal impressions and armchair speculations for his claims about public opinion, but subsequent research may be thought to vindicate a premise like C2. Space does not permit a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, but it may nevertheless be useful to consider one particular strand – namely the literature on 'partisan cues' – in order to illustrate what does and does not count as evidence for C2.

In his classic study of mass opinion John Zaller argues that 'when elites uphold a clear picture of what should be done, the public tends to see events from that point of view, with the most politically attentive members of the public most likely to adopt the elite position' (Zaller, 1992, p. 8). Citizens – especially the most informed and politically sophisticated among them – appear to take 'cues' from political elites: learning where parties stand on an issue influences citizens' opinions about the issue. As Zaller himself asks: 'If many citizens are largely uncritical in their response to political communications as carried in the mass media and if most of the rest respond mechanically on the basis of partisan cues, how can one deny the existence of a substantial degree of elite domination of public opinion?' (Zaller, 1992, p. 311).[10] A body of subsequent literature supports Zaller's contention that 'partisan cues' influence citizens' policy opinions (Arceneaux, 2008; Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014; Bullock, 2011; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Nicholson, 2011).

Are such results evidence of elite control over citizens' policy opinions? They are evidence of elite *influence*, but control is more than mere influence. Elites might influence citizens by providing them with information about policies, or by how they frame policy choices, but such influence would not necessarily amount to control over the popular will and would not necessarily undermine popular rule. The hypothesis we are considering is that some body of elites has a degree of control over the popular will such that – in virtue of popular control over policy – they are able to control policy through their control of the popular will. The hypothesized control must therefore mean something like the following: were elites to want the popular will to have some particular content, then it would.[11]

There is a ready explanation for why partisan cues influence public opinion that does not imply elite control. The effects of partisan cues may be explained by a 'signaling' model of communication between elites and ordinary citizens. According to this model, the relatively uninformed partisan regards her party's stated position and other campaign messages as signals of unknown, relevant information about policies and therefore *rationally* revises her policy preferences according to the content of the signal. Observing that most members of the left-wing party oppose and most members of the right-wing party support a proposed piece of legislation signals to observers something about the content of the legislation. Left-leaning citizens will rationally become more skeptical of it; right-leaning citizens will rationally become more open to it.

For present purposes, the important feature of the signaling model is that if it is correct, then the influence of elites' policy positions, campaign messages, and other behavior depends upon citizens' beliefs about the underlying causes of elites' behavior. The right-wing party's support for a policy signals to an observer that the policy fits with conservative ideology, *if* the observer believes that a conservative ideology is the underlying cause of the party's position. The signaling model therefore implies limits to party elites' influence over the rank-and-file. They are not free to manipulate the rank-and-file into holding just any preferences because some attempts at manipulation will affect beliefs about the underlying causes of elites' actions, thereby upsetting the signaling mechanism responsible for elite influence. For example, if rank-and-file conservatives learned that their party supported a massive expansion of social welfare programs, many would no doubt infer, not that a massive expansion is consistent with conservative ideology, but that the policy positions of the party were no longer reliable signals of which policies fit with conservative ideology.

Ordinary citizens' beliefs about the underlying causes of party elites' behavior may be sticky enough that infrequent or marginal deviations from elites' normal behavior do not cause revisions to these beliefs. Such stickiness would create opportunities for infrequent or marginal acts of manipulation. For example, if leaders of the right-wing party came to support a *modest* expansion of social welfare programs, *and* their positions on other issues remained unchanged, then many of their supporters would no doubt treat their new policy positions as informative signals of the merits of the modest expansion. Indeed, John Bullock (2011) uses a survey experiment conducted in the US to show that reading a (fictitious) claim that the Republican Party supported the expansion of Medicaid caused an increase in the number of Republican respondents who expressed support for it.

These opportunities for infrequent or marginal manipulation do not mean that elites have the kind of dominating control over the popular will that is incompatible with popular rule. It helps once again to consult our intuitions concerning parallel claims about autocratic rule, so as to ensure that sympathy with or hostility towards Schumpeter's position does not bias our judgements about what popular rule requires. If an autocrat solicits expert advice on economic policy and treats the advice as informative, then he makes himself vulnerable to manipulation by his advisers. Yet we would not hesitate to describe a regime as an autocracy, as an instance of autocratic rule, simply because the autocrat solicits advice from advisers. The manipulation to which he thereby exposes himself may interfere with his rule or attenuate it, but this vulnerability is not grounds for denying that the regime is an instance of autocratic rule. Similarly, we should not refuse to describe a regime as an instance of popular rule simply because citizens treat elites' policy positions as informative signals and, consequently, make themselves vulnerable to limited and occasional manipulation.

