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DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY  
VS. DIRECT DEMOCRACY  
WHICH ONE WOULD BE MORE  
RECOMMENDED TO APPLY IN  
ALBANIA?

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Deliberative democracy is a form of democratic governance in which decision-making is grounded in discussion, reflection, and debate among citizens. It emphasizes the process of reasoned argument, where citizens or their representatives engage in dialogue to consider diverse perspectives, weigh evidence, and reach decisions that are more informed and reflective of collective interests. Unlike direct democracy, where citizens vote directly on issues without needing to engage in deep discussion or consensus-building, deliberative democracy prioritizes informed dialogue, often through structured forums or assemblies.

Let's see first what the differences between deliberative democracy and direct democracy are. We can consider these aspects below as the ones to do our comparison:

### **1. Decision-Making Process**

In Direct Democracy citizens vote directly on specific policies or issues, such as through referendums or plebiscites, without structured deliberation.

In Deliberative Democracy citizens or their representatives engage in structured discussions to weigh different viewpoints before reaching a decision, often within small groups or citizen assemblies.

### **2. Focus on Dialogue**

Direct Democracy primarily focuses on the vote itself and is less concerned with the quality of the discussion or debate that precedes it.

Deliberative Democracy seeks a deep, reflective discussion, enabling citizens to understand different perspectives and to consider broader societal impacts before taking a decision.

### **3. Outcome Quality**

In Direct Democracy decisions can be quick but might lack depth or consideration of long-term consequences.

Deliberative Democracy emphasizes informed and balanced decisions that reflect consensus and often lead to greater public satisfaction and legitimacy.

## **The Strengths and Weaknesses of Deliberative Democracy**

### **Strengths**

- **Increased Civic Engagement.** Encourages active citizen participation and fosters a sense of ownership over political decisions.
- **Informed Decision-Making.** Citizens gain a better understanding of complex issues through discussion and expert input.
- **Reduced Polarization.** By promoting dialogue, it can decrease partisan divides, as individuals are exposed to diverse perspectives.
- **Legitimacy and Trust.** Decisions made through inclusive dialogue often enjoy greater legitimacy and public trust.

### **Weaknesses**

- **Time-Consuming.** The process requires time for discussions, limiting its feasibility in urgent

decision-making scenarios.

- **Resource-Intensive.** Requires funding and logistical support to organize and facilitate effective deliberative forums.
- **Limited Representation.** It may be challenging to ensure truly diverse representation in deliberative forums, potentially skewing discussions.
- **Risk of Dominance by Strong Voices.** There's a risk that more vocal or persuasive individuals might dominate discussions, leading to biased outcomes.

### **Case Study Comparison in Council of Europe (CoE) Member States**

Among the CoE member states, Denmark and Ireland are often cited as strong examples of successful deliberative democracy. Denmark is known for incorporated citizen assemblies to deliberate on complex issues like climate change policy.

On the other hand, Hungary has faced criticism for its lack of support for democratic forums and limited citizen participation in decision-making, reflecting challenges to deliberative democracy.

### **Council of Europe (CoE) Agenda and Objectives for Deliberative Democracy**

The Council of Europe emphasizes strengthening participatory and deliberative democracy as part of its commitment to human rights and democratic governance. Key objectives of its current agenda include:

- **Promoting Citizen Engagement.** Supporting member states in implementing participatory democratic practices, including citizens' assemblies and town hall meetings, to increase citizen involvement in government.
- **Strengthening Trust in Institutions.** Through deliberative democracy, the CoE seeks to rebuild public trust in democratic institutions by fostering transparency and accountability in decision-making.
- **Enhancing Democratic Resilience.** The CoE is exploring how deliberative democracy can strengthen member states' resilience against populism and authoritarianism by creating channels for meaningful public input.
- **Inclusion and Representation.** Fostering more inclusive democratic practices, ensuring that marginalized groups have representation in deliberative processes.

The CoE's ongoing work on deliberative democracy aims to make European democracies more participatory, resilient, and representative by integrating citizen input into governance structures.

If a country like Albania is transitioning toward more democratic governance and deciding between implementing direct or deliberative democracy first, the choice depends on its societal structure, political culture, and level of civic education.

What would work better in Albania?

### **Scenario 1**

Apply Direct Democracy first, then move to Deliberative Democracy.

In this scenario, Albania would start by empowering citizens to vote on issues directly without structured dialogue or deliberation. The potential benefits are:

- Immediate Engagement. Direct democracy can mobilize citizens quickly, helping them experience direct involvement in decision-making.
- Foundational Civic Experience. Citizens gain experience in voting on policies, which can enhance their understanding of political processes and build foundational skills for participating in deliberative discussions later.

However, starting with direct democracy may have drawbacks:

- Risk of Populism. Without structured deliberation, there's a risk that decisions could be swayed by populist ideas or misinformation, leading to short-term or reactionary choices rather than long-term, well-considered solutions.
- Limited Depth. Direct democracy might not encourage citizens to engage deeply with complex issues, making the later transition to deliberative democracy potentially more challenging.

### **Scenario 2**

Apply Deliberative Democracy first

Implementing deliberative democracy directly would be effective if Albania has some foundational civic infrastructure or an existing culture of community discussion and debate, what is not the case.

Key benefits would be:

- Building a Culture of Dialogue. This approach instills habits of reflection, discussion, and consensus-building from the outset, helping create a more informed and engaged citizenry.
- Reduced Polarization. By fostering a culture of dialogue early on, citizens learn to understand and consider different perspectives, which can mitigate divisions and reduce the influence of extreme views.
- Preparation for Direct Democracy. After establishing deliberative practices, introducing direct voting mechanisms could become more productive, as citizens would be used to engaging thoughtfully with issues.

Challenges would be:

- Complexity and Resource Needs. Setting up effective deliberative democracy requires resources, facilitation, and time, which is proved to be a barrier in Albania infrastructures.
- Limited Immediate Engagement. Compared to direct democracy, deliberative democracy can

seem slower and less impactful for citizens eager for quick and visible change what is usually how things are expected from the public perspectives.

### **Scenario 3**

Apply Deliberative Democracy, then add Direct Democracy

Starting with deliberative democracy and then adding elements of direct democracy (e.g., referendums) might provide a balanced path like:

- Informed Transition. Citizens would first engage in deliberative processes, which can increase their political literacy and critical thinking, making direct democracy more informed and effective when introduced.
- Gradual Empowerment. Beginning with deliberative forums allows citizens to develop a voice and gain experience with civic engagement in a structured, inclusive way. Later, as direct voting options are introduced, these citizens may be more prepared to make thoughtful decisions.

### **Which Scenario would be More Efficient in Albanian reality?**

Most efficient path is scenario 3. So, beginning with deliberative democracy and transitioning to direct democracy it's more effective in Albania. It builds a foundation of informed and engaged citizens who are likely to use their direct voting powers more responsibly.

- Least efficient path for Albania would be scenario 1. Starting with direct democracy, is less efficient because Albania is still a country with limited democratic experience. Without prior engagement in deliberative processes, citizens may lack the knowledge and skills needed for effective, responsible decision-making, risking populist or reactionary outcomes.

By starting with deliberative democracy Albania can establish a culture of thoughtful, informed participation, paving the way for a more mature and balanced democratic system in which both direct and deliberative elements can co-exist effectively.