

# **Jürgen Habermas and Deliberative Democracy**

Hercules Bantas

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## Author's Notes

Jürgen Habermas outlined his vision of what a deliberative democracy should look like over many years, and spread it through many a weighty tome. This concise, clearly written guide condenses it all and presents it in easy to understand language, as well as canvassing many of his critics. The page numbers are for citation purposes only and may not coincide exactly with printed versions of this guide. If you enjoyed this ebook, look out for *John Rawls and Deliberative Democracy*, *John Dryzek and Deliberative Democracy*, *Deliberative Democracy Basics*, and *Deliberative Democracy Essentials*. All of which are available through Amazon.

## **Habermas and Deliberative Democracy**

Habermas's deliberative democracy theory utilises the entire public sphere of a nation state, encourages active citizenship, and does not exclude any citizen from political deliberation. The private sphere also plays a part in the formulation of public opinion, meaning that communication forums outside the public sphere can play a part in the distribution of political power.

### Habermas's Deliberative Democracy

Habermas uses a liberal framework for his deliberative democracy theory, with the rule of law and constitutionalism as key tenets but, unlike Rawls, he grounds constitutionalism and law on communicative reason. He outlines a more inclusive theory of deliberative democracy, where political deliberation is not restricted to political elites, and both the public and private spheres play a part in the political process. Before moving on to the procedural elements in Habermas's theory, the discussion begins with two concepts that form the 'nuts and bolts' of Habermas's work on deliberation: first, the public sphere which hosts political deliberation; and second, the 'Ideal Speech Community' that outlines the conditions under which a political community can reach consensus.

## The Public Sphere and the Ideal Speech Community

Habermas's concepts of the public sphere and the ideal speech community form the backbone of his deliberative theory. They are key concepts in the allocation of citizen power as a capacity to influence others and to challenge elites because they describe how and where political deliberation can occur in a deliberative democracy. He developed the concept of the public sphere used in his deliberative theory by conducting a historical analysis of the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere during the early modern era between the English civil war and the French revolution. He identified elements present in the bourgeois public sphere, namely a critically enabled political public sphere that is free of institutional interference and a literary public sphere where citizens can develop their critical faculties, as necessary for a properly functioning public sphere that deploys deliberative democracy. To augment his concept of the public sphere, Habermas developed a rational model of deliberation through his theory of the ideal speech community in which he outlines the conditions under which a community may reach consensus on moral problems and norms without the taints usually associated with self-interest, prejudice, and political affiliation. In conjunction, these two

1

concepts- a public sphere free of state interference and consensus-oriented, rational deliberation- form the foundation of his deliberative theory. The discussion will begin with the public sphere, before moving on to the ideal speech community.

## The Bourgeois Public Sphere

Habermas argues that the formation of the bourgeois public sphere was a peculiar, unprecedented historical event that occurred in several nation states in Europe during the early modern era (Habermas, 1989, p. 26). Existing political structures were strained by pressure from a rising civil society fuelled by the growing wealth of the middle classes through trade and capitalist activity (1989, p. 14). These pressures led to private people within the respective nation states coming together to form publics, which then took control of the public sphere from the authorities of the time, and used it to engage those same authorities in debate over the rules governing the sphere of commodity exchange and social