The point of this brief discussion of the literature on partisan cues is to illustrate why caution is in order when interpreting evidence of elite influence over public opinion. Not every variety of influence amounts to control. The mechanism underlying elite influence may even imply that elites *lack* control – such is the implication of the signaling model of partisan cues.

Note that even if we grant for the sake of argument that party elites do have dominating control over the political opinions of their rank-and-file, the premise about elite control

that Schumpeter needs might still be false. The elites of one party may have control over the policy opinions of most of their rank-and-file supporters, and elites of a rival party may have control over the opinions of most of their rank-and-file supporters, yet both groups of elites may nevertheless lack control over the aggregate will of the people. The control of different parties over their respective supporters might work at cross purposes, cancelling out and leaving no group of elites with control over the aggregate will of the people.

Perhaps one way to defend the premise C2 is to interpret it as a claim about the effects of multipartisan consensus among elites. The claim might be that for any policy, were the elites of all the major parties to support the policy and to want the public to support it, then the public would support it. If this counterfactual were true for a large range of policies, then it would indeed be true, according to our working definition, that elites – taken as a single, multipartisan group – have control over the popular will, and the reconstructed argument (C1, C2, C3) would go through. This claim appears far too strong – the evidence for elite influence, such as the influence of partisan cues, does not support it, because it is consistent with the signaling model of elite influence – but let us grant it for the sake of argument.

This kind of multipartisan elite domination would likely be inconsistent with robust political competition. A plausible conjecture about electoral competition is that if a policy lacks independent popular support, then one of the parties should be able to oppose the policy and find some means of framing its opposition for electoral advantage. If the parties do not respond to such electoral incentives, and if third parties are incapable of entering the field and taking advantage of the dominant parties' unresponsiveness, then the political system is not genuinely competitive. Thus, in a sufficiently competitive democracy, political elites as a class should not be able to control the popular will any more than producers as a group can control the price of their product in a competitive market. This effect of political competition may not be part of Schumpeter's vision of electoral democracy, but what matters for the present argument is that it is compatible with his two principal theses about public opinion – namely that the ordinary citizen often has no policy opinions and that, when he does have opinions, they reflect the manipulative influence of elites.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to show that even if one accepts Schumpeter's account of public opinion, one need not concede his conclusion that popular rule is merely an imagined feature of democracies. Some degree of popular rule is compatible with apathetic, ignorant and suggestible citizens, contrary to what Schumpeter and others have maintained. The people may have control over policy even when they lack a will as to which policy should be chosen, for policy may depend, counterfactually, on which policy, if any, they want, even when in actual fact there is no policy that they want. Moreover, the people may have control over policy even when their collective will reflects the manipulative influence of elites, because popular control over policy concerns the influence and effects of their will, not its origins. So long as no group of elites has dominating control over the popular will, this popular control may be reasonably described as popular rule, and neither Schumpeter nor subsequent empirical research gives us reason to think

that elites have dominating control over public opinion. The upshot of these arguments is that even if we grant the possibility and utility of a value-free, descriptive and minimal theory of what makes regimes democratic, and even if we take on board much of Schumpeter's depiction of the real-world democracies that such a theory must describe, we may still conclude that the best theory is one that identifies popular rule or popular control as a necessary ingredient of democracy.

Some readers may judge that this defense of popular rule against Schumpeter's critique is persuasive as far as it goes, but only because it does not go very far. A likely worry is that any conception of popular control that is compatible with Schumpeter's apathetic and manipulable citizens must be rather thin – too thin, perhaps, to be of any normative interest. Let me briefly indicate why this worry seems to me misplaced.

That popular control over policy is held to be compatible with indifferent citizens is no reason to conclude that the concept has been rendered normatively insignificant. When a conservative billionaire acquires ownership of a newspaper, no one doubts that his ownership gives him control over the newspaper's coverage, and no one questions the normative significance of this control, even if the billionaire is content to let the editors do as they wish – that is, even if he lacks a 'will' regarding editorial policy. His control is consequential, valuable to him and worrisome to others because it renders editorial policy dependent on what he wants it to be. And even if he is *presently* indifferent, there is no guarantee that he will remain so. Similarly, popular control over a policy issue is significant even when the people are indifferent because there is no guarantee that they will remain so. The thought here runs parallel to the core intuition behind republican or 'neo-Roman' theories of freedom (Pettit, 1997; 2013; Skinner, 1998). A slave is subject to his master's arbitrary will, and this remains true and normatively significant even when the master is indifferent and content to let the slave do as he pleases – i.e. even when the master has no determinate will regarding what the slave should do.

That popular control over policy is held to be compatible with elite manipulation of the popular will is also no reason to doubt its significance. Schumpeter's analogy with advertisers' manipulation of consumers can be turned against him here. No one doubts that the consumer has control over the disposal of his income, or that this control is a significant effect of his property rights and the rule of law, even though advertisers are recognized as sometimes manipulating how he decides to exercise this control. The consumer has control because he disposes of his income as he wishes; its disposal is up to him, counterfactually dependent on his preferences, even when he is unsure or indifferent about how to spend it, and even when advertising shapes his preferences. His control is clearly of some normative significance, notwithstanding the manipulative influence of advertising. There is no imaginable way of stripping him of this control – of making the disposal of his income independent of his preferences – that would be normatively inconsequential. We cannot conclude that his control is inconsequential – that the alternatives to his having control are all comparable, normatively speaking – simply because advertisers can sometimes manipulate the exercise of his control. Similarly, one should not doubt the reality or normative significance of popular control over policy merely because elites can sometimes manipulate its exercise. Its significance depends on the alternatives to giving the people control over policy.

Thus, even if democratic citizens are often apathetic and manipulable, there are good reasons to think that it matters whether they have control over policy. They may, for all Schumpeter shows.

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Notes

1 Other critical treatments of Schumpeter's democratic theory include: Held (2006), Mackie (2009), Medearis (2001) and Pateman (1970). See Green (2010b) for a response to Mackie's critique.
2 See the discussion of the 'vocal' model of popular power in Green (2010a, pp. 65–102) for an attempt to reformulate the commitment which is common to most democratic theory before Schumpeter and which his theory rejects.
3 What he says in this passage (p. 271) is that, like economic competition, political competition is 'never completely lacking, but hardly ever is it perfect'; and that by 'competition for leadership' he means 'free competition for a free vote', which, he tells us, should not be taken to 'exclude the cases that are strikingly analogous to the economic phenomena we label "unfair" or "fraudulent" competition or restraint of competition'.
4 As far as I can tell, the only passage in which Schumpeter suggests that leaders might be responsive to voters out of a desire to win the next election is on p. 287, where he speaks of democratic governments having to 'attend primarily to the political values of a policy', which 'forces upon the men at or near the helm a short-run view'. But whether the 'political values of a policy' have something to do with voters' opinions about the policy's merits is unclear.
5 The claim that 'electorates normally do not control their political leaders in any way except by refusing to re-elect them' could be taken to mean that refusing to re-elect is the sole means by which electorates exert control over their leaders' *behavior*. But while it is not without ambiguity, in my view the better interpretation of the sentence, given the context and the rest of Schumpeter's theory, is to read it as saying that the only way in which the electorate controls their leaders is that they can refuse to re-elect them – i.e. they have control over whether their leaders remain in power, not over their behavior in office.
6 For an analysis of control that supports the claim that this counterfactual dependence counts as control, see Pettit (2013, pp. 152–6).
7 On the concept of power and its 'desire-independence', see Lovett (2010, p. 68).
8 For an example of a conception of popular control that is compatible with insights from social choice theory, see Ingham (forthcoming).
9 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1292a26–28, cited in Landauer (2012, p. 206).
10 Zaller's own answer is that his findings do not necessarily imply elite domination of public opinion. His explanation relies on a definition of 'elite domination' as 'a situation in which elites induce citizens to hold opinions that they would not hold if aware of the best available information and analysis'. His explanation differs from the one provided here, which rests on the definition of 'control' in terms of counterfactual dependence on the will. Notice that on Zaller's definition of 'elite domination', there would – implausibly – be no elite domination even if elites had unlimited power to determine citizens' opinions, provided that elites chose to exercise that power in a fashion that brought citizens' opinions into alignment with the opinions they would hold if aware of the best available information and analysis.
11 Thus, what Bernard Manin (1997, pp. 218–32) calls 'audience democracy', which resembles Schumpeter's description of democracy, is in principle still compatible with what I am calling 'popular rule'. Politicians may have some freedom in how they choose to frame themselves, their opponents and policy issues, and their framing choices may influence citizens' preferences, but with sufficient electoral competition we would not expect politicians' influence in this regard to translate into control over the will of the electorate. See the concluding thoughts of the present section.

